AESTHETIC PLAY AS ETHICAL PRACTICE: RETHINKING MORAL LIFE THROUGH KANT, SCHILLER, GADAMER, AND PRISON THEATER

A Dissertation

by

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation investigates how aesthetic play supports moral life, with the Shakespeare Behind Bars (SBB) prison theater program as its centerpiece. This project responds to the ascendancy of instrumental rationality and technological thinking in ethical reasoning, as diagnosed by Kant, Hegel, Heidegger, and others. I argue that moral life patterned after aesthetic play rehabilitates practical wisdom and interpretation in our age while also cultivating our capacity to make contextualized moral judgments.

I understand aesthetic play through the heritage of Kant's aesthetics and suggest that play between reason and imagination teaches us to accommodate both universality and particularity in moral judgments. The ethical potential of Kant's third *Critique* is unfolded in my analysis of Schiller and Gadamer, followed by a turn to theater studies and field research into the SBB program.

For Kant, aesthetic judging is analogous to moral judging, and so aesthetic experience is preparatory for moral life. For Schiller, aesthetic play unifies the rational and sensuous aspects of human being, allowing us to realize the highest expressions of morality and freedom. For Gadamer, aesthetic play models the way we engage with others in all contexts. Play means engaging with others, letting them ask questions and make demands, and responding by playing along. I suggest that these characterizations of aesthetic play model a view of moral life that resists instrumentalization.

Acting theory after Stanislavski emphasizes truthfulness on stage and integrity to the character. Furthermore, many theater theorists understand their work to be ethical, as

theater helps us understand a broader range of possibilities for human experience. The role of play and improvisation in theater further develops our moral aptitude to adapt and exercise wisdom in our interactions with others. SBB demonstrates how the ethical aims of theater can be implemented. SBB boasts a recidivism rate 60 percentage points below the national average, suggesting that collaborative creative play might indeed transform our character.

I conclude that aesthetic play helps us reimagine ethical life and cultivates our capacities for good judgment, interpretation, genuine listening, and practical wisdom in responding to a changing situation—the very moral aptitudes that calculative moral reasoning suppresses.

DEDICATION

For Grandmommy

In Memoriam
1936-2016

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

In the summers of 2014 and 2015, I spent several weeks visiting rehearsals and performances of the prison theater troupe Shakespeare Behind Bars (SBB). The men in the program, who are all serving time for violent crimes (mostly rape and murder) welcomed me into their oddball community and treated me with respect and care. Their stories of personal transformation while studying and performing Shakespeare presented a phenomenon I decided to investigate philosophically, the yield of which I present in this dissertation. I am addressing a classic philosophical question: what is the relation between aesthetics and ethics? But the phenomenon of Shakespeare Behind Bars sparked a further curiosity for me: could creating art cultivate our aptitude for moral goodness?

This dissertation will approach these questions by investigating the philosophical history of the concept of aesthetic play and its relation to ethics in the German trajectory from Kant and Schiller to Gadamer. My research into phenomenology of theater and acting theory and my analysis of my experience of SBB further this trajectory and suggest that aesthetic play can indeed foster moral development in its participants. My thesis is that aesthetic play, such as the creative process we undertake with others when we put on a play, broadens our ethical horizons and cultivates ethical aptitudes such as

interpretation, judgment and practical wisdom, and responsiveness to others in a changing situation.

My project contributes to an ongoing discussion about the dangers modern life is subject to when calculative rationality comes to dominate ethical life. I am following a distinguished line of thinkers in the history of modern thought who diagnose this very danger as a distinctive mode of modern life. This line of thinking begins with Kant, Schiller, and Hegel, who criticize the instrumental rationality they see emanating from and gaining ascendency in Enlightenment thought. In the 20th century, we associate this line of thinking perhaps primarily with Heidegger, who names the problem technological thinking. The critical theorists have their version of the diagnosis as well, exemplified by Horkheimer and Adorno in their critique of science, morality, and culture in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. Gadamer, too, indicts scientific and mechanistic thinking as inadequate to contexts that demand more hermeneutic approaches, such as understanding and ethics. Consanguine in all of these diagnoses is a sustained criticism of calculative rationality's ubiquity in modern life.

Kant is perhaps the first modern thinker to criticize the belief in the world's calculability that seeped from the scientific revolution into the realm of ethical life. Kant's ethics aim to accommodate the utter incalculability, i.e. contingency, of human life. He focuses on the will and acting according to universal law in his moral theory because those are the elements of ethical life that can be understood rationally. Also countering the tendency toward understanding the world instrumentally, Kant's second formulation of the Categorical Imperative demands that human beings not be used as

means to our ends but rather deserve respect in virtue of their being ends in themselves. Kant's theoretical philosophy, too, asserts the role of human cognition in the constitution of the world, cementing the centrality of the human even in matters of scientific knowledge.

Schiller criticizes the way rationality prevails over human beings' sensuous aspect in *On the Aesthetic Education of Man*, advocating to educate the sensibility in order to restore balance to these two basic elements of human experience. He expresses concern that without such balance, the rational aspect is liable to consume our very humanity and our ability to respond to others with compassion and care. Schiller's idea that the rational and the sensuous must combine, destroy one another, and yet preserve one another in a third element (the aesthetic) patterns Hegel's own reliance on the notion of *aufheben* in his response to the rise of instrumental rationality. For Hegel, human experience repeatedly unfolds in two key movements, first from immediacy (sensuousness) to its negation in the rational universal, and then from that universal to its determinate negation, which reveals a more complete universal that comprehends the particular as well. Hegel rejects the simple rational universal (the second moment of the dialectic) because it alienates the human being's immediate conscious experience and negates *without preserving* one's particularity and unique experience. This is how Hegel answers the problem of calculative rationality coming to prominence in the age of Enlightenment: he assures us that in the coming of age of human consciousness, this kind of reason must be sublated in a more absolute and comprehensive understanding of the universal and particular as a unity.

For Kant, Schiller, and Hegel, the primary danger of the rise of instrumental rationality was the possibility of human beings themselves being subsumed under abstract universals and used as mere means to some other end. These thinkers recognized the complexity of the human being and aimed to preserve the uniqueness and dignity of the individual in the face of calculating reason.

In the 20th century, criticisms of the legacy of the Enlightenment grew stronger as they engaged with the proliferation of new technologies and the still prominent impetus to understand human life in terms of abstract universals and calculable quantities. Heidegger is perhaps the most influential of these more recent critics of modernity. In "The Question Concerning Technology," he claims that the essence of technology, its way of disclosing truth, is a conception of the world guided by exploitation and control. Heidegger names our comportment to things (i.e. to objects of equipment) "enframing."[1] Enframing, for him, is the relation we have to things we have already understood and are ready to put to use, which is why he associates it with technological thinking. This comportment subjugates the full and complex nature of a phenomenon to the function or usefulness of an object, producing a subject-object dualism that opens the possibility of humans' mastery over the world of nature and things. Heidegger observes that the will to mastery has become so dominant that we no longer limit our rational calculations about things' utility to man-made or natural objects; we extend the paradigm to human being, as well. Thinking from a perspective of mastery leads to reductive enframing that

[1] Martin Heidegger, "The Question Concerning Technology," in *Martin Heidegger: Basic Writings*, ed. David Farrell Krell (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1993), 325.

conceals the fullness of human being. Heidegger cautions that technological thinking permits us to treat others as "standing reserve" or raw material—literal "human resources"—that can be used to meet the goals of efficiency and economy.[2] This worldview causes us, in the words of Hans Ruin, to "lose contact with that which cannot be calculated."[3]

Horkheimer and Adorno level a similar criticism against Enlightenment rationality in its contemporary incarnation in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, claiming that "it amputates the incommensurable."[4] They argue that modern science has developed in such a way that our conceptual apparatus for apprehending the world ossifies in the image of the scientific method, which closes off possibilities for genuine novelty and individuality. As a result, we find ourselves alienated from nature (our sensuous aspect) and even from morality. Horkheimer and Adorno locate the source of the problem in the way Kant's theoretical philosophy has developed in modern consciousness. They suggest that the schematism in particular leads to unconscious, mechanistic categorization of objects according to universals that may or may not fit. They characterize this ultra-scientific stance as manipulative and dominating, perpetrating violence against many-sided human being. *Dialectic of Enlightenment* echoes Heidegger's claim that this perverse expression of reason as purely instrumental has

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[2] Heidegger, 322-323.

[3] Hans Ruin, "*Ge-stell*: enframing as the essence of technology," in *Martin Heidegger: Key Concepts*, ed. Bret Davis (Durham, UK: Acumen Publishing Limited, 2010), 190.

[4] Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, ed. Gunzelin Schmid Noerr, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Stanford, CA: Stanford UP, 1987), 9.

gained ascendency in 20th century thought, to the detriment of knowledge, moral judgment, and culture.

Gadamer follows Heidegger's lead in diagnosing the modern age with a failure to recognize that the scientific method is not adequate to all modes of understanding and indeed does violence to our very humanity when it overreaches its proper scope. In "On the Possibility of a Philosophical Ethics," Gadamer offers that ethical theory has become an issue of mastery and a mere tool, further contributing to the critique of instrumental rationality.[5] Gadamer rejects the ubiquity of utilitarian reasoning and scientific thinking because it too often covers over the truth that is revealed through dialogue and play, such as the truth disclosed in art, the human sciences, and language. These aspects of the human experience demand a hermeneutic approach, involving interpretation and practical wisdom, says Gadamer, and he includes ethics in this realm of experiences that cannot adequately be engaged by the scientific method.

All of these diagnoses of the modern age converge in supporting the claim that in our age, many aspects of the human experience, often including ethical life, are subject to instrumentalization, even mechanization. In this project, I will refer to the object of this suite of concerns about our age as "clockwork thinking." I take this metaphor from the title of Anthony Burgess's now canonical *A Clockwork Orange*. In the novel, the teenaged main character is arrested for a litany of violent crimes and then subjected to an experimental aversion therapy treatment plan called the Ludovico Technique that

[5] Hans-Georg Gadamer, "On the Possibility of a Philosophical Ethics (1963)," in *Hermeneutics, Religion, and Ethics*, trans. Joel Weinsheimer (New Haven: Yale UP, 1999), 18-36.

reprograms his brain and body to feel unbearably sick at the thought of violence, thus compelling him to be peaceful. In this dystopian world (which is modeled on Burgess's own post-war England), the methods of the sciences have completely replaced other modes of ethical formation and moral reasoning. The aim of the Ludovico Technique is to mechanize ethical behavior, associating moral goodness with such technological values as predictability, efficiency, and calculability.

Burgess intends to criticize this conception of moral goodness with the title of his novel; he suggests that a mechanistic approach to ethical life is not fit for the type of beings we are. In his introduction to the 1986 republication of the book, Burgess reminds readers of the Cockney origin of the phrase "a clockwork orange" as an idiom meaning something like "the most bizarre thing." He explains, "I mean it to stand for the application of a mechanistic morality to a living organism oozing with juice and sweetness."[6] In other words, Burgess points out in his book the absurdity of trying to mechanize a living organism like a piece of fruit or a human being.

This, then, is the inspiration for my phrase "clockwork thinking" or "clockwork morality" as the term of art that captures what is consanguine in the critiques of modernity we have just reviewed. When human beings are understood primarily as rational beings, and indeed it is this aspect of human being that Enlightenment thinking privileges, the significance of other aspects of human being can be diminished. Without the influence of the contextualized and contingent, the particular and embodied, and the sensuous and imaginative, reason is prone to be simply calculative and instrumental.

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[6] Anothony Burgess, *A Clockwork Orange* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1986), x.

Clockwork thinking is the name I will give to the type of thinking that relies on scientific methods and calculative reason and fails to account for what is distinctive about and determinative of the human condition. An over-reliance on instrumental rationality neglects the natural or sensuous aspect of human being, the roles of imagination and sense in the constitution of experience, indeed our finitude and our situatedness in a world. A clockwork approach to morality forgets that human beings are not calculable, for in addition to being rational, we are also sensuous, finite, contextualized beings.

Following the German tradition I have outlined above of critiquing Enlightenment thought for tending toward instrumentality, I too wish to address the problem of the proliferation of clockwork thinking. In my view, an overemphasis on reason and the accompanying neglect of sensuousness, imagination, and human finitude have led to the deterioration of our capacity for making careful judgments that are responsive to the particular ethical situations we find ourselves in with particular others. I suggest that one possible way forward is to examine the resources embedded in the field of aesthetics, as many before me have done, to find ways of resisting, undoing, or revolutionizing the clockwork thinking that has taken over modern life. In this dissertation, I argue that as a mode of human experience that asserts the very elements of human being that clockwork thinking neglects, art has the potential to reinvigorate these aspects of human being, rehabilitate our capacity for judgment, and further develop our ethical sensibilities.

Associating the sphere of the ethical with the sphere of the aesthetic has a long and contentious history, dating back to ancient Greece at least. Plato and Aristotle

famously disagreed about the relation between ethics and aesthetics, in particular about the effects of aesthetic experience on a citizen's ability to function as part of a just society. In the *Republic*, Plato recognizes from the beginning that participating in mimetic arts works to form the very shape of our souls. As he designs his ideal "city in speech" to answer the question of what it means to be just, i.e. to live and do well, Plato starts with an ideal education or *paideia*—a term denoting the Greeks' notion of a holistic education and upbringing that aims at forming well-rounded, cultured citizens who will be good participants in public life. It is important to note that when formulating this ideal intellectual, moral, and physical education, Plato excises the poets almost before he does anything else. His concern is that mimetic arts disrupt the unity and order of the soul, and a disordered soul leads inevitably to a disordered, dysfunctional society. Plato recognized the intimacy between aesthetic practice and moral cultivation, and he attempted to eliminate what he saw as a potential threat. However, while Plato's ultimate answer to the problem of untangling the relationship between art and morality is to exclude art from his city, his word is hardly the last in thinking about this relation.

In contrast, Aristotle argues in favor of the morally transformative power of poetry and tragedy, mimetic arts that he claims use imitation and an exploration of the possibilities of human life as a form of moral edification. Like Plato, Aristotle recognizes art's ability to evoke in us emotions such as pity and fear. But Aristotle characterizes the aesthetic experience as one of catharsis, a purging and purification of emotion more so than a simple indulgence of emotion. Thus, instead of banning art that inspires emotion like Plato does, Aristotle embraces it, believing that the emotional

purification we achieve in aesthetic experience safeguards, rather than threatens, the harmony of the soul and in society since purging pity and fear from our souls makes way for the excellent functioning of reason. As so often is the case, these two thinkers set the stage for the debate that would unfold with the centuries to come about the relation between art or aesthetic experience and moral goodness.

Of course, the notion of aesthetic experience itself is anachronistic to the ancient Greeks, as is the problem of clockwork thinking, which has a distinct Enlightenment character and only becomes an issue with modern conceptions of the subject. Enlightenment rationality brought to the debate its own host of problems associated with moral formation, not the least of which being the question of how to cultivate without coercing individuals endowed with their own reason and power of judgment. The task of understanding the relationship between art and morality takes a new shape in modernity, and our responses to the question of moral formation must take into account individuals' rational capacities and our commitment to human freedom.

Thus, my point of departure for participating in this ongoing philosophical conversation is the same constellation of philosophers who supplied the critiques of modernity that opened our investigation. While the age of reason set the clockwork progression of modernity into motion, it also saw the awakening of its antidote: imagination, art, and play as indispensable elements of moral cultivation. The *Bildung* tradition in German philosophy found its roots in Kant's thought, and thinkers like Schiller brought Kant's cautious insights into the analogy between beauty and morality to full maturity by thematizing the connection between ethics and aesthetics in terms of

the unity of the human being and the role of aesthetic play in human freedom. Gadamer's hermeneutics revive and magnify this heritage in the 20th century. He also focuses on the idea of play and suggests that ethical life demands our attunement to the dialogical play we are always already participating in. Allow me to unfold this trajectory briefly to foreshadow these three discussions of the concept of aesthetic play as relevant to our understanding of ethical life.

If the concern with clockwork thinking is that it alienates the sensuous, imaginative, and situated aspects of human being, Kant's notion of aesthetics as a potential bridge between the rational and the sensuous holds promise for providing a corrective to modernity's exaggerated expectations for reason in the sphere of moral life. Kant's turn to reflective judgment and the notion of free play as the facultative response to beauty in the third *Critique* provide the groundwork for the alternative to clockwork thinking that I will explore in this dissertation. The harmonious play of the understanding and the imagination in Kant's conception of aesthetic judgment models an orientation toward the world that is playful and interpretive instead of subsumptive and schematic. I suggest that his exploration of aesthetic judgment and play in the third *Critique* offers significant resources for revising our understanding of ethical life in the modern age and rehabilitating the role of the sensuous in judgment.

Kant himself saw aesthetic judgment as homologous to moral judgment, such that aesthetics can serve as a propaedeutic to morality. Schiller urges further that aesthetic play is a necessary aspect of our humanity and in fact frees us to act in our highest capacity as moral beings. While the free play of the faculties in Kant's work

joins the sensuous and the rational in a new arrangement that is playful and not subsumptive, for Schiller, aesthetic play in fact unifies these aspects of the human being, recognizing the importance of each in engendering the highest sense of human freedom. Following their lead, my exploration of aesthetics as a solution to the problem of clockwork morality comes to focus on the notion of aesthetic play as a resource for revising our understanding of ethical life to incorporate the sensuous, imaginative, and situated.

In the 20th century, Gadamer develops this trajectory of the German tradition even further with his idea that play is a constitutive part of the human experience. Gadamer takes aesthetics to model the ways human beings discover truth hermeneutically, through dialogue and interpretation, and he argues that play is fundamental to both the work of art and the hermeneutic process. Thus, as he develops a hermeneutic conception of understanding in contrast to the scientific model, he also indicates a way to reconceive of ethical life in contrast to the clockwork model. Gadamer's hermeneutics leads us to understand the ethical as dialogical play requiring openness, interpretation, and responsiveness. With Gadamer, play can be understood as the medium or activity in which we have our being, and so it provides an essential resource for reimagining ethics beyond the limits of the clockwork approach. A hermeneutic approach to human life demonstrates the inextricability of ethics, art, and language, and thus also the importance of examining our attitude toward art when examining our ethics.

All together, Kant's, Schiller's, and Gadamer's engagement with the relation between art and morality in terms of aesthetic play supports further investigation into the notion of play as the locus of a way forward. As play resists systematicity and incorporates both imagination and reason, it serves as an orientation toward others and things that might rehabilitate ethical life in the face of clockwork thinking. This is the intervention I wish to offer in this dissertation. I argue that aesthetic play is a mode of engaging with others that has the potential to rehabilitate the moral aptitudes that clockwork thinking suppresses, namely interpretation, judgment, practical wisdom, and responsiveness to others in a changing situation.

Aesthetic play is a way of integrating the rational and the sensuous or, what is largely the same thing, navigating the interaction between the will and what is given in the world, including other human beings. Play is a way of interacting with the world and with others to create something new from what is given and pliable but which nevertheless must also be respected and not mastered. Play demands interpretation and judgment in the face of what is novel and incalculable, and it requires us to remain open to revising our modes of engagement with the world in order to accommodate a changing situation.

In this, I suggest that aesthetic play stands to offer several corrections to the course of modern ethical life. Because aesthetic play involves reason and imagination working in harmony (for Kant, and in unity for Schiller), taking play as a model of ethics can reintroduce the sensuous and imaginative aspects of humanity back into the picture. The play between imagination and reason in aesthetic play, rather than the subsumption

of one under the other, can help us to understand ethical life as a sphere of judgment, not of schematization. Aesthetic play also requires that we take into account the factical reality we find ourselves in, a standpoint which can reassert the significance of the particular individuals and the particular situations we encounter in ethical life. Play can indicate a way to synthesize the universal and the particular in ethical life without doing violence to either. An ethics modeled after the salient features of aesthetic play recognizes human finitude and reinvigorates the roles of interpretation and judgment in moral reasoning.

Thus, aesthetic play offers us resources to supersede clockwork morality and rehabilitate moral aptitudes that have fallen out of popular use with the ascendancy of instrumental rationality. I will suggest further, however, that aesthetic play can do more than recommend a revised image of ethical life: it can cultivate in its participants these very aptitudes, for interpretation, judgment, consideration of our situation, and so on. The foregoing trajectory in the history of German philosophy provides a theoretical framework for believing that aesthetic play can contribute to our understanding of ethical life; I suggest we turn to a practical discipline, the performing arts, for a phenomenological expression of the link between aesthetics and ethics. In acting theory and phenomenology of theater, and in the practice of theater in Shakespeare Behind Bars, I argue that we find evidence of the potential such aesthetic play has for developing our moral sensibilities and fostering our moral capacities.

The kind of aesthetic play that takes place when participating in a theater production exercises our capacities for interpretation, judgment, and listening and

responding to others in a changing situation. In theater, actors are to take in a given script and translate the written word into actions and movements, a performance that depends on a process of interpretation, i.e. a hermeneutic process. As putting on a play is a collective artistic endeavor, requiring the cooperation of each actor in presenting a coherent scene and story, the process of interpreting a theater script must take place in collaboration with others. This communal activity itself places actors in a mindset of considering others and the particularities of their situation when determining their own actions, and the dynamics of acting reinforce that mindset. Actors participate in a continual give and take, and verisimilitude depends on their ability to listen to each other and respond honestly in the moment instead of simply delivering a memorized line on cue. This capacity for communally interpreting a script and then putting it into action not mechanically but in constant communicative interplay with others requires the very aptitudes most undervalued in clockwork thinking. Thus, practicing theater is often tantamount to practicing and developing those moral aptitudes.

In particular, my experience with the prison theater program Shakespeare Behind Bars illustrates to me how engaging in a collaborative project of aesthetic interpretation and play cultivates the aspects of morality that are covered over in the clockwork morality of our age. Briefly, prioritizing honesty in relating to and understanding a character that one must play on stage (in the style of Stanislavski) develops one's capacity for understanding others and involves one in a play of self-reflection and genuine listening and responding that is neglected in clockwork conceptions of ethical life. In the case of SBB, witnessing individuals literally imprisoned in a concrete

expression of clockwork logic connecting honestly with others and coming to self-knowledge through Shakespeare reveals the potential of aesthetic play to cultivate our ethical sensibilities.

I choose prison theater as the ultimate focus of my investigation of the potential of aesthetic play to rehabilitate our moral aptitudes because the prison industrial complex is perhaps the most extreme emblem of the moral consciousness of our age. People who are incarcerated in the prison industrial complex present a limit case for the power of aesthetic play because their lives are otherwise entirely dictated by clockwork. Today's prison inmates are numbered, classified, and shipped (the term used for when prisoners are transferred from one prison to another) like the literal "human resources" Heidegger worried would result from technological thinking. Inmates' potential for living full lives and growing into complete expressions of their humanity and the full range of their capacities, moral and otherwise, is severely restricted. If aesthetic play can be demonstrated to rehabilitate our ethical life in such an extreme case, it can be expected to mitigate the dangers of clockwork thinking anywhere.

Thus, I take as my guide to the practical potential of aesthetic play a theater company that operates entirely within the clockwork framework, that is, inside a state prison. Shakespeare Behind Bars, as I mentioned in the opening paragraph, is a group of inmates at Luther Luckett Correctional Complex, a medium-security men's prison in Kentucky, who come together to study and perform Shakespeare's works with an eye to the opportunity for self-reflection and personal transformation such work offers. SBB in particular draws my attention in the context of an investigation of the value of aesthetic

play in moral cultivation because of the restorative aims with which it was designed and the success stories that come out of it. SBB's stated mission sets "successful reintegration into society" as its ultimate goal. The program links aesthetic experience with moral cultivation in a way that is instructive. The troupe's approach to acting emphasizes empathy and honesty over deception, and these expectations spill into their interactions offstage, reinforcing the ethical significance of their aesthetic practice. For the men in SBB, developing ethical relations is not a side effect of their work together but a priority. "The play is *not* the thing," one of the actors told me, tweaking the famous line from Hamlet. They know that the work they do is transformative and significant. After 20 years, the recidivism rate for SBB participants speaks volumes for the success of the program. While the average percentage of ex-offenders who return to prison within three years of their release nationwide is 67%, SBB boasts a mere 5.1% of its graduates re-offending.[7] The SBB program demonstrates the moral cultivation that can take place in the practice of theater and thus supports the claim that aesthetic play can rehabilitate modern ethical life and develop the moral aptitudes that clockwork morality neglects.

I heard about the Shakespeare Behind Bars program through Hank Rogerson's 2007 documentary of the same name,[8] and I wanted to learn more about this group of men who volunteer their time and dedicate themselves to studying and performing Shakespeare while incarcerated. In May of 2014, I spent nearly three weeks in La

[7] Shakespeare Behind Bars playbill, 2015; interview with Matt Wallace, artistic director of Shakespeare Behind Bars.

[8] Hank Rogerson, *Shakespeare Behind Bars* (Los Angeles: Shout! Factory and Philomath Films, 2006).

Grange, Kentucky, visiting several rehearsals and performances for both inmate and public audiences. The play they produced that year was *Much Ado About Nothing*. A year later, the troupe celebrated their 20th season, and I returned for the public performances of *Pericles* and to catch up with an SBB veteran from the 2014 production who had been paroled in December, 2014. My analysis of the program comes from these firsthand observations and informal communications with the inmates involved as well as interviews with the facilitators and support staff in corrections. I supplement my own experience of SBB with published accounts such as Rogerson's documentary and Amy Scott-Douglass's book, *Shakespeare Inside*.[9]

My research into the SBB program supports my suggestion that aesthetic play, such as that we participate in when we put on a play, offers significant resources for rehabilitating ethical life in the face of clockwork thinking. The men in the program have established their own rehabilitative[10] modes of interacting with each other that can be translated into practices of moral formation outside the prison industrial complex as well. Over the past 20+ years, this theater group has developed principles and practices that explicitly support moral cultivation in the course of their aesthetic play. Their approach to playing a character promotes honesty and understanding. In addition, artistic

[9] Amy Scott-Douglass, *Shakespeare Inside* (New York: Continuum, 2007).

[10] Now that I have introduced the context of corrections, and as the concept of "rehabilitation" is rather contentious in the discourse on prisons, let me clarify my use of it throughout this chapter. Definitions of the term "rehabilitate" span from "restore ability" to "make fit" as for office or for use. I contend that we need to rehabilitate not people but our modes of interacting with each other and our ways of thinking. We need to restore our ability for moral judgment beyond the limits of instrumental rationality. We need to move away from the bizarreness of a clockwork orange and towards a morality that better *fits* the kind of beings that we are. I find the term "rehabilitate" appropriate in this context, though not in the usual parlance of corrections.

director Matt Wallace encourages the men to exercise their own interpretive power and judgment in making choices on stage, as he truly facilitates more than he directs. SBB is designed to help individuals take responsibility for their choices, and as those choices play out in a shared context on stage, participants also practice making judgments and responding to others' needs in real time. The aesthetic play these actors engage in underscores the importance of attunement to context and responding to others by improvising within the boundaries of what is given. Their work with Shakespeare affirms the image of ethical life that accommodates human finitude and emphasizes judgment and interpretation, and it demonstrates how the aptitudes required for such an image of ethical life can be cultivated in the practice of theater.

In the course of this dissertation, I will investigate the relation between ethics and aesthetics through the German philosophical discourse on aesthetic play that I outlined above and through the practical field of theater, in acting theory, phenomenology of theater, and the phenomenon of Shakespeare Behind Bars. Ultimately, I will show that aesthetic play can first disclose a model for ethical life that better fits many-sided human being than does instrumental rationality and second cultivate the moral aptitudes that clockwork thinking neglects, such as interpretation, judgment, practical wisdom, and responsiveness to others in a changing situation.

Chapter II is dedicated to drawing out of Kant's third *Critique* the resources his theory of judgment provides for revising our understanding of ethics to accommodate our experience of the particular without violating the moral demand for universality. Kant's own assessment of the link between aesthetics and ethics is that aesthetic

judgment may be propaedeutic to morality because of the structural analogy between the two. I will suggest that we unfold the ethical potential of Kant's third *Critique* beyond his own conception of the relation between aesthetics and ethics and limn a picture of ethical life in the image of Kant's notion of the free play of the faculties and aesthetic universality.

The third chapter explores Schiller's extension of Kant's aesthetic theory, wherein the concept of play is highlighted as an essential element of moral formation. Schiller takes a stronger view of the relation of aesthetics and ethics than Kant, arguing for the supremacy of the aesthetic as the realm in which our rational and sensuous aspects come into a unity and human freedom reaches its apogee. Schiller's thought on ethics and aesthetics in "On Grace and Dignity" and *On The Aesthetic Education of Man* provides further insight into the character of ethical life rehabilitated by the practice of aesthetic play. Further, this chapter addresses the specific anxiety that the link between art and morality might be exploited to indoctrinate and manipulate people, as seems to be the case in Burgess's *A Clockwork Orange*. I will show how participation in aesthetic play (the co-operation of the sensuous and the rational) invalidates the potential the arts may have for such coercion, serving instead a liberatory purpose, as Schiller contends.

This investigation of the philosophical relation between ethics and aesthetics concludes with a chapter on Gadamer's aesthetics (Chapter IV), specifically his notion of aesthetic non-differentiation, as it parallels his own ethical thought. For Gadamer, the spheres of ethics and aesthetics are not wholly distinguishable, as he gives such primacy to the ethical that all of his work can be understood as practical philosophy. I argue that

Gadamer's aesthetics of play constitutes an ethical theory of non-differentiation no less powerful than Gadamer's explicit discussions of ethics as the coordination of Aristotelian practical wisdom and Kantian commitment to universality. Gadamer's work provides the most complete alternative to today's clockwork conceptions of moral practice.

These theoretical views compose a revised picture of ethical life in the image of aesthetic play, an image that better fits the many-sidedness of human being as rational and sensuous. The notion of aesthetic play specifically demonstrates the roles imagination, sensuousness, and human finitude have in moral reasoning, even though these aspects of human being have been neglected in contemporary moral consciousness. The next two chapters, Chapters V and VI, present evidence in theater studies and from SBB that aesthetic play can do more than provide a new picture of ethical life; it can rehabilitate the moral aptitudes that have faded from prominence with the rise of clockwork thinking.

Chapter V explores two branches of theater studies—phenomenology of theater and acting theory—that support a much stronger relation between aesthetic play and moral formation than either Kant, Schiller, or Gadamer was willing to assert. Many theater theorists, especially in the wake of Stanislavski, understand their work to be explicitly ethical as it helps them to understand a broader range of possibilities for human experience and to practice genuine listening and honestly responding to others. The role of play and improvisation in theater further supports the development of our

moral aptitude to adapt to changing circumstances and exercise wisdom in our interactions with others.

Chapter VI is dedicated to an in-depth analysis of the Shakespeare Behind Bars program in its commitment to ethical development and personal transformation through encounters with theater. Here, the power of aesthetic play to cultivate moral sensibilities is demonstrated in the phenomenon of prison theater and the success of this particular program. I understand the SBB program not simply as an example of how aesthetic play can rehabilitate its participants but as trailblazing a way forward, out of limited clockwork thinking, thus rehabilitating our understanding of ethical life in the image of collaborative aesthetic play. Shakespeare Behind Bars reveals how the revised image of ethical life we have imagined can come to fruition and demonstrates the real rehabilitation that aesthetic play can provide when our many-sided humanity has been reduced to clockwork.

In conclusion, I offer this analysis of aesthetic play, theater practice, and the relation between ethics and aesthetics to show the potential aesthetics has for ameliorating the problem of instrumental rationality in the sphere of ethical life. Not only does aesthetic play provide resources for a revised picture of ethical life; it also has the power to cultivate moral aptitudes for interpretation, judgment, practical wisdom, genuine listening, and responding to others' needs in a changing situation. In this, aesthetic play affords an alternative to the clockwork thinking that dominates today's moral consciousness, an alternative that better fits the many-sidedness and finitude of human being.

CHAPTER II

FREE PLAY AND AESTHETIC UNIVERSALITY IN KANT's THIRD *CRITIQUE*

Introduction

Kant clearly and adamantly insists on the separation of the spheres of truth, beauty, and goodness. He breaks apart the classical triumvirate of knowledge, aesthetics, and ethics into three discrete domains of human existence. Nonetheless, as many have rightly noted, Kant's third *Critique* develops several morally rich features of aesthetic experience that may inform moral thought perhaps much more than Kant himself would have supported. In this chapter, I suggest that while Kant may have rejected the direct relevance of our faculty of taste to moral life, we nevertheless find in Kant's aesthetics resources for building a more engaged, communal, and even humane model of moral goodness than clockwork thinking (or even Kant's own practical philosophy) provides. I will not offer an in-depth criticism of the potential dangers of Kant's ethics here; that is well-worn territory. My ultimate goal, in the next few chapters, is to develop an image of moral life that grows out of the notion of aesthetic play. Kant's *Critique of the Power of Judgment* provides the first contours of this image.

I will focus on three distinctive features of Kant's aesthetics that represent the ethical potential of the third *Critique*: free play, aesthetic universality, and the *sensus communis*. These features correlate with three peculiarities of judgments of taste that

differentiate them from ordinary cognitive judgments; they are reflective (and in this, playful and interpretive), subjectively universal, and necessary (made possible by the *sensus communis*). Understanding play as an ethical concept infuses moral life with an openness that perhaps we do not find in Kant's own moral philosophy—openness to the particular and relevant features of a moral situation, to the role of interpretation in making moral judgments, and to the other. I argue that Kant's aesthetics contains the potential for an image of morality that acknowledges both the need for playful interpretation in moral judgment and our co-constitution with others in the human community, supporting a sense of universality in moral judgments that preserves particularity.

In this chapter, I will lay out the basics of Kant's aesthetics and its relation to ethics as Kant sees it, then expand upon his notions of free play, aesthetic universality, and the *sensus communis* in order finally to demonstrate how in my view aesthetics is not only a propaedeutic to moral life but a model for a more humane and communal understanding of moral life. This investigation of Kant's third *Critique* allows me to close the chapter with several conclusions about aesthetic play that will serve as the foundation for the rest of my evaluation of the philosophical heritage of play as an ethical concept. The following chapters unfold the ethical potential of the third *Critique* along a historical trajectory from Kant through Schiller to Gadamer, which provides the foundation for our understanding of theater as an ethical practice (Chapter V) and our investigation of the ethical register of play we find in Shakespeare Behind Bars (Chapter VI).

Kant's Aesthetics

As Kant presents in the introductions to the third *Critique*, freedom and nature each have their own domains, governed by the principles of purposiveness and lawfulness, respectively. The two are at odds because the realm of nature is governed by mechanistic laws of causality while, in the realm of human freedom, it is the will that sets ends, thus becoming itself the cause that can determine the desired effect.[1] Because the will is purposive, i.e. sets ends, it does not fit neatly into the mechanistic structure of cause and effect in nature. This separation calls into question the compatibility of the two principles, natural law and purposiveness. The aesthetic lies in the territory in between, in which lawfulness and freedom must demonstrate that they can play nice together, so to speak. Aesthetic experience reveals the potential these two domains have for working in harmony. In examining aesthetic judgment, Kant is searching for hope that the mechanistic lawfulness of nature can exist alongside and be amenable to human freedom or the will.[2]

Kant explains in the published introduction to *The Critique of the Power of Judgment* that one thought motivating this third part of the critical project is the

[1] Immanuel Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, ed. Paul Guyer, trans. Paul Guyer and Eric Matthews (New York: Cambridge UP, 2000), §10. Further references to Kant's third *Critique* will be given parenthetically in the text using section numbers. Line numbers will be added for direct quotations.

[2] I use the term "hope" here in reference to Kant's famous three questions that might be said to correlate to his three *Critiques*: "What can I know? What should I do? What may I hope?" (A805/B833, *Critique of Pure Reason*).

conviction that there *ought* to be a connection between the moral and the natural. He writes:

> Now although there is an incalculable gulf fixed between the domain of the concept of nature, as the sensible, and the domain of the concept of freedom, as the supersensible, so that from the former to the latter ... no transition is possible ... : yet the latter **should** have an influence on the former, namely the concept of freedom should make the end that is imposed by its laws real in the sensible world; and nature must consequently also be able to be conceived in such a way that the lawfulness of its form is at least in agreement with the possibility of the ends that are to be realized in it in accordance with the laws of freedom.—Thus there must still be a ground of the unity of the supersensible that grounds nature with that which the concept of freedom contains practically.... (5:175-76)

Kant investigates the power of judgment because, he contends, it can serve as the unifying ground for the lawfulness of nature and the laws of freedom. To put it another way, the *Critique of Judgment* demonstrates the compatibility of natural law and human purposes, giving us hope in our ability to affect the domain of nature with our ability freely to set ends, even though nature is otherwise governed by mechanistic causality.

According to Kant, we do indeed discover cause for hope that nature's causality is compatible with human freedom in the structure of aesthetic judging, particularly in the free play of (or the harmony between) our faculties. Kant claims that the power of judgment itself "perceives a relation of the two faculties of cognition which constitutes the subjective, merely sensitive condition of the objective use of the power of judgment

in general (namely the agreement of those two faculties with each other)" (First Introduction, 20:223-24). Kant's idea here is that aesthetic judging shows us that our cognitive faculties (imagination and understanding) can work in accord with one another, grounding the possibility of judgment in general and revealing the compatibility of nature and freedom, lawfulness and purposiveness. It is this compatibility that gives us hope in our ability to accomplish our moral ends in the mechanistic natural world.

Further, I suggest that the third *Critique* is richly suggestive in its recurrent meditations on the role of aesthetics in morality. Concern for what we may hope, that is, concern for discovering the extent to which the world is amenable to us and our will, is a question with significant moral valence. To ask about the relationship between my will and the world as it is given implies a desire to realize my will in the world, and for Kant, that desire is the grounding of morality—a pure willing that has not yet touched nor been touched by the world (autonomy). Thus, to ask about hope in terms of aesthetics, as Kant does in the third *Critique*, is implicitly to ask how aesthetics might further our moral project. Kant's exploration of the territory of judgment as the foundation of the bridge between nature and freedom is simultaneously a meditation on the transition from mechanistic nature to a world of people, a community, or a moral context in which our will takes effect. In short, Kant's aesthetics gives us resources (especially the concept of aesthetic play) that allow us to comprehend a human community distinct from yet situated within the natural world of mechanistic causality, a world of moral beings.

Since aesthetic judgments are the key to understanding the link between freedom and nature for Kant, encountering beauty can be understood as an essential element of

our understanding of our moral nature, at least of how it is realized in the material world. In the remainder of this section, I will lay out the fundamentals of Kant's aesthetics so that we can investigate its possible relation to morality. I will focus in particular on the key concepts of free play, aesthetic universality, and the *sensus communis*.

There are four moments (quality, quantity, relation, and modality) of the judgment of taste as presented in the Analytic of the Beautiful. First, Kantian judgments of taste are disinterested; they are not grounded in the subject's desire for the object's existence but rather in a feeling of contemplative pleasure alone (§2, §5). The pleasure that grounds our judgments of taste is the pleasure that results from the free play of our faculties, the way the understanding and the imagination operate in harmony. This pleasure does not equate to a self-interested, idiosyncratic—or, to use Kant's term, pathological—inclination toward any object, but it is nevertheless subjective (Introduction, VII, 5:190). Kant's claim that judgments of taste are grounded in the pleasure resulting from the play of our faculties is key to this chapter, so it bears quoting the text on this point. In §15, Kant reiterates: "The judgment is also called aesthetic precisely because its determining ground is not a concept but the feeling (of inner sense) of that unison in the play of the powers of the mind, insofar as they can only be sensed" (§15, 5:228). Second, judgments of taste are universal yet subjectively so since the beautiful pleases us without being mediated by a concept (§6, §8). In other words, aesthetic judgments are admittedly subjective, as they are grounded in a feeling of pleasure, yet they are nevertheless spoken with a universal voice, as if they were objective judgments (§8, §32). Third, the beautiful expresses purposiveness yet has no

discernible purpose or end; thus judgments of taste are grounded in the *form* of purposiveness (§11). We encounter the beautiful *as if* it were purposive though it serves no clear purpose. Finally, judgments of taste are necessary; we take our judgments of taste to be exemplary of a common sense and thus expect that what we call beautiful will necessarily cause pleasure for everyone (§18, §22).

