

THE ETHICS OF MEDIOCRITY:
CONCEIT AND THE LIMITS OF DISTRIBUTIVE JUSTICE
IN THE MODERN MEDIOCRE-ARTIST NARRATIVE

by

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ABSTRACT

The modern principle of freedom of subjectivity sets a moral standard which radically departs from Aristotle's doctrine of the mean: modern moral agents, exemplified by the rising middle class, are granted the right to develop extreme dispositions towards goods like honour and wealth. Given that Aristotle considers such goods divisible in the sense that when one person gets more another gets less—the basic definition of distributive injustice—it isn't surprising that modern philosophers like Kant have trouble reconciling this right with duty to others.

Failing to resolve this dilemma satisfactorily in ethical terms, Kant and others turn to aesthetics, but Kant, at least, takes no account there of moral agents' interest in the actual existence of goods. In this respect, the alternative to the Kantian aesthetic response I document in my dissertation is more Stoic than modern. That response, the modern mediocre-artist narrative, features a mediocre artist who fails to achieve the new standard of distributive justice and a genius who ostensibly succeeds.

Though other critics discuss the ethical dimension of mediocre-artist narratives, they don't consider the possibility that the mediocre artist's failure might be due to the ethical dilemma just described. They therefore tend to uphold uncritically the narratives' negative judgments of mediocrity, ascribing the latter's failure to egotism. By contrast, I examine the genius' artistic efforts for evidence of a similar failure. Ultimately, I demonstrate that the genius does indeed fail, albeit less spectacularly, arguing on this basis that egotistical characterizations of mediocrity are unjust. But the mediocre aren't the only victims: in "concealing" genius' failure, mediocre-artist narratives ignore unmet claims on its fruits.

Finally, I invoke Derrida's notion of the "lesser violence" to outline a new genre that recognizes the unattainability of the modern standard of justice. I call this genre morally progressive, rejecting Jürgen Habermas' view that freedom of subjectivity has hit a dead end, and that we must backtrack to a philosophical turning indicated but not taken by Hegel, namely, the path of intersubjective freedom.

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DEDICATION

To my family, for their patience; to my wife, Jacquie, for her impatience; and to my son Leo, who supplies the strongest motivation of all.

Chapter 1: Introduction

The Psychology of mediocrity

Why in Peter Shaffer's play Amadeus does the self-professed mediocrity Salieri want to destroy Mozart? And how is it that Franz Werfel's Verdi, during an equally intense crisis of self-doubt, briefly envisions murdering his fellow composer Wagner? One might consider these violent impulses to be the understandable reactions of two artists to the appearance of a rival who casts doubt upon the value of their entire life's work. But most critics—taking their cues from the texts it should be said—have on the whole been less forgiving than that, ascribing their reactions not to shattered egos but to all-too intact ones. Although Werfel's Verdi doesn't need a critic to draw attention to his ego—he talks of nothing else—Katherine Arens, for example, characterizes a slightly less self-aware Salieri as an “egomaniac.”¹ Even melancholy mediocrity Andrea del Sarto, the apparently passive protagonist of Robert Browning's dramatic monologue of the same name, has been accused by professional readers of egotism.² Mediocre artists, these critics imply, are always inclined to overestimate their worthiness, and even their reactions to their own self-accusations of mediocrity often reflect a perversely persistent conviction that they deserve more honours than they do. If this conviction remained a purely internal affair, mediocre artists would be guilty of nothing more than conceit; however, they act upon that conviction, too. And though they typically stop short of actual murder, at the very least mediocre artists create injustice by attempting to acquire more than their share of honours—through the medium of their mediocre art to begin

with and then, when their conceit is laid bare, by any other means. Thus, one critic points out that Rameau's nephew, the mediocre "pantomime" of Denis Diderot's 18th-century dialogue, is "a particular kind of human being" who "proclaim[s] his readiness to steal if this would enable him to overcome [mediocrity's] more obvious financial and social drawbacks."³ In sum, most critics have either characterized or accepted uncritically the characterization of mediocre artists as egocentric or conceited and, because the latter are inclined to act upon their conceit, as perpetrators of injustice. These critics therefore interpret the reactions of mediocre artists to the realization of their own mediocrity not as momentary moral lapses but as signs of character-related predispositions.

It would seem, then, that the mediocre artist's moral failings do not merely supervene upon his artistic shortcomings (his realization that he is artistically incapable impairing a previously healthy moral capacity); instead his two incapacities, the moral and the artistic, are in him from the start. And the frequency with which this pairing of incapacities crops up in mediocre-artist narratives strongly suggests that it is not mere coincidence. Nor, I would argue, is it simply a matter of dramatic necessity, i.e., the need for dramatic conflict, which wouldn't be fulfilled if the mediocre artist were capable of immediately accepting the validity of the aesthetic judgment passed upon him. One could certainly offer a banal explanation for the mediocre artist's double incapacity by observing that if a conceited man chooses to pursue honour, wealth and power through art, he will tend to overestimate his worth as an artist just as he overestimates his worth in general, so that conceit and artistic mediocrity naturally go hand in hand. However, things are more interesting than this conditional suggests, because the conceited man doesn't arbitrarily choose art as his path to honour. As I will show, in the era of "modernity" (to be defined shortly), art is a privileged path to honour because, at least according to some thinkers and writers, it is the only means

by which honour and other external goods can be justly distributed. In the right hands, of course. In the wrong hands, the hands of the conceited mediocre artist, artistic production results in an unjust distribution.

In short, mediocre-artist narratives contain an assumption, inadequately analysed by critics, that the moral and aesthetic faculties are related insofar as an incapacity for artistic production entails an incapacity for moral action, a notion which is far from self-evident. Which invites the subordinate research question that this dissertation will attempt to answer: What unexamined developmental principle of the soul (psuche) and its moral and artistic faculties—what principle of psychological development, in other words—underlies the modern critique of mediocrity as it can be read in these narratives?

That this principle, though assumed, isn't identified let alone discussed by literary critics who take the theme of mediocrity as their focus, is perhaps due to a dearth of ready-to-hand theoretical resources. Most late 19th and early 20th-century Kulturkritik aside (whose primary object of critique, in any case, is the developmental state of modern culture as a whole rather than that of specific individuals), the most influential modern philosophical critiques of mediocrity have been undertaken by those promoting the development of artistic capacity in lieu of moral capacity. On the continent in the late nineteenth century, for example, Nietzsche called for a "psychology of the artist" whose precondition was intoxication, including a Dionysian intoxication with cruelty and destruction⁴; and in similar though not identical fashion the Romantics before him tended to advocate transcending mediocrity not in the name of morality but in the name of artistic excess. It is this understanding of mediocrity which is explicit in a literary history sketched by Joshua Scodel in the introduction and postscript of his recent (2002) monograph Excess and the Mean in Early Modern English Literature. As his title suggests, Scodel finds the origins of the early

modern ideal of mediocrity in Aristotle's doctrine of the mean⁵—a genealogy I do not dispute—and associates the growing early modern embrace of excess or extremes with the rejection of that ideal. Although Scodel is careful to say that his study “traces no neat progression or clear shift from the celebration of the mean to the embrace of excess,”⁶ he goes a little further out on a limb in his postscript when he claims that “developments beginning in the early modern period have ultimately led to changes in the understanding both of literature and of the mean-extremes polarity, changes that separate the period I have studied from our own.”⁷ One such development is the “growing cult of the sublime from the mid-seventeenth century onward,” which “provides an early instance of the now common association of great literature with imaginative extremes.”⁸ Although in previous chapters he gives some early modern examples of advocacy of the extreme which claim moral sanction—some early modern proponents of “extreme passion,” for instance, “treated profound feeling as ethical proof of merit”⁹—here in the postscript he focuses solely on an advocacy of the extreme which casts ethics aside. Scodel talks about the Romantic and post-Romantic “reduction of literature to purely ‘imaginative’ writing,” a reduction which has “marginalized—at least for those who still care about literature as a normative category—explicitly didactic genres that once espoused moderation and the mean....”¹⁰ He also points to a “major strain” of Romantic and postmodern critiques of bourgeois culture which take their orientation not from ethics (nor from a political theory founded upon ethics) but from a “politicized aesthetics of sublime excess.”¹¹ In short, Scodel's historical sketch depicts an aesthetic rejection of the mean which is simultaneously a rejection of ethics.

As already implied, this thesis attempts to isolate a different critical strain, one which rejects the mean for the sake of both aesthetic and ethical development. The question becomes, then: What principle promoted the modern rejection of the Aristotelian mean in

favour of the extreme without calling for a corresponding rejection of ethics? The answer I propose is freedom of subjectivity, identified by Hegel in the early 19th century as the very principle of modernity.¹² Whether or not the writers I am concerned with here were directly influenced by Hegel—Diderot, who predates him, obviously wasn't—Hegel's principle provides a neat, theoretical encapsulation of a number of modern cultural phenomena—especially the politico-economic rise and consolidation of an individualistic and materially inclined bourgeoisie—that would have formed the context of these writers' thought. From now on, therefore, the term “modern” will primarily refer in this dissertation to writers who implicitly, if not explicitly, demonstrate a commitment to this principle. This definition of the modern is no doubt reductive in comparison to what is usually understood by the term, but for my purposes it is sufficient. I supplement it only by saying that the modern, or modernity, refers roughly in this dissertation to a period that begins in the second half of the eighteenth century and persists through the twentieth, wherever a commitment to the principle of freedom of subjectivity may be discerned.

The principle of freedom of subjectivity recognizes the subject's right, by virtue of her capacity for reason, to cultivate each of her various faculties according to its own internal norms and without reference to any external authority, and this right extends to the moral or appetitive faculty whose extreme inclinations Aristotle saw as irrational and in need of moderation. By contrast with Aristotle, many modern philosophers besides Hegel grant legitimacy to the appetitive faculty's inclinations (even if they don't necessarily and explicitly reject the mean). Thus, for instance, in his Critique of Practical Reason Immanuel Kant carefully demarcates the realm of the appetitive faculty or “lower faculty of desire,” granting it the exclusive and unbridled right to legislate in the sensible realm, prescribing the precepts by means of which the moral agent is to pursue her own happiness—which in Kant,

it must be said, is not as comprehensive as Aristotelian happiness, or eudaimonia, but is instead restricted to what Aristotle called “external” goods, goods like honour, wealth and power.

Given this restriction of the meaning of happiness, one may well ask how moderns like Kant were able, for all intents and purposes, to reject the mean without forfeiting ethics. For Aristotle characterized external goods as “divisible” in the sense that when one individual gets more of them, another gets less. By this account, modern philosophers who promote the independent development of the appetitive faculty risk a scenario in which some get more of these goods while others get less. In short, they risk promoting distributive injustice. In order to counter this risk, modern philosophers have to ensure that the moral agent’s full development of his inclinations doesn’t conflict with the development of his sense of duty towards others. Consistent with the principle of freedom of subjectivity, Kant attempts to ensure this by granting the higher faculty of desire—the faculty which prescribes the moral agent’s duty—exclusive right to legislate in the supersensible realm. Kant considers that to allow the precepts of the lower faculty to override the laws of the higher faculty is as unjust as the reverse situation. But although he recognizes the claims of the higher and lower faculties of desire in principle, Kant has difficulty—and he is not the only one—reconciling them in practice. He encounters a contradiction or antinomy in practical reason: his ethical subject is paralyzed, pulled in two directions by the prospect of happiness and the call of duty. The only ethical advice Kant can offer is a compromise: Seek to be worthy of happiness; your worthiness will be rewarded in the afterlife.¹³ Unfortunately, this compromise does not live up to the promise of earthly happiness which the principle of freedom of subjectivity promotes.

Here is where the privileged status of art in modernity comes in: according to some

modern thinkers including Kant, and, less explicitly, some modern writers, art has the power to harmonize the respective laws of the sensible and the supersensible realms. (For some modern writers, of course, no such harmonization is possible and the artist must choose between the claims of the two realms. In the conflict between making a living through mediocre art and creating art that is truly worthwhile, the sensible realm usually gets the upper hand. Analyzing George Gissing's New Grub Street, John Halperin writes that "[t]he clash between art and materialism—between the creative man wanting to do something worthwhile and the circumstances of his life which force him to be mediocre or die—is at the centre of New Grub Street."¹⁴ This notion of mediocrity, however, is not the one I'm attempting to elaborate here.) In the more precise terms of my own argument, art gains a privileged status in modernity because it is seen as the only means to the just distribution of external goods, allowing as it does the subject to develop (in accordance with the precepts of the sensible or appetitive faculty) her extreme inclinations towards those goods while simultaneously and without conflict developing her sense of duty in accordance with the laws of the supersensible or "higher" faculty of desire.

Some modern thinkers and writers, then, having followed the principle of freedom of subjectivity to an impasse in ethical development, turn to modern art for a way past it. And, to reiterate the point above, getting past it does not mean (characterizations of the mediocre artist as egocentric notwithstanding) transcending one's own limitations as a finite, desiring being. The mediocre artists of my primary texts are not morally bound to disregard their own passions; only to dutifully consider the passions of others as well. They can thus also be distinguished from the type of mediocre artist which Philip J. Gallagher identifies in Milton's poem "The Passion," a poem which, according to Gallagher, depicts the "psychological state" of an "egocentric" speaker who attempts "to become inspired about" Christ's Passion,

but who fails because “the immolation of the individual will is the desideratum for getting ‘into’ the Passion (to get into Christ you must get out of yourself)...”¹⁵

Kant comes close to the critical strain I’m attempting to isolate, looking as he does to art—at least at times—for a two-way bridge between the sensible and supersensible realms. As Ralph Ellison points out, Kant represents the faculty of judgment as “capable of overcoming ‘the great gulf that separates the supersensible from appearances,’”¹⁶ an overcoming which allows for “the free and unregulated play of the faculties.”¹⁷ But Ellison also argues that there is a tension in Kant between this horizontal image of the bridge—a horizontality which appears to put sensible and supersensible activity on the same level in terms of moral value—and a vocabulary of verticality or elevation, according to which aesthetic activity leads above and beyond the exercise and goals of the “mere” sensory faculties.¹⁸ The fact that from this vertical perspective Kant’s aesthetic bridge falls short on the sensible side—proving as useless as a rainbow for guiding subjects to material happiness—is not surprising when one considers that the Kantian aesthetic stance is based upon the viewer’s disinterest in the actual existence of objects represented, a disinterest which characterizes the experience of the beautiful but which reaches its peak in the “experience” of the Kantian sublime, when the viewer is moved to go even against his interest: “The beautiful prepares us for loving something, even nature, without interest; the sublime, for esteeming it even against our interest (of sense).”¹⁹ Clearly, then, the Kantian sublime cannot be considered the standard against which mediocrity, as I am attempting to define it, falls short: the existence of the external goods which make for happiness is of the utmost importance to the modern moral agent I’m concerned with here.

So whose aesthetics could have provided a possible aesthetic passage beyond the developmental impasse thrown up by the principle of subjectivity? I propose Stoicism as a

candidate. (The principle of freedom of subjectivity would not have prohibited modern writers from being influenced by a premodern norm as long as they didn't accept it unquestioningly.) This proposition may seem, for different reasons, both obvious and counterintuitive. It may seem obvious insofar as some later Roman Stoics, at least, were familiar enough with Aristotle's doctrine of the mean to reject it in favour of extreme states of the soul.²⁰ The Stoics, then, set a precedent for rejecting the mean. On the other hand, the Stoics seem very unlikely candidates, given that they promote what Aristotle would consider a deficient extreme, whereas the modern writers in question promote what Aristotle would consider an excessive extreme. However, I will argue with the help of John M. Dillon that there is a theoretical affinity between these two extreme positions. Dillon's claim is that it is the Stoic model of a unitary soul (in contrast to the Peripatetics' bipartite soul) which fundamentally distinguishes the Stoic position (total elimination of the passions) from the Peripatetic position. I will argue that when the modern subject is artistically engaged, his lower and higher faculties are meant to operate by proxy as one unitary (aesthetic) faculty. Given this unity, it would make no more sense in the modern case than in the Stoic case for the subject to moderate her passion for external goods, for her passion must either wholly accord or wholly fail to accord with the law or norm of that unitary faculty. Only if her extreme passion were to conflict with the judgment of another faculty deemed more rational would there be good reason for her to moderate it.

That said, to claim that the modern writers I examine in this dissertation turned to Stoicism as if determinedly in one direction, would be to put the matter too strongly. It is more accurate to say that the influence of Stoicism was all around them, "in the air," and not always in a recognizable or conscious form, a consequence of Stoicism's complicated and incomplete transmission from antiquity. This quality of Stoic influence is perhaps most

succinctly summed up by R. M. Wenley: “Evasive, [Stoicism] has proven remarkably pervasive.”²¹ In my approach to the question of Stoic influence in modern mediocre-artist narratives, I will consequently take what Strange and Zupko call—and not in a dismissive way—the “low road.” Rather than “paying close attention to the particular questions that exercised thinkers such as Zeno and Chrysippus, in order to determine the extent to which later figures contributed to their solutions,” I’ll look at how some modern writers “recontextualized”, probably unconsciously, Stoic ideas “to solve their own problems”²²—specifically, the problem of how to reconcile happiness and duty, the precepts of the appetitive faculty and the laws of the “higher” faculty of desire.

The key to the usefulness of Stoic aesthetics for such a reconciliation lies first of all in Stoic ethics, upon which Stoic aesthetics is based. For the Stoics the same law of Nature orients impulse—the stretching towards, in Aristotelian terms, external goods (as well as bodily goods)—and reason, which is concerned with goods of the soul like duty. Consequently, for the Stoics there is no impasse in the wise man’s psychological development; he experiences no conflict in assessing, and acting upon, the values of external goods and goods of the soul. The writers of modern mediocre-artist narratives don’t always appeal to nature, but they do make use of the Stoic continuity of impulse or inclination and reason.

As for the state of the Stoic artist’s soul, it is reflected in his art—more precisely, in the values which his art assigns to external goods and goods of the soul. (Art is by no means necessary to the psychologically developed wise man, but it can, according to the Stoics, educate the passions of audiences who are not yet fully developed.) In similar fashion, the state of the modern mediocre artist’s soul—specifically, the underdevelopment of his higher faculty of desire—is reflected in his art insofar as, despite the supposed power of artistic

activity to overcome the antinomy of the lower and higher faculties of the soul, his art values happiness at the expense of duty. It is this underdevelopment which brings down upon the mediocre artist the charge of egotism, as well as the charge of mediocrity, since although the mediocre artist's disposition is in an extreme with respect to the emotions and actions of the lower faculty of desire, it is in a mean with respect to those of the artistic faculty, which do not stop there but run the entire gamut of emotion and action arising from the lower and higher faculties combined—from happiness to sense of duty.

The Ideology of mediocrity

So far in this introduction, I have proceeded as if my primary critical task were elaborating the psychology of the mediocre artist, showing how his higher faculty of desire remains egotistically underdeveloped despite the fact that artistic activity ostensibly has the power to overcome the antinomy that would prevent him from simultaneously exercising both his lower and higher faculties. Other critics have taken a primarily psychological approach to the theme of mediocrity, for instance Charles A. Hallett in his 1975 monograph on the Jacobean (but very modern²³) playwright Thomas Middleton, Middleton's Cynics: A Study of Middleton's Insight into the Moral Psychology of the Mediocre Mind. (I use Hallett as an example because, interestingly, he claims that Middleton's mediocre cynic “poses as the stoic [sic] who philosophically endures the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune,” but who is in truth “a complete refutation of everything that he pretends to be.”²⁴) In fact, the primary critical task I have set for myself is testing the claims made for art's conciliatory power, which brings me to my main research question: Is the judgment of the mediocre artist valid? I.e., does the genius' art really have the power to reconcile happiness and duty, or is it

ideological? I attempt to answer this question by subjecting to critical scrutiny the art of the genius featured alongside mediocre art in these narratives, and against which the mediocre artist's work is said to fall short.

What I find is that the genius' work fails—albeit less spectacularly than the mediocre artist's work—to embody the value of external goods and goods of the soul in such a way as to reconcile the claims of happiness and duty.

Since the claim for art's conciliatory power cannot be made good even by the genius, it follows that the mediocre artist's flawed psychology is merely an epiphenomenon of a more extensive structural fault, a fault in the supposedly unbroken aesthetic field said to be coterminous with the fields in which happiness is pursued and duty followed. Discovery of this fault reconfirms the unjust consequences of the modern—and bourgeois—principle of freedom of subjectivity's promotion of the development of the appetitive faculty's extreme inclinations, a consequence which the resort to art would have at least temporarily covered over. My dissertation thus follows Theodor Adorno's advice that “[w]here [criticism] finds inadequacies [in artistic phenomena] it does not ascribe them hastily to the individual and his psychology, which are merely the façade of the failure, but instead ... pursues the logic of its aporias, the insolubility of the task itself. In such antinomies criticism perceives those of society.”²⁵

I will argue, then, that the mediocre-artist narrative scapegoats the mediocre artist (not that the mediocre artist isn't guilty; he just doesn't deserve to shoulder the entire burden of guilt) and alleges the innocence of the genius with the effect of promoting belief in the compatibility of social justice with the modern, bourgeois cultivation of the extreme inclinations of the appetitive faculty—that is, the unfettered individual pursuit of happiness. In a word, I will argue that the mediocre-artist narrative is ideological.

Not that I ascribe to the writers of modern mediocre-artist narratives a conscious intention to exploit. The notion of ideology I employ here is the one discussed by Rosalind Coward and John Ellis in their gloss on the French Marxist critic Althusser. Coward and Ellis argue that ideology is “the [cultural] practice in which individuals are produced and produce their orientation to the [sic] social structures so that they can act within those structures in various ways.”²⁶ Thus, for instance, “the ideology of the free worker, freely selling his labour at its market value, is a representation which it is necessary to live in order to function within the capitalist system.”²⁷ In similar fashion, I argue that the modern mediocre-artist narrative, insofar as it shifts responsibility for the unjust consequences of encouraging the development of subjects’ extreme inclinations towards external goods onto the mediocre artist’s bad character, is a representation which it is necessary to live in order to function ethically as an artist within the capitalist system (as far as this particular critical strain goes, non-artists are already compromised). Artists must believe that they can pursue the honours and other external goods which accrue to the successful artist and do their social duty. They need to believe, in other words, that artistic production differs from capitalist production in that the profit (in the form of honours, etc.) it generates isn’t unjustly appropriated.

It may seem odd to associate artistic production with distributive justice and injustice; the latter terms are usually used in relation to industrial production, whose output is the collaboration of many people, so that the contributions of the various labourers (and capitalists) to those products must be fairly determined when it comes time to share out the profits from their sale. (According to Marx, of course, these contributions are not fairly determined.) Artistic productions like paintings and novels, by contrast, are more often represented as the work of an individual (and in my primary texts gallery owners and literary publishers don’t appear to complicate the issue), so the artist’s contribution is therefore not

typically in question except in cases like plagiarism and forgery. But since plagiarism and forgery are not issues in the texts I consider here, what can distributive justice and injustice mean in relation to artistic production in mediocre-artist narratives? Answering this question requires a gloss upon my above observation that mediocre artists in the narratives examined act upon their conceit and attempt to acquire—sometimes successfully, though only temporarily—more than their share of honours and other external goods. Even assuming that they are considered entitled to all the profit generated by their work, these mediocre artists attempt to acquire even more profit—more honours, wealth and power—than their work actually generates. (I call these goods “profits” rather than “wages” because insofar as the artist is represented in my primary texts as a sole producer and owner of his own means of production, he fits the image of the capitalist more than he does the image of the labourer. This is not to say, of course, that other cultural critics like Walter Benjamin haven’t identified the modern artist with labour.²⁸)

So where do these additional honours, etc. come from? From the same place as the mediocre artist’s legitimate share: the stock of the common good; however, to the extent that this stock which a society holds in reserve is depleted by the illegitimate portion claimed by the mediocre artist, the mediocre artist takes it from others who deserve it. Society, after all, doesn’t have an inexhaustible supply even of an apparently immaterial good like fame; fame involves attention and attention takes time and energy, which, at least for us mortals, are limited.

But even if a society can agree that an artist deserves all the honours, etc. that his or her work generates, one can still ask how it is to measure those profits. Does it rely, unlike in the case of industrial production, on the evaluation of experts? Not so much in the case of the societies represented in my primary texts, where the market seems to have more say initially

than any critic. Can these societies rely on market mechanisms, then? No, because the market can't be wholly trusted; it typically overvalues, at least temporarily, the mediocre artist's work, causing an unjust allocation of rewards. What these societies apparently rely on to properly assess the value of the mediocre artist's work is time, the time it takes for the benefits of that work to accrue—or not—to the community as a whole. When these benefits do not materialize, the conceit of the mediocre artist is revealed, and it becomes apparent that he has been working only for himself.

One might well ask why, in these texts, the conceit of the genius isn't also revealed in time. Or, for that matter, why it is legible to me. The only answer I can give is that the time of my primary texts is a fictional, ideological time which functions to discredit only the mediocre artist; the time which has made it possible (given the inclination) to read the conceit of the genius as well, is an historical time, e.g., the time which has elapsed between the publication of Eugène Fromentin's Dominique and the writing of this dissertation. During that time, various "postmodern" "technologies"²⁹ of reading have been developed by such critics as the late French philosopher Jacques Derrida.

The reader may object that these technologies could have unconscious ideological affinities with the productive capacities of a newer phase of the capitalist order, and that, rather than making possible a true critique of the old order, they are simply involved in producing or legitimizing the new representations (or whatever term replaces it) that are necessary to function within the new order. Fredric Jameson famously took a similar line, if a slightly softer one, in his Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism.³⁰ To such an objection, my only reply is a Derridian one, which deserves a gloss I have no space for here: structures like the capitalist order cannot be anchored in such a way as to make them immune to play, and must therefore be perpetually reinforced by the ideological

repetition of the normative relations not just between, but constitutive of, their elements—elements which can include the people subject to those orders. Such relations, and the elements they constitute, are thus susceptible to being reconfigured. The upshot in the present case is that critics are no more wholly determined in their productions by the current capitalist order, than they are wholly free of that order.

Still, my claim that the distributive injustice made legible by applying these technologies of reading to modern mediocre-artist narratives has sufficient power to call the capitalist order into question, admittedly flies in the face of much current theory on justice. In particular, the late Iris Marion Young recently and influentially argued that there are limits to the critical effectiveness of any theory of justice which defines justice exclusively in distributive terms.

It should be said that Young by no means wholly discounts the value of considering issues of distributive injustice. She recognizes the unequal distribution of material resources in the world, believes that redressing this imbalance should be a priority for any program of justice, and firmly declares that such considerations should be part of every conception of justice.³¹ What Young objects to is an overextension of the concept of distributive justice to immaterial goods—which appear to include the external good which the mediocre artist is particularly desperate for: honour or fame.³² According to Young:

Distributive theorists of justice agree that justice is the primary normative concept for evaluating all aspects of social institutions, but at the same time they identify the scope of justice with distribution. This entails applying a logic of distribution to social goods which are not material things or measurable quantities. Applying a logic of distribution to such goods produces a misleading conception of the issues of justice involved. It reifies aspects of

social life that are better understood as a function of rules and relations than as things.³³

Presumably, the problem with conceiving of honour as a thing instead of a function of a relation, is that one thereby thoughtlessly assumes it is susceptible to just distribution—that no fundamental reorganization of social relationships is needed to redress an unjust allotment of honour, only a redistribution of it among existing subject positions. But as the word “relation” implies, honour’s value is relative: an honouree is only an honouree in relation to an honourer. So how can the value generated by that relationship be divided up equally between the two? It is entirely dependent on a differential allotment. (I don’t think it’s too much of a stretch to suggest that this insight may have been anticipated by Aristotle in his discussion of the divisibility of external goods; after all, he places the emphasis in that discussion not on the possibility of an equal division of external goods, but on the fact that when one person gets more, another gets less.) In any case, if a society wanted to redress the unjust distribution of honour, it would probably have to do away with honour altogether and conceive a new relationship between its members, one based on a thorough social equality.

However, not just my method of reading—which makes legible the instability of the aesthetic field that is supposed to ground the character-based opposition of mediocrity and genius—but also the contradiction arising from the principle of freedom of subjectivity which suggests that method, go a long way towards avoiding the risk of reification referred to by Young. In its contradictory aspect, the principle of freedom of subjectivity has the—admittedly, often unrecognized—power to reveal the problem of distributive injustice as precisely a problem of relationship. (Might I boldly suggest that it is when the critic, faced with this contradiction, remains confident in his or her ability to overcome it, that psychology reenters the picture, not in the form of egotism, necessarily, but in the form of, say, a

classically optimistic character?) It reveals first of all that (modern) injustice involves a problematic relationship between the individual and himself, since one obstacle to justice is the fact that the individual is split between his impulse to pursue external goods like honour to the extreme, and his sense of duty towards others. Secondly (this time from a more political than ethical perspective) it reveals that injustice involves a problematic relationship between the individual and the collective, for the individual, in exercising her right to pursue external goods to the extreme, comes into conflict with the rights of others to do the same. What becomes clear, thanks to the principle of freedom of subjectivity and the contradiction which arises from it, is that distributive injustice cannot be addressed solely by redistributing goods; that redistribution must be accompanied and even made possible by a new ideology, a new set of relations which re-enable the subject—or whatever she will now be called—to function within a new order.

This power of contradiction engendered by the principle of freedom of subjectivity is the reason I do not subscribe to Jürgen Habermas's proposal that critics backtrack to an earlier road sketched out but not taken by Hegel, the road of intersubjectivity.³⁴ And it goes without saying that I reject the road Hegel ultimately did take: the road of a higher-level subjectivity in which the individual is effectively subordinated to the state.³⁵ Both thinkers claim that their routes bypass the impasse generated by the principle of freedom of subjectivity, and thereby avoid the violence of a forced reconciliation between the individual subject's impulses and his reason, and between the individual and society—a reconciliation which, moreover, masks the force which effected it. Hegel's solution supposedly addresses the "demand for an unforced identity,"³⁶ and Habermas's offers the prospect of an "uncoerced formation of will."³⁷ But in making these promises of non-violence, both men give up the insight offered by the principle of freedom of subjectivity: namely, the

impossibility (even in borrowed Stoic terms) of an unforced reconciliation of happiness and duty. Given that the genius's vision of reconciliation legitimates a social order that cannot in fact be wholly just, thereby blunting any effective social critique of that order, acknowledgment of the practical impossibility of such a reconciliation turns out to be, in Jacques Derrida's phrase, the lesser violence.³⁸

So what might this new ideology of the lesser violence accomplish when it is allowed to transform the mediocre-artist narrative? I propose that it will re-enable the artist to admit to being partially disabled, unable to function wholly ethically as an artist in the new order. This admission will be made, not in the melancholy or bitter spirit of the modern mediocre artist of old, nor in a spirit of cynicism that embraces injustice, but in the hope that by never claiming to have fully addressed it, injustice will be better addressed.

Chapter by chapter

Part One of this dissertation establishes in more detail the theoretical context of my close readings of the primary texts—not just the modern theory but the ancient, in opposition to much of which many modern philosophers explicitly define the modern.

In Chapter 1, I anticipate the causes and consequences of the modern rejection of the mean by reading Aristotle in hindsight. I argue that, from the perspective of the modern principle of freedom of subjectivity, Aristotle's doctrine invalidly constrains the moral agent, but that the consequence of rejecting the mean is distributive injustice.

In Chapter 2, I attempt to confirm what I anticipated in Chapter 1 by showing how the modern principle of freedom of subjectivity necessitates the rejection of the mean insofar as it grants the appetitive faculty the very right which Aristotle denies: the right to develop its extreme inclinations into a firm disposition whose object is the moral agent's happiness. (In

anticipating the causes and consequences of the modern rejection of the mean, I will often use “extreme”, the preferred term of the moderns in question, rather than “excessive” or “excess,” even though Aristotle uses it to refer to both excess and deficiency. My justification for this is twofold: one, these moderns don’t consider excessive that which Aristotle considers excessive—“excessive”, after all, characterizes that which lies beyond the bounds of the ethical, and the moderns in question, even though they embrace the extreme, do not reject ethics; two, the term “extreme” in Aristotle doesn’t always connote that which is beyond the bounds of the ethical. For instance, when Aristotle defines virtue “in respect of what is right and best,” he calls it an extreme. When substituted for “excess”, therefore, the term can simultaneously support the unethical denotation given it by Aristotle, and, without as much strain, the ethical denotation which it acquires in the modern era.³⁹⁾ I show how Aristotle’s definitions of freedom, subjectivity, and right all entail a rejection of the mean and the consequence of that rejection, distributive injustice. I stop short, however, of a discussion of Hegel’s proposed solution to this problematic consequence, since that solution does not influence the critical strain which is my focus.

