

Without Taste:

Psychopaths and the Appreciation of Art

Psychopaths are the bugbears of moral philosophy. They are often used as examples of perfectly rational people who are nonetheless willing to do great moral wrong without regret; hence the disorder has received the epithet "moral insanity" (Pritchard 1835). But whereas philosophers have had a great deal to say about psychopaths' glaring and often horrifying lack of moral conscience, their aesthetic capacities have received hardly any attention, and are generally assumed to be intact or even enhanced. Popular culture often portrays psychopaths in ways that suggest a great gap between their amorality and their aesthetic sensitivity. In *The Silence of the Lambs* (Jonathan Demme, 1991), Hannibal Lecter appreciates fine art, fashion, and wine, while he eats his way through his enemies. His real-life counterparts, however, do not demonstrate the same sensitivities. There is no evidence that psychopaths are capable of real aesthetic appreciation, and some evidence that they are not.

In this paper, we set out the limited evidence for the psychopath's deficient aesthetic sensitivity. The best explanations of what the psychopath lacks turn out to implicate abilities that are also thought to be central to moral thought and action: an impaired capacity for empathizing with others and deficient ability to take a disinterested attitude towards things (so-called distance). We endorse the latter explanation. Thinking about what underlies the psychopath's deficient aesthetic understanding turns out to throw light on a difficult problem: the connection between ethics and aesthetics.

1.

Psychopaths have been widely studied, but, to our knowledge, no systematic research has ever been done on the aesthetic sensitivity of the psychopath. However, on the basis of many case studies, we conjecture that the psychopath has a serious deficiency in this area. Hervey Cleckley, in one of the first and most important studies of psychopathology, makes several comments about the lack of aesthetic appreciation in the psychopaths he treated. For example, Max had (1982, 26 and 27)

no interest, as contrasted with knowledge, in any matter that could be called philosophic or poetic. He liked to rattle off his little round of fragmentary quotations, the connections and the connotations of which he realized only in the most superficial sense, to contribute a few pat and shallow saws of his own believed by him to be highly original, iconoclastic, and profound, to boast generally of his wisdom, and then to go on to descriptions of his other attainments and experiences.

To take still another point of view and consider him on a basis of those values somewhat vaguely implied by "intellectuality," "culture," or, in everyday speech, by "depth of mind," we find an appalling deficiency. These concepts in which meaning or emotional significance are considered along with the mechanically rational, if applied to this man, measures him as very small or very defective. He appears not only ignorant in such modes of function but stupid as well. He is unfamiliar with the primary facts of data of what might be called personal values and is altogether incapable of understanding such matters. It is impossible for him to take even a slight interest in the tragedy or joy or the striving of humanity as presented in serious literature or art. He is also indifferent to all these matters in life itself. Beauty and ugliness, except in a very superficial sense, goodness, evil, love, horror, and humor have no actual meaning, no power to move him.

Other profiles of psychopathic personalities suggest a similar blind spot for aesthetic value. Consider Anna, another of Cleckley's patients. Anna was well-read, by contrast to many psychopaths who merely simulate bookishness, but according to Cleckley's estimation "*King Lear* and *True Confessions* elicited responses in no fundamental way different." (Cleckley 1982, 61) This lack of differentiation between what others would take to be deeply significant art and senseless pulp indicates a profound lack of understanding of what distinguishes art from other artifacts or, if you like, good art from bad.

There is, however, some reason to think that mental illness in general and perhaps

psychopathology in particular are not incompatible with one's producing great artworks, and perhaps these illnesses can even promote artistic genius. First, there is the widespread idea in popular culture that the artistic genius is mad, and that madness is the key to his genius. In some cases, morally disturbing works might be thought to reflect a morally depraved character like that of the psychopath. Think of some of Edvard Munch's paintings, *The Scream* or *The Vampire*, for instance. Munch was clearly not the picture of mental stability. But perhaps that is the very reason his paintings are so moving. Further, there are some famous collections of artworks by institutionalized patients and some of these works are very good indeed: for example, some of those at the Prinzhorn Collection at the Psychiatric Institute of the University of Heidelberg and the American Visionary Art Museum in Baltimore.¹ It is not clear, however, that any of the artists whose works appear in these collections were in fact psychopaths; many have not been diagnosed at all, and others lived before the diagnostic category existed in its current form. Of course, we cannot simply assume that *none* of these artists were psychopaths.