In addition to these four moments in the Analytic of the Beautiful, Kant emphasizes that judgments of taste are reflective, not determinative (Introduction, IV). Kant contrasts the reflective use of our judgment with the determining power of judgment, which is what constitutes ordinary cognition. The determining power of judgment uses a given universal (a concept) to subsume particulars beneath it. In the language of the first *Critique*, cognition of an object occurs when we determine a concept through a particular manifold of intuition. For Kant, moral judgments are also determinative, as we subsume our individual wills under the universal demand of the moral law, which is given by reason itself. On the other hand, when the particulars are given instead of the universal, that is, when we encounter a manifold of intuition for which we do not already have a concept through which to determine it, then the power of judgment becomes reflective (Introduction, IV). In other words, the power of judgment becomes reflective when it encounters something unique. In this case, we must create or expand a concept in order to process the manifold we have encountered. Unlike determining judgments, reflective judgments do not constitute the objects of experience or give the law to nature (Introduction, V); rather, reflective judgments may serve a regulative function, regulating the way we think about and understand the world when

cognition reaches its boundaries, as in the singular experience of the work of art (Introduction, IX). In sum, we employ the reflective power of judgment when we encounter something given that is novel or strange, something other than what our cognitive faculties ordinarily process.

Encountering beauty is Kant's quintessential example of experiencing a manifold of intuition through which we cannot determine a concept. In the face of beauty, our power of judgment becomes reflective. In these encounters, our faculties operate differently from the way they do in determinative judgments. Rather than a manifold of intuition being subsumed under a universal concept, the imagination (the faculty of intuition) and the understanding (the faculty of concepts) themselves fall into an equal relationship, one which Kant describes as a "free play" (§9, §35). In the absence of a determinative concept, there is play in the agreement of our cognitive faculties, and a reflective judgment can thus be understood as something of a judgment call. The strange or novel manifold of intuition that presents itself to us in art or in nature (in the beautiful) demands a new judgment from us, a playful interpretation and expansion of the conceptual apparatus we have available for comprehending the world. In aesthetic experience, our reflective judgments are also playful and interpretive.

Kant calls our reflective aesthetic judgments a bridge between purposiveness and lawfulness largely because of their peculiar universality and necessity (identified in the second and fourth moments). The judgment of taste demonstrates the compatibility of human subjectivity on the one hand and universality, as it is found in nature and in the moral law, on the other hand. For even though aesthetic judgments are understood to be

subjective, grounded in a feeling of pleasure and not in a concept, they are nevertheless also understood to index something universal. The judgment "this is beautiful" is spoken like an objective statement about the thing at hand. We expect others to assent to subjective judgments of taste as necessarily and universally as they do to cognitive and moral judgments.

For example, when I call this sunset beautiful, I make the statement as if it were an objective fact, not a subjective report of my feelings. I do not say that I am experiencing aesthetic pleasure or that I like the sunset; I call it beautiful as if beauty were a property of the sunset. In addition, I recognize that I can make no rational argument to convince *you* that the sunset is beautiful. I simply expect that you experience it in the way I experience it. Thus, Kant is compelled to claim, in the second moment of the Analytic of the Beautiful:

> … there can be … no rule in accordance with which someone could be compelled to acknowledge something as beautiful. … One wants to submit the object to his own eyes, just as if his satisfaction depended on sensation; and yet, if one then calls the object beautiful, one believes oneself to have a universal voice, and lays claim to the consent of everyone. (§8, 5:215-16)

In other words, judging that something is beautiful requires subjective experience, not a determinate concept and a rule for schematizing a manifold of intuition. Nevertheless, even though our aesthetic judgments are grounded in a subjective feeling of pleasure and

lack conceptual determination altogether, we do take them to lay claim to universality.[3] In fact, Kant says our judgments of taste have "subjectively universal validity" (§8, 5:215). Because the pleasure we take in beauty results from the free play of the faculties, and all human beings share the same facultative constitution, pleasure in the beautiful is thus universally available to human beings even though it is subjective. Even while we disagree about what should be judged as beautiful, we are capable of making judgments about pleasure and displeasure that demand universal assent.[4]

Indeed, our aesthetic judgments implicitly claim necessity along with universality: we expect that everyone encountering the same beautiful object will necessarily experience the same feeling of pleasure we do. Kant calls this type of necessity exemplary,[5] meaning that we take our judgments of taste to identify examples or models of what everyone ought to, or should be expected to, find pleasurable even though we can put no determinate rule to the necessity of finding pleasure in what we call beautiful (§18, §22).

Kant says that since aesthetic judgments are grounded in the feeling of the free play of the faculties, we recognize that the common or shared constitution of all human beings is a necessary precondition for subjectively universal judgments like judgments

[3] We find support for this claim even in the first moment of the Analytic of the Beautiful; the disinterestedness of our pleasure in the beautiful suggests its universality. As our pleasure in the beautiful is not grounded in interest, it does not stem from any pathological inclination.

[4] Of course, erroneous judgments are still possible, and we may not in fact receive universal assent from others regarding our judgments of taste, but every claim to beauty is a demand for agreement and implies an expectation of universal confirmation.

[5] He contrasts exemplary necessity with theoretical necessity, which is objective, and practical necessity, which is necessary according to a rule.

of taste. Thus, he introduces the *sensus communis* as the guarantor of the necessity of the judgment of taste (§20). The *sensus communis*—not vulgar "common sense" but a communal sense, and a sense for what we have in common—is the subjective condition we all share. It is a universal, *a priori* capacity to first feel (sense) the disposition of our faculties and recognize their disposition as a playful agreement. (Kant calls this a transcendental feeling.) The *sensus communis* allows us then to reflect on the feelings of our fellow human beings in order to determine whether we should expect the disposition of their faculties to match ours, i.e. whether they are likely to share our feeling about the disposition of our faculties (§20, §22, §40). We imbue our subjective judgments with necessity and universality only on the grounds of this shared sense for how others judge.

This is the unique character of aesthetic judgments, then: they are reflective, interpreting a unique manifold of intuition instead of schematizing it, and while they are subjective (grounded in a feeling of harmonious free play between our faculties), they are nevertheless peculiarly universal and necessary, guaranteed by our shared facultative constitution as human beings, including the transcendental feeling of commonality Kant calls the *sensus communis*.

The Relation Between Aesthetics and Ethics

Kant's work indicates a clear relation between aesthetics and ethics: aesthetic judging is structurally analogous to ethical judging, and in this, engaging with aesthetics is propaedeutic to ethical life. The structural analogy between the two realms invites us to understand aesthetics as an aid to morality, but the two realms of beauty and goodness

remain independent of one another in Kant's philosophy. I suggest that Kant's aesthetics provides a richer resource for our understanding of ethical life than Kant affirms. I will argue that in fact the key features of Kant's aesthetics provide one possible model for reimagining ethics in the face of clockwork morality. However, I will first make plain the extent of the relation between these two realms as Kant understands it before I lay out my case for the stronger relation I am suggesting. The next subsection, "Aesthetics and Ethics are Analogous," presents the relation between aesthetics and ethics according to Kant; the following subsection, "Kant's Aesthetics as a Model of Morality," presents my argument for understanding the key features of Kant's aesthetics as the basis of a new image of ethical life.

Aesthetics and Ethics are Analogous

Even though Kant maintains that the spheres of ethics and aesthetics are independent of one another, he clearly believes there is some kind of association between the two. We see this evidenced in the contexts of his discussions of beauty as the symbol of morality, the universal standpoint we take in aesthetic judging, and how beauty can teach us to love without interest.

Kant addresses the relation between ethics and aesthetics most explicitly in §59, where he calls beauty itself the symbol of morality. This claim has been the source of much discussion. One possible reading of Kant's claim is that beauty stands in as a

sensible presentation of the idea of the good will, as Ted Cohen has argued.[6] Cohen relies on Kant's definition of morality by reference to the unqualifiedly good will. He offers that there is a structural analogy between a will that is unqualifiedly good because it wills nothing outside itself (i.e. nothing but the form of willing or action) and an object of beauty, which exhibits the form of purposiveness without itself having any purpose or any end outside itself. Because freedom, viz. the freedom of the will, is an idea and not a concept, it cannot be schematized; the idea of a free will, i.e. a good will, can only be expressed symbolically. Thus, beauty is the symbol of morality; or, as Cohen understands it, a beautiful object sensibly presents the idea of an unqualifiedly good will.[7]

In the same section of the text (§59), Kant identifies several structural similarities not only between beauty and morality but specifically between aesthetic judgments and moral judgments. Kant writes:

> Now I say that the beautiful is the symbol of the morally good, and also that only in this respect (that of the relation that is natural to everyone, and that is also expected of everyone else as a duty) does it please with a claim to the assent of everyone else, in which the mind is at the same time aware of a certain ennoblement and elevation above the mere receptivity for a pleasure from

[6] Ted Cohen, "Why Beauty is a Symbol of Morality" in *Essays in Kant's Aesthetics*, ed. Ted Cohen and Paul Guyer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 221-236.

[7] Cohen, 221-236. There is reason to be skeptical of this reading since Kant also claims that beauty presents aesthetic ideas, yet he believes the morally good will is more than a mere idea. Regardless, Kant does say that beauty is the symbol of the morally good, and this is simply one among many associations he draws between ethics and aesthetics in the third *Critique*.

> sensible impressions, and also esteems the value of others in accordance with a similar maxim of their powers of judgment. (§59, 5:353)

Kant explains that both aesthetic judgments and moral judgments are "natural to everyone" and "expected of everyone else." In other words, both aesthetic and moral judgments come to us in virtue of the constitution of our faculties, and they both take on necessity that makes them expected of everyone and allows them to lay claim to universal assent. What is more, both types of judgments elevate the mind above sensation, and they direct our esteem towards others similarly constituted (i.e. other human beings). These similarities between aesthetic and moral judgments lead Kant to suggest that practicing aesthetic judgment is propaedeutic to moral goodness. The elevation of the mind in aesthetic experience and the structure of aesthetic judgments in particular can teach us what morality requires.

As aesthetic experience elevates the mind above mere receptivity, it can be understood as preparatory to moral steadfastness in that it allows us to practice thinking from a universal standpoint. In encountering beauty, we must take account of the feelings of all other human beings, and adopting that universal standpoint displaces us from our individual pathologies. Developing our faculty of taste improves our ability to judge universally, and our desire for the pleasure we feel in recognizing our fellowship with other human beings prompts us to displace our individual interests and occupy the space of universality. In exercising the aesthetic power of judgment, our thinking is elevated and expanded to incorporate the whole human community. Moral judgment also requires that we take a universal standpoint and set aside our personal inclinations, a

universal standpoint which is analogous (though not identical) to that which aesthetic judgment requires. In speaking of the "broad-minded way of thinking" that the aesthetic use of the power of judgment cultivates, Kant writes that to achieve this, a man must "[set] himself apart from the subjective private conditions of the judgment, … and [reflect] on his own judgment from a universal standpoint (which he can only determine by putting himself into the standpoint of others)" (§40, 5:295). The enlarged or elevated mentality that we achieve in taking the universal standpoint in aesthetic judgment is analogous to the standpoint of reason we must take in moral judgment.

Furthermore, Kant explains that the disinterested pleasure we find in encountering beauty can teach us to love something without any desire to possess it as an object. He writes, "The beautiful prepares us to love something, even nature, without interest" (Remark following §29, 5:267). This mention of disinterested love recalls Kant's reference in the *Groundwork* to the scriptural commandments to love our neighbors and to love our enemies (*Groundwork* 4:399). Pathological or interested love (inclination) cannot be commanded, Kant explains there, and so the neighborly love that Jesus commands must rather be a practical love, a love that we might understand as akin to the disinterested love we learn from aesthetic experience. Our experience of the beautiful can teach us the kind of love and respect we should feel toward the good. Thus, Kant claims that the beautiful is "usable as an instrument of the intention with regard to the latter [the good]" (§16, 5:230).[8]

[8] Even though encounters with beauty do help us cultivate a mind amenable to the strictures of morality, they cannot, in fact, prompt us to act morally. Kant touches on this issue in his discussion of art when he mentions how "novels and sentimental plays"

A further support to the moral frame of mind, let us not forget that we take pleasure in beauty, a pleasure that is unique among pleasures in that it arises from a disposition of our faculties alone, not from mere sensibility or the satisfaction of our inclinations. The pleasure we find in beauty is disinterested, universal, and necessary. Thus, in cultivating our taste, we begin to associate a certain kind of pleasure with the very aspects of judgments of taste that are analogous to moral goodness.[9]

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can never make us moral (Remark following §29, 5:273). Reading about or watching virtuous characters cannot make us virtuous people. We must still accomplish our moral ends through autonomous decisions grounded in respect for the moral law alone, for Kant. Now, encounters with beauty do help us to recognize and practice maintaining the state of mind required for moral action. Remember, the structure of the judgment of taste is analogous to that of moral judgments, and relishing that state of mind can help us develop our ability to feel love and respect without interest and to think from a universal standpoint. Thus Guyer concludes in a footnote, "The cultivation of taste and the development of morality are mutually reinforcing" (p.388, fn.19).

[9] We naturally wish to prolong this pleasure and remain in the state of pleasant contemplation that beauty sparks in us, and so we attempt to communicate our pleasure to others. This desire, combined with our natural tendency toward sociability and the fellow-feeling that arises through the *sensus communis*, draws us into communion with others when we experience aesthetic pleasure. Kant's views on culture, especially as he expresses them in the "Critique of the Teleological Power of Judgment," support this reading of taste and art as helpful in developing the sociable state of mind that makes for harmonious communities. Culture is the process by which human beings develop an aptitude for setting ends, and Kant argues here that this is the ultimate end of nature with regard to human beings. Our unsocial sociability, by which we desire communion with others yet also need to compete with them, leads us naturally to winnow our unruly inclinations and channel them toward this end. Kant explains, "... the culture of training (discipline), is negative, and consists in the liberation of the will from the despotism of desires, by which we are made, attached as we are to certain things of nature, incapable of choosing for ourselves" (§83, 5:432). Disciplining our desires by cultivating taste frees us to use our own understanding—that is, to think for ourselves from a universal standpoint—and to pursue our own ends with hope that the world will be amenable to those ends. Thus Kant concludes:

> Beautiful arts and sciences, which by means of a universally communicable pleasure and an elegance and refinement make human beings, if not morally better, at least better mannered for society, very much reduce the tyranny of

The parallels Kant draws between aesthetic judging and the moral frame of mind make aesthetics a valuable propaedeutic to moral life. First, beauty itself symbolizes morality, perhaps making the moral concept of an unconditionally good will concrete and visible. Second, structural similarities between judgments of taste and judgments of morality mutually reinforce our ability to make both kinds of judgment. Third, aesthetic experience allows us to practice taking a universal standpoint in our judging, analogous to that which we must take in moral decision making. Fourth, encounters with beauty teach us to love without interest, as morality also commands. And finally, the pleasure we experience in beauty leads us to associate universality with a pleasant fellow-feeling that is conducive to moral life.

This is the relation Kant envisioned between aesthetics and ethics. The two must remain distinct and separate for Kant, yet he saw a structural analogy between them that makes aesthetics preparatory for ethical life.

Kant's Aesthetics as a Model of Morality

Now I would like to offer a reading of Kant's aesthetics that draws out the ethical potential in several key features of his thought, namely play, the *sensus communis*, and aesthetic universality. In my view, these features of Kant's aesthetics supply several central elements of a new picture of ethical life, modeled on aesthetics, that counteracts

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> sensible tendencies, and prepare humans for a sovereignty in which reason alone shall have power… (§83, 5:433)

When we cultivate our desires in the context of society and under the direction of taste, we can learn to govern ourselves in accord with reason, as morality demands.

the clockwork model of moral reasoning. Because the play of the faculties that takes place in aesthetic judging allows for the unique and singular to remain as such in imagination without being entirely subsumed under a universal, and the *sensus communis* gives us a sense for how all others judge, the aesthetic state of mind leads to a kind of universality that can accommodate particularity and preserve individuality while still guaranteeing universality.

It is my contention that the disposition of the faculties in aesthetic judging—their free play—is responsible for significant moral resonances in Kant's aesthetic theory. When we encounter beauty, our cognitive faculties are somewhat confounded. We do not have concepts at the ready to cognize or subsume the manifold of intuition that beautiful scenes present us. In aesthetic judgment, instead of determining a concept through the manifold of intuition as we would in a determinative judgment, our power of judgment becomes reflective, and our faculties fall into a free harmony that Kant calls "play." Play is what displaces us from the mechanistic sphere of conceptual understanding or the systematic operation of our faculties. In this, both imagination and understanding fulfill their functions while yet remaining free from their usual limitations. As Paul Guyer summarizes in a footnote to the Cambridge edition of the text, free play "somehow satisfies the demands of both sensibility and understanding without being mechanically governed by the normal rules of either" (p.359, fn.15). The imagination stays free, though it enters a harmonious relation with the lawfulness of the understanding, and the understanding does its job of organizing what is given in imagination but without definitively schematizing that sensuous content. In this way, the

imagination and the understanding play in accord with each other. This harmonious free play of the faculties frees us from the systematic subsumption of particular intuitions and frees us to engage the reflective power of judgment.

Normally, our faculties work to determine and subsume the world, constituting it as a lawful and organized place, and we aim to bring ourselves into order under the moral law as well, determining our will through that universal concept alone. Aesthetic play for Kant demonstrates a new sort of agreement of the cognitive faculties, a playful one instead of a schematic one. To refer again to Ted Cohen's essay on beauty as the symbol of morality, there he says that the aesthetic introduces a comportment towards an object that exceeds the theoretical (contemplation), the practical (use), and the pathological (interest).[10] What Cohen then calls an inexplicable way of making sense of an object,[11] I am calling an interpretive and playful orientation to things.

The playful agreement between imagination and understanding invites us to interpret the world we encounter instead of simply cognizing or subsuming it. When our faculties play, we are free to expand our concepts and even create new ones. When we encounter beauty, instead of a determining judgment, we make a judgment call; our relationship with beauty is more open-ended, open to interpretation and responsive to the particulars at hand. To put it another way, an aesthetic mode of engagement with the world is playful instead of being subsumptive. To make an analogy, there is a difference in orientation toward a thing we wish to scientifically understand—we study it, dissect it, classify it—and a thing we're playing with. When we are engaged playfully with people

[10] Cohen, 230.
[11] Cohen, 230-231.

and things, we don't try to master them or determine them. A playful orientation toward the world allows us to create order and meaning nonetheless, while yet respecting and not subsuming the particularity and freedom of others and things.

To put this idea another way, playfully engaging the world makes our primary orientation an *interpretive* one. Interpretation requires that one take in the given particulars and develop a meaningful account grounded in that particularity. Again to make an analogy, interpreting a text requires more than categorizing it (by genre, for instance); a reader must engage with the distinct composition of words and sentences in order to both discover and create meaning in and from what is given. Interpretation is a playful act, and interpretation is the response that is proper to that which is novel and unique. For Kant, it is beauty that demands interpretation; I suggest that ethical life merits the same, for our world is composed of unique individuals in particular situations, not instantiations of a universal. Our ethics must be able to accommodate the particular while aiming for universality.

Kant's notion of play and its concomitant interpretive orientation toward the world constitute just one key element of the understanding of ethical life I am recommending. I will further suggest that this fundamental feature of Kant's aesthetics—along with the *sensus communis*, which the play of the faculties brings to light—allows for a new sense of universality that accommodates the particularity of ethical situations and of specific others we are involved with in ethical life. In this, Kant's aesthetics gives us resources for envisioning moral life as more engaged and communal. As we examine the contours of moral life in the image of play, let us further

investigate how the *sensus communis* allows us to translate our subjective pleasure in the beautiful into a shared sense of belonging to the community and being co-constituted with other human beings.

The *sensus communis* is an essential aspect of my reading of Kant's aesthetics as indicative of a new possibility for ethical life because the *sensus communis* is what elevates our pleasure in the play of our faculties above private sensation. The *sensus communis* is the transcendental constitution of human beings that allows us to compare the disposition of our faculties (their play) with the expected disposition of others' faculties. The *sensus communis* is our capacity to judge if others' faculties will be at play like ours are, i.e. to judge whether we should expect our experience to be shared. In this, I suggest that the *sensus communis* has significant ethical potential as it brings us into a sense of what is shared or common among the human community.

Kant defines the *sensus communis* as "a communal sense, i.e. a faculty of judging that in its reflection takes account (*a priori*) of everyone else's way of representing in thought, in order **as it were** to hold its judgment up to human reason as a whole" (§40, 5:293). Recall from above that Kant understands the *sensus communis* to be an *a priori* capacity to sense the disposition of our faculties (*viz*. their free play) and judge whether others' faculties' disposition will accord with ours. Kant presents the *sensus communis* in the context of guaranteeing the necessity of judgments of taste, but the *sensus communis* is essentially another name for the aesthetic power of judgment, encompassing all three of the distinctive features of aesthetic judgment I have highlighted in this chapter: its reflectiveness, universality, and necessity. It is a faculty of

judging that reflectively accounts for the disposition of everyone else's faculties, comparing its own feeling to the expected feelings of everyone else and discerning when its judgment is subjectively universally valid. Indeed, Kant calls taste itself a *sensus communis* (§40). Having good taste means being able to judge when it should be expected that others' feelings accord with our own subjective judgments. This accords with our common understanding of what it means to have good taste: one who has good taste in art is good at discerning when what pleases them about a certain painting or sculpture will also be pleasing to others. To put it in Kant's terms, having good taste means being good at discerning when our pleasure comes from the disposition or play of our faculties, a response which is universal and shareable, and not from any idiosyncratic personal inclination. We make judgments of taste by "putting [ourselves] into the position of everyone else" (§40, 5:294) by being displaced from our particular sensations and attending to the disposition of our faculties in reference to the expected disposition of others' faculties.

Judgments of taste differ for Kant from theoretical and moral judgments because of this communal sense, our sense of how others will respond to an experience, even when we have no conceptual framework by which to schematize and understand that experience. As I have said, free play is the way our faculties encounter what is unique or strange, and the *sensus communis* allows us to do so in a way that accords with how all others judge the same strange or novel experience. Our communal sense gives us to know that others feel as we feel and are constituted as we are constituted. Due to the

sensus communis, the play of our faculties results in a feeling of community with others who share the same facultative constitution and the same basic experience of the world.

This fellow-feeling leads us to pursue meaningful connections with others. We want to share our experience of beauty and linger in the feeling of pleasure we find in discovering that others experience the world like we do (§12). Kant says that we desire to communicate our aesthetic pleasure, and that taste promotes our natural tendency toward communing sociably with others (§41).

Yet what is communicated in a judgment of taste is not a concept but a feeling. Thus, we communicate not a determining judgment in the first *Critique* sense but the feeling of the arrangement of our cognitive faculties (the fact of their free play). As a result, the judgment of taste is able to connect individuals holistically, in our wholeness as rational and sensuous beings. In sum, the *sensus communis* allows us to access a general sense for the feelings of others, based solely on the fact of our having the same faculties, i.e. on the fact of our sharing the human condition. As a result, the judgment of taste communicates more than just the disposition of our faculties. Taste assures our fellowship with others; we feel not just the arrangement of our faculties when we encounter beauty but also our commonality and community with all humanity. Sensing our co-constitution with others is what leads to the possibility of our judgments having subjective universal validity, for without this communal sense, we would not be able to judge whether to claim universality for our judgments based on pleasure.

The new kind of universality achieved in aesthetic judgments, which Kant calls subjective universality or aesthetic universality, provides the final resource for

understanding ethical life that I want to highlight. As we know, Kant takes universality to be the mark of morality: the moral imperative is to act on a universal law. The notion of universality that Kant draws on in his ethical thought is an objective one, in which we treat one another as rational beings. Taking the universal standpoint in the context of Kantian morality means abstracting from one's own pathological desires and inclinations to arrive at a universal judgment independent of the subject doing the judging. In this way, universal moral judgments are understood to function objectively, with the force of necessity.

In aesthetic judgment, on the other hand, while the characteristics of universality and necessity remain, they are recast in subjective terms. Judgments of taste are grounded in our feeling of pleasure and the free play of our faculties, not in any concept (§15, 5:228). Hence, judgments of taste cannot be argued for or proved objectively; we must experience the beautiful object for ourselves in order to assent to its beauty (§8, §33). Nevertheless, we understand judgments of taste to operate universally. Since the pleasure we experience is grounded in the play of our faculties and we share the same facultative constitution with all other human beings, our subjective feeling is universally communicable, and we expect others to experience pleasure in beauty when we do.

The universality of aesthetic judgments differs importantly from the objective universality of moral judgments, grounded in pure reason. How Kant conceives of this difference might best be captured in the maxims he presents in §40 for reason and for the power of judgment. The maxim of reason is a demand to be in accord with ourselves and to think consistently (§40, 5:294). The maxim of the power of judgment is "to think in

the position of everyone else" or to think in a broad-minded and enlarged way (§40, 5:294). Objective universality, grounded in reason, implies self-consistency, whereas the universality of aesthetic judgments implies broad-minded thinking that encompasses, in Kant's words, "the whole sphere of those who judge" (§8, 5:215).

Universality grounded in reason alone reflects Kant's bifurcated picture of the human being, in which the rational must subsume the sensuous and reason must win out over inclination. I suggest that this picture of morality is susceptible to clockwork thinking, for it is too one-sided to fit the kind of beings that we are—complex and contextualized particulars. Objective universality provides a one-dimensional morality (and this *is* what Kant wants—morality according to *pure* reason). In contrast, when universality is grounded in a relation of play among the faculties (not one of subsumption) and involves our shared sense of how others judge, it is multidimensional. Aesthetic universality incorporates reason and imagination and is outward-looking and community-oriented. We might express this idea in spatial terms: objective universality is vertical, dictated by reason and imposed upon the human world; aesthetic universality is horizontal, arising from the broad human community itself. Rather than the moral law or the pure categories of the understanding determining the universal validity of our judgments, this validity arises from the plane of our human experience, including both our cognitive experience and our affective engagement with particular others and things.

What is more, the imposition of objective universality can do violence to the individual. This was the concern of thinkers like Horkheimer and Adorno when they criticized Kant's ethics in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. A strictly universal sense of

morality cannot accommodate the particularity of individuals and situations. The kind of universality that arises in aesthetic judgment, however, is grounded in the faculties' response to uniqueness, to something that cannot be determined simply through a universal, and so aesthetic universality maintains the unique particularity of its object. As a subjective form of universality, aesthetic universality can maintain the integrity of the subject, the individual, rather than subsuming it under a universal law, while nevertheless equating morality with taking a universal standpoint.

I recommend this kind of universality in the context of ethical life because it accommodates the particulars and suits the multi-sided, complex, contextualized beings we are. Aesthetic universality is grounded in our expectation that we can communicate with and share experiences with others. This approach is more appropriate for a humane and communal morality that supports our elevating and expanding our thinking to incorporate the whole human community in moral considerations.

All together, these three features of Kant's aesthetics—play, the *sensus communis*, and aesthetic universality—open the possibility for new links between aesthetic experience and morality. The playfulness introduced in aesthetic experience provides a model for understanding others in their particularity, as unique individuals, i.e. as more than objects and as more than instantiations of categories. The broader way of thinking that the *sensus communis* makes available to us helps us to view our moral project as an endeavor that requires interpretation and judgment. Perhaps most importantly, aesthetic experience as Kant describes it can lead us to understand ourselves as co-constituted members of the broad human community, because of the emphasis it

places on both the common facultative constitution of human beings and our capacity for sharing what seem otherwise to be private experiences (i.e. the feeling of pleasure).

The play of our faculties shows our power of judgment itself to be grounded in part in a communal sense, i.e. in our fellow-feeling with others, and thus we come to understand ourselves as co-constituted with others. Combined with our natural tendency toward sociability, which Kant establishes in "Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Intent" (1784) and reiterates in the third *Critique* (§9, §41), aesthetic pleasure seems to support the formation of concrete human communities. The experience of beauty, an experience that teaches us about our fellowship with other human beings and about the possibility of non-conceptual, subjective communication, draws us into communities with others.

Encounters with beauty lead us to understand the world as a human one and not just a mechanistic one. We come to see ourselves as members of the broad human community, co-constituted with other human beings who are facultatively alike. A human world is a place where nature and freedom, imagination and reason, are both harmoniously in play, and it is the harmonious play of our faculties that reveals that world to us. This realization is relevant to a picture of moral life that is both interpretive and communal, in which we make moral judgment calls based on a sense for the fundamental similarity and interconnectedness of all human beings, just like we do in aesthetic judgments. Kantian aesthetic play also offers a way to keep the particulars of a situation in play when making a judgment in ethical life.

These aspects of Kant's aesthetics provide valuable resources for revising our understanding of morality. Our faculties' playful response to beauty and tapping into the *sensus communis* both allow us to approach the world with an open mind and a reflective spirit that aims to interpret and respond in a way that is comparable to all others who judge. In this revised view of moral life, human society demands of us what encounters with art demand of us—that we make a new judgment, grounded in principle and guided by the spirit of universality, but wholly new and undetermined each time, and somewhat playful in the way it is also accountable to the particulars presented in imagination. Moral judgments involve reflection and interpretation, just as aesthetic judgments do. And thus, these can also be playful rather than schematic.

Ethics in the Image of Play

While Kant admits that aesthetic judgment can be understood as preparatory to moral goodness, the aesthetic experience of play is not properly moral for Kant. Many have found ethical potential in his aesthetic thought, but Kant does not elaborate on the possibility of a deep kinship between his aesthetics and an image of moral life that accommodates both particularity and law. Nonetheless, I suggest that we incorporate Kant's notion of aesthetic play in our image of ethical life in our age, an image of a universal ethics like Kant's but supplemented with the resources we find in aesthetic play, deepening our sensitivity to particulars in how we enact the moral demand we find within us. Play gives rise to aesthetic universality, which expands our concept of

morality to accommodate other people in their particularity and in the context of our particular communities.

Aesthetic judging requires us to reflect, it throws our faculties into a free play, and as a result we make judgments about objects without subsuming them as such. Aesthetic judging also puts us in touch with our shared human condition and our participation in an inclusive human community. Most of all, beautiful things demand that we interpret our surroundings thoughtfully and with an eye to a universal built from the ground up among the human community of those who judge, not a universal mandated from pure reason. In my view, Kant's aesthetics contains the potential for this alternative approach to moral life: that we make moral decisions with an eye to the aesthetic universal, considering our relation to an expansive human community, allowing our imagination to play and not subsuming particular details under universal concepts, and expecting to make a new judgment that responds freely to our situation, as we interpret it.

Reimagining morality in the image of aesthetic play is important given the dangers that many have identified in Kant's ethics. First, Hegel's concern that Kant's ethics is an empty formalism and that the content of the moral law cannot be specified contributes to contemporary criticisms that abstract or objectively universal moral codes such as Kant's are not practicable. On the other hand, modeling moral judgments after aesthetic judgments means taking a specific content or situation as the starting point rather than reasoning from a pure, which is to say abstract, rational principle. Unlike the objective universality of Kant's moral law, aesthetic universality allows judgments to

retain the specific content of the situations that give rise to those judgments. In this, aesthetic universality circumvents the criticism that moral judgments might be empty, mere form, for it depends on particular sensuous content much more than objective universal judgments might. Aesthetic universality keeps our judgments grounded in the phenomenal world, so we can't be accused of alienating the particular practical details at hand in deference to abstract theoretical constructs.

Second, the type of universality associated with Kant's ethics gives way to a prevalent critique—that subsuming individuals under universals can do violence to the particularity of those individuals. Objective universality does not accommodate individual situations, which are often essential to matters of morality. Approaching an ethical judgment from an aesthetic perspective, however, allows the particularity of the situation to lead, for in aesthetic judging the particular sensuous content remains undetermined, and the free play of the faculties sends us into reflection and directs us to consider how others judge instead of systematically conceptually determining the matter at hand. Making moral judgments from a position of aesthetic universality preserves the particulars in the play of the imagination with the understanding and avoids the potential for individual details to be neglected or even violated as they are summarily subsumed under a category.

In sum, I am arguing that aesthetic universality offers an intervention for moral life that is less susceptible to what I have called clockwork thinking. This is the final and perhaps most important reason for preferring aesthetic universality to the objective sense of universality provided in Kant's ethics: I believe that aesthetic play helps us to avoid

falling into the trap of simplifying moral judgment to clockwork. Experiencing the world aesthetically requires attention and responsiveness to particulars that make clockwork simplification impossible. A playful rather than subsumptive approach to ethics reintroduces elements of practical wisdom such as reflection and interpretation in the process of moral reasoning—elements that necessarily involve *human* reasoning and judgment, not calculation. Furthermore, when we reimagine moral judgments as subjectively universal, indexing not simply to a universal law but to our human community's way of judging (i.e. to the *sensus communis*) and to the particular situation at hand, we necessarily retain the role of others and the indelibly contextualized nature of moral judgments.

I see two advantages of understanding morality in terms of aesthetic play and universality rather than the subsumptive, objective universality Kant intends in his ethical theory: (1) cementing the role of interpretation, and with it, practical wisdom, in moral life and (2) widening the Enlightenment conception of the human community to include marginalized populations. To take the second point first, a universality that works horizontally, via the *sensus communis*, and takes into account how others judge rather than necessitating the categorization of events and objects in a top-down sort of way democratizes judgment and re-centers the mental processes we experience (i.e. the play of our faculties or *how* we judge) rather than the assumptions and conclusions that inform our judgments (i.e. what our judgments assert). As a result, aesthetic universality reinforces the idea of a human community that is inclusive of all whose faculties are like ours—all human beings, not exclusively those who come to the same conclusions we do.

Kant is often misunderstood to mean that universal judgments take a predetermined path, that there is only one way to judge or one legitimate conclusion to reach in our judging, and imagining the role that play and the *sensus communis* can have in moral life helps us to understand that agreement about what is moral is not what makes us a community; having the capacity to reflect and make a judgment at all is what makes us a community. Indeed, it is our capacity for play—for understanding the world in a way that demands interpretation—that makes the world a moral world, a human world. In this respect, Kant's work is highly relevant to understanding the community building and moral education taking place in the playful work of Shakespeare Behind Bars, for it reminds us that even those whose practical judgments our society condemns, and whom we therefore excommunicate, are nevertheless essential and indelible members of the human community.

The second advantage of reimagining ethics in the face of aesthetic universality comes from its grounding in the play of the faculties as a response to the particulars presented in imagination. As I have said, taking a playful orientation toward the world allows us to account for the particulars of a situation, to reflect and interpret them rather than perhaps hastily subsuming them under a universal rule. The kind of universality grounded in play leaves us room to interpret situations and things and decide anew each time how to respond to those particulars, which a simple objective universality does not easily allow. Thinking playfully about moral judgments reintroduces a more robust role for modes of responding to particulars such as interpretation and practical wisdom. These elements are key aspects of moral reasoning that resists clockwork thinking.

Conclusions about Play

We have seen how certain key elements of Kant's aesthetics, namely free play, the *sensus communis*, and aesthetic universality, might be understood in a moral context, even though Kant never intended to put them to this use. A free and playful relation between the imagination and the understanding establishes a reflective relation between us and our world, and that invites us to interpret instead of just mechanistically classify what is presented to us. Combined with our innate sense for how others judge and the feeling of belonging to a broad human community that comes with it, a playful orientation toward the world enables us to take a standpoint of universality that is grounded in our human world as we experience it, including its excesses and uniquenesses, the uncategorizable—the beautiful. When we adopt a standpoint of aesthetic universality in making moral judgments, we have the freedom to express practical wisdom in responding to the particularities of the situation and of the others involved, and we can judge in view of the community we belong to, thus making universal moral judgments that respect the particulars. Thus, we can truly take account of each other's humanity and not simply make moral judgments objectively, as if the players involved were mere objects to be organized and categorized.

Kant's work in the third *Critique* constitutes a crucial moment in the discourse on the relation between aesthetics and moral development. Kant's theory has the advantage of associating our pleasure in aesthetic play with the feeling of our commonality with other human beings. The *sensus communis* is responsible for our feeling of pleasure in

aesthetic play; we enjoy the experience of beauty because it reveals to us our fellowship with others, our shared ability to feel the same things and experience the world in the same ways. So Kant's idea of aesthetic play is implicitly outward-looking, strengthening our feeling of community with others and developing our actual social relations with others as we share the experience of beauty together in art and in nature. These features of aesthetic experience, as I interpret them, reinfuse our understanding of moral life with a sense for the particular being of others and a concern for their feelings, situations, and ways of judging that are distinct from anything objectively universal.

However, Kant's notion of aesthetic play also has significant limits in terms of its usefulness in developing our moral capacities. (In other words, aesthetic universality has its advantages for reimagining moral life, but Kant's version of play can only get us so far.) For one, it paints aesthetic play as somewhat elusive, a disposition of the faculties that occurs to us inadvertently. The free play of our faculties is not a state we can initiate in any direct way; we can only seek out beauty in art and in nature. This means that our pursuit of fellow-feeling and the moral benefits we incur from practicing aesthetic judgment are destined to be indirect. We can linger before beauty and communicate our feeling to others in order to prolong the pleasure, but Kantian aesthetic play is not something we can actively choose to engage in. In addition, Kant's version of play happens entirely internally, in the mind of the one experiencing beauty. Play does discover to us our ability to share the private feeling of pleasure with others, yet that discovery need not involve actual others. Kant's notion of aesthetic play is basically

passive and may occur in isolation; this is play within the mind of the perceiver, not play *with* other participants in the aesthetic experience.

Furthermore, the universal perspective we can achieve through play is not properly moral for Kant. While he insists that aesthetic judgment is structurally analogous to moral judgment and is propaedeutic to moral life, the features of aesthetic experience I find most compelling and morally relevant never influence Kant's moral thought.[12] Kant admits that aesthetic experience can teach us to love without interest and give us practice thinking from a universal perspective, but he does not advocate that we take an aesthetic perspective on moral judgment. The spheres of morality and aesthetics remain separate for Kant; he fails to recognize the deep potential relevance of his aesthetic theory to practical life.

Thus, it is left to Kant's successors in the history of German philosophy to unfold the ethical potential of the third *Critique*. To begin with, Schiller uncovers the role of play in our moral endeavors by thematizing the fundamental unity of the human being that Kant leaves irresolvably bifurcated. For Schiller, the concept of play remains central, and the affinity between our moral nature and aesthetic judgment is made clear in terms of man's aesthetic education. (See Chapter III.)

In closing, while play is not, strictly speaking, an ethical concept for Kant, it does reveal to us some important features of ethical life—even if they are features Kant relegated to the realms of aesthetics. Ultimately, I recommend an aesthetic view of

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[12] Kant published *Metaphysics of Morals* (1797) after completing the third *Critique* (1790), yet the notion of judgment does not make a significant appearance in the latter text.

morality grounded in play because play provides an openness, and reflective judgment an indeterminacy, that allows us to interpret, not subsume, particular individuals and situations and gives us freedom to respond with care and wisdom, measuring the fitness of our dealings with others not by a disembodied rational universal but according to our communal sense of how human beings judge.