In Chapter 3, I turn to Kant, a philosopher whose ethical and aesthetic attempts to solve the antinomy in practical reason have had an influence on that critical strain. Unable to effect the reconciliation of happiness and duty on the field of ethics itself, Kant as well as other modern philosophers turn to art. This, I argue, is the point at which two critical strains emerge: one strain, isolated by Joshua Scodel, embraces an aesthetics of excess which leaves ethics behind; the other, the strain I isolate in this dissertation, turns to art in a continued attempt to solve the antinomy in practical reason. Kant, of course, takes the latter path, but I show that a crucial aspect of the Kantian aesthetic stance, namely, disinterest towards the

existence of objects represented, limits the usefulness of Kantian aesthetics for the critique of mediocrity, which insists upon the cultivation of the appetitive faculty's extreme inclinations towards real external goods.

Chapter 4 argues that critics of mediocrity must therefore ultimately and implicitly resort to certain Stoic assumptions in order to fully establish the grounds of their judgments.

In Part Two, I turn to the primary texts themselves. five literary texts in English, French and German ranging from the eighteenth through to the mid-twentieth century. My selection of this eclectic, if limited, collection of texts is meant to show that the response of the mediocre-artist narrative to the problem I've defined is by no means narrowly limited in time or space. It is, at the very least a modern, western European response. I might also add that the response isn't limited to a single genre either: the five texts include a play, a poem, a philosophical dialogue and two novels. What's more, the arts represented in these texts include poetry, music and painting. What I do in each case is show that the genius, no less than the mediocrity, fails to attain the new standard of justice.

For each text, I also provide a new perspective on a central critical problem by bringing to that problem insights gained from my theoretical analysis of modern mediocrity. In the process I try to show how mediocre-artist narratives from different periods—the Enlightenment, the Romantic, the Victorian and the modernist—deal with the antinomy in practical reason in their own way, reflecting some of the social-justice concerns of their day.

Chapter 5 presents a close reading of Denis Diderot's 18th-century philosophical dialogue Le Neveu de Rameau which, in the context of a growing civil sphere characterized by a competitive market economy, asks to what extent artistic mediocrities and geniuses benefit the world by their character and occupation, and to what extent they benefit only

themselves. Despite traditional comparisons of Le Neveu to Socratic dialogue, I show via a rhetorical analysis of one speaker's contradictory defence of the playwright Racine that the dialogue ultimately fails to arrive at stable, character-based definitions of mediocrity and genius. Not that I am by any means the first critic to question the dialectic efficacy of Diderot's text: the approach was inaugurated in an influential essay by Hans Robert Jauss. However, Jauss and others claim that Diderot himself was aware of the dialogue's limits by virtue of his moral skepticism, according to which there is no general law beyond the dictates of self-interest and no lessening, despite this fact, of the self-interested individual's obligation to search for absolute justice. But I argue that Diderot's skepticism only extends to metaphysical solutions of this antinomy; his skepticism is perfectly compatible with the idea of an empirically founded universal morality grounded in the physical organization and needs which humanity has in common. This dual respect for the bodily claims of the individual and those of the community has led critics to characterize Diderot's ethics as a combination of Stoicism and Epicureanism, but I argue that Stoicism alone (albeit a modified Stoicism) can better define it, especially in light of the egoistic theories which arise out of 18th-century reinterpretations of Epicureanism.

Chapter 6 presents a reading of the mid-19th-century French painter Eugène Fromentin's one and only novel, Dominique. Haunted by the aura of the old aristocracy in a nominally democratic present, the novel centres on the question of the justice of claims to uniqueness. Critics, based on their interpretations of the novel's ultimate stand on the value of uniqueness and its cultivation, have categorized Dominique as either a romantic novel or an anti-romantic novel, a polarization of opinion which a second generation of critics has tried to synthesize or at least explain. All of these critics, however, have tended to derive the value of uniqueness from the happiness or unhappiness of the mediocre narrator rather than

from the happiness—and dutifulness—of the genius, which is my own approach. Focusing on the ambiguous phrase “le don cruel,” I argue that the genius’s gift is a source of happiness for himself but a mixed blessing in its effect on the mediocre Dominique and others like him. In short, the genius, no less than the mediocrity, falls short of the modern standard of justice.

In Chapter 7 my focus turns to the Victorian era, and more specifically to “Andrea del Sarto,” a dramatic monologue by Robert Browning. The monologue calls into question the potential for injustice inherent in the mediocre artist’s use of the monologue form, which has the power to represent his desires in the guise of the desires of his subject. Andrea’s subject is, not fortuitously, his wife Lucrezia; gender relations, and in particular the domestic relations between husband and wife, constitute the contextual social-justice issue.

On a first reading Browning seems to adopt an almost postmodern scepticism about the possibility of reconciling Andrea’s and Lucrezia’s desire: Andrea’s aesthetic motto, “a man’s reach should exceed his grasp,” suggests that the only way the artist can avoid unjustly appropriating his subject is to choose one who is beyond his reach. But this precept proves to be simply a more subtle tactic for reconciling the antinomy between his own happiness and his duty towards Lucrezia. Whereas he claims to have perfectly grasped Lucrezia on canvas to his own detriment, Andrea ultimately acknowledges at the level of his monologue that there is something (noncorporeal) in Lucrezia which exceeds his grasp, an acknowledgment which technically wins for him the artistic glory he’s failed to achieve in his painting (critics have, on the whole, conflated the aesthetic merit of Andrea’s painting and his monologue). And, of course, at the same time he supposedly avoids injustice against Lucrezia, and thus does his duty. But while it’s true that in the end Andrea doesn’t falsely and unjustly claim to speak for Lucrezia, neither does he give her a voice; her silence, in fact, is a necessary condition of his aesthetically profitable speculation. Instead of disrespecting her, in short, he

over-respects her, confining her to a realm where the value of her desire supposedly exceeds that of the result of crass domestic negotiation.

In Chapter 8, I read against Nietzsche's The Case of Wagner another work in which Wagner figures, a modernist novel by the early 20th-century Austrian writer Franz Werfel entitled Verdi: A Novel of the Opera. If Nietzsche represents the postmodern shedding of the last ethical vestiges of Romantic aesthetics, then Werfel's novel takes Nietzsche and tries to use his critical insights to revitalize modernity's will aesthetically and ethically. When he was at the height of his creative powers, Werfel's Verdi was able to unproblematically reconcile his fame and his duty. He only falls into crisis later on in his career, when his inspiration dries up and he egotistically and unjustly continues to work for fame despite having outlived, like a rusty tool, his social usefulness. Even then, Verdi's crisis would pose no real threat to modern ethics—and in particular to the standard of justice—if it weren't for the question of who or what employs inspired artists as tools. Werfel first speculates that the force which used to sweep him up so powerfully isn't human, and in his anxious desire to see it harnessed he is almost ready to pin his hopes on his rival, Wagner, whose genius' will seems strong enough to encompass the scope of a force which so callously ignores the claims of human egos once it has finished with them. Ultimately, however, he is more relieved by Wagner's death, which confirms to him that his rival is only a mediocre human after all. But his experience of schadenfreude causes Verdi to question anew the egotistical quality of strictly human motivation. In this way he pingpongs between two sources of ethical motivation: a human ego which, left to its own devices, sets duty at naught, and an inhuman force which regularly ignores the claims of the human ego. Repressing this antinomy, he returns to the earlier ethic of genius, i.e., setting a term to the claims of the ego, which he

considers compatible with doing one's duty. Nietzsche would no doubt consider Verdi a mediocrity for repressing in this way, but Nietzsche's decision that the genius should follow the inhuman and become an Übermensch is another kind of repression, one which equally turns away from the ethical implications of the antinomy in practical reason. What the case of Werfel's Wagner shows is that the genius is as susceptible as the mediocre artist to injustice, that is, susceptible not only to having his claims ignored, but susceptible to pursuing egotistical claims—for Wagner presumably didn't want to die, he wanted to create more music even though the inhuman force which Verdi hopefully associates with duty was finished with him. Only when the desire to reintegrate the will—whether in ethical terms or purely aesthetic ones—remains an ambition is the failure to do so blamed on a weak will or character.

Chapter 9 presents a reading of the twentieth-century play Amadeus by the British dramatist Peter Shaffer. There I argue that the principle of freedom of subjectivity puts the right of aesthetic—in this case, musical—judgment in the hands of the composer and takes it out of the hands of the patron, that is, king and court. The court musician Salieri's tragedy is that he interprets this historical shift in the model of musical production in transcendent terms, i.e., he concludes that Mozart's work has absolute value and that the work he, Salieri, composed under the old system is worthless despite its positive reception by the king. Though critics have often adopted a psychoanalytic approach to Shaffer's works, they don't seem to have paid attention to this particular aspect of the Freudian economy in Amadeus. For Salieri's ignorance of the material conditions of musical production isn't only fetishistic in the Marxist sense, it is also fetishistic in the Freudian sense. Salieri takes no aesthetic pleasure from the music which he himself produces; his only aesthetic pleasure comes from

listening to Mozart's music. He considers himself to have been born mute, a pair of ears and nothing more. Needless to say, this fetishistic pleasure, derived exclusively from his ears and at the cost of his self-esteem and his tongue, as it were, is painful. On the basis of his apparent desire for pain—a pain which, after all, could be alleviated if he would only accept the historical contingency of musical value, one might consider Salieri to be a masochist. However, he has a psychic investment stronger than his sense of self-worth, namely, his need to believe in God, specifically the God of exchange, who both guarantees the absolute value of music and rewards artistic duty with fame and fortune. Mozart both confirms this belief system, in that he seems to avoid the distortions of musical reception by singing, as it were, directly into his (Mozart's) own ear, and disrupts it insofar as he seems to be rewarded by God despite his obscurity. The eventual demise of Mozart, instead of reassuring Salieri, throws him into further crisis, for Salieri isn't punished by God for his part in it. His desire for punishment is only answered years later, as Mozart's music begins to grow louder as his own grows fainter, demonstrating, as Salieri sees it, that absolute value ultimately triumphs over historically contingent over- and undervaluations. I emphasize, however, how Mozart's music—and especially the model of musical production he represented—threatened the material well-being of the old musical establishment in a very historical way, and that the appearance of musical transcendence in later years was simply the sign that the old establishment had passed away and the new establishment, with no reason to feel threatened by Mozart's music, could now see it as a common good. The fact that Mozart was adequately rewarded with fame and fortune by society only after his death points to the irreconcilability of happiness and duty, an antinomy with which the genius no less than the mediocrity must contend.

In Part Three (Chapter 10) I discuss the ethical implications of this antinomy and also engage with a critic of modernity's principle, Jürgen Habermas. I argue against his conclusion that freedom of subjectivity has turned out to be a dead-end, and claim that in turning to a principle of intersubjectivity Habermas ignores the ethical insights which the antinomy generated by freedom of subjectivity offers, insights that can only be gained by continuing to tease out the implications of this antinomy. I then imagine a new genre of mediocre-artist narrative that takes these insights into account.

PART ONE: Theorizing Mediocrity

Chapter 2: Reading Aristotle in Hindsight

Introduction

In his commentary on Thomas Carew's poem "Mediocrity in Love Rejected" Joshua Scodel points out that in the early modern period, adherence to the Aristotelian mean began to be considered mediocre in the pejorative sense which has since become dominant:

"[Thomas Carew's] spurning of 'Mediocrity' identifies the Aristotelian mean with 'mediocrity' in its now standard and less frequent early modern pejorative sense."⁴⁰ In this dissertation, I likewise assume that modern judgments of mediocrity imply a rejection of the Aristotelian mean. The first methodological consequence of this assumption, obviously, is that I need to give some account of Aristotle's doctrine, for understanding the latter is essential to an ultimate appreciation of both the causes and consequences of its rejection in the modern era. In my attempt to anticipate these causes and consequences—the causes especially—I am bound to give a reading of Aristotle that appears distorted by hindsight. Since, however, I am less concerned with capturing Aristotle's thought than I am with the reception of that thought in the modern era, I feel that the distortion, as long as it is flagged and qualified, is justified.

For instance, in anticipating the causes of the modern rejection of the mean, I argue that Aristotle's doctrine restricts the independence of the moral agent when it comes to following the extreme inclinations of his or her appetitive faculty. Aristotle, of course, would not have put it that way, not only because independence or autarkeia is not a major theme in his ethics, but because, first of all, he argues that the moral agent is free to follow his extreme inclinations (I will principally use the adjective "free" rather than "independent" from now on since "independent" is awkward in adjectival phrases)—that is, his vice is in many cases

voluntary and he holds responsibility (aitios) for it. The moral agent is not, however, free to follow his extreme inclinations with the moral blessing of the community, and this is the meaning of independence I am driving at. Of course, this too would be nonsensical to Aristotle, but only because he considers those extreme inclinations to be vicious; an ethics which rejected the doctrine of the mean for ethical reasons would not feel the same way. Secondly, Aristotle argues that the perfect good, happiness (eudaimonia)—which for humans consists in well-performed rational activity⁴¹—is autarkes,⁴² and cultivating the mean counts as rational activity, if not the highest form of it. But, again, an ethics which rejected the mean would presumably recognize a greater degree of rationality—and thus a greater degree of autarkeia—in such cultivation than does Aristotle (a point I will return to in Chapter 2).

In anticipating the consequences of the modern rejection of the mean, I argue that Aristotle imposes this restriction (from the modern viewpoint) upon the moral agent's independence in order to avoid a situation of distributive injustice. Avoiding distributive injustice, I conclude, will be the primary challenge faced by those moderns who reject the mean. In this respect, Aristotle is a useful first guide in the search for the weakest point of the ethical theory that underlies modern judgments of mediocrity. It is to this point that my critique of that underlying ethical theory will in subsequent chapters be directed.

But my aim in this chapter is not to give an account of Aristotle's entire doctrine; I am concerned here more specifically with anticipating the causes and consequences of rejecting the mean as a standard of action or feeling in the sphere of major honour and dishonour—the mean, in short, which for Aristotle defines the virtue of magnanimity. I have chosen to focus on magnanimity because in my chosen texts honour or fame is the primary external good pursued by modern artists—mediocrities and geniuses alike—and because in

these same texts the vice which principally characterizes the modern mediocre artist is conceit, the name which Aristotle gives to the vice that exceeds the mean of magnanimity. The reason I don't focus on the virtue of justice and its corresponding vices (despite its prominence in my title) is that the modern mediocre artist is not accused of the vice of injustice, only of creating a situation of injustice. Let me be clear: the mediocre artist's exaggerated sense of his own worth (while in itself a black mark against him) is said to lead to a situation of distributive injustice; the mediocre artist isn't said to have in addition to a conceited disposition an unjust disposition, that is, a tendency to desire more than he deserves (pleonexia). I trust that the difference between a conceited and an unjust disposition, though subtle, is clear: the mediocre artist isn't said to want more than he deserves—which would be a sign of an unjust disposition—but only “what he deserves”, even though “what he deserves” is based upon a false belief about his own worth.

One accidental advantage of my focusing on the single virtue of magnanimity (and its corresponding extremes) is that I avoid the difficult task of interpreting Aristotle's doctrine of the mean in such a way that it can describe every virtue, a difficulty which has been brought into stark relief by a critical debate between J.O. Urmson and Rosalind Hursthouse. Still, giving an interpretation of Aristotle's doctrine that fits even magnanimity alone is no straightforward matter and it will be helpful in anticipating potential objections to consider here three objections to Urmson's interpretation of the doctrine which Hursthouse raises in her essay “A False Doctrine of the Mean.”

Hursthouse's first objection is to Urmson's claim that to each virtue in Aristotle there corresponds exactly two vices: “That to each virtue there should correspond precisely two vices, neither more nor less—what kind of explanation could there be of this extraordinary

mathematical symmetry? What could there be about our lives and the way we conduct them, about our feelings and our dispositions to have those feelings, that necessitated such a symmetry?”⁴³ As an example of a virtue which Aristotle himself recognizes as having more than two corresponding vices, Hursthouse gives temperance, which, as its Greek name “Sophrosune” suggests, “saves one not merely from the defect of ill health but from vice in general.”⁴⁴ Now, on the face of it, magnanimity would seem to present an Urmsonian symmetry, that is, to its mean there appears to correspond exactly two vices: conceit and pusillanimity. But, as I have begun to argue, the mean of magnanimity saves one not merely from the peccadillo of conceit, but from injustice—not the vice of injustice, strictly speaking (since the conceited man, as I’ve said, is not necessarily an unjust man and is not motivated by that which motivates the unjust man), but an unjust act. Although this “asymmetry” complicates my attempt to anticipate the consequences of modern writers’ rejection of the mean as a standard of action or feeling in the sphere of honour and dishonour, it by no means threatens to undermine my argument. On the contrary, my argument relies on the asymmetry. As will become clear in the next chapter, if I were to fail to take it into account, I could not fully specify the grounds of the modern judgment of mediocrity.

The second of Hursthouse’s objections is related to the first, and concerns Urmson’s attempt to “fill out” Aristotle’s vague (and symmetrical) notions of excess and deficiency with specific phrases like “for too many or too few reasons”, “toward too many or too few things” and “too often or too rarely”.⁴⁵ To be more specific (and continuing with these same examples), Urmson claims that vice is a matter of being disposed to feel a certain emotion for too many or too few reasons, toward too many or too few things, or on too many or too few occasions. But Hursthouse points out that Aristotle more often talks about virtue in terms of

the right (dei) reason, the right object, or the right occasion, and these cannot be expressed as means between too many and too few or too often and too rarely: “The idea that the concept of the right reason could be captured by specifying it as a mean between too many and too few reasons has only to be stated to be seen as absurd. . . . [R]ight object and right occasion similarly cannot be specified as means. . . .”⁴⁶ But Hursthouse does acknowledge that some virtues can be specified in this way, and magnanimity, as I will show, is one of these. Its corresponding excess, conceit, does involve a “too much” and its deficiency, pusillanimity, a “too little.” Granted, things are complicated a little by the fact that Aristotle presents at least two criteria of magnanimity susceptible to this kind of measurement—the rectitude of the moral agent’s claim to honour, which depends upon his not overestimating (or underestimating) his own worth; and the degree of joy or distress the moral agent is disposed to feel towards a given allotment of honour—but my argument is in no way threatened by this complication. On the contrary, both of these criteria must be considered if I am to fully specify the consequences of rejecting the mean.

There is one other objection raised by Hursthouse which has a bearing on my argument: Hursthouse says that the proper estimation of one’s worth (one of the two criteria of magnanimity just mentioned) is a matter of judgment rather than emotion or feeling, as Urmson implicitly contends when he more generally claims that “for each specific excellence of character that we recognise there will be some specific emotion whose field it is.”⁴⁷ This observation opens up a theoretical can of worms which Hursthouse herself doesn’t attempt to close, for judgment (gnome) would normally be classed as an intellectual activity by Aristotle and located in the calculative rather than the appetitive part of the soul, but magnanimity is a moral not an intellectual virtue. And, indeed, Aristotle’s description of

magnanimity often sounds very much like his descriptions of most of the other moral virtues, such as when he writes: “At great honours bestowed by responsible persons [the magnanimous man] will feel pleasure, but only a moderate one....”⁴⁸ (I’ve left this criterion off my earlier list because, since neither the conceited nor the pusillanimous man will ever be in a position to receive honours from responsible persons, it is not susceptible in practice to measurement in terms of “too little” or “too much”.) In passages like the latter, it is clearly not the magnanimous man’s judgment which lies in a mean, but his feelings. The one possible explanation that occurs to me for the appearance of an intellectual criterion in the definition of a moral virtue—that when Aristotle speaks of the magnanimous man’s proper estimation of his own worth he is referring elliptically to his feelings about the estimate which his rational faculty has supplied him with—is not supported by the text. Let us assume, therefore, that Hursthouse’s observation is correct, and that the intellectual criterion of magnanimity contradicts Urmson’s wholly emotional interpretation of the doctrine of the mean. Since I make no claims about Aristotle’s doctrine beyond its application to the single virtue of magnanimity, Hursthouse’s observation would have posed no threat to my argument if I hadn’t included alongside the criterion of rectitude, the criterion of emotional joy or distress felt towards a given allotment of honour. If it weren’t for the latter criterion, I could have left to someone with a broader critical agenda the question of how emotion and judgment are articulated at a more general level of Aristotle’s doctrine. As it happens, however, the apparent co-existence of an emotional and an intellectual criterion within the single virtue of magnanimity would seem to require me to supply an answer to that question. Otherwise, it might appear as if magnanimity reflects two separate doctrines, one that emphasizes the value of keeping one’s emotional disposition in a mean, and another that

emphasizes keeping one's judgments—i.e., one's intellectual state—in a mean. The question would then arise as to which of these doctrines modern writers are in fact rejecting when they reject the mean as a standard in the sphere of honour and dishonour. Do they reject both? Fortunately for me, these questions ultimately prove moot since, as will become clear in Chapter 5, some of the Stoic assumptions which form the ground of modern judgments of mediocrity make no distinction between judgments and feelings. Modern writers who reject the mean for ethical reasons therefore do not experience the co-existence of an emotional and an apparently intellectual criterion in Aristotle's definition of the moral virtue of magnanimity as a problem.

In sum, I do not need (or pretend) to offer in this chapter a definitive and all-encompassing interpretation of the doctrine of the mean. For my limited purposes, the slightly modified version of Urmson's interpretation that I've just presented will do.

In section 1 of this chapter, I anticipate the causes of the modern rejection of the mean by analysing Aristotle's two principle criteria of magnanimity: the rectitude of the claims to honour which the magnanimous man makes; and the moderate degree of joy or distress he is disposed to feel towards a given allotment of honour. Since both of these criteria are means, rejecting the mean involves rejecting both, and anticipating the causes of this rejection in the modern era will involve determining what both criteria limit or curb. It will turn out, not surprisingly, that the first criterion curbs the moral agent's tendency to overestimate his own worth. As for the second criterion, it too curbs a tendency, in this case the moral agent's tendency to overestimate the value of honour. Based on these two observations, I anticipate that the cause of some modern writers' rejection of the mean is their belief—on grounds which include the principle of freedom of subjectivity—in the moral

agent's right to cultivate those tendencies.

In section 2, I attempt to anticipate the consequences of the modern rejection of the mean, arguing that Aristotle prescribes these restrictions upon the moral agent in order to prevent the distributive injustice that would result from the unrestrained cultivation of his tendency to overestimate both his own worth and the value of honour. The reason distributive injustice would result, is that there can never be enough of a “divisible” good like honour—divisibility meaning that when one person gets more of it another gets less—to support all the extreme claims that unhindered moral agents would make upon it. Both the lesser value which Aristotle ascribes to honour as an external good as well as his notion that only the worthy deserve honours, function to limit such claims. Since rejecting the mean allows the worth of both moral agents and honour to rise, I anticipate that the consequence of the modern rejection of the mean, and therefore the primary challenge to the theory which underlies modern judgments of mediocrity, is distributive injustice.

Though this chapter is not the place to address in detail a potential objection to the latter speculation, I must at least acknowledge it here. The hypothesis that modern writers reject the mean because they believe moral agents should have the independence to evaluate their own worth may not seem to be supported by my earlier observation that the modern mediocre artist is characterized as conceited. How can a person be considered conceited if their own estimate of their worth is authoritative? The short answer is that the conceit which figures in modern judgments of mediocrity is a modified form that arises in response to—and not, as in Aristotle, in anticipation of—the threat of distributive injustice. The modern definition of conceit thus reflects the new freedoms granted the moral agent. Of course, that conceit returns in any form in these modern texts is a sign that something is amiss. I will

address this issue in greater detail when I turn to my primary texts.

**Anticipating the causes of the modern rejection of the mean: two
criteria of magnanimity**

In Book Four of the Nicomachean Ethics, Aristotle writes that “a person is considered to be magnanimous if he thinks that he is worthy of great things, provided that he is worthy of them.”⁴⁹ If one takes the first part of this definition first, one is struck by the impression that the magnanimous man, in considering himself worthy of great things, is making an extreme claim; and, indeed, Aristotle says that he “is an extreme as regards the greatness of his claims.”⁵⁰ In fact, in this respect, even the conceited man is not excessive in relation to the magnanimous man; Aristotle says explicitly that as far as the greatness of his claims goes, the “conceited man ... does not exceed the magnanimous man.”⁵¹ One might reasonably wonder, then, what magnanimity has to do with a mean at all. It is the second part of Aristotle’s definition—the proviso—that answers this question: in order for the disposition of the magnanimous man to lie in a mean, his own estimate of his worth must correspond to his actual worth (“provided that he is worthy of them”). When this condition is fulfilled, then although the magnanimous man’s disposition is an extreme as regards the greatness of his claims, as regards the “rectitude” of those claims, his disposition is in a mean: “So although the magnanimous man is an extreme as regards the greatness of his claims, as regards its [sic] rectitude he is a mean, because he estimates himself at his true worth. The others show excess and deficiency.”⁵² More specifically, the conceited man, although he does not exceed the magnanimous man with respect to the greatness of his claims, “goes too far in comparison with his own merit,”⁵³ that is, the conceited man typically overestimates his own

worth. As a first criterion of magnanimity, then, this mean places a restriction on the moral agent's independence or freedom to overestimate his own worth in the form of exaggerated claims to honour.

As I admitted above, this reading of Aristotle will undoubtedly appear distorted, first of all because Aristotle does consider the moral agent to be free to overestimate his own worth and make exaggerated claims to honour, assuming that it is the desire for honour which tempts him to such claims. For to begin with, if the moral agent were not free to overestimate his own worth, if "pleasurable and admirable" goods like the external good of honour were an external compulsion upon him, forcing him to do things like overestimate his own worth, then all his acts would have to be considered compulsory since they are all undertaken with pleasurable and admirable goods in view. Secondly, Aristotle argues that the pursuit of pleasurable and admirable goods like honour cannot be categorized as compulsory because compulsory acts are painful, but the pursuit of pleasurable and admirable goods like honour is pleasant. Finally, Aristotle reasons that if the moral agent were to refuse to take the blame for his conceited and other shameful acts, then he could not logically take credit for his praiseworthy acts like acts of magnanimity either.⁵⁴

But, for Aristotle, the primary significance of the fact that the moral agent's pursuits of pleasurable and admirable goods are free or voluntary is that his acts can be praised or—as in the case of overestimating one's worth—blamed. So although according to Aristotle's doctrine of the mean the moral agent is free to overestimate his own worth, he is not free from public censure for doing so, and this is the degree of independence I am referring to when I say that the first criterion of magnanimity is restrictive.

Lifting this restriction would of course sound absurd to Aristotle: Why would any

community condone vice? But it must be remembered that the modern writers in question, unlike those to whom Scodel refers, reject the mean in the name of ethics. The question becomes, then: What would it mean in an ethical context to reject this mean in favour of the extreme? Well, even if an ethical philosopher felt for some reason that conceited people should not be blamed for their conceit, it's unlikely that she would go so far as to promote the moral agent's delusion. There is only one way to lift the restriction on the moral agent's cultivation of his extreme tendency without indulging him in his delusion, and that is to recognize his capacity, and by extension his right, to judge for himself what he is worth without reference to some external assessment. To reject this mean, in other words, would be to recognize the validity of every extreme claim to honour, not just the so-called magnanimous man's. Such universal recognition would not be accorded arbitrarily, but would stem from a sincere belief in every moral agent's honour-worthiness or dignity. Now, this of course is an ideal, and in practice there will always be external adjudication of such claims as well as partial restrictions, on some ground, on the moral agent's freedom. But in principle, rejecting this first mean of magnanimity in favour of the extreme means recognizing every moral agent's right to cultivate his extreme self-evaluative tendencies.

But there is a second reason why my anticipatory reading of Aristotle's doctrine as restrictive will appear distorted: there is another meaning of freedom or independence (autarkeia) in Aristotle which can't be reduced to the question of praiseworthiness and blameworthiness. As I said above, Aristotle argues that the perfect good, happiness (eudaimonia)—which for humans consists in well-performed rational activity—is autarkes, and cultivating the mean counts as rational activity, if not the highest form of it. At the very least, the appetitive faculty, when it is habituated to stick to the mean, is rational “in the sense

that a child pays attention to its father.”⁵⁵ And while this paternal metaphor may seem to refute the notion that the moral agent is in any way autarkes when he feels and acts in a virtuous mean, Aristotle insists that one cannot be truly virtuous merely in response to external prompting or pressure, just as in the arts a person is not literate if he manages to “put a few words together correctly by accident, or at the prompting of another person.”⁵⁶ When the moral agent is acting in a truly virtuous fashion, far from responding to some external compulsion, he “knows what he is doing,” “chooses” to perform that action “for its own sake,” and “does it from a fixed and permanent disposition.”⁵⁷ And while it is tempting in this context to accuse Aristotle of restricting the moral agent’s independence when he reports, apparently approvingly, such beliefs as “while the good man, whose life is related to a fine ideal, will listen to reason, the bad one whose object is pleasure must be controlled by pain, like a beast of burden,”⁵⁸ such control has nothing to do with the self-control (sophrosune) of the wise man whose disposition is in a mean. So why, then, if the wise man is characterized as having self-control, does Aristotle resort to the paternal metaphor to describe the rationality of even the wise man’s appetitive faculty? The answer, perhaps, is that Aristotle considers the child to be a part of the father: “a child until it is of a certain age and has attained independence, is as it were a part of oneself...”⁵⁹ From Aristotle’s point of view, it would seem, when the appetitive faculty submits to the authority of the rational principle, it is, as it were, submitting to itself.

One may safely assume, however, that the moderns who reject the mean do not share this view. On grounds which include the principle of freedom of subjectivity, they recognize a greater degree of rationality—and thus a greater degree of autarkeia—in the appetitive faculty than does Aristotle. Even a self-restriction of the appetitive faculty—the restriction of

one part of the soul by another—would therefore seem invalid to them. However, because I don't want to get too far ahead of myself here, I will neither elaborate upon this claim nor provide any further evidence in support of it until the next chapter.

Aristotle's second criterion of magnanimity concerns the moral agent's disposition, not with respect to his own worth, but with respect to the honour he claims. The magnanimous man's disposition towards honour—and not just honour but other “external goods” like wealth and power—is in a mean because he recognizes that honour, though the greatest of external goods, isn't worth as much as “goods of the soul” (i.e., “actions and activities of soul”⁶⁰): “It is chiefly with honours ... that the magnanimous man is concerned; but he will also be moderately disposed towards wealth, power, and every kind of good and bad fortune, however it befalls him: that is, he will neither be overjoyed at good nor over-distressed at bad fortune, since he does not regard even honour as a very great thing.”⁶¹ In attempting to anticipate the causes of the modern rejection of the mean, one can say that this second criterion of magnanimity restricts the moral agent's freedom to feel and act as if honour is a very great thing.

But why, according to Aristotle, do honour and other external goods not merit the high value which some vicious men place on it? More specifically, why does Aristotle consider honour and other external goods to be less valuable than goods of the soul, goods which are “good in the strictest and fullest sense.”⁶² Aristotle's answer is that external goods like honour are not final, i.e., not chosen for themselves alone the way the supreme good, happiness (eudaimonia), is chosen for itself alone, but at least partly as means to happiness:

Now we call an object pursued for its own sake more final than one pursued because of something else, and one which is never choosable because of

another more final than those which are choosable because of it as well as for their own sake; and that which is always choosable for its own sake and never because of something else we call final without any qualification.

Well, happiness more than anything else is thought to be just such an end, because we always choose it for itself, and never for any other reason. It is different with honour, pleasure, intelligence and good qualities generally. We do choose them partly for themselves (because we should choose each one of them irrespectively of any consequences); but we choose them also for the sake of our happiness, in the belief that they will be instrumental in promoting it.⁶³

That one can choose happiness for itself alone is just another way of saying what I quoted Aristotle as saying above: that happiness is autarkes, which in this context is probably better translated as “self-sufficient” rather than “independent,” though the two meanings are intimately related and encompassed by the single Greek term. So we can say that Aristotle considers honour and other external goods to be less valuable than goods of the soul, because they are not self-sufficient goods, i.e., they are means to the moral agent’s self-sufficiency, but they do not constitute his self-sufficiency in themselves.

Given that for Aristotle honour and other goods are not self-sufficient (autarkes), the claim that holding the moral agent’s disposition towards these goods to a mean restricts his freedom would sound absurd to him. In his eyes, lifting the restriction would compromise the moral agent’s freedom. It would allow the moral agent to make external goods like honour ends in themselves, thereby trapping him, as it were, in a state of dependency, unable to progress towards the state of self-sufficiency which awaits those who make happiness their

supreme goal.

But of course it is unlikely that any ethics would encourage a moral agent's tendency to misdirect his energies. As with the first criterion, mutatis mutandis, the only way to lift the restriction without encouraging misdirection is to recognize the moral agent's capacity, and by extension his right, to judge—or rather feel—for himself the value of honour and other external goods. I speculate that a belief in this capacity and right—held on grounds that include the principle of freedom of subjectivity—is a cause of some modern writers' rejection of the mean.