Would the existence of great works of art created by psychopaths undermine the conjecture that psychopaths have a severe aesthetic deficit? Cleckley comments at length on this possibility. (1982, 305):

Are some of those established by tradition as high priests of truth, beauty, and inspiration really members of the clinical group we call psychopaths? Although some of their works convey reactions and evaluations as inadequate as those of the typical psychopath and as incompatible with even minimum standards of human feeling and behavior, we should not necessarily identify their disorder with that of the patients presented in this book. ... In contrast with them, the typical psychopath does not labor consistently to express in art pathologic reactions or distorted appraisals of life. ... If the sort of patient described here should have sufficient talent and industry to produce works accepted as valuable literature or art, I do not think it likely he would in them try to express nihilistic or perverse attitudes. Whatever he might express would probably be as spurious, as little representative of authentic human experience, as his convincing but empty promises, his eloquent protestations of a love he does not feel. His production, however brilliant technically, would be a valid rendering of neither health nor disease

¹ We are indebted to Eva Dadlez for raising this point.

but a counterfeit.

According to Cleckley, it is unlikely that many of the great artists we think of when we think of "mad geniuses" were psychopaths. Consider what may appear to be a counterexample. Jack Henry Abbott, described by Hare (1993) as a psychopath, got a fair amount of positive press for his book *In the Belly of the Beast*, which was published with the help of Norman Mailer, who later regretted his involvement in the affair. The Vintage Books edition sports this endorsement by *The New York Times Book Review*: "Awesome, brilliant...the most intense, the most fiercely visionary book of its kind in the American repertoire of prison literature" (Abbott 1991). By contrast, psychopathy researcher Robert Hare describes the book as "a rambling book about hate, violence, and rationalizations for his behavior" (Hare 1993, 53). The incoherence of thought and deficient comprehension of language stand out immediately in the following passage: (Abbott 1991, 61)

Among themselves, these pigs are evil to the point of boredom. I've seen them among themselves; I've heard their talk. They are *extremely* venal. Extremely devoid of any trace of spirituality. Their dullness approaches the mentally defective. It is *fascist*. The very symbol of injustice. It would seem to be an irony, but it is not: *prisoners do not make guards to be what they are*. Neither does society in general. The *state* does. It gives them *arbitrary* power over prisoners. They embrace it *as a way of life*. That is the source of their evil.

...It is much more difficult – and therefore it has a moralizing quality – for a prisoner to hurt or kill a guard than for a guard to hurt or kill a prisoner. The consequences to a prisoner are severe to a hellish degree. A guard gets a *medal* for it.

What stands out first, perhaps, is the lack of serious engagement, emotional and otherwise, with such concepts as 'evil', which is *boring*, 'hurt or kill' which is glorified if perpetrated by prisoners (having a "moralizing quality"), and the ridiculous assertion that guards get medals for killing prisoners. There is a general lack of cohesion in the line of reasoning from evil, boredom, and venality, to mental defectiveness, fascism, and way of life,

indicative of a lack of ordinary comprehension of these terms and their connotations.² This gives us good reason to doubt that Abbott has produced what we should call a work of art or, if you like, a great work of art. It reads to us more like a semi-competent attempt at aping the phrasing and style of beat literature. Where it has the style and themes of such literature, it lacks the soul, or meat, of it. Nevertheless, we need not deny that some psychopaths still might produce what could be called works of art, particularly if they saw some advantage for themselves in doing so. But the capacity to create art does not presuppose the capacity to understand or care about it.