CHAPTER III

MORAL BEAUTY AND AESTHETIC FREEDOM:

SCHILLER AND THE POWER OF PLAY

Introduction

Writing less than five years after Kant published the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, Friedrich Schiller advocates a much stronger link between the aesthetic and the moral than Kant does. Schiller's work thus presents a much clearer case for understanding play as an ethical concept. Schiller grounds his work in Kant's philosophy, yet he asserts the fundamental unity of the human being in contrast to Kant's dividing it irreconcilably into the rational and the sensuous. Schiller's insistence on the necessity of viewing the human being holistically in considerations of morality and freedom reinvigorates the roles of character, judgment, and practical wisdom in ethical life in the wake of Kant's focus on reason and autonomy. Ultimately, Schiller develops the thesis that the combination of intellect and sense in aesthetic play results in a higher ideal of freedom, aesthetic freedom, and a higher ideal of morality, too, understood as grace or moral beauty. In terms of aesthetic play, Schiller develops an account that both gives human beings a more active role in choosing to engage in play and gives play itself a more central role in developing our moral being from out of our sensuous being.

Schiller's work presents a stronger argument for understanding play as an ethical concept than we found in Kant. Whereas Kant clearly delineated spheres of human

experience and philosophical inquiry, Schiller's thought emphasizes unity and integration, and in the two works discussed in this chapter, "On Grace and Dignity" and *On the Aesthetic Education of Man*, Schiller intentionally blends aesthetics and ethics into a single line of thought. Thus, the chapter proceeds by presenting the problem with modern, Enlightened thought as Schiller understood it and his solution, to which the integration of art and morality is integral. Following my presentation of Schiller's combination of ethics and aesthetics in both "On Grace and Dignity" (in the section "Moral Beauty") and *On the Aesthetic Education of Man* (in the section "Aesthetic Freedom"), I will present a significant objection to Schiller's blending of art and morality that arises through a work of fiction.

Anthony Burgess's *A Clockwork Orange* appears to critique Schiller's notion of aesthetic education through its depiction of a technique of reformation that uses art in perverse ways to coerce improvements in behavior. Yet the divergences between that picture of moral formation through encounters with art and Schiller's full account of aesthetic play serve to support Schiller's thought as a solution to clockwork thinking instead of casting doubt upon it. Burgess's imagined system of aesthetic education is still utilitarian in nature, using art as a tool for artificial moral development, instead of understanding art as an interactive player in the cultivation of character. Schiller's idea of aesthetic education distinguishes itself not only from the utilitarian model of ethics but also from Kant's conception of aesthetic play, involving engagement and participation, not simply passive reception. Thus, Schiller's idea both reorients ethical theory away from clockwork mechanization and advances Kant's foray into the morally

educative character of aesthetic play and shows play to be an active, participatory process by which humans may develop and embrace their freedom.

All together, Schiller's thought highlights the role of sensibility and the awakening of aesthetic play as key aspects of moral development, and in so doing he also alerts his readers to an ideal of freedom that he suggests is more complete than Kant's and thus serves to bridge the gaps between reason and sense and between ethical theory and ethical life. Schiller's work towards putting the rational and sensuous aspects of the human being back together and thus bringing codes of morality and the lived experience of ethical life closer to one another enables us to reimagine ethical life in the image of art, play, and judgment instead of in the clockwork terms of science, utility, and economics.

Diagnosis of the Problem

Schiller's magnum opus, *On the Aesthetic Education of Man*, begins with a diagnosis of the problems besetting modern society akin to the account of the dangers of clockwork thinking I have already established.[1] In the fifth and sixth letters, Schiller mourns the complete subjugation of feeling to the dominance of reason. Schiller first sets up a bifurcated picture of the human being that he attributes to Kant: human beings have two main aspects to their nature, the rational (also the moral) and the sensuous. While Kant does not explicitly associate our sensuous nature with caprice or irrationality, Schiller identifies this as an oversimplification of Kant's thought that has

[1] Friedrich Schiller, *On the Aesthetic Education of Man*, trans. Reginald Snell (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, Inc., 2004).

already become commonplace. Yet Schiller objects to the sharp division between reason and sense and their respective and exclusive associations with moral freedom and caprice,[2] and he describes at length how we experience that bifurcation as a problem in modern society.

Schiller acknowledges the benefits humanity has incurred from the Enlightenment (fifth letter). People are thinking for themselves, questioning lawless authority, and taking a stand for the moral. Yet by the same token, he identifies two varieties of "human degeneracy" that have come to light, one a lack of reason, the other an extremity of rationality that lacks feeling.[3] Later in the letters, he calls these two states barbarity and savagery, associating "enervation" (a lack of feeling) with the former and "coarseness" (a lack of reason) with the latter.[4] The person who lacks reason is no better than a savage and requires discipline and restraint. The person who lacks emotion, though, risks falling into a selfish belief in his own self-sufficiency that turns the individual into a miser and a despot and destroys the communal spirit required for

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[2] Schiller tells us in the third letter that we must become aware of "a third character" that can facilitate the transition between the rational and sensuous aspects of our being (*AEM* 30). This third character is the aesthetic, the analysis of which he develops in the rest of the book. The power of the aesthetic to mediate between the claims of nature and the dictates of the will is an idea Schiller gets directly from Kant. His solution to Kant's bifurcation is from the start rather Kantian: Schiller takes himself to be following out the logic of Kant's third *Critique* as an antidote to popular opinions of Kant that rely too heavily on the first *Critique* to the neglect of this later work.

[3] Schiller, *AEM*, 35. In Schiller's judgment, the Enlightenment emphasis on reason has produced these two extreme deficiencies in human character, and it is aesthetic education—the cultivation of that third character—that stands to resolve the issue. It can be argued that Schiller is once more following Kant's lead here, as Kant also retreated from focusing exclusively on reason when he wrote the third *Critique* about judgment, art, and teleology.

[4] Schiller, *AEM*, 55.

morality. This is the insight that distinguishes Schiller most decisively from popular memory of Kant, for Kant credits emotion with no positive role in moral life.[5] By Schiller's account, we have more to fear from a lack of sympathy than from a lack of reason since it is rational and scientific thinking that has come to dominate modern consciousness. Schiller's own concerns are commensurate with those of 20th and 21st century thinkers who see the modern age as one in which reflective ethical life is being reduced to a set of codes and utilitarian calculations. While the emphasis on reason is not the sole culprit of this decay, its idolization to the exclusion of feeling is a major cause of the mechanization of ethical reasoning.

In the sixth letter, Schiller explains the cause of the problem as he understands it. He writes:

> As soon as enlarged experience and more precise speculation made necessary a sharper division of the sciences […], the essential bond of human nature was torn apart, and a ruinous conflict set its harmonious powers at variance. The intuitive and the speculative understanding took up hostile attitudes upon their respective fields, whose boundaries they now began to guard with jealousy and distrust, and by confining our activity to a single sphere we have handed ourselves over to a master who is not infrequently inclined to end up by suppressing the rest of our capacities. While in one place a luxuriant imagination ravages the hard-earned

[5] Kant does claim that the feeling of respect supports our pursuit of the good, but it is important to note that feelings are not equivalent to emotions for Kant. Even so, respect for the law is the only "moral feeling" Kant identifies. In the *Metaphysics of Morals*, he identifies the development of conscience and feelings of love as concomitant with moral goodness, but these play no major role in our becoming good or developing moral communities for Kant.

> fruits of the intellect, in another the spirit of abstraction stifles the fire at which the heart might have warmed itself and the fancy been enkindled.[6]

It is culture itself that has divided humanity into these two classes of hyperrational barbarians and overly sensuous savages (the upper class and the lower class, according to Schiller). Enlightenment could not occur otherwise than through this separation of powers within the human being and in society. The development of scientific knowledge and culture required it; Reason and Nature had to be divided. But the divisive character of reason was not limited to the sphere of scientific knowledge; it imposed itself on every aspect of human experience. We can tell from Schiller's language that he understands that imposition to be violent. He calls the conflict between reason and nature "ruinous," "hostile," tearing us apart. He sees the boundary between these realms as something that is now "guard[ed]," each side "confin[ed]" by a "master," "suppressing" its opposite. Schiller sees this state of things as quintessentially unfree, in which the intellect is "ravage[d]" and the heart (or imagination, our sensuous nature) is "stifle[d]." This poetic presentation of the rift between sense and intellect clearly demands peace and harmony between the sides as its resolution. Though Schiller represents both sense and intellect as possible masters, his emphasis throughout *On the Aesthetic Education of Man* reveals that he believes modern society has chosen the latter, opting to obey reason alone at the cost of our capacity for emotion and imagination.

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[6] Schiller, *AEM*, 39.

Indirectly, Schiller seems to place blame for our one-sidedness on an idea familiar to us from Plato's *Republic*, the principle of specialization. As I mentioned above, in order to keep our society running smoothly and keep our culture progressing, divisions based on skill, knowledge, and class were necessary. We might say that the principle of specialization serves the *utility* of the state. Now, while the state runs like clockwork—and Schiller does call it both "a common and clumsy mechanism" and "an ingenious piece of machinery"[7]—human beings have been torn apart, fragmented, by this overspecialization. Schiller characterizes the mechanized modern state as lifeless and as ultimately botching our humanity.[8] Thus, long before Heidegger wrote about the dangers of modern society in terms of enframing, Schiller wrote, "Compelled to disburden itself of the diversity of its citizens by means of classification, and to receive humanity only at second hand, by representation, the governing section finally loses sight of it completely, confounding it with a mere patchwork of the intellect…."[9] Mechanistic thinking, we see once more, leads away from humanity, and the fullness of human life gets covered over in classifications that serve utility but not many-sided humanity.

According to Kant's epistemology, perfecting our scientific knowledge of the world requires subsuming natural phenomena under ideal categories. Schiller worries that practicing that way of conceptualizing our world has grown into an exclusive way—or, to use his imagery of violence and imprisonment, an oppressive and stifling way—of

[7] Schiller, *AEM*, 40.
[8] Schiller, *AEM*, 40.
[9] Schiller, *AEM*, 41.

seeing our world and our selves. We have developed just one of our various faculties, and as a result we've become one-sided. In reference to this one-sidedness, Schiller alludes to athletes who train one muscle group and neglect others, claiming, "Athletic bodies are certainly developed by means of gymnastic exercises, but only through the free and equable play of the limbs is beauty formed."[10] Training individual muscles or muscle groups has its utility, surely, but the resulting body cannot be called beautiful, whole, and free, only skilled. He continues, "In the same way the exertion of individual talents certainly produces extraordinary men, but only their even tempering makes full and happy men."[11] Freedom is the only thing that can create beauty and balance, not any oppressive subsumption of one faculty to another. Strict training is appropriate to the factions in a military conflict such as Schiller describes between reason/intellect and sense/imagination, but those warring parties must develop freely, unrestricted, in order to resolve the factions into a harmonious whole, a happy and full human life, a life of beauty. In sum, Schiller is critical of the tendency to cultivate intellectual strength without equally cultivating the power of imagination.

In this we see a criticism of the strict adherence to reason that results from Kant's work. Regardless of the caution Kant takes in *Metaphysics of Morals* by developing an account of moral feeling (that is, including a sense in which our sensuous nature is crucial for ethical life), not to mention featuring the imagination and its power to bridge the natural and the rational in the third *Critique*, his popular legacy largely places him squarely in Schiller's "barbarian" camp, valuing intellect and reason far more than our

[10] Schiller, *AEM*, 45.
[11] Schiller, *AEM*, 45.

sensuous nature. For this reason, although Schiller begins with a Kantian framework for understanding the multifaceted character of human being and even follows Kant's lead in turning to the aesthetic to bridge the two aspects of our nature, he takes issue with and revises some of the pillars of Kant's thought. Chiefly, Schiller develops a more robust account of the relation between aesthetics and morality, integrating feeling and reason in a way Kant's enduring bifurcation of the human being does not allow. Schiller claims that it is only by means of the aesthetic, or what he calls the "play impulse," that human beings can develop "full and happy" lives, lives of moral beauty and aesthetic freedom, complete and integrated selves. As a result, Schiller's work makes aesthetic play central to moral development, a firm relation between the aesthetic and the moral that Kant was hesitant to commit to.

Moral Beauty

Schiller saw aesthetics and ethics as inextricably related and explicitly combined them in his writing, as demonstrated in an early essay (responding to Kant's work) titled "On Grace and Dignity."[12] In one sense, this essay constitutes a variation on a common theme for Schiller: resolving the bifurcation between reason and sensuousness that Kant's work seemed to have put firmly in place. Schiller, also known as the poet of freedom, sought freedom from the dominance of reason over emotion in this reconciliation. "On Grace and Dignity" can be understood as one attempt to understand

[12] Friedrich Schiller, "On Grace and Dignity," in *Friedrich Schiller: Poet of Freedom, Volume II*, trans. George Gregory (Schiller Institute, Inc., 1992), 337-395. [Accessed online.]

our rational nature and our sensuous nature working together in harmony. In another sense, however, Schiller is responding to two aspects of Kant's thought, one from his ethics, and the other from his aesthetics. On the one hand, Schiller takes issue with Kant's apparent claim in the *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals* that acting from duty means acting contrary to inclination.[13] On the other hand, Schiller is also responding to Kant's ideal of beauty, the human form in its moral vocation, from the third *Critique* (§17). In response to both of these provocations from Kant, Schiller's primary focus in "On Grace and Dignity" is to demonstrate how the form of morality makes the human form beautiful, as expressed in its grace and dignity, thus uniting our moral nature and our sensuous nature. In effect, Schiller incorporates both ethics and aesthetics in order to move away from a purely rational conception of morality grounded in autonomy and toward an integrated and holistic conception of moral character. In this, Schiller's aesthetic theory is inherently ethical, and his thought unfolds in unintuitive pairs of terms such as "moral beauty" and "aesthetic freedom."

Schiller's notion of grace, for example, ―the free appearance of moral action, attributable to the cultivation of the sentiments to accord with the moral law― exemplifies the possibility of unifying the sensuous and the rational. In "On Grace and

[13] On this point, in this early essay of Schiller's, it is my judgment that Schiller himself falls victim to this common misunderstanding of Kant. He does not seem to understand the epistemological point Kant makes—that only when our inclination is contrary to duty do we know with certainty that we're being motivated by duty—and instead seems to take Kant to be claiming that only when inclination contradicts duty can we be motivated by duty at all (hence can we be moral at all). Regarding this misconception concerning Kant's ethical theory, it is my impression that Schiller outgrows that mistake as he moves away from "On Grace and Dignity" and composes his considered response to Kant's third *Critique*, *On the Aesthetic Education of Man*.

Dignity," Schiller highlights the ethical implications of the unity of reason and feeling, touting moral beauty—moral character expressed phenomenally—as the highest aim of ethical life, turning Kant's ideal of beauty on its head and representing the beautiful soul as the ideal of *morality*, too. Schiller's notion of grace is one way to imagine morality expressed as physical beauty in the human person. But Schiller goes beyond Kant by suggesting that the graceful person—the person expressing her moral vocation phenomenally—is not only the ideal of beauty but the ideal of morality as well.

Because Schiller develops his own thought as a revision of Kant's moral theory through Kant's aesthetics, Schiller's work constitutes an integrated philosophy of both ethics and aesthetics. Beginning with moral beauty as developed in "On Grace and Dignity" and continuing through *On the Aesthetic Education of Man* with the notion of aesthetic freedom, I will develop a fuller picture of Schiller's thought in the next two sections. Then I will expand on the idea of aesthetic play as it features in *AEM* and explicate how that idea lends itself to a holistic understanding of ethics and the integrated, i.e. sensuous *and* rational, human being.

Schiller's work provides an integrated account of ethical being that does not alienate us from our sensuous being. As a result, Schiller's thought also reintroduces a robust role for practical wisdom and contextualized judgment in ethical life through his focus on character and what he calls condition, not just actions and person.

For Schiller, every human being is constituted by two distinct elements, her person, which has both sensuous and rational aspects, and her condition, which describes her place in the world. Kant's ethics, by grounding the moral content of an action on the

purity of the will, restricts moral judgment to considerations of person. In introducing the relevance of condition, Schiller allows for more complexity in his conception of moral reasoning. Schiller takes seriously the contextualized nature of our moral judgments in a way that Kant's ethical theory does not. I argue that revitalizing the notion of condition or context and displacing the locus of ethical judgment from reason alone helps us develop practical wisdom in new situations that demand moral judgments. Further, this holistic ethical theory makes room for the type of cultivation aesthetic play has to offer: only by understanding ethics as a way of being in the world and not a code to follow can we understand how play supports ethical life.

In a particularly caustic critique of Kant's ethical theory, Schiller expresses the fear that the moral law has been "infused with a *rigidity* which transforms the most powerful expression of moral freedom into a merely more glorious kind of slavery" (emphasis original).[14] He finds the moral law in Kant's work to be compulsory, not a matter of choice for the moral person. Schiller's assessment of the problem is that the utter subjugation of emotion to reason is the cause of this slavery, and this leads him to advocate for a unification of sentiment and reason for a holistic—and wholly free—picture of morality. In response to Kant, Schiller writes, "Human nature is a more interconnected whole in reality than the philosopher, who can achieve something only by dissection, is allowed to let it manifest itself."[15] We also see here an implicit advertisement for Schiller's own philosophy: the philosophy of a poet and a playwright can accomplish a holistic interpretation, whereas a professional philosopher has been

[14] Schiller, "On Grace and Dignity," 366.
[15] Schiller, "On Grace and Dignity," 367.

trained in the art of dissection. Through a holistic picture of human being, incorporating both reason and emotion into a moral theory, Schiller believes he can not only improve on Kant's ethical theory but also secure morality itself against the dangers of vice. He writes:

> Only when it flows forth *from his entire humanity* as the united effect of both principles, *when it has become nature for him*, is his moral way of thinking secure from danger. For, so long as the moral mind still applies *force*, natural impulse must still have power to set against it. The enemy merely cast down can arise again, the reconciled is truly vanquished.[16] (emphasis original)

Schiller follows Kant in conceiving of morality as a weak opponent to inclination that must build up its resistance. Yet whereas Kant believes the moral will always involve a struggle, Schiller expresses hope in the cultivation of moral character such that we can develop a second nature (as Aristotle offers) and reform our inclination to be in harmony with our moral nature. Schiller's military vocabulary here is clear: he aims to vanquish inclination by *reconciling* the foes, not by striking it down with reason.

Thus, Schiller argues that our dual nature as rational and sensuous beings serves our moral vocation rather than thwarting it. Bringing these two aspects of our being into accord, i.e. being in agreement with ourselves, is the highest moral goal we can attain. Here again, we might notice Kant's influence on Schiller's thought. For Kant, the demand that one be consistent with (or in agreement with) oneself is the maxim of reason (*Critique of the Power of Judgment*, §40). Again, what is for Kant the highest aim

[16] Schiller, "On Grace and Dignity," 365.

of morality depends on reason alone, and Schiller appropriates that highest good while expanding it to envelop our sensuous nature as well as reason.[17]

In "On Grace and Dignity," Schiller describes this accord between the aspects of our nature as one of three relations that might exist between our rational nature and our sensuous nature. Either one might dominate the other (just as in barbarism and savagery, as he describes in *On the Aesthetic Education of Man*), or they might work in harmony. Schiller subtly accuses Kant's moral philosophy of promoting the subjugation of sentiment to reason, calling this viewpoint severe, gloomy, and ascetic.[18] Indeed, Kant does recommend subjugating our natural inclinations to the dictates of reason. And while Kant dissociates virtue and happiness, claiming that reason has no business trying to make us happy but only *worthy* of happiness, he never intends morality to be associated with misery and deprivation, either. Schiller couches his critique of Kant so as to suggest that his real disagreement is with *expressions* of Kant's views (in popular understanding and, to an extent, in Kant's own writing) and not with Kant's intentions, but he makes it clear that the avowed exhortations to asceticism are indeed present in Kant's text, if unintentional. Rather than arguing against Kant's rejection of the idea that virtue should lead to happiness, Schiller locates his disagreement with Kant's philosophy in his focus on moral action over moral character. Schiller agrees with Kant that action should be motivated by duty alone to be moral, but he also claims that our ultimate aim is not

[17] Of course, later in his career, Schiller will refine this view in terms of the third character I've mentioned above, the aesthetic, which he fleshes out in *On the Aesthetic Education of Man*. At this point in his thought, however, Schiller focuses on the moral implications of reconciling the two aspects of human nature rather than developing an account of *how* those two come to be reconciled.

[18] Schiller, "On Grace and Dignity," 365.

moral action but moral character: "…it is not man's purpose to accomplish individual moral acts but to be a moral creature. Not *virtues* but *virtue* is his precept…" (emphasis original).[19] Thus, he concludes that we ought to strive to perform our duty with pleasure, cultivating our emotions to rally behind moral motivations, transforming our feelings from natural, pathological phenomena into practical guides to moral virtue.

Feeling transformed to accord with the moral law is the cause of what Schiller calls grace. Grace is a freedom of movement that bespeaks a person's moral character. Schiller conceives of grace as visible proof that a person is no longer *constrained* by the moral law but rather has cultivated her inclinations so as to harmonize with the requirements of morality. A graceful person acts morally but makes those actions look involuntary, natural, as if inclination alone has led her to act that way (because, in fact, her inclinations *do* align with her moral duty and lead her to act that way). This, Schiller argues, is a higher ideal of morality than acting from duty and contrary to inclination. Human beings strive to reach a state of virtue, not merely to perform moral actions, and so it is moral character that should be our concern, not simply how an action is motivated. Moral character is evidenced by grace, not struggle to perform the dictates of duty. This shift reflects Schiller's concern for a holistic morality that incorporates both reason and feeling; it is reminiscent of Aristotle's virtue ethics and parallels Schiller's later claims in *On the Aesthetic Education of Man* that the Greeks had a more integrated existence than we moderns.

[19] Schiller, "On Grace and Dignity," 364.

Refocusing ethical thought on character instead of action and motivation not only reflects an integration of reason and feeling but also provides for a reinvigoration of concomitant notions in ancient Greek thought such as practical wisdom. Schiller's objection to Kant extends to Kant's narrow concern with the person in moral evaluations; Schiller, on the other hand, sees the person and her condition as inseparable elements of ethical life (as explained above and presented in the eleventh letter of *On the Aesthetic Education of Man*). What is missing from Kant's conception of the moral person is precisely the sensuous input, the world or condition. Our condition—the very fact that moral persons are situated in a world—is what necessitates that we cultivate practical wisdom along with our respect for the moral law (and, for Schiller, the transformation of our feelings to align with that law). Popular understanding (I should say *mis*understanding) of Kant's ethics throws out all contextual considerations in moral deliberation, but Schiller's integration of reason and feeling with respect to moral character, along with moral beauty as the expression of freedom, reintroduce the world as context for our moral being and awaken in modern consciousness the forgotten need for practical wisdom in addition to scientific knowledge and pure reason.

This need for practical wisdom can also be understood as an opening for moral judgment that follows the model of Kantian aesthetic judgment, with the possibility of creating new categories for interpreting our experience of unique individuals in unique situations. It is my argument that a holistic moral theory (like Schiller's) that takes seriously our sensuous nature and our need for aesthetic play in developing the highest form of freedom makes room for a conception of moral judgment akin to Kant's

aesthetic judgment—more reflective than determinative, allowing others and situations to appear in their individuality, and expanding our conceptual frameworks to accommodate novelty and uniqueness instead of subsuming particular others and events under pre-existing categories. Such a conception of moral judgment preserves humanity in its multi-sidedness rather than reducing it to rationality alone. Thus, Schiller's theory of moral beauty—i.e., a moral theory that focuses on character, context, and judgment—resists the clockwork approach to moral reasoning and accounts for human beings in their wholeness and liveliness rather than treating them like calculable machines. This is a morality that Kant and Schiller would both approve of, much different from the logic of economy and scientific classification that currently plagues modern moral consciousness.

Aesthetic Freedom

Many of Schiller's initial insights into the unity of reason and feeling that he began to explore in "On Grace and Dignity" only came to their full expression in *On the Aesthetic Education of Man*. There, through the novel notion of aesthetic freedom as distinct from moral freedom, Schiller was able to develop an account of human freedom that completely confounds the clockwork model of morality. Thus far, Schiller has only argued that the reconciliation of the aesthetic and rational aspects of human being allows us to achieve a higher moral ideal and is necessary for achieving true freedom; in *On the Aesthetic Education of Man*, he reveals *how* he believes that reconciliation might come

about. Aesthetic education or "training of the sensibility,"[20] is both the step in human development that awakens us to the need for reinstating the value of our aesthetic aspect in the face of hyperrational Enlightenment thought and the means of moving toward a unity of sense and reason. In other words, aesthetic education, especially the development of the play impulse, awakens us to a higher human ideal and awakens us to our power to achieve it. In Schiller's own words, he urges the importance of aesthetic education in letter eight when he says it is not enough to strive for intellectual enlightenment, since even this enlightenment depends on our character. Thus, he argues, "Training of the sensibility is then the more pressing need of our age, not merely because it will be a means of making the improved understanding effective for living, but for the very reason that it awakens this improvement."[21] In other words, Schiller values aesthetic education for two important reasons: (1) training our sensuous nature along with our intellect helps us make the transition between the theoretical and the practical (it makes the "understanding effective for living"), and (2) he believes that exercising our sensuous nature awakens us to improving our understanding in the first place. So Schiller promotes aesthetic education for making moral improvement possible, making it happen, and making it take effect in the world. Without cultivating sensibility, our best moral intentions may yet fall short of being actualized in the sensible world.

Continuing in the vein mentioned above, with Schiller's conception of the dual nature of the human being as a unity of person and condition, it is this vocabulary that leads him into perhaps the most important discussion in *On the Aesthetic Education of*

[20] Schiller, *AEM*, 50.
[21] Schiller, *AEM*, 50.

Man, that regarding man's various impulses. First, he enumerates two: the formal impulse and the sensuous impulse, corresponding with person and condition. The person or ego is that which persists through time, which the formal impulse requires. The condition or world is that which changes, i.e. physical reality that exists temporally; this corresponds to the sensuous impulse. In the eleventh letter, Schiller writes, "… in order not to be merely world [or condition], [man] must lend form to his material; in order not to be merely form, he must make actual the potentiality which he bears within himself."[22] Our formal impulse lends form—order, rationality—to the physical world, whereas our sensuous impulse allows us to realize externally (in the physical world and in time) our potentiality. The sensuous impulse translates the ideal into the material; the formal impulse brings material/physical nature into harmony with the rational self. The two impulses operate in tandem to constitute experience, similar to the interplay of understanding and imagination we know from Kant's theoretical philosophy.

But of course we know that Schiller is after a deeper unity than Kant's philosophy affords. Thus, he introduces a third impulse, just as he introduced a third character that can mediate between the opposing spheres of reason and sense or person and condition. He tasks culture with the job of uniting these two impulses, and he finds that culture has developed aesthetic play, or the play impulse, as its means of reconciliation. Before we explore the play impulse itself, let us consider again how Schiller speaks of this unity. As before, he finds the unity of the human being to be a moral concern. In a footnote in letter 13, Schiller writes:

[22] Schiller, *AEM*, 63.

> In order to make us co-operative, helpful, active people, feeling and character must be united, just as susceptibility of sense must combine with vigour of intellect in order to furnish us with experience. How can we be fair, kindly and humane towards others, let our maxims be as praiseworthy as they may, if we lack the capacity to make strange natures genuinely and truly a part of ourselves, appropriate strange situations, make strange feelings our own? But this capacity, both in the education that we receive and in which we give ourselves, is stifled in proportion as we seek to break the power of desires and to strengthen the character by means of principles. Because it is difficult to remain true to our principles amidst all the ardour of the feelings, we adopt the more comfortable expedient of making the character more secure by blunting the feelings, for it is certainly infinitely easier to keep calm in the face of an unarmed adversary than to master a spirited and active foe. In this operation, then, consists for the most part what we call the forming of a human being; and that in the best sense of the term, as signifying the cultivation of the inner, not merely the outward, man. A man so formed will indeed be secured against being crude Nature, and from appearing as such; but he will at the same time be armed by his principles against every sensation of Nature, and humanity from without will be as little accessible to him as humanity from within.[23]

This passage is worth quoting at length for its beauty and clarity in expressing Schiller's worry about the loss of humanity that occurs from what I'm calling clockwork thinking,

[23] Schiller, *AEM*, 71, fn.

here understood as moral reasoning so forcefully wedded to universal principles or rules that it silences the sensuous aspect or our ability to perceive the particular. Notice once again, Schiller uses language evoking embattled foes and military operations to describe the tension between reason and feeling and how it is generally understood and quashed in popular moral philosophy. Notice also Schiller's presentation of his solution in the rhetorical question at the beginning of the passage. He suggests that fairness, kindness, and humanity stem from our "capacity to make strange natures genuinely and truly a part of ourselves, appropriate strange situations, make strange feelings our own." Schiller defines morality in part by our ability to encounter the "strange" with grace and dignity, and he equates morality with what it means to be human. As a poet, playwright, and literary thinker, Schiller is certainly not alone in this notion. One common idea about the moral worth of reading and studying literature is that it immerses us in the foreign and, through characters we relate to and plot lines we recognize, helps us to feel at home in a strange world and accept otherness with grace.

I submit that it is Kant's aesthetics that gives us the best account of how creatures such as us who constantly subsume the new under old universal concepts can nevertheless encounter the strange with reflectiveness and respect. When we encounter beauty, for Kant, the play of our faculties expands our conceptual framework or even creates new concepts; this is the response that the "strange" demands from us in moral life. Thus, for Schiller, appropriating the strange with fairness, kindness, and humanity is the paramount task of morality. It follows that as we recognize the necessity of a balance between the principled and universal on the one hand and the sensuous and particular on

the other hand, we ought to embrace the role our sensuous nature can play in developing good moral reasoning. Schiller suggests throughout *AEM* that suppressing feeling dulls our humanity and decreases our capacity to do justice to the strange, the other.[24] Schiller diagnoses this state of things as an outward show of being cultured yet a diminution of our humanity. Moving from a bifurcated intellectual and physical existence to an integrated moral one requires a certain indulgence of the sensuous (what Schiller calls the material impulse) in order to transcend the struggle between reason and feeling and achieve unity and freedom in play.

Schiller's account of the material and formal impulses and his description of how play mediates the two substantiates this claim that true moral freedom requires play. Let us now turn to what Schiller has to say about play in the course of this work in aesthetics and ethics. In the 14th letter, Schiller claims that only in experiences that disclose simultaneously our sensible being and our intellectual being do we become fully conscious of our humanity. Such experiences awaken in us the mediating third impulse, the play impulse, or that which reconciles our dual nature, for the play impulse is "a partnership between the formal and the material impulse."[25]

Schiller defines "play" as "everything that is neither subjectively nor objectively contingent, and yet imposes neither outward nor inward necessity."[26] Schiller understands both the formal impulse and the sensuous impulse to place constraints upon us—the formal from within (as rationality does in cases of moral necessity) and the

[24] I will also argue later in the chapter that stifling the sensuous leads to a disconnect between lived experience and morality (between theory and praxis).

[25] Schiller, *AEM*, 77.

[26] Schiller, *AEM*, 78.

sensuous from without (as in the case of physical necessity or mechanistic causation). Between the demands of sense and the dictates of reason, however, we are allowed to play, free from compulsion. Play takes place in the intermediate zone between the rational and the sensuous, on the territory Kant also describes as the realm of the aesthetic. Again hearing echoes of Kant's third *Critique*, this description gives us the sense of a kind of purposiveness without purpose in Schiller's image of play: that which is neither contingent nor necessary might be understood as that which is indeterminately purposive, as Kant defines beauty. Play seems to follow rules and move toward a goal, but the activity of play itself has no real purpose. This kind of play, purposive without a purpose and taking place between the constraints of necessity and the whim of contingency, frees us "both physically and morally," Schiller says.[27] For Schiller, as for Kant, play is associated with freedom.

To be more specific, play is a mental operation for Schiller, as it is for Kant. It might be understood in Schiller's work as an excess of vital force or energy that is expressed in "free, non-utilitarian exercise" of the faculties.[28] Aesthetic play in particular is a contemplative activity, not a physical one. Schiller says that the object of the play impulse—that which can fulfill its need and drive—is beauty, which is to say that aesthetic play (as an expression of the play impulse) strives to realize the ideal of beauty.[29] As a partnership between the formal and material impulses, the play impulse and its striving for beauty is equal parts receptive and creative. It is only as human

[27] Schiller, *AEM*, 74.

[28] Hilde Hein, "Play as an Aesthetic Concept," *The Journal of Aesthetic and Art Criticism* 27.1 (Autumn, 1968), 67.

[29] Schiller, *AEM*, 76.

beings strive to appreciate and manifest beauty in the world (Schiller's most common example is through decoration and embellishment of the person and of the spaces and tools of everyday life[30]) that the play impulse is satisfied and we embrace the freedom of using our faculties for fun and become fully human. In Schiller's words, in aesthetic play, "… receptive and creative power develop in the happy equilibrium which is the soul of Beauty and the condition of humanity."[31]

Beyond this movement toward a higher freedom, play also establishes unity among disparate parties. For Kant, play puts an individual in touch with the whole community of others who judge, and more fundamentally than that, it draws the imagination and the understanding into a harmonious and not subsumptive relation. Schiller begins his analysis of play by expanding on a more fundamental sense of unity that play brings about. Even while the gap between sense and reason is infinite and cannot be bridged, beauty (the object of the play impulse and the focus of Schiller's discussion of play for most of *AEM*) is capable of bringing the two into a certain kind of synthesis. He writes in the 18th letter, "Through Beauty the sensuous man is led to form and to thought; through Beauty the spiritual man is brought back to matter and restored to the world of sense."[32] Striving for beauty is the impetus that draws the sensuous and the spiritual/intellectual/rational into agreement. Beauty or play is no midpoint or mean between these extremes, though; rather, its function is to reconcile the opposing workings of sense and reason, creating a harmony between the two in the human being

[30] Schiller, *AEM*, 125, 132, 136.
[31] Schiller, *AEM*, 124-125.
[32] Schiller, *AEM*, 87.

who experiences it. Thus Schiller becomes one of the first to rely on the notion of *aufheben* to accomplish the unification of the sensuous and the rational. Reginald Snell translates *aufheben* as "combined by cancellation"[33] or, as he adds in a footnote, "*preserved by destruction* in the dialectical sense" (emphasis original).[34] Play cannot change the nature of either sphere, the sensuous or the rational, and it cannot lessen the infinite distance between them, but it can combine the two in their negation, preserving them both in their destruction in the third character, the aesthetic.

Aesthetic play is the means of transitioning from physical being to moral being; it is how one becomes fully human, Schiller says. He writes, "The mind, then, passes from sensation to thought through a middle disposition in which sensuousness and reason are active *at the same time*, but just because of this they are mutually destroying their determining power and through their opposition producing negation" (emphasis original).[35] Schiller characterizes this play between the two determinations as a double negation, which produces a new form of freedom.

The result of this double negation is a mind that is effectively undetermined because it is overdetermined in the same way that an encounter with beauty involves an excess. Kant characterizes beauty as presenting an excess of intuition (in Schiller's terms, merely an excess of sensuous determinations); Schiller understands beauty as an excess of determinations, both sensuous and formal. In Kant's system, the excess cannot be conceptually determined and instead introduces play in the workings of our cognitive

[33] Schiller, *AEM*, 88.
[34] Schiller, *AEM*, trans. by Snell, 88-89 fn.
[35] Schiller, *AEM*, 98-99.

faculties; we must creatively interpret and play with our experiences of the beautiful. For Schiller, beauty involves the competing determinations of sense and reason simultaneously, resulting in an excess that demands mediation in a third thing. As in Kant, beauty for Schiller cannot be conceptually determined; we must actively play with it in order to understand it. We must call in aesthetic play as the mediator when our experience is excessively determined by both sense and reason at the same time. In the simultaneous experience of our sensuous nature and our rational nature, the two opposing powers are mutually destructive.

The happy consequence of this mutual destruction is the aesthetic, and it grants us a new sort of freedom:

> This middle disposition, in which our nature is constrained neither physically nor morally and yet is active in both ways, preeminently deserves to be called a free disposition; and if we call the condition of sensuous determination the logical and moral, we must call this condition of real and active determinacy the *aesthetic*.[36]

In the aesthetic, where sensation and intellect both determine our being, these cancel each other out, like colored beams of light combining to create white light. When combined, the overabundance of the conflicting determinations of sense and reason form a kind of blank that resembles indeterminacy. On the one hand, we are free from moral determinations and free to act according to the sense impulse, and on the other hand, we are free from sensuous determinations and free to act according to the formal impulse

[36] Schiller, *AEM*, 99.

that would bring the world into alignment with reason. This blank white light, the "negation resulting from an infinite inner abundance,"[37] Schiller calls "active determinacy" or "aesthetic determinacy."[38] This is the new freedom that play affords us, freedom from the determinations of matter at the same time we are free from the demands of reason.

Free from both constraints, we are also released from the day-to-day violence of satisfying our survival needs, Schiller says, and this freedom opens new possibilities for our interactions with others. To return to the example of adornment, embellishment, and decoration, Schiller calls these an early stage of aesthetic play that demonstrates that our concern for beauty supersedes survival needs.[39] Schiller says that at this point, man has progressed through a desire for pleasure to a desire to please others.[40] Striving to realize beauty in these ways involves an awareness of how others judge such that one's own adornment will be pleasing to others. In this, as well as in the way aesthetic play is defined by the release of all internal and external coercion, aesthetic play effects an end to violence and the struggle to survive in favor of an other-directed existence that Schiller likens to love and gift-giving.[41] In the aesthetic state, interacting with others is no longer constrained by physical needs, duty, and law; it is governed by the mutual desire to grant the other's freedom,[42] and so it signifies a higher sense of freedom than can be achieved through Kantian or rational morality alone. The inclusion of the

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[37] Schiller, *AEM*, 100.
[38] Schiller, *AEM*, 99-100.
[39] Schiller, *AEM*, 132-136.
[40] Schiller, *AEM*, 135.
[41] Schiller, *AEM*, 136-137.
[42] Schiller, *AEM*, 137.

sensuous impulse and a certain respect for the world of experience (our condition as human beings) leads to greater freedom and more loving interactions with others.

I offer that this new freedom—aesthetic freedom—is more valuable to moral life than Kant's idea of moral freedom as determined by respect for the moral law (autonomy). Aesthetic freedom makes room for the sensuous and particular to play a role in our judging, and it demands interpretation and practical wisdom in place of the systematic subsumption of particulars under the universal. In this way, aesthetic judgment and aesthetic freedom bring us closer to an ethics that respects the whole human person, including her condition, and makes us less susceptible to sacrificing our humanity to the clockwork.