Anticipating the consequences of the modern rejection of the mean: Distributive injustice

One might assume that the primary challenge faced by an ethical theory that rejects the mean as a definition of magnanimity in favour of the extreme, is successfully addressing the Aristotelian objection that those who follow such an ethics must be guilty of conceit, the vice which Aristotle associates with excess in the sphere of honour and dishonour. But as I noted above, the only way for modern writers to reject the mean as a first criterion of magnanimity without promoting self-delusion is to recognize the moral agent's capacity and therefore right to judge his own worth. Once this right is recognized, the correspondence between the moral agent's estimate of his worth and his actual worth is guaranteed, and conceit is no longer theoretically possible, let alone a theoretical challenge.

That said, the notion of conceit plays a socially stabilizing role in Aristotle's theory of magnanimity, one which modern writers cannot so easily do without (as testified to by the fact that, as mentioned above, conceit slips in again through the back door of their texts, so to

speak). That socially stabilizing role is to rationalize an “arithmetically disproportionate”⁶⁴ or unequal distribution of honour by limiting some people’s claims to it, thereby minimizing the impression of distributive injustice in society. The rationality or proportionality of what Aristotle calls distributive justice involves four factors: two persons and two shares. Distributive justice occurs when the shares given to these two persons are in the same proportion as the proportion between the two people, that is, their relative merit.⁶⁵ Aristotle doesn’t subscribe to the egalitarian notion that any two persons deserve half of a given pie; for him, if the two persons receiving such an equal share are not themselves equal in merit the distribution is actually unjust. By this logic, the conceited man’s claims to honour can be invalidated because, although they are no more extreme than the magnanimous man’s, they are disproportional with regard to the relative merit of the two men. Modern writers cannot appeal to this logic, however, having effectively forfeited the resource of conceit. Unlike Aristotle, they are committed in principle to recognizing all extreme claims, not just the magnanimous man’s. The biggest challenge to their theory, I therefore contend—and the primary consequence of rejecting the mean—is the threat of distributive injustice. (One may prematurely conclude here that the modern writers in question, by my own testimony given above, fail to meet this challenge since they portray a mediocre artist whose actions lead precisely to a situation of distributive injustice. But note that it is only the mediocre artist and not the genius who is said to produce such injustice. The genius supposedly pursues honour to the extreme without unjust consequences.)

But, one may ask, if conceit functions in Aristotle to rationalize an arithmetically disproportionate or unequal distribution of honour and other external goods, then why do modern writers need it? Their recognition of all extreme claims commits them to an arithmetically proportionate or equal distribution, which wouldn’t seem to require any such

rationalization. This question assumes, however, that an equal distribution of honour and other external goods is possible, that everybody can get as much honour as they desire in the same way, for instance, that they can get as much air as they desire. But air is not (at least not yet) a public good or commodity the way honour is, not only because no one has found a way to capture and bottle all of it, but because the supply of air is so great that no one deprives another of their own share by breathing it. Honour, a scarcer good, is another story. Aristotle calls honour and other external goods “divisible” because, as Bernard Williams puts it, when one person gets more of them, another gets less.⁶⁶ This divisibility can probably be explained even more radically than as a function of supply and demand. It would seem to be in the nature of honour at least, if not every external good, that its value is differentially constituted. That is, honour makes one stand out from the crowd, so that, paradoxically, if everyone were to have it, no one would have it, and the success of some claimants to honour is inevitably predicated upon the failure of other claimants. This is perhaps the fundamental reason why Aristotle has to limit claims to honour—not only by distributing it according to merit, but by insisting that one should cultivate a moderate disposition towards it. Modern writers forfeit both of these limiting functions when they reject the mean, and thereby commit themselves to a seemingly impossible standard of distributive justice.

However, one can imagine at least two plausible routes out of this dilemma which modern writers might attempt before ultimately resorting to conceit again. They might first of all continue to describe honour as divisible, its availability depending largely on good and bad fortune, even while promoting the cultivation of an extreme disposition towards it. But instead of attempting to make good on all the resulting extreme claims, they could promote extreme emotion towards honour as an end in itself. Since the value of honour wouldn't lie in

itself but in the extreme emotions it is capable of eliciting, the question of how to fulfill all claims to it would be moot. In fact, the impossibility of doing so would probably be considered a plus insofar as it would increase the intensity of the vaunted emotions honour elicits. This validation of extreme emotion for its own sake sounds very Romantic, but can it still be called an ethics? Especially insofar as the extreme emotions in question are not promoted in the interest of community or sympathy towards one's fellow humans—arguably the “saving grace” of a Romantic philosophy which hasn't yet completely expunged ethical action in favour of aesthetic experience—but are fuelled by an unfulfillable desire for personal aggrandizement. To this extent, this first route out of the dilemma bears a stronger resemblance to the aesthetically oriented critical strain which Scodel isolates.

A second plausible and more obvious route out of the dilemma would be to assert against Aristotle the indivisibility or “multipliability”—and thus the universal availability—of honour. All extreme claims could then, in principle, be met, and there would be no distributive injustice. Of course, it would remain to be proven that honour can be considered an indivisible or multipliable good, but the problem of distributive injustice would at least be shifted.

This second route out of the dilemma can be further broken down, and I will do so in the next chapter as I follow the modern attempt to avoid the primary consequence of rejecting the mean, namely, distributive injustice. In the next chapter I will also elaborate upon my anticipations of the causes of that rejection, namely, the restrictions which the doctrine of the mean places upon the moral agent's freedom to cultivate his extreme disposition towards his self-worth and the worth of honour. I will verify that in response to Aristotle's doctrine some modern writers insist upon the moral agent's capacity and right to

determine those two values themselves.

Chapter 3: Freedom of Subjectivity as a Cause of the Mean's Rejection

Introduction

My object in this chapter is twofold: One, to make a plausible case for the idea that the modern principle of freedom of subjectivity as identified by Hegel is a cause of the modern rejection of the mean, insofar as that principle reflects a belief in the moral agent's capacity and right to cultivate the extreme inclinations of his appetitive faculty; and two, to show how, in keeping with Aristotle's understanding of external goods as divisible, this cultivation threatens to produce distributive injustice.

The fact that I restrict my focus here to a principle should not, as I took pains to make clear in my introduction, be construed as a commitment to a Hegelian or generally idealistic vision of history. I am claiming neither that freedom of subjectivity is the only cause of the modern rejection of the mean and that material practices have nothing to do with it, nor that the principle itself has no connection to material practices. On the contrary, a fundamental assumption of this dissertation is that the rising fortunes of the principle of freedom of subjectivity go hand in hand with the rising fortunes of the middle class, who seek philosophical justification for their material pursuits. This assumed causal connection combined with my hypothesis that the primary consequence of the principled rejection of the mean is the threat of distributive justice should make it clear that my topic has a material or, more specifically, economic dimension.

But this is not to say that I see no transformative power in the contradiction which arises from that principle. Without either subscribing to Hegel's claim that such contradiction is the motor of history or totally discounting the Marxian claim that philosophical activity, whatever its apparent contradictions, tends to stall history, I do consider that incoherences in cultural phenomena like the principle of freedom of subjectivity have the power to make

economic contradictions visible to those who suffer under them and, to this extent, the power to impell the unjustly treated individual in the direction of a more just social order.

Admittedly, though, my attempt to find in Hegel at least one of the grounds for the modern rejection of the mean is only partly justified by Hegel's own discussion of Aristotle in his Lectures on the History of Philosophy. For in those lectures, Hegel, though acknowledging Aristotelian philosophy's historically conditioned limitations, emphasizes the affinity or continuity between his own thought and Aristotle's rather than any break between them. However, Hegel's representation of Aristotle is not entirely trustworthy, as he makes an explicit effort in the Lectures to subsume Aristotle within his own system—to translate him, as he says: "We must simply give ourselves the trouble to understand [Aristotle's reflections on ethics], and to translate them into our own form of speech, conception and thought; and this is certainly difficult."⁶⁷ Most studies of the Aristotle-Hegel connection, in fact, are attempts to correct for Hegel's creative misinterpretations of Aristotle. One such study, the one I will be primarily referring to in this chapter, is Hegel & Aristotle by Alfredo Ferrarin.

There is also something a little opportunistic about my use of Hegel, for although his identification of the principle of freedom of subjectivity suggests to me a possible cause for the modern rejection of the mean which one can read back into Aristotle, and although his discussion of the contradiction which arises from that principle suggests a problematic consequence of rejecting the mean which one can also read back into Aristotle, I do not follow Hegel in his dialectical development of that contradiction. Hegel's final position lies not only beyond art⁶⁸, but beyond the individual subject, in what Jürgen Habermas calls the "higher-level subjectivity of the state."⁶⁹ From the standpoint of this higher-level subjectivity even the individual genius, far from appearing capable of transcending mediocrity, looks

decidedly mediocre. To quote Vincent Descombes: “By pronouncing the speculative utterance (‘I am everything which is’), the [Hegelian] thinker abolishes his humanity along with his particularity, since evidently a man, as such, is never any more than a mediocre fragment of the world.”⁷⁰ By contrast, the critical strain which I am attempting to isolate retains faith not only in art but in the genius of the individual subject. My opportunistic abandonment of Hegel is therefore called for at the point where he no longer exerts any influence on that critical strain.

In addition to the above-mentioned Ferrarin study, I will turn to Hegel’s Elements of the Philosophy of Right as well as some of the secondary literature on that text in order to support my claims.

The Principle of freedom of subjectivity

In the early nineteenth century, Hegel wrote in his Elements of the Philosophy of Right (1820) that “the principle of the modern world is freedom of subjectivity, the principle that all the essential factors present in the intellectual whole are now coming into their right in the course of their development.”⁷¹ In the most general terms, the principle of freedom of subjectivity recognizes the subject’s capacity and right to test against her own reason the validity of norms previously imposed from the outside, and to retain only those which stand up to that test. Thus, the Protestants can be said to uphold the principle of subjectivity when “[a]gainst faith in the authority of preaching and tradition, “they assert[] the authority of the subject relying upon his own insight....”⁷² But it isn’t just religious life that is affected by the principle of subjectivity: as Habermas says, “state, and society as well as science, morality, and art are transformed into just so many embodiments of the principle of subjectivity.”⁷³ In the course of this transformation, each faculty associated with these separate spheres of

activity is set upon its own self-assured foundation—including the moral or appetitive faculty.

But how much freedom does the modern appetitive faculty really have as a result? Certainly, Aristotle’s claim that the appetitive part of the soul, seat of the moral virtues, is rational only “in the sense that a child pays attention to its father”⁷⁴ doesn’t live up to our common conception of freedom, but we need to make certain we understand what Hegel means when he uses the word. (It may seem invalid to use Hegel’s definition of freedom to understand the notion of freedom implicit in the principle of freedom of subjectivity given that Hegel finds the latter principle to be limiting in its contradictions. Nonetheless, the freedom which Hegel holds up is the freedom which the principle of freedom of subjectivity promotes—it’s just that followers of the principle trip over its contradictions, as it were, on the way to that freedom. After all, there would be no contradiction in the principle of freedom of subjectivity if, in following it, moral agents didn’t fall short of the degree of freedom it promotes.) And it’s not just what Hegel means by “freedom” that we have to be sure we understand: in order to appreciate fully how the modern principle of freedom of subjectivity promotes the cultivation of the appetitive faculty’s extreme inclinations, Hegelian “subjectivity” and “right” also need to be defined. Because these three concepts are so closely related in Hegel’s system, my analyses of each will significantly overlap, to the point where each analysis can almost support on its own (albeit from a slightly different angle) my hypotheses that the modern principle identified by Hegel is one of the causes of the modern rejection of the mean, and that the contradiction which arises from it is a consequence partly foreseen by Aristotle. For in recognizing the moral agent’s capacity and right to cultivate the extreme inclinations of his appetitive faculty while maintaining the necessity of his doing his duty to others, modern writers who uphold the principle of freedom

of subjectivity commit themselves to an incoherent standard of distributive justice that, in dividing the moral agent, either paralyzes him or turns him unjustly towards an exclusive concern with either his own good or a common good which excludes him.

**A new definition of freedom: cause and consequence of the modern rejection of
the mean**

As Allen Wood has noted,⁷⁵ Hegelian freedom cannot be understood in the conventional sense of the possibility of acting, i.e., the freedom to exercise any number of options; Hegelian freedom is instead action itself, and an action by which the subject is determined. To be determined hardly seems conducive to freedom, and one might conclude prematurely that a determination of the subject's appetitive faculty in accordance with the modern principle of freedom of subjectivity constitutes little or no advance on Aristotle's ideal of a dependent and childlike appetitive faculty whose extreme inclinations need moderating. However, Hegel adds an essential qualifier to this determination of the appetitive faculty: because the agent is determined by his own action, his is a self-determination (and presumably not in the Aristotelian sense that a child who pays attention to his father could be said to be self-determined because he is a part of the father's self: it would seem that in accordance with the principle of freedom of subjectivity the appetitive faculty can follow its own extreme inclinations and does not need to take orders from any other faculty, though this still remains to be confirmed). Hegel's qualification makes this determination seem somewhat more compatible with our ideas about freedom.

Still, one might wonder why Hegel insists upon any form of determination at all, why he doesn't simply conventionally locate freedom in the realm of the undetermined, the realm

of untrammelled possibility. The reason is that Hegel sees the attempt to remain undetermined as a form of confinement, a retreat into the self in order to avoid dealing with externals. As Wood puts it elsewhere, Hegel rejects what he sees as the Stoic (and specifically Epictetan) strategy of “aloofness from our external condition.... Such a strategy is self-defeating, like the strategy of the neurotic personality that avoids the trauma of failure by precluding from the outset any possibility of success.”⁷⁶ For Hegel, this Stoic strategy takes to the limit the “self-protective attitude”⁷⁷ which he associates with ancient Roman-style property law, a law instituted by a society of individuals who feel the need for “social protection against others and against the whole.”⁷⁸ I take Hegel to mean here that the Stoics are so afraid of losing what is theirs to others, that they truly value only what cannot be taken away from them—namely, their virtue. The Stoics notoriously reserve the term “good” for virtue, calling externals like honour and wealth “preferred indifferents” because, although one’s “manner of using them is constitutive of happiness or unhappiness,” “it is possible to be happy even without these.”⁷⁹

But of course we are not concerned so much with the Stoics at the moment as with Aristotle. The more pertinent question, then, is whether Hegel considers the level of determination by external goods which Aristotle sanctions to be sufficient for freedom. Does Aristotle’s moral agent venture far enough out from the bastion of the self for Hegel’s taste? That is, does he follow the extreme inclinations of his appetitive faculty far enough, or are those inclinations towards external goods like honour unduly moderated by reason? I would be remiss if I didn’t at least attempt to answer this question by turning to a passage in the Lectures where Hegel explicitly lauds Aristotle’s notion that reason should guide the passions. As Ferrarin puts it, Hegel praises Aristotle for identifying in the “unity of character,

as the result of reason's guidance and habituation of the passions, the correct relation between the lower and higher parts of the soul. . . ."⁸⁰ One might easily interpret this support for Aristotle to mean that the Hegelian moral agent should not be so determined by external goods as to follow the extreme inclinations of his appetitive faculty. But one should be leary of this conclusion, if only because when Hegel talks about "unity" of character, he means something much more radical than Aristotle would have accepted. For Hegel, the appetitive faculty's pursuits are ultimately determinations of reason (even if this fact isn't historically recognized right away), so the guiding of the appetitive faculty by reason is really just reason determining itself. Although this is reminiscent of Aristotle's paternal metaphor—the child being part of the father, the father when giving orders is really just ordering himself—there is a crucial difference: in Hegel, reason determines itself in order to come to know itself; in Aristotle, the father (rational part of the soul) already knows what needs to be known, and is merely imparting that wisdom to his child (the irrational or only partly rational part). True, according to Aristotelian ethics the rational part of the soul must have the obedience of the irrational or only partly rational part if the moral agent is to be fully moral since "knowing about [acts that are just and admirable and good for man] does not make us any more capable of doing them, if the virtues are states of character."⁸¹ Nonetheless, even if the rational part can't do without the other part, it still knows. By contrast, reason in Hegel must do or produce or determine itself in order to know (itself). This difference between Aristotle and Hegel at the level of their psychological theory is reflected at the level of their politics as well, where it manifests itself as a difference in the way they conceive the relationship between self and other. This difference in their conceptions of that relationship has, in turn, a bearing on the relative importance of external goods to freedom in their respective ethical

systems. However, approaching the question of external goods from this angle is unnecessarily convoluted at this point. I only bring up the difference in order to cast suspicion on Hegel's explicit support for Aristotelian psychology. Having dealt with this "deceptive" passage, I will now follow my own textual approach to the question of the respective levels of determination by external goods prescribed by Aristotle and Hegel.

The first thing one can say in favour of Aristotle from Hegel's point of view is that he clearly doesn't take as negatively extreme a view of external goods as the Stoics do, by which I mean not only that the Stoics take a deficient interest in external goods relative to the Aristotelian mean, but that, in Hegelian terms, the freedom or self-sufficiency that characterizes Aristotelian happiness is a more positive or concrete type of freedom than the negative or abstract freedom of the Stoics. That is, the state of self-sufficiency which characterizes Stoic happiness requires the moral agent to remain undetermined by external goods—a negative or abstract freedom in Hegelian terms—while the state of self-sufficiency which characterizes Aristotelian happiness requires the moral agent to be determined by external goods to some degree. For although, as already mentioned, Aristotle doesn't consider external goods to be as valuable as goods of the soul because they are in part means and not ends in themselves, he also says that "all the other goods [besides goods of the soul] either are necessary pre-conditions of happiness or naturally contribute to it and serve as its instruments."⁸² More tellingly, Aristotle caps these comments off with the very unStoic claim that "[i]n the course of life we encounter many reverses [including, presumably, the loss of external goods like honour] and all kinds of vicissitudes, and in old age even the most prosperous of men may be involved in great misfortunes, as we are told about Priam in the Trojan poems. Nobody calls happy a man who suffered fortunes like his and met a miserable

end.”⁸³ Despite the fact, then, that Aristotle recognizes the uncertainty of the moral agent’s continued possession of external goods, he is not driven like the Stoics to claim that the moral agent can be happy without them. Instead, he continues to assert that moral agents should go out and pursue external goods as a necessary means to their happiness.

But does even the goal of an uncertain possession of external goods go far enough towards the opposite, positive extreme for Hegel? Are such uncertain pursuits compatible with Hegelian freedom? The answer lies in an elaborated version of Hegel’s definition of freedom, a version which only apparently contradicts Hegel’s insistence that the moral agent should not avoid dealing with externals. According to this elaborated version, the free moral agent is “not at all [determined] by anything external.”⁸⁴ This apparent contradiction is explained by Hegel’s belief that the path towards freedom involves not only confronting externals, but making them one’s own, at which point one is truly no longer determined by them for one cannot be determined by what is one’s own. One can, however, be determined by what one repudiates (Cf. Hegel’s notion of fate, a kind of proto-Freudian return of the repressed), which is presumably why Hegel rejects the abstract freedom of the Stoics. Hegel, in sum, promotes a degree of self-sufficiency or freedom that is as extreme as the Stoics’, but in the positive direction, by which I mean not only that the Hegelian moral agent takes an excessive interest in external goods relative to the Aristotelian mean, but that Hegelian freedom, though absolute, is concrete rather than abstract because it has passed through the state or states of being determined by external goods. In order for the moral agent to attain this Hegelian degree of freedom, his appetitive faculty must be allowed to develop its extreme inclinations towards external goods, since full acquisition of the latter, far from simply being a means to the freedom or self-sufficiency characteristic of happiness, actually

constitutes that freedom for Hegel. From this perspective, the restriction which Aristotle's doctrine of the mean puts on the appetitive faculty is a restriction upon the moral agent's capacity to attain freedom. Modern writers who follow the principle of freedom of subjectivity, therefore, have cause to reject the mean.

But though modern writers may find in the principle of freedom of subjectivity—and more precisely in the degree of freedom that principle promotes—cause to reject the mean, what are the consequences of this rejection? Is the principle of freedom of subjectivity compatible with distributive justice? Can everyone's extreme claims to external goods be met given that, according to Aristotle, external goods are divisible? Considering Hegel's broad view of the principle's inability to reunite society after freeing its individuals from slavish obedience to external authority, it would seem that he doesn't think so. As Jürgen Habermas points out, Hegel sees the principle of freedom of subjectivity as “one-sided.” That is, although it possesses “an unexampled power to bring about the formation [*Bildung*] of subjective freedom and reflection and to undermine religion, which heretofore had appeared as an absolutely unifying force The principle of subjectivity is not powerful enough to regenerate the unifying power of religion in the medium of reason.”⁸⁵ What is more socially disunifying than the competitive, all-out pursuit of a limited amount of goods?

But, one may ask, who says that modern writers are interested in distributive justice as well as freedom? Does their principle of freedom of subjectivity call for or require the former? Yes, since without distributive justice, freedom is ultimately lost. A situation of distributive injustice means that some individuals have failed to develop the extreme inclinations of their appetitive faculty because they came up against the extreme inclinations of others. Let's not forget, Hegel doesn't define freedom as the mere potential to act: it isn't

enough for subjects simply to have the opportunity to cultivate their extreme inclinations towards external goods; they must actually be able to acquire those goods. Just as one cannot develop a courageous disposition in the absence of perilous situations, one cannot cultivate an extreme disposition towards external goods in the absence of those goods—and envy doesn't count as such a disposition. According a high value to opportunity is typical of the capitalist state, but it tends to mask the institutionalized unevenness of the playing field by attributing responsibility for failed outcomes to the individual. True, if one imagines a group of subjects in something like a state of nature into which the principle of freedom of subjectivity is suddenly introduced, then subjects will, for a while, be able to cultivate their extreme inclinations; however, as soon as the initial scramble for honour and other external goods is over and the successful group enters into a period of consolidation, then such cultivation will end for some. For that matter, even the freedom of the successful will be compromised insofar as they are forced to deal constantly with resistance from the less fortunate.

My insistence that all subjects should ultimately possess the external goods towards which they are inclined may seem to make for an infantile ethics. Doesn't maturity require that one adjust one's expectations to reality? Well, that is one definition of maturity, but it is a definition better suited to an ethics which neither values external goods highly (whether for anti-materialist reasons or because their acquisition is always uncertain and provisional) nor equates their possession with moral maturity in the sense of self-sufficiency. It is undoubtedly more difficult in the twenty-first century than it was in, say, the eighteenth, to believe in a link between moral maturity or self-sufficiency and the possession of external goods, but the principle of freedom of subjectivity nonetheless posits such a link.

Needless to say, it's not enough for the state to impose distributive justice from without; subjective freedom would be lost in this case as well since it is precisely about subjects taking their norms from themselves. For the principle of freedom of subjectivity to be preserved, distributive justice must arise out of the actions of subjects themselves. But such actions cannot conflict with subjects' cultivation of their extreme dispositions—self-sacrifice appears to be immoral according to the principle of freedom of subjectivity—so we are back to the same old contradiction.

Because Hegel sees this contradiction in the principle of freedom of subjectivity, he looks to the aforementioned “higher-level subjectivity of the state” for the unifying power which was lost with religion; however, as I also said above, this solution takes him outside the focus of my dissertation. I will therefore turn now to Hegel's definition of subjectivity.

Subjectivity and the consequence of the modern rejection of the mean

Assuming that I have plausibly demonstrated that the conception of freedom implicit in the principle of freedom of subjectivity gives modern writers cause to reject the mean, I will attempt to give evidence in this section for my second hypothesis, namely, that the modern rejection of the mean leads to the threat of distributive justice.

Subjective freedom as discussed above corresponds for Hegel to a conception of the will which is an advance on the historically earlier conception of it as an undetermined capacity for action, that capacity which Hegel claims—rather reductively, it should be said—the Stoics wrongheadedly attempt to preserve by retreating from the external world. Hegel's term for the earlier stage of the agent's conception of his powers is “personality”⁸⁶: in Hegelian terms, the Stoics and the ancient Romans (partially overlapping categories, of

course) conceived of themselves as persons. In subjectivity, on the other hand, the concept of the will is given external, determinate existence.⁸⁷ Moderns do not only think of themselves as persons, but as subjects, who give “meaning to their lives through the particular choices they make....and derive what Hegel calls ‘self-satisfaction’ from their role in determining for themselves what will count as their own particular good or happiness.”⁸⁸

But although the subject may derive self-satisfaction from determining her own particular happiness, it is far from certain that the subject’s will conforms to anything like a universal will, and without such conformity the subject is bound to be the object of a communal sense of distributive injustice. Can the particularized will have universal validity? Or, to put it another way, does the concept of the will, in being given the determinate existence of subjectivity, lose the predicate of universality which defined it when it was conceived of as personality? The indirect and partial answer to the latter question is that, in Hegel, nothing is lost or forgotten in the historical unfolding of the concept’s meaning. In being given external, natural embodiment, the formerly abstract concept of the will isn’t simply conceived now as a strictly natural will. It is conceived precisely as the particularization of the former; its relation to that previous concept is therefore preserved. It is by recognizing itself in the abstract will—by being “reflected” into itself, as Hegel says—that the particular will retains an element of the latter’s universality. Hegel criticizes those who oppose the concepts of the will as abstract personality and particular subjectivity as if they are completely isolated moments in the concept’s history. According to Hegel, those who engage in such “abstract reflection” often disregard the great things which some moral agents produce for the world, focusing exclusively on the subjective satisfactions—power, honour and fame—which these agents acquire in return. For Hegel, then, particular wills,

even while satisfying themselves, may perform universally acclaimed deeds:

Abstract reflection ... fixes this moment [of the will as particular subjectivity] in its distinction from and opposition to the universal.... It is just this type of ratiocination which adduces that familiar psychological view of history which understands how to belittle and disparage all great deeds and great men by transforming into the main intention and operative motive of actions the inclinations and passions which likewise found their satisfaction from the achievement of something substantive.... Such ratiocination assures us that, while great actions ... have produced greatness in the world and have had as their consequences for the individual agent power, honour, and fame, still what belongs to the individual is not the greatness itself but what has accrued to him from it, this purely particular and external result.... Reflection of this sort stops short at the subjective side of great men....⁸⁹

But while they may produce this greatness in the world, particular wills do not necessarily do so. The uncertainty stems from the fact that the universal element preserved in the particularized concept of the will is still the old abstract conception of will as personality, as an unlimited possibility for action which doesn't take into account the specific desires which differentiate one subject from another. So although the particular will recognizes not only itself but others in that universal will, it can't always adequately conceive of those others in the specificity of their desires. As far as determining desires go, it is more confident about its own, and whether the fulfillment of those will result in the happiness of others as well is still an open question:

The subjective element of the will, with its particular content—welfare [or

happiness], is reflected into itself and infinite and so stands related to the universal element, to the principle of the will. This moment of universality, posited first of all within this particular content itself, is the welfare of others also, or specified completely, though quite emptily, the welfare of all. The welfare of many other unspecified particulars is thus also an essential end and right of subjectivity. But since the absolutely universal, in distinction from such a particular content, has not so far been further determined as “the right” [the abstract right of the person], it follows that these ends of particularity, differing as they do from the universal, may be in conformity with it, but they also may not.⁹⁰

Insofar as the particular content of the will conceived as subjectivity can be distinguished from the absolutely universal form of the will conceived as personality, the content of the subjective will is still at least partially natural, not fully integrated into a human project. Given, then, that the subject, in pursuing the natural content of happiness, is still externally determined rather than self-determined, can the subject’s inclinations be trusted to do the work of his reason? Should the subject’s inclinations be moderated so that, or until, the difference between the abstract universal and the particular content can be resolved? No, because this difference is part of the historical process; it is the contradiction that propels the subject to the next level of consciousness, where she will undertake ends that are higher than happiness but do not exclude it. As Ferrarin confirms: “Happiness is the stage at which the will has a content that is still natural and given. This does not mean that individual inclinations should be curbed and happiness annulled; on the contrary, striving for happiness provides us with the individual basis and starting point for the beginning of actions

that then become directed by reason to higher ends.”⁹¹ So there is a limit to the freedom or self-determination enjoyed by the will conceived as subjectivity, but what freedom the subject does have to exercise her inclinations is not restricted or moderated for all that.

Not that Hegel wouldn't characterize such an exercise as potentially excessive. It is excessive when it isn't exercised by great men who, in their pursuit of happiness—e.g., honour, wealth and fame—also manage to produce great things in the world and so presumably steer clear of that extreme of distributive injustice which normally follows upon an active egotism. But this isn't to say that Hegel prescribes the mean. For one thing (though I'm not sure Hegel makes this point), not all men can be great, obviously, so the mean is a principle whose usefulness is limited, especially to a philosophy which stresses that all adult men of sound mind are capable of reason. Exceptionality cannot be the foundation of a universal aspiration. For another thing, and related to this last point, the great man's exceptionality ties him to the natural realm, the realm of unfree external determination, in both a subjective and an objective way. Objectively, his exceptionality is required or determined by the lack of ethical development in the community of which he is a part; only in an ethically underdeveloped community is exceptionality or genius necessary to make up this lack:

[W]hen societies and communities are uncivilized ... ethical conditions and their actualization are more a matter of private choice or the natural genius of an exceptional individual. For instance, it was especially to Hercules that the ancients ascribed virtue. In the states of antiquity, ethical life had not grown into this free system of an objective order self-subsistently developed, and consequently it was by the personal genius of individuals that this defect had

to be made good.⁹²

Subjectively, the exceptional man's character is determined by a natural capacity for moral action, not a socially mediated capacity. That is, insofar as there is no well-developed ethical order around him to make apparent the right course of action in given situations, the exceptional man must rely on his natural talent for virtuous action: "Virtue is the ethical order reflected in the individual character so far as that character is determined by its natural endowment."⁹³ A mean disposition, then, no less than an excessive one, remains externally conditioned—particular, insofar as it hasn't integrated all externals and become universal, its occasional correspondence to the universal will still having something of the accidental about it. In fact, it is this particularity of virtuous action which accounts for its being defined as a mean between deficiency and excess:

Since virtues are ethical principles applied to the particular, and since in this their subjective aspect they are something indeterminate, there turns up here for determining them the quantitative principle of more or less. The result is that consideration of them introduces their corresponding defects or vices, as in Aristotle, who defined each particular virtue as strictly a mean between an excess and a deficiency.⁹⁴

As for why Hegel prefers excess to the mean given that both dispositions are externally determined, the answer seems to be twofold: One: men who aren't great, even though they may benefit in other ways from great men's deeds, learn little from those deeds because they are not, strictly speaking, their own projects. The Hegelian subject must himself work towards freedom. From this perspective, the excessive inclinations of men who aren't great have the virtue of being those men's own inclinations. Two: The great man, by

avoiding the extremes of pusillanimity and, especially, conceit or egotism, can rig a kind of natural justice which goes some way towards stabilizing a partially unfree order (based on the concept of will as subjectivity) that would otherwise be overturned by its contradictions—contradiction being for Hegel the developmental motor in the history of the concept. From this perspective, an excessive disposition has the virtue of producing a clear contradiction: in accordance with the principle of subjectivity, the subject has the right—the moral and not just legal right—to freely exercise his inclinations, but when those inclinations are excessive (as they must be for the reasons discussed above), his moral claim on the external goods which he pursues in this way does not have universal validity. His right to subjective freedom, in short, is simultaneously validated and invalidated. This contradiction is inherent in the principle of freedom of subjectivity.

But, once again, Hegel's solution to this contradiction—the ethical life which the state makes possible—takes us beyond the focus of my topic. I will therefore turn to the definition of right.

Right and the cause and consequence of the modern rejection of the mean

For Hegel, “[a]n existent of any sort embodying the free will, this is what right is.”⁹⁵ Thus, the external goods which the subject pursues via the free exercise of his appetitive faculty are rights, since by integrating them into his projects he makes them expressions or embodiments of his free will. And since the will is progressively freer—not less free—as it integrates more and more of the external world, the subject's development of his extreme inclinations brings him that much more into his rights. There seems to be no question of forcing the moderation of those inclinations and thereby restricting the subject's rights.