A deficit like Abbott's—of understanding both of emotional and of abstract terms—is a typical trait of psychopaths (Hare 1993, 2004). And it does not appear to be as much a linguistic problem as a deeper, conceptual one. According to Hare (1993, 141): "Virtually all investigations into the psychopath's inner world paint an arid picture. The philosophy of life that these individuals espouse usually is banal, sophomoric, and devoid of the detail that enriches the lives of normal adults." This may be why there are no television shows or other works of popular art starring a true psychopath. *Dexter's* eponymous protagonist is clearly a largely emotionally intact person with a bizarre quirk for murder. The reason he is so popular is because he exhibits many of the emotions that we can identify with, for instance feeling socially inept, feeling like no one could love him if they knew the truth about him, and so on. These feelings would not be characteristic of a psychopath.

We suggest, on the basis of the case studies, that psychopaths do not have the capacity to understand or appreciate art. This is a conjecture, one that we hope will be tested. Let us warn against one possible misinterpretation of the conjecture. One might think that the

² One might worry that we have picked just one particularly incoherent passage out for this paper. We

psychopath fails to appreciate art because what art *represents* is something he has no interest in. Perhaps if he were interested in the subject of artworks, he might be interested in those artworks too. However, the psychopath's lack of interest in what Cleckley calls "personal values" is not comparable to the lack of interest someone might show in, say, ballerinas. The tool for diagnosing psychopathy, the *PCL-R*, describes the psychopath as one who is "only concerned with 'number 1', and views others as objects to be manipulated" (Hare 2004, 39). Psychopaths exhibit little, or no, interest in features of life that do not affect their attaining what they want in a fairly direct way. A psychopath's interest in you and your concerns is proportional to what he judges you have to offer him; if he thinks that learning about your concerns will enable him to manipulate you to give him, say, money or sex, you will have his undivided attention. Similarly, the psychopath's interest in art, insofar as he appears to have any at all, is directly proportional to the interest he sees in it for himself. Psychopaths' lack of interest in others for their own sakes extends to all other animate and inanimate objects, and is exacerbated by their tendency to have relatively primitive goals. Psychopaths want money, power, status, excitement and sex, but helping others, changing the world, saving their souls, preserving beautiful objects, solving scientific problems, etc. are of little concern to them; indeed, they may not even be intelligible to them as projects. Psychopaths have little understanding that others care about anything else than they, themselves, care about: (Hare 1993, 195)

They perceive themselves as superior beings in a hostile dog-eat-dog world in which others are competitors for power and resources.
Generosity and good will in others is usually regarded as stupidity deserving of exploitation.

The lack of interest that Cleckley notes, then, does not merely represent what we may

encourage those with this worry to pick up the book, which we believe speaks for itself.

call a regrettable lack of intellectual and artistic curiosity and appreciation, but points to a more profound deficit. The remainder of the paper is devoted to understanding what could explain these moral and aesthetic deficits, provided our conjecture is correct. Why and how would psychopaths be lacking in both moral and aesthetic feeling? Does the psychopath's inability to appreciate both art and ethics tell us something about the connection between the two fields of value?

2.

Cleckley hypothesizes that the psychopath lacks an understanding of the significance of human experience. Not only is he unable to experience emotions such as love, hate, grief, and shame, but the emotions that appear to be within his ken, e.g., anger and lust, are experienced in the most superficial of ways. He is unable, Cleckley believes, to participate in the normal human experience of life. This is largely the reason that he is unable to understand what life is to other people also. A corollary of his general deficit, then, is an inability to empathize with others. This fits very nicely with the recent trend to blame the bulk of the psychopath's deficit on his lack of empathy.