Schiller emphasizes that on this reading of the effects of play, art and beauty cannot be understood as aids to moral behavior as they may previously have been (in fact, as Schiller once thought they might be in earlier essays). He urges in letter 21:

> Beauty gives no individual result whatever, either for the intellect or for the will; it realizes no individual purpose, either intellectual or moral; it discovers no individual truth, helps us to perform no individual duty, and is, in a word, equally incapable of establishing the character and clearing the mind. A man's personal worth or dignity, then, insofar as this can depend upon himself, remains completely undetermined by aesthetic culture, and nothing more has been accomplished except that it has been rendered possible for him *on the part of*

> *Nature* to make himself what he chooses—that he has had completely restored to him the freedom to be what he ought to be.[43] (emphasis original)

Aesthetic freedom does not bolster morality by directing those who experience art or beauty to behave morally. Culture does not develop our character, either. In rejecting the belief that beauty might affect one's "personal worth or dignity," Schiller might appear also to abjure the belief that the aesthetic disposition has any effect whatsoever on our development as moral creatures. However, we must remember that for Schiller, art and morality unite at two points: in dignity and in grace. Aesthetic freedom may not contribute to our moral worth or *dignity*, but it does give rise to the easy grace of making moral actions look involuntary, as appearing to stem effortlessly from our character. As it mediates the sensuous and the formal, aesthetic freedom allows us to demonstrate our moral character phenomenally. Recalling this, we arrive full circle at the convictions Schiller proffered in "On Grace and Dignity" about the need to reconcile the sensuous and the rational to reach the ideal human state. This unity, here fleshed out as aesthetic indeterminacy or aesthetic freedom, makes possible a higher ideal than moral autonomy. This is what Schiller calls the full and happy humanity, achieved not through reason alone but through that third impulse, play. Refocusing the idea of freedom on aesthetic play brings the sensuous aspect of our being that is completely set aside in Kant's ethics back into the spotlight. It allows for a moral theory that accommodates the whole of our humanity and not just one bifurcated half. For Schiller, only when we are fulfilling the full potential of our moral nature through aesthetic play, indeterminacy, and freedom are

[43] Schiller, *AEM*, 101.

we fully human. Thus, he writes, "Man plays only when he is in the full sense of the word a man, and *he is only wholly Man when he is playing*" (emphasis original).[44] Aesthetic play is what makes it possible for us to embrace the strange and act freely in response to others, as moral life demands.

This is what Schiller meant when he said that training our sensibility makes our understanding effective for living. Aesthetic freedom, in its active determinacy, not only reconciles the diversity of sense and reason into a unity but also resolves the gap between theory and practice in ethical life. It is only through a freedom that spans sensuous reality and our moral, rational nature that we can enact or realize the moral law in the real world. Schiller sums it up this way:

> The transition from the passive condition of perceiving to the active one of thinking and willing is only effected, then, through an intermediate condition of aesthetic freedom, and although this condition in itself decides nothing in respect to our judgement or our opinions, and consequently leaves our intellectual and moral values completely problematical, it is yet the necessary condition by which alone we can attain to a judgement and to an opinion.[45]

Aesthetic freedom is the condition of the possibility of our using our judgment, especially in ethical life when our will would be constrained by a purely rational moral law without the opposing determination of sense also coming into play. This, I suggest, is an element sorely missing from common modern understanding of ethical theory and moral codes, and indeed from Kant's ethics, as well. As we seek universal rules and

[44] Schiller, *AEM*, 80.
[45] Schiller, *AEM*, 108.

formulas for solving moral dilemmas, we intellectualize and mechanize moral life and ignore our phenomenal, sensuous being, making the moral more abstract and cerebral than practical. We distance person from condition, to use Schiller's terms, by treating condition or worldly circumstance as irrelevant to moral reasoning. Schiller demonstrates how aesthetic play can return the practical (as in practicable) element to practical (as in ethical) life by freeing us to act simultaneously as the type of beings we are, members of two distinct worlds, the sensuous and the intelligible. In direct response to Plato, then, Schiller argues for the possibility of a unity between these two aspects of our nature that is caused by, not disturbed by, the play of art. Schiller advocates for free play as the means of accomplishing what Plato could only achieve with a noble lie, for he claims that "Taste alone brings harmony into society, because it establishes harmony in the individual."[46]

Objection and Reply

We have seen how Schiller answers the problem of emotion starving while reason gluts itself by consuming the many-sidedness of human nature: he advocates aesthetic play, our response to art and beauty, as the means of reinvigorating both aspects of our nature and uniting them in a higher ideal of freedom. His account of aesthetic freedom allows for a more holistic understanding of ethical life, unifying not only feeling and intellect but theory and practice as well. I have suggested thus far that Schiller's thought provides us with new conceptions of the moral and of the freedom

[46] Schiller, *AEM*, 138.

required for us to reach our full potential as moral beings, and with the means of realizing that potential through free play.

Some would argue, however, that Schiller's use of aesthetic education as a means of moral improvement relies on coercion, not true freedom. Parts of the text of *On the Aesthetic Education of Man* might even seem to lend credence to this interpretation. Take, for example, this passage from letter nine:

> …render to your contemporaries what they need, not what they praise. … [T]ry your fashioning hand upon their idleness. Drive away lawlessness, frivolity and coarseness from their pleasure, and you will imperceptibly banish them from their actions, and finally from their dispositions. Wherever you find them, surround them with noble, great and ingenious forms, enclose them all round with the symbols of excellence, until actuality is overpowered by appearance and Nature by Art.[47]

From his language here, a reader might get the idea that Schiller thinks art works on people to make them good (to "drive away lawlessness, frivolity and coarseness") and can do so without their consent. There is reflected here a kind of hegemony as "the young friend of Truth and Beauty"[48] to whom Schiller gives this advice attempts to "fashion" his contemporaries and "overpower" their nature with art. The threat of sinking into fascism is not far from Schiller's thought.

Indeed, this view also seems consistent with some of Schiller's earlier work, particularly the essay known as "The Dramatic Stage as a Moral Institution," an essay

[47] Schiller, *AEM*, 54-55.
[48] Schiller, *AEM*, 53.

which Gail K. Hart takes up in detail in her monograph *Friedrich Schiller: Crime, Aesthetics, and the Poetics of Punishment*.[49] There, Hart supports the position that Schiller's views on the connection between art and morality risk condoning a certain hegemony of art over nature and even over freedom. She cautions that there is no guarantee that aesthetic education is liberatory and not coercive since education is imposed from outside and is intended to work within the individual to direct and form.[50] In this, Hart draws primarily on Schiller's early work on the moral power of theater, citing his claims there that drama works to catch the conscience of the whole audience by raising awareness of missing the moral mark and by inducing self-examination. Hart's description of Schiller's theater is overtly panoptical, with actors and spectators alike functioning as surveillance for one another's moral coming-to-consciousness during a play.

For the most part, Hart recognizes that this view is relegated to Schiller's early work, specifically that which he wrote prior to encountering Kant's third *Critique*, yet she also seems concerned that Schiller cannot completely obviate the charge of coercion even in his later considered stance on freedom and aesthetic play in *On the Aesthetic Education of Man*. She intimates that the unity Schiller develops there between the sensuous and the rational opens the door to the possibility of coercion of the will taking place through the imprisonment of the body. Where I have lauded the unity of mind and world as an essential step in actualizing our moral character and bridging the gap

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[49] Gail K. Hart, *Friedrich Schiller: Crime, Aesthetics, and the Poetics of Punishment* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2005).

[50] Hart, 25.

between theory and practice, Hart is wise to acknowledge that given this unity, unfreedom imposed in the world might have negative repercussions for our intellectual and spiritual freedom as well. Hart argues that Schiller indicted incarceration as a punishment for this very reason; she reads Schiller's plays in particular as evidence that he eschewed physical imprisonment as a means of moral reform for criminals because of the damage to their character that incarceration inflicts. To be clear, while this paraphrase of Hart's position—that incarceration is psychologically damaging—seems fairly incontrovertible, her position with respect to Schiller is more precisely that incarceration of one's body (that is, a *condition* of unfreedom) is harmful to one's *person* because of the deep unity of these two aspects of the human being. It is this very same link between the physical and the moral that also leads Hart to fear that the aesthetic education Schiller recommends may also be hegemonic, forming a person's character without their knowledge or free assent.

Hart's angle of approach in criticizing Schiller's faith in aesthetic education as emancipatory is to discuss the Schillerian resonances of the moral training program offered in Anthony Burgess's *A Clockwork Orange*. She understands Burgess's Ludovico Technique as a Schillerian ghost, a frightening modern instantiation of his ideal of aesthetic education that should give us pause before accepting Schiller's thesis that experiencing art develops higher ideals of humanity and freedom.[51]

We will now return to *A Clockwork Orange* in greater depth compared to the introduction to this dissertation. Not only did Burgess provide a useful heuristic for

[51] Hart, 135.

understanding the pitfalls of modern morality in the term *clockwork*; I argue that he imaginatively tested a version of aesthetic education that has fallen prey to clockwork thinking. In the novel, ultraviolent youth terrorize the city nightly, and jailers have collaborated with various doctors and psychologists to develop a correction program. Known as the Ludovico Technique, this program involves injecting a violent offender (main character Alex) with a drug that induces nausea before subjecting him to a literal theater of horrors (films and music) depicting in graphic detail the atrocities he himself has committed. Alex's body is trained to become physically ill at the sight or thought of violence, a successful result for the new technique.

The Ludovico Technique relies on a fundamental connection between the condition of one's body and one's psychological/intellectual state like that for which Schiller argues. Beyond that premise, we see Burgess drawing on Schiller's ideas as he makes film and music the vehicles for Alex's reeducation. The echo of Schiller's notion of theater, art, and training of the senses causing moral development is strengthened in the novel by reference to Beethoven's ninth symphony and the words written by Schiller himself.[52] Hart frames this Schillerian echo as an exposition of how Schiller's principles struggle to remain relevant in the modern world. She ultimately judges *A Clockwork Orange* to be an attack on Schiller's thought, since the kind of "transformation" Alex undergoes at the hands of art is clearly involuntary and abusive. Hart seems persuaded

[52] This reference is exaggerated and repeated in Stanley Kubrick's film version of *A Clockwork Orange*. Hart takes the novel and the film together and enumerates many potential links between these works and Schiller.

by the claim that Schiller's aesthetic education does indeed have the potential to be coercive after a close reading of Burgess's text and Stanley Kubrick's film adaptation.

So what are we to do to get Schiller out of this mess? Can we in good conscience hold onto the hope his writing generates that art and beauty will propel us toward a higher ideal of humanity and a truer freedom? I see a significant omission in Hart's presentation of Schiller's thought that gives me reason to keep the faith: she neglects the notion of play altogether. This oversight might be excused given that Hart is focusing primarily on Schiller's early works and not especially on *On the Aesthetic Education of Man*. Nevertheless, I find the introduction of the notion of aesthetic play to be problematic for Hart's account of the hegemonic potential in aesthetic education. Likewise, *A Clockwork Orange* misses the centrality of play in Schiller's concept of the aesthetic; this is the feature of Schiller's thought that the Ludovico Technique rejects, and it is also the feature that guards against this reading of aesthetic education as coercive. Reasserting the importance of play for Schiller supports his claim that aesthetic experience is indeed emancipatory even in the face of the worries Hart derives from *A Clockwork Orange*'s perversion of Schillerian aesthetic education.

The version of aesthetic education represented in *A Clockwork Orange* makes the mistake of imagining aesthetic experience in terms of perception or reception alone instead of in terms of play. In so doing, it fails to comprehend the thoroughgoing unity of sense and intellect that Schiller champions. Rather, The Ludovico Technique merely aims to affect the mind and the will through its actions upon the body, still a one-sided procedure. While Alex is subjected to the torture of watching and listening to the films

of violent crime, his body is strapped tightly and his eyes are pried open. He is deprived of the power of will and made to receive passively the images on the screen. Thus, Alex's experience in the Ludovico theater can hardly be considered an experience of the aesthetic at all. He is not given the opportunity to experience the simultaneity of the material impulse and the formal impulse, and so he is unable to experience the play impulse or its object, beauty. Yet aesthetic play is the only state in which we can engage with art and beauty. Recall Schiller's exhortation that "Man shall *only play* with Beauty, and he shall play *only with Beauty*."[53] Art is not to be merely contemplated or received but played with. In aesthetic play, man's whole being is engaged, mind and body, and this is the point that the so-called aesthetic education in *A Clockwork Orange* misses. Alex is strapped into a chair and forced to *view* art. There is no interaction or opportunity for play in that scenario. His body remains unfree throughout the process. It is disingenuous, then, to suggest that the Ludovico Technique models a Schillerian conception of aesthetic education. It uses art as an unconventional tool for coercion, yes, but it relies on external constraints to enforce perception of art only. For Schiller, perception of art is insufficient to constitute aesthetic education; the body must also be engaged in the play.

The *A Clockwork Orange* model of aesthetic education suffers from the same problem that plagues Kant's notion of aesthetic play: it is too passive. Both make art and beauty into something we undergo instead of something we engage in and with. For Schiller, play is an *impulse*, not simply a state we find ourselves in, and it is this very

[53] Schiller, *AEM*, 80.

aspect of Schiller's theory that vaults us out of the shortcomings of Kant's aesthetics and into the second dialectical moment of the progression I'm laying out in the philosophical history of the idea of aesthetic play. It is essential that we not overlook the fact that Schiller's view of the unity of the physical and the moral makes aesthetic play active, free, and practical.

Ultimately, the idea that the Ludovico Technique is a model of Schiller's aesthetic education is misguided. It neglects the holistic foundation of Schiller's thought and mistakenly focuses on perception in place of play. Consequently, it need not threaten a belief in the emancipatory and ameliorative power of aesthetic play. Beyond having nothing to fear from the Schillerian resonances in *A Clockwork Orange*, I suggest instead that this novel recommends Schiller's account of aesthetic play even more strongly, foregrounding the dangers of clockwork thinking with respect to morality and art and highlighting the risks involved in a one-sided approach to moral formation. Schiller's idea of training the sensibility has very little to do with forcing others to experience art and very much to do with our modes of engagement with the world. He teaches us the vital importance of engaging both our material and our formal impulses in making moral judgments so as to fulfill our destiny as whole, happy, and supremely free human beings. The argument presented by Burgess's text, as I read it, rails against a one-sided, clockwork approach to moral improvement and provides a frightening counterexample to Schiller's thought that serves to awaken readers to the urgent need for active engagement and aesthetic play in developing moral capacities and true freedom. Indeed, the perverse use of art in *A Clockwork Orange* serves to reinforce Schiller's

claim that sacrificing sensuous nature to cold, instrumental rationality constitutes a sacrifice of what makes us fully human. Although Hart's analysis of *A Clockwork Orange* appears to question whether Schiller's view holds, I find that Burgess's work in fact merely complicates and confirms Schiller's approach to solving the problem of clockwork thinking.

Conclusion

Schiller takes Kant's notion of aesthetic play a step further, and in so doing, he also makes explicit the relation it has to ethical life. In part, we might understand Schiller to be revising Kant's ethics to be more consonant with Kant's aesthetics, incorporating the insights of the third *Critique* into a theory of moral formation in *On the Aesthetic Education of Man*. Schiller provides an immediate legacy to Kant's work that supports understanding ethical life through the lens of aesthetic play. But Schiller also goes beyond Kant by counterbalancing the dominance of reason with the freedom that comes from aesthetic play, thus providing a view of morality that is playful and responsive to our sensuous nature instead of purely rational.

Schiller's emphasis on the unity of the dual aspect of human being and his development of the notions of aesthetic play and aesthetic freedom, while grounded in Kant's work, provide a more nuanced and more feasible solution to the problem of modern clockwork thinking. Without the counterbalancing influence of imagination, reason's law is simply compulsory, and man is not wholly free. Schiller's mediation of these two aspects of the human being in aesthetic play offers an avenue for human

beings to become free to act morally and indeed thereby to be fully human. Play transforms our divided physical and intellectual being into a unified entity that can make principled moral judgments with care and wisdom. Schiller's thought provides an opening for judgment and practical wisdom to reenter the moral scene as he reinstates the relevance of our condition, our world, in addition to the human person (or moral autonomy) alone. Thus, Schiller's aesthetics brings new fullness and life to our understanding of moral life. Moral beauty and aesthetic freedom—our expressions of the unity of ethics and aesthetics, or the overcoming of our solely physical and solely intellectual being in the aesthetic—are the apotheosis of human life.

In closing, let us briefly return to Schiller's diagnosis of the problems of modernity, namely the dominance of reason and intellect over sensuous nature. Thus far, I have explored the dangers associated with reason's cannibalization of sensation and the effects of that development on moral formation and human freedom. But Schiller presents another side to the problem that will be taken up in greater detail in the work of our next thinker, Hans-Georg Gadamer. For Schiller, it is not only sensation that is threatened by the overextension of scientific thought; it is our humanity, and certainly the validity of our ethical thought. Divided from the sensuous impulse and relegated to the realm of the intellect, ethics has been cut off from the phenomenal world.[54] In isolation from particular situations and individuals, ethics becomes abstract and formulaic, even mechanical. While Schiller's emphasis on the unity of the human being makes strides to resolve that severance and obviate clockwork thinking from the realm

[54] Schiller, *AEM*, 48.

of morality, it will be Gadamer's reconception of human life in terms of hermeneutic interpretation—and again, play—that completes the picture.

CHAPTER IV

PLAYING WITH OTHERS:

A GADAMERIAN ETHICS OF NON-DIFFERENTIATION

Introduction

In the intervening years, the notion of aesthetic play as an ethical concept falls out of fashion as the romantic idea of the unity between art and morality, of which Schiller's work is emblematic, is superseded. In the 20th century, however, Hans-Georg Gadamer, a careful student of Kant's and Schiller's thought, resurrects the idea of play both as central to our understanding of art and as an insightful perspective on moral life. For Gadamer, play becomes the structure of all human interactions that give rise to understanding in addition to being the structure of the work of art. In this, play unifies the human experience, fuses the self with others in communication, and unites theory and practice in ethics. But before delving into the details of Gadamer's hermeneutics, let us look back briefly at how Kant and Schiller laid the groundwork for Gadamer's thought.

For Kant, aesthetic experience reveals a harmony within the human being and a community among human beings that other forms of experience fail to disclose. For Schiller, aesthetic experience both reveals and develops a higher unity within the human being than Kant's philosophy alone allows, a unity that discloses a new kind of aesthetic freedom. Both thinkers counted on this harmony/unity to bridge the diverse aspects of

the human being and constitute human experience within the world as both rational and sensuous. In this, Kant and Schiller were able to understand human experience in a less abstract and one-sided way than their early modern predecessors who focused exclusively on either the rational or the empirical. We have seen how a more integrated image of the human being can also lead to an enriched image of ethical life, incorporating both universal law and particular persons and conditions. Gadamer continues that legacy of striving to understand human experience in a way that is more integrated and situated and less abstract.

One of Gadamer's goals in *Truth and Method* is to preserve the notion of unity that Kant and Schiller have thus far attributed to aesthetic experience. Gadamer's thought rests on Kant's revolutionary claim that human beings constitute the world as such through our acts of understanding, and Gadamer also develops and deepens Kant's suggestion in the third *Critique* that our communal sense is foundational to human experience. Schiller's work made significant strides in perpetuating the harmony of human experience that Kant promoted, for Schiller thought beyond Kant to a unity of the bifurcated aspects of the human being: the imaginative and sensuous on one hand and the intellectual and rational on the other hand. Gadamer's work yet again preserved and extended the scope of the unity Kant and Schiller aimed to secure in our understanding of the human being.

Pursuant to that unified view of human experience, Gadamer's insistence that his hermeneutics presents a practical philosophy[1] indicates that the problems he identifies in other areas of philosophical thought, such as aesthetics and epistemology—and the solutions he discovers through his exposition of his hermeneutics—give us vital clues to resolving the problems of ethical life. Recent scholarship has accordingly described a Gadamerian ethics by drawing on his discussions of understanding, the fusion of horizons, and dialogue with the voice of the other.[2] My aim in this chapter is to contribute to the conversation surrounding the ethical import of Gadamer's hermeneutics. Unlike most recent scholarship, however, I take my point of departure not from the notion of dialectical understanding but from what is rather understood as Gadamer's aesthetics, in particular his discussions of art and play.

My exploration of the ethical dimensions of Gadamer's aesthetics will unfold as follows. First, I will outline Gadamer's notion of aesthetic differentiation, the approach to aesthetics that isolates art as such from its context of meaning and attempts to evaluate only the "purely" aesthetic characteristics of an artwork. Gadamer critiques this position with respect to art. Second, I will present Gadamer's suggestion that we adopt a perspective of aesthetic non-differentiation so as to preserve and make present the true meaning of an artwork instead of abstracting from it. This constitutes my preliminary

[1] See, for example, "Hermeneutics as Practical Philosophy" and "Hermeneutics as a Theoretical and Practical Task."

[2] Christopher Smith and Georgia Warnke, for example, have both defended Gadamer's peculiar combination of Aristotelian and Kantian ethical frameworks. Others, like Lauren Barthold and Darren Walhof, have focused on specific aspects of hermeneutics (such as the relationality of understanding) and cashed those out in terms of ethical relationships such as friendship and solidarity. Lawrence Schmidt, James Risser, and Monica Vilhauer have also made noteworthy contributions to this area.

presentation of Gadamer's aesthetic theory. Third, I will exposit the role of play in aesthetic non-differentiation. As we will see, the concept of play is central to Gadamer's aesthetics and remains relevant to his entire discussion of hermeneutic understanding in *Truth and Method*. Finally, I will demonstrate how the opposition between aesthetic differentiation and aesthetic non-differentiation lends contour to two opposing pictures of ethical life, one differentiated, abstracted, and therefore impoverished, and the other non-differentiated, playful, and, I will argue, more richly humane and responsible. I suggest that Gadamer's ethics is encompassed, like his aesthetics, in the notion of non-differentiation, and that Part I of *Truth and Method* and Gadamer's essay "The Relevance of the Beautiful" provide an image of ethical life inscribed by the human activity of play.

Ultimately, I argue that Gadamer's critique of aesthetic differentiation and his proposed alternative, aesthetic non-differentiation, provide a conceptual framework for reimagining modern ethical life and indeed Gadamer's ethics as an ethics of non-differentiation. In this, the role of play in Gadamer's aesthetics and ethics is a vital resource in counterbalancing clockwork morality in our age. As Gadamer proposes that we counteract aesthetic differentiation with an understanding of art as constituted by play, so I propose that we adopt a playful orientation toward ethical life in an effort to achieve something like ethical non-differentiation or a unity between ethical theory and ethical practice.

Critique of Aesthetic Differentiation

Most aesthetic philosophy is conducted from the perspective of aesthetic consciousness, Gadamer claims. The aesthetic consciousness aims to apprehend a work of art purely aesthetically, separating out its aesthetic qualities (those qualities which are received immediately through our senses) from its function or effects in society and from whatever shades of cultural or historical meaning form the work's original context. In order to accomplish this abstraction to the purely aesthetic, Gadamer says that aesthetic consciousness performs an act of aesthetic differentiation, through which it attempts to "[view] the aesthetic object in its own right."[3] Aesthetic differentiation is a move to extract a work of art from its native context and basically remove it from time and space.

In many ways, the museum can be the domain of aesthetic consciousness, where diverse works of art are extracted from their original context of meaning, function, and effect and repurposed—displayed, as if transcendent of time and space, for all to experience as aesthetic objects.[4] In a museum, works of art are collected in a single place, offering the illusion of simultaneity, regardless of their original historical or geographic positions. In this, aesthetic differentiation holds the viewer at a distance from the meaning and effects of a work of art and encourages the viewer to experience and understand the work as an abstract universal, a purely aesthetic object, art as such.

Yet Gadamer is suspicious of this presentation of art. He is ultimately critical of both aesthetic consciousness and its act of aesthetic differentiation. The museum

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[3] Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method* Second, Revised Edition, ed. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (New York: Continuum, 2004), 115.

[4] Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 75.

presentation of art conceals the truth of those artworks, he argues. Museum art is detached from its cultural, religious, and political contexts of meaning and from its original function and effects in society. Distancing the viewer from the artwork and isolating its aesthetic characteristics in this manner conceals the true being of the work of art. Because the museum arrangement amputates works of art from the context in which their meaning arises, viewers are left unable to encounter them *as* artworks. Gadamer claims that aesthetic differentiation reduces works of art to abstract expressions of "a perverse formalism."[5]

Thus, Gadamer dismisses the idea that our perception or consciousness of an object might be purely aesthetic; he writes, "Abstracting down to the 'purely aesthetic' obviously eliminates it."[6] Both viewing objects in their own right and isolating the purely aesthetic aspects of an object, Gadamer argues, are impossible tasks for beings cognitively constituted as we are. First, cognition takes place always in relation; we cannot know things in themselves without relating them to other objects and to universals that allow us to categorize and comprehend them. Second, Gadamer follows the legacy of Kant and Heidegger that dates back even to Aristotle in his conviction that human beings always perceive objects *as* objects, not simply as aggregations of sensuous inputs. Gadamer cites Aristotle's example in *De anima* of seeing a white phenomena *as* a man. He explains, "our perception is never a simple reflection of what is given to the senses."[7] The human experience of perception is always already an experience of

[5] Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 80.
[6] Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 77.
[7] Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 78.

understanding what is there *as something*. We must always already discern what is to be understood as background, edges, and focus within our field of vision. Seeing anything at all involves also determining what we should *not* see. In Gadamer's words, "Seeing means articulating,"[8] giving shape, clarity, and meaning to the world we see.

Seeing an object for what it is necessarily involves more than simple perception; true perception incorporates processes of understanding, interpretation, and even application. This is Gadamer's main claim throughout *Truth and Method* and his strongest objection to both aesthetic consciousness and historical consciousness, which would isolate certain aspects of comprehension. To demonstrate, consider the phenomenon of a stop sign. It is tempting to abstract from the human experience of approaching a stop sign and to separate out a variety of sequential cognitive processes: seeing the octagonal shape, the red color, the letters; understanding those letters to spell out the word "STOP"; interpreting this sign as an indication that one ought to bring one's vehicle to a halt; and finally applying that newly acquired information by applying one's foot to the brake pedal and coming to a stop. But this extensive abstraction is merely a temptation, Gadamer would argue. In reality, we must have a unified experience—seeing, understanding, interpreting, and applying—if we are to say that we have truly perceived the stop sign as what it is (a stop sign). I cannot be said to have seen the stop sign *as* a stop sign if I have failed to comprehend what it means in my experience, that is, the response it demands of me—to stop. Understanding the stop sign means realizing or to use Gadamer's word, concretizing, its meaning within the context

[8] Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 79.

of my experience. Understanding any phenomenon always involves interpretation and application. These processes are all unified in human cognition, and the attempt to isolate the experience of seeing as a purely sensuous, material, or objective process (as aesthetic consciousness intends) disregards the truth of the phenomenon of human perception.

As a result, it is impossible for us to see only the aesthetic aspect of an object. Seeing anything at all means understanding it as something, and so abstracting down to the aesthetic alone means not actually understanding—or even seeing—what is before us. The aesthetic consciousness that attempts to abstract an object down to the purely aesthetic "eliminates" it because "only when we understand it, when it is 'clear' to us, does it exist as an artistic creation for us."[9] When we try to extract all content or meaning from our perception of aesthetic objects, we cease to understand them as aesthetic objects, for we cease to understand them at all. Thus, Gadamer concludes, "Pure seeing and pure hearing are dogmatic abstractions that artificially reduce phenomena. Perception always includes meaning. Thus to seek the unity of the work of art solely in its form as opposed to its content is a perverse formalism…."[10] Pure aesthetic consciousness is merely a "dogmatic abstraction," not a legitimate approach to understanding works of art. Gadamer gives this assessment of "aesthetic differentiation" in "The Relevance of the Beautiful": "it is a secondary procedure if we abstract from whatever meaningfully addresses us in the work of art and wholly restrict ourselves to a

[9] Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 79.
[10] Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 80.

'purely aesthetic' evaluation."[11] Aesthetic differentiation is secondary or derivative; it is an impoverished and inauthentic attempt to see the truth of an artwork.

To give a concrete example, Gadamer refers to the experience of reading sheet music as compared to the experience of hearing a musical piece performed. Aesthetic differentiation would suggest that experiencing the piece written by the hand of the artist is a more purely aesthetic experience than experiencing that work filtered through the interpretations of the performers and the conductor of any particular orchestra. Yet Gadamer suggests that obviously the experience of *listening* is essential to understanding a piece of music, and so the attempt to abstract an artwork from whatever cultural context in which we find it embedded (or through which it is being interpreted) is misguided.[12] The same is obviously true for drama or any other performance art, and Gadamer extends these obvious examples to make the claim for artistic mediums such as sculpture and painting as well. A viewer's encountering an artwork as what it is depends on the unified experience of the work itself and its full context of meaning.

To summarize, perception is always already combined with understanding, articulation, and even interpretation because of the kind of beings we are. Our experience of the world is never reducible to a sensuous (i.e. "purely aesthetic") encounter with material objects. But more than that, our experience of artworks is also always already wrapped up with historically and culturally inflected meaning that make up the truth of the work. In aesthetic differentiation, artworks are detached from our

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[11] Hans-Georg Gadamer, "The Relevance of the Beautiful," *The Relevance of the Beautiful and Other Essays*, ed. Robert Bernasconi, trans. Nicholas Walker (New York: Cambridge UP, 1986), 29.

[12] Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 141.

processes of understanding and interpretation. As a result, these are incapable of disclosing their truth; we close ourselves off to their true being when we abstract artworks from the contexts of meaning to which they belong. Aesthetic differentiation constitutes an alienation from the world to which both we and the artwork belong.

Aesthetic Non-Differentiation and Play

Gadamer's solution to this alienation is what he calls "aesthetic non-differentiation." Given our understanding of aesthetic differentiation as an abstraction of the formal, purely aesthetic aspects of a work of art from its meaningful context, aesthetic *non*-differentiation can be understood as the perspective that maintains an essential unity in the work of art. Form and content, meaning and its presentation, the material object and its cultural context—from the perspective of aesthetic non-differentiation, all of these aspects of the work of art are inseparable. What is more, aesthetic non-differentiation is a position that recognizes the truth of human perception, i.e. the total unity of perception, understanding, and interpretation.[13] From a perspective of non-differentiation, understanding and interpretation have always already taken place in the perception of a work of art. Thus, Gadamer's position eliminates the processes of abstraction, alienation, and distancing that take place when one attempts to understand or interpret a work of art by isolating its "purely" aesthetic qualities.

[13] Gadamer says in "The Relevance of the Beautiful," "In the belief that we generally employ an inadequate and dogmatic concept of sensory perception as an aesthetic criterion, I have chosen in my own investigations the rather elaborate expression 'aesthetic non-differentiation' to bring out the deep structure of perception" (29).

To put it another way, Gadamer describes aesthetic non-differentiation as the recognition that the work of art and its presentation or performance are a single unified event of being, not an original product and a reproduction, as aesthetic differentiation would have it. The example of drama is illustrative here. Gadamer insists that the performance of a play and the play itself are one and ought not to be differentiated as two separate works, the original play as written or as the author intended it and its interpretation and performance according to the individual actors and director. He emphasizes that both the being of the play and the being of the performance are brought into existence as one. The example of music makes the truth of Gadamer's insight even more evident: the being of the symphony is realized in its performance, which ought not to be evaluated by the standard of the written score as if only what is written on the page by the composer presents the true being of the work. Gadamer writes:

> The work of art cannot simply be isolated from the "contingency" of the chance conditions in which it appears, and where this kind of isolation occurs, the result is an abstraction that reduces the actual being of the work. It itself belongs to the world to which it represents itself. A drama really exists only when it is played, and ultimately music must resound.[14]

The work of art itself and the conditions under which it becomes present to us are involved in a dynamic unity, and aesthetic non-differentiation is the point of view that recognizes that unity.

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[14] Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 115.

For Gadamer, aesthetic non-differentiation is another name for his idea that art is constituted by play. In "The Relevance of the Beautiful," Gadamer defines play as a free impulse that intends itself and its own presentation. Echoing the Kantian conception of art as purposive without a purpose, Gadamer describes human play as rational and rule-governed while nevertheless being an end in itself. We do not play in order to accomplish any exterior purpose, and yet our play is intentional and goal-oriented. Its purpose is its own playing out.[15]

Further, in *Truth and Method*, Gadamer explains that play is structured by repeatable parameters, yet each instantiation is unique. A game of soccer, for instance, is bounded and made possible by the rules and possibilities of the game, yet that regulative structure is played out in infinite variety each time the game is played.[16] A theatrical play is similar: the play text provides the structure, and the play plays itself out in a variety of ways depending on the actors, the director, the historical time period and location, and so on. Gadamer terms this "identity in variation,"[17] indicating that play has its identity in the variety of presentations it engenders.

Now, it is important to note that the variety of instantiations of play available to us does not necessarily mean that play itself is subjective (or, by extension, that an interpretation or presentation of an artwork is subjective). Gadamer argues that variation

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[15] Gadamer, "The Relevance of the Beautiful," 22-31.

[16] The example of the sports game reveals another truth about play: play always involves something or someone that one plays *with*. Gadamer explains that we enjoy ball games (and cats enjoys balls of yarn, too) because something spherical moves in a way that is unpredictable, and so we have movement that is out of our control that we must playfully respond to (*Truth and Method*, 106).

[17] Gadamer, "The Relevance of the Beautiful," 29.

in the work of art "is not at all a question of a mere subjective variety of conceptions, but of the work's own possibilities of being that emerge as the work explicates itself, as it were, in the variety of its aspects."[18] He makes it clear that that familiar standard-bearer for the work of art, the "right" or "correct" presentation of it, is still a relevant criterion.[19]

In that same vein, Gadamer suggests that play has its own autonomy over the players who participate in it. The play itself is primary over the subjectivity and individual consciousness of the players.[20] He writes, "The players are not the subjects of play; instead play merely reaches presentation (*Darstellung*) through the players."[21] When we play, we give ourselves over to the play; we get absorbed in it and lose ourselves in it. We give up our own autonomy in order to submit to the playing so that it can reach self-presentation through us. It matters little who or what is doing the playing, whether it is competitors in a sports arena, children on a playground, or kittens in a basket; play occurs, as if of its own accord. In fact, play does not even require subjects engaged with or against each other in any way. If we examine the way we use the term "play," Gadamer shows, we understand that play takes place through light, color, even the wind. "The movement of playing … renews itself in constant repetition," he says.[22] Subjects don't play; the play plays.

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[18] Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 117.

[19] Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 117. To be precise, I ought to say that Gadamer believes in the standard of *a* right or correct presentation of the work, not *the* singular correct presentation of it.

[20] Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 105.

[21] Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 103.

[22] Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 104.

Gadamer uses this concept of play to further understand what art is in *Truth and Method*. Art is play that is directed toward a spectator, and its self-presentation is only complete when the spectator takes the play seriously and participates in it. Although art is created by an artist or author, the play of art nevertheless retains "an absolute autonomy"[23] over the players and the artist. Art plays itself out and engages those who witness it in its play.[24]

Thus, the play of art always involves an other.[25] In *Truth and Method*, Gadamer writes: "All presentation is potentially a representation *for someone*. That this possibility is intended is the characteristic feature of art as play" (emphasis added).[26] As he expresses it in "The Relevance of the Beautiful," "the act of playing always requires a 'playing along with.'"[27] It involves "constant cooperative activity"[28] on the part of the spectator. Insofar as art has the character of play, it requires a spectator participating in its coming to presence.

The example of theater is once again instructive here. The audience at a play must play along with the unfolding of the drama, not in the same way as the actors, of course, but in suspending the concerns and practices of their everyday lives and surrendering their individual interests and activities to the collective performance of the art of theater. Having an audience to perform for that is wholly wrapped up in the play is

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[23] Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 110.
[24] Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 102-110.
[25] Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 108.
[26] Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 108.
[27] Gadamer, "The Relevance of the Beautiful," 23.
[28] Gadamer, "The Relevance of the Beautiful," 27.

what makes a play what it is; without the audience playing along, the play fails or is simply a rehearsal.

In this, art is different from a game. Although both involve play, only art depends on the participation of the spectator. Consider, in contrast, a sporting event. There, the spectators are entitled to engage in any number of activities that are unrelated to the play of the game: talking, eating, walking around, and so on. Spectators can lose themselves in their cell phones instead of in the gameplay without affecting the play at all. Furthermore, players come together to participate in sports even when there is no expectation of having spectators present. A pick-up soccer game in a local park is no less a game for having no audience. In fact, when a sports game becomes audience-directed, as art is, Gadamer warns, it risks becoming a spectacle, not truly play that absorbs the players.[29] In art, on the other hand, both the players' openness to the audience and the spectators' thoroughgoing engagement in playing along are essential to the playing out of the play.

As a work of art plays itself out with its audience, the artwork and the spectator engage in a to-and-fro play of communication and interpretation that Gadamer compares to the play of light and shadows, or the back-and-forth of conversation.[30] The character of play is essentially dialogical. In this, the play of art is a unifying force. Just as a

[29] Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 108-109.

[30] Gadamer, "The Relevance of the Beautiful," 22-23; Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 104-106.

dialogue binds its interlocutors,[31] so Gadamer explains what he calls "the binding quality of the experience (*Erfahrung*) of art."[32] But art differs from conversation in that it unites players and spectators in their wholeness as rational and aesthetic beings, without resorting to the commerce of concepts. Gadamer relies on Kant's conception of the judgment of taste to make this point in "The Relevance of the Beautiful," attributing to Kant's third *Critique* the idea of play constituting the indissoluble unity (and unifying power) of the work of art. He writes, "What I described as aesthetic nondifferentiation [sic] clearly constitutes the real meaning of that cooperative play between imagination and understanding which Kant discovered in the 'judgment of taste.'"[33] In other words, aesthetic non-differentiation or art as play provides a meaningful experience that unifies the sensuous and the rational and remains, as Kant argued, non-conceptual. Gadamer is interested in the ways meaning is communicated non-conceptually, and Kant's aesthetics is foundational for his thought in this respect. Again following the influence of Kant's third *Critique*, particularly the notion of taste as a communal sense, Gadamer suggests that there also exists in play a dynamic unity between the work of art and the spectator. Thus the unity that characterizes art (when it is considered from a standpoint of non-differentiation and play, that is) is not just a unity between the form and the meaning of the work of art or between the artwork itself and its presentation, but also between the work and the observer, i.e. the player and the spectator.

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[31] In *Truth and Method*, Gadamer writes, "There can be no speaking that does not bind the speaker and the person spoken to. This is true of the hermeneutic process as well" (399).

[32] Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 84.

[33] Gadamer, "The Relevance of the Beautiful," 29.

The spectator's participation in the work of art is not, strictly speaking, a matter of choice. Rather, the spectator is seized by the affect of the play. In this, the spectator cannot be distanced and aloof, as in the case of aesthetic differentiation. The spectator is drawn into the playing out of art and engaged in its unfolding. Because of the dialogical character of play, art proves itself to be revelatory of truth. Gadamer explains that we find participation in the playing out of art enjoyable and allow ourselves to be involved because we recognize something true about ourselves and our world in the play of art.[34] He writes, "… what we experience in a work of art and what invites our attention is how true it is—i.e., to what extent one knows and recognizes something and oneself."[35] This recognition is Gadamer's reconception of the ancient idea of mimesis in art. Instead of a work of art imitating or reproducing reality straightforwardly, he rather believes that as we participate in the play of art, we come to recognize what is true both about our world and about ourselves. He writes, "In being presented in play, what is emerges. It produces and brings to light what is otherwise constantly hidden and withdrawn."[36] Through the play of art, we come to see things as they truly are. Spectators achieve both self-knowledge and the unconcealment of truth in the play of art, and so they linger and participate willingly in the play that has seized them with its subjectivity-absorbing autonomy.

In addition to rewriting the relationship between player and spectator as a unity, the character of art as play guides us to reassess time and space as essential elements of

[34] Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 128-129.
[35] Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 113.
[36] Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 112.

the unity of the work of art. When Gadamer expands on the relationship between time and play in Appendix II of *Truth and Method*, he suggests that the occasionality of play draws time and space themselves into its playing out and makes every performance politically relevant as it unfolds with reference to the present time's cultural context. He urges, "The play of art is not as transcendent of space and time as the aesthetic consciousness maintains."[37] Every work of art is essentially bound to the time and place of its unfolding in the interplay between artwork and spectator. Gadamer also adds in this context that artistic play is characterized by "the playing itself out by trying out possibilities."[38] There is an openness to the play of art that relies on the particular engagement of players and spectators for its coming to presence, and in playing out a variety of available possibilities, the work of art is necessarily varied and unique in each of its temporal and spatial manifestations. Understanding art as play gives the lie to the museum concept of art that aesthetic differentiation creates, showing how such amputation of the work of art can never reveal its full being.