Of course, as a member of a merely moral community, one in which the universal has not yet been determined any further than the abstract right of the person, the subject all too easily infringes upon the rights which all other subjects have to their own particular goods. This situation looks very much like distributive injustice, caused as in Aristotle by conceit, i.e., the subject's egotistical (but perhaps pardonable given the lack of a well-developed ethical order) focus upon his own good alone. One might expect this unjust outcome to call forth some restriction on the offending subject's rights; however, Hegel seems to reserve the term "injustice" (Unrecht) for a violation of abstract right,⁹⁶ and the logic of retribution he describes unfolding in the same context is the fate of the violator of abstract right alone: "[W]hen I commit a crime, I set up a law making it permissible for others to violate my right to the same extent that my crime violates the right of its victim."⁹⁷ This retributive logic is reminiscent of Kant's categorical imperative, which essentially states that one should never act unless one can also will that one's grounds for acting in that way become a universal law. What happens to Hegel's criminal is that by violating the abstract right of another, he (unwittingly) sets up the grounds of his violation as a universal law, which consequently comes back to bite him. In both Kant and Hegel, this retributive logic serves to reveal an action as unreasonable (though in Kant, in contrast to Hegel, it is meant to reveal this before the agent acts, not after. Hegel's agent learns through experience, not mere thought experiment). There is no corresponding discussion of this retributive logic in Hegel's discussion of morality. When, in the introduction to his Philosophy of Right, Hegel talks generally (i.e., not in the specific context of abstract right) about the "restriction" of a right,⁹⁸ he isn't referring to the unfolding logic of retribution. True, as in the case of the person, when the right embodied by the free will of a subject (that is, the right which consists of the

subject's particular good or happiness) comes into conflict with the rights of other subjects to their own particular goods, a certain unreasonableness is revealed to the agent, namely, the limits of his conception of freedom of the will as subjectivity. After all, if the will of the subject were absolutely free, it would not conflict with anything—there would be nothing external to it with which it could conflict. However, unlike in the case of the person, the result of this conflict is not a retributive violation of the subject's right to happiness, but a “subordination” of that right. Subordination, not violation, is the meaning of restriction when Hegel speaks generally about rights:

Every stage in the development of the Idea of freedom has its own special right, since it is the embodiment of freedom in one of its specific forms.... [These rights] can come into collision with each only in so far as they are all on the same footing as rights. If mind's moral attitude were not also a right, or freedom in one of its forms, it could not possibly come into collision with the right of personality or with any other right, because any right whatever has inherent in it the concept of freedom.... Yet at the same time collision involves another moment, namely the fact that it is restrictive, and so if two rights collide one is subordinated to the other.⁹⁹

There may seem to be little to choose between violation and subordination, but the difference is crucial in precisely the terms which concern us here. Whereas the logic of retribution, in violating the criminal's own rights as a person to the same extent as he violated his victim's, forcefully moderates (at the very least) his will's embodiment or development, the logic that leads to subordination allows the subject to continue pursuing free-will-embodying externals to the extreme by preserving his claim to those externals in a higher concept of the will

which doesn't run into the right-infringing contradictions of subjectivity. That higher concept of the will is ethical life, whose embodiment is the state. Subjects' rights are subordinated to the rights embodied by the state: "civil society [the sphere of subjects' pursuit of their own particular good] depend[s] on the political state and [is] subordinate to it."¹⁰⁰ As the verb "depends" suggests, this subordination of the subject's rights doesn't mean a concession of rights but rather a fulfillment of them. In the state, according to Hegel, the subject's right to pursue happiness to the extreme is fully realized, undisturbed by the contradiction between particular goods and the universal good to which the principle of subjectivity gives rise: "The principle of modern states has prodigious strength and depth because it allows the principle of subjectivity to progress to its culmination in the extreme of self-subsistent personal particularity, and yet at the same time brings it back to the substantive unity and so maintains this unity in the principle of subjectivity itself."¹⁰¹

My purpose in this chapter has been to demonstrate that the modern principle of freedom of subjectivity departs from Aristotelian ethics by granting subjects the right to pursue their happiness or particular good to the extreme, a departure which gives rise to a quintessentially modern problem: the conflict between that right and duty to the common good, which, if left unresolved, creates a situation of distributive injustice. As I said in the introduction to this chapter, Hegel usefully articulates this modern principle and its inherent contradiction, but his attempt to resolve the latter takes him beyond the scope of my dissertation. For one thing, he looks for resolution in the political sphere, the sphere of the modern state, rather than in art, the sphere over which the critical strain I'm trying to isolate presides. For another, the individual subject—the artist in my primary texts—is not the agent of this resolution: the modern state is not the embodiment of his will, but that of a higher-

level subjectivity. The subject's contribution, as subject, to the advance of freedom is therefore unconscious; from his own perspective, he is simply attending selfishly to his own needs. This distinguishes Hegel's ethics not only from Aristotle's, as Ferrarin argues in the following passage, but from the ethics of the mediocre-artist narrative, where an egotistical character is censured: the "innermost core [of Hegelian happiness] is not Aristotelian.... Happiness is individual happiness, the selfish satisfaction of interests that have nothing to do with the common good, and which nonetheless are conducive to it. Through happiness, the cunning of reason reaches very far."¹⁰²

But before I turn to a modern philosopher—Kant—who attempts to resolve the conflict between the subject's right and duty without taking conscious responsibility for that resolution away from him, and who can at least partially illuminate the aesthetic grounds of the modern judgment of mediocrity, I will very briefly consider the development of the principle of freedom of subjectivity in the early modern period and explain why the early moderns don't come up against the contradiction inherent in it.

The early modern period

In 16th- and 17th-century Europe several civil wars raged: England's civil war pitted the Parliamentarians against the Cavaliers, the French Wars of Religion saw a clash between the Huguenots and the Catholics, and Germany's Thirty Years' War was fought between the Protestant Union and the Catholic League. Though arising from a complex of factors, all of these civil wars featured Catholic or Church of England vs. Protestant factions, the latter fighting in no small part for the right already alluded to above, namely, the political right to rely upon their own insight rather than the Church in religious matters. Given the early moderns' experience of these wars of conscience, it is perhaps not surprising that there are

attempts in this period to limit a divisive freedom of subjectivity to the private sphere and to leave the public sphere intact. One result of this limitation of freedom of subjectivity is that many early writers promote the extreme pursuit of external goods by the private individual but continue to embrace a mean disposition when it comes to the individual's political role. Joshua Scodel points out that the early modern writer Francis Bacon, for example, “distinguishes between rules appropriate to men considered as ‘congregate’ (social) and ‘segregate’ (individual) beings.”¹⁰³ When it's a matter of “increasing the individual's power” with respect to “worldly success—what the Advancement calls the ‘Architecture of Fortune—’” Bacon goes “much further ... in rejecting the ethical mean”¹⁰⁴; when, on the other hand, it's a matter of “congregate” man, Bacon “reveals his greater conservatism ... by treating rulers' and subjects' ideal behaviour in terms of ... mean ‘temperament’ conceived of as the proper blending of opposite extremes.”¹⁰⁵

The principle of freedom of subjectivity, in validating the development of the moral faculty's excessive tendencies, doesn't only recognize the agent's right to determine her own good as an individual but her own good as a citizen or member of a social group as well, for the external goods which she desires cross the boundary between individual and collective life (political rule, for instance, is an honour according to Aristotle¹⁰⁶). And once she has crossed this boundary in the quest for political honour, she must of necessity be concerned not only with her own good but the good of others—at least as long as political honour is defined in the classical sense in terms of the capacity for distributive justice. The principle of subjectivity thus gives the agent a say in the social distribution of external goods. That this right isn't recognized in the early modern period has nothing to do with any limit imposed by the principle of freedom of subjectivity itself. In fact, Bacon, as already mentioned, has to appeal to the Aristotelian mean in order to justify placing a limit on the “congregate man's”

freedom to pursue external goods into the collective sphere. But whereas Aristotle assigns the right to distribute external (and other) goods exclusively to the ruler, and validates only the claims to rulership of those who are able to rule (and be ruled) “in the interests of the whole state, not in those of just one part...,”¹⁰⁷ modernity’s principle of freedom of subjectivity, again by legitimizing the development of the moral faculty’s excessive tendencies, recognizes by definition the capacity of all agents (regardless of whether they rule in the strict sense of the term) to distribute external goods in the interest of all, for the agent’s extreme disposition would otherwise have to be considered, in contradictory fashion, unjust and therefore illegitimate. What seems to be happening in the early modern period is that the economically empowered but still largely politically disenfranchised merchant and intellectual classes are confident in all but their political desires because of the recent or ongoing experience of civil war. Thus, although areas of personal or subjective freedom are opening up, even fairly radical proponents of those freedoms, like Bacon, do not presume to extend them across the entire spectrum of personal and collective life.

Chapter 4: Kant's Ethical and Aesthetic Solutions to the Antinomy in Practical Reason

Kant's supreme good

But as I argued above, the reason Aristotle considers the appetitive faculty's excessive inclinations to be irrational is that external goods are divisible; pursued excessively, they lead to an unjust distribution. The divisibility of external goods is also what makes them less valuable than goods of the soul like virtue, which one can never have too much of nor ever reduce one's happiness by pursuing. How, then, does modernity justify granting the appetitive faculty the freedom to develop its excessive inclinations? Simply put, modernity has to claim that the moral agent's excessive—or extreme, since excess is by definition disproportionate and therefore irrational—pursuit of external goods does not result in anyone getting less than their share.

One strategy for validating this claim is to reevaluate external goods by stating or implying that they are multipliable rather than divisible—a strategy most clearly exemplified by Adam Smith, who claims that the “avarice of private greed” will “redound[...] to the welfare of the community.”¹⁰⁸ There is, however, one crucial feature of Adam Smith's theory which doesn't fit the developmental model promoted by the principle of freedom of subjectivity: Smith discounts the motives and intentions of the individual. As Robert Heilbroner puts it, Smith says “Don't try to do good.... Let good emerge as the by-product of selfishness.”¹⁰⁹ By contrast, as the importance of character in the modern mediocre-artist narrative suggests, the principle of freedom of subjectivity doesn't rely on an “invisible hand” to transmute the moral agent's extreme pursuit of external goods into the common

good. In fact, if the agent's individual pursuits automatically benefitted everyone else, then following the tendencies of his appetitive faculty could hardly be considered a form of development at all; his action would be "incidentally virtuous," to use Aristotle's phrase, rather than "done knowingly, of choice, and from a virtuous disposition."¹¹⁰ The modern moral agent who is my focus in this dissertation is expected to pursue honour (and power and wealth) in the right way.

A more representative model of modern moral development from my point of view is found in Kant, who in his Critique of Practical Reason (1788) grants the appetitive faculty or "lower faculty of desire" the exclusive and unbridled right to legislate in the sensible realm, i.e., to prescribe the precepts by means of which the moral agent is to pursue external goods—though he grants that right in the name of the "principle of self-love and private happiness"¹¹¹ rather than the principle of freedom of subjectivity (Hegel's later formulation): "To be happy is necessarily the wish of a being which, while rational, is yet finite, and is thus inevitably a ground determining its faculty of desire."¹¹² But although Kant grants the appetitive faculty this right, he is much less complacent than Smith about the concomitant prospects for distributive justice; not only does he reject any impersonal mechanism for automatically assuring the compatibility of individual happiness and the common good, he locates the moral agent's motivation for contributing to the common good—that is, for doing his duty—in a different part of the soul altogether. The principle of self-love and private happiness, Kant realizes, cannot be relied upon to orient dutiful action. If the lower or appetitive faculty is permitted to govern the "higher faculty of desire" from which the sense of duty springs, it will only enslave that faculty to its own self-loving ends. As Sebastian Gardner points out in his commentary on Kant, "[t]o the extent that we pursue ... ends ... determined by what Kant calls 'inclination'—reason does not set any ends of its own: it is

merely, in Hume's phrase, the slave of the passions."¹¹³ Therefore, and again in keeping with the principle of freedom of subjectivity, Kant in turn grants the higher faculty of desire exclusive right to legislate in the supersensible realm, though he does so in the name of the principle of morality: "The principle of morality consists solely in this: that there is independence of everything bound up with what...constitutes the element of matter..."¹¹⁴

Despite this clear demarcation of the realms in which the lower and higher faculties of desire are free to legislate, Kant does acknowledge that the cultivation of the higher faculty "restricts in many ways—indeed can reduce to less than nothing—the achievement of the ... conditional purpose, happiness" and "injures the ends of inclination."¹¹⁵ And it might be supposed on the basis of this admission that Kant is not as committed as Smith is to the freedom of the lower faculty. However, Kant states in the strongest terms his unwillingness to discount the lower faculty's claims to happiness. As Sebastian Gardner points out, Kant insists that "[s]ensibly derived motivation cannot ... be denied a rational claim on us...[T]o suppose the contrary... [is] misanthropy."¹¹⁶ In embracing the idea that both happiness and duty are essential components of the summum bonum or supreme good, Kant commits—in principle at least—to a model of moral development in which the moral agent cultivates the extreme inclinations of his lower faculty of desire in a manner compatible with the cultivation of his higher faculty.

The Ethical solution to the antinomy in practical reason

Anyone familiar with the Critique of Practical Reason will know that, despite his insistence that happiness is an essential component of the supreme good, Kant admits neither the market's ability to transform greed into the public good, nor the moral agent's ability to multiply like loaves and fishes the external goods he acquires. Instead Kant squarely faces an

antinomy in practical reason whereby the moral agent is “torn between . . . two principles,”¹¹⁷ happiness and duty, and admits to being unable to establish a synthetic or causal connection between these such that either pursuing one’s happiness demonstrably leads to doing one’s duty or—and this is the preferred direction of causality in Kant—doing one’s duty leads to happiness.¹¹⁸ What’s more, he courageously makes clear what the implications are if this antinomy cannot be resolved: the very legitimacy of the moral law hangs in the balance: “Now since the furtherance of the summum bonum (the very concept of which implies the said connection) is an object of our will, pertaining to that will necessarily and in an a priori manner, and since, moreover, it is an object inseparably bound up with the moral law, the impossibility of their being a summum bonum cannot but furnish proof of the spurious character of the moral law.”¹¹⁹

In the end, instead of making the easily subverted claim that morality—i.e., the laws of duty—tell us how to make ourselves happy, Kant has to be satisfied with a lesser claim, namely, that morality tells us how to be worthy of happiness in some infinite beyond: “morality is, strictly speaking, not the doctrine telling us how to make ourselves happy, but the doctrine telling us what we must do to be worthy of happiness. And it is only when religion is brought in as well, that there arises, over and above this, the hope that, at some future time, we shall be made to partake of happiness, to the extent that we have made it our endeavour not to be unworthy of it.”¹²⁰

But this solution clearly doesn’t live up to the standard set by the principle of freedom of subjectivity. The latter principle recognizes the freedom of the moral agent to pursue happiness, whereas in Kant it isn’t the moral agent but God, the “wise and all-powerful apportioner,”¹²¹ who is recognized as the legitimate distributor of the external goods which make for each moral agent’s happiness. In Kant, in other words, the moral agent can only

pursue his happiness indirectly, through his higher faculty of desire, the exercise of which can make him worthy of that happiness; as for the moral agent's lower faculty, it has no de facto moral authority in this world because its desires conflict with the moral agent's duty.

The Aesthetic solution

The inability of practical reason to reconcile happiness and duty means that modernity must look elsewhere for a justification of the appetitive faculty's newly recognized right. Ultimately, it turns to art. Even Kant, apparently unsatisfied with his attempt in the Critique of Practical Reason to prove the legitimacy of the moral law, tries anew in his aesthetic critique, the Critique of Judgment (1790).

It might seem that enlisting art to resolve what is fundamentally an ethical problem contradicts the principle of freedom of subjectivity, which places art and morality on separate foundations; however, there is no contradiction if one defines the function of aesthetics in the way, for example, that Beardsley defines it: as the production of a kind of experience that is a combination of experiences which one could have individually in the exercise of one's other faculties but in tandem only in the exercise of one's artistic faculty: "The traits of aesthetic experience are to be found individually in a great many other experiences, of course, but not in the same combination, I think....And we can say that aesthetic objects, generally speaking, have the function of producing such experiences....On the whole, it is what they do best; they do it most dependably, and they alone do it in the highest magnitude."¹²²

That which Kant specifically asks art to produce is a combination of sensible and supersensible experience. Kant enlists artistic activity to bridge the realms of the sensible and supersensible, to create a causal connection between happiness and duty such that pursuing one's happiness makes one dutiful or doing one's duty makes one happy:

Albeit, then, between the realm of the natural concept [by means of which the precepts of happiness are prescribed by the understanding], as the sensible, and the realm of the concept of freedom [by means of which duty is prescribed by reason], as the supersensible, there is a great gulf fixed, so that it is not possible to pass from the former to the latter (by means of the theoretical employment of reason), just as if they were so many separate worlds, the first of which is powerless to exercise influence on the second: the latter is meant to influence the former—that is to say, the concept of freedom is meant to actualize in the sensible world the end proposed by its laws; and nature must consequently also be capable of being regarded in such a way that in the conformity to law of its form it at least harmonizes with the possibility of the ends to be effectuated in it according to the laws of freedom.—There must, therefore, be a ground of the unity of the supersensible that lies at the basis of nature, with what the concept of freedom contains in a practical way, and although the concept of this ground neither theoretically nor practically attains to a knowledge of it, and so has no peculiar realm of its own, still it renders possible the transition from the mode of thought according to the principles of the one to that according to the principles of the other.¹²³

According to Kant this unifying ground is the territory (territorium) of the cognitive faculty of judgment (which includes aesthetic judgment) and its associated mental faculty, the feeling of pleasure and displeasure.¹²⁴

Because it presides over a territory rather than a realm (ditio), the faculty of judgment has no authority to prescribe either precepts for happiness or moral laws¹²⁵ but its

productions and receptions do prepare us for moral action by educating our emotions. And since this notion of emotional preparedness would be nonsensical without the opportunity to morally act, emotional preparedness can be seen as a kind of indirect proof of the legitimacy of the moral law, a legitimacy which hinges upon the actual attainability of the supreme good.

Still, although Kant's Critique of Judgment offers this resource for bridging the sensible and supersensible realms, the bridge ultimately falls short since it leads only to the emotional goal of disinterest. The sensible realm is allowed to contribute only its form and not its substance to moral ideas. As I will show in the next chapter, the modern critique must borrow from Stoicism to make up the needed ground of its judgments.

Chapter 5: The Stoic Aesthetic Grounds of the Modern Judgment of Mediocrity

Despite bridging the sensible and supersensible realms, Kant's aesthetic resolution of the antinomy in practical reason is limited in its efficacy because the Kantian aesthetic stance is characterized by disinterest—that is to say, the aesthetic judgment which the observer passes upon the artistic representation of an object is not dependent upon that object's existence. If it were dependent in this way, the observer's judgment would reflect only the idiosyncratic interests or inclinations of his lower faculty of desire and wouldn't have the universal validity Kant credits it with. But modern mediocre-artist narratives turn to art precisely for its capacity to reconcile the moral agent's disinterested sense of duty with his interests—those inclinations whose value judgments are based upon the actual existence of objects represented. Kantian artistic activity, by producing pleasure without interest, may develop our sense of duty but it doesn't develop our feeling for happiness. Modern mediocre-artist narratives therefore can't rely entirely on Kantian aesthetics for the grounds of their judgments. My claim in this chapter is that they rely partly on Stoicism to make up that ground.

I don't claim that this borrowing is conscious; as I said in my introduction, Stoic assumptions were simply “in the air” for the moderns, and not always in a recognizable form due to Stoicism's complicated transmission. These assumptions can explain continuing modern confidence in the artist's ability to reconcile—in real and not just symbolic terms—happiness and duty, the extreme claims of the lower faculty of desire and the claims of the higher. I'll address the bridging function of Stoic aesthetics to begin with, and then turn to what gives it its advantage over Kantian aesthetics as a resource for the modern critique of

mediocrity: its engagement with the real.

Unlike Kant, the Stoics don't have to turn to art in an attempt to resolve an ethical antinomy: no such antinomy arises for them, and their aesthetics is simply an extension of their ethics. One law guides Stoic ethical activity in both its impulsive and reasoned aspects, namely, the law of Nature. For first of all the Stoics say that when a moral agent is impelled to select an external good he is being "administered" in accordance with his impulse¹²⁶; and since such an administration by an impulse is "natural" to him as an animal capable of going in search of what is appropriate to his constitution,¹²⁷ his impulse, in administering him, executes the law of nature. Secondly, although humans, like other animals, are naturally administered in accordance with their impulses, it is also natural—or at least, it becomes natural—for them to be administered by their own reason: "to live correctly in accordance with reason comes to be natural for them."¹²⁸ Thus, in the same way that impulse, as administrator, executes the law of nature, reason too executes nature's law. And although it's true that nature has bestowed reason upon rational beings in the interest of a "more perfect management"¹²⁹ (meaning that impulse is not quite as good an executor of nature's law as reason), impulse and reason are nonetheless guided by the same natural law. Under the promptings of impulse the moral agent can thus select external goods without being pulled in a direction opposite to that indicated by reason. The modern antinomy in practical reason, in short, would seem to find a solution in Stoic ethics—a solution which Stoic aesthetics, as an extension of this ethics—also provides. In fact, some Stoics considered art to be a superior educational tool to pure ethical discourse.¹³⁰

As an actual extension of Stoic ethical discourse (and not just the supplier of a symbolic resolution of an ethical aporia) Stoic aesthetics is also concerned with the real

status of the external goods represented in art. The Stoic aesthetic stance, unlike the disinterested Kantian stance, involves judging representations of external goods in the light of their value as actually existing objects. The relevant aesthetic insight of the Stoics (one which, according to Martha Nussbaum, actually originates with Aristotle) is that “the very literary form of a tragic drama embodies a commitment to the beliefs that ground the emotions....By depicting the gifts or damages of fortune as if they have real importance...they present already a certain view about the world and the importance of external happenings in it....”¹³¹ The Stoics judge the tragic dramatist’s representation of external goods in the light of their real value, and conclude that he overestimates their value, for losses of these goods “are devastating misfortunes only to people who have the wrong scheme of values.”¹³² Such tragic misrepresentations of the value of external goods do require the Stoic spectator to adopt a certain detachment in order to learn the right lessons from them,¹³³ but this detachment is nothing like Kantian disinterest for it’s meant to provide necessary critical distance from the drama’s belief about the value of external goods, not to take the spectator’s mind off any consideration of the existence of those goods. By repeatedly engaging in aesthetic judgments concerning the real value of external goods represented, the Stoic can cultivate a feeling for happiness (in the Kantian not the Stoic sense). He learns how much to value external goods, and thus how to pursue them in the right way.

It may be objected that an aesthetic theory which takes into account the real value of external goods but which considers that the tragic dramatist consistently overvalues them, hardly constitutes much progress over Kantian aesthetics for a modern critique looking to justify granting the appetitive faculty the right to develop its excessive inclinations. The Stoics, after all, actually call external goods “indifferents” [adiophoros] rather than goods.¹³⁴

In short, between Kantian disinterest and Stoic indifference there seems to be little to choose. However, according to Diogenes Laertius, the Stoics used “indifferent” in two senses, and only one of these senses approaches the sense of neutrality which we would commonly ascribe to the term, that is, the sense that something is “entirely equal with respect to choice and avoidance.”¹³⁵ For the Stoics external objects are indifferent in the other sense: though one can be “happy”—i.e. virtuous—without them, some external objects, like reputation and wealth, are still “preferred” [proegmenos],¹³⁶ meaning that they are “selected”¹³⁷ when “circumstances permit.”¹³⁸ Conversely, some external objects like poverty and sickness are “dispreferred”¹³⁹ and “disselected” or avoided.¹⁴⁰ Another way of saying that external objects are indifferent in this second sense is that they are capable of “activating impulse and repulsion,”¹⁴¹ and impulse, Philo tells us, “is formed by the tonic power of the mind. By stretching this out through sensation, the mind grasps the object and goes towards it, eager to seize and reach it.”¹⁴² This eager impulsive stretching for external objects seems much closer than Kantian indifference to the extreme disposition promoted by the principle of freedom of subjectivity.

But perhaps Philo’s language can’t be trusted. His use of the term “eager” to describe a disposition acceptable to the Stoics does seem surprising given the latter’s reputation as, well, Stoics. And it’s true that the school was notorious for counselling the complete eradication of the passions [apatheia] rather than, as the Peripatetic followers of Aristotle advised, their moderation [metriopatheia]. Cicero, one of our most important sources for Stoic ethics, famously takes the Peripatetics to task for advocating mean or moderate states of passion (“disturbance or disease”) in the soul:

The Peripatetics ... do not quite succeed in convincing me of their “mean” or

moderate [mediocritates] states either of disturbances or of diseases of the soul. For every evil, even a moderate [mediocre] one, is an evil; but our object is that there should be no evil at all in the wise man. For as the body, even if moderately [mediocriter] ailing, is not healthy; so in the soul the so-called mean or moderate [mediocritas] state is without health.¹⁴³

The Stoics may well promote an extreme disposition towards external goods, but in Aristotelian terms it seems to be a deficient extreme rather than, as in the modern case, an excessive extreme.

There is, however, a theoretical affinity between these two extreme positions, as suggested by their shared rejection of the mean or mediocrity. As John M. Dillon argues, it is the Stoic model of a unitary soul (in contrast to the Peripatetics' bipartite soul) which fundamentally distinguishes the Stoic position on the passions from the Peripatetic position. According to Dillon, "[i]f one does not postulate an irrational part of the soul ... the phenomenon of pathos becomes extremely troublesome. There can be no 'moderate' form of it. One cannot be partly or moderately irrational, rather as one cannot be half pregnant."¹⁴⁴ Now, admittedly, modernity doesn't posit a unitary soul per se; in fact, as I have shown, it puts the individual faculties on separate normative foundations in order to guarantee their freedom from interference by any other faculty. However, modernity does need to coordinate the independent activities of the lower and higher faculties of desire in order to overcome the antinomy in practical reason and legitimate the lower faculty's right to freely develop its extreme inclinations. Artistic experience, by combining in a Beardsleyan way the kind of experience one gets from exercising one's lower faculty with the kind one gets from exercising one's higher faculty, provides this coordination. When the moral agent is

artistically engaged, his lower and higher faculties are, for all intents and purposes, operating by artistic proxy as one unitary faculty and in accordance with a single norm (what I identified in the Stoic context as the law of nature). It would make no more sense in this modern case than in the Stoic case to moderate the artistic faculty's judgments concerning the value of external goods; at a given moment, that faculty is either generating a rational judgment or an irrational one, one which either accords or fails to accord with its own law. If it generates an irrational judgment, then that impulse should be eliminated entirely; if it generates a rational one, then the impulse should be wholly embraced. Only if impulses towards external goods can be shown to arise from an irrational principle separate from the law which orients the pursuit of goods of the soul—as Aristotle argues—is there good reason for subordinating those impulses to that law and moderating them.

But granted that the moderns, thanks to their Stoic borrowing, can claim that the artistic faculty is capable of a thoroughgoing rationality vis-à-vis external goods, how can the cultivation of that faculty educate the moral agent's feelings except by eliminating them? Is the modern happiness that is compatible with rational duty an emotionless thing? No, the question presupposes what the Stoics deny¹⁴⁵: that rationality and emotion are phenomena belonging to separate and warring parts of the soul. The Stoics wholly reject passion [*pathos*] certainly, but as Dillon points out, they also have a conception of *eupatheia*—good, rational feelings. One of these *eupatheia* is “wishing”—the rational counterpart of desire which consists in a “well-reasoned stretching.”¹⁴⁶ “Wishing” is as entirely rational as desiring is irrational; therefore, one need not moderate it. As for the rational emotion which accompanies the attainment of what one wishes for, it is a “well-reasoned swelling” called “joy” [*chara*], the opposite of irrational pleasure.¹⁴⁷ Joy, too, need not be moderated. The

Stoic position is from this point of view fully compatible with the modern position.¹⁴⁸

So the Stoic borrowing allows the moderns to claim that exercising the faculty of judgment develops, without contradiction, the moral agent's feeling for happiness and his sense of duty. The modern mediocre-artist narrative claims that art can resolve in a real and not just symbolic way the antinomy in practical reason which the modern moral agent encounters when trying to follow the contradictory imperatives of the sensible and supersensible realms.

Having now, I hope, established the grounds of the modern critique of mediocrity, I will test the validity of that critique by asking whether the standard of distributive justice which the mediocre artist is expected to attain is actually attained by the genius. If even the genius cannot attain to that standard, then the characterization of the mediocre artist as conceited (on the basis of his failure to attain that standard) is unjust.

PART TWO: Characterizing Mediocrity

Introduction

In the following chapters I attempt, via readings of selected English French and German narratives written between the 18th and 20th centuries, to show that the judgments passed upon mediocre artists in these narratives are invalid.

I don't argue that the mediocre artists in question are wholly innocent of the charge of having failed to attain the modern standard of distributive justice. My claim, rather, is that they aren't alone in their guilt, because the geniuses with whom they are compared, though positively characterized for the most part, are revealed upon close textual analysis to be guilty of the same shortcoming. These shortcomings are less spectacular in the case of the genius, certainly—in no small part thanks to the rhetorical efforts made on their behalf—but they are legible. Thus, the burdening of mediocre artists with all of the guilt makes them not-entirely-innocent scapegoats.¹⁴⁹ Their function as scapegoats is to keep alive the modern ideal of justice, for by ascribing the mediocre artist's failure to achieve the new standard of justice to his conceit rather than to an antinomy or aporia in the standard itself, modernity can assert that it is possible for an artist with the right character—the magnanimous character of genius—to attain it.

I don't attempt to say definitively whether the scapegoating of the mediocre artist and disavowal of the genius' failure reflect the writer's cynical intention or his naive moral aspirations; to diagnose a pathological character in the writer would be to repeat the strategy by which the mediocre artist is condemned. Instead, I argue for the impossibility of the new standard of justice, and try to make as legible as possible that within it which escapes intention and aspiration.

**Chapter 6: The Rotten Apple Doesn't Fall Far From the Tree: The Common
Root of Genius and Mediocrity in Diderot's Le Neveu de Rameau**

The form of Denis Diderot's Le Neveu de Rameau (1821)¹⁵⁰ has traditionally been likened by critics to Plato's Socratic dialogues, and even some contemporary critics continue to pursue some variant of this line. Merle Perkins, for instance, writes that Moi, the dialogue's less eccentric speaker, "puts up with his unusual interlocutor [Lui] for the very reason that together they constitute through their give and take a useful pair, equipped to explore human nature."¹⁵¹ But to argue, as I will do in this chapter, that Diderot's dialogue ultimately fails to arrive at workable definitions of mediocrity and genius is to call into question the utility of dialectic in Diderot.

Not that I am the first critic to do so, by any means. As Philip Knee points out, this line of questioning was inaugurated in an influential essay by Hans Robert Jauss.¹⁵² But the limits of Diderot's dialogue which my reading makes legible are different than the ones posited by Knee, and unlike him, I am not entirely convinced Diderot himself had a knowledge of those limits. According to Knee, the failure of the dialogue to arrive at the truth of the good reflects Diderot's moral scepticism, according to which there is no general law beyond the dictates of self-interest (knowledge of which would permit the individual to ground his actions within a universal morality), and no lessening, despite this fact, of the self-interested individual's obligation to search for absolute justice.¹⁵³ But this Kantian antinomy between the self-interested precepts of the empirical realm and the general moral laws of the metaphysical realm, does not accurately define the limits set by Diderot's brand of skepticism; Knee doesn't consider the possibility of an empirically founded universal morality. As Hisashi Ida argues, Diderot employs Hume's moral sense theory to avoid both

the metaphysical assumption of a pre-established social harmony (à la Shaftesbury) and the moral relativism associated with a Lockean empirical theory of sentiment.¹⁵⁴ According to Ida, even in the last stage of his philosophy (which corresponds to the composition and revisions of Le Neveu de Rameau), Diderot grounded universal morality in the physical organization and needs which humanity has in common.¹⁵⁵

One need not look for subterranean philosophical influences in order to determine whether this natural but non-relativistic morality proposed by Diderot has affinities with Stoicism; Diderot took explicit positions on the ancient school, most notably in his apology of Seneca, originally published as the Essai sur la vie de Sénèque le philosophe, sur ses écrits, et sur les règnes de Claude et de Néron. In a commentary on this text, Douglas A. Bonneville follows Luppol in characterizing Diderot's ethics as a "combination of Stoicism and Epicureanism, according to which the individual, in Spinozan fashion, satisfies the needs and desires of his body without violating an intellectual ideal of virtue...."¹⁵⁶ The part-epicurean tag applied to Diderot (even by Diderot himself) is clearly meant to account for his ethical recognition of the passions, a recognition one would expect of an ethics attempting to ground itself in modernity's principle of subjectivity; in fact, Ida confirms that "La passion, qui désignait dans le vocabulaire de l'âge classique [the neo-classical period] influencé par la philosophie cartésienne un état affectif surtout violent ou pathologique, se voit investie d'une valeur positive au XVIII^{ème} siècle en tant que principe moteur de la vie psychique."¹⁵⁷ Diderot's validation of the passions—and not just ordinary ones but "les grandes passions"¹⁵⁸—is what most obviously distinguishes him from the Stoics; however, in his very modern insistence (in the face of the threat of antinomy posed by this validation of the passions) on the possibility of a justice measured "par l'accord ... entre la volonté particulière et la volonté générale,"¹⁵⁹ he seems to rely more heavily on Stoicism than on

Epicureanism. For Epicurus' utilitarian ethics tend, as Epicurus' own words suggest, toward the particularization or relativization of justice: "Taken generally, justice is the same for all, since it is something useful in people's social relationships. But in the light of what is peculiar to a region and to the whole range of determinants, the same thing does not turn out to be just for all."¹⁶⁰ And the threat which Epicureanism poses to Diderot's notion of justice even increases in the 18th century with the "réinterprétation de l'épicurisme par la théorie morale égoïste."¹⁶¹ The proponents of this modern Epicureanism, like Locke and Hobbes, sharply distinguish between the natural precepts of pleasure which guide the individual in nature and the artificial moral laws which guide the individual in society; these philosophers represent, according to Ida, "un courant nominaliste qui fait dépendre les distinctions du vice et de la vertu, non pas de la nature, mais des conventions artificielles définies par les sanctions de l'autorité civile ou de Dieu."¹⁶² Diderot, in order to maintain the coherence of a justice meant to coordinate the actions of the individual as both natural and social being, must therefore posit a very Stoic "continuité ... entre la nature et la société,"¹⁶³ a continuity between natural law and moral law, or the promptings of impulse and those of reason.