Given the origin of 'empathy' in the German aesthetic movement (*Einfühlung*), as an ability to 'feel into' artifacts of various kinds, it is tempting to think that lack of empathy is the key to understanding the psychopath's aesthetic deficit (Stueber 2006), as well as his immorality (Blair 1995, Mei-Tal 2004, Nichols 2002). Consider Max again. Lack of empathy explains his deficient aesthetic appreciation as well as his immorality. In fact, deficient empathy predicts that even if psychopaths *did* take a more personal interest in the subjects of much art, they would experience great difficulties in appreciating any artwork that would require them to feel

for, or identify with, others. Could Max appreciate Van Gogh's *The Potato Eaters* (1885)? It seems unlikely that Max could understand the work, because he would have difficulties imaginatively identifying with the peasants whose lives and experiences are its subject. And this failure seems attributable to his lack of empathy.

This interpretation of the psychopath's aesthetic deficit fits perfectly with one way of thinking about the relation between aesthetics and ethics. Gregory Currie (1998) argues that appreciating fiction requires the ability to imaginatively project oneself into a fictional world. In other words, to appreciate fiction, one must have the capacity for empathy. This ability, he claims, can and often does have tangible moral value. A reader exercising this ability in fiction might learn, for example, "something about the value of good humor, concern for others, and forgetfulness of self" (172). This view echoes Martha Nussbaum's claim that: (1990, 162)

our own attention to [Henry James'] characters will itself, if we read well, be a high case of moral attention. ... [The novel] calls forth our 'active sense of life,' which is our moral faculty. The characters' 'emotions, their stirred intelligence, their moral consciousness, become thus, by sufficiently charmed perusal, our own very adventure.' By identifying with them and allowing ourselves to be surprised (an attitude of mind that storytelling fosters and develops), we become responsive to our own life's adventure, more willing to see and to be touched by life. [Quotes are from Henry James' *The Art of the Novel*]

For Nussbaum, aesthetic engagement can actually educate and improve the same abilities we need in order to make sound moral decisions. The ability to emotionally identify with real people, then, is seen as crucial to ethics, and the ability to emotionally identify with fictional people is seen as crucial to aesthetics. In the absence of the imaginative-empathic abilities that Nussbaum and Currie make reference to, however, we would expect a deficient ability to appreciate works of art. This is what we find in the psychopath.

3.

Attractive though it may be, the empathy hypothesis has three key weaknesses. First, it is confined to those cases in which aesthetic appreciation requires empathic understanding of fictional characters. While philosophers disagree about the importance of this ability in appreciating narrative art, most agree that it plays *some* role (Kieran 2003). However, when it comes to non-narrative, non-representational art, it is hard to see that empathy is necessary for such appreciation. An ability to imaginatively occupy another's point of view and feel what they do would not aid one in appreciating Cézanne's still-lives, Pollack's drip paintings, a piece of music without text or program, indeed *any* work of art that does not concern the actions and situations of persons. So the empathy theory gives us no reason to think the psychopath could not appreciate these forms of art.

There is more required to appreciate art, even humanistic art, than empathy. As the formalists emphasized, aesthetic experience and appreciation is not limited to one's involvement with the human drama depicted in art, and full appreciation of artworks requires an ability to appreciate features other than the human drama in art. Formalism is widely, and rightly, discredited, as a general theory of what art is, but formalists do draw our attention to some features of art appreciation that cannot be explained through empathy. Clive Bell (1914, 27) wrote:

Art transports us from the world of man's activity to a world of aesthetic exultation. For a moment we are cut off from human interests; our anticipations and memories are arrested; we are lifted above the stream of life.

Bell claims that too much attention to human thoughts and emotions can in fact distract one from other valuable elements in art; he remarks that his own ability to appreciate music is limited by his inability to free himself from human concerns: "terror and mystery, love and hate" and so on. So, if the problem with psychopaths was merely a lack of empathy, the

psychopath would be ideally positioned to appreciate other aspects of art.

The formalist view that *certain* kinds of aesthetic experiences are possible without an ability to appreciate human interests is very plausible. And so the empathy hypothesis suggests that psychopaths are potentially capable of appreciating some artworks, or at least some significant aspects of artworks. Our conjecture, however, is not merely that the psychopath cannot appreciate the travails and triumphs of fictional characters, but that he is *wholly* deficient in his aesthetic sensibilities.