Gadamer claims that play comes into its truth only as art. Art is the consummation of play, in which play is transformed into what Gadamer calls "structure."[39] "Structure" refers to the repeatable and permanent aspects of the work of art, whereas its playing out is characterized by uniqueness and temporality. In art, Gadamer says, play "has the character of a work, of an *ergon* and not only of *energeia*.

[37] Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 499.
[38] Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 499.
[39] Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 110.

In this sense I call it a structure (*Gebilde*)."[40] In other words, as structure, play is transformed from an actuality or what is currently taking place (*energeia*) into a work, an accomplishment, or a complete reality (*ergon*). Art understood as the unity of structure and play is play reaching its ideality. Gadamer writes:

> Play is structure—this means that despite its dependence on being played it is a meaningful whole which can be repeatedly presented as such and the significance of which can be understood. But structure is also play, because—despite this theoretical unity—it achieves its full being only each time it is played. That both sides of the question belong together is what we have to emphasize against the abstraction of aesthetic differentiation.[41]

The transformation of play into structure in art unifies the universal and particular aspects of the work of art, ensuring that aesthetic consciousness cannot perform "the abstraction of aesthetic differentiation."

Art has a further transformative function, according to Gadamer: as the players and the spectators give themselves over to its playing out, and as the autonomy of the play absorbs their subjectivities, in fact the participants in the play are also transformed. Just as transformation into structure raises play to its ideality, so Gadamer suggests that in art, reality itself is raised to its truth. He writes, "… 'reality' is defined as what is untransformed, and art as the raising up (*Aufhebung*) of this reality into its truth."[42] Recall that Schiller is the one who introduced this notion of *aufheben* as the function of

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[40] Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 110.
[41] Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 116.
[42] Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 112.

the beautiful. For him, the play impulse supersedes our physical being to bring us into our more complete truth as free moral beings. For Gadamer, it is again the effect of the aesthetic experience of play to draw us into the truth of our being and transform human beings into what we most truly are. Speaking of the transformative experience of the participating spectator, Gadamer says, "… the absolute moment in which a spectator stands is both one of self-forgetfulness and of mediation with himself. What rends him from himself at the same time gives him back the whole of his being."[43] In this, participants in the play are also elevated and transformed, lifted beyond their individual subjectivities and made receptive to what is universal. This is Gadamer's definition of the familiar concept of *Bildung*, the process by which one transcends the pathological and becomes open to the universal. Here again, the play of art proves to unify the particular and the universal for Gadamer. In his own words, play functions "to bridge the chasm between the ideal and the real."[44]

This understanding of art and play is foundational to the rest of Gadamer's argument in *Truth and Method*. Our understanding of history and other human sciences, the way we read text, and, most fundamentally, the way human beings have their being linguistically—interactive play shapes all of these aspects of the human experience. Play characterizes the relationship between tradition/authority and interpretation in every hermeneutical situation. The back-and-forth conversation between a given work and the participant in its playing out is what allows understanding to unfold. The dialogical

[43] Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 125.
[44] Gadamer, "The Relevance of the Beautiful," 15.

structure of play characterizes every uncovering of truth and every experience of understanding.

The demand that a work of art places on its audience to play along is akin to a human other or a text presenting a question to which we must respond. Likewise, the dialogical structure of play mirrors the demands of practical life. In order to understand our proper mode of engagement in ethical life, we must recognize the question put before us by the other. We must engage ourselves in the back and forth interplay of demand and response, and we must be willing to lose ourselves entirely in the unfolding of ethical life. Gadamer suggests, too, that *Bildung*, the process by which the individual is transformed and transported into the universal, is essentially comprised of openness to the other. We cultivate our humanity and commit ourselves to striving after truth when we open ourselves to participating in the play of dialogue, whether our interlocutor is a human other or a work of art. Play inscribes the very character of Gadamer's hermeneutics and functions to bring differentiated others into unity.

Clearly, the unity among individuals that play accomplishes for Gadamer strikes an ethical tone. Indeed, much of Gadamer's discussion of play as it constitutes the dynamic and unifying character of art seems to describe features of ethical life. Consider, for example, how Gadamer repeatedly refers to an artwork or a text as a "Thou" involved in an "I-Thou" relationship with a spectator or reader. The allusion to Buber brings ethical concerns to the background of the conversation about hermeneutics and leads us to transpose Gadamer's discussions of art and text into an understanding of how we ought to interact with human others.

Consider also the way Gadamer understands the work of art as an address to the spectator who must decide to participate and respond: "The work issues a challenge which expects to be met. It requires an answer—an answer that can only be given by someone who accepted the challenge. And that answer must be his own, and given actively. The participant belongs to the play."[45] The ethical register here is profound. The work of art addresses us just as the other addresses us and demands a response.

To use the terminology of play, then, to expand our conception of ethical life: as ethical beings, we belong to the back-and-forth play that unites us with the other, and we must accept the challenge of responding when the other addresses us. Like a work of art, the other sets us a task and demands an active response, and we are responsible for playing along with them. Gadamer's conviction that the spectator's participation is essential to the meaning of a work of art prepares us to embrace the role of the other—and the essential incorporation of their dynamic presence—in the play of moral life. Contrary to the distancing of aesthetic differentiation, the spectator who participates in the play joins in "the communion of being present"[46] with the other, and that communion has a decidedly ethical resonance. The following section takes up this ethical character of play in Gadamer's thought in greater detail.

An Ethics of Non-Differentiation

Ethics, too, can be subject to the problem of differentiation. Too often, ethics is discussed not in terms of communion with the other but rather detached from such

[45] Gadamer, "The Relevance of the Beautiful," 26.
[46] Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 128.

particularities. As I discussed in the introduction to this dissertation and as Schiller also observed (see Chapter III), modern ethical theory prioritizes absolute universality, rationality, and calculability over the lived experience of human beings in specific situations. In isolation from real, contextualized ethical questions, ethics suffers the fate Gadamer diagnosed of aesthetics: it becomes "a perverse formalism."[47] Just as Gadamer argues that isolating the "purely" aesthetic is so extreme an abstraction as to eliminate the aesthetic altogether, one might suggest that striving for a "pure" morality—e.g. one grounded purely in reason and abstracted from the lived human experience of the phenomenal world—is too extreme a divergence from life into theory to be practicable as an ethics. As Gadamer writes in "On the Possibility of a Philosophical Ethics," ethical theory is often conceived of as a form of knowing, which he calls "knowing at a distance," a conception of ethics which "conceal[s] what the concrete situation calls for."[48] It is, as Gadamer argued of aesthetic differentiation, merely a "dogmatic abstraction."[49]

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[47] Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 80.

[48] Gadamer, "On the Possibility of a Philosophical Ethics (1963)," in *Hermeneutics, Religion, and Ethics*, trans. Joel Weinsheimer (New Haven: Yale UP, 1999) 33.

[49] Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 80. Such a criticism may be leveled against Kant's ethics, which has been decried as empty formalism that is impossible to practice (e.g. by Hegel). It is beyond the scope of this dissertation to evaluate Kant's moral theory; however, I do suggest that insofar as Kant's theory of judgment applies to moral judgments as well (as I have suggested in Chapter II of this dissertation), I believe Kant's thought about ethical life to be more complex than Gadamer's caricature of a purely rational ethics. My target in bringing up this criticism is not Kant's thought per se but rather popular oversimplifications of his thought that are peddled in introductory ethics courses these days.

We see evidence of this kind of reductive abstraction in the way ethical reasoning is often taught by means of thought experiments involving trolley cars or simplified tales of ethical dilemmas to which students are taught to apply the rules of different ethical systems. Often, such students are discouraged from extrapolating from the minimal facts given; the rules must be applied to the facts without digressing into the gray area of imagination and interpretation. Yet we know from our discussion above with respect to aesthetic differentiation that differentiating interpretation or application as an element of ethics that is separate from the processes of perceiving and understanding an ethical situation is only a distorted abstraction. We ought to respect the human desire to ask questions when a simplified ethical dilemma is presented, for neither facts nor ethical principles can stand alone without the context and orientation provided by interpretation.

Attempting to understand either an ethical theory in isolation from its roots in the history of thought (its tradition) or an ethical scenario in isolation from its full context in the lived world is tantamount to attempting to have an aesthetic experience of a work of art divorced from the world (the horizon of meaning) to which it belongs. Like aesthetic differentiation, this ethical differentiation, as we might call it, amounts to an abstraction from the meaning and truth of the ethical situation, the experience of the other to which one must respond. Ethical dilemmas and ethical principles presented out of context as if these abstractions were universal truths distance ethical theory from lived ethical practice in a way that eliminates the ethical no less than aesthetic differentiation eliminates the aesthetic.

Thus, I am especially interested in Gadamer's critique of aesthetic differentiation as I have outlined it here because it offers a new conceptual framework for understanding a problem in contemporary moral life that I have called clockwork thinking. Clockwork thinking or clockwork morality is a type of ethical differentiation; it abstracts from the historical and contextualized being of the ethical situation and approaches ethics as if human beings and ethical situations were wholly calculable according to utilitarian reasoning.

Clockwork thinking is a problem that Gadamer diagnoses as well, as I have previewed in the introduction to this dissertation. What I call clockwork thinking is akin to Gadamer's diagnosis of the preponderance of mechanistic or utilitarian reasoning even in contexts that demand more hermeneutic approaches, such as understanding others and making practical judgments. Gadamer follows Heidegger's analysis of modernity in his concern over the proliferation of scientific method to the exclusion of the type of thinking and understanding more native to the arts and humanities. As we know, Gadamer's masterwork, *Truth and Method*, establishes how understanding is possible in art, the human sciences, and in language, including literary texts. His essay "The Universality of the Hermeneutic Problem" further elucidates what he sees as the problem of the ubiquity of scientific method leveling these other sources of truth.[50] While these discussions focus on understanding and truth, it is clear that Gadamer's concerns are motivated by ethical considerations. The overuse of scientific method and

[50] Hans-Georg Gadamer, "The Universality of the Hermeneutic Problem," in *The Gadamer Reader: A Bouquet of the Later Writings*, ed. Richard E. Palmer (Evanston, IL: Northwestern UP, 2007.

calculative reasoning amounts to a neglect of the human element in knowledge and in life, moving our everyday interactions further from the humane—which Gadamer has shown to be truly also the hermeneutic—and toward the mechanistic.

Gadamer's essay "On the Possibility of a Philosophical Ethics" makes a similar argument directly about ethical theory, that it too easily ossifies into something unquestionable and absolute that cannot accommodate various situations and human finitude.[51] There, his solution to the problem of the distance between ethical theory and moral practice is to draw on the strongest elements of both Kant's and Aristotle's ethics. Gadamer recommends taking the fact of our unconditional obligation to others from Kant's ethics, along with the commitment to universality and the disavowal of personal inclination or interest. From Aristotle, then, Gadamer wishes to preserve the notion of practical wisdom and the unity of knowing and doing the good. Gadamer promotes an idea of ethics that is always theory in practice, an endeavor and not just an idea, which

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[51] Theodore George has also written on this theme in Gadamer's work and Gadamer's response to what I have called the threat of clockwork morality. (Theodore George, "The Responsibility to Understand," in *Phenomenological Perspectives on Plurality*, ed. Gert-Jan van der Heiden (Leiden: Brill Publishing, 2014), 103-120.) He expresses Gadamer's view of ethical theory and its relation to practical life this way:

> Gadamer's approach to understanding endorses the notion that theory for its own sake is abstract to the point that it risks being irrelevant, perhaps even dangerous, for factical life. Indeed, it is precisely because no theory, no schemas or rules given ahead of time, are adequate to factical life that the need to understand first arises. But, with this, however, there is no knowledge, no skill, no formula or recipe that can guarantee the success of understanding. This success, always in jeopardy, turns less on knowledge or skill than on the care or competency required to interpret, discern, judge, and respond to our circumstances. (114)

As I have also argued, George suggests that it is vital for Gadamer that ethical life be conducted through an orientation of interpretation and playfulness and not schematization, for otherwise we risk doing violence to the particular individuals and circumstances involved. George argues that Gadamer's ethics calls into question our comportment and our character, not our knowledge or our rules for acting.

can accommodate both universality and particularity. Gadamer embeds a version of this idea in *Truth and Method*, in his insistence on the unity of perception with understanding, interpretation, and application, as well as his claim that hermeneutics is itself a practical philosophy.

Thus, I suggest that Gadamer's discussion of aesthetic non-differentiation, especially as he spells it out in terms of play and participation, informs how we might understand ethical non-differentiation, or a playful approach to ethical life, as key to a Gadamerian ethics. I suggest that "non-differentiation" is Gadamer's aesthetic articulation of his own ideas about ethics, as he lays them out directly in terms of unconditional obligation and practical wisdom and indirectly in terms of the unity of understanding and application. In the case of art, we have already seen how a perspective of non-differentiation reconciles individuals to one another and establishes communion (results with clear ethical significance). A further look into aesthetic non-differentiation will reveal to us its aptness for describing a holistic approach to ethics as well. Imagining ethics in the image of non-differentiation, i.e. in accordance with the centrality of play in Gadamer's understanding of human life, promotes ethical reasoning that recognizes the impact of a living context and incorporates interpretation, ever-present as it is in human perception, in the making of moral judgments. We shall find here that, as was the case with Kant and Schiller in the previous chapters, patterning ethics after the concept of aesthetic play reinstates practical wisdom and responsiveness to particulars as key elements of moral life.

Ethical non-differentiation means, for starters, recognizing the unity of perception, understanding, interpretation, and application in ethics just as we did above for aesthetics. We must recognize the distortion inherent in separating out these elements and strive to accomplish their unity in our moral reasoning. For Gadamer, as for Kant, the world we experience is always already understood as a dynamic unity of the rational and the sensuous, and focusing on either aspect to the exclusion of the other is an abstraction that impoverishes our understanding of the world. In aesthetic differentiation, we abstract the sensuous qualities of a work from the elements that allow us to understand its meaning. In ethical life, we too often commit the opposite abstraction, extracting the details of a situation that can be understood by pure theoretical reason and neglecting the practical details that reflect our situatedness, our finitude, and our essential relationality.

It is disingenuous, indeed inaccurate, to speak and act as if we can isolate the facts of an ethical dilemma from its full context in the lived experience of all players. Ethical situations do not come to us as differentiated dilemmas; context always determines the full truth of the situation. We must especially learn to appreciate that interpretation has always already taken place when we purport to understand an ethical situation. Clockwork morality trains us to disavow interpretation as biased and unmerited; calculative rationality demands that we stick to the facts, what is determinately known. But for Gadamer, knowledge is not complete without interpretation, the process by which we articulate our concepts, bringing them into play

and enabling phenomena to speak to us in a language we can understand.[52] Interpretation is what makes something "appear as itself for the first time."[53]

I would like to suggest that the trend of clockwork thinking gains in popularity in part because we do not wish to see things are they are. We attempt to distance ourselves from the demands of ethical life when we begin to recognize their utter depth and inescapability. But just as the play of art seizes its viewer, the demands of ethical life seize us and refuse our flight from its complexity. We cannot be aloof from the play of ethical life, for just as Gadamer says of language later in *Truth and Method*, we are uncannily close to it. The play of ethical life is unrelenting, yet its demands often feel strange or alien, coming from diverse others as they do. Non-differentiated ethics means resisting the urge to flee the "baffling proximity"[54] of ethical demands and complicated ethical reasoning by reducing and abstracting down to something like pure perception and instead embracing the holistic nature of ethical life, wherein perception, interpretation, and even application are understood as inseparable.

Just as aesthetic non-differentiation unified the work of art and the spectator in its play, so ethical non-differentiation also unites the individuals whose demands, interests, and indeed entire subjectivities are at play in ethical life. When individuals encounter one another on the field of practical life, each makes a demand on the other—for recognition, responsibility, respect, etc. These moral beings must enter a dialogue with one another; they must both play along with the rules and possibilities of the interaction.

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[52] Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 398.
[53] Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 400.
[54] Jean Grondin, *The Philosophy of Gadamer*, trans. Kathryn Plant (Montreal: McGill-Queens UP, 2003), 123-125.

As both engage, they give themselves over to the unfolding dialogue and surrender their particular being to the fusion of horizons taking place between them, the intersubjective coming-to-presence of the truth of their relationship *as* moral beings. Ultimately, it is the autonomy of the play, of the dialogue itself, that drives the players forward and sets the limits and possibilities of their interaction. In this, the players unite in the playing out of the situation, open to one another's novelty and strangeness and putting their prejudices at risk by putting them into play. The playful unfolding of ethical life, like the play of art, is not subjective nor wholly objective but truly intersubjective.

The final unity that a non-differentiated ethics affords is a unity between ethical theory and ethical practice. Gadamer explains that in aesthetic non-differentiation, we understand that play is structure and that structure is play, that each comes into being in the realization of the other. Art is a phenomenon of unification, the co-appearing of structure (that which is enduring and repeatable, the text of a play for example) and play (the particular instantiation of the work of art, a specific performance for example). In the same way, we can understand ethical non-differentiation as the unification and co-appearing of theory (the repeatable principles that apply universally) and practice (the particular instantiations of ethical behavior that constitute practical life).

When interpretation is understood to be one with application, the gap between knowing the good and doing the good vanishes. To know the good is to enact the good, for understanding is only complete and concrete when it is also applied or realized in the world of experience. Above, I used the example of a stop sign: understanding the stop

sign for what it is *means* stopping at the stop sign. In the case of ethical life, we cannot say that we understand the good if we are not actively striving to realize the good.

The unity of knowledge and action is not an ethical prescription; it is a description of human life. When understanding already incorporates the given, there is no distance between the universal and the particular. Talking about interpretation and application as supplements to understanding is redundant. Dennis Schmidt explains this relation in terms of the constant interplay between the factical, which is given and particular, and understanding, which is intelligible and universal. He writes:

> Understanding does not stand above factical life as a theory, but neither is it to be defined as a matter of praxis; it is rather a continuous act that is renewed at every instant; it is a way of life that is informed by history, language, and habits—all of the realities of the situation of factical life.[55]

In other words, understanding is play. There can be no understanding of ethical life in theory that is not always already activated in practice, in the ongoing play of ethical life.

To put it another way, instead of understanding ethics as the rote application of transcendent, universal rules (a schematic and mechanistic approach), a playful and non-differentiated understanding of ethics helps us to see the fundamental unity between the good and its particular instantiations. Just as the identity of the work of art is realized in its various presentations (recall Gadamer's phrase "identity in variation"[56]), the good is realized in and through the contextualized realizations of it in human life. We cannot

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[55] Dennis J. Schmidt, "Hermeneutics and Ethical Life: On the Return to Factical Life," in *The Blackwell Companion to Hermeneutics*, eds. Niall Keane and Chris Lawn (Hoboken: Wiley-Blackwell, 2016), 108.

[56] Gadamer, "The Relevance of the Beautiful," 29.

presume to know the truth about the good until we participate in its playing out, thus dissolving dogmatic claims about abstract universal moral truths.

Given the unities forged among understanding, interpretation, and application, between the self and the other, and between theory and practice, I recommend taking a playful approach to ethical life as a way of resolving the problem of ethical differentiation many have diagnosed in modern ethical life. Understanding ethics as a playful interaction between oneself and an other that unites us in responsive communion with one another obviates the concern I have expressed about treating ethics as a sphere of life that can be abstracted from its horizon of meaning and dealt with in a strictly rational way independent of the human relations and situations in which ethical questions arise.

The question naturally arises: does grounding ethics in play give rise to a relativistic and subjective sort of ethics? Here again, turning to Gadamer's discussion of play in the realm of aesthetics is instructive. He is convinced that defining art in terms of play does not necessarily relativize or subjectivize aesthetics; in fact, he is careful to avoid such results, as he critiques Kant and Schiller for making those mistakes in their conceptions of aesthetic judgment and play. According to Gadamer, Kant subjectivizes aesthetics by basing his notion of beauty on the feeling of pleasure and its capacity to incite a certain response (the play of the faculties) in the viewer (48-49).[57] Schiller is

[57] Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 48-49. As I have intimated in Chapter II, I suggest that Kant's aesthetics is more properly *inter*subjective due to the structure of aesthetic universality and the *sensus communis*. Nevertheless, Gadamer's point that Kant's emphasis lies on the experience of the subject, constituting a theory of taste and not a theory of art, remains valid.

guilty of the same, particularly with respect to play, as he develops his notion of aesthetic education in terms of subjective impulses.[58]

Gadamer wishes to avoid relegating play to the realm of the subjective. Rather, Gadamer understands the play itself as autonomous, drawing the players into its unfolding in a way that keeps it from becoming subjective. The players belong to the play; they do not control its coming into being, they just participate in it. Gadamer explains:

> No matter how much the variety of the performances or realizations of such a structure [the meaningful whole of a work of art] can be traced back to the conception of the players—it also does not remain enclosed in the subjectivity of what they think, but it is embodied there. Thus it is not at all a question of a mere subjective variety of conceptions, but of the work's own possibilities of being that emerge as the work explicates itself, as it were, in the variety of its aspects.[59]

Making an almost explicit reference to the ethical tone of his aesthetics, Gadamer calls this "the obligatoriness of the work of art,"[60] meaning that the possibilities for presenting a work of art are not entirely arbitrary. The work allows for multiple interpretations and a variety of performances, but it is not the case that the subjective player has free reign to enact the work arbitrarily according to his whim.

Likewise, situations that present themselves in ethical life and others who address us and demand an active ethical response contain a various but finite array of

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[58] Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 561.
[59] Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 117.
[60] Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 117.

possibilities for being, and we must attend to the whole meaning of the play we are involved in with others if we are to respond appropriately and play our role in realizing the good. Ethical non-differentiation indicates a continuity between ourselves and others, such that we recognize our communion in play, playing together not as adversaries or as subjective isolates but intersubjectively, acting freely but guided by the possibilities presented by the play itself.

Our ethical interactions with others are also always guided by the larger context we share with the other players, namely cultural norms and values that belong to tradition. Creative freedom and artistic creation are always governed by these values,[61] and so must be the creative play we engage in in practical life. We are always beholden to tradition; aesthetic and ethical non-differentiation means recognizing that we belong indelibly to that horizon of meaning. The artist creates, but she still belongs to her world. Likewise, ethical actors play and actively respond to the demands of the other, yet they still belong to the world they share with that other, and so the possibilities they can bring into being are limited by that world, by the play they are participating in with the other. Insofar as ethical life can also be understood hermeneutically as a conversation, we can also recognize that the variety of responses open to us is determined by the specific demand the other or the situation places upon us. "The priority of the question"[62] in Gadamer's hermeneutics demands that our actions also must always be understood as responses to questions, always embedded in the whole play. Thus the ethics grounded in this conception of aesthetic play is not subjective but truly intersubjective and beholden

[61] Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 129.
[62] Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 357.

to the accretion of tradition, the context of meaning out of which today's world has arisen.

Reimagining aesthetic non-differentiation in the context of ethics results in a possibility for ethical life that emphasizes the Aristotelian notion of practical wisdom. Ethical non-differentiation or Gadamerian ethics requires that we reflect on the details of our situation and the particularity of the other with whom we are involved and consider these with reference to the whole of the world we share, the tradition we come from, and the play we are in the midst of, and only then make a decision about how to realize the good. Like Aristotle's phronesis, this approach to ethics seeks a response that emanates from the possibilities of being already contained within the situation instead of imposing an abstract or transcendent ethical principle. Thus, ethical non-differentiation is a way of returning to a more Greek conception of practical philosophy, an integrated politico-ethical way of living together in a community that is guided not by rules but by practical wisdom.

However, I cannot recommend a wholesale return to ancient Greek practical philosophy (and neither did Gadamer). As Gadamer's own work in ethics supports, practical wisdom must also be tempered for our age with Enlightenment concerns for universality. Gadamer recommends that we preserve Kantian universality and the fact of our unconditional obligation to others in our ethical theory. I suggest that Gadamer's ethics of non-differentiation better fits our modern life because of this recognition of the role of reason in morality and the value of setting aside personal inclination and striving for universality in ethical life alongside the emphasis on practical wisdom and

accommodating what is particular in a situation. What is more, understanding ethics in terms of a deep unity between theory and practice or universality and particularity and among others in a community obviates the worries I have expressed above in terms of the dangers of what I have called ethical differentiation and clockwork morality, namely the abstraction of ethical decision-making from the reality of our lived experience as multi-faceted, contextualized, embodied beings.

Conclusions

Ethical non-differentiation, as I have described it with reference to Gadamer's concepts of aesthetic non-differentiation and play, provides a clear countercurrent to the trend of clockwork thinking in contemporary ethical life. The standpoint of differentiation in both aesthetics and ethics attempts to understand complexity by extracting something formal and universal from the integrated whole. Aesthetic differentiation attempts to examine the purely aesthetic elements of a work of art, yet in ripping the artwork from its context of meaning, this standpoint dissolves the very thing it aims to examine. Likewise in the realm of ethics, the standpoint of differentiation attempts to address ethical questions by stripping away the complicating details of individual situations and applying pre-established universal principles. Ethical differentiation or clockwork thinking restricts its scope to that which is calculable and predictable, yet in so doing, it fails to account for the whole of human experience. Gadamer's work demands a conception of moral life that does justice to the situatedness,

finitude, and intersubjectivity of human beings engaged in the dialogical play of communal life.

What the standpoint of *non*-differentiation recognizes is that the being of the work of art, and indeed the coming to presence of the good in ethical life, depends on an integrated play of the universal or formal and the particular or the meaningful content. Play is what brings the work of art into being, into its true meaning, and the same can be said for ethical life: playing along with others is what allows us to listen and respond to the ethical demands addressed to us, and only in that back-and-forth play can we reach a meaningful communion with others. Only a playful approach to being with others can realize the good in its universal and particular aspects, for only therein are ethical theory and ethical practice understood as a unity. In this, practical wisdom, interpretation, judgment, and responsiveness to others can once again take a prominent place in contemporary ethical reasoning and obviate the reductive claims of clockwork morality.

Gadamer's hermeneutics and the ethics of play we can derive from his aesthetics fulfill the ethical potential of Kant's third *Critique*. Thus, this chapter signifies the close of my own engagement with this trajectory in the history of philosophy concerning aesthetic play. We began this investigation reimagining ethics in the image of Kant's notions of free play, the *sensus communis*, and aesthetic universality. These gave us a picture of ethical life that harmonizes the universal with the particular by foregoing schematism and instead achieving universality by thinking in a broadminded way from the standpoint of everyone who judges. Schiller further developed the ethical significance of Kant's aesthetics by demonstrating how aesthetic education is a form of

moral formation. For Schiller, aesthetic play unifies the rational and sensuous aspects of the human being, a unity that is essential to transcending the constraints of both. Play is how we become free moral beings for Schiller. Kant's sense of harmony between the faculties and Schiller's analysis of the unity of the human being made possible Gadamer's ultimate unity that art and dialogue establish among individuals and between theory and practice.

Of these three, Gadamer's thought most explicitly leads us to understand play as an ethical concept. Play is his articulation in aesthetic terms of his idea of the unity of interpretation and application, which is fundamentally an ethical claim. Where Kant and Schiller understood play somewhat abstractly as taking place internally and discovering to us our intersubjectivity, Gadamer focuses more on the realities of play in the phenomenal world. He retains the Kantian idea that play is an aesthetic concept and that our experience of community is intimately bound up with our experience of art. Yet he develops these in view of our actual engagements with others and not just in terms of our faculties and impulses. In investigating how understanding works, Gadamer comes to reveal how the dialogic structure of play shapes every aspect of human life, and so his work supports in full detail the suspicion Kant incited, that aesthetic play informs moral life.

Gadamer gives us a preliminary picture of what an ethics of play might look like in practice. It requires recognition of the truth of human finitude, which entails contextualized judgments (practical wisdom) but also an openness to being questioned, a reflective and self-critical spirit, a willingness to listen to and learn from others, and an

openness to revising one's judgments. In order to develop in more concrete terms what it might look like in practice to understand play as an ethical concept, I shift our discussion in the next chapter to the theories of play we find in the discipline of performance studies and dramatic arts. My own understanding of the transformative power of play is rooted in my experience with the prison theater troupe Shakespeare Behind Bars. Like Gadamer, I take the example of the dramatic arts to be paradigmatic of the structure of play, and so now I propose that we explore that field on its own terms. The following chapter (Chapter V) will develop the ethical significance of play in acting theory and the phenomenology of theater, providing us with one final theoretical lens for understanding the phenomenon of Shakespeare Behind Bars in Chapter VI.

CHAPTER V

AESTHETIC PLAY IN PRACTICE:

THEATER PHENOMENOLOGY AND ACTING THEORY

Introduction

Thus far, we have explored play as a theoretical concept and discovered its aptness for indicating a way of ethical life that is less susceptible to instrumentalization than much contemporary moral thought. However, play is also a practical concept that unfolds in action. Since my ultimate goal is to show how aesthetic play works in practice to condition our moral aptitudes, I will now redirect our investigation to a practical example of aesthetic play: the play that takes place in theater. For what is play without a playhouse? This chapter will examine the concept of play from the perspective of theater studies. Diverging from the canonical philosophical tradition and drawing on a different field of study to address the question of aesthetic play and its relation to ethical life amounts to a Gadamerian fusion of horizons that will bring new truth to light. This chapter will put the insights from Kant, Schiller, and Gadamer into conversation with the observations and theories from two related fields in theater studies: phenomenology of theater and acting theory. This research will not only provide an example of the type of aesthetic play we have discussed thus far but will also further my argument that aesthetic play can model and in fact cultivate moral aptitudes that clockwork thinking suppresses such as interpretation and responsiveness to others in a changing situation. In this

chapter, we will find that the practices of theatergoing and acting both work to develop the moral sensibilities relevant to the image of ethical life we have thus far gleaned from the notion of aesthetic play.

The two branches of theater studies I will address, phenomenology of theater and acting theory, encompass the experience of multiple players in the play of theater, namely the spectators and the actors. In general, the phenomenologists have more to say about the audience's experience, addressing theatergoing as a whole. Meanwhile, the acting theorists are more concerned with the actors' experience on stage. Nevertheless, both approaches to the phenomenon of theater incorporate all players and overlap in their discussions. My approach follows this precedent; I will comment on both the audience and the actors as players, focusing first on the audience and then on the actors, yet interweaving these as appropriate.

The discussion of aesthetic play we have undertaken thus far, from out of the work of Kant, Schiller, and Gadamer, has taken place primarily in terms of play as an interaction with or response to art, i.e. from the perspective of the spectator. For all three thinkers, aesthetic play happens either within the human being or among human beings who encounter art and beauty. As we transition to talking about theater and acting, let us recall briefly the basic points of each of these accounts of aesthetic play.

Kant says that in response to beauty, our imagination and our conceptual understanding play in harmony with one another, and this relationship of our cognitive faculties helps us to comprehend our connectedness with other human beings. He thinks experiencing aesthetic play shows us how we can make judgments that are universal but

not strictly speaking objective, thus accommodating the unique and particular in a universal judgment.

Schiller says aesthetic play is not just a relation between our cognitive faculties but is an impulse of its own—a third thing that enables us to reach a higher degree of freedom and moral being than we could access through either our imagination and material impulses or our understanding and rational impulses alone. For Schiller, aesthetic play establishes the unity and wholeness of the human being, reconciling the rational and the sensuous into one singular experience.

For Gadamer, aesthetic play involves entering into a conversation with a work of art, letting it ask a question of us or make a demand on us, and responding by playing along with it and surrendering our own aims in order to discover a new truth with the artwork. Gadamer says aesthetic play models the way we engage with other human beings in all kinds of contexts.

In sum, aesthetic play is how we participate in the *work* of art. Aesthetic play is a response to beauty or a striving for beauty that establishes a harmonious relation among others and things that is not experienced in strictly scientific or rational facets of human existence. The unique harmonious relations established as one appreciates or strives to create beauty demonstrate our connectedness with other human beings. Now, the phenomenon of theater is a good example of an art that people respond to in just these ways. As spectators taking in live theater, we engage our imaginations and our conceptual faculties in harmony, and we are reminded of our connectedness with other human beings in the theater. We play along with what takes place in a theater and

participate in the production even as audience members; we play our part. And playing along with theater assures us of our unified being—that we cannot separate the rational and the physical/emotional parts of us. As we have seen in the previous chapters, all of these features speak to an image of ethical life distinct from that which stems from the logic of calculative rationality.

But the phenomenon of theater provides more to the current investigation than an example of an art form that sparks aesthetic play. The very medium of this art form is human behavior, not paint or musical tones, and so we have the opportunity to consult the other side of the conversation we have with art. By investigating acting theory as well as the experience of theatergoing, we can hear from the artwork itself, so to speak, about how aesthetic play is also undertaken in the creation of art and the ethical effects such undertakings produce. Examining theater will expand our sense of aesthetic play beyond its being a response to beauty. Acting demonstrates that aesthetic play is something we can initiate by striving to understand characters and their objectives; by taking our cues from others, listening and responding by playing along with them; and by actually playing with possibilities and experimenting with how the world might be or become. In this, understanding theater as aesthetic play also reveals how such play might cultivate moral aptitudes in its participants, for many of these skills of acting (understanding, listening, responding, and so on) parallel the capacities and experiences that constitute living well with others.

Ultimately, the study I undertake in this chapter will justify acting and theater as instances of aesthetic play and highlight the kinship between theater and ethics, as

recognized by those in the field. I will begin the discussion by clarifying the scope of the project and defining what theater is in this context. Next I will argue for theater as the quintessential art form for investigating aesthetic play and its relation to ethical life. It is both a unique and a representative form for learning about aesthetic play and its players. The remainder of the chapter extends that argument by engaging with theater studies on its own terms. Phenomenology of theater describes the universal features of the theatergoing experience mainly from the perspective of the audience, and acting theory presents the other side, the play from the actor's perspective. These two fields together capture a more practical angle than we have seen thus far from the history of philosophy on how aesthetic play works. As we will see, ethical concerns permeate both the theoretical discourse and theater practice. Ultimately, the discussion in this chapter will prepare us to analyze in Chapter VI how SBB's practice of theater cultivates moral aptitudes, thus fulfilling the potential aesthetic play has to contribute to moral formation in our age.

Definition and Rationale

First, I would like to make clear what I mean when I talk about theater. In the previous chapter, we saw Gadamer defining aesthetic play in particular contradistinction to child's play and the play involved in sports games. Recall that the specific involvement of the spectator in artistic play is particularly relevant for Gadamer in making that distinction, and so drama performed in a theater is quintessential play for him. In contrast, play theorists such as Huizinga, Turner, and Schechner include basic

play behaviors and performed rituals in their discussions of the social significance of play. Those who theorize theater, not just play, sometimes have still more inclusive definitions. Philosopher Paul Woodruff, for example, calls theater simply the art of making human behavior worth watching.[1] He includes in his definition of theater not only putting on plays (which he calls "art theater") but also sporting events and other public events that require witnesses, such as weddings and trials. I am not interested in providing my own definition of what counts as theater, but I shall define the scope of this project. Plays performed in theater spaces and other art events of this spirit are at the center of my discussion, along with the training and rehearsals that support such productions. While the burgeoning field of performance studies reveals the vast reaches of performativity in our everyday lives, I prefer to focus on what Woodruff calls "art theater." I wish to investigate the phenomenon that most readily comes to mind when one thinks of theater and acting.[2]

Why talk about theater? There are, of course, several surface-level attractions in taking theater as the quintessential art form in this investigation. First, I was led to investigate the relation between aesthetics and ethics by the phenomenon of prison theater, and so I seek to learn more about how theater-making works in order to understand whether and how this form of communal creative play can accomplish the moral development it seems to achieve in the Shakespeare Behind Bars troupe. Second,

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[1] Paul Woodruff, *The Necessity of Theater: The Art of Watching and Being Watched* (New York: Oxford UP, 2008).

[2] Among other reasons for limiting my scope to this definition of theater, I believe that this focus will best capture the phenomenon of Shakespeare Behind Bars that I am seeking to describe and understand.

there is precedent in the foregoing philosophical conversation for singling out theater as a demonstrative example of how human beings respond to art and beauty. Gadamer uses theater as his touchstone throughout his discussion of art, and Schiller was himself a playwright.[3]

But of course there are also deeper reasons for choosing to focus on theater in detangling the relationship between art and morality. To begin with, theater provides a visible and tangible demonstration of how what is conceptual or theoretical can be translated and transformed into something living and practiced. As actors and directors translate a written script into a living production, so we can glean clues about translating aesthetic and ethical theory (such as we have discussed thus far) into our lived reality. As a discipline, theater studies must wrestle with the problem of unifying theory and practice as much as any moral philosopher does. I believe this multidisciplinary study will be instructive, especially as we consider not only how aesthetic play can pattern an alternative to clockwork morality but how it can even cultivate the necessary aptitudes for enacting that alternative.

What is more, as theater phenomenologist Stan Garner notes, creating the world of the play requires staging not an objective or scientific representation of the world but a perspectival one. Theater recreates a world as it is disclosed to a subject, which is to say, a phenomenal world.[4] The theater is a rich context for studying ethical life if our

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[3] Indeed, the precedent of using drama as the emblematic art form when theorizing aesthetics goes back as far as the origins of the debate over art's role in moral formation in the work of Plato and Aristotle.

[4] Stanton B. Garner, Jr., *Bodied Spaces: Phenomenology and Performance in Contemporary Drama* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1994), 2-3.

goal is to reintegrate our phenomenal understanding of the world with the rational and calculating scientific view of the world I suggest our ethics have fallen into the fashion of prioritizing. Garner goes on to observe that a dramatic text presents events and characters in all of their possibilities for being. A playtext provides parameters for a variety of ways things might be done or said, a presentation of things which is in itself phenomenological. Garner writes, "... the dramatic text effects a version of the *epoche* or 'reduction,' whereby phenomenology suspends awareness of the object's actual existence in one place and one time in order to disclose this actuality in its own parameters and tolerances, its dialectic of the variable and the invariable."[5] This phenomenal quality of the play makes it a prime space to investigate the parameters of social life and determine which elements are invariable in terms of sharing our world ethically with one another.

Finally, theater is the art form that most saliently demonstrates the key aspects of play that are at issue in ethical life. Theater brings us face to face with others, whether we are actors or audience members. With human action as its medium, theater is grounded in the activity of being human, and it allows us to tell stories about and experiment with human life in all its iterations. The aim of theater is to create human situations and interactions in a communal space, and in this it is distinct from other artistic activities such as painting or even other communal events of shared creative play such as a sewing circle or a soccer game. Many of the theorists we will encounter in this chapter argue that theater-making and theatergoing are themselves ethical undertakings.

[5] Garner, 6.

Theater is an ideal point of contact between art and ethics, for theater is ethics played out.

Before we can complete the argument that theater play is ethically edifying, however, we must understand theater and acting as instances of aesthetic play according to Kant, Schiller, and Gadamer's accounts. The remainder of this chapter makes the case for this claim through the work of phenomenology of theater and acting theory and indicates how these theorists and theater practitioners understood the work of theater to be ethical in character.

Theater and Aesthetic Play

In response to the question of how acting and theater qualify as aesthetic play, there are many stories to tell. This section will focus on the answers we get from the fields of theater phenomenology and acting theory. Others in the human sciences have their own ideas about the relation between play and ordinary human life, though. Historians, sociologists, and anthropologists have lately been interested in understanding many social behaviors in terms of theater and play. Johan Huizinga is often credited with starting the conversation with his 1938 *Homo Ludens*.[6] Huizinga suggests that human play serves no evolutionary purpose yet makes human beings what we are. Play for Huizinga is fun, irrational, and social, forming communal bonds among players. In this, Huizinga also suggests that play itself confirms that human life is not merely

[6] Johan Huizinga, *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play-Element in Culture* (Boston: The Beacon Press, 1950).