Through a rhetorical analysis of the defense of the playwright Racine by Moi, I will now attempt to show that the genius in Diderot's philosophical dialogue actually falls short of this standard of justice nonetheless. His character thus cannot be strictly opposed to that of the mediocre artist, and the conceptual opposition established between genius and mediocrity breaks down. In short, I argue that the charge of injustice levelled at the mediocre artist is itself unjust, not because the mediocre artist bears no guilt at all, but because an attempt is made to make him bear all the guilt. The mediocre artist is scapegoated in this way, I argue, in the interest of preserving a vision of universal justice—a justice which would not only fulfill the claims of the people of 18th-century France, but those of all people and all times.

The injustice of the judgment passed upon the mediocre artist is evidence of the limits of this universal vision.

It is at least debatable whether Diderot is aware of these limits; as I have suggested, his ethics, however sceptical, do not discount the possibility that he ultimately sides with Moi.

Lui on the immorality of genius

In the opening pages of Diderot's philosophical dialogue, it isn't the questionable ethics of mediocrity which are first called into question but the ethics of genius. It is necessary to look at this weaker claim to begin with because it sets up the terms of the subsequent debate. Lui characterizes his more successful uncle Rameau as egocentric: "Il ne pense qu'à lui; le reste de l'univers lui est comme d'un clou à soufflet Et c'est ce que je prise particulièrement dans les gens de genie. Ils ne sont bons qu'à une chose. Passé cela, rien. Ils ne savent ce que c'est d'être citoyens, pères, mères, frères, parents, amis."¹⁶⁴ Good at what they do, but not good in the unqualified sense—failing as they do to fulfill their ethical obligations to others, geniuses guide themselves solely by the precepts of their occupation: narrow, self-interested exceptions to the "conscience générale"—or "idiotismes moraux" as Lui calls them.

But according to Lui, it isn't the self-interested idiotisme per se which threatens society. For one thing, idiotismes are to be found in every occupation and are practised by every worker, not just the genius (which implies that the good which the genius pursues is on a par with the good pursued by every other occupation, and can, in this sense, be called an external good, a component of happiness). And while it's true that the proliferation of

idiotismes goes hand in hand with bad times—“plus les temps sont malheureux, plus les idiotismes se multiplient”¹⁶⁵—most idiotismes are practiced by mere “fripons”¹⁶⁶ or rascals, and so amount to little more than petty crime. More importantly, idiotismes can actually constitute a kind of system of checks and balances, a brand of justice patterned after the mutual antagonism of nature:

Lui—Dans la nature, toutes les espèces se dévorent; toutes les conditions se dévorent dans la société. Nous faisons justice les uns des autres, sans que la loi s’en mêle Au milieu de tout cela, il n’y a que l’imbécile ou l’oisif qui soit lese, sans avoir vexé personne; et c’est fort bien fait. D’où vous voyez que ces exceptions à la conscience générale, ou ces idiotismes moraux dont on fait tant de bruit ... ne sont rien.¹⁶⁷

(Needless to say, this is not modernity’s ideal of justice whereby self-interest and the general good are reconciled. It is more akin to Hobbes’ state of nature.)

But if it isn’t idiotismes moraux per se which threaten society, why is the idiotisme of the genius a threat? According to Lui, it is because the genius follows the self-interested precepts of his occupation with too much assiduousness. Most workers (Lui seems to have shopkeepers mainly in mind) are content to leave their work behind them at the end of the day. The genius, on the other hand, like other people who acquire great wealth and/or prestige, is always working:

Moi—Ce que je conçois clairement à tout cet entortillage, c’est qu’il y a peu de métiers honnêtement exercés, ou peu d’honnêtes gens dans leurs métiers.

Lui—Bon, il n’y en a point; mais en revanche, il y a peu de fripons hors de leur boutique; et tout irait assez bien, sans un certain nombre de gens qu’on appelle assidus, exacts, remplissant rigoureusement leurs devoirs, stricts, ou ce qui revient au même toujours dans leurs boutiques, et faisant leur métier depuis le matin jusqu’au soir, et ne faisant que cela. Aussi sont-ils les seuls qui deviennent opulents et qui soient estimés.¹⁶⁸

Instead of keeping his idiotismes confined to normal boutique hours, the genius extends those hours, effectively turning the self-interested precepts of his occupation into a set of general principles supposedly applicable at all times—and not just to his own activities. The genius isn’t content to be alone in following his general principles; he tries to impose them upon everyone else.

Thankfully, Lui says, the genius isn’t wholly successful at imposing his illegitimate wisdom. The result is two “gospels” or moral codes, one valid and one invalid. The former lets other people be; the latter, comprising the general principles of the genius, doesn’t:

Lui—Ce sont eux [les hommes de génie] qui changent la face du globe Il s’établit partie de ce qu’ils ont imaginé. Partie reste, comme il était; de là, deux évangiles; un habit d’Arlequin. La sagesse du moine de Rabelais, est la vraie sagesse, pour son repos et pour celui des autres: faire son devoir, tellement quellement; toujours dire du bien de Monsieur le prieur; et laisser aller le monde à sa fantaisie.¹⁶⁹

The genius, then, gets no credit from Lui for uniting previously divergent interests under the banner of his own. People must be permitted to go their own way; they shouldn't have a way imposed upon them by someone else. The genius actually upsets the balance of natural justice, which is maintained by mutual friponnerie between social ranks. A moderate, self-interested pursuit of external goods is good for society; it reflects a natural diversity of needs and ideas of happiness; however, the genius, in his conceit, considers what is good for himself to be good for everyone else. Lui accuses Moi and the other philosophes precisely of trying to impose a one-size-fits-all happiness: “Vous croyez que le meme bonheur est fait pour tous. Quelle étrange vision! Le vôtre suppose un certain tour d'esprit Romanesque que nous n'avons pas; une âme singulière, un gout particulier. Vous décorez cette bizarrerie du nom de vertu; vous l'appellez philosophie. Mais la vertu, la philosophie sont-elles faites pour tout le monde.”¹⁷⁰

Moi on the immorality of mediocrity

In sum, Lui is intent on demonstrating that genius, not mediocrity, is responsible for evil in the world, but whether he is capable of such a demonstration is another question: “Si je savais l'histoire, je vous montrerais que le mal est toujours venu ici-bas, par quelque homme de genie.”¹⁷¹ As Lui's self-professed inability to prove his point suggests, he has more than a little of the fool about him and cannot be taken as the moral center of the dialogue.

This isn't to say that he has no wisdom to contribute to the discussion—there may be something to his condemnation of genius, after all—but, as Moi observes, it is mixed up with

folly: “O fou, archifou, m’écraiai-je, comment se fait-il que dans ta mauvaise tête, il se trouve des idées si justes, pêle-mêle, avec tant d’extravagances.”¹⁷²

An answer to Moi’s question can be inferred from one of Lui’s justifications for his own behaviour, the same argument he uses to condemn the genius. Lui claims that there are no moral generalities by which to guide one’s conduct, but only the self-interests of the moment: “dans un sujet aussi variable que les moeurs, il n’y a d’absolument, d’essentiellement, de généralement vrai ou faux, sinon qu’il faut être ce que l’intérêt veut qu’on soit; bon ou mauvais; sage ou fou”¹⁷³ Lui’s head contains a mixture of folly and wisdom because it sometimes pays to act wisely and it sometimes pays to act the fool. Currently, Lui’s welfare depends on acting the fool for his bored, rich patrons: “J’ai affaire à des gens qui s’ennuient et il faut que je les fasse rire. Or c’est le ridicule et la folie qui font rire, il faut donc que je sois ridicule et fou....”¹⁷⁴

But this patronage is one source of Lui’s mediocrity, as he himself complains: “le moyen de sentir, de s’élever, de penser, de peindre fortement, en fréquentant avec des gens, tels que ceux qu’il faut voir pour vivre; au milieu des propos qu’on tient, et de ceux qu’on entend Vous croyez que cela dit, redit et entendu tous les jours, échauffe et conduit aux grandes choses?”¹⁷⁵ In general, the art of the man who acts according to the needs of the moment by adopting any position required of him, is mere mediocre pantomime.

So what about the ethical effects of Lui’s mediocre art of pantomime? Since he, like all pantomimes, acts as if there is neither absolute truth nor absolute falsehood but only the interests of the moment, what is the effect of his self-interested lies upon society, however petty those lies seem to be at that moment? Moi’s answer to this question is unequivocal. Despite the fact that, in his mediocrity, the pantomime’s ambitions are limited to doing well

in the moment, the lie which serves in that moment extends well beyond it in terms of its negative effects: “Si le mensonge peut servir un moment, il est nécessairement nuisible à la longue....”¹⁷⁶

Moi's double standard of justice

Lui and Moi would agree with each other that, unlike the mediocre pantomime with his mixture of wisdom and folly, the genius is more of a purist, acting according to fixed principles applicable at all times. But whereas Lui sees this assiduous behaviour as an extension of boutique hours, a pursuit of self-interest beyond limited fripponerie and into the realm of out and out evil where natural justice is upset, Moi claims, on the contrary, that the artist's pursuit of self-interest, at least, is compatible with the general good and ultimately reduces the harm done in society. The genius traffics only in truth, whose pattern of propagation through the medium of time is the exact inverse of the lie's: “au contraire, la vérité sert nécessairement à la longue; bien qu'il puisse arriver qu'elle nuise dans le moment.”¹⁷⁷ But doesn't that moment of harm suggest that even the genius is guilty of some injustice? And if this is the case, can the character of the genius be rigorously opposed to that of the mediocrity?

But Moi has not exhausted his resources in the debate. He can claim that the harm inflicted in the moment by the genius' choice of the truth hurts only him, that he is, in fact, a scapegoat. The genius' suffering would come as a punishment for breaking, not a just law, but a bizarre law legislated by others in the blindness or the necessity of the moment: “Il peut arriver que [le genie] soit la victime du préjugé et des lois; mais il y a deux sortes de loi, les unes d'une équité, d'une généralité absolues; d'autres bizarres qui ne doivent leur sanction

qu'à l'aveuglement ou la nécessité des circonstances."¹⁷⁸ The guilt associated with breaking such a law is only temporary; in time the judgment is reversed. These laws "ne couvrent le coupable qui les enfreint que d'une ignominie passagère; ignominie que le temps reverse sur les juges et sur les nations, pour y rester à jamais."¹⁷⁹ The genius' apparent ethical blindspot, in short, would not actually be her blindspot, but society's. He is guilty of no injustice as he pursues his occupation into the street and beyond regular hours. The genius, after all, is formed by nature—"C'est la nature qui forme ces hommes rares-là."¹⁸⁰—and, as Lui declares in a moment of near-wisdom, nature's empire establishes itself slowly and softly, without force:

Le vrai, le bon, le beau ont leurs droits. On les conteste, mais on finit par admirer. Ce qui n'est pas marqué à ce coin, on l'admire un temps; mais on finit par bailer. Baïllez donc, messieurs, bailer à votre aise. Ne vous gênez pas. L'empire de la nature ... s'établit tout doucement C'est comme cela qu'on dit que les Jesuites ont planté le christianisme à la Chine et aux Indes. Et ces Jansénistes ont beau dire, cette méthode politique qui marche à son but, sans bruit, sans effusion de sang, sans martyr, sans un toupet de cheveux arraché, me semble la meilleure.¹⁸¹

Commenting on this wholly peaceful conversion scene, Moi says, "Il y a de la raison à peu près, dans tout ce que vous venez de dire."¹⁸² His qualification or "à peu près" is intriguing. Perhaps Moi disagrees only with Lui's claim about the lack of martyrs, of which the genius, punished for breaking an unjust law, is one. Or perhaps the establishment of

nature's empire involves another form of violence. It's difficult to say. But happily the reversal of the judgment passed upon the genius is not the only court scene in the dialogue, and this second scene affords a clearer appreciation of the fact that the genius's case is not quite so open and shut. Moi acknowledges more openly not long afterwards that the genius—he chooses the playwright Racine as his example rather than the bad example, Rameau—harms others near him in the moment. Racine, like a tree, has blighted a little of the life in his immediate vicinity: He is “un arbre qui a fait séché quelques arbres plantés dans son voisinage; qui a étouffé les plantes qui croissaient à ses pieds”¹⁸³

True, in the same breath as he openly acknowledges the guilt of this genius, Moi does offer as mitigating evidence the benefits of his legacy. Racine's branches have stretched beyond that guilty patch and across time and space; his good intentions have ultimately begun bearing fruit for humanity: “mais il a porté sa cime jusque dans la nue; ses branches se sont étendues au loin; il a prêté son ombre à ceux qui venaient, qui viennent et qui viendront se reposer autour de son tronc majestueux; il a produit des fruits d'un goût exquis et qui se renouvellent sans cesse.”¹⁸⁴ As in the first case, it seems, the good the genius does simply requires a little time to be appreciated. For this reason, Moi advises a long, forgive-and-forget view: “Oublions pour un moment le point que nous occupons dans l'espace et dans la durée; et étendons notre vue sur les siècles à venir, les regions les plus éloignées, et les peuples à naître. Songeons au bien de notre espèce.”¹⁸⁵

But there is a crucial difference, not wholly analyzed by Moi, between the guilt of genius in the first and second cases. Whereas in the first case, the guilt turns out, upon appeal, to be that of society, which heaps ignominy on the genius for breaking a bizarre, illegitimate law, in the second case the guilt remains, in some sense at least, the genius'. The

judgment in this second case cannot be overturned but only outweighed by the good the genius does; a measure of guilt remains on one side of the unbalanced scale. The metaphor of the scale is suggested by Moi himself: “Mais pesez le mal et le bien. Dans mille ans d’ici ... il sera l’admiration des hommes. Dans toutes les contrées de la terre il inspirera l’humanité, la commiseration, la tendresse Il a fait souffrir quelques êtres qui ne sont plus; auxquels nous ne prenons presque aucun intérêt....”¹⁸⁶ It’s always possible that Diderot is being ironic here, Moi here holds the genius to a lower standard than in the first case: instead of expecting his work to be just in its effects across the entire expanse of space and time, Moi allows the genius to thwart the peaceful establishment of nature’s empire close to home.

But this isn’t the only contradiction in Moi’s rhetorically acrobatic attempts to defend the genius. At one point Moi claims that ethical shortcomings are not essentially bound up with genius but are detachable; and even if they happen to characterize Racine, they are more likely to attach to the idiot than to the genius: “Je ne vous ai pas dit que le genie fût indivisiblement attaché à la méchanceté, ni la méchanceté au genie. Un sot sera plus souvent un méchant qu’un homme d’esprit.”¹⁸⁷ But in claiming that ethical shortcomings are detachable from genius, Moi contradicts his other definition of genius, namely, that genius is what it is precisely because it chooses the good—that is, long-serving truth—over the bad, i.e., an only momentarily beneficial lie. Now he claims that the genius’ choice of good or bad is not essential to his qualification as a genius; he allows Racine to choose the bad without losing his credentials. Moi’s position, in short, changes to suit the needs of the moment.

But perhaps Moi is here discounting only the ethical effects of Racine’s non-aesthetic activity, his private indiscretions, as it were; he would still qualify as a genius because of the ethicalness of his art. There is nothing more common than the question of whether a genius’

private failings should be taken into account when assessing the merit of his public work. But if Moi is implicitly answering this question in the negative, then he is employing Lui's defence of mediocrity, claiming that one should let people (including Racine) be some of the time, allow them to go partly their own way. The only difference is that Moi grants the genius—the nature of whose work does not allow him, like the mediocre man, to be selfish while working—another, more private space in which to do so. Against his intentions, Moi is literally forced to make room in his concept of genius for an irreducible measure of injustice.

In fact, one might ask how Racine, despite his bad character, manages to do any good at all. For he is not simply a man possessed of virtues which he only bothers to exercise at work; according to Moi he actually lacks those virtues altogether. Moi acknowledges that Racine didn't receive them from nature along with his talents though it would certainly have been better if he had: "Il eût été mieux sans doute qu'il eût reçu de la nature les vertus d'un homme de bien, avec les talents d'un grand homme."¹⁸⁸ So how, to repeat the question, does Racine manage to do any good at all? Perhaps because talent and virtue are both received from nature, talent follows the same path as virtue, genius using its unerring aesthetic instincts to compensate for its ethical blindness.

In the final analysis, Moi isn't entirely willing to grant the genius even a bit of unethical breathing room; he proposes that the genius' intentions might be pure after all, that even in his private moments and intimate spaces, he is working to establish nature's empire. Our inability to see the genius' apparent ethical shortcomings as, in truth, inextricably linked to his genius and therefore part of nature's plan, is perhaps due to our own injustice, our own lack of generosity: "Si nous ne sommes pas assez généreux; pardonnons au moins à la nature d'avoir été plus sage que nous. Si vous jetez l'eau froide sur la tête de Greuze, vous éteindrez

peut-être son talent avec sa vanité. Si vous rendez de Voltaire moins sensible à la critique, il ne saura plus descendre dans l'âme de Mérope.”¹⁸⁹

In conclusion, Moi's rhetorical acrobatics suggest a strong investment in the genius's capacity to reconcile the self-interested pursuit of an occupation which brings wealth and fame, however belatedly, and the general good, a standard of justice which reflects the Enlightenment's validation of the passionate pursuit of self-interest. Whether or not Diderot shares Moi's investment, the possibility that he does so is not discounted by his scepticism, which doesn't extend to an empirically founded universal morality. In any case, the reconciliation isn't attained in the dialogue, which is fissured by contradictions, and the judgment of injustice passed against the mediocre artist is therefore itself unjust, evidence of the unacknowledged violence more broadly inherent in such a moral vision.

**Chapter 7: “Le Don Cruel”: Genius’ Contribution to the Common Good in
Eugène Fromentin’s Dominique**

Introduction

At the heart of Eugène Fromentin’s only novel, Dominique (1863), is an example of another literary form which we never actually get to read: the lyric poetry of the eponymous main character, who rejects this production of his youth for both aesthetic and ethical reasons. As I argued in Chapter 3, one of the insights which modernity borrows from Aristotle through the Stoics is that not just the content of a literary text, but its form, reflects beliefs about the importance of external goods. For Aristotle and the Stoics a belief in the high value of external goods is inherent to the form of tragic drama, which for that reason poses the danger of rousing extreme passions in the audience. Now, the lyric poetry of the Romantic era seems a potential suspect for the same charge: it is certainly designed to arouse extreme passions (I suspend for the moment the important question of whether external goods are typically—or even ever—the source of this arousal). Could an anti-Romantic—and, more broadly, anti-modern (since, as I’ve been arguing, modernity’s principle of freedom of subjectivity promotes extreme inclinations)—principle underlie Dominique’s judgment of his own work?

Given that his judgment is couched in the extreme-embracing language of mediocrity, the answer would seem to be no; however, the hypothesis must still be seriously considered if only for the reason that it has received considerable indirect critical support over the years. Based on the novel’s apparently negative attitude towards the passions—an attitude at least

implied by Dominique's condemnation of his own lyrical impulses—many critics of an earlier generation concluded that Fromentin's novel is anti-Romantic.

That said, their conclusion was not the end of the critical story—not even at the time. Many critics of the same generation (notably, the French critic Henri Peyre¹⁹⁰) apparently gave little weight to Dominique's self-judgment in assessing the novel's attitude towards the passions, and consequently claimed just the opposite of their peers: that Dominique is a Romantic text.

But despite the apparently greater compatibility of the latter position with my own, my intention in this chapter is not to make my case by supporting one group of critics against the other; rather, I intend to make my case by incorporating aspects of both positions. For I believe that both pieces of contradictory evidence which have given rise to such polarized critical opinions on the novel's attitude towards the passions or extreme emotion need to be explained. (As I will show, a more recent crop of critics has similarly attempted to account for the contradictory evidence offered up by Dominique, but their approaches differ from mine in several crucial respects.) And though the form of lyric poetry, by allowing this contradictory evidence to be read, could be said to arouse a problematic degree of passion in the poet and his audience, that degree cannot be accurately called excessive. It is better characterized as contradictorily excessive and deficient, a degree which paralyses rather than overstimulates.

But let us update the Aristotelian/Stoic insight about the connection between form and passion even further. One could say in Coward and Ellis's terms that the subject formally constituted by lyric poetry isn't functionally enabled in relation to the structures of the capitalist order. That order requires a subject who perceives himself to be free to pursue his

desire for external goods to the extreme, a perception which is impossible if the subject perceives himself to be in conflict with others pursuing their own happiness. As Hegel says, in conflict or collision there is a moment of freedom-belying restriction.

It would seem, then, that Romantic lyric poetry doesn't offer very strong ideological support for the capitalist order—that was, after all, mutatis mutandis, the conclusion of Hegel, who said that Romantic poetry, as an embodiment of the principle of freedom of subjectivity, was too weak to reunify the social whole.

But weakness can always be turned into a virtue—or rather a vice; it's a matter of letting it be perceived that the form has simply fallen into the wrong poet's hands. Then one can claim that in the right hands the form has the power to reconcile happiness and duty. The form of the mediocre-artist narrative, with its fatalistic dramatic trajectory and opposition of mediocrity to genius, is well-designed to support this claim. The novel Dominique surrounds the lyric poetry at its center like a buttress of commentary, transforming that form's weakness into a strength.

But the novel is not without its own weakness, its own contradiction. I will attempt to bring that contradiction out in this chapter by analysing the phrase “le don cruel,” which can be read, certainly, as a cruel talent or gift which Dominique has for getting enough distance on himself to take his own measure, that is, to see himself as mediocre, but which can just as easily and even more plausibly be read as a cruel contribution from genius, whose writings enable Dominique to take his own measure. I will argue that in Dominique this is ultimately the genius's contribution to the common good, one which must compensate for the fame he takes from it. If, as the phrase suggests, this cruel contribution can be shown to fall short, then the genius will be no more successful than the mediocre Dominique at resolving the

conflict between happiness and duty, and he can be said to be guilty of the same injustice of which the mediocre Dominique accuses himself.

In the first section of this chapter I will discuss those other critical responses which attempt to account for the novel's apparently contradictory attitude towards the passions, in order to show where they fall short. Then, in the second section, I will present my analysis of the "don cruel."

Other critical responses

As I said above, a recent crop of critics has attempted to account for the contradictory evidence offered up by Dominique. Norma Rinsler, for instance, has concluded from this evidence that Fromentin's novel offers no moral lessons vis-à-vis the correct level of the passions, and is therefore neither Romantic nor anti-Romantic:

The book was published in 1862, ergo, it is felt, it cannot be a straightforward account of Romantic passion. The most tempting conclusion would be to see it as anti-Romantic: Dominique is the man who has learned the futility of the Romantic dissatisfactions that lead Olivier to attempt suicide; putting passion behind him, he has chosen the path of work and will that Augustin had pointed out to him, and has settled for the ordered calm of a gentleman-farmer's life. The ambiguity of the text is not removed by this reading. Dominique's final state may be seen as a proof of moral strength; or it may be interpreted as emotional cowardice, which would allow for an implicitly Romantic view.... All these readings suppose that some kind of moral lesson is being offered to the reader, but there are two possible versions of the

moral.... Unless we believe that Fromentin had not made up his mind what he wanted to say, the apparently equal validity of these two readings suggests that neither has much to do with the text, and that they are the conclusions of readers who are reading their own novel.¹⁹¹

But I question Rinsler's assumption that only those plausible interpretations that do not contradict each other have "much to do with" a text. As if a text can't have an ideological function, and as if that function can't break down and reveal to the subjects it is meant to enable the contradictions against which they struggle. And is the appearance in a text of an ethical antinomy—here, two contradictory ethical commands vis-à-vis the proper level of the passions—valid grounds for claiming that the text has no ethical dimension? Can't the writer—or the reader, for that matter—be trying to resolve, albeit unsuccessfully, that very antinomy?

One might object that these contradictory dicta do not constitute a true antinomy because they cannot both be inferred from a single principle. I would disagree. It is my contention that they both follow from the principle of freedom of subjectivity, though they need to be reformulated slightly for this to be appreciated. In place of Rinsler's "emotional cowardice" we need to put "pusillanimity", and in place of the vague phrase "moral strength", "magnanimity".

As I discussed in the section on Aristotle, the pusillanimous man underestimates his own worth when it comes to the highest honours, and therefore doesn't pursue that which his worth entitles him to. The modern principle of freedom of subjectivity doesn't alter the meaning of pusillanimity so much as its scope. It does so by implicitly democratizing worth, that is, by permitting everyone—at least in principle—to develop their extreme inclinations

towards honour. Anyone who does not avail herself fully of this permission implicitly underestimates her worth and can, in modern terms, be considered pusillanimous. Thus, to the extent that Dominique suppresses those inclinations in himself, “putting passion behind him” as Rinsler says, he is pusillanimous.

Seen solely from this perspective, Dominique would seem to be a straightforwardly Romantic—and modern—text. But as I’ve already discussed, many modern writers and philosophers, even as they validate extreme emotion, feel pressured to reconcile it with duty towards others, that is, with the subject’s obligation to allow other subjects to pursue their own inclinations. The latter risk arises because of the divisibility of external goods like honour (again, divisibility meaning that if one person gets more, another gets less). From this perspective, lyric poetry presents the moral risk of vanity or egotism, for its defining formal characteristic, a single speaker, seems made for an egotistical appropriation of honour or fame. While it’s true that the Romantic poet usually represents himself as being alone, cut off from human society so that the risk of such a misappropriation of fame seems remote, his loneliness is belied by the readers of his poem, who clearly represent the poet’s opportunity for fame, and whose attention upon the speaker’s poem keeps them from attending to any other fame-seekers. Seen solely from this perspective, Dominique’s suppression of his extreme inclinations towards honour—his putting passion behind him—is a sign of magnanimity. By refusing to take anyone else’s share of honour, he shows that he estimates himself at his true worth.

The latter reading of Dominique’s level of passion may be un-Romantic (in the sense, at least, that Rinsler and others have defined it), but it isn’t anti-modern; it follows from the same modern principle of freedom of subjectivity as the other reading. And insofar as both

moral readings, far from being unrelated, emerge antinomically from this one principle, they do not simply cancel each other out, as Rinsler claims, but call for another level of moral reflection.

The critic Jean Yamasaki Toyoma appears to respond to this call when he argues that Dominique's decision to stop writing poetry—to embrace his limitations rather than overcome them—makes him an original and testifies to his continuing belief in the Romantic ideal of originality, because this reading suggests a way of synthesizing rather than dismissing the novel's apparently contradictory attitudes towards the passions. For what drives the pursuit of originality or distinction (a synonym which Toyoma himself warrants and which sounds more plausible as an object of desire) if not a passion for it? Seen in this light, Dominique's decision to root out his passion for artistic distinction explains both the response of those critics who call the novel un-Romantic and—insofar as this same decision enables Dominique to cultivate a passion for a non-artistic form of distinction—the response of those critics who call the novel Romantic. And crucially for our purposes, Toyoma would not grant the two critical positions equal validity. He would see that critics who call the novel un-Romantic may have evidence to point to, but that they read that evidence incorrectly: they don't see that Dominique, rather than putting his passion for distinction behind him altogether, only roots out a passion for artistic distinction in order to cultivate a passion for non-artistic distinction. In short, Dominique acts on the single Romantic principle of distinction (or individuality, another of Toyoma's synonyms), which he follows unwaveringly—i.e., without being pulled alternately in two directions. He is not, as the first group of critics would have it, a cured Romantic: “[I]t is [his] ... refusal to use his literary talents ... which enables Dominique to be original.... His mediocrity is an alibi for

distinction, for by embracing his very limitations instead of overcoming them Dominique separates himself from others.... Because of ... his unwavering belief in individuality Dominique cannot be understood as a cured romantic.”¹⁹²

An objection may have occurred to the reader at this point. Especially when expressed in terms of originality, as Toyoma expresses it at times, the Romantic principle which Dominique follows unwaveringly may seem like a purely aesthetic rather than an ethical one (even if Dominique has to turn his back on art to follow it). For when has originality ever been understood as a moral imperative? I have tried to bring out the moral implications of the pursuit of originality by talking about Dominique’s passion for distinction, but this may strike the reader as forced. It is therefore the moment to cite an earlier passage in Toyoma, where he himself makes explicit the moral dimension of his theme. If Dominique, despite his artistic limitations, were to continue to pursue artistic originality or distinction, Toyoma says, he would be guilty of disrupting the natural order, guilty of demanding fame without merit—in a word, guilty of conceit: “What would happen ... if everyone thinking himself among the ‘happy few,’ though not possessing the prerequisite genius, pursued lofty goals beyond his capacity? The answer seems simple: no one would know his natural place in the scheme of things; there would be a clamor for fame without merit....”¹⁹³

Here, Toyoma offers an explicitly moral version of his argument according to which Dominique remains true to the Romantic aesthetic ideal of originality by recognizing his artistic limitations where others continue to try and transcend them. In this moral version, Dominique remains true to a moral ideal (which Toyoma will later also categorize as Romantic) by recognizing those same limitations. The fact that by confining his activity

within his artistic limits Dominique achieves both an aesthetic and an ethical ideal, suggests that artistic activity and ethical activity share a field of action in Fromentin's novel. And if they share such a field, then the above-mentioned synthesis, which promises to resolve in aesthetic terms the novel's apparently conflicting attitudes (reflected in acts) toward the passions, can presumably resolve those same conflicting attitudes and their consequent acts in moral terms. I.e., just as Dominique can simultaneously embrace and suppress his passion for distinction, and by doing so follow unswervingly the Romantic aesthetic ideal of originality, he can presumably embrace and suppress his passion for distinction, and by doing so follow unswervingly the Romantic moral ideal of demanding only the fame one merits. Dominique would not be pulled in two incompatible directions, forced to choose between either conceitedly claiming more fame than he deserves based on an inflated sense of his own merit, or pusillanimously claiming less fame than he deserves based on a deflated sense of his own merit.

But can even Dominique's "rigorous logic" resolve in moral terms the novel's conflicting attitudes towards the passions, which, as I've argued, emerge antinomically from the principle of freedom of subjectivity? At stake in this question is not only Dominique's capacity for acting without conceit and its unjust effects, but also his freedom from victimization by the "happy few," for if the artistically unworthy Dominique can successfully avoid conceit, then there is no reason to suspect the artistically meritorious of it. Which is why, while I appreciate Toyoma's attempt to morally vindicate the mediocre Dominique, I would prefer he didn't risk covering up possible injustices committed by genius by claiming to have vindicated Dominique fully.

That Toyoma does cover up the injustice of genius is suggested by his invocation of the notion of merit, for as I said in my earlier discussion of Aristotle, relative merit goes a long way towards justifying an unequal division of goods in society. Instead of permitting all subjects, in accordance with the principle of freedom of subjectivity, to develop their extreme inclinations towards fame, Toyoma constrains all but the “happy few”—and constrains them not with the antinomic injunction to respect others’ equally extreme inclinations, but with an appeal to recognize their own limited natural capacities. In Toyoma, a revolutionary emphasis upon sweeping away socially imposed limitations gives way to a reactionary emphasis upon preserving naturally imposed ones. His concern for the stability of the Romantic social order, in which everyone should know his or her place, leads him to foreground the distinction between social (situational) and natural limitations:

Romanticism proposed a society in which each individual free from religious tradition, political absolutism and an hierarchical social system could rise to the level of his own genius and energy. Unfettered by models imposed on him he could fulfill his natural and unique potential. In order for such a system to succeed the romantic society required that each person possess perspicacity enough to be able to differentiate between the limits forced upon him by his situation and those imposed by nature. Against the former he could work and battle; against the latter he could but acquiesce.¹⁹⁴

One might also notice that in this passage Toyoma presents a reductive version of his aesthetic argument; according to the latter argument, Dominique doesn’t simply acquiesce—passionlessly, as it were—to giving up poetry (if he did, there would be no critical controversy over the novel’s attitude towards the passions). In fact, he makes his acquiescence work for him—despite the earlier prohibition on working against one’s natural

limitations—giving up one form of distinction (artistic honours) in exchange for a non-artistic form. Only those critics who are “unable to follow the rigors of Dominique’s logic”¹⁹⁵—and, based on the passage just cited, that would seem to include at times Toyoma himself—notice his acquiescence alone (for which Romantic critics judge him as pusillanimous and anti-Romantic critics praise him as magnanimous). What Toyoma avoids by skirting in a moral context the issue of Dominique’s exchange of one form of distinction for another, is the moral question of whether that exchange is a fair one, a question which doesn’t impose itself when it’s a matter of aesthetic judgment and a question of Dominique’s originality. In a purely aesthetic context, one might go as far as to suggest (though Toyoma doesn’t) that artistic originality and non-artistic originality are of differing aesthetic value, but one wouldn’t say that achieving one form of originality in return for giving up one’s pursuit of the other is an unfair exchange.