Second, the empathy hypothesis presupposes a controversial view of ethics: that moral reasoning and action requires, at a fundamental level, an ability to feel what others feel. In other words, the hypothesis supposes that lack of empathy by itself is sufficient to explain the psychopath's moral insensitivity. Martha Nussbaum and others working in a broadly Aristotelian tradition have emphasized the importance of emotion and imagination in ethics, but traditional utilitarian and Kantian accounts do not. Kant suggests, in fact, that the ability to understand and reason well morally is independent of one's native talent for fellow-feeling (1995, 14):

[I]f nature has put little sympathy into the heart of a man, and if he, even though an honest man, is by temperament cold and indifferent to the sufferings of others ... would he not find in himself a source from which to give himself a far higher worth than he could have got by having a good-natured temperament?

Kant's view is that the lack of ability to empathize would make it more difficult for a person to act in accordance with duty, but not that it would make it impossible. Though we do not here want to endorse Kant's view, we do note that in order for the empathy hypothesis to explain the psychopaths' moral deficits, we must suppose that Kant (and, more than likely, Mill) is wrong and Aristotle (or, rather, Nussbaum's interpretation of him) is right. And there are at least some reasons to be hesitant about taking such a blunt approach.

Third, there is the question about the connection between the imagination and the affective capacities of psychopaths. It is now relatively common to make a distinction between cognitive empathy and affective empathy. Substantive imaginative capacities are usually associated with cognitive empathy, and the evidence for their involvement in psychopaths' empathy deficit is not terribly strong. Although there is plenty of evidence that psychopaths have difficulties *identifying* affect in faces (Blair et al. 2001, Iria & Barbosa 2009) and voices (Blair et al. 2002), have abnormal emotional responses to words (Williamson et al. 1991), and even their own imaginings (Patrick, Cuthbert, and Lang 1994), there is little evidence to suggest that they have poor imaginative skills generally. When, for instance, asked to imagine a fearful event, psychopaths report as much detail as do nonpsychopaths. It is their physiological responses to the imaginings and the verbal reports of the imaginings that are abnormal. In general, it appears that psychopaths experience much less fear to imagined fearful events than controls (Patrick, Cuthbert, and Lang 1994).

There are other issues with placing imaginative identification at the center of the morally relevant feelings we feel for others. Daniel Batson and colleagues found that subjects respond differently to imagining being in someone's situation themselves ("imagine-self") and imagining what the other person feels, but from their perspective ("imagine-other") (Batson et al. 1997). Imagining oneself in someone else's bad situation induces *both* empathic concern³ and personal distress. As opposed to empathic concern, which is thought to produce altruistic motivation (Batson 1991, Nichols 2004), personal distress produces egoistic or self-directed motivation, e.g., to put an end to the upsetting situation. Personal distress often leads to helping

³ By 'empathic concern', Batson means a warm compassionate emotion, which is sensitive to the welfare of the other, but does not necessarily match the others' emotion. Indeed, often it will not. So, empathic concern is not quite philosophers' empathy, but more like 'sympathy'.

others, but it does so much more when the person cannot easily escape the upsetting situation.

When escape is easy, people who experience personal distress are more likely to leave the situation – and the victim of distress to their own devices – than people who experience empathic concern (Batson 1991). If the aim, then, is to produce altruistic or other-directed motivation – to help others in need – it is better *not* imaginatively identify with others, but simply consider their situation in detail (cf. also Maibom 2010). The connection between imaginative identification with others and altruism or morality is not as tight as we are often led to believe. Plausibly, the (moral) value of imaginative identification is overrated.