"mechanical"[7]—it is beyond the comprehension of reason alone. In *From Ritual to Theatre*, Victor Turner argues that we can understand most human behaviors by reference to the social drama being played out and investigates tribal rituals in particular (precursors to modern theater, he suggests) as structured by play.[8] Richard Schechner's *Performance Theory* furthers Turner's line of thought, describing everyday human interactions in terms of the "scripts" being enacted and likening play behaviors (including theater) to peacetime analogues of hunting behaviors, violent energies displaced in ritualistic and theatrical settings.[9] Indeed, what has now grown into the field of performance studies, grounded in theories such as these, tends to interpret human behavior as a whole in terms of what is being performed and for whom. By these lights, all human activity can be understood in terms of performance, theater, and play.

But is this the kind of play the philosophers we have examined thus far have been interested in? Not quite. Understanding all human activity as performance broadens the category of play to accommodate social and ethical behaviors, rather than classifying play and theater as forms of social and ethical acting, as I have suggested. Thus, rather than delving deeply into historical, sociological, and anthropological theories surrounding performance and play, I seek to learn from phenomenologists of theater and acting theorists, whose work focuses more directly on theater, i.e. on play that is meant to be watched and taken aesthetically. I will unfold these traditions in the following two

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[7] Huizinga, 4.

[8] Victor W. Turner, *From Ritual to Theatre: The Human Seriousness of Play* (New York: Performing Arts Journal Publications, 1982).

[9] Richard Schechner, *Performance Theory* (New York: Routledge Classics, 2003).

sections. While the characterization is not universal, phenomenology of theater will generally have more to say about the role of the audience in the play of theater, while the acting theory section will focus on the play of the actor.

Phenomenology of Theater

The first lens through which I will examine how theater qualifies as aesthetic play is the phenomenology of theater. Theater phenomenologists note the universal structures of the experience of theater, primarily though not exclusively from the point of view of the spectator. As I have said, aesthetic play is how players participate in the *work* of art. In the case of theater, the audience has its own role to play in the total production: the audience must take up the appropriate position (in their seats), know their cues (when to stay silent, laugh, applaud, and so on), and play along with the fiction unfolding onstage and the fictional world the actors draw them into. What is often called the *suspension of disbelief* might better be termed a *willingness to believe* in the world presented in the theater. The audience is in a sense another collaborator with the actors and the playwright in the eventual production.[10] The participation of the spectator that is fundamental to aesthetic play is also an essential element of theater. Theater theorist Jill Dolan writes, "Spectators come to theater not only to witness, not only to

[10] Richard Hornby says the actors collaborate with the playwright in their development of embodied characters, such that the characters presented on stage accord with the characters as presented in the playtext. (Richard Hornby, *The End of Acting: A Radical View* (New York: Applause Books, 1992), 195-199.) This claim might be extended to the audience too as collaborators in the final production of the work of art, as most theater theorists agree the play itself is not complete without a proper audience, which is to say, one that plays its part.

passively consume, but also to participate by actively imagining other worlds. Performance remains an incomplete form, whose address is only fulfilled in the moment of reception."[11] The art of theater is incomplete without the audience playing its part. Being a good audience member means using our imaginations to cooperate in the work of the artists creating the work; it means playing along.

Throughout our investigation of aesthetic play, we have come to expect it to involve not only human beings' rational capacities, but their imaginations and feelings as well. Kant, Schiller, and Gadamer all emphasized a sense of harmony or unity among these disparate parts of the human being in their accounts of aesthetic play. Participation in the aesthetic play of theater is no different: it too involves both our rational and our sensuous capacities. For many, this is an obvious result of the fact that theater performance is necessarily embodied in human persons, both actors and audience members. As I have said above, the medium of this art form is human activity itself, and so unlike a novel, for example, the creation and enjoyment of which might seem an exclusively cognitive experience, participation in theater always involves the whole human body in addition to reason.

Actors must involve their rational and sensuous faculties in the creation of characters, for example. In his book *The End of Acting*, Richard Hornby discusses how building a character is not merely an intellectual process; rather, characters are developed in practice, as a collaboration between the actor's body and imagination and

[11] Jill Dolan, *Utopia in Performance: Finding Hope at the Theater* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2005), 97.

the playtext itself.[12] Character happens in acting, in playing, in experimenting with the text. The fulfillment of the play requires playful participation of body and mind working in harmony. Bert O. States makes a similar claim in his works of theater phenomenology, taking the proto-existential stance that we ought not separate the doer and the deed in theater.[13] Characters are made in their enactment, he says. The nature of a playtext is such that a spectator's experience of a character must come from the character's speech and actions alone; there is no narration or description to fill in psychological depth or to list character traits. For Hamlet to be indecisive, for example, an audience must recognize his not acting when he has the chance; his impulsiveness is not known to us apart from his stabbing Polonius through the arras.[14] In this way as well, theater depends on an assumed singularity, not duality, of mind and body or of reason and sensuous reality.

For audience members, the experience of theatergoing also engages both our rational faculties and our sensuous capacities. As Woodruff has described, theater is the art of watching human activity, and he equates such watching with the activity of *caring*.[15] We are not bored by the human activity presented on stage because in one way or another we come to care about what happens there. Caring requires emotional engagement,[16] not just a rational interest in the outcome of a plot. Furthermore, Woodruff says that one key to our caring about what happens on stage is our imagining

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[12] Hornby, 88-89.

[13] Bert O. States, *The Pleasure of the Play* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1994), 11-12.

[14] Bert O. States, *Great Reckonings in Little Rooms: On the Phenomenology of Theater* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 143.

[15] Woodruff, 20.

[16] Woodruff, 148.

the characters as "carable-about" (able to be cared about).[17] He says that we must be able to imagine characters as having a past, having potential and a future, and having a network of others they might love and be loved by. Imagining that these conditions are true of a character is what makes them carable-about. Woodruff explains that while the actors might be responsible for making us actually care about their characters, finding someone *carable-about* is a function of our imagination, not of the reality of what we see on stage. We only need to be able to *imagine* others as having a past and a future and being loved and loving; these qualifications need not be true. The audience's imaginative capacities must be engaged for theater to succeed, then, and thus the audience's participation likewise requires both the rational and the sensuous. The harmony between these aspects of human being is characteristic of aesthetic play as we have come to understand it.

On a similar note, aesthetic play involves what I have called broadly harmonious relations among others and things. For Kant, this means a harmonious free play between the imagination and the understanding. For Schiller, since aesthetic play is an explicit stepping-stone in developing our moral being, aesthetic play means caring about our relations with others. (In his example of adorning ourselves, Schiller makes it clear that aesthetic play is other-directed and that we aim to please.) In addition, aesthetic play is the process by which our sensuous nature is reconciled with our rational nature for Schiller, and so play establishes a harmonious relation, even a unity, between these dual aspects of the human being. For Gadamer, aesthetic play is the means of participating in

[17] Woodruff, 103-105.

truth-revealing dialogue with others, which is the model for ethical interactions. Clearly this, too, involves harmonious relations with others.

There are many ways the play of theater both develops and depends on similar harmonious relations. As Hornby explains, for example, a play must be able to stand independently as a work of art, meaning that all of the actors' performances must cohere as a harmonious whole. To accomplish that goal, actors must be attuned to their surroundings, discovering the world of the play, not just creating it ex nihilo, as well as communing with others on stage so that the world they create and discover together is a singular and coherent one.[18] Mark Fearnow makes a similar claim about the harmonious relations necessary in theater in his investigation of the ethical dimensions of theater, *Theatre and the Good*.[19] There he says that theater is completely structured by relations of trust: the actors, director, and audience must all trust each other that the space of the play is somewhat sacred, that no one will be harmed, that the play will not be interrupted, and that no one will be humiliated.[20] States adds that a live performance is "one long danger," a precarious illusion that "may at any moment be shattered by a mistake or an accident."[21] The actor on stage is vulnerable, and it is only a relation of trust among the actors and with the audience that enables the play to take place amid that precariousness. The audience in particular is responsible for taking the illusion seriously so that it is not shattered in their care. The presence of the audience gives stakes to the

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[18] Hornby, 61-62.

[19] Mark Fearnow, *Theatre and the Good: The Value of Collaborative Play* (Youngstown, NY: Cambria Press, 2007).

[20] Fearnow, 21-22.

[21] States, *Great Reckonings*, 119-120.

performance and gravity to the play. Given this aura of seriousness and danger surrounding live performance, it is clear that one ideal the play must strive for is harmonious relations among the participants, as it is in all aesthetic play.

Harmony among the various parts that are brought together in aesthetic play leads us to the final key point about aesthetic play: the connectedness it reveals for those who participate. Recall that for Kant, the *sensus communis* reveals the breadth of the human community, encompassing all who are facultatively constituted like us. Likewise for Schiller, the concern for others that we develop and exercise in aesthetic play reaches beyond the scope of those who play with us. For Gadamer, too, we must, in play, remain open to learn from and listen to all others, not only those who are also open to the revelations that arise in dialogue. So in theater, participating in its play opens us to acknowledge our connectedness with all human others. We are most directly connected with others who are present in the theater—the other players—but theater has the unique power to connect us also with fictional characters and, by extension, anyone like those characters. In this, theater expands our sense of relation to human others beyond those we actually encounter in the world.

States understands theater, indeed works of art in total, as creations that hover between the human and the worldly, between the self and the other, bringing these disparate spheres into harmony and revealing their interwovenness. As artists express themselves in their various mediums and spectators interact with their works of art, self, work, and other are all united in the experience of aesthetic play. Echoing something like a Kantian conviction concerning the bridging of otherwise separate realms as well as a

Gadamerian fusion of horizons, States writes, "The pleasure [in art]... arises from a dimension of actuality in which the self and the other are joined and exchange natures, thus offering a momentary solution to the enigma of our ontological isolation from the things of the world."[22] Occupying the space between self and world, theater makes apparent the fundamental connectedness of these spheres and draws its participants into meaningful relations with the world and others.

Furthering the idea that theater connects people, Jill Dolan makes the optimistic claim that theater even creates a space of community, a temporary public sphere, in which disparate others who gather in the playhouse can experience the possibility of an ameliorated future characterized by radical belonging and universal participation in the social discourse. With reference to anthropologist Victor Turner (whose research in theater and ritual we have already noted the impact of in the field of performance studies), Dolan invokes the idea of *communitas*, the possibility of belonging to a group or a culture that is enacted when we perform and witness a ritual or drama. As it occurs in theater, Dolan and Turner both contend, *communitas* opens the possibility of an inclusive and pluralistic universality as well as a general openness to new possibilities, especially in structuring human relationships.[23] On the whole, both Turner and Dolan suggest that theater and its achievement of *communitas* can encourage participation in

[22] States, *The Pleasure of the Play*, 19-20.

[23] For Turner, the ritual performance is liminal and temporarily inverts the social structure, allowing the powerless to perform rituals of power and gain voice and audience in the public sphere. (His demonstrative example is coming-of-age rituals.) He argues that this same model applies to theatrical performances, which offer a liminoid space that suspends the social reality and provides the opportunity to enact change in the social hierarchy.

the public sphere and serve the ends of democracy and egalitarianism.[24] The space of the theater helps us to feel connected with others such that we comprehend our belongingness to the same community and our opportunity to participate in the formation of our society.

Beyond this basic concept of connectedness as members of the same community, Dolan believes theater can serve the ethical function of demonstrating a more perfect society and giving participants the experience of *ideal* community. She claims that theater is capable of performing utopia, generating "small but profound moments in which performance calls the attention of the audience in a way that lifts everyone slightly above the present, into a hopeful feeling of what the world might be like if every moment of our lives were as emotionally voluminous, generous, aesthetically striking, and intersubjectively intense."[25] Her hope in the power of theater may be overstated, but Dolan's underlying claim that theater is an ethical undertaking that opens possibilities for living well is a popular one, and clearly one I support. Fearnow, Woodruff, and States also make the same basic argument: the practice of theater is indeed an ethical practice.

For Mark Fearnow, the structure of trust relationships that theater is built upon, mentioned above, reestablishes community cohesion that is faltering in our age. Dolan agrees that "live performance provides a place where people come together, embodied and passionate, to share experiences of meaning making and imagination that can

[24] Dolan, 11.
[25] Dolan, 5.

describe or capture fleeting intimations of a better world."[26] The general claim is that the experiences of trust, compassion, collaboration, and imaginative play that we experience in theater show us how better to live with and care about others. We have seen how Paul Woodruff describes theater in terms of watching and caring about others; he too argues that watching and caring in the context of theater is practice for caring about and investing in others in regular life. He writes simply, "... this is not just a matter of theater; we are better members of the human community if we know how to see other people as carable-about."[27] Woodruff sees caring about others as the proper foundation for our ethical life, and he urges that we are only able to fulfill our ethical vocation insofar as we become caring and attentive toward others. "We will be better people," he writes, "if we become accustomed to paying attention to other people—to be good and caring watchers."[28] Thus, not only does the experience of theater give us practice participating in a cooperative community built on trust; it also teaches us to be better members of the communities we already belong to outside of the theater. Participating in theater helps us develop the sensibilities and aptitudes required in ethical life.

Theater also develops our sense of human freedom, both in terms of taking responsibility for our own choices and in terms of acknowledging others' ability to forge their own way as rational individuals. As Kant, Schiller, and Gadamer all contend, being fully human involves acknowledging our freedom, and Woodruff here again claims that theater demonstrates this aspect of human being. He claims that theater treats human

[26] Dolan, 2.
[27] Woodruff, 104.
[28] Woodruff, 21.

beings as capable of free choice and action.[29] Consider this: since characters are only known to the audience through their actions (and it is impossible visually to represent the mind at work), character identity is built out of actions alone.[30] In order for a set of actions to establish a character, those actions must cohere as originating in a singular identity or person.[31] In other words, the creation of character in theater only works because we presume that individuals make their own free choices that constitute or at least demonstrate their character. We can also note this underlying assumption about theater in the way audiences respond to and invest in characters' behavior, both hoping they will make good choices and (especially in tragedies) mourning their unfortunate ones. It seems counter-intuitive that a set of scripted and rehearsed speeches and actions should reveal to us human freedom, but the success of theater depends on the audience's playing along and believing that they are watching characters making choices and acting freely. It is in this willingness to believe in a character's freedom that the audience can practice a key ethical aptitude: extending full humanity to others by recognizing and acknowledging their freedom to choose and act upon those choices.

Theater also cultivates our moral sensibilities in the way it presents an array of possibilities for human life. Bert States calls theater both "an enactment of significant human experience"[32] and "an exercise for realizing the possibilities of the actor."[33] In this, we see that theater presents real and significant possibilities for humans and human

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[29] Woodruff, 83.

[30] Recall that we discussed this above as the existentialism of character development in theater.

[31] Woodruff, 88-91.

[32] States, *Great Reckonings*, 182.

[33] States, *Great Reckonings*, 129.

experience that both actors and audience members may have no access to otherwise. When we understand ethics in terms of caring, understanding, and practical wisdom, being exposed to a broader range of possibilities for human life leads us to develop better ethical judgment. We are better able to interpret various ethical situations and respond with compassion and wisdom when we have a wider range of experience of the world and others to draw on. To put it in Kantian terms, we improve our capacity for broad-minded thinking when we broaden the scope of our experience. Theater helps us broaden that scope. We can meet characters we never have cause to encounter in our normal lives and experience situations that are far outside our own realm of possibility. Participating imaginatively in the play of theater gives us something like an inside look into the lives of others, and this strengthens our powers of interpretation and judgment.

Jill Dolan says that theater "articulates the possible."[34] She claims that experiencing possibilities in the theater is the closest we sometimes come to living a different life or in a better society, and so she believes that theater presents a vital space of possibility in which we can see a better world actually enacted.[35] She writes, "The very present-tenseness of performance lets audiences imagine utopia not as some idea of future perfection that might never arrive, but as brief enactments of the possibilities of a process that starts now, in this moment at the theater … experimenting with people

[34] Dolan, 2.

[35] For Dolan, the actuality of theater performances is crucial and unique. Referring to her notion of "utopian performatives" as transformative moments that occur in theater, she writes, "Utopia is always a metaphor, always a wish, a desire, a no-place that performance can sometimes help us map if not find. But a performative is not a metaphor; it's a doing, and it's in the performative's gesture that hope adheres, that communitas happens, that the not-yet-conscious is glimpsed and felt and strained toward" (170).

across a range of 'what ifs' until we settle on the best choices."[36] In this way, theater also functions as a proving ground for possibilities for ameliorating the world we live in. Thus, not only does theater allow us to practice and prepare for ethical life; it also allows us to experiment with what a moral world might look like. Art gives us a frame of reference to see new possibilities for our own world.

These aspects of theater as aesthetic play apply mostly to spectators. This is a perspective that is always available to us when we talk about art. But theater presents us with the rare opportunity of examining the medium itself, since the medium of theater is human activity. Therefore, let us now examine theater as aesthetic play according to what is at once both the medium of the artwork and a creator of the work, the actor.

Acting Theory

When I talk about acting theory, I will focus on the theories that have been influential for the actors in Shakespeare Behind Bars. Group facilitator Carol Stewart candidly noted that the acting theory of Konstantin Stanislavski was foundational to SBB's practices, and indeed his thought was revolutionary at the beginning of the 20th century and has grounded most acting theory offered ever since.[37] The approaches to

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[36] Dolan, 17.

[37] The developments in acting theory that are relevant to our understanding of Shakespeare Behind Bars (most notably, Stanislavski's notion that acting involves not simple imitation but the revelation of psychological truth) all took place in the 20th century. Before Stanislavski arrived on the scene, acting was stylized and stilted. The idea was for actors to develop careful technical control of their bodies and facial expressions in order to present an audience with the exact right emotions in recognizable ways. Nineteenth century acting relied on the supposition that facial expressions could be indexed one-to-one with corresponding emotions and that it was the actor's job

acting that I will explore are those of Stanislavski and his students, Chekhov and Strasberg; the school of thought that equates acting with play, exemplified by Copeau and Saint-Denis; and two thinkers who understand acting to serve a more political purpose, Brecht and Boal. I intend to show in this section (1) a chronological progression in the history of acting theory, focusing on those theories that have made possible the type of experience actors in the Shakespeare Behind Bars troupe have, (2) how these theories of acting embrace different aspects of our concept of aesthetic play, and (3) how these approaches to acting reflect the ethical character of the activity of theater and can rehabilitate our own ethical capacities. While different theorists disagree about what makes good acting and how actors ought to be trained, they all maintain that acting is a function of integrating the rational and sensuous aspects of human being.

In order to situate this investigation of 20th century acting theory following the tradition of Stanislavski, it is important to understand first the problem that actors and

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simply to present those to the audience. The actor's job was to develop the right habits during rehearsals to be able to show those emotions on cue. Indeed, actors' goal was to be mechanical, to have precise control over all aspects of the body (Hornby, 102-103). For much of the 19th century, actors even eschewed rehearsing together in the way the play would be performed. Rehearsals consisted mostly in blocking out the movements and practicing the actors' cues. It was up to each individual actor to memorize lines and interpret the story. Actors were type-cast into a set of roles within their character repertoire—those whose facial expressions and mannerisms they had perfected in training. It was only late in the 19th century that this explicit showing of emotions through physical technique gave way to a conception of acting that was more naturalistic, involving the imagined lives and motivations of the characters in addition to the technical training of the body. At the turn of the century, theater was exploring the philosophical questions of the day about the complex relationships between intelligence and calculating technique on the one hand and spontaneous inspiration and sensibility on the other hand. Acting became more of a communal activity, and actors began to develop strategies for involving their own emotions and sensibilities in their presentation of characters for an audience. (Robert Gordon, *The Purpose of Playing: Modern Acting Theories in Perspective* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2006), 8-36.)

directors have always needed to address: somehow, the actor is two people in one. States refers to this as actors' "ontological double status on the stage": actors are both themselves and someone else.[38] How can actors bridge the gap between themselves and the characters they portray? Diderot expressed a version of the problem of acting in an 1830 essay titled "The Paradox of the Actor," in which he argues that there must be some sort of Cartesian dualism in actors such that the mind can feel nothing of the body's activities, for if an actor actually felt all the feelings they presented on stage, they would be too emotionally spent to perform it all twice.[39] Another iteration of the problem concerns the way actors communicate psychological complexity to an audience: how can an audience access a character's person, psychology, motivations, and so on, when all an audience experiences directly is the actor's body and voice? Acting presents several versions of the classic problem of mind/body dualism, and acting theory has sought for decades to bring fullness of life and complexity of character to the stage using an actor's only tools: the body and the voice.

Stanislavski and His Students

One answer to the problem of acting that has become popular the world over came in the early 1900s from Konstantin Stanislavski. For Stanislavski, acting had to feel lively and honest, integrating the person of the actor with the actions, emotions, and situation of the character such that acting became an experience of connecting with another person for the actor and not artificially disconnecting from their own complex internal life. Hornby describes Stanislavski's solution to the problem of acting this way:

[38] States, *The Pleasure of the Play*, 26.
[39] Cited in Hornby, 106.

> In place of Cartesian dualism, we need an integrated model of acting that sees it as a skilled, felt activity. Despite the phenomenon of double consciousness, the actor is not really doing two separate things, and should not think of himself as being in two separate parts. Responding to both internal and external stimuli, he both thinks and feels, but most important, he is *involved* in the activity rather than detached from it.[40] (emphasis original)

Stanislavski's ideas revolutionized acting training and theory. He conceived of actor training as more than a technical discipline for the body, as theorists of the 19th century had. He believed that it wasn't enough for the audience to believe in a character's choices, speeches, and emotional responses within a scene. Stanislavski wanted his actors, too, to believe in the fictional world of the play and to experience the characters' psychological and physical condition for themselves. For Stanislavski, acting was much more than mimicry. It took real imaginative work on the part of the actor. Using an idea he called the "magic if," Stanislavski instructed actors imaginatively to put themselves in their characters' situations in mind and body and then simply act accordingly. Stanislavski also strove to make each performance of a script appear as if everything were happening for the first time. Actors were encouraged to listen to the other players' lines as if they had never heard them before and did not know what they were going to say, thus eliciting honest first-time reactions. They were also to deliver their own speeches as if they were composing them on the spot, the same way conversations take place offstage. In this, the Stanislavskian approach to acting became one of making what

[40] Hornby, 115.

is rehearsed somehow new. This approach to acting required a thorough understanding of the characters and the situation and a commitment to an artless enactment of those on stage. The criteria of a good performance for Stanislavski, then, were honesty, integrity, and truth-telling.[41]

In this, we can already notice some aspects of aesthetic play coming to light in our conception of acting as an art form, and we can imagine how actor training in this style developed moral aptitudes that resist clockwork thinking. Stanislavski's ideal for acting mirrors Gadamer's ideal for dialogue, that it bring to light a truth that could not have been revealed in the absence of the interplay between interlocutors. For Stanislavski, actors must play along with their characters, asking them questions and listening to the answers they discover, in order to bring to light the truth of the character. Furthermore, actors have to interact genuinely with each other on stage, actually listening and responding honestly to one another and not just mechanically delivering lines on cue. Stanislavski's integrated idea of the actor as wholly embodied and in harmony with their character (instead of suffering the separation of mind and body, as someone like Diderot suspects) also reflects Schiller's sense of aesthetic play, in which our aesthetic play brings us into a fuller unity and integrity as human beings. Stanislavski's style of acting entails a complex of ethical values that align with the image of ethical life we have explored in the philosophical notion of aesthetic play. In practicing this approach to acting, participants in the play cultivate their capacity to enact these modes in their ordinary lives as well as on stage.

[41] Gordon, 37-47.

Throughout his career, Stanislavski pursued the question of how to integrate the actor's physical being and their psychological being such that emotion might not just be expressed in the body of the actor but also understood as felt by the character. His answer was to focus on understanding a character's motivations or, the term Stanislavski used, objectives.[42] A character's back-story and motivations for speaking and acting as they do are what give life to the fictional world on stage, Stanislavski believed.[43] Further, he pinpointed the notion of motivated action as itself the integration of a person's physical and psychological being, and so it was motivated action that he wanted to present on stage to give full life to a character.[44]

In order to focus on action and objectives while keeping the process embodied (engaging the sensuous) and not purely intellectual, Stanislavski developed a technique he called "active analysis" for building an acting troupe's understanding of the story and the characters before they had even read the playtext. Playing through the storyline and getting a feel for how the characters might experience their situations was a more important first step for Stanislavski than conducting a close reading of the text. [45] In this

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[42] As Richard Hornby points out, Stanislavski was more interested in the concept of objectives than "motivations" because motivation is more backward-looking and often more subconscious than an objective. In order for it to be useful to his actors, Stanislavski needed to focus on forward-looking, conscious objectives. (Hornby, 163-167) However, it was the word "motivation" I heard used in SBB rehearsals, and so I will use the two terms, objectives and motivations, interchangeably.

[43] While Stanislavski is not believed to have read any Freud, and their conclusions about one's ability consciously to understand and perform one's motivations conflict, Stanislavski's focus on underlying motivation instead of emotion at face value parallels Freud's development of psychoanalysis in the early 20th century. (Gordon, 53)

[44] Gordon, 48-51.

[45] For Stanislavski, it was essential that the process of building a character and learning a role be embodied and practical from start to finish. (Hornby, 88-89)

way, he kept his actors' work grounded in their own bodies and psychologies instead of casting them into a textual landscape in which they would have to slowly find their feet through the personalities of their characters (a method which is admittedly difficult and which Stanislavski believed led to the wooden acting and bootless mimicry of emotions on stage that he aimed to overcome).[46] Through active analysis, actors come to understand characters' objectives in each discrete action and in each scene, as well as what Stanislavski called each character's "super-objective," or their underlying motivation throughout the whole play, which gives coherence to their actions.[47] Stanislavski's notion of active analysis anticipates most of the acting techniques of the 20th century. In particular, the technique of playing through a story without relying on the playtext foreshadows the use of improvisation and games to collapse the mind/body dualism that has persistently confounded actors and directors. I will discuss the theorists who conceive of all acting as play in the next section; first, let us explore two other directions Stanislavski's ideas have taken.

Stanislavski's theory of acting developed throughout his career, and some of his students appropriated portions of his theory (ideas that Stanislavski himself may have

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[46] On the other hand, Stanislavski's work has been criticized for being too actor-focused, to the exclusion of both the audience and the text. For one, focusing exclusively on the psychology of the actor in developing the expression of the character's psychology assumes that the audience will react emotionally precisely as the actor does. In addition, this technique limits an audience's responses to the play to empathetic ones instead of critical evaluation or judgment, for example (Gordon, 56-57). Textual purists may also worry that Stanislavski's method for developing characters relies too much on the psychology of the actor and not enough on the provisions made by the author in the text. We can see how such a technique may need to find some balance with other acting training techniques and hermeneutic practices.

[47] Gordon, 51-55. Hornby, 163-167.

abandoned) to develop their own theories and means of actor training marked with the hallmarks of Stanislavski's work. The two most prominent of these students are Anton Chekhov and Lee Strasberg, whose work is, like Stanislavski's, now the bread and butter of actor training. These names have become popular shorthand in the theater world for the most prominent style of acting still practiced in the western world. Stanislavski laid the groundwork for all 20th century acting training in his insistence that actors must work to narrow the gap between the personality of the character and the person of the actor.[48]

Anton Chekhov did much to normalize the idea of using games and play both to relax actors to access deep or unconscious emotions and motivations and as a means of imagining themselves into the fictional world of the play and the particular situation of a character. Compared to Stanislavski, Chekhov's methods of actor training were even more directed toward action and the body. Chekhov had his actors develop what he called psychological gestures for each character—a style of movement that embodied the character's personality and objective. This technique was aimed at literally *incorporating* the character, making it a part of the actor's body. Theater historian Robert Gordon writes:

> Whereas Stanislavski's method basically required the actor to place her person in the character's situation, leaving physical details of characterization to be added on at a final stage of rehearsal, … the principal aim of Chekhov's technique was

[48] Gordon, 46-48.

to enable to actor to use movement in order to transform the actor's body into that of the character.[49]

Chekhov's actors had to imagine and create, and then explore, experiment with, and learn, an imaginary body for the character. All of the character's lines, emotions, and objectives had to be physicalized and made concrete.[50]

Stanislavski and Chekhov both experimented with different ways of unifying what Schiller would call the person and the condition of both the actor and the character. Stanislavski asked actors to imagine their person in the character's condition so that they could honestly perform that condition as if they were indeed living it out. Chekhov maintained an even stronger integration between the mind/personality of the actor and the body of the actor, insisting that actors had to involve their bodies in the exploration of a character's person and condition. The psychological gesture was a way of engaging both the physical and the mental in a performance so that the whole of the actor could be fused with the whole of the character. As aesthetic play, acting is engaged in creating harmonious relations among what might be understood as disparate parts, just as we have seen above.

Beside Chekhov, Stanislavski's other most famous student was Lee Strasberg, who adopted a technique that Stanislavski developed and then abandoned as the foundation of his own theory of acting, which Strasberg called The Method (now popularly known as "method acting"). The technique was called "affective memory" or "emotion memory," and it involved an actor recalling in detail a past emotional

[49] Gordon, 69.
[50] Gordon, 69-71.

experience in order to project the actor's remembered emotions onto the situation of a character in the drama.[51] Strasberg wished for actors to be liberated from the strictures of both psychological and physical acting techniques, and so he aimed at spontaneity and natural movement on stage. Strasberg was the most open of Stanislavski's protégés about the paradox that an actor must be himself and be other than himself, and Strasberg wanted to alleviate the pressure of that paradox by encouraging actors to express their own genuine emotions.[52]

All told, the movement that Stanislavski began in acting theory was a move toward particularizing an actor's performance. Stanislavski, Chekhov, and Strasberg all trained actors not simply to perform a generic character or to present stylized emotions but to embody particular characters acting on particular motives in particular circumstances.[53] This focus on particularity in acting reflects the harmonious relation between the universal and the particular that is established in aesthetic play, making space for sensuous concerns to shape the work of art alongside rational concerns and connecting individuals as individuals by engaging their particularity. Acting theory in the tradition of Stanislavski proves to be an apt example of aesthetic play as Kant, Schiller, and Gadamer have described it. The focus on particularity in this style of acting also brings to light its ethical character and the aptitude it can cultivate in its practitioners for understanding others as unique individuals, not as types to be

[51] Gordon, 47-48. Hornby, 177-178.
[52] Gordon, 73-83.
[53] Gordon, 84.

categorized or tools to be used. Approaching acting through the work of Stanislavski and his students fosters an ethical approach to our interactions with others offstage as well.

Acting as Play

Within the tradition of Stanislavski but moving beyond his ideas about the psychological aspects of acting, there were several theorists for whom physical and imaginative play became the defining characteristic of theater. Focusing on play in acting is a second way of resolving the problem of acting, i.e. of the actor's ontological double status. For these mid-20th-century acting theorists, drama simply is play, and imaginative games and improvisation are the most relevant techniques for actors to learn and practice. They believed that improvisational games could reconcile the separation between the actor and the character or between the actor's mind and the actions of their body. Gordon writes, "The word *play* becomes a key term, improvisation being the game in which the whole intelligence of the performer engages with the complex and changing nature of reality."[54] As play in this sense, drama becomes "a form of dialectical thinking,"[55] a mode of playing out possibilities in conversation and in community with others that gives rise to synthesis and unity. This approach to acting, too, exemplifies aesthetic play and fosters moral capacities such as listening, responding, and improvising within the boundaries of a given scene.

Leading the charge for understanding theater as play in the early to mid 20th century were Jacques Copeau and his nephew Michel Saint-Denis. Both associated Stanislavski's revolution in theater with the possibility of deepening the connection

[54] Gordon, 199.
[55] Gordon, 199.

between aesthetics and ethics or between art and life, and they aimed to enact that possibility by making acting less theatrical and more authentic. Copeau and Saint-Denis saw play as a way to resolve the unique tension in the actor between the self, the character, and the performing body.[56] Copeau and Saint-Denis promoted improvisation and artless playfulness as the key to authentically performing before and with an audience.[57]

Through play, Copeau believed he could connect actors with nature and with life instead of just with acting techniques or character psychology. In this, while his conception of acting is grounded in Stanislavski's revelation that acting ought to integrate mind and body through imagination, Copeau intended to supersede Stanislavski's system and draw acting closer to ethical ideals of honesty and sincerity, values that might seem to disappear on stage. Stanislavski believed truthful acting would bring life and psychological depth to the stage; by identifying acting with play, Copeau extended this belief to include the whole being of the actor in the liveliness and honesty developed in acting. Thus for Copeau, associating acting with play serves an explicitly ethical purpose.

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[56] Gordon, 121-123.

[57] Others who saw play as primary in drama and in acting training include Viola Spolin, Keith Johnstone, Clive Barker, and James Lecoq. Many of these thinkers found their inspiration in the work of sociologists and anthropologists who wrote about play and performance as aspects of everyday social life, such as Erving Goffman. Divisions within performance arts—such as the difference in style between those devoted to the song and dance of Broadway and those who followed Stanislavski's or Strasberg's techniques for developing the psychology of characters—brought many to ask about the distinction between performance and acting and to emphasize playfulness with bodily movement as the heart of acting as distinct from other performances. (Gordon, 191-192)

Like Stanislavski, Copeau was motivated by the conflict actors experience when asked to translate analytical work with a text into expressions of emotion and real actions and movement on stage. Play was conceived as a solution to the ever-present anxiety over the heterogeneity of a text and a player's cognitive understanding of it on the one hand and an embodied performance and the player's sensuous existence on the other hand. Copeau believed that improvisational play and theater games could integrate an actor's intellectual and physical being because of the unifying quality of imagination,[58] in much the same way that Kant believed the play of the imagination could bridge the rational and the sensuous. And similar to Schiller, Copeau thought that play was instrumental in establishing the unity of the human being (i.e. of the actor).

For Copeau, the discipline and craft of theater allows the actor to possess himself as a whole being, which is then gifted to the audience in performance.[59] Basically, the idea is that improvisational play develops self-knowledge and self-possession.[60] We must explore our own embodiment—the shapes and limits of our bodies, our possibilities for action, movement, and noise-making, too—and the ways in which we

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[58] Gordon, 126-128.

[59] Gordon, 140. This formulation of the craft of acting is obviously focused on the actor; it does not directly fit with the conception of theater as a play among actors *and* audience that we have been exploring thus far. Nevertheless, this theory of acting, focusing on physical and imaginative play, does impact the activities of the Shakespeare Behind Bars troupe. In combination with the other theories presented here, it contributes to the whole picture of theater as involving the audience as players in ethical aesthetic play.

[60] Copeau was also invested in involving his actors in every element of theater production, with the hope that he could cultivate the wholeness of an actor's person on stage through engagement with lighting and scenery design and studying the history and theory of theater in addition to practicing the craft (Gordon 128-131).

can project ourselves in the world in order to be connected and whole in mind and body. Play is that exploration.

Michel Saint-Denis followed Copeau's commitment to play in acting, but as he implemented his ideas in a British context committed to performing Shakespeare faithfully (while Copeau worked in France), Saint-Denis added a greater emphasis on respect for the text being performed. Combining this emphasis on the text with his conception of acting as play, Saint-Denis wanted actors to interpret a text not analytically but through discovering its possibilities for enactment through play and improvisation. For Saint-Denis, the whole process of theater-making is concrete and embodied, not simply intellectual. He wanted an actor's movements to be organic, originating in the center of the body and supported by the whole. In this, Saint-Denis tried to reach an ideal of free but controlled movement. While Saint-Denis aimed for embodied playmaking, though, he wished to keep the actor's self out of the equation. Saint-Denis used improvisation as a way to train his actors not to rely on their own personalities when interpreting and presenting a character. He believed that every motion and even every sound had its own embedded inflections of meaning, and the goal of acting training was to discover how the body and the voice could express meaning. Playing with movement and sound in rehearsals allowed actors to develop the versatility and capacity of their physical bodies, without the more psychological elements that Stanislavski and his students tried to draw out.

A variety of games and exercises are used in acting training in this school of thought. Copeau is the one who first gives us now-conventional styles of theater warm-

ups for the body and the voice, exercises that help actors arrive and prepare both mentally and physically for their rehearsals and performances. Those who understand acting as play have also frequently employed a rehearsal technique that has actors wear masks to neutralize their facial expressions. The masks force the actors to find different imaginative ways of expressing emotion and psychological complexity when their faces are not visible. The exercise leads to exploration of and experimentation with expressive movements and noises outside of the typical range. Actors engaged in training driven by the idea of drama as play might also be asked to observe and mirror a partner's movements without any sense of character or plot. This sort of exercise teaches actors to lend their bodies to new ways of moving and opens up the possibility of finding modes of expression that, while foreign for the actor's own patterns of movement, might express a character or an emotion in a new way. Playing with the body and forms of movement leads to a natural unfoldment of character that is first and for the most part embodied, diminishing the chance of an actor's interpretation of a text remaining too intellectual or analytical.

Improvisation is also important for those who understand acting as play. Improvising scenes without a script develops actors' skills in listening and responding to other players. Improvisation also refines actors' attunement to the situation unfolding around them and the reality of the play world they must imagine and inhabit with others. These aptitudes are all valuable in cultivating a good life that incorporates the phenomenal and contingent. The artistic practice of improvisation heightens our

attunement to others and develops our capacity to make appropriate moral judgments in a changing situation.[61]

How is this kind of playfulness in acting an example of aesthetic play? Let us recall that aesthetic play involves participation in the work of art, establishing harmonious relations among disparate parts of the human being, incorporating sensuousness and feeling along with reason and intellect, and demonstrating our connectedness with other human beings. When acting itself is understood as play, all of these features come to the fore. As players who involve their whole being in the work of art, actors transform the *work* of art, as its medium. Their job is not simply to express a playwright's or a director's intentions for the work of art but to participate in its creation, just as aesthetic play requires. Involving actors' whole being in their play also requires developing harmonious relations between their intellectual understanding of a character and a text on the one hand and their bodily expressions of character and meaning on the other hand. This encapsulates the whole purpose of understanding acting as play: it draws an actor's sensuous being into harmony with their understanding of the parameters of plot and character established by a text. The art of acting, according to play theorists like Copeau and Saint-Denis, is experimenting with and exploring the possibilities for human life that arise from playing with imagined characteristics within the constraints of physical reality. We have come to understand the art of living well with others as perhaps demanding a similar comportment, negotiating the dictates of

[61] Garry Hagberg has made the same observation concerning jazz improvisation in "Jazz Improvisation and Ethical Interaction: A Sketch of the Connections" in *Art and Ethical Criticism*, ed. Garry L. Hagberg (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2008).

morality within a contingent situation and doing so in cooperation with others. Thus, the practice of acting as play contributes to the development of capacities relevant to practical life as well.

Brecht and Boal

The final movement in acting and theater that we should examine in this brief review of acting theories related to the methodology of the Shakespeare Behind Bars troupe is the approach that sees acting and theater as means of liberation from oppression, epitomized in the work of Bertolt Brecht and Augusto Boal. While the facilitators of SBB may not explicitly employ Brecht's or Boal's methods (whereas they admit to emulating Stanislavski and openly discuss the theater games and improvisations that contribute to their process), it is clear that their work with the inmates who participate in SBB has some similar consequences for the actors themselves and their audiences. Acting is often the kind of aesthetic play that draws attention to our limitations as subjects of power and our opportunities to resist oppressive structures, and in my view, this is certainly true when such aesthetic play takes place behind bars. As we have seen, aesthetic play can reveal to us the characteristics of an ethics that resists clockwork thinking and cultivates our moral sensibilities. Brecht and Boal contribute to this view of the ethical significance of play in their approach to theater as both transformative and liberatory.