So, is the exchange a fair one? And by “fair” I mean fair not only to Dominique but to the potential victims of his conceit as well. If I am more focussed on Dominique’s victimization than on his victimizing, that’s because first of all, even in Toyoma’s vindictive reading of Dominique’s actions, Dominique’s victimization is less spectacular than his victimizing (the potential conceit of genius can’t even be glimpsed there); and secondly, because if the genius can be proven to be conceited, then it follows that the mediocrity can’t avoid at least a measure of conceit. In order to answer the question of the fairness of Dominique’s lot, I will analyse the novel’s ambiguous phrase “le don cruel.” This talent which Dominique has for self-assessment, and which is the source of his non-artistic distinction, can also be understood as a contribution from the happy few, those who give him

the measure of what he is. But is this contribution sufficient to make up for the quantity of distinction which the happy few withdraw for themselves from the common good?

The cruel contribution

If, as I hypothesize, the judgment of mediocrity which Dominique passes upon his own lyric poetry is grounded (as far as possible) in the modern principle of freedom of subjectivity, then Dominique, his possible scapegoating notwithstanding, should not be expected to sacrifice his desire for distinction to the common good. That is, he should in principle be permitted to cultivate that desire to the extreme even though, by the logic of divisibility, the more distinction he acquires for himself, the less is available to others—an insight which is at least partly expressed by Dominique's reference to usurpation: "s'attribuer un lustre auquel on n'a pas droit, c'est usurper les titres d'autrui..."¹⁹⁶ The logic of divisibility seems especially inescapable in the case of distinction, since the value of the latter good is predicated precisely on its being held by a minority; if everyone were granted distinction, in other words, distinction would have no value, and the people holding it would not stand out. But in accordance with the principle of freedom of subjectivity, we would also expect Dominique to be prohibited from sacrificing the common good to his own needs—that is, prohibited from preventing anyone else from pursuing their own extreme desire for distinction. I would argue that in Fromentin's novel, this seemingly unworkable combination of permission and prohibition is most explicitly expressed in a way that gives it the initial appearance of being unproblematic. According to Dominique, honour or distinction is a good from the public treasury—that is, a common good—and the artist, in order to withdraw some of it for himself, must either possess "des dons supérieures" or risk being caught stealing, "en

flagrant délit de pillage dans le trésor public de la renommée.”¹⁹⁷ This is the old Aristotelian idea of merit again, invoked as always to rationalize an unequal distribution of goods. We can accept its logic, however, and still test the justice of Dominique’s situation. Now, Dominique clearly does not ascribe to himself superior abilities, and so, insofar as he doesn’t have the right to distinction, it seems perfectly just that he should have to give up his desire for it. But what are these superior abilities which he supposedly lacks? And is it the case that the genius possesses them?

To answer the first question first, these superior abilities can be summed up in the Romantic ideal identified by Toyoma: originality. As Dominique points out, “il n’est donné qu’à bien peu de gens de se dire une exception [emphasis added].”¹⁹⁸ Only those who are original, then, have the right to withdraw honour from the treasury of the common good. Since, according to the terms of my argument, the right to develop one’s extreme inclinations towards honour must not infringe on the rights of others to draw from the common good, originality must somehow “top up” the common good, replacing the value of the honour withdrawn by the genius.

Originality, here, is not to be understood in the most radical sense of uniqueness, for society has no use for something that it doesn’t already share to some degree. The genius’ originality, in other words, must also partake of the universal, an idea which is certainly not foreign to romanticism. As Irving Babbit writes in Rousseau and Romanticism,

though all things are ineffably different they are at the same time ineffably alike. And this oneness in things is, no less than the otherwiseness, a matter of immediate perception. This universal implication of the one in the many is found even more marked than elsewhere in the heart of the individual. Each

man has his idiosyncrasy.... But in addition to his complexion, his temperamental or private self, every man has a self that he possesses in common with other men. Even the man who is most filled with his own uniqueness, or “genius,” a Rousseau, for example, assumes this universal self in every word he utters.¹⁹⁹

The universality to which Babbitt refers is neither metaphysical nor conventional but natural and so accessible to “immediate perception,” as Babbitt puts it above. This immediate perception of the universal is attained through “expansive emotion,” the natural but, prior to the modern era, suspect and therefore conventionally constrained passions of the individual, passions which are, however, least constrained in the genius: “the famous ‘return to nature’ means in practice the emancipation of the ordinary or temperamental self that had been ... artificially controlled.... The genius does not look to any pattern that is set above his ordinary spontaneous ego and imitate it. On the contrary, he attains to the self-expression that other men, intimidated by convention, weakly forego.”²⁰⁰ In expressing his own unbridled passions, then, the genius also expresses universal human passion; there is a continuity between his own good, as he perceives it, and the common good. Given that Babbitt calls the supposition that “man will long rest content with mere naked reason as his guide” a “stoical error,”²⁰¹ he would undoubtedly not have characterized as Stoic the grounds of the romantic confidence in the passionate genius’ justice. Nonetheless, as I have been arguing, the continuity—especially the natural continuity—between the individual good and the common good is more fundamentally Stoic than the goal of apatheia, since that continuity—which the Stoics express in providential terms—is the very condition of the latter goal.

That the genius, in expressing his own expansive passions, supposedly expresses a universal passion as well—or at the very least a passion shared by Dominique—is clear from a passage in which the latter describes finding his own personal feelings expressed in the writings of genius:

Toute circonstance où je me reconnaissais plus d'ampleur de forces, plus de sensibilité, plus de mémoire, où ma conscience, pour ainsi dire, était d'un meilleur timbre et résonnait mieux, tout moment de concentration plus intense ou d'expansion plus tendre était un jour à ne jamais oublier. De là cette autre manie des dates, des chiffres, des symboles, des hiéroglyphes, dont vous avez la preuve ici, comme partout où j'ai cru nécessaire d'imprimer la trace d'un moment de plénitude et d'exaltation.... [Un] jour ... je trouvai dans des livres, que je ne connaissais pas alors, le poème ou l'explication dramatique de ces phénomènes très-spontanés....²⁰²

Rinsler has something to say about Dominique's theme of originality, but her conclusion is that the novel suggests that “since we cannot escape the human condition, a wholly original self is not possible.”²⁰³ This conclusion not only invalidly generalizes to all of humanity Dominique's sense of unoriginality—Not even Dominique himself claims that no one is original; he says, to repeat the passage quoted above, only that “il n'est donné qu'à bien peu de gens de se dire une exception [emphasis added],”²⁰⁴—it also ignores the fact that the universality of the genius' self is as important as its uniqueness. The genius' goal isn't to escape the human condition or transcend human nature but to express it through his own particularity.

So how does the public share in these original but also universal passions represented in the genius' art, passions which are either merely potential in the public or not as well expressed? As with the Stoics, by learning moral lessons from them, by imitating them. For, as I said above, the Stoic corollary to critical distance in the case of a work which gives a false impression of the value of external goods, is identification in the case of a work which gives a true impression.

In keeping with Rinsler's claim that the novel suggests—in a melancholy tone, presumably—the impossibility of escaping human nature by means of a wholly original self, Rinsler devalues the act of imitating or resembling, saying “We have only the freedom to choose what we will resemble.”²⁰⁵ But resemblance is only unambivalently devalued in the novel when it involves an already existing resemblance to the average person, not when it involves an aspiration to resemble the clarified and fully developed self of the genius—that is, one's own best universally human self. The lesser form of resemblance is alluded to by the narrator, who justifies his own otherwise indiscreet narrative by claiming that the preservation of Dominique's anonymity will be guaranteed by the fact that so many of his readers will recognize themselves in his portrait: “[Dominique] était devenu, d'après ses propres termes, si peu quelqu'un, et tant d'autres pourraient à la rigueur se reconnaître dans ces pages, que je ne vois pas la moindre indiscretion à publier de son vivant le portrait d'un homme dont la physionomie se prête à tant de ressemblances.”²⁰⁶ The morally educational value of the genius' art can be inferred from Dominique's assessment of the relative moral uselessness of his own mediocre story:

Ce que j'ai à vous dire de moi est fort peu de chose, et cela pourrait tenir en quelques mots: un campagnard que s'éloigne un moment de son village, un

écrivain mécontent de lui qui renonce à la manie d'écrire, et le pignon de sa maison natale figurant au début comme à la fin de son histoire. Le plat résumé que voici, le dénouement bourgeois que vous lui connaissez, c'est encore ce que cette histoire contiendra de meilleur comme moralité, et peut-être de plus romanesque comme aventure. Le reste n'est instructif pour personne, et ne saurait émouvoir que mes souvenirs.²⁰⁷

The bulk of the passion inspired by Dominique's story benefits only him, evoking only his personal memories, and this measure of his life story's usefulness is consonant with his assessment of the social usefulness of his life. In contrast to a genius like Diderot's Racine, Dominique's figural, tree-like reach extends its benefits only as far as his own family:

Enfin, d'inutile à tous, je deviens utile à quelques-uns, et j'ai tiré de ma vie, qui ne pouvait rien donner de ce qu'on espérait d'elle, le seul acte peut-être qu'on n'en attendît pas, un acte de modestie, de prudence et de raison. Je n'ai donc pas à me plaindre. Ma vie est faite et bien faite selon mes désires et mes mérites... Comme les arbres de courte venue, je l'ai coupée en tête: elle a moins de port, de grace et de saillie; on la voit de moins loin, mais elle n'en aura que plus de racines et n'en répandra que plus d'ombre autour d'elle [Compare Moi's claim that Racine's shade covers everyone]. Il y a maintenant trois êtres à qui je me dois et qui me lient par des devoirs précis...²⁰⁸

Now it's true that Dominique himself claims not to have learned any moral lessons from the example of genius: "Leur exemple ne m'apprit rien, leur conclusion, quand ils concluent, ne me corrigea pas non plus."²⁰⁹ On the contrary, instead of inspiring a movement of true identification, the work of genius actually gives rise in Dominique to an evil or at

least injurious sense of alienation—an alienation from himself; he feels thereafter like a spectator of his own life: “Le mal était fait, si l’on peut appeler un mal le don cruel d’assister à sa vie comme à un spectacle donné par un autre, et j’entrai dans la vie sans la haïr, quoiqu’elle m’ait fait beaucoup pâtir, avec un ennemi inséparable, bien intime et positivement mortel: c’était moi-même.”²¹⁰ But one must ask whether it is Dominique or the genius who is to blame for this “mal,” this evil or injury? One could attribute Dominique’s alienation—his early failure to wholly identify with and learn from the example of genius—to a flaw in his own character, a dispositional conceit and injustice which causes him, at least initially, to rebel against himself, or at least that part of himself whose claim to fame has been invalidated. But one could also, in a more critical spirit, analyse further what Dominique calls in the just-cited passage “le don cruel.” It could turn out that this cruel gift²¹¹, upon being opened up analytically, reveals the genius’ own injustice. It could reveal that the genius sets, in fact, a bad example, one with which it is impossible for Dominique to wholly identify.

In order to investigate this possibility, it is first necessary to establish that the gift is from the genius. Although the word “don” connotes a natural capacity or talent, in this case a talent in Dominique, it is also clear from the context that Dominique’s cruel gift is not something he was born with, but rather a gift of experience—specifically, the experience of coming into contact with the somewhat familiar but mostly self-alienating writings of genius. It is the gift of being able to recognize one’s own lesser worth from the standpoint of a higher standard. Dominique’s already-cited statement that “En me démontrant que je n’étais rien, tout ce que j’ai fait m’a donné la mesure de ceux qui sont quelque chose,” is susceptible to reversal: those who are something—i.e., geniuses—have given him the measure of his own

nothingness. Despite Dominique's claim that he got from his own botched essays some "leçons utiles,"²¹² he certainly didn't learn to appreciate—or deprecate—the value of his own work from that work itself. Unless one subscribes to the notion of absolute value—which, if it existed in the world of the novel, would have spared Dominique the self-esteem-lowering trauma of encountering the writings of genius—then value can only be measured by difference, in relation to a standard. And nothing can be its own standard. Dominique's "don cruel," then, is a gift from the genius.

But in what sense, precisely, can this gift be said to be unjust? Can a gift even be unjust, given that it is offered freely, without exchange? It may be more productive, then, to translate "don" as "contribution," as in the genius' contribution to the common good, which is what supposedly justifies the fame he receives in return. Could it be, though, that the genius' contribution to the common good harms others like Dominique as much as it benefits them? Could it be that the genius consequently receives more fame than he merits? Such a distribution of goods would definitely qualify as unjust. What good, then, does Dominique receive from the genius in exchange for the latter's fame? What benefit, that is, does he derive from his ability to assess his own worth? I have already discussed that benefit in my summary of Toyoma's attempt to reconcile the apparent romantic and anti-romantic strains in the novel: Dominique attains a kind of uniqueness: "Si quelque chose le distingue un peu du grand nombre de ceux qui volontiers retrouveraient en lui leur propre image, c'est que, par une exception qui, je le crois, ne fera envie à personne, il avait eu le courage assez rare de s'examiner souvent, et la sévérité plus rare encore de se juger médiocre."²¹³ As Toyoma puts it, Dominique's "turn away from success"—based on his newly acquired sense of his own (mediocre) worth—"is by far more original than its pursuit...."²¹⁴ But Toyoma also

recognizes that the substitute goal of unenviable exceptionality is a “sad fulfillment,”²¹⁵ or, as Georges Sand put it, “un triste bonheur.”²¹⁶ Thus it can be said that the genius, in pursuing his own happiness—fame, e.g.—through art, has interfered with Dominique’s pursuit of his own happiness, has caused him to diverge from his original, if less original, path, and the happiness Dominique achieves at the end of the new path is an adulterated one, a substitute happiness tainted with sadness.

One could argue, of course, that Dominique’s only real chance of happiness is the adulterated one, since the object of his original pursuit lies beyond his abilities. The genius, on this account, does Dominique a favour by redirecting him in a more productive direction. But the genius isn’t supposed to deflect others away from his own trajectory; he is supposed to be an example to be followed, his passions, in their uniqueness, are supposed to be universal as well, his desires the desires of all humanity. And yet he discourages would-be imitators like Dominique from the pursuit of fame. The genius desires fame and takes it from the public treasury, but he can’t offer fame to the public in return, for fame, like other external goods, is divisible: if one person has more, another has less. The genius is, in this sense, a bad example, one which cannot be followed or imitated. (But only insofar as the genius’ specific interest in artistic honours is unthematized—only, that is, insofar as the act of artistic production is kept behind the scenes—does his bad example remain unremarked.) Dominique can only imitate the genius by separating himself in two: the genius in him watches ineffectively as the mediocrity lives out his life. Full identification is impossible: the gap between spectator and actor cannot be crossed. At best, Dominique can only parody the genius, not imitate him: “je n’eus qu’un regret, ce fut de parodier peut-être en les rapetissant

ce que de grands esprits avaient éprouvé avant moi.”²¹⁷ And unlike most parody, it is the parodier and not the parodied who is belittled—unjustly, it would seem.

Chapter 8: Bad Portrait, Good (?) Monologue: The Questionable Transcendence of Mediocrity in Robert Browning's "Andrea del Sarto"

Introduction

On the face of it, the speaker of the dramatic monologue would seem to suffer from the same vice as the Romantic lyrical poet, namely, the egotistical appropriation of everything the speaker represents, everything which passes through the filter of his consciousness. In mediating access to another person—in claiming to represent or speak for another—the speaker takes the moral risk of serving nothing but his own desire, discounting the desire of others in the process and unjustly ending up with more than his share of desired goods.

This risk is undoubtedly present in other literary forms, not to mention other artistic forms, and it is surely no coincidence that the eponymous speaker of Robert Browning's dramatic monologue "Andrea del Sarto" (1855) is a painter. But monologue presents this risk in a particularly stark form, and the function of painting within the monologue seems to be largely a self-referential one, drawing the reader's attention to the monologue's artifactual status. Browning's response, like that of the Stoics, is not to reject the offending form, but to adopt a critical detachment from it, to reflect, within his own monologues, on monologue's excesses in order to educate his readers' passions. This is a very blunt way of putting it, of course; Browning's subtle poetry cannot be reduced to mere didacticism. Nonetheless, the moral function of Browning's art can be isolated.

However, in critiquing the egotistically appropriative tendencies of the monologic form via a number of his own dramatic monologues including "Andrea del Sarto", Browning also seems to take a certain distance from Stoic aesthetics (in its modern and recontextualized

usage), for his critique demonstrates a new level of skepticism regarding the solvability of the modern dilemma which those aesthetics are implicitly enlisted to solve: namely, the antinomy in practical reason whose solution is essential to attaining the modern standard of justice. For Browning, not even the genius is able to represent the value of external goods like fame in such a way that the passion he (and the reader) feels for them is compatible with both his happiness and his duty. It is, in fact, a sign of the genius' genius that he doesn't even try; only the mediocre artist is conceited and unjust enough to attain what he desires through the medium of his art. Browning thus seems to reject any Stoic scheme linking the representation of external goods to reality; the mediocre artist's representations are (and the genius's representations would be, if he were foolish and inartistic enough to assume the possibility of such a scheme) fatally contaminated by subjectivity.

One could argue that Browning thereby takes his skepticism too far, invalidating the mediocre artist's evaluation of the external good wealth (and even the bodily good, sex) which the principle of freedom of subjectivity recognizes as valid. But it would be more accurate to say of Browning that he doesn't take his skepticism far enough, believing as he does that the genius can simply leap over the realm of nature and into the realm of freedom, disregarding his own claims to happiness and fulfilling only his ethical obligations to others. The impossibility of such a leap is testified to by the fact that the genius does unjustly benefit by it, acquiring honour or glory (an external good somehow exempted from the disdain with which wealth is regarded in the monologue) at the expense of the desires of his subject, which are depreciated or discounted in a sense which will soon become clear.

Thus, if one extends one's skepticism further than Browning does, one finds that his concept of mediocrity in "Andrea del Sarto" doesn't stand up to analysis—not because the

main moral criterion of mediocrity, namely, an unjust disposition, doesn't apply to the mediocre artist, but because it can be shown to apply to the genius as well. Since an artist can be unjust without being mediocre, injustice is not a sufficient condition for being mediocre. For this reason, the charge of injustice levelled against Andrea del Sarto is itself unjust, and forces him to bear an excessive share of the guilt. Insofar as critics accept uncritically the judgment of mediocrity which Andrea passes upon himself, they leave unchallenged an unjust aesthetic ideal.

However, ultimately, Andrea is not the true victim of this injustice. I say this not because the unjust accusation is a self-accusation, and, as Aristotle says, one cannot commit injustice against oneself; in its way, self-accusation can be as onerous as being accused. No, Andrea is not the true victim because, in addition to condemning himself to a mediocre fate, he also absolves himself. His portraits may not meet the ethical and aesthetic criteria of genius, but his monologue—at least in the terms established by that monologue—does. The real victim of injustice is Andrea's wife Lucrezia, who, as the face of both the bad portraits and the supposedly good monologue, has her desires discounted.

Some commentators have argued that Andrea del Sarto ultimately adopts in his monologue a kind of Stoic acceptance of his mediocre fate. This reading, however, ignores the fact that through that very monologue Andrea transcends his mediocrity. If any Stoic goal implicitly orients Andrea, it isn't apatheia. Instead—Browning's skepticism notwithstanding—it is the goal which modernity's recontextualization of Stoic logos makes possible: an extreme passion for the happiness-making external good glory, which, thanks to the continuity of logos as a principle of development across the realms of nature and

freedom, is (supposedly) consistent with the fulfillment of Andrea's ethical obligation to take Lucrezia's desires into account.

The critical context

Rather than present an exhaustive account of previous criticism generated by Browning's monologues, especially "Andrea del Sarto," I will rely heavily in this section on a single critic whose work best illuminates the stakes of my own reading, and whose influence I should acknowledge. It was Loy D. Martin, in his monograph Browning's Dramatic Monologues and the Post-Romantic Subject, who suggested to me the possibility of considering the literary genre of the mediocre-artist narrative as materially productive in the sense defined by Coward and Ellis. That is, the mediocre-artist narrative, in attempting to grant legitimacy to the actions of moral agents potentially inhibited by the contradictions of the capitalist order—specifically, the incompatibility of pursuing external goods to the extreme and doing one's duty towards others—can be seen as involved in the "production of subjects who think and feel themselves to be free"²¹⁸ to participate in that order. Martin takes this approach to the genre of the dramatic monologue, claiming that it "constitutes and locates a certain kind of subject"²¹⁹ that feels itself to be free to produce for the marketplace²²⁰ despite certain contradictions that belie that freedom. Martin also argues, like myself, that these contradictions are legible—even foregrounded²²¹—in the monologue. However, there is a crucial difference between Martin's approach and my own, namely, the nature of the contradictions which the ideology of the free subject is meant to overcome and which are simultaneously revealed by the monologue. Whereas Martin focuses on contradictions that ultimately interfere with the speaker's pursuit of happiness, the

contradictions I focus on ultimately interfere with others' pursuits of their own welfare. It is this difference which will illuminate the stakes of my own reading, a difference which I will now further specify by considering briefly three of Martin's readings of Browning—"Pictor Ignotus," "My Last Duchess," and, finally, the monologue which is the main focus of this chapter, "Andrea del Sarto."

"Pictor Ignotus"

According to Martin, the monologue "Pictor Ignotus" represents the unknown painter of the title as an agent free to pursue the external good of honour or fame. It does so by making such a pursuit seem authorized by reason even though the unknown painter's expectation of fame is, in fact, unreasonable, even fantastic, the ideology of an earlier time reimagined: "The painter's fantasy of his own success and fame. . . . seems natural and reasonable because it is a reimagining of the rewards garnered by painters whose names . . . have been preserved."²²² As the latter passage suggests, the unreasonableness of the unknown painter's expectation of fame does not stem from any lack of artistic ability or character flaw but from the fact that the fame of the past cannot be attained in the current order. The Pictor Ignotus is involved in new, capitalist relations of production, relations which past painters—the ones whose names have been preserved—didn't have to negotiate. More precisely, painters of the past produced on commission for patrons who were "relatively individual and homogeneous in nature," and who "stipulated in advance much of what the painting was to depict and even exactly what materials were to be used."²²³ By contrast, the modern painter must produce "without a prior and unambiguous mandate from a unitary consumer. This is the form of the modern or bourgeois market, where an artisan like a painter must risk his own

appraisal of what the public wants by completing his work previous to any commitment to purchase it.”²²⁴ Under these risky conditions, Martin argues, the artist must, in order to be known—as a whole, a distinct and stable identity—“split off” a part of herself in the form of an artistic product, becoming alienated from herself or “self-estranged” in the process: “[T]o preserve a distinct identity long enough to acquire a name—to be ‘known’—requires an external splitting off of a part of one’s self (one’s talents) in the form of a product. To be whole is to be known as such, but to be known, one must become fragmented or self-estranged by placing one’s internally constituted talents at risk.”²²⁵ This is one of the irrational contradictions—the need to split off a part of oneself to become whole—which the monologue represses by presenting a fantasy of fame, the fantasy of a painter unified in the possession of his own labour: “All of these contradictions can be articulated only from within an ideology that renders the individual identity as discrete and homogenous and that represses the alienation of the individual from the product that, through his talents, he produces.”²²⁶

The reader may already have inferred the crucial difference between the type of contradiction repressed (and simultaneously manifest) in Martin’s text, and the contradiction with which my own study is concerned. Early on in his monograph, citing M. H. Abrams, Martin distinguishes between three aspects of alienation (against which the Victorians struggled more modestly than the Romantics, Martin argues). These three aspects are: the subject’s internal alienation, i.e., his separation from himself; the subject’s alienation from other people; and, lastly, his alienation from his environment.²²⁷ In his analysis of the subject located and constituted by the Victorian dramatic monologue, Martin chooses to focus primarily on the subject’s separation from himself, employing the already-referred-to Marxist

motif of alienated labour to express this separation in economic terms: “The dramatic monologue is, in the fullest and most conscious sense, the product alienated from its producer.”²²⁸ The consequences of this choice reverberate through the rest of Martin’s text, necessarily affecting his readings of Browning’s monologues, which at times appear rather one-sided, subordinating and sometimes obscuring questions of justice. For even when Martin does discuss the artist’s alienation from other people, as he does in “Pictor Ignotus”, he represents the artist, not the people, as the victim of this alienation. It is the public, not the artist, who is the egotistical aggressor in their economic relationship, approving only those works produced by the artist that it subjectively deems valuable and thereby inhibiting the artist from remaining self-identical and self-sufficient in fame:

The painter realizes that his painting , if it is to be praised ... must stand the test of an aggressively heterogeneous public. It must, in other words, take its value from exchange in the marketplace....a consensus, were it possible, would leave the producer or artist free to remain unified and wholly invested in his or her representations....[but] the ideology of the free market system ... forbids intersubjective consistency in the form of consensus. The market is democratic. “Different people like different things.”²²⁹

And the only thing more damaging to the artist’s self-sufficiency than not being universally appreciated, apparently, is being universally appreciated. The egotism of the public is so extreme that were consensus on the value of his work to be reached, the Pictor Ignotus would be reduced to slavery; the cost of the artist’s pursuit of happiness, as always, accrues to himself, not to others: “If the painter’s identity is fused with his product, and if that product is preserved by being valued, the painter himself may gain a kind of immortality. But the cost

is intolerable; he becomes, like a slave, a commodity that can be bought and sold, judged capriciously and coldly cast aside.”²³⁰

It might be objected that there are no negative consequences for others of the Pictor Ignotus’s desire for fame, that this particular monologue isn’t productively approached with my contradiction in mind. Perhaps, but Martin himself sees a key intertextual reference in “Pictor Ignotus” to the Gospel of Saint Matthew’s parable of the talents, a parable whose message—again according to Martin—concerns precisely the expense to others of securing one’s own welfare. Martin’s decision to focus nonetheless on the cost to the artist of the free market system’s contradictions, leads him to posit a strangely asymmetric symmetry between the monologue and the parable: “If the parable of the talents institutes a troubling compatibility between assuring one’s own fate and oppressing others through usury, Browning’s poem foregrounds the incompatibility between maintaining the integrity of the self and submitting that self to the exchange values of trade.”²³¹

“My Last Duchess”

But we don’t have to depend on Martin’s reading of “Pictor Ignotus” alone to see the consequences of his decision played out: “My Last Duchess” is a monologue in which the injustice resulting from the speaker’s actions is spectacular and undeniable, and yet, for Martin, that injustice ultimately functions in the monologue to draw the reader’s attention to the fragmentary quality of the speaker’s identity, and to elicit at least some sympathy for him: “[T]he structure of the poem seems to me to entail a serious judgment of character while simultaneously requiring our partial sympathy with the duke as a ratification of that judgment. For we are allowed to see the duke as he is incapable of seeing his fellow

creatures: not as an embodiment of a changeless abstraction . . . but as a living, changing, hesitating human being who is finally knowable only in process and only in a fragmentary way.”²³²

Now, I appreciate the fact that Martin’s approach doesn’t stop at the analysis of character as if it fully explained the Duke and his injustice. Martin’s acknowledgment that the Duke is “knowable only in process” implies that the Duke does not set out egotistically to commit his injustice so much as he sets out in order to constitute, however partially or provisionally, his ego. His activity, in other words, however extreme, is in some sense the condition rather than the result of his sense of self. This implication by no means absolves the Duke, but it does complicate things, drawing attention as it does to a kind of Hegelian struggle for recognition which everyone—both the Duke and his “fellow creatures”—engages in (though not all with the same crazed intensity as the Duke, of course, and it is here that something like character reenters the picture). From this perspective, ego or identity is a kind of divisible good such that when one person gets more, another inevitably gets less. To the extent that the Duke is wholly villainized, therefore, singled out as if all other subjectivities constitute themselves without even a hint of injustice, he can be considered, however unpalatably, a scapegoat of sorts—a scapegoated villain or a villainous scapegoat, depending on where one puts the emphasis. Martin himself does not proceed explicitly to this conclusion, but the partial sympathy he manages to discover for the Duke in his reading sets the tenor for it. As does his judgment of the poem as less successful than “Pictor Ignotus,” apparently on the basis that it tends to encourage the total villainization—or “monologization”—of the Duke by failing to make the contradictorily guilty and innocent act by which the Duke’s ego is constituted legible or persuasive enough:

However unstated the poem may leave its moral conclusion, the reading subject must choose either to identify with the duke or—as I believe, more correctly—to condemn him. The reader becomes the subject of a new discourse that must be monological. Such a discourse reflexively constructs the subject that initiates the poem itself in the form of an equally monological “intention,” or intelligible “meaning.” To me, then, “Pictor Ignotus” is by a slight measure the more successful of the two poems it does what the monologue is uniquely designed to do more completely.²³³

The role of the monologue, in Martin’s own words, is “dividing the subject,” and it is by performing this role, no doubt, that the monologue reveals the limited usefulness of the unitary concept of character for describing ethical situations.

But in line with what I said above about his choice to focus on one of the forms of alienation, for Martin the crucial division which the monologue performs runs between the subject and herself, not between the subject and others. And so, even though I appreciate that Martin’s analysis doesn’t stop at character, I could wish that his reading went further than treating the Duke’s unjustly and monologically objectifying view of others as a poetic device for turning (at least some of) the reader’s sympathy back towards the Duke.

It could be objected here that my own approach does the same, that I’ve asserted in every one of my readings so far that the morally condemned mediocre artist is a scapegoat of sorts. The difference, however, is that I add an additional step to the critique: whereas Martin begins by observing the injustice committed by the speaker and then ends on the wrong done by totally villainizing him, I go on to claim that the scapegoating of the mediocre artist covers up yet more injustice committed against others (the real interest, in my opinion, of the

scapegoating of the mediocre artist, whose victimhood is often no more dramatically or morally compelling than the Duke's). This claim isn't a mere repetition of my first observation regarding the injustice perpetrated by the mediocre artist, for the victims I refer to in the last step of my critique are the victims of the genius, who is said to pursue fame and other external goods while simultaneously doing his duty towards others, but who is in fact guilty of the same egotism—that is, equally divided by the claims to happiness and duty—as the mediocre artist. True, the injustice caused by the genius in the pursuit of his own welfare is often less spectacular, but that's why it so frequently escapes criticism and why the mediocre-artist narrative can continue to support ideologically a notion of subjectivity necessary for the smooth functioning of a capitalist order riven by contradiction.

It may be validly objected that this third critical step isn't needed in the case of "My Last Duchess" because all of the less spectacular violence—the Duke's scapegoating—is made legible in the second step. It is true that "My Last Duchess" doesn't have the same structure as the mediocre-artist narrative; in particular, the Duke is not portrayed as a weak-willed character and contrasted with some moral genius. In order, therefore, to fully demonstrate the stakes of Martin's focus on self-alienation rather than alienation from others, it is necessary to turn finally to his reading of "Andrea del Sarto."

"Andrea del Sarto"

Bad monologues, bad portraits

I begin by quoting a passage from "Andrea del Sarto," in which the Florentine Renaissance painter addresses his wife Lucrezia: "My face, my moon, my everybody's moon, / Which everybody looks on and calls his, / And, I suppose, is looked on by in turn, /

While she looks—no one’s....”²³⁴ This passage, despite a radical difference in the tone of the monologue as a whole, has clear affinities with another of Browning’s monologue’s, “My Last Duchess.” There one also finds a husband describing a wife who bestows the favour of her glance upon all: “‘twas not / her husband’s presence only, called that spot / of joy into the Duchess’ cheek.... / / she had / A heart...how shall I say?...too soon made glad / Too easily impressed; she liked whate’er / she looked on, and her looks went everywhere.”²³⁵ It goes without saying that in neither of these monologues, because they are monologues, can the reader confirm the accuracy of the men’s accounts of their wives’ desires—those accounts may be nothing but the products of jealous imaginations. One thing, however, is certain: both husbands desire their wives, and they unjustly attempt, to varying degrees, to possess them through art. These attempted possessions through art are apt figures for the already-mentioned risk of injustice posed by art and by monologue in particular.