On closer inspection, the empathy hypothesis is less promising than it seems at first. As we just saw, imaginative identification is less reliable as a means of producing other-directed motivation than other approaches. Furthermore, psychopaths' empathy deficit is less cognitive – although they do have certain recognitional problems – than it is affective. They exhibit a *lack of engagement* with others' suffering. Although this is usually reduced to an affective deficit, there is a way of conceptualizing this deficit that has some promise for understanding the nature of the disorder as well as the connection between ethics and aesthetics. We want to suggest that the psychopath's deficient affective empathy as well as his aesthetic insensitivity is part of a more pervasive deficit: an inability to take an interest in anything that does not serve, directly or indirectly, to gratify some desire.

4.

In empathy, someone takes an interest in someone else in a way that is not obviously related to their own self-directed interests. But empathy is not the only way of taking an interest in something apart from its use to us. One might, for instance, be fascinated by Duchamp

latrines. To take such an interest, however, requires that one contemplate the object not just for its use for oneself in serving one's ends, but that one consider the object in relative independence from such ends. According to Edward Bullough, distance is "one of the essential characteristics of the 'aesthetic consciousness'" (1912, 90). Distance characterizes an attitude that we can take towards objects. It is achieved by: (89)

putting the phenomenon [...] out of gear with our practical, actual self; by allowing it to stand outside the context of our personal needs and ends – in short, by looking at it 'objectively' as it has often been called, by permitting only such reactions on our part as emphasise the 'objective' features of the experience, and by interpreting even our 'subjective' affections not as modes of *our* being but rather as characteristics of the phenomenon.

This attitude is, of course, not the natural or, if you like, the normal attitude we take towards things. Ordinarily, we think of things in terms of their uses for us: (89)

We are not ordinarily aware of those aspects of things which do not touch us immediately and practically, nor are we generally conscious of impressions apart from our own self which is impressed.

What is required for aesthetic experience, according to Bullough, and the formalist tradition he represents (e.g. Kant 1780/1987), is the ability to disengage from one's ordinary attitude to objects in the world as things to be used by me to serve some purpose. The capacity for distance is precisely the capacity to put aside one's private concerns and desires in order to treat or study something for its own sake, or at least, not only for one's own sake. In experiencing art, this means the ability to set aside personal associations and attitudes that are not clearly relevant to evaluation or understanding. For example, if one associates a song very strongly with a close friend and that friend comes to a tragic end, one might have a hard time thinking about and attending to the joy in that song again. The importance of the capacity for distance is that one be able to put aside one's own, possibly idiosyncratic, concerns in order to open oneself up to what the artwork has to offer.

There are a number of reasons to expect psychopaths to lack the ability to attain this kind of distance. First, one of the diagnostic features of psychopathy is the conning/manipulative trait. This trait describes an individual who uses others to gain what they want, with little regard for the consequences for that other person. To put it in Kantian terms, psychopaths tend to use others merely as means, and not also as ends in themselves. They are notoriously exploitative. This seems to indicate that other people are, in general, not regarded in a disinterested fashion, but rather in terms of what they, or association with them, have to offer for the psychopath.

Second, an important feature of psychopathic violence is the prevalence of *instrumental* violence. Some psychopathy researchers, e.g., Blair, take this as being characteristic of psychopathy as opposed to more reactive forms of antisocial personality disorder (Blair et al. 2005).⁴ Instrumental violence is violence committed with some goal in mind, which usually does not include the victim's pain. The pain or suffering inflicted on the victim is the means to an end. Again, the propensity to engage in this type of aggression – most forms of aggression are reactive (i.e., responses to some situation) – seems to reflect the way in which psychopaths relate to the world and people in it: as objects to be used for some personal gain. It is noteworthy that, in a large survey of the types of murder committed by psychopaths, Michael Woodworth and Stephen Porter (2002) found that the most common form of murder committed by psychopaths was instrumental in nature. In descending order of prevalence, psychopaths murder for monetary gain, nonconsensual sex, to gain access to a woman, and to get drugs or alcohol. By contrast, most nonpsychopathic murders are reactive. Nonpsychopaths tend not to

⁴ Blair claims that psychopaths engage in *both* instrumental and reactive aggression, whereas reactive aggression is the most common form of aggression for other criminals, as well as for certain types of antisocial personality disorder (Blair et al. 2005).

think of others in purely instrumental terms; others' pain and suffering are usually not simply means to an end.