German playwright, director, and theater theorist Bertolt Brecht is usually associated with politically explicit theater productions. He was indeed interested in how theater could challenge and invert the bourgeois hierarchy of playwright, director, actors,

and audience in order to involve the spectators in the creation of the theater experience and demonstrate how even the disenfranchised and the oppressed could participate in political and social change.[62] As others have noted about aesthetic play, theater for Brecht is a necessarily participatory art. He also wanted to remind his audiences of the problems facing the real world they inhabited, not to provide a means of escapism in the theater.[63] But Brecht never meant his productions to be polemical. Brecht criticized bourgeois theater for not making contact with the people, and he wanted to bring fun, laughter, and pleasure back into the theater. Brecht's goal, however, was not simply to satisfy spectators' need for entertainment but to transform them.[64] He believed that the "very form [of theater] might induce in its spectators an attitude of active engagement with the world and the possibilities for changing it."[65] Brecht saw theater as an instantiation of aesthetic play that transforms its participants and brings new possibilities for society to light.

Brecht aimed to accomplish this transformation in his audiences through what he called the alienation effect (*Verfremdungseffekt*), literally "strange-making" or "distancing" his spectators, and even his actors, from the play itself.[66] He would have his actors read the stage directions aloud, for instance, or surround the stage with additional

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[62] Gordon, 221-222.

[63] Gordon, 221-222. As Woodruff explains it, Brecht's return to critical thinking and rational inquiry in theater is essentially Platonic: "Plato and Brecht, though far removed from one another in time and philosophy, still had virtually the same complaint: that theater arouses emotions which disable the power of reason in those who watch" (Woodruff, 185).

[64] Gordon, 226.

[65] Gordon, 226.

[66] Gordon, 233. Hornby, 200-201.

media—photographs, news stories, subtitles, and so on—that audiences would have to navigate.[67] By presenting a disjointed world and inconsistent characters, not to mention actors who would break character to address the audience as themselves, Brecht refused to allow his audience to be complacent and simply undergo the experience of theater. He wanted to prompt spectators to ask questions and think critically about the play and about their own lives and social problems.[68] By forcing the audience to interact with the play and the players, Brecht "aimed to disrupt the habitual empathy induced in the spectator by the performance…, promoting instead a critically alert attitude that awakened the rational faculties and made the individual spectator actively responsible for constructing an interpretation of the performance."[69] Brechtian theater presents not simply a play but a dialectical game that spectators must participate in and interpret. Brecht believed that this heightened awareness in his actors and his spectators could cause them to consider how social conditions are constructed (just as the fictional play world is constructed), which in turn could induce critical thinking about the social structures of power and oppression in their own societies. He understood this method of performance to be fundamentally playful, experimental, open, and fun because it involved "the active pleasure of laughing at contradictions in society's status quo, and exploring ways of resolving them through social change."[70] We might also recognize the culture of dialogue and engagement Brecht aimed to spark as a key element of ethical life in the style of aesthetic play. Involvement with this kind of theater cultivates a

[67] Gordon, 228-229, 240-241.
[68] Gordon, 228-236. Hornby, 200-201.
[69] Gordon, 229.
[70] Gordon, 247.

commitment to social change and the capacities we need to enact that change in our communities.

Augusto Boal, known for his concept of "theater of the oppressed," was influenced by Brecht to think about the social meaning that was conveyed in theater and not just actors' psychological interpretations of character.[71] Reminiscent of Kant on art, Boal believed theater provides a language of singular experiences that are nevertheless communal and shareable broadly.[72] Boal also followed Brecht's lead in transforming spectators into participants in the drama so that the theater experience induced spectators to feel their responsibility for making change in the world around them.[73] Boal frequently invited spectators to intervene in the play itself, to change the direction of a scene or to alter a character's lines or actions.[74] Like Brecht, Boal treated theater as a rehearsal for real social change. Spectators could participate in the social drama and could also watch the changes they made play out, learning about unintended consequences and the immense complexity of social change.

While theater for Boal was liberatory and transformative, though, it was also cathartic, for he believed that it was in the theater (in the rehearsal for social change and not in our real lives) that we could undo our internalized repression and play out a

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[71] Gordon, 259-260. Boal's work can best be understood as a fusion of Brecht's work in theater and Paolo Freire's idea of "pedagogy of the oppressed," in which education is understood as liberatory self-actualization. Boal's title (*Theater of the Oppressed*) is an homage to Freire. (Gordon, 261)

[72] Gordon, 272.

[73] Gordon, 261.

[74] Gordon, 262.

subversion of the social hierarchy that might seem impossible to us in reality. Gordon writes about Boal's work:

> Theater of the oppressed is a tool for transforming individuals and groups into active participants in their own social and personal destinies. While it does not pretend to offer global solutions to macrocosmic problems, it provides effective strategies for transforming the passive victim of oppression or repression into an active protagonist with a faith in the possibility of changing the concrete circumstances of his oppression.[75]

The collaborative exercise of experimenting with social constructs in the theater helps us to learn about our own social situations and imagine solutions to the problems plaguing our own society.

Brecht and Boal both understand theater as a process of awakening to constructed social conditions, becoming critical of those structures, and experimenting with ways of ameliorating our social situation. In this, theater as liberation yet again expresses the key features of aesthetic play as we understand it, especially in its ethical significance. While Brecht and Boal are more explicitly interested in social constructions than human being, their emphasis on freedom from oppression nevertheless echoes Schiller's idea that aesthetic play develops human freedom from external and internal constraints. Additionally, both theorists planned for spectators to participate directly in the production of theater. Furthermore, the idea that theater can be a dialectical game or in fact an actual conversation among the characters, the actors, and the audience realizes

[75] Gordon, 271.

Gadamer's ideal of art as dialogue. Most importantly, theater in the style of Brecht and Boal does not allow audience members to escape from their everyday lives or to sit isolated in the crowd; spectators must learn about the conditions of their fellow human beings and become involved in playing out various possible futures in collaboration with others. The aesthetic play that takes place in this kind of theater intentionally connects members of a community and allows us to discover new ways of being with one another that are less oppressive and more freeing.

These three theories of acting together represent three different emphases in acting. Stanislavski stressed the importance of discovering a character's psychology and engaging an actor's person. Those who see drama as play emphasize the body as a meaning-maker and explore its interconnectedness with meaning in the text and with an actor's interpretation of a character. Brecht and Boal return our thought to reason and critical thinking, drawing their actors' and audiences' attention to problematic social constructs and encouraging them to act out possible solutions.[76] I would like to suggest that these three together represent the core assumptions underlying SBB's practice. Actors in that program do try to understand their characters' psychology, and they draw on their own emotional and experiential resources to fill out that understanding. Rehearsals and performances are also playful undertakings that give the actors freedom to discover new patterns of movement for and ways of making meaning with their

[76] Because of his emphasis on reason and critical thinking, Brecht is sometimes criticized as being against emotion in theater. Brecht protested, however, that he had no objection to emotions, but he wanted to examine them instead of just evoke them. Brecht wished to balance emotion with reason in theater, and he was critical of other approaches to theater for dismissing reason in their focus on emotion. (Gordon, 248-249)

bodies, leading to both more freedom and more control in their movement. And the whole process of producing a play in a prison draws the attention of all participants to the social structures at work in the world that condition the possibility of the play. I will argue that what plays out on stage also serves as a rehearsal for solving some of those problems in our everyday experience. The way aesthetic play develops its participants' moral capacities and makes visible what is problematic in our world is one of the strongest arguments for prison theater. This argument will be taken up again in the next (and final) chapter. For now, suffice it to say that theater-making is indeed an example of aesthetic play as Kant, Schiller, and Gadamer have defined it, for it is the *work* of art that brings into being harmonious relations among disparate parts of the human being and among human beings interconnected in both momentary and established communities.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have justified theater as a prime example of aesthetic play. I have offered evidence from theater phenomenology and acting theory to support my claim that theater expands our understanding of aesthetic play in practice and demonstrates its capacity to cultivate moral aptitudes. Observations in the phenomenology of theater demonstrate how integral it is to the art form that the audience participate in the dialectic. Further, acting theory gives us the distinct advantage of being able to interrogate the very medium of the work of art to see how it functions in aesthetic play. All together, we have seen how theater engages all of its participants, actors and spectators, in aesthetic play that generates harmonious relations, integrates the various

aspects of the human being from the physical to the psychological, and reveals our connectedness with other human beings, both ontologically and in the playing out of social and ethical life.

This brief look into theater studies has taken our understanding of the relation between aesthetics and ethics beyond the limits of the philosophical views of Kant, Schiller, and Gadamer. We have seen how the concrete practice of aesthetic play enacts the image of ethical life these philosophical views of aesthetics give rise to and how participating in that play cultivates our powers of interpretation and judgment, our attunement to others and to our situation, and our capacity for listening and responding to others with care. This art form is an ideal case study to see, in the following chapter, how theater in practice can indeed develop our capacities for moral judgment and practical wisdom and draw us into more understanding relations with our fellow human beings.

CHAPTER VI

AESTHETIC PLAY BEHIND BARS:

A MODEL FOR MORAL CULTIVATION

Introduction

The final piece of our analysis of the ethical potential of aesthetic play is to examine the Shakespeare Behind Bars prison theater program. In the preceding chapters, we have seen how aesthetic play can be understood to provide a new image of ethical life that counteracts the popular clockwork view of morality and can even cultivate the moral aptitudes involved in enacting that new image of ethical life. We have seen how theater in particular is a form of aesthetic play that fosters interpretation and judgment, practical wisdom and attunement, and genuine listening and responding to others in a changing situation. I now offer my analysis of SBB as a model of particular practices of aesthetic play that have proven to rehabilitate moral sensibilities such as these and ethical relations in a clockwork society.

This final step in my argument exceeds the ethical potential of aesthetic play that is entailed in Kant, Schiller, and Gadamer's philosophy. It even goes beyond what our analysis of theater phenomenology and acting theory accomplished in the previous chapter with respect to the power of play to cultivate our moral capacities. For the design of the SBB program is intentionally rehabilitative in just the ways I have argued aesthetic play can be, and its development over the past two decades has led to a refined

community of practice that recognizes and emphasizes the most transformative elements of theater and communal ethical life. We will see evidence in this chapter of the relation between aesthetics and ethics that I propose. I contend that aesthetic play, as it occurs in the context of SBB, demonstrates that the playfulness and engagement of the whole human being (in its many-sidedness, situatedness, and contingency) that are characteristic of art both exemplify and cultivate the moral aptitudes appropriate to a mode of living well with others that is not susceptible to instrumentalization and that better fits the kind of beings that we are. First, though, let me give you a glimpse into the power of the SBB program with this remarkable and yet representative story, as an introduction to what theater can look like inside a prison and what kind of comportment and character it can cultivate in those who play along.

When Mike Smith joined the Shakespeare Behind Bars program at Luther Luckett Correctional Complex, a men's prison in Kentucky, he was not too keen on playing the part of a woman. But when his best friend Sammie Byron chose to take on the role of Othello, Mike changed his mind. Othello is spurred by jealousy to strangle his wife, Desdemona, and Sammie was in prison for that very crime: he had strangled a woman he loved. Mike knew Sammie would need his friend's support to reenact his crime rehearsal after rehearsal, so he decided to play Desdemona. Simply, Sammie needed him. What is more, Mike was in prison for attacking his girlfriend and her

mother. He reflected that it would be good for him to learn what it felt like to be afraid of a man he trusted.[1]

Stories like Mike and Sammie's are anomalous in the droves of literature written about the prison machine. We hear about prison violence, recidivism rates, drug use, and corruption. Stories like this one, stories of healing, are rare and precious. The overwhelmingly negative reports that come out of prisons and the astronomical incarceration and recidivism rates in America would seem to indicate that people typically don't find rehabilitation when they're doing time. Instead, they develop violent protective behaviors and drug addictions. One of the two Shakespeare Behind Bars facilitators I met in 2014, Carol Stewart, captured the hopelessness of incarceration when she said to me grimly one afternoon, "It's hard to be good in here."

The prison context provides the closest thing we have in our society to a closed system at the limits of our typical practices of moral cultivation; in this respect, it serves as an ideal locus of inquiry into the power of theater to develop moral judgment in our age of hyperrationality, emotional detachment, and clockwork thinking in general. As I have said, the modern prison industrial complex is literally the concrete presentation of the ideals of clockwork thinking. Inmates are numbered and catalogued, their personal identities and vocations entirely erased, reduced to programmed cogs in the machinations of the prison clockwork. At least that's the idea. Prisons are often

[1] This story is compiled from interviews that Amy Scott-Douglass conducted with Mike and Sammie at Luther Luckett Correctional Complex in 2004. These are published in Amy Scott-Douglass, *Shakespeare Inside* (New York: Continuum, 2007).

compared to warehouses for their efficiency in storing their wards; they are designed to keep everything running efficiently and uniformly.

Yet in a rare correctional facility, a theater program has sprung up, and a small faction of inmates are allowed to spend some small portion of their time rehearsing a monologue, or a scene, or even a whole play, engaging their imaginations and their creativity while interacting with others in the population in ways the prison rules typically forbid.[2] As we see in Mike and Sammie's story, prison theater also provides an opportunity to form deep bonds of friendship, to practice self-reflection, and to work towards personal growth and transformation. We have seen in the previous chapter how acting theory and theater phenomenology reveal the inherent ethical resonances of theater-making and theatergoing and the power these have to develop moral sensibilities in the players involved. *Prison* theater is no exception; there, too, participants in theater, both actors and spectators, practice modes of being with others, of human activity, and of pursuing an objective that foster ethical sensibilities and cultivate real moral capacities that can resist the clockwork tendency of our age.

In this chapter, I will analyze the Shakespeare Behind Bars program and how its expressions of aesthetic play, in the persons of the actors and the spectators, supports my claim in this dissertation that aesthetic play can cultivate the relevant aptitudes of a more

[2] In Luther Luckett, for example, the men are not supposed to touch each other. Touch is taboo, for it too often signifies violence, manipulation, or even attachment, affection, and intimacy, all of which the prison is designed to quash. But of course actors on stage must be allowed to touch each other when the script demands it. This one feature of prison theater was especially meaningful to the men I met in the SBB program; it constituted a treasured exception to the prison grind in the space of their rehearsals. They began every rehearsal with a round of greetings that typically included some kind of welcoming touch, be it a handshake, a hug, or a fist bump.

multi-sided and phenomenal understanding of moral life. I will describe how the members of SBB play in terms of the design of the program, their approach to acting, and their relation to their audience. Each of these aspects reveals its own ethical resonances and demonstrates its power to transform the players involved. We will see, for one thing, how the SBB program presents a model of ethical life in the image of aesthetic play that counteracts the clockwork morality that permeates our society and that incorporates elements we have seen in the work of Kant, Schiller, and Gadamer, and in the theory of theater we examined in the previous chapter. Ultimately, I will also argue that SBB's structure and practice models the actual power of art to effect moral formation and to rehabilitate ethical aptitudes that instrumental rationality suppresses.

As I understand it, the picture of ethical life that SBB paints highlights taking responsibility, acting with honesty and integrity, making good judgments, considering both the individual and the situational context, and responding to others' needs and demands within the boundaries of an accepted script. Accordingly, the moral aptitudes that aesthetic play cultivates that distinguish it from the common clockwork morality of our age might be described as interpretation and imagination as key elements of judgment, attunement to the situation as well as the universal demands of morality (a form of practical wisdom), and an openness to the other and to revising our judgments expressed in genuine listening and responding in a changing situation.

My observations about the SBB program in this chapter come from my own experience visiting the program, Hank Rogerson's 2007 documentary, *Shakespeare Behind Bars*, and a variety of published accounts of the program, such as Amy Scott-

Douglass's book, *Shakespeare Inside*. My visits to the program took place in the summers of 2014 and 2015, when the troupe was performing *Much Ado About Nothing* and *Pericles*, respectively. Additional observations and stories come from my continuing correspondence with some of the members of the SBB troupe. I will use the men's own comments and actions to characterize the program as often as possible, though the terms of my study require that I use pseudonyms for the inmates when referring to my first-hand observations.[3]

SBB Program Design

Over the years, the SBB program has evolved to make explicit and to magnify the ethical development that results from their aesthetic practice. I will begin by describing how the program operates now.

The Shakespeare Behind Bars circle, as they call it, is made up of twenty to thirty inmates at Luther Luckett Correctional Complex, a medium- to minimum-security men's

[3] In hindsight, this is an element of my study that I wish I could have designed differently. I understand the purpose of the Internal Review Board and value their commitment to protecting human subjects (and especially prisoners) in research programs such as this. Anonymity is typically preferable for persons who participate in research studies. However, the men at Luther Luckett were somewhat upset that I would not be able to use their real names. A couple of them referred to a favorite line of theirs from the *Shakespeare Behind Bars* documentary, when one inmate, Leonard, points out that inmates like them are generally known for the worst thing they've ever done. Many of the men feel that their involvement in SBB is the *best* thing they've ever done. Many of them want recognition for their work towards personal growth and transformation, and they want their names to be published and known for a good reason, not just in the annals of police reports and news stories having to do with their crimes. I regret that I can only refer to these remarkable men by pseudonyms. It doesn't do them justice.

prison in La Grange, Kentucky.[4] These men devote their evenings and the little free time they have to working to read, understand, and perform one of Shakespeare's plays each year. Artistic director Matt Wallace leads rehearsals, but he functions more as a facilitator than a director; he does not impose a coherent vision on the production but relies on the men to work it out among themselves. At the end of each season, the men perform the full play for their fellow inmates and for public audiences made up of their family members, professional actors, educators, and donors. After each performance, the actors participate in a talkback session, during which they answer questions from the audience (visitors or other inmates) about the production, the program, and their experiences.

SBB's official mission is to use theater as a way for inmates to experience personal and social situations that will allow them to develop and practice skills that will help them succeed on the outside.[5] The prison administration recognizes the instrumental value of theater to equip inmates with transferrable skills like reading comprehension, public speaking, teamwork, discipline, and so on that will serve them well upon their release. The true value of the program to the men who participate, however, is not so

[4] The program was founded in 1995 by Curt Tofteland. Tofteland has since initiated sister programs throughout Kentucky and also in Michigan, where he currently lives. The focus in this dissertation is exclusively the SBB program at Luther Luckett, where Matt Wallace has succeeded Tofteland as the artistic director and program facilitator. There is also at Luther Luckett a shorter program called the Journeymen, designed for 18-20-year-olds in the population. The Journeymen study scenes instead of a whole play and memorize monologues or sonnets. They put together a brief performance that serves as the opening act before the main event (SBB's play) each season. The men in SBB mentor the Journeymen both personally and in their acting, but there is no expectation that the Journeymen will become SBB apprentices; they must come to that decision on their own.

[5] Shakespeare Behind Bars website, www.shakespearebehindbars.org.

easily quantified. Their work has significant returns in terms of skill development, yes. The men even earn a kind of clout on the prison yard for participating in SBB. (Not to mention, putting on a play is fun!) But the artistic process they undertake entails both a greater risk and a deeper kind of reward than this instrumental language indicates. The work of acting itself presents a high risk. In this case, a troupe of amateurs is taking on the monumental task of learning and performing the Bard. Acting takes practice, and in live performance, the stakes are high. The men have to work hard to succeed on stage before an audience. On the other hand, the real work that goes into an SBB production requires deep self-awareness, difficult self-reflection, and unrelenting honesty with and openness to the other men in the program. Beyond the skills of successful reintegration into society, these are the aptitudes the SBB program cultivates, the aptitudes required for living well with others in a world that tends to reduce our individuality to clockwork. The opportunity for personal growth and moral transformation in the midst of this work—and the genuine commitment to such that the program design evokes in its participants—constitutes the real value of the SBB program, beyond what can be sold to a prison administration.

The transformative power of this aesthetic process for the men in SBB is evidenced in the dramatically reduced recidivism rate among SBB veterans. Upon release, roughly 67% of ex-convicts in the United States reoffend and return to prison within three years; for those who have participated in SBB, that rate is just 5.1%. The program is designed to engage the ethical dimensions of the theater dynamic, and the

numbers do bear out its success in developing an aptitude for moral judgment and steadfast of moral character among its participants.

The entire program is designed to encourage the men involved to take responsibility for their actions and learn to problem solve as a community, starting with the very first step in the production cycle: casting. Every year, the men begin the season by choosing their own parts. Casting is important because SBB productions are significantly character-driven. In the absence of an imposed, unifying directorial vision, the men do their own interpretive work, and it is primarily directed toward understanding the characters they are called to perform. The actors work over the course of the year to relate honestly to the character as a full-bodied and complex human being and to understand their motivations and decisions within the context of the play.

Several of the actors have explained that in truth, the roles choose *them* rather than the other way around. During the summer months (between seasons), they read and re-read the play that Wallace has chosen for the next year, and they listen for a role to speak to them. The role that chooses each actor might call him to examine aspects of his own past, including his crime or his victim's experience, or it might speak to him of a life he would like to experience but can only imagine. As they work to bring a character to life, then, the actors reflect on what motivates their own everyday decisions and strive to understand the reasons behind another person's actions. This exercise in self-reflection and empathy extends to the whole group: when two men want the same role, they must talk it over, examine their reasons, and decide together not who deserves the

part, but who *needs* it more.[6] Even the first steps of putting on a play help develop in SBB participants an attunement and a responsiveness to others' needs in conversation with their own choices.

SBB is somewhat unique among prison theater programs in that all of the roles are played by the inmates themselves, even the women's roles. (Other programs, like Agnes Wilcox's Prison Performing Arts program, invite professional female actors into the prison to perform the women's parts.[7]) This can become a point of tension, as many of the men resist playing women's roles, in part because of the general stigma against expressing femininity in a men's prison and in part for fear that it will make them targets of violence out on the yard. There is also an understanding, however, that every member must take his turn playing a female role (must take one for the team, as they sometimes see it). As it turns out, some of the men have found the female roles in particular to be sources of insight and cause for personal growth. As we saw in the opening story in this chapter, Mike Smith, who was serving time for assaulting his girlfriend and her mother with a kitchen knife, reflected that it was invaluable for him to learn from the experience of playing Desdemona how his own victims may have felt.[8] In SBB's 2014 production of *Much Ado*, the actor playing Beatrice, Fox, stole the show for his sharp, captivating, and complex performance; Fox's insight during one rehearsal was that he just had to play her "straight," as a human being, not as a *woman*. The experience of playing a

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[6] This aspect of the process is important enough to the men involved that one of the inmates, Lou, explained it to me, unprompted, on my very first visit.

[7] Scott-Douglass, 66.

[8] Scott-Douglass, 83-84. Note that while the stories from my own experience at Luther Luckett are related using pseudonyms, Scott-Douglass uses the inmates' real names.

woman's role can foster the men's capacity for understanding others in their full and complex humanity, a morally-inflected capacity that clockwork thinking diminishes.

SBB is also unique among other educational and so-called "value-added" programs offered at the prison. Unlike sex offender programs or substance abuse treatment plans, SBB men receive no time off their sentences for participating. The rewards are entirely personal and immaterial. Nevertheless, the group has no trouble garnering interest; quite the contrary, they have to maintain rigorous standards for membership. New members must be sponsored by veteran members, and the whole SBB circle must approve a new recruit. In addition, the program requires the men to have one year of good behavior before they can join, and disciplinary infractions are taken very seriously. As one of the Journeymen reported, participating in this theater program is "a motivation to do what's right."

One might suspect that SBB's recidivism rate is so low because the men who participate self-select into the program and therefore probably already have the motivation and the disposition not to re-offend. This may be true in part, but the SBB circle aims to counteract this bias by recruiting those among the general population who would most benefit from joining. Rather than simply accepting the self-selectors eager to participate in Shakespeare, the men in the program actively recruit those who are at risk in one way or another—the new transfers and the young men especially who might fall in with the wrong crowd. They reach out to those in need of a support system. Their concern for incorporating at-risk others into the SBB community demonstrates both their

commitment to ethical formation through their aesthetic practice and the program's efficacy in cultivating habits of care and solicitude for others in its members.

The SBB circle is like a family, according to most accounts, and the practice of making human activity worth watching, as Woodruff has described theater (i.e. the watchfulness and care that goes into theater) provides vital support in the prison environment. These values are so central to the SBB mission that one actor who made parole in 2014, Erroll Rogers, tours around Kentucky schools speaking with students about how to live up to their potential and make choices that promote strong communities. He calls his program H.O.P.E., Helping One Person Everyday. SBB members find support and personal growth in the SBB program, and they make it part of their mission to help others do the same.

Giving and receiving feedback is another key element of the design of the program. Since the facilitators' goal is for the men to be self-directed as much as possible, they are responsible for giving one another notes about their scenes in order to improve the performance. Compared to most other theater troupes, SBB embraces this idea in a radical way. One of the men who participated in SBB (and has since been released) related to Stewart that the theater groups he has been involved with outside of Luther Luckett are much less receptive to feedback from the actors, relying exclusively on the director to critique their performance. This fact reveals how the SBB program is designed to help the men involved develop their own capacity for judgment and compassionate criticism. Not all theater endeavors value the critical conversation in the same way. The men in SBB must practice both sides of the critical conversation—giving

thoughtful constructive criticism to their peers and hearing criticism of their own creative work. In this way, the men also construct a collaborative interpretation and presentation of the play. When a scene isn't working well or there is some kind of disconnect in the flow of the scene, the SBB actors work together as a community to diagnose the problem and brainstorm solutions. The process can be tense, as any exchange of criticism can be, but the men learn to give feedback with care and to receive criticism with grace.

Over the past two decades, this group has developed principles and practices of aesthetic play that develop ethical relations within their community—that develop a cohesive community within a prison, no less!—and that support the personal transformation and rehabilitation of individual members. The sense of accountability among these men is paired with a great sense of artistic freedom in making choices on stage. Their process of setting a Shakespearean script on its feet contains numerous object lessons in ethical life, underscoring the difficulty and vital importance of taking responsibility for one's choices, responding to others by improvising within the boundaries of a given script, and striving for honesty and empathy. What is more, the SBB practice of aesthetic play might also be understood to cultivate these very moral aptitudes in its participants. Much of the impact of the program depends on SBB's approach to acting, so let us investigate that in more depth, particularly in light of the acting theory we examined in the previous chapter.

SBB Approach to Acting

The ways the SBB approach to acting contributes to the powerful moral development that takes place in the program are a result of the inherent ethical significance in certain acting theories. The men need not work intentionally to make better decisions (although they do); their engagement with theater is instructive and transformative on its own.

As I mentioned in Chapter V, the SBB approach to acting is primarily Stanislavskian, with a blend of influences from those who theorize acting as play and from those who understand theater as a kind of activism, as Brecht and Boal do.[9] Their work is intensely character-driven, and the men strive to understand their characters as individuals, listen and respond honestly on stage, and "tell the truth" (a motto of theirs, thanks to the program's founder, Curt Tofteland), practices that contribute to the rehabilitation of ethical modes of being with others. Honesty is the number one rule in the SBB circle, much as it was the goal of acting for Stanislavski. Copeau, too, valued honesty in acting, even with his emphasis on play. Copeau wanted his actors to play to and with the audience, but he didn't want any trickery or deception. He believed that if the actors kept no secrets, i.e. if they were honest about the fact that they were acting and embraced the playfulness of putting on a play, then the acting could be authentic and truthful even if the play itself is not realistic.[10] For the men in SBB, their commitment to

[9] As I mentioned in the previous chapter, the facilitators I have spoken with do not list Brecht and Boal among their primary influences, but the idea that theater can be transformative and can work toward political and ethical ends is apparent in SBB's work.

[10] Gordon, 123-124.

honesty structures the expectations the men have for their interactions with each other and the way they approach acting.

As I have explained, SBB facilitator Matt Wallace chooses which play they will study each year, and over the summer, the men read the play and begin to pay attention to which character speaks to them. Thus begins the work of establishing a sincere relation to and understanding of the person and condition of their character. From the leading roles to the smallest parts, the men take their task seriously and attempt to construct a whole persona from the scripted words. Fox told me that as he understands it, Shakespeare didn't write any filler characters. Each one has a unique story and complex internal life that an actor must understand (or at least imagine) in order to portray a realistic character on stage. The idea of treating their characters as particular individuals they must understand rather than generic parts comes directly from Stanislavski, who offered that particularizing a role brought liveliness to the stage and ethical import to acting.

While we recognize this approach to acting as following the tradition of Stanislavski, the emphasis on honesty and genuine engagement with the characters as human beings leads some SBB actors to claim, "The secret is, we're not acting." The way their aesthetic play rehabilitates habits of ethical comportment toward their fellow human beings is obvious to those who participate. They strive to understand another's actions and motivations, using tools of self-examination and reflection as a resource for reaching out empathetically toward another. Stanislavski coached his actors not to strive for emotion but to strive for empathy, to relate to the character. Stanislavski's ideals of

honesty and truthfulness refer to being faithful to a character, behaving in a logical and coherent way, thinking as that character would—not about being true to life/reality or experiencing honest emotions, as Strasberg claimed. In relating to characters with integrity, acting in character becomes not a transplanting of the self (into the shoes of another) but an expansion and transformation of the self to incorporate the other.[11] As Lou, one of the SBB actors, explained it to me on the first day I visited, they're trying to discover the story of the character, a process much more like getting to know another human being than it is like inventing a persona. The ways the SBB men interact with each other and the ways they interact with other characters on stage mutually reinforce their goal of relating to others with honesty and emotional depth while examining and expanding their own sense of self.

The SBB troupe has also adopted Stanislavski's conviction that acting hinges on understanding the logic of action, which is to say understanding a character and their objectives.[12] Thus, the SBB actors focus on understanding characters' motivations, which is their term for what Stanislavski called objectives. The SBB facilitators often remind their actors to think about their motivations when moving on stage. As Carol Stewart put it in a rehearsal, "Make a decision and *move*. Don't just amble." An actor's motivation must grow out of the scene at hand, and he has to commit to the choices he makes, or his movements will seem aimless or unwarranted. Indeed, "Motivation!" has become another of the troupe's buzzwords, a common reminder from one actor to another as they watch each other in rehearsal. The first time I heard the comment,

[11] Hornby, 73-74.
[12] Gordon, 49-53.

"Motivation, motivation!" it was coming from Victor, one of the SBB mentors to the Journeymen. He had internalized this lesson and was sharing it with the younger generation. The actors have to understand both their characters and the text well enough to understand how each line and movement is motivated.

One result of this demand for actors to examine motivations is that the men who participate in SBB also spend time paying attention to what motivates their actions and how their choices are either intentional and committed or meandering and incidental. Wallace told me that one day at rehearsal, long-time SBB veteran Rhodes realized, "I didn't have to get in the car that night. Had I not gotten in the car, had I not made that one choice, it wouldn't have gotten to this. I wouldn't have ended up taking a life." Interrogating their own motivations for acting on stage allows these men to reflect on the motivations—and, perhaps, the unmotivated actions—that landed them in prison. Even for those of us whose choices have not led to incarceration, examining our motivations and intentionally committing to our actions rather than ambling through our daily decisions fosters reflection and care in making moral judgments.

Further, in thinking about motivated action and simply in practicing the art of acting, SBB actors experience possibilities they may not otherwise have access to. Recall that Bert States calls theater "an exercise for realizing the possibilities of the actor,"[13] and Jill Dolan writes that theater "articulates the possible."[14] SBB allows its participants to expand their range of experience by realizing new possibilities for their lives. Expanding our self-understanding to incorporate a broader range of possibilities

[13] States, *Great Reckonings*, 129.
[14] Dolan, 2.

for human activity through acting is akin to a Gadamerian fusion of horizons, which strengthens our capacity for practical wisdom and caring interpretation in the situations we encounter in ethical life. As Rhodes realized that he could have made different choices in his past, so many of the men experience revelations about what possible paths their lives may have taken—and may still take—through acting a scripted story and performing someone else's (a character's) journey.

In addition to cultivating the aptitudes that are relevant to ethical life, putting on a play also places ethical demands directly on the actors. What Gadamer has called "the obligatoriness of the work of art"[15] certainly applies to the playtext. Actors are obliged to respect both the possibilities presented in the text and their fellow actors' freedom as they interpret and enact the text together. Theater is a process of adjudicating which possibilities are allowed within the boundaries of a script and which are not. Putting a play on its feet (a favorite phrase of Wallace's) requires actors to be careful readers and interpreters of a text and then to make appropriate choices based on the possibilities the text opens up. Not only do the actors have to commit themselves to certain actions and then take responsibility for the choices they're making, but they also have to operate within the scope of the script. Much like morality itself, the script sanctions certain possibilities while restricting others. When in Act 5, scene 1 of *Much Ado* Victor (playing Benedick) challenges Grant (as Claudio), for example, he may bully and batter him with his words and even draw his weapon, but he may not harm or kill him. That isn't in the script. To turn an inanimate text into a scene taking place in time and space,

[15] Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 117. (See Chapter IV.)

those in charge must make innumerable interpretive choices about how things should go. In the case of SBB, Wallace's hands-off directing style leaves the actors themselves free to choose how they interpret each line, scene, and character, just as we must each govern our own behavior in social life. In both stage acting and ethical action, we must use our judgment and decide which possibilities to enact. Exercising this kind of practical wisdom in rehearsals helps the SBB actors develop the wisdom and sensitivities that are central to ethical life.

To give an example of SBB actors developing a broader understanding of the possibilities for human activity and character, consider the range of emotions an actor might be expected to express on stage. Wallace described for me some of the exercises they do together early on in the rehearsal process, such as mirroring others' emotions and practicing inhabiting emotions that may be unfamiliar to them. Wallace told me that for many of them, every emotion they try to express looks like anger. Anger is their default response to situations that may be upsetting in a variety of ways, and the men have to practice responding with emotions that are either taboo in the prison setting, like grief, love, or remorse, or that they have never had cause to experience in their lives previously, like the complex combination of disappointment, shame, and heartbreak Leonato experiences in *Much Ado* when he sees his daughter renounced for infidelity.

This was the first scene I saw in rehearsal, and afterward, Wallace asked me to share with the group what I thought of the scene. I observed that Danny had seemed sincere and spot on when he expressed a father's mix of disappointment and rage at his daughter's supposed ruin. I learned later that Danny chose to play Leonato in order to

learn just such emotions. He said he wanted to learn what it was like to be a father. This was something he regretted not ever having experienced for himself and a role he felt he needed to understand better as he worked toward forgiving those who had hurt him.[16] For Danny, as for many, learning to express emotions he himself had never felt expanded his sense of self and his understanding of others.

Further, SBB facilitators urge the actors to take a line or a moment deeper into themselves rather than letting it rest on the surface of their emotional capacity.[17] The men attempt to *feel* the depth of the written word and the emotions of their characters, not just act them out. In the process, the men are also taught to get in touch with their own repressed emotions.[18] With similar effect, the men are also directed to "physicalize" all of their lines, making the language of Shakespeare concrete and visible for their audience. In rehearsals, they must experiment with how to manifest unfamiliar words phenomenally so that others on stage and everyone in the audience can understand the movement of the play and the objectives of each character most clearly.

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[16] Danny told me even later that when he was younger, his girlfriend's father had forced her to have an abortion, a choice Danny did not support and resented having made for him and his girlfriend. He was able to work with some of the emotion of having a child taken from him in the scene, as Leonato feels Hero's life has been cut short when he believes she has slept with another man before her wedding.

[17] SBB founder Curt Tofteland called this locating where the line took up residence in their bodies, a concept that resonates with inmates like Hal Cobb, who wrote about just that in his prize-winning essay, "My Pursuit of Character." Cobb's essay has now been published, with an introduction by Tofteland, as an article titled "Prospero Behind Bars." (Curt L. Tofteland and Hal Cobb, "Prospero Behind Bars," *Shakespeare Survey* 65 (2013): 429-44.)

[18] Augusto Boal urged that theater should provide a therapeutic function since catharsis is liberatory, a loosening of repression that allows for action in opposition to oppression. In this, he believed, catharsis in theater can unlock repression in all its participants and undo the voice of sanction in our own minds, i.e. our internalized oppression, an idea a troupe of inmate actors in particular can relate to.

Exercises like this, mirroring a partner in rehearsal and experimenting with how to make a line physical, draw on the acting theory of Copeau and others who see theater games and improvisational play as central to the practice of theater. As we see in this context, embodied play and playful interactions with others help us develop our own emotional capacities as well as our attunement to others' moods and emotions. These sensibilities strengthen our ability to make wise judgments in ethical life, for they give us a broader range of resources for interpreting particular situations.

The process of interpreting, adjudicating, and enacting possibilities with others also requires openness and communication among participants, yet another moral aptitude that this type of aesthetic play can develop. "It's a give and take," explained one SBB actor, echoing Gadamer's sense of play as a constant dialogic give and take among participants. When discussing how he memorized all of his lines, another actor shared the insight that you can't learn just your own lines. You have to learn your cues, too, and be aware of what everyone around you is up to. Indeed, our choices do not take effect in isolation but in situation. This fact brings actors first to consider the effects of their actions on others as they deliberate and second to prepare themselves to respond to others' actions and offerings in the aftermath of their actions. To consider the same scene from *Much Ado* I mentioned earlier, if Victor chooses to nudge Grant out of the way when he enters the stage instead of just walking past and ignoring him, he should be prepared for Grant to respond in kind, escalating the scene rather quickly to a physical challenge the script may not support. (This happened in rehearsal.) By analogy, the men playing the scene learn to anticipate how others might respond to their advances and

plan their actions according to a better understanding of others. They practice careful attunement to and dialogic play with others as well as exercise practical wisdom in choosing which possibilities to enact, all the while cultivating these moral capacities for use in other situations.

The troupe's approach to acting also helps them get in touch with the humanity and the particularity of others. This is evidenced in particular in the challenge the men face when playing women's roles. The men playing female characters tend to adopt a default, exaggerated, ostensibly "feminine" stance with their hands clasped in front of them in the style of choir singers. With practice, they break out of that pattern and grow into the well-rounded personalities of their particular characters.[19] I saw this firsthand in one *Much Ado* rehearsal. In the renunciation scene at the church, Hodges, playing Hero, was having trouble figuring out how to stand, what to do with his hands, and how to react to Claudio's accusations when his character wasn't given the kind of lines he wished she had.[20] Wallace's direction to Hodges was, "Forget that you're supposed to be a woman. You're a human being who didn't do it." He encouraged Hodges to connect with that familiar feeling and do his best to use what resources Hero did have available, such as movement and touch, to convince those present (actors and audience) of her innocence. Assistant facilitator Carol Stewart gave him the additional advice that he should imagine not what a woman would do or how a woman would stand but how *Hero*

[19] In the final performance of *Much Ado*, the wooden attitude I saw often in rehearsal only surfaced in the wedding scenes, when the bridesmaids in Act 4 and the decoy brides in Act 5 needed to look uniform.

[20] In fact, Hodges told me he thought Hero should at least get to slap Claudio in the end for everything he put her through. He followed this comment with a surprising show of feminist solidarity, thrusting his fist into the air and chanting, "Girl power!"

would act, move, and stand. I watched as his movements on stage grew less stilted and looked less pre-packaged as he strove to embody Hero's humanity, not just impersonate her gender. In the same way that particularizing characters in the style of Stanislavski instead of playing generic roles brings life to the stage, particularizing the female characters especially and striving to see their fundamental humanity reveals a new perspective for the actors on the many crimes committed against women by LLCC inmates. Learning to appreciate others both as fundamentally like us, as human beings, and as particular individuals in particular situations is essential both for stage acting and for making complex moral judgments.