In the more starkly allegorical “My Last Duchess,” this injustice is horrifyingly obvious, the Duke having arranged for his wife to be killed and effectively replaced by her portrait, access to which the Duke can control by opening or shutting a curtain: “‘none puts by / The curtain I have drawn for you, but I.’”²³⁶ In “Andrea del Sarto” there is none of the spectacular violence of “My Last Duchess”—Andrea’s wife Lucrezia agrees to sit quietly with her husband in exchange for five portraits of herself, which are destined for a lover—and yet I would argue that Andrea, in this attempt to possess Lucrezia through art, also shows himself to be susceptible to the risk of injustice posed by monologue. The ethical critique of Andrea, however, must be indirect, passing through an aesthetic critique of his portraits of Lucrezia, whom he claims to have grasped perfectly on canvas. Andrea himself describes his

mediocrity in these terms: “Ah, but a man’s reach should exceed his grasp, / Or what’s a heaven for? All is silver-grey / Placid and perfect with my art: the worse!”²³⁷

So, how is Andrea’s claim that he has perfectly grasped Lucrezia on canvas unjust? It is unjust in that it rests upon a more fundamental claim disproven in the course of the monologue. This more fundamental claim is that Lucrezia is purely a body without mind or soul to speak of, which is what makes her perfectly graspable, for even the desires of her body are supposedly transparent. Lucrezia’s key bodily desire in Andrea’s account is not the attention of her various admirers but her desire for “gain” or wealth, which, insofar as it has led Andrea to pursue financial success instead of artistic glory in a supposed attempt to please her, is the purported cause of his mediocrity. This is the sense in which Andrea’s claim to have perfectly grasped Lucrezia on canvas is unjust: it is part of an accusation of Lucrezia which relies on Andrea’s supposed ability to represent Lucrezia’s desire, but which is designed to achieve Andrea’s own desire, namely, an alibi for his mediocrity. I will now more fully unpack this argument. In order to do so, I will first look at the work of genius referred to in Andrea’s monologue.

A Good portrait

The work against which Andrea judges his own work and finds it wanting, is Raphael’s painting of the Virgin Mary. What comes out of Andrea’s critique of this painting is that the artist must aim beyond the (female) body, for the body is what can be grasped. Raphael’s imperfect grasp of Mary’s body (more precisely, of her arm) is the sign that he has attempted something greater, i.e., her soul, which is the soul of the work: “That arm is wrongly put—and there again— / a fault to pardon in the drawing’s lines, / Its body, so to

speak: its soul is right, / He means right—that, a child may understand. / Still, what an arm!
 And I could alter it: / But all the play, the insight and the stretch....²³⁸ In opposition to the
 reach of the mediocre artist, the genius' reach exceeds his grasp, and this excess, too, has
 ethical implications, but positive rather than negative ones. Raphael doesn't attempt to
 possess his model through art, doesn't claim to fully represent her. In allowing his work to
 remain imperfect, Raphael indicates an inaccessible dimension to Mary, a desiring soul
 which cannot be fully fleshed out.

Now the question arises as to whether Andrea considers Lucrezia to be unpossessable
 in this way and thus a suitable subject for a work of genius. Much hinges upon the answer, as
 I've hinted: Andrea's aesthetic and ethical status, as well as Lucrezia's. In a sense which
 includes the notion of fidelity, Andrea does consider Lucrezia unpossessable, of course, as
 the lines with which I opened my analysis testify: Andrea says that Lucrezia is no one's. On
 the other hand, Andrea considers Lucrezia to be possessable in the carnal sense, possessable
 by any suitor who currently, if only temporarily, holds her interest. In fact, the two senses are
 related: Lucrezia is supposedly unpossessable in the first sense because she is so eminently
 possessable in the second sense. According to Andrea's hyperbolic account (and the
 body/soul thematic introduced in Andrea's critique of Raphael's painting calls for that
 account to be taken literally), Lucrezia is all body, and body is what can be perfectly grasped.
 Lucrezia is so perfect in her corporeality, so much a body, that she is mindless: "had you—
 oh, with the same perfect brow, / And perfect eyes, and more than perfect mouth, / And the
 low voice my soul hears, as a bird / The fowler's pipe, and follows to the snare— / Had you,
 with these the same, but brought a mind! / Some women do so...."²³⁹

Since Lucrezia is Andrea's preferred model, the aesthetic consequence of his characterization of her as nothing but a body is mediocre art. Because Lucrezia can be perfectly grasped, Andrea's painting of her cannot have the value of Raphael's painting of the Virgin Mary. Andrea, in fact, imagines a rather prurient critical comparison of the relative usefulness of the two models: " 'Rafael did this, Andrea painted that; / The Roman's is the better when you pray, / But still the other's Virgin was his wife—' ”²⁴⁰

But just as important as the aesthetic consequence, and tied to it, is the ethical consequence—for both Andrea and Lucrezia. In his hyperbolic account of her mindlessness, Andrea fails to consider the possible existence of a soul full of opaque desires in Lucrezia which he can't represent. His blindness to Lucrezia's desire is implicit when, in imagining what Lucrezia's mind would contain if she had one, he has her say only what he himself has supposedly always wanted her to say: "Had the mouth there urged / 'God and the glory! never care for gain. / The present by the future, what is that? / Live for fame, side by side with Agnolo! / Rafael is waiting: up to God, all three!' / I might have done it for you...." ²⁴¹ It is here, in this little hypothetical scenario, that Andrea blames the mindless Lucrezia most explicitly for his mediocrity; however, one suspects that Lucrezia's mindlessness is nothing but a desiring which resists Andrea's. Lucrezia may very well have hidden desires, but Andrea, too full of his own desire for Lucrezia and, even more importantly, too full of his own desire for absolution from mediocrity, can't even imagine that such hidden desires may exist. He therefore unjustly blames Lucrezia for his artistic shortcomings.

A Good monologue

Judged solely by his perfect portraits and his hyperbolic account of Lucrezia's mindlessness, Andrea is undoubtedly guilty of injustice. However, Andrea cannot be judged solely on these, because he goes on to recognize—in his monologue if not in his painting—Lucrezia's resistance to being perfectly grasped, a resistance which testifies to her having a mind of her own with desires that Andrea cannot fathom.

The key to this reading, obviously, is an appreciation of the difference between Andrea's paintings and his monologue, which has its own aesthetic and ethical qualities. But it is precisely this difference which some critics have collapsed, finding in the monologue's narrative content and style only an explanation or confirmation of Andrea's painterly mediocrity.

Pointing to the narrative content of that monologue, they explain Andrea's artistic failure either in terms of his inability to romantically possess Lucrezia or Lucrezia's unwillingness to be possessed, and end up implicitly embracing the very aesthetic standard which Andrea rejects. Elizabeth Bieman is a case in point. In her essay, "An Eros Manqué: Browning's 'Andrea del Sarto,'" she seeks the cause of Andrea's mediocrity first of all in the fact that Lucrezia can't be grasped or "mastered" and is therefore not a wholly suitable subject for a sublime painting like Rafael's: "[Browning makes] certain that his readers will not find Lucrezia fully appropriate as model for the Madonna.... There is one way only to make the soulless Lucrezia fit a picture of the 'Virgin.' That way is to reduce the capital letter and take the word back, far from its association with the Queen of Heaven, to its roots in pagan antiquity. Then, we are told, a virgin was not necessarily a woman untainted by carnal experience but one who owned no man to be her master."²⁴²

And in addition to blaming the unmasterable Lucrezia for Andrea's mediocrity, Bieman blames Andrea himself, claiming that he lacks "erotic power." Insofar as she considers this single power to be the key to both romantic and artistic success, Bieman seems to recognize, albeit in an inverted form, the way in which romance figuratively represents the aesthetic relationship between artist and subject in Browning's monologue. However, Bieman then contradictorily goes on to define the goals or standards of that power's exercise in opposing terms, proposing an "erotics" of the grasp and an aesthetic of the reach with exceeds the grasp: "[Andrea] lacks the erotic power which he needs both to hold a wife in physical terms, and to stretch towards heaven in art."²⁴³

Bieman obviously takes the aesthetic standard from Andrea's own self-critique, but when she turns from the narrative content to the style of Andrea's monologue, she seems to jettison it again. She writes disparagingly of Andrea's "vacillation"²⁴⁴ and "timidly uxorious retraction,"²⁴⁵ traits which, I argue, mark the monologue as aesthetically and ethically meritorious. I will now elaborate on this claim.

Loy D. Martin, in his reading of "Andrea del Sarto," approaches my line of argument without actually taking it. He cites Andrea's question to Lucrezia—"You turn your face, but does it bring your heart?"—and argues that "Lucrezia's turn of the head, like her smiles later on, is beyond Andrea's power of interpretation.... They do seem to emanate from a desire for some kind of reply, but their context is always the impossibility of a meaningful break in Lucrezia's silence."²⁴⁶ An opening seems to present itself here for a reading of Andrea's question as an acknowledgment, despite his own desire to represent Lucrezia's desire, of the impossibility of representing it. But instead of reading Andrea's unanswered question as a sign of his ability to exceed his grasp of Lucrezia, Loy reads it as a sign of Andrea's

disability, one which keeps him trapped in a kind of mirror play within the bounds of himself: “Our understanding of this poem will be an understanding of Andrea’s own communicational disability, a disability of which Lucrezia’s patient and vacuous smile is only a reflection.”²⁴⁷

Besides these unanswered questions, a series of inconclusive speculations, also sometimes formulated as questions, are addressed to Lucrezia over the course of Andrea’s monologue. This speculative style is what Bieman calls Andrea’s “vacillation” and “timidly uxorious retraction.” However, that the resulting open-endedness of the monologue is supposed to constitute not just Andrea’s aesthetic redemption but his ethical redemption as well, is indicated by the fact that these speculations concern the cause of Andrea’s mediocrity. First, the unjust theory that Lucrezia’s mindlessness is to blame is cast into doubt: “Perhaps not. All is as God over-rules.”²⁴⁸ Then this answer is in its turn deemed insufficient: “yet the will’s somewhat.”²⁴⁹

Bieman recognizes that insofar as Andrea’s speculations on the role of Lucrezia, God, and the will all relate to the larger question of his mediocrity, they are continuous, but she disparages the discontinuous aspect which Andrea gives them by retracting each one in turn. Instead of leaving Andrea’s aesthetically and ethically meritorious style of vacillation as it is, she tries to correct or master it by illuminating the cause of his mediocrity herself: “Andrea . . . seems to vacillate between blaming Lucrezia, fate, and himself for his shortcomings. The first two targets for his blame are seen to be intimately related if we read the poem as I suggest, and the third not very far removed.”²⁵⁰

Like Bieman, the critic John Maynard also finds confirmation of Andrea’s mediocrity in his monologue, and this method causes him, too, to embrace related ideals of romantic and

artistic possession. Maynard claims that the unsexed Andrea can't hold the readers of his monologue any more firmly than he can hold Lucrezia: "Despite the promptings of our better selves we are in effect moved to join with Lucrezia and go along to our preferable various cousins. Our short-lived adoption of this poor man ends not in our being seduced but in our betraying him too."²⁵¹ Like Bieman, Maynard critiques Andrea's manner of speaking: in the hierarchy of unattractive traits which he ascribes to Andrea, the second worst is his "so annoying habit of starting attractive ideas and images only to tamp them down, grey the events, and finally close them out."²⁵² Maynard's use of the word "grey" here seems to play lip-service to the standard of mediocrity defined by Andrea in his aesthetic self-critique: "All is silver-grey / Placid and perfect with my art: the worse!"²⁵³ But the real thrust of Maynard's critique is the insufficient development of Andrea's attractive ideas, his habit of "closing them out," presumably too soon. But is closure the best descriptor of Andrea's monologic style? Isn't it more accurate to say that Andrea's monologue tends to defer closure? In claiming that Andrea closes out each idea, Maynard takes a very fragmented view of the monologue; in effect, he does the opposite of Bieman, but falls thereby into the same simplifications. Whereas Bieman recognizes the continuity of Andrea's ideas in relation to the larger question of his mediocrity, but ignores their discontinuous aspect by fusing them into a successful answer to that question, Maynard recognizes their discontinuity but by radically separating them into independent, closed-out inquiries, ignores their continuous aspect. What Maynard would aesthetically value, presumably, is the full development of a single one of Andrea's speculations, a seductive, persuasive answer to the question of who is to blame for Andrea's mediocrity. Andrea, however, recognizes the limits of each idea as an account of his mediocrity, and, rather than stop at a simplistic answer, goes beyond it in an

attempt to do justice to Lucrezia and a complex issue. In short, Andrea reaches for that which exceeds his grasp, and in doing so he exhibits, according to his own definition, the quality of genius.

A Good (?) monologue

Up to this point, Browning seems to be master of his poetic effects: that is, he seems to have recognized the unethicalness of Andrea's claim to have perfectly grasped Lucrezia, and allows Andrea to redeem himself in the course of the monologue by recognizing that there is something beyond Lucrezia's body that eludes his grasp. Also, insofar as Lucrezia, the sexually experienced married woman, is shown to be as capable as Mary of an aesthetically valuable withholding, Browning successfully expands the realm of art's viable subject matter to include the domestic sphere that Andrea seems to devalue when he asks "What wife had Rafael, or has Agnolo?"²⁵⁴

But by the aesthetico-ethical logic dictated by his own monologue, Browning's apparent mastery may signal an unrecognized injustice. I would argue that Browning seems to be blind to the unethical implications of a distinction he makes within the domestic sphere between the aesthetic value of the product of Lucrezia's withholding and the aesthetic value of the product of her negotiation. Only the product of the former is prized.

The monologue begins, as I said at the opening, not with a murderous silencing of Lucrezia, but with the negotiation of her silence. To this extent, the suspicion that Andrea, in mediating access to Lucrezia through his monologue and paintings, manifests nothing but his own desire, would seem to be laid to rest. Lucrezia has a say in her silence: "But do not let us quarrel any more, / No, my Lucrezia; bear with me for once: / Sit down and all shall happen

as you wish.”²⁵⁵ However, Andrea’s promise to surrender artistic control to Lucrezia’s lover—to “Treat his own subject after his own way”²⁵⁶—and to “shut the money into this small hand / When next it takes mine,”²⁵⁷ signals the low value which will be placed on the artistic product of this negotiation. Browning’s emphasis on what eludes the grasp means that only those desires of Lucrezia’s which remain ungraspable, indeterminate, unspoken, are recognized as valid. In eschewing the grasp, Browning also discounts the concrete results of Lucrezia’s domestic negotiations with Andrea. In order for her desires to be validated, Lucrezia must keep them to herself, unsatisfied. She must play the role of silent mystery to the speculative artistic musings of her husband.

To this extent, Martin is correct when he calls Lucrezia’s smile a mere reflection; it remains caught within Andrea’s conceited or narcissistic economy. That is, Andrea’s grasp-exceeding monologic speculations upon Lucrezia’s enigmatic smile satisfy his desire for the glory of genius (even if his limitations as a mere character prevent him from knowing it) at the same time as they discount the product of Lucrezia’s concrete desire and make precious only the product of those desires of hers which remain mysterious and thus unsatisfied.

Since Andrea can only satisfy his desire for glory at Lucrezia’s expense, glory proves to be as divisible a good as gain, subject to the same economic constraint, which dictates that if one person gets more, another person gets less. It isn’t, therefore, only the mediocre Andrea who is guilty of injustice; so is Andrea the genius. The two cannot be distinguished on the basis of the criterion of an unjust disposition. If grasping or possessing is one form of violence, locating an other absolutely beyond one’s reach in order to capitalize more effectively on their enigmatic otherness is another form. In his brilliant monologue, Andrea—or is it Browning?—capitalizes on Lucrezia in precisely this way.

Of course, that I am capable of offering this reading is due to the fact that Browning's monologue opens up the possibility of a redemptive reading, the possibility of articulating an unspoken injustice. That which exceeds the grasp is thus not only a more subtly violent form of appropriation, but also the promise of future redress.

But the claim to have fully done justice must always be, to use a term of the late Jacques Derrida, deferred, or the worst injustice, as he argued, will remain unacknowledged. In deferring, one does not avoid this injustice entirely, one acknowledges one's injustice, which one cannot name, but which someone will name in the future. This is what I do now.

Such an acknowledgment may look like a new form of attempted mastery, reflecting a desire not to be mastered in turn by someone capable of pointing out one's blindspots. But perhaps this is only a conceited ambition in aesthetic terms; in ethical terms I hope it is the attempt to do right, to recognize the validity of other people's desires as far as one can.

Chapter 9: The Case of Wagner and Verdi:

Franz Werfel's Verdi: Ein Roman der Oper

Introduction

This chapter compares two late-modern—some would say postmodern—diagnoses of mediocrity: Nietzsche's The Case of Wagner (1872) and Verdi: A Novel of the Opera (1924), a novel by the Austrian-Czech writer Franz Werfel in which the figure of Wagner also appears. As my use of the term “diagnosis” suggests, the Stoic notion of the passions or pathē as literal diseases comes into its own again in these two texts, where attempts are made to prevent mediocre musicians' work from having a deleterious effect on their audience's healthy moral development. What makes these texts seem postmodern is that the Stoic-inspired strategy of critical detachment they adopt towards the morally unhealthy works in question is a second-order critical detachment. That is, the mediocre musicians themselves have already been involved in the revaluation of values—to use a Nietzschean phrase—including the value of those external goods like fame which are the stuff of justice, and the corruption of their will is a result of that revaluation. In short, these mediocre artists suspect modernity's critical impulse itself of being morally unhealthy, and along with the threat of nihilism, the threat of their reaction hangs in the air.

As I've already discussed, Jurgen Habermas identifies modernity's central philosophical problem as one of self-grounding: unable to orient itself according to norms from the past, it must derive its orientation from its own principle, the principle of freedom of subjectivity.²⁵⁸ In moral terms, freedom of subjectivity means first of all, “the right of individuals to perceive what they are supposed to do as valid,”²⁵⁹ that is, the freedom of the individual to determine his or her ends. But modern moral concepts are also founded on the

“demand that each person may pursue the ends of his particular welfare only in harmony with the welfare of everyone else.”²⁶⁰ Clearly, this right and this demand are in tension—the principle of freedom of subjectivity creates this tension but is also expected to resolve it, to mediate particular and universal claims, the claims of the individual and the claims of society as a whole. But the principle of freedom of subjectivity isn’t powerful enough to reconcile the individual claims it supports, isn’t powerful enough to restore the ethical totality which religion once guaranteed.²⁶¹ A one-sided way of expressing this problem would be to say that the individual claims which the principle of freedom of subjectivity supports are too powerful; that individual wills, once liberated, destroy collective will. However, this one-sided way of putting things doesn’t take sufficient account of the quasi-dialectical nature of the tension between particular and universal claims: unable to tap into the legitimizing power and moral guidance of universal claims, many individuals of a certain character or personality will see their own claims as narrow and self-interested—in short, as illegitimate—and their wills may consequently weaken, becoming in the parlance of late modernity, mediocre. What’s more, these weakened individuals may then come to see the force which exceeds their will as inhuman and inhumane, as lying beyond all ethical responsibility. In other words, instead of living with the contradiction which the principle of freedom of subjectivity makes legible, instead of deriving from that contradiction a singular ethical insight, certain modern subjects will posit two ways of acting, two kinds of life.

In addition to diagnoses of mediocrity, these two texts offer prognoses on the possibility of “overcoming” the condition (these medical metaphors are taken from the texts themselves). An optimistic prognosis depends in both cases upon successfully distinguishing between the condition of the mediocre artist and that of the genius—either amputating or

quarantining mediocrity from the body politic to prevent the continuance or the spread of the condition. This bio-logical analysis of the contradiction seems intended to allow the results of the procedure to live on their own as two distinct forms of activity.

In both Nietzsche and Werfel, hinging upon the success or failure of these procedures is the fate of ethics and the fate of art—the fate of ethics in art. In Nietzsche, for whom the separation of mediocrity and genius is possible, art leaves ethics behind; a strong will is no longer an ethical will but an aesthetically inflected will to power, an affirmation not only of one's own will but of the (non-universal) strivings of life as a whole. By contrast, in Werfel, for whom the separation of mediocrity and genius fails, the two collapsing entirely into each other without contradiction, art neither egotistically continues to fall short of ethics, nor does it leave ethics behind. Instead, ethics and art alike are carried along into the future along a wholly peaceful middle path which should no longer exist after the collapse of the contradiction: To one side is the injustice of the human ego, to the other, the injustice of the inhuman.

The liberation of the ego

The moral right of individuals to perceive what they do as valid liberates them from old forms, old allegiances, which are criticized and left behind. At first—at least to the Enlighteners—there seems nothing socially destructive in this; it is believed that a new, more just society will ultimately result. Even when, as in Wagner's early career, this commitment to destruction is radicalized to the point where morality itself comes under attack, optimism about the society of the future is preserved. Nietzsche writes that in Wagner's Ring cycle,

Siegfried and Brunhilde's "sacrament of free love" promises to usher in a "Socialist utopia in which 'all turns out well.'"²⁶²

But in the course of his aesthetic pursuit of this end, says Nietzsche, Wagner ultimately "struck the reef" of Schopenhauer's pessimistic philosophy and became "ashamed" of his own optimism, which is to say, ashamed of the exercise of his freedom. For the product of that freedom, the new world envisioned by his willful critique, is now seen by Wagner to be "as bad as the old."²⁶³ In the absence of a collective, utopic vision to legitimate his action, and suspicious now of the demands of his ego, Wagner's will weakens in a certain way: with all its strength it turns upon and violates itself: "[Wagner] commanded as the inexorable will to himself, as lifelong self-discipline: Wagner who furnishes perhaps the greatest example of self-violation in the history of art...."²⁶⁴ To this extent, Wagner is Christian, for the Christian "wants to be rid of himself. Le moi est toujours haïssable."²⁶⁵ This self-violation, undoubtedly, is not understood by Wagner as violence, but as pacification.

The work of Franz Werfel's Wagner, too, is characterized by a liberation from old forms: Wagner "was a German, and to be German meant—'to you everything is permitted because nothing, no relation and no form can bind you'.... Wagner, being bound by no tradition, was free for flight...."²⁶⁶

But in Werfel, Wagner doesn't "strike the reef" of Schopenhauer's philosophy, as Nietzsche puts it—or if he does, we don't see it. The perspective is Verdi's, and it is through his eyes that we ultimately contemplate Wagner's fate. In the beginning, at least, Wagner's will appears as strong as ever and it is Verdi who is thrown into crisis—by Wagner. Like Wagner, Verdi until recently felt strong enough to maintain an optimistic vision of society;

however, Verdi's vision was to be realized not by the negation of all binding conventions but, on the contrary, through convention. Even for the young Verdi, "the word Art...had no romantic suggestion...of supermanhood."²⁶⁷ In Benjaminian fashion, it is the link to the past which guarantees that past injustices will be heard. To turn one's back on the past through originality, therefore, is a kind of impotence, a powerlessness to redress old wrongs:

Verdi avoided originality....What is originality often but the despairing effort of impotence? The deeper the roots of any artist's work are struck, the louder rises the wrath of those to whom all that has been has been bad. [Verdi's] balanced and experienced judgment recognized the value, the essential uses of convention. He had none of the pariah's hate against all that is generally esteemed; justly weighed, its practical usefulness proved, he held what was customary high. At least, until now he had done so.²⁶⁸

What has caused Verdi's reevaluation of the value of tradition is the rise of Wagner and the latter's eclipse of the old Italian composer's work. At least, Verdi initially blames Wagner. While being rowed down the Venetian Grand Canal after a concert conducted by Wagner, Verdi spots the German composer and his party in a trio of nearby gondolas: "For ten years, ten of his ripest years, every moment of which had been filled with good will, [Verdi] had laboured. And for ten years it had all been vain, pitiful, dead! Yes, dead! He was dead, and that man slumbering there, his unsuspecting enemy, had killed him."²⁶⁹ This blame quickly turns to murderous rage, of which Verdi is almost immediately ashamed:

Under the fury of this paroxysm the Maestro rose to his feet in

the gondola. Undisturbed gleamed the great dome of Wagner's head by the side of his wife, who gazed before her with anxious eyes. And as he stood thus, in the monstrous, all-transforming moonlight, and stared into the boat so close to his own, the thought "So near my hand" flashed through his mind. Excited as he was, with the words of death and murder still in his brain, it seemed to him as if he had said "So near to death"; and he sank back horror-stricken and ashamed.²⁷⁰

Verdi's reevaluation of the value of tradition, in short, turns out to be nothing but murderous envy.

This incident confirms for Verdi, or perhaps even gives rise to, his theory that the artist's convention-destroying claim that he is working towards a better world for humanity as a whole, is nothing but a self-serving rivalry with other artists. In a vision he has towards the end of the novel, Verdi sees a host of young faces and asks himself: "Were they the younger school who, united by a common mad ambition, and divided by hatred of each other, continued to trump up new refinements, and invent their horrible combinations and modulations as if they must continually at all costs outdo themselves?"²⁷¹

Thus, even though he begins with a different set of values, Werfel's Verdi arrives at conclusions similar to those of Nietzsche's Wagner: the subject's unbridled right to negate that which she deems invalid has resulted only in the liberation of an egotistical will, one too weak to create on its own a redemptive vision of the whole.

The victimization of the ego

But unlike Nietzsche's Wagner, Verdi doesn't respond to this pessimistic insight by turning his will upon himself, doesn't choose the path of Christian self-violation, as Nietzsche puts it. Or, rather, he chooses that path much earlier in life and sees it now, even adjusting for the distorting despair of the moment, as just another route to personal glory:

His life had been the life of a navy, a coalheaver. An existence in which there was no time to live. Looking neither to the right nor to the left, asking for nothing but what was convenient and necessary for his work, he had never had leisure to taste the joy of living....What had this devil of misguided energy, this Satan, this Asmodeus of incessant motion wanted of him?....He had, so ran his indictment, toiled only for reputation, had racked and strained his talent, had suffered and struggled, only out of a self-destroying ambition to be the idol of the people....²⁷²

And Verdi's insight into the unworthy spoils of self-discipline does not prompt him to undertake a more radical campaign against his ego. On the contrary, he sees his ego as a *victim* of self-discipline, and still in need, therefore, of true liberation. Instead of pursuing life, Verdi has mishandled his ego, taken it down the wrong path, the path of rivalry: "I, too, am the rival of another. What is it that men want of one another? What is this evil, this senseless evil, that they do each other? It is not in nature. Our soul has wandered into a false path, a dreadful path. Our poor Ego, how we mishandle it, how we let others mishandle it!"²⁷³

As Verdi's inclusive "we" suggests, this false path is not just his own but that of Europe as well, a deviation, as far as Verdi is concerned, from the path of the Enlightenment along which modern music had heretofore developed. Verdi doesn't reject the main trunk of this development, as he sees the fragmenting rivalries of the present as an unnatural outgrowth from it. Against the young conservative Fischböck, who complains that with humanism came the "insolent Ego, the self-regarding being, ruled only by its unresting desires," and whose advent "rent song asunder," Verdi maintains that humanism, and its musical expression the monody or Aria, "delivered [music] from the thrall of the church."²⁷⁴ Thus, the true path for Verdi, the path of life—which at this juncture still looks human and humane—remains open; along the latter, the Enlightenment may still, apparently, progress; the ego, once truly liberated, may still fulfill its ethical destiny.

Wagner's cold and sick communities

But for this persistence of ethics in his aesthetics, Verdi's rejection of a Christian-style self-violation and his (at least theoretical) embrace of life sounds surprisingly Nietzschean—surprisingly Dionysian. And it should be pointed out that the effect of Verdi's work, of his chosen musical medium, opera, does tend towards the Dionysian antithesis of self-discipline: "Opera," says the narrator, "is a frenzy, a delirious self-immolation in which the god too often belabours his priests with the deadly thyrsus."²⁷⁵

The "too often" signals, of course, a reservation, but it is far from the full-blown, reactionary lament of another of Werfel's fictionalized figures from musical history, Monteverdi, one of the founders of opera, who "had worked out the ideas of the Florentine Camerata to perfection," laying aside "soul-destroying counterpoint with its alternating

voices” to allow “the voice of the individual soul [to speak] forth”—only to find that his attempt to wed words to music resulted not in heroic, Aristotelian drama but crowd-pleasing ecstasy:

Strive as you will to join song to words—music, the lighter element will always rule. He, Peri, and Caccini the singer had founded opera upon a fallacy.... “So Marsyas flayed Apollo,” thought the old man, sadly realizing that he had worked not for the deliverance of music alone but for the release of evil also. It was not drama, not the heroic emotion of Aristotle, which had resulted, but dramatic music—the new solo and chorus singing with its ecstatic effects upon the senses so eagerly sought after by the crowd.... Of what use was it now to try to set to music any truly poetic work,—lofty tragedy as Rinuccini and Striggio had known it? The theatre, under the leadership of clever slave-drivers, reigned supreme, and music, debased to please the popular ear, grew emptier, less musical, and more wanton from day to day.²⁷⁶

By contrast with Monteverdi, Verdi, in fact, doesn’t even try to weigh light opera down with words:

By nature, [Verdi] was sparing of words.... If it had been possible he would have liked the whole text of the opera to consist of nothing but ejaculation of joy, pleasure, pain or surprise. What need was there for long sentences of many

words that nobody understood where there was music going on? The logic of musical speech and the logic of words were quite opposite things. What was the use, anyhow, of all that long-winded discussion about mythological gods?...No! It was all a mistake! Music was meant to express human emotions, actions, character and conflict, but never these abstract contemplative ideas.²⁷⁷

It is Wagner, not Verdi, who is the presumptive heir of Monteverdi, champion of the recitative music drama: “He, Wagner, the avenger of Monteverdi, had resurrected, unquestioned, the principle of the recitative music drama, and re-established it triumphantly.”²⁷⁸ Verdi’s crisis of confidence aside, the Italian composer definitively rejects the Wagnerian aesthetic.

In its refusal of the literary element in music, as well as the idea, Verdi’s negative assessment of Wagner’s aesthetic resembles Nietzsche’s in The Case of Wagner, where Nietzsche writes: “Not every music so far has required a literature: one ought to look for a sufficient reason here. Is it that Wagner’s music is too difficult to understand? Or is he afraid of the opposite, that it might be understood too easily—that one will not find it difficult enough to understand?”²⁷⁹ As with Verdi, closely connected to Nietzsche’s refusal of the literary element in music is his refusal of the idea: “Wagner required literature to persuade all the world to take his music seriously, to take it as profound ‘because its meaning was infinite’; he was his life long the commentator of the ‘idea’...which is to say, something that is obscure, uncertain, full of intimations...among Germans clarity is an objection, logic a refutation.”²⁸⁰

But the similarity between Verdi's and Nietzsche's aesthetic critique of Wagner is somewhat deceptive. At this point, Verdi still assumes the possibility of a common musical language, one which can provide a normative ethical orientation even in the midst of Dionysian frenzy. Verdi's refusal of the abstraction of words and ideas thus stems from his commitment to an accessible, popular conception of music: "It is as impossible to conceive music without the public as politics without the masses."²⁸¹ Nietzsche's critique, by contrast, means to show that, despite the appearance of profundity, Wagner's music is in reality accessible, popular in the very negative sense which Nietzsche ascribes to popularity—nineteenth-century popularity, anyway: "It is not the public of Corneille of whom Wagner has to be considerate, but mere nineteenth century."²⁸²

Wagner's music attracts a public, joins people together in a kind of Dionysian synthesis only because the nineteenth-century public isn't demanding or discerning enough. To return to a Habermasian vocabulary for a moment, the Enlightenment's principle of freedom of subjectivity has led in the nineteenth century to a particularly strong sense of the fragmentation of ethical totality, to a strong sense of the loss of an ethical common ground—in short, to nihilism—but instead of moving forward to become "active nihilists," as Nietzsche believes they should, Wagner's audience *reacts*, responding to the fragments of old forms even though these forms no longer have normative strength. Nietzsche would say, of course, that it is the audience who lacks the strength to follow those norms, and that it is the age which lacks the right to those norms, not the norms which lack the right to dictate to the age: "Not everybody has a right to every teacher: that applies to whole ages."²⁸³ Wagner's presentation to his audience of the trappings of collective myth is thus an instance of the century's general "misuse of traditional means without the capacity to furnish any

justification, any for-the-sake-of; the counterfeiting in the imitation of big forms for which nobody today is strong, proud, self-assured, healthy enough....”²⁸⁴ Wagner binds people together not because of his strength but because of his weakness and the weakness of those “decadents” who come into contact with him. The latter should resist him, but in their weakened state they succumb to him instead, getting even weaker: “For that one does not resist [Wagner], this itself is a sign of decadence. The instincts are weakened. What one ought to shun is found attractive. One puts to one’s lips what drives one yet faster into the abyss.”²⁸⁵ Wagner “increases exhaustion.”²⁸⁶ In short, Wagner spreads like an opportunistic disease, afflicting those already in a weakened state; the community which he brings together is a community of the sick: “Is Wagner a human being at all? Isn’t he rather a sickness? He makes sick whatever he touches....”²⁸⁷

It’s true that Werfel’s Verdi, also, sees Wagner, at least in the beginning, as a disease, but the route of his infection is ostensibly different. It isn’t because his only apparently opaque music is, at bottom, all too accessible, easily digested, like clear broth, by the sick. On the contrary, his wordy music really is opaque. It, along with all German culture, has spread beyond its frontiers by coldly abstracting from life. This abstracting force would seem to be the mishandled ego again, negating all tradition, all custom, at the expense of a living community. The rivalry of the ego seems to be transcended, but in fact the community it creates is a cold one, devoid of human warmth: “Out of the formalities of the empty heart, the viciousness of the empty head...it seeks to rear its palaces of ice in which there lives no voice of song. For a thousand years this northern Lucifer lived in barbarism, but now his infection is spreading to every brain.”²⁸⁸

The natural law

But Verdi can still contrast this growth of abstraction with a natural growth. Even when Verdi's music goes unheard by the people, it is still supposedly rooted in the earth: "[Verdi] had sprung far from his first beginnings; but it was a true growth, that of a mighty, dark-foliaged tree. He might indeed be called a member of that very small, ideal class formed by those who belong to no class, because their greatness oversteps all distinctions. The song that stirred in the highest branches of the tree might float unheard above the people's head: but it is from the very roots that these high branches derive nourishment."²⁸⁹ To spread the word of freedom, this ego even negates like its German counterpart, but what it puts behind it, according to Verdi, are only false, unnatural ideas of belonging: "It may yet be, perhaps, when all false ideas of nation, class and government have been chased away, that men shall rise to the conception of such a monarchy as shall rest upon nothing outward or meaningless—a tree that does not strive to detach itself from and rise above the undergrowth, but stands rooted within it, one and whole from root to crown."²⁹⁰ The liberated ego, here, would seem to have truly fulfilled the ethical promise of the Enlightenment, bringing community as well as individual liberty.