To sum up, psychopaths appear to have difficulties appreciating things for properties or aspects that are not properties or aspects that can be *used* by them to gratify some desire, either directly or indirectly. The objects in the world are not there to be appreciated in their own right; they are there to be *used* to gratify some desire or need. The psychopath's attitude to the world is super-practical. And aesthetic appreciation, Bullough argued, requires a capacity to put aside one's practical concerns, to distance oneself from the work.

Bullough's theory and variants thereof have been subjected to a number of criticisms over the years, with George Dickie's (1964) being the best known. We can understand these objections as posing a dilemma to the distance theory. On the one hand, there is the worry that "distance" is too poorly defined a notion to be helpful, and, on the other hand there is the concern that, if it is made more specific, it will not be able to capture the appropriate attitude to take towards all works of art. In other words, "distance" may be understood in such a bland and general way that it will appear true that we need to exercise it when attending to art, but it will not tell us anything about how we should attend to art – it will be empty. The solution is to make the notion more specific. The problem is that any such more specific notion of distance will be open to counter-examples, or so the argument goes. For example, one might make the notion of distance more precise by specifying that distance means distance from one's own set of moral values and commitments, but then aesthetic distance would exclude one's consideration of certain facets of the work, such as recognizing the moral vision of the work, that are clearly relevant to understanding at least some works as works of art (Pole 1962).

Our aim is to make the notion of distance specific enough to be helpful, without

worrying that it might not apply to every case. We have focused (following Bullough) on how distance disengages the audience from thinking about one's own *practical* interests, so some might object that this leaves our account open to counter-example: some artworks may require engagement with one's own practical, even selfish and small-minded, desires. For example, some works of pop art set out to engage and comment on consumerist sentiment: appreciating Warhol's Marilyn Monroe silkscreens requires fully engaging the desires (commercial and sexual) connected with her image. John Currin's paintings of pornographic photographs force the viewer to confront the sexual desires that the original images were designed to evoke (though he also hopes to transcend them). Or consider the scene in *Annie Hall* (1971) in which Woody Allen breaks the fourth wall to address the viewer directly and ask whether we don't agree with him that people who lecture loudly about a director's *oeuvre* while waiting in line are horrible. Here too we seem to be asked to engage with our own interests, not to distance ourselves from them.

This objection is, however, fairly easily handled. First, it is not clear that even in these cases, distance plays *no* role whatsoever. When viewing Warhol's silkscreens, or even Currin's paintings, we are supposed both to *feel* our self-oriented desires and also to *reflect* on them. That reflection requires a certain distance from practical concerns. Second, we are not arguing that each and every act of appreciation of each and every piece of artwork requires aesthetic distance. So we are not unduly concerned about there being some counterexamples to our suggestion. Our claim is merely that a *capacity* for distance is a necessary condition of developing an appreciation and understanding of artworks in general, and of most if not all individual works. Even works that require (at some points, at least) a consideration of one's own practical interests also depend on the audience's *general* capacity for distance.

This way of thinking about the psychopath's aesthetic deficit carries a number of advantages. First, it explains this deficit better than the empathy deficit theory. As we saw, focusing on empathy leaves out many significant forms of aesthetic engagement of which psychopaths seem to be incapable. Second, it reminds us of an often ignored aspect of aesthetic distance. Aesthetic distance does not require not caring about the object at all (for psychopaths would certainly be capable of that), but caring that extends beyond one's immediate concerns. What Bullough calls "the antimony of Distance" is the conflict between caring about an object only in terms of what it can do for me, and not caring about it at all. For most of us, it is difficult to achieve what he calls "personal" distance: emotional involvement that "has been cleared of the practical, concrete nature of its appeal, without, however, thereby losing its original constitution." (91) What is difficult for us is close to impossible for the psychopath. Third, it brings out that what is often thought of as a distinctively *moral* attitude, i.e., seeing and appreciating others for their own sakes, is an instance of a more general attitude towards the world which has application in aesthetics. It is the ability to disengage from one's practical interests in the world and see the world, as far as possible, as it is in itself and appreciate for what it is, in its own right.