In particularizing their characters and seeking to grasp their humanity, SBB actors make great strides toward a broader understanding of the human condition and of their own particular situations, and as we have seen, understanding is itself an ethical aptitude.[21] Rhodes explained to me, "Shakespeare understood humanity, and any condition of the human experience helps us [the SBB actors] understand where we went wrong, why we're here, and helps us prepare to go back on the street." Theater-making is practice for understanding others, events, cause and effect, how people act, and so on. Woodruff makes the argument that each experience of understanding complexity and human interiority improves one's capacity for understanding, period.[22] Through the process of putting on a Shakespeare play, the SBB actors develop a deeper understanding of themselves and others. These developments in experience and capacity for understanding contribute to the development of moral judgment, as well. The

[21] See Chapter IV.
[22] Woodruff, 207-210.

dialogue actors share with their characters, with each other, and with a live audience constitutes understanding in Gadamer's sense.

Beyond cultivating actors' capacities for interpretation and judgment, expanding their understanding of the possibilities for human life, and giving them practice assessing a situation and exercising practical wisdom, aesthetic play in acting also, finally, teaches genuine listening and adaptive responsiveness as ethical aptitudes. We have already seen the importance of listening and responding in our investigation of acting theory. In order for a theater performance to really transport the audience, the actors must be mentally present in the world of the play, acting as if for the first time within the parameters of that situation. The key to good acting is to make it look like the characters are reacting to the plot as it unfolds, thinking of their dialogue and responses to one another on the spot. Without this newness and liveliness, a play will feel stilted and tired; in other words, good theater cannot look rehearsed. The lines and scenes have to *mean* something every time, which requires genuine involvement and responsiveness. Therefore, the actor has to relate and respond to both real and imagined situations (both the other actor's accidental sneeze that might disrupt the play and the fictional circumstances that have brought the characters into conversation on the stage). Actors have to listen to one another and respond with imagination and truthfulness.[23] Stage actors must listen to and respond to one another in the moment in order to turn repeated motions endlessly rehearsed into meaningful interactions on stage. When theater is merely a tired repetition of what has been rehearsed, it fades from being transformative to being mere routine.

[23] Hornby, 159-163.

Genuine engagement in the world of the play and with others on stage is requisite for theater to be truly playful, lively, and meaningful.

One might achieve this liveliness and freshness through play as Copeau and Saint-Denis have proffered, for example rearranging the scenery or experimenting with different movements or intonations. In the early stages of rehearsals, for example, Wallace will have his actors play with the text and practice their lines emphasizing all the vowels sounds or all the verbs, in hopes that an unfamiliar cadence will bring new meaning to the words. Another theorist who understands theater as play, Keith Johnstone, recommends the intentional interruption of routine in rehearsals as a way to keep the story moving and the action and lines new and meaningful each time.[24]

In SBB rehearsals, the men cultivate their ability to engage with each other in this way when they practice giving and receiving "impulses" with a warm-up game they call "Zip Zap Zo." Standing in a circle, one man will say "zip" and clap his hands toward another who must receive the impulse, say "zap," and pass the clap, so to speak, to another person in the circle. The men make eye contact, use physical movement (the clapping), and speak to one another as if passing a conversation around the group.[25] The goal is to stay alert to the impulses that others are throwing your way and to respond appropriately. (If you say "zap" when it's your turn to say "zo," you're out.) This game is a common theater warm-up exercise, but the SBB men also use it as a reference when they're working on a scene that lacks dynamic communication. Wallace told me they

[24] Gordon, 202.

[25] This game can be observed in Rogerson's *Shakespeare Behind Bars* documentary.

will say about a scene, "There's just not enough zip-zap-zo here." What they mean is that the actors are reciting their lines as if in a vacuum; they aren't giving and receiving as in a real conversational exchange. When the men were at their best, I noticed that Wallace often gave them the feedback: you're doing a good job of listening to each other. In this way, good theater cultivates good ethical practice, for the centrality of listening and responding in ethical life cannot be overstated.[26] Being a responsible ethical actor (in the image of ethical life we have been exploring, revealed in aesthetic play) means being receptive to the needs and motivations of others, receiving them with respect and grace, and responding appropriately, just as stage actors learn to do.

SBB's acting techniques amount to an approach to acting that intentionally draws on the ethical potential of acting to develop one's capacities for caring for others, listening and striving to understand others in their multi-sided humanity, and responding appropriately to their needs as well as taking responsibility for our own actions. Actors' training in this respect is tantamount to ethical training. Performing a script means negotiating terrain populated by others whose freedom we must account for and respect while creatively enacting our own choices. This negotiation requires certain aptitudes—for judging our own position and others', for interpreting the situation and its limitations, for communicating with others about our shared situation, and for making wise choices about how to go about pursuing our objectives in this context. The men in SBB practice listening to each other (receiving words, deeds, and criticism) and making committed

[26] Heidegger also touted the value of genuine listening as a boon to ethical life. In "The Question Concerning Technology," he writes, "... man becomes truly free only insofar as he … becomes one who listens, though not only one who simply obeys" (330).

and well-motivated choices in response, according to the possibilities that a given script both opens and restricts. As we cultivate these aptitudes in the context of acting, we cultivate them for ethical life as well. Along with the structure of the program itself, this approach to acting enables the men in SBB to experience moral development as they learn and practice the art of theater. Let me now share with you the final element of the theater dialectic: the experience of SBB's audience.

SBB Audience Experience

Allow me to transport you briefly into the audience with me. We have waited in line to show our identification and pass through a metal detector at the front desk. We are wearing yellow wristbands that mark us as visitors, and we are waiting once more (there is a lot of waiting in prison) before the first set of double doors that separate the LLCC inmates from the free world. We will travel through four sets of doors—set up in pairs like air locks—before we are out on the prison yard. We will pass through the visiting room first, and then down the sidewalk to the nearest building out on the yard, the prison chapel, where SBB rehearsals and performances take place.[27] The walk to the chapel is short, but we can hear and see to our left the occupants of LLCC's solitary confinement unit shouting and banging on windows to get our attention the whole time. Our guides tell us to ignore them. The chapel building is newer than most of the

[27] At the beginning of the year, the SBB men meet in the education building for rehearsals. Deeper in the prison yard, this is not a room I have had the opportunity to see for myself. Once the men are staging the final production, their rehearsals move into the performance space, the chapel.

buildings on the yard,[28] and it looks like any other modern church building. Red cushioned chairs fill the space, with aisles on each side and down the middle for entrances and exits. We take our seats, and in lieu of dimming the lights (the prison lights must remain at full brightness throughout the performance), we the audience are cued to silence by a startling chant: behind the scenic backdrop, invisible to us, the actors have joined their hands in a circle and shouted with one voice, "Shakespeare!"

With all the lights up, we can see the towering fences and razor wire just out the windows. The scenery is sparse; one actor has a brother in printing who can provide them with a single backdrop that they use for every scene. Rarely do they use props unless necessitated by the text (such as masks for the masquerade in *Much Ado*). The men on stage wear minimalist costumes, never shedding their routine prison khaki, the sleeves and pant legs of which are constantly visible to the audience. Wallace has explained to me that this is an intentional choice, not a requirement from the prison administration. He wants his audiences to have that visual reminder always before them. He wants visitors to see the men as impressive, transporting actors *and* as prison inmates.[29]

And transport us they do. Take a scene from *Much Ado*, for instance, with a vivacious Beatrice sparring with a braggadocious Benedick. Although both characters are played by men incarcerated for violent crimes, their dialogue is charming, witty, and

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[28] The chapel was not yet constructed when Hank Rogerson filmed his documentary in 2002. The performance of *The Tempest* shown in the film takes place in the visiting room.

[29] Reminding the audience of the real identity of the actors even when they are in costume is a sort of Brechtian *Verfremdungseffekt*, designed to inspire dialogue and critical thinking among the audience.

successfully comes off as the banter of lovers. One of the most common responses from visitors to SBB's public performances is the marveling, "I forgot we were in a prison!" We forget that Beatrice and Benedick are played by men that society tells us we should scorn and fear. We even forget that Beatrice is being played by a man. We are drawn into the play by these delightful characters, whom Fox and Victor have brought to life in a powerful, truthful performance.

But a play like *Much Ado* doesn't allow us to forget forever that we're sitting in a prison. This is a play that borders on tragedy. "Sigh no more, ladies… / Men were deceivers ever" (2.364-65) is comedy's only slightly softer version of Hamlet's "Get thee to a nunnery. … We are arrant knaves, all. Believe none of us" (3.1.122, 128-29), and Claudio's shaming of Hero for suspected unfaithfulness would mirror Othello's murder of Desdemona were it not for the magic of comedy. This is a comedy with some violence and close calls. In the SBB production, it is the scene at the wedding, when Claudio publicly renounces Hero, that shocks us back into the consciousness of where we are and who those men are on stage. Grant, our Claudio, enters with fists clenched. His face is cold, edging into rage with every word he speaks. He swallows the anger until the lines, "Sweet prince, you learn me noble thankfulness.— / There, Leonato, take her back again." (4.1.30-31). On "there," Grant shoves Hodges, playing Hero and looking surprisingly sweet in his wedding garb, across the stage into Danny's not-quite-ready arms. I think, "that's no way to treat a woman," yet at the same time, I remember, he is not a woman, and these are not lovers. These are men convicted of violent crimes. And no matter how many times I see the scene, no matter how well I get to know Grant,

Danny, and Hodges and to understand their loyalty to and support of each other, my heart catches. We are in a prison, and this could turn into a real fight.[30]

The fear passes quickly. These are practiced actors, and no one is in danger. Better, these men truly care for one another as family (a sentiment many of them laid claim to). What they do on stage wouldn't work if they didn't. I'm watching father-daughter relationships, courtships, and "bro"mance on stage that is honest and emotional. These men trust each other and are honest with each other. That's their primary rule, after all—honesty above all else. For many of them, this environment is the safest they ever know. In the SBB circle, they are home. This scene will not explode like it might. But the illusion has broken,[31] and we, the audience, are conscious once more: Prison. Convicts. Violence is very much a reality of this world, indeed of our world.

This was my experience of SBB as an audience member visiting from the outside. It basically realizes Bert States's observation in *The Pleasure of the Play* that we cannot pass simple judgments on complex dramatic characters (tragic heroes with their tragic flaws, for instance). He says of villains, for example, that even though they may kill people in the play, they are also responsible for the transformative journey we have experienced in the theater.[32] SBB actors take their public audiences on similar complex journeys; they make us forget about their crimes while simultaneously not allowing us to forget where we are and who they are. The threat of violence and the pleasure of the play are constantly in tension in an SBB production, and so as audience members, we cannot

[30] In this, we are reminded of States's description of theater itself as "one long danger." (See Chapter V.)

[31] Another Brechtian moment.

[32] States, *Pleasure*, 128.

make simple judgments. We, too, must listen openly and engage both intellectually and imaginatively with the men on stage before any kind of judgment is possible. The SBB actors approach every role as presenting a complex human being (remember the lesson I received from Fox, that Shakespeare doesn't write filler characters),[33] and their performance as actor-inmates brings their audience to do the same, i.e. to consider their full, complex humanity.

Developing our ability to consider others' humanity and to make complex judgments is central to the image of ethical life aesthetic play presents, and indeed, the activity of theatergoing helps cultivate these capacities. Recall that Paul Woodruff claims that theatergoing develops our humanity, just as Schiller argues that aesthetic play is what makes us whole beings capable of compassion and humanity in the first place. This requires more than following the rules of a rational morality; in imagining others as "carable-about" (to use Woodruff's term again), we must engage ourselves in our many-sidedness. Care requires that we use our rational faculties as well as our sensuous and imaginative ones in order to understand and accommodate the given situation and use good judgment in deciding how to act. As a result, we practice navigating the complexity of embodied and situated ethical life, both in terms of our own complex humanity and the complexity of others. In aesthetic play, we lack the distance from others that we would need in order to reduce them down to numbers in a calculation, and so we practice wisdom and judgment instead of simple rule following.

[33] As a student of Shakespeare, I don't find this to be especially true, but I recognize it as an important tenet of the SBB approach to acting that serves a practical purpose (similar to "there are no small parts!") as well as an ethical one among this troupe of actors.

The experience of theater helps develop our humanity in part because it helps us to see others as fully human.[34]

In theater, we practice imagining the full lives of characters we see in a limited context on stage. To wit, we imagine characters still existing and performing actions that might be referenced later or part of the plot, even when the actor is not on stage. Bert States calls this "real-izing" the characters in a play, or granting them an imagined reality that outstrips what we actually witness from them on stage. For States, the tendency to real-ize fictional characters highlights the opposite tendency we have in ordinary life, to "fictionalize" others and imagine their existence as restricted to the role they play in our lives and the contexts in which we encounter them. States writes, "... we real-ize the characters of a play just as we tend to fictionalize the people in our lives. That is, we grant characters in a play a peripheral life they do not have, and we see people as characters in the closed field of our own life."[35] In this, theater gives us the opportunity to correct our default mode of thinking about others[36] and develop the moral

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[34] In addition, Woodruff claims, theater gives us practice using our imaginations to understand the world as a human one. He observes that often we see events at such a distance that they seem more like inevitable and natural occurrences than like human actions. In the theater, however, every event that takes place must be relayed to an audience through a particular person. Echoing Garner's claim that theater is inherently phenomenological (see Chapter V), Woodruff shows that there are no perfectly objective events in theater; events must always be humanized, he says, if they are to be shown on stage. We come to understand the world with more care when we recognize it as a human world where events that take place are always the result of human actions and choices. (Woodruff, 70)

[35] States, *Great Reckonings*, 151.

[36] This formulation of our tendency to reduce others to characters in the drama of our own lives and the need to imagine peripheral lives for others we encounter in the world calls to mind David Foster Wallace's commencement address "This Is Water," in which he makes the same claim, that we ought to work to think beyond our natural

aptitude of considering others in their wholeness, as individuals with their own freedom, objectives, and situated experience. In practicing imagining characters' "peripheral" lives, their existence outside of the closed field of the stage itself, we can begin to grant others in our real lives the same courtesy, the same *humanity*, and imagine their lives outside the boundaries of our limited interactions with them. This is indeed an ethical undertaking, for imagining others with complete lives keeps us from making facile judgments or taking their actions out of context.[37]

The activity of "real-izing" the other is central to the SBB experience. The actors approach their characters with an aim to real-ize them in the extreme and understand them as whole and complex human beings. Likewise, SBB performances invite their audiences to imagine the full and complex lives the actors themselves lead when not on stage. With the lights up and the minimalist costumes that never conceal the men's state-issued boots and khaki uniforms, the audience is constantly reminded that they are in a prison and that the actors on stage are inmates. Yet their performance, camaraderie, and insightful reflections during the talkback sessions reveal thoughtfulness, discernment, and genuine care that are antithetical to the stereotypical violent criminal. SBB audiences are forced to reevaluate the roles they imagine prison inmates playing in their own limited pictures of the world. We must open ourselves to a new horizon on which to understand these individuals who perform Shakespeare in prison.

("default") self-centeredness and imagine others' lives outside of the context in which we encounter them (such as the grocery store line or in traffic). ("This is Water – Full Version – David Foster Wallace Commencement Speech," published to YouTube May 19, 2013, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8CrOL-ydFMI.)

[37] Recall States's point that complexity and even contradictions in characters in plays make simple judgments of them impossible. (See Chapter V.)

While theatergoing leads us to imagine others' lives outside of the context of our own experience, it also urges us to understand others as themselves contextualized, another key moral aptitude that clockwork thinking quashes. States describes dramatic characters as oak trees, firmly planted in the soil of the play itself. Characters exist entirely within the context of the play and cannot be uprooted and transplanted into another context.[38] It is our mission as theatergoers and as ethical beings to strive to understand others—the characters we meet on stage and those whose lives interweave with ours in everyday life—from within their own contexts, the contexts they have grown out of and within which they are firmly rooted, rather than from out of our own contexts. This is the key insight in Gadamer's assertion that the fusion of horizons in understanding is fundamentally ethical; we cannot understand one another, treat each other with respect, and exercise good judgment without expanding our sense of context and striving to comprehend where others are coming from. Ordinary people, too, are rooted in their contexts, just like dramatic characters, and ethical life demands of us that we practice understanding them within those contexts. Just as every actor must read the whole play, not just his own character's lines, so we have to familiarize ourselves with others' worlds and contexts in order to be able to understand them, and theater helps us foster that practice.

One concrete expression of the fusion of horizons that can take place in a playhouse is the variety of ways actors and audience members make contact, from shaking hands after the performance and actors moving through the audience and

[38] States, *Great Reckonings*, 151.

sharing that physical space to actors simply making eye contact with audience members during the show. Eye contact from visitors in particular is an important aspect of the public performances for the men in SBB. Jerry Alter, the Classification and Treatment Officer at Luther Luckett who works with SBB, told me in an interview that most visitors from "the free world," as they say, keep their heads down upon entering the prison, refusing to make eye contact.[39] One of the actors, Rhodes, told me that he loves the public performances each year because these are their chance to show their humanity to the world. They spend the year working to emulate the full-bodied humanity of a character that exists only on the page, and as a reward, they also earn the chance for visitors to look them in the eye without shame or fear and recognize *their* humanity. Jill Dolan's research in theater phenomenology supports and explains this feeling: in one of her examples of utopian performances, she mentions performers who come down from the stage and interact (physically, through touch, and also verbally, in conversation) with audience members. When this happens, she explains, there is an opportunity for the actors and the spectators to be vulnerable together, both establishing and acknowledging the community and intimacy that are formed in the playhouse.[40] She finds the same to be true for actors who make eye contact and shake hands with members of the audience after the production.[41] Interacting with the actors is a way of building rapport and even intimacy in an ordinary theater; the effect is amplified when the actors live behind bars,

[39] I felt the truth of this statement as the guards instructed us not to look up at the inmates in solitary confinement who were knocking on their windows as we visitors walked to the chapel.

[40] Dolan, 32.

[41] Dolan, 54.

where they must grow accustomed to visitors avoiding eye contact and receiving gentle, welcome touches only at hyper-regulated times when family members visit. As we see in Dolan's analysis and in the phenomenon of SBB, the relations of play forged among actors and their audience can develop into ethical relations and cultivate moral sensibilities such as showing that we recognize the humanity in others.

The experience of SBB performances is somewhat different for the inmate audiences. I was able to attend just one of these shows, tucked into a back corner by the keyboardist where I could be guarded more closely. My first impression was that there were more bawdy jokes and laughter when the SBB troupe was playing to their fellow inmates. I was surprised to see, though, that the actors didn't back away from the romantic or emotional scenes before an inmate audience. They performed the show with integrity, maintaining an open and vulnerable disposition on stage despite the stigmas they were up against. What is more, if interaction with the audience raises the potential for intimacy and builds momentary community in the playhouse, as Dolan has argued, this audience had even more to contribute on that front. With their fellow inmates, the actors approached the audience more freely, pointing at particular men when making jokes, speaking directly to them (one actor at one point grabbed a spectator's hand while delivering a soliloquy), and even incorporating an audience member into one of the dance scenes. The gulling scene in *Much Ado* was made more hilarious in the yard performance when Victor, the actor playing Benedick, snuck around the whole chapel, weaving in and out of the rows of chairs, instead of just hiding behind the scenery as he did in the public performances. I can guess that these advances would have been less

welcome among a public audience, perhaps even prohibited by the corrections officers due to safety concerns. But they heightened the effect of theater bringing disparate individuals together in virtue of playing along with the same imaginary world.

The contact that takes place between the SBB actors and their audiences—throughout the show with the lights up, during intermission, and afterwards during the talkback sessions—works to blur the boundary between actor and character, a boundary that is constantly in question during an SBB performance and ought to be, according to Brecht, in order for theater to fulfill its ethical function. Especially if one has read about the program or seen Rogerson's documentary, the audience knows the men are drawing on their own experience and emotional life to portray their characters. One cannot help being curious about how much of a performance is based on an actor's life experience. Theater that sparks curiosity in the audience and intentionally distinguishes between the actor and the character is explicitly ethical for a playwright and director like Brecht, and the SBB men follow in his footsteps. The SBB troupe works to keep the boundary between actor and character in question as they appear before the audience in their regular prison uniforms during intermission. Brecht believed that theater ought to spark questions and prompt the audience to seek answers, truly to begin a Gadamerian dialogue that can lead to a fusion of horizons, and SBB performances directly fulfill this ethical potential in theater.

Breaking the fourth wall (the division between the stage and the audience), another element of Brechtian theater, also contributes to the cultivation of moral comportment and character that is accomplished in the SBB playhouse. Seeing their

families and faithful SBB supporters they know by name reminds the men of who they are, where they are, and what's important about the practice of prison theater. Several of the men introduced their family members to me during intermission, in part because they were proud of having gotten to know me (and having impressed me) through their work in SBB. Seeing the men standing in their uniforms and boots also reminds the audience, of course, of who these men are, where we all are, and what's important about this organization. Wallace likes to remind folks on the outside that everyone in that troupe (save one or two) will be released back into society; what do you want them to spend their time doing while they're behind bars?, he asks. Disallowing the illusion of the play world to take over entirely serves a Brechtian purpose: we cannot escape the truth and the problems of society when we go to the theater; we must confront them. The experience also develops the capacities we need in order to confront the problems of our age and rehabilitate modern ethical life.

The audience experience at an SBB performance is every bit as transformative as theater phenomenologists have observed it can be. Not only do SBB audiences play along with the world of Shakespeare and find themselves caught up in the play, but they also develop connections with those around them and play their part harmoniously with the actors and their fellow spectators. I experienced one example of audience members forging connections when I watched the yard performance; several of the men in the audience looked back at my reactions when especially funny or especially shocking things were happening on stage. They looked to share my reactions and participate in the emotional gravity of the play by making eye contact with someone else responding to

the same play. I noticed the same thing happening among the SBB members when we all had the privilege of watching Matt Wallace's troupe of actors from Kentucky Shakespeare perform an abridged version of *Hamlet* during an SBB rehearsal. Having performed *Hamlet* themselves some years back, the SBB actors often looked or pointed across the room to others in the audience as a way of recalling an experience or sharing in a particular line or joke. Connecting with the work of art in the company of others was a way of connecting with others, acknowledging the sameness of our experience, and building an atmosphere of shared humanity, community, and responsiveness to one another. In this shared experience, SBB fosters ethical comportment toward others that respects their humanity and their particularity.

The Role of Interpretation, Wisdom, and Judgment in Countering the Clockwork

The program design, approach to acting, and audience experience of Shakespeare Behind Bars all contribute to the formation of a community that supports the development of moral judgment and care for other human beings. SBB evidences and expands upon the inherent ethical potential in the processes of theater-making and theatergoing. The program highlights the real transformations that encounters with theater can inspire, even in the extreme case of theater performed by men whose ethical formation society has judged insufficient (i.e. those who have been convicted of violent crimes and exiled from their own communities) and within the concretization of clockwork thinking, the prison industrial complex. Even in prison, where humane treatment seems to meet its limit and the logic of exchange reigns supreme (where

inmates "pay" for their crimes), theater shows itself to be a form of aesthetic play that gives rise to a new way of thinking about ethical life and cultivates the capacities necessary to enact it. The aesthetic play that takes place in theater leads its participants to understand life in human terms, in terms of freedom, choices, and responsibility, incorporating the phenomenal and the sensuous, and also to recognize the situatedness, embodiedness, and context of every individual as well as the scripts and circumstances each of us is given to work within.

The picture of ethical life we learn from SBB is grounded in a community that values and understands each individual both in their humanity and in their singularity. SBB's aesthetic play gives rise to an ethical community in which others' humanity is recognized and respected and members strive to respond to one another's needs and the demands of the situation on the grounds of that shared humanity. Such a view of ethics rejects the dominant social model of clockwork thinking, i.e. the exchange of goods and services and the treatment of others as literal human resources (like Heidegger's "standing reserve"), not human beings. As we have seen, many aspects of theater, especially the incarnation of theater in the SBB program, develop our ability to fulfill this alternative view of ethical life. Performing a script requires actors to make choices, and acting with others on stage requires them to consider others and take responsibility for the consequences of the choices they make. They must always be intentional about what motivates their actions, and they must be ready to respond to what others give them. These are some of the basic principles of acting as the SBB men understand it and as we have seen in the previous chapter. SBB demonstrates the ethical value these

practices hold for the actors who perform them, and the activity of aesthetic play such as this cultivates the same moral capacities—careful judging that responds to the particulars and openness to revising our interpretations and make a new judgment—in those who participate.

This picture of ethical life in a community of caring and responsive actors is distinguished from the common clockwork morality of our age by three key features: the role of judgment, the emphasis on practical wisdom, and the role of interpretation in making moral decisions. We have seen all of these elements brought to light in our previous investigations of the ethical life aesthetic play illuminates in the work of Kant, Schiller, Gadamer, and theater theory.

Kant turned our attention to the unique power of judgment that is exercised in aesthetic judging, as we explored in Chapter II, and he hinted at the possibility of a structural analogy between this type of judgment and moral judgments as he understood them. Here at the end of our investigation of the image of ethical life that aesthetic play makes possible, we see that Kant's insight into the strange simultaneity of the universal and the particular in aesthetic judgment is precisely what is present in the ethical judgment SBB acting cultivates: it is vital in this view of ethical life to recognize both humanity and singularity in the other. To put it more simply, this view of ethical life requires the exercise of judgment, i.e. our capacity for thoughtfully considering both what is given phenomenally and what is universal or dictated by universal moral law. Clockwork morality tends to oversimplify the process of moral decision-making and refuse the idea that morality requires anything like a judgment call, demanding instead

that we apply universal and absolute moral rules rather indiscriminately to whatever situation we might encounter. Schiller's unification of the rational and the sensuous, as well as Gadamer's unification of theory (or understanding) and practice (or interpretation and application) make strides toward erasing the clockwork image of moral life as the somewhat automated application of rules to situations. Gadamer also resurrects the importance of practical wisdom in ethical practice. Much of his thought returns us to the insights of Aristotle's ethical theory while maintaining an emphasis on our unconditional obligation to others and on hermeneutic aspects of human life that Aristotle was blind to, such as the centrality of interpretation in the practice of good judgment. Practical wisdom is a key element of the SBB version of ethical life in accordance with their emphasis on making choices that fit within the given script and with the practice of rehearsing a dramatic script, as it leads to gradually refined actions and choices.

The role of interpretation in the production of a Shakespeare play and in the concomitant moral formation is especially significant, as this process underpins both our use of the power of judgment and the development of practical wisdom. There is a powerful ambiguity in the transition from a script to a performance, an ambiguity which holds great potential for creative and careful interpretation (which, as we know from Gadamer, also entails application or action) among the members of the SBB community. The facilitators give SBB actors interpretive power over the playtext, and the ambiguity of the characters and the scenes gives them space to develop that power. In the process, they also practice making meaning as a community of interpreters, sharing their own

understandings of the text with one another and developing together their vision for each scene. The practice of interpreting a text or a situation and then also normalizing that interpretation with others in the community develops the aptitude for interpretation and responsive judgment that is central to the image of ethical life that aesthetic play promotes. As Gadamer also recognized, the work of interpreting an ambiguous text—and the very recognition that understanding is always at one with interpretation and application—is in itself ethical.

As SBB's work makes plain, it is the ambiguity of literary and cultural scripts that makes interpretation and improvisation possible, elements of both stage acting and ethical life. Simone de Beauvoir, for one, also points out the centrality of ambiguity to ethics (in *The Ethics of Ambiguity*).[42] One way to understand ethics is as the practice of responding when it is unclear what the right thing to do is, even despite the rules, mores, and beliefs that purport to guide our actions. From an existentialist perspective like de Beauvoir's, we see that every action requires a radical choosing on the part of the actor, a commitment grounded solely in one's internal motivation. For that action to be ethical, it must interpret the circumstances and the need of the moment and respond to the demands of the situation. Heidegger presents a similar existentialist perspective in "The Question Concerning Technology" when he suggests that our aim in interacting with others must transcend the technological techniques of enframing and mastery to respond to the fullness of being they present. The existentialist model of ethical action is analogous to the model of stage acting that SBB uses, not conforming to an outside

[42] Simone de Beauvoir, *Ethics of Ambiguity* (New York: Citadel Press, 1976).

standard but acting creatively in ways that sustain human relationships and support others' acting and choosing freely as well. Such a view of ethics supports the idea that aesthetic play can cultivate the aptitudes requisite for moral life.

The value of ambiguity in a script we must perform also answers one nagging question about the SBB program compared to other prison theater programs: why Shakespeare? If the goal of prison theater programs like this one is to make space for moral aptitudes and ethical community to develop among marginalized populations, why should we continue to study the one man who is perhaps most emblematic of a hegemonic European canon? One of the strengths of doing Shakespeare with prison inmates is this very demand for interpretation in the face of ambiguity and unclarity. Scripts that are centuries old and written in a nearly-foreign language require close study and creative invention to be understood and to make understandable for an audience. The utter strangeness of Shakespeare's language to modern readers holds vast interpretive potential, and this capacity for adaptation and imagination aids the ethical aims of a group like SBB. These actors must learn the difficult work of trying to understand something unlike what they are used to, and they must practice putting into action an ambiguous and perhaps conflicting script. The practical reasoning and judgment that go into the practice of this kind of acting is an apt rehearsal for ethical life that is creative, not mechanistic. In addition, as we have observed throughout this investigation into the ethical character of aesthetic play, aesthetics often has to do with how we encounter what is strange and new to us, as does ethics. A playwright like Brecht wrote with the intention of alienating his audiences and making the world

strange; the work of a playwright like Shakespeare, which has outlasted his own age by several centuries, is automatically strange to contemporary readers and theatergoers. The process of producing and watching a Shakespeare play is an exercise in coming to understand what is other, just as ethical life requires us to care for and respond to the other. The choice to perform Shakespeare is yet another element of the SBB program that contributes to its power of moral development for the participants.

As I noted above, an SBB production highlights the constant tension between the threat of violence and the pleasure of the play that exists both in theater and in everyday life. Indeed, this is why we need ethics, to mitigate this tension and maintain the precarious balance between what is threatening and what is pleasing in our experience with others. Understanding ethical life through the lens of aesthetic play, as the SBB program does, teaches us how focusing on interpretation, good judgment, and practical wisdom can uphold ethical interactions with more humanity and caring than a calculating clockwork system that attempts to maintain a simple mathematical balance between harms and goods. The example of SBB shows us a way to rehabilitate an understanding of ethical life that is a humane alternative to clockwork morality.

Conclusion

Examining the Shakespeare Behind Bars program as we have in this chapter demonstrates a stronger relation between aesthetics and ethics than we have seen thus far, for SBB evidences aesthetic play's power to effect moral formation and transformation in its participants. The SBB experience highlights how an actor's

honesty, responsibility, and responsiveness on stage model and indeed cultivate the responsible behavior of an ethical agent. SBB also demonstrates the ethical significance of both theatergoing and engaging with marginalized populations, particularly those we see as other and whose contributions to our understanding of ethical life we may doubt. The men in SBB both learn and teach what Gadamer advocates: that we should always be open to learning from the other, regardless of how different from us they may seem. Through art, we can connect with others at the level of our very humanity, as Kant's discussion of the *sensus communis* has shown us, and we can also be reminded of each individual's singularity and freedom. The practices involved in acting and the experience of watching a play at Luther Luckett Correctional Complex fulfill the argument of this dissertation that participating in aesthetic play cultivates our moral capacities. Beyond the rehabilitative aims claimed by most prison programming, the structure of SBB gives rise to ethical transformation in its participants and invites general ethical development in the community it creates. This aesthetic play cultivates our attunement to ambiguity and rehabilitates our aptitude for judgment, practical wisdom, and interpretation, the very elements of human life that clockwork morality would have us reduce out of the equation.

CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSION

The second year I visited LLCC, the men I had met the year before welcomed me back like a long-lost sister. Raymond scolded me for making the long drive from Texas to Kentucky alone, which he said was unsafe. Hodges gave me an update on the novel he's writing. Jeffrey couldn't wait to introduce me to his family during intermission. When I wrote to explain that I couldn't attend their performance this year, Fox assured me in his letter that I would always be part of the family, even when I couldn't make the trip. To the men in SBB, I am part of their community, and I am always welcome to participate and play with them and to continue the ongoing conversation we're engaged in about their work with Shakespeare and their lives both in prison and beyond. I have experienced firsthand the care, empathy, honesty, and intimacy the SBB program fosters among its participants.

But as we know, the aesthetic play that grounds the SBB community supports something more fundamental and far-reaching than these relationships I have built with the men at Luther Luckett: aesthetic play supports an unconditional openness to the other, an openness that I experienced during my very first visit to the prison when I was immediately welcomed into the fold. I was attending a rehearsal in the chapel, two weeks before opening night for *Much Ado*. A few of the inmates greeted me as I walked in with Wallace. Many of them seemed eager to introduce themselves and shake my

hand, though they approached me with careful deference to my obvious nervousness. I was surprised and pleased to notice that they all maintained respectful eye contact throughout our exchanges. I settled into a seat near the back as Wallace began the rehearsal. Shortly after the men began their scene, I noticed one inmate from the far side of the chapel get up and walk towards me. Eddie crossed the space and silently handed me his copy of the script, pointed to the lines that were being spoken on stage, and smiled. Then he walked back to his original seat, leaving his script with me so that I could follow along. I was overwhelmed by the sense that the men in the chapel with me wanted me to feel like I belonged there and could participate as they did, and they seemed to know how to help me, a young woman clearly out of her element in a men's prison, feel safe and respected in that space. The men invited me into their group to play and learn and grow together right from the start. In the SBB troupe's embrace of the other, the visitor, we see Gadamer's ethics of non-differentiation realized in practice: their journey of understanding and self-reflection manifests as ethical engagement with the other.

My involvement with Shakespeare Behind Bars makes plain that when we choose to be open to the other and truly engage in the interplay of human life, when we attune ourselves to that which falls beyond the scope of objective and scientific explanation, we allow ourselves to discover a deeper and more humane truth about ethics. Participation and dialogue are essential to the revelation of truth; I could not learn about the ethical capacities SBB's aesthetic play cultivates without engaging in it myself and coming to understand this troupe from the inside. Gadamer recognized this principle

on a large scale when he criticized scientific knowledge's claim of objectivity, as if truth could stand independent of a cultural context and a process of inquiry. Our interactions with other human beings are always conditioned by prejudice, as Gadamer observed, and the understanding we reach is always a product of dialogue and the fusion of horizons—something we create together with others and not something objectively discoverable. Thus, my research into the SBB program is, as befits the human sciences and the play of ethical life, interpretive, involved, embedded in relations, and utterly situated. The entire character of this investigation counteracts the claims of clockwork thinking and promotes the fitness of aesthetic play to model an alternative image of ethical life.

Here, at the conclusion of our investigation, then, let us look back over the path we have traced and gather together the picture of ethical life I am recommending we strive for: ethical life in the image of aesthetic play. Each of the preceding chapters has given further contour to this image of ethical life as well as reason to understand aesthetic play as a mode of ethical formation. The aesthetic theory of Kant, Schiller, and Gadamer, as well as theater theory and the SBB program all provide unique resources for building a view of how one can approach living well with others by prioritizing community, openness, interpretation, good judgment, and practical wisdom over a mechanistic understanding of ethical life.

Kant's aesthetics introduced an understanding of judgment in which singular experiences can be taken as universally valid insofar as they make accessible a sense of our co-constitution with other human beings. Aesthetic play for Kant assures us of our

belonging in community with others, and I have argued that this can ground a new view of ethics that integrates the phenomenal and the particular along with the purely rational.

Schiller's aesthetics presented an essential unity between the rational and sensuous aspects of human being, claiming a greater possibility for freedom in this unity and in the ascendancy of the play impulse than in our rational and moral impulse alone. As we strive for beauty (the appearance of freedom) for Schiller, we must develop our ability to play with all aspects of our humanity in equal balance in order to maintain that humanity and realize the highest expressions of our human being, dignity and grace.

Gadamer returned ethics to a place of priority by showing how hermeneutic experience always already contains the practices of interpretation and application along with understanding, thus making every aesthetic experience, dialogue, and search for truth a practical undertaking. Play for Gadamer is ever-occurring, demanding our openness to the other in all situations.

Theater theory in the wake of Stanislavski emphasizes honesty, improvisation and responding truthfully to what happens on stage, and evoking curiosity and participation in an audience, in particular by engaging with what is alienating and strange. This type of aesthetic play has explicit ethical aims pertaining to the ways people relate to one another and conduct themselves within a community.

Shakespeare Behind Bars showed us how the specific ethical aims of theater can be implemented to great effect, even in a situation that is constrained in the extreme, to make personal transformation and moral development possible. The members of this acting troupe are enacting the very image of ethical life I advocate and thereby

demonstrate how aesthetic play does indeed support moral development of a style that counteracts the clockwork thinking of our age.

Thus, we have arrived at a description of aesthetic play as a process of both responding to art and beauty and striving to create art and beauty that involves developing harmonious relations among disparate parts of the human being (including the rational and the sensuous) and among differentiated individuals, ultimately demonstrating our connectedness with one another. As such, aesthetic play has the power to support our ethical vocation as members of a broad human community, and the more experience we have with aesthetic play, the better able we will be to meet the demands of ethical life with other multi-faceted human beings. We have seen this at work in the case of Shakespeare Behind Bars, as those participants in aesthetic play develop good judgment, a sense for interpreting scripts with a community, and practical wisdom in responding to a changing situation.

The Shakespeare Behind Bars program brought all of the elements of this new view of ethical life together, collecting the resources from Kant, Schiller, Gadamer, and acting theory in one representative and expansive example. The ethical community that the SBB program has formed through their participation in the work of art helps inmates tap into their sense of belonging to a community and their capacity for broad-minded thinking, as Kant instructs us the free play of the faculties does. The SBB community recognizes each member's humanity and also their distinctiveness as individuals, and together the members practice coming to judgments that suit their community, acting democratically and from a place of collective identity. The members of the SBB

community recognize the importance of freedom from constraint and coercion in their ethical practice, as Schiller advocated, and they find that freedom and also the concomitant responsibility in their work with Shakespeare. For men locked behind bars, it is indeed their ability to play with beauty that realizes their highest sense of freedom and activates the development of their moral capacities. It is perhaps Gadamer's sense of ethical life that most permeates the SBB community, for the actors' work is grounded in openness to the other and dialogue with one another, the script, and audiences too. The processes of interpretation and enactment are central to their understanding of a Shakespeare play, and so their aesthetic play leads them to understand ethical life as similarly integrated, a unity between theoretical understanding and ethical practice.

Our study of acting theory, phenomenology of theater, and SBB practice completes this alternative picture of ethical life with insights that philosophical study alone has yet to broach, fulfilling the promise of the philosophical tradition of aesthetic play. Theater cultivates in its participants the very aptitudes of ethical life I have emphasized: honesty and integrity to character, responsiveness to others and improvisation in a changing situation, and engaging with what is strange or alienating in order to spark conversation and change. SBB's acting practice further accentuates the importance in ethical life of listening to one another (especially to those we think we have the least to learn from when it comes to moral development). SBB teaches us to allow others the space for personal transformation and growth, to be prepared to learn from others, and to allow them to surprise and delight us as we play together. The SBB

circle exemplifies caring for one another in a community and being open to what others can teach us and how we ourselves can be changed by our interactions with the other.

Perhaps the most important lesson we stand to learn from this investigation into aesthetic play and the mode of ethical life we find exemplified in Shakespeare Behind Bars is that we must be open to finding insight into the human experience in the unlikeliest of places and among the most marginalized populations. Seeking to be open to and learn from the other must include *every* other, for here I recommend that we strive to live by the model of ethical life we found in a prison.

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