To see, more clearly, how this impacts the field of ethics, it may be useful to briefly consider a suggestion made by Stephen Darwall about sympathetic concern. According to Darwall, "the concern we experience for people in sympathy is central, not just to seeing individuals and their well-being as having categorical importance, but also to the very concept of well-being or personal good." (Darwall 1994, 278) As such, sympathy is central to ethics. Now, sympathy differs from empathy in being a third person stance, where empathy is a stance of caring from the first person perspective (as-if from your perspective). The latter is much more

enmeshed with the feelings of the subject than sympathy is. Sympathy does not require emotion matching; as Darwall says, welfare is normative for sympathy. A plausible reconstruction of the third person stance in sympathy is distance. Sympathy embodies a greater distance from the suffering of the subject than empathy. It is crucial to Darwall's account that this more distanced approach is one that we sometimes ought to take towards ourselves also. It is foundational to our deliberations about what to do to increase or safeguard our welfare.⁵ It is what, if you like, grounds the value of welfare or wellbeing.

However, sympathy connects us to two different types of value, "value *for a person* and person-neutral value." (Darwall 1994, 275) Value for a person is more obviously related to considerations related to wellbeing of the sort that are familiar from empathy. It is the person-neutral value that is different from the concern embodied in empathy, yet foundational to the ethical enterprise. When we care for another in a person-neutral way, we see them as mattering categorically. They do not matter *for us*, as such, or even *for themselves*; they matter, as it were, *simpliciter*. This particular form of valuing seems to us very close to Bullough's personal distance, once it is separated from the other type of valuing inherent in sympathy, i.e., valuing their welfare in particular. And, we suggest, that this type of appreciation strikes to the heart of what is wrong in psychopathy and what is basic to moral and aesthetic value.

We conclude that it is plausible that the capacity for distance is crucial to seeing *anything* as having value, as opposed to seeing it as being valuable-for-me. The first indication certainly is that psychopaths have no real grasp of value, other than material or monetary value. This is partly because they, themselves, are locked within their narrow practical way of looking at the world. They cannot appreciate objects or subjects in their own right. Appreciating moral and

⁵ This might ground certain obligations to ourselves; for instance, an obligation not to use our bodies to

aesthetic value requires an ability to let oneself go, to embrace the world for its own sake. All the evidence suggests that this is a capacity that is woefully deficient in the psychopath.

5.

Examining in more depth the psychopath's inability to take appropriate distance promises a more profound understanding of what unites, or, perhaps better, what underlies, aesthetic and moral value. While many contemporary philosophers disagree about *exactly* how aesthetic and moral value relate to one another (Carroll 2000), our examination of the psychopath suggests that aesthetic and moral value are cousins, sharing a common ancestor in the capacity to distance oneself from narrowly egoistic concerns.

The psychopath embodies a way of relating to the world that is inimical to aesthetic and moral value. Both moral and aesthetic value require appropriate distance – an ability to step back from one's own point of view and appreciate the world around us without concern for whether we can benefit from it. Distance is a prerequisite for an appreciation of the other, and hence for an appreciation of art and moral understanding. The capacity for distance is a basic capacity that can then be developed into distinctively aesthetic modes, distinctively moral forms of relating to others, as in sympathy, or both. The abilities to participate fully in both moral life and in art are rooted in the same basic capacity, a capacity that psychopaths lack – to take an interest in what is not one's own.

serve some end of ours as we might do in prostitution.

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