But what, in fact, is the scope of this ethical action? Is human will truly strong enough to embrace all of life or does life exceed its grasp? Does human will ultimately grasp life or does life grasp human will, like a tool? Verdi suggests in his moments of resignation that the latter is the case, but this insight still ethically orients, imposing limits upon the egotism of the ego. Speaking to his friend, the Senator, about the waning value of his music, Verdi acknowledges that "this universal feeling against me is well-founded. We have both, my friend, been standing still without realizing it. It is vain for us to oppose the natural law, the

practical necessity, that a rusty tool must be thrown away.”²⁹¹ The mediocre Verdi has felt himself “unable to reach the primeval unsubjected stream which once he had the power to evoke,”²⁹² but even genius can only tap that stream at certain moments: “Genius is the divining-rod by which at certain moments a human being can tap those secret springs. Nothing more.”²⁹³ These moments, not the entire span of history, constitute the ethical horizon of the will, the duration of duty: “Do you still believe that art or fame will last?” Verdi asks the Senator. “Each of us has his duty. Mark you, only one day, whether it comes sooner or later.”²⁹⁴ Up until that point, the negating ego and the common good are one; afterwards, if the artist persists in going beyond the call of duty, continuing to work even though he is a “rusty tool,” then he reveals the egotism of his ego, his conceit or vanity: “Oh, what vanity! Did he not often say in his letters to his friends that he would never do any more serious work? And now to think better of it, to boast, to work in vain! Was this devil not yet laid, this devil of vanity, that destroys everything, kills all quiet satisfaction and drives before it every moment of the day with such infernal maddening fury?”²⁹⁵

Fruitlessness

But that which exceeds the will has at least two related aspects in Werfel’s novel. It is first of all the natural law just mentioned, which limits the egotism of the ego, putting a term to its public effectiveness, holding back its purely egotistical intentions. This aspect gives rise to the “old cry of every reformer, every innovator and rebel whether in art or politics— ‘Not thus did we plan!’”²⁹⁶ This is perhaps its less sinister aspect—that things turn out differently than planned doesn’t discount the possibility that the individual ego is simply incapable of seeing life’s broader plan and the end towards which it has dutifully but

unconsciously contributed. Under its closely related aspect, however—obsolescence, destruction, death—that which exceeds the ego is more sinister. In the epigraph to section VI of Chapter IX, one of Verdi's nihilistic moments is revealed in a letter to Clarina Massei: "I believe that our life is a meaningless and, what seems to me even worse, a fruitless story. What can come of it? What can we accomplish? If we face the problem squarely there is but one answer—a saddening and humiliating answer: Nothing!" In Verdi's worst moments a horrible version of the genius' inspiration grips him, an inspiration which is even worse than death, "an unbearable sense of endangered life, not as if death were seeking to separate soul and body but as if something were seeking to kill the soul itself. An unspeakable sense of threatening perdition, something far more than death."²⁹⁷ This sublimity which escapes representation is also beyond the human: "How to name it he did not know, that last confine of the temporal beyond which the outer horror lay. He had no power against that which lay outside the kingdom of humanity."²⁹⁸ This failure of will is perhaps the ultimate metastasis of mediocrity in Werfel's novel. The moment of horror Verdi experiences demands more than resigning himself to being a bit player in a larger human drama; it demands that he somehow come to terms with that which can't be humanized.

The Prognosis

At times, Wagner seems to be immune to such a weakness of will because he seems to be more than a man; his inhuman coldness looks at times to be capable of controlling that kingdom outside of humanity. At times like this, he can't be justly compared to Verdi; the Italian composer can't even be held to the same standard. That is what the Senator's son Italo

says: “If Wagner is more than a man...it is manifestly unjust to compare Verdi, the man, with him.”²⁹⁹ But this unflattering non-comparison is precisely what Verdi can’t bear.

One might expect that an optimistic prognosis for the mediocre Verdi and for humanity as a whole might depend upon Wagner after all. Wagner, precisely because of his possible inhumanity, may be humanity’s last hope—though it is touch and go for a while, as Wagner’s “insufficient frame swayed and strained under the force of the stream of energy that daily and hourly flowed from it.”³⁰⁰ But for Verdi, Wagner’s inhumanity would spell the Italian composer’s doom. When Verdi finally works up the courage to read the score of Tristan, he discovers to his relief that it is the work of a man, as prey to obsolescence as his own: “The Maestro had expected to read his doom in this red volume. So far as his eyes could convey an impression this music was beautiful, narcotic, wistful and imaginative; but it was based upon its own time, it was the work of a man, and it could not undo his own work.”³⁰¹ Wagner’s human status is confirmed when he dies, and his death not only ensures that Verdi’s past work will not be undone; it inspires in Verdi a joyful sense of possibility:

“Wagner is dead.

“He can produce no more. His work lies completed before the world; he can add nothing to it now.

“But the Maestro lives still. Who knows? He is alive, and everything is possible.” He felt the wild light spring into his eyes, of this joy that was pumped from the depths of his loins by his heart.³⁰²

So Wagner, in a way, turns out to be the redeemer of humanity after all. By his very human death he confirms the limit and the value of the human. But of what value is the human now?

In finding comfort in its modest position, the human ego, at least in its representative Verdi, seems to have returned to its egotistical ways. Verdi soon recognizes the joy which Wagner's death inspired in him as utterly vile: "The Maestro now recognized this moment of evil joy as the vilest moment of his life. Better be dead himself than entertain such thoughts. Is this humanity?"³⁰³ Even when Verdi subsequently engages in charitable deeds, he identifies the ground of the impulse in the most negative terms: "Every time that death strikes down one, another realizes that he has been spared and he is moved to discharge his indebtedness to the powers that have shown him mercy by a deed of charity. The finest and highest impulses of man rest upon a groundwork of corruption, and it was out of this primordial slime that the Maestro reared his resolution now."³⁰⁴

Struck by this insight, Verdi offers a vision of aesthetic progress that is almost Nietzschean in its "purification of the aesthetic phenomenon from all theoretical and practical associations," as Habermas says of Nietzsche.³⁰⁵ Art, according to Verdi, periodically reinvigorates human will, but it does so only for its own aesthetic purposes—it grabs a flagging attention and refocuses that attention on itself, for itself, not in order to direct the will toward justice: "The secret of Art is weariness....Every device, however new and effective, becomes wearisome in the long run after a few years. One has to find new ways of arresting attention. That is the sum and substance of aesthetic progress."³⁰⁶

Still, instead of embracing this pessimism, Verdi continues to follow the natural law, pursuing his ego's desire for fame only when it coincides with his public duty. When a visitor catches sight of some new, bold work the aged Verdi has left lying on a table, and asks why he hasn't shown it to anybody, Verdi replies: "When people publish work today,

they think of nothing but the effect it will have upon their fellow artists. But I have always considered that I have a duty towards the public.”³⁰⁷

Nietzsche goes further than Werfel’s Verdi. He, too, sees the extent to which Wagner negates life, the way his art “withdrew from the corrupted world”³⁰⁸ once it gave up on the prospect of a utopian reintegration of life. But, for Nietzsche, Wagner’s withdrawal was never inhuman—as it seemed for a time to Verdi—but all too human, an attempt to re-cover the abyss with a form of spiritual redemption. And like Verdi, Nietzsche has his “vile” moment, during which he sees in the sickness which is Wagner a cure (“Perhaps nobody was more dangerously attached to...Wagnerizing...Wagner is merely one of my sicknesses”³⁰⁹), redemption from an apparent weakness of will: “[Wagner’s] opera is the opera of redemption.”³¹⁰ Finally, like Verdi, Nietzsche is ultimately disgusted by the hope he derives from Wagner’s humanity, his “humaneness,”³¹¹ and in his disgust he too discounts the impulses from which humanity’s moral acts spring: “Once one has developed a keen eye for the symptoms of decline, one understands morality, too—one understands what is hiding under its most sacred names and value formulas: impoverished life, the will to the end, the great weariness. Morality negates life.”³¹²

But what Nietzsche puts in its place, “master morality,” is not really a morality at all; it is an aesthetic taste, an instinct for what one should “put to one’s lips.” Whereas Verdi, in the end, still justifies his artistic activity in terms of a correspondence between ego and duty, shamed by the thought of mere egotistical rivalry with other artists, and afraid of that which lies beyond the kingdom of humanity, Nietzsche boldly proclaims that “the existence of the world is justified only as an aesthetic phenomenon.”³¹³ His artist is “an entirely reckless and amoral artist-god who wants to experience, whether he is building or destroying, in the good

and in the bad, his own joy and glory—one who, creating worlds, frees himself from...the affliction of the contradictions compressed in his soul.”³¹⁴

The contradictions in question are contradictory moralities, master morality and Christian or slave morality. Their compression in the modern soul means that there is very little difference between the mediocrity and the genius, but Nietzsche seems to have every confidence that these can be separated out. A successful diagnosis, in fact, is already a positive prognosis, and the virtue of Wagner’s case is that he makes these contradictions clear—as long as one resists him oneself, that is:

What alone should be resisted is that falseness, that deceitfulness of instinct which refuses to experience these opposites as opposites—as Wagner, for example, refused, being no mean master of such falsehoods. To make eyes at master morality, at noble morality (Icelandic saga is almost its most important document) while mouthing the counterdoctrine, that of the “gospel of the lowly,” of the need for redemption!—...But all of us have, unconsciously, involuntarily in our bodies values, words, formulas, moralities of opposite descent—we are, physiologically considered, false.—A diagnosis of the modern soul—where would it begin? With a resolute incision into this instinctive contradiction, with the isolation of its opposite values, with the vivisection of the most instructive case—The case of Wagner is for the philosopher a windfall....³¹⁵

Conclusion

But I think Nietzsche goes too far and Verdi not far enough. The modern soul, thanks to the principle of freedom of subjectivity, has revealed an unsolvable contradiction—an ego which can't be reconciled with life as a whole, and this revelation is a form of progress that shouldn't be left behind or backed away from. Only as long as the ambition to wholly reintegrate life remains valid—and this includes Habermas' attempt to substitute for the principle of freedom of subjectivity the "higher-level intersubjectivity of an uncoerced formation of will"³¹⁶—does this contradiction appear as a failure of will. When that ambition is put aside, then the unfortunate inevitability of the injustice suffered and perpetrated by individuals in society can be properly acknowledged—neither turned away from in the name of humanity, as Verdi does, thereby covering it over, nor glorified in the name of supermanity.

Chapter 10: Salieri's Fetish: Job Cuts Due to a New Model of Musical Production and Reception in Peter Shaffer's Amadeus

Peter Shaffer's 1979 play Amadeus is an historical tragedy in a very specific sense of that phrase. It isn't one in the sense that the play's action unfolds in a past which serves as a mere ornamental setting for a nugget of perennial wisdom about the ends to which a certain type of fatally flawed character inevitably comes. Nor—what essentially amounts to the same thing—is the play an historical tragedy in the sense that its tragedy could only have taken place within that past, within an historical context the finitude of whose determining influences makes it possible to trace the tragedy's cause back to a fatally flawed character. Amadeus, I contend, is an historical tragedy in a more radical sense: its tragedy is bound up with historicity itself, that is, with the inevitable but unpredictable rupture of old systems of value, including aesthetic value, and the painful—especially for some, like Salieri—devaluation of that which was valorized under the old system. No one, regardless of their character, can escape such a fate, though Salieri undoubtedly makes things worse by refusing to accept it and insisting to his own detriment on the timelessness of aesthetic value—“A note of music is either right or wrong—absolutely! Not even time can alter that....”³¹⁷—which retroactively wipes out the worth of what he accomplished under the old system.

By isolating the value of the musical commodity from its material conditions of production, Salieri fetishizes, in the Marxist sense, music. But there is an aspect of Freudian fetishism to this move as well. In order to eliminate the contingency of musical reception, i.e., the way the value of music shifts depending on the musician's audience, Salieri imagines a closed circuit of production and reception, the genius singing silently to himself, his tongue in his own ear. This isn't the fetish, though: in Salieri's metaphorical universe, this image

represents a kind of whole-body pleasure, which isn't as narcissistic as it sounds because the closed circuit of production and reception ultimately guarantees that the genius' music will, at least eventually, give a degree of pleasure to others which is consonant with its true value. Salieri's fantasy of a closed circuit is apparent when Mozart's wife Constanze brings Salieri some of her husband's original scores in the hopes of securing a royal appointment for him. Salieri is astounded by how clean they are, concluding that Mozart had already finished them in his head before writing them down: "[Constanze] had said that these were [Mozart's] original scores. First and only drafts of the music. Yet they looked like fair copies. They showed no corrections of any kind.... It was puzzling—then suddenly alarming. What was evident was that Mozart was simply transcribing music ... completely finished in his head."³¹⁸ This model of musical production and reception becomes historically dominant by the end of the play, when there are multiple references to Beethoven, the (no longer shocking) interiority of whose compositional feats is given added emphasis by his deafness: "I [Salieri] even conducted the salvos of cannon in Beethoven's dreadful Battle Symphony. The experience made me almost as deaf as he was!"³¹⁹ For Salieri, therefore, the actual performance is secondary, inessential to the valuation of the music; the audience contributes nothing, but is merely a passive consumer. But for this very reason, Salieri discounts the audience's positive reception of his own music; as far as he is concerned, he can give no real pleasure because he is tongueless. God, he complains, has made him mute: "You gave me the desire to praise you—which most men do not feel—then made me mute. Grazie tante! You put into me perception of the Incomparable—which most men never know!—then ensured that I would know myself forever mediocre."³²⁰ It goes without saying that Salieri can't pleasure himself either. The only pleasure he gets is from Mozart's music, but, imagining

himself a passive consumer, he can take no active part even in that, claiming instead that he “was born a pair of ears and nothing else.”³²¹ This is Salieri’s fetish, as it were: he can only derive pleasure from his ears.

That Salieri, in self-scapegoating fashion, is willing to endure the pain of such a limited pleasure, points to his investment in the notion of absolute value—not primarily the absolute value of music, but the one who guarantees that value: God. For Salieri, the very justness of God is at stake. And the genius is the one who embodies God’s justice on earth.

Whether one reads Peter Shaffer’s play Amadeus as an historical tragedy in the sense specified above or as a character study in mediocrity largely depends upon what one makes of the historical shift in the way aesthetic value is determined in the play—whether one sees it as an historical shift through and through, i.e., from one historical authority to another, or as a shift from one historical authority to a transcendent authority whose judgments can’t be overturned in time. Salieri, despite his (ironic) defense of his work under the old system, clearly disrespects the old authority. Speaking to the audience—to the future—anticipating and participating in its disdain, he declares: “You, when you come, will be told that we musicians of the eighteenth century were no better than servants: the willing slaves of the well-to-do. This is quite true. It is also quite false. Yes, we were servants. But we were learned servants! And we used our learning to celebrate men’s average lives!... We took unremarkable men [i.e., our rich patrons] ... and sacramentalized their mediocrity.”³²² The right to pass judgment upon the value of a musical composition, once the undisputed privilege of men from the ruling class like Joseph II, Emperor of Austria, center of a system of patronage in decline, is passing to the composer himself, who is increasingly vested with

the authority to judge his own compositions. Even before this historical shift is complete, even before the audience of the future comes, Salieri's music is devalued, for as soon as Mozart, harbinger of the new system, arrives at court, Salieri's patron, Joseph II, loses his authority—in Salieri's eyes and ears at least—to confer musical value on his beneficiary's work. Tragedy springs from this historical shift not only insofar as Salieri, in losing his sense of self-worth, falls psychologically from his former lofty position (even before he falls from that position in material terms), but insofar as his corresponding envy of Mozart leads him to plot the latter's ruin as well.

The theoretical ground of this shift, I argue, is the principle of freedom of subjectivity, which recognizes the autonomy of music vis-à-vis political power. But as I have argued in previous chapters, the principle of freedom of subjectivity also leads to an antinomy in practical reason: the subject is torn between the laws of duty prescribed by the higher faculty of desire and the lower faculty's precepts of happiness (previously excessive but now legitimate inclinations), for if she follows her happiness, the subject fails to do her duty, and following her duty will not lead to her happiness. Insofar as the subject's happiness involves the pursuit of external goods like honour or acclaim, goods which are the concern of distributive justice, in doing her duty at the expense of her happiness she suffers a form of injustice.

That Salieri is traumatized not only by the aesthetic consequences of the shift, i.e., by the devaluation of his own music, but by the resulting antinomy in practical reason, is suggested by his strong sense of having been treated unjustly by God. As a young man, Salieri, kneeling before a portrait of Christ, made a deal with Him, proposing that he dutifully serve Him through his music in exchange for the happiness of fame:

Every Sunday I saw Him in church, painted on the flaking wall....an old candle-smoked God in a mulberry robe, staring at the world with dealer's eyes. Tradesmen had put him up there. Those eyes made bargains, real and irreversible. "You give me so—I'll give you so! No more. No less!....The night before I left Legnago for ever I went to see Him and made a bargain with Him myself!....I knelt before the God of Bargains, and I prayed through the mouldering plaster with all my soul.... "Signore, let me be a composer! Grant me sufficient fame to enjoy it. In return I will live with virtue. I will strive to better the lot of my fellows. And I will honour You with much music all the days of my life.³²³

But the conditions of such a deal could only be fulfilled under the old dispensation; under the new system of aesthetic value, the acclaim Salieri receives from the now delegitimized judges of aesthetic value is worthless, and his dutiful service thus goes unjustly unrewarded.

Of course, in the other texts I've looked at, the mediocre artist is not represented as the victim of injustice, but as the perpetrator of it. With his argument for divine injustice, Salieri would seem to exonerate himself from such a charge, for he claims to have held up his end of the ethical bargain, namely, dutiful service to God. Is no ethical judgment passed upon the mediocre artist in *Amadeus*, then? Does the play not fit the pattern observed in my other primary texts? I would argue that it does fit the pattern. Just as Andrea del Sarto tried to wholly exonerate himself from the charge of injustice, shifting the blame for his unjust representation of Lucrezia onto Lucrezia herself, Salieri may be attempting to shift the entirety of the blame for his own injustice onto God.

It wouldn't be surprising if the reader couldn't rely entirely on Salieri's testimony; after all, the composer is at the very least guilty of envy—murderous envy—towards Mozart. Then again, this rather late development in Salieri's ethical life may not be the best indicator of an unjust disposition, which is a criterion of mediocrity in the other texts I've looked at. It may be that Salieri's unjust reaction to Mozart is merely an uncharacteristic blip in an otherwise healthy soul. Do critics, then, see any sign of unethical behaviour in Salieri before the advent of Mozart?

Felicia Hardison Londré does. She claims that Salieri “never admits to himself that he was at fault from the beginning, not only because he asked [God] for the wrong thing [fame], but because his end of the bargain with God was only superficially kept, even before Mozart arrived on the scene. Despite his vow to ‘live with virtue’ and ‘to better the lot of [his] fellows,’ Salieri gave way to gluttony and gossip-mongering.”³²⁴

Two questions must be asked here. One, can Londré's charge against Salieri be construed as a charge of injustice; and, two, does the charge hold up?

Insofar as fame is an external good, Salieri's request for it—his pursuit of it, in effect—does constitute an activity in the field of distributive justice. And Londré's charge that Salieri, in asking for fame, asks for the wrong thing, certainly suggests that he overvalues it, and the excessive valuation of an external good is a criterion of injustice in Aristotle, as I showed above. As for Salieri's purported gluttony, if substantiated it would certainly constitute a form of excess, but in relation to bodily goods rather than external goods, strictly speaking, so I pass over that charge. What about gossip-mongering? Londré associates this activity with Salieri's employment of the Venticelli, who help him in his “jockeying for social position and professional advancement,”³²⁵ goals which can be

categorized as external goods related to power, wealth and fame. Clearly, Londré considers gossip-mongering to confer unfair advantages in the pursuit of these external goods, i.e., she considers Salieri to have acquired by means of gossip-mongering an unjust share of power, wealth and fame, a share which doesn't reflect his desserts. In short, she accuses Salieri on two counts of an unjust disposition. Thus, as in the other texts I've examined so far, the concept of mediocrity, as it can be read in Amadeus, includes the trait of injustice.

But do Londré's charges hold up? That depends upon which standard one holds Salieri to. Judged by an Aristotelian standard of justice, Salieri is probably guilty; he seems both to value excessively the external goods of fame, power and wealth, and, correspondingly, to strive for more than his share. However, judged by the standard of justice set by the modern principle of freedom of subjectivity, Salieri is not guilty, because that principle legitimates—at least in theory—the extreme pursuit of external goods like fame, wealth and power, the desire for which arises from a lower faculty of desire whose inclinations, formerly considered excessive, are now deemed appropriate. According to this standard, injustice only arises when the pursuit of external goods—i.e., the pursuit of happiness—conflicts with duty, and Salieri seems to have held up that end of the bargain, helping his fellow men (Londré admits that Salieri only resigned from various committees to help poor musicians after declaring war on God³²⁶) and “honour[ing God] with much music all the days of [his] life!”³²⁷ (a part of the deal unmentioned by Londré. Salieri doesn't break the latter promise until he perceives that God has broken His.). Justice, then, seems to break down on God's side.

But to hold Salieri to one or the other standards, and to call him either guilty or innocent, is to ignore the axiological instability at the heart of the drama, namely, the already

mentioned shift in the way aesthetic values are determined. This shift in aesthetic value goes hand in hand with a shift in ethical values—more precisely, standards of justice. As I argued above, Salieri sees himself as having been treated unjustly by God because the fame which He promised to give him is worthless. But it is only worthless under the new system of aesthetic value; under the old system, Joseph II had the power to grant aesthetic value to Salieri's work, and so Salieri's resulting fame had worth. Salieri retroactively erases that worth by insisting, in reaction, upon the timelessness of aesthetic value, and, by making God the perpetual arbiter of it, covers up that axiological instability instead of taking it into account. What the shift in the way aesthetic value is determined makes legible is the contingency of the way fame and other external goods are distributed under any system, a contingency which no performance of duty can eliminate. In short, what becomes legible is that there is no transcendent setter of exchange rates between happiness and duty. No happiness can ever be fully deserved and no duty can ever be fully performed. To claim that any one individual, because of their character, has failed to achieve the standard of justice whereby duty and happiness are reconciled, is to accuse that individual of failing to complete an impossible task. Salieri is in this sense both guilty and innocent: guilty because he has failed, and innocent insofar as he is made a scapegoat—or makes himself a scapegoat—in the interest of preserving the myth of timeless values.

It seems no coincidence that art (more specifically, music) is the ground upon which Salieri makes his deal with God; as I've argued, modernity turns to art—and ultimately to a Stoic aesthetic—in an attempt to reconcile a threatening rift between happiness and duty, nature and freedom. And even if this artistic project fails and justice breaks down in Salieri's

case, there is always the possibility that the genius Mozart will bring redemption through his own art.

At first, though, Mozart, far from holding out the hope that his art will reconcile happiness and duty and confirm Salieri's faith in God, only emphasizes for Salieri God's injustice: God chooses Mozart to be his blissful instrument even though the young genius isn't dutifully virtuous (an inversion of Salieri's own unfair exchange with God in which God received his dutiful virtue but wasn't chosen to be His instrument: "Spiteful, sniggering, conceited, infantine Mozart! – who has never worked one minute to help another man! – shit-talking Mozart with his botty-smacking wife! – him you have chosen to be your sole conduct!"³²⁸ And when the dying Mozart himself has become a tragic figure, Salieri calls him too the victim of an unjust God: "God does not love you, Amadeus! God does not love! He can only use! ... He cares nothing for who He uses: nothing for who He denies! ... You are no use to Him any more—You're too weak—too sick! He has finished with you! All you can do now is die!"³²⁹ Now, one could easily argue that Salieri here is scapegoating God for his own attempts to bring about Mozart's downfall, but the fact is that Mozart is the victim of larger forces than Salieri, even if I wouldn't call those forces God. God or spirit is Salieri's word for the already discussed contingency of justice, which Salieri defiantly rejects: "They say the spirit bloweth where it listeth: I tell you NO! It must list to virtue or not blow at all!"³³⁰ Salieri's strong reaction against the new dispensation notwithstanding, the old system still has some force left in it; Mozart still depends upon the support of Joseph II, and the value of his music—and by extension, his happiness—are still subject to his judgment. At the premiere of Mozart's opera The Marriage of Figaro, the audience takes their seats when the emperor and his Court haven taken theirs; when the emperor stands for the intermission,

the audience rises too; when the emperor returns to his seat, the audience sits; and when, at the end of the opera, the emperor yawns, his yawn is followed by “scant applause” from the audience.³³¹

But Salieri ultimately posits a concept of genius which avoids injustice, whether perpetrated upon himself or perpetrated by him upon others. For Mozart, as Salieri explains towards the end of the play, ultimately gets the fame he deserves—though posthumously. In later years, as Salieri’s music becomes ever fainter in the ears of the public, Mozart’s gets louder and louder. Somewhat like Diderot when trying to explain away the injustice of the genius, Salieri implies that the judgments passed by the emperor and the public upon Mozart’s music were flawed human judgments, and in time those unjust judgments were overturned. Human injustice simply got in the way of divine justice for a time; Mozart really did deserve fame.

But is it true that Mozart avoids perpetrating any injustice of his own? Doesn’t he acquire fame at the expense of Salieri, not to mention the old guard of the court, who immediately sense in his disrespect towards their authority the threat he poses to their privilege? If Mozart’s music were truly timeless, as Salieri claims it is, then in composing to please himself, Mozart would please everyone (a dream reminiscent of Adam Smith’s). That it doesn’t, Salieri of course puts down to the aesthetic incapacity of Mozart’s audience, but it is at least as much, if not more, about the Court’s capacity to sense that any shift in musical authority from the court to the composer will threaten the interests of the establishment. One may attempt to justify this threat, of course, by claiming that the court’s authority is illegitimate, but the truth of such a claim is perhaps a little too self-evident from a 21st-century perspective. The fact is, composition is not a transcendent activity unrelated to the

struggle for a finite or divisible supply of external goods like fame, wealth and power, and this fact is at no time more evident than during the transfer of musical authority. After the fact, when the primary players in the drama are dead, it is much easier to imagine that Mozart's music pleases everyone, that the time devoted to his music by modern orchestras, for instance, doesn't take time away from the performance of the music of other composers. Or, if one does recognize this fact, one can always excuse the injustice on the basis of the superior aesthetic value of Mozart's music, but then one has to assume that aesthetic value is a fixed thing. To refuse this assumption of fixity is not to subscribe to a thoroughgoing relativism; it is to acknowledge an irreducible injustice in every dispensation, including, especially, one's own, where the blind spot is biggest.

Salieri's injustice, then, may be more spectacular than Mozart's, but that's partly because Salieri hides his enemy's injustice behind the claim that the value of the latter's music is absolute. Perhaps Salieri makes this claim because he can't bear the thought of a thoroughly unjust God, and is, despite the decline in popularity of his own music and the resurgence of Mozart's, in some way relieved by the eventual justice of posterity's judgment. If so, he scapegoats himself to get this relief, because the tragedy of Amadeus cannot ultimately be wholly attributed to the character of Salieri the mediocre artist.

Not that the tragedy can be wholly put down to the character of the genius Mozart either, of course. Both men are to some extent victims and beneficiaries of an inevitably unjust distribution of divisible goods. Neither man can ever wholly deserve the fame or the obscurity which his music brings him. The creation of a music which could transcend this injustice in Stoic fashion by inspiring in its audience an unerring sense of the value of fame, a fame which, in gratitude for the musician's performance of his aesthetico-ethical duty, would

be given by the audience to the musician in the correct proportion—the creation of a music, in short, which could embody justice in its very reception—is an impossible task.

In the end, then, the character trait of injustice is insufficient to fully distinguish Salieri from Mozart, the mediocrity from the genius, and the judgment passed upon Salieri by Londré and other critics is thus, to this extent, unjust. In this light, Salieri's final benediction of the audience, whom he addresses as fellow mediocrities, doesn't seem quite so tragic. If the mediocrity is not fully absolved, if he cannot avoid a share of the guilt, at least he no longer has to carry the entire burden alone: "Mediocrities everywhere – now and to come – I absolve you all. Amen!"

PART THREE: The Future of Mediocrity

Chapter 11: The Impasse in Moral and Artistic Development

Unrecognized as a Form of Progress

The limits of an artistically mediated distributive justice are a function of neither a lack of principle in the mediocre artist nor a lack in the principle of freedom of subjectivity. If anything, the principle of freedom of subjectivity helps make those limits legible by introducing an antinomy in practical reason, an antinomy which, although it paralyzes the moral agent between two contradictory commands, nonetheless constitutes a form of moral progress.

Theorists of modernity, however, have been less inclined to see it that way. Although I agree with Jürgen Habermas' rejection of certain postmodern claims that the possibilities of modern culture have been exhausted,³³² unlike him I do not think that the discourse of modernity needs to be "retrace[d]...back to its starting point—in order to examine once again the directions once suggested at the chief crossroads."³³³ This time around, Habermas wants to choose a philosophy of intersubjectivity, which is supposed to have the power to avoid the dilemma into which an emphasis upon subjectivity has led modern thought. According to Habermas, the model of intersubjectivity makes possible an "uncoerced consensus arrived at among free and equal persons."³³⁴ A critique of this claim is beyond the scope of my thesis; I will only say that in alleging that coercion between subjects can be entirely eliminated, Habermas avoids the insight into the irreducibility of force which the antinomy in practical reason affords. The appropriate response to that antinomy, I would argue, isn't backing away from it as if from a dead-end. Nor, however, is it to embrace the unbridled subjectivity of artistic production, abandoning ethics in favour of aesthetics. This is the developmental model championed by that critique of mediocrity which Scodel sketches, a critical strain which finds its purest form in the Nietzschean claim that "art counts as man's genuine

metaphysical activity, because life itself is based on illusion, deception, optics, the necessity of the perspectival and of error.³³⁵ No, rather than abandoning the principle of modernity, backing away from the antinomy which arises from it, or enthroning the arbitrariness of art as a first principle, one would do best to acknowledge the limits of an aesthetically mediated justice. Such an acknowledgment would be, in the (translated) words of Jacques Derrida, the “lesser violence.”³³⁶

Acknowledging these limits is not to be understood in a Kantian sense. It does not mean restricting artistic representation to the unmediated conflicts of the sensible realm—the realm of subjects who indulge, with unjust consequences, the excessive inclinations of their lower faculties of desire—because the universality of the moral law cannot be imagined without its being reduced to one subject’s more subtle strategy for acquiring happiness. As Richard Beardsworth argues in Derrida and the political, by placing this limit between the realms of the sensible and the supersensible Kant “empties practical reason of all content. He thereby leaves the world exactly where it stands, suspended, in all its bourgeois ugliness, under an incomprehensible law which resists a priori the transformative work of political imagination.”³³⁷ As Beardsworth points out, this was the critique which Hegel levelled at Kant.

But Hegel’s attempt to recognize the violence in modern society is no more successful than Kant’s. By conceiving of the limit between the realm of the sensible (or finite) and the realm of the supersensible (or infinite) as a mediating figure that allows the infinite to take a series of finite forms, Hegel can argue that although the antinomy of practical reason cannot be solved in the atemporal medium of logic, which doesn’t admit contradiction, the conflict between the claims upon the subject of the sensible and

supersensible realms can be resolved in the medium of history—or, we might say, the medium of story, since narrative too is temporal. If, for the Stoics, tragedy embodies or is informed by an exaggerated sense of the value of external goods, tragedy for Hegel is informed by competing senses of their value. In the context of his commentary on Derrida's reading of Hegel's reading of Antigone, Beardsworth explains that for Hegel civil law—the law informing individuals' pursuit of happiness—and public law—the law prescribing citizens' duties—are both necessary for the moral health of the community. But the recognition of this necessity, tragically, only comes about as a result of the two laws coming into conflict, citizens upholding the value of external goods at the expense of goods of the soul like duty, and governors upholding the value of goods of the soul like duty at the expense of external goods. Only when both sides have suffered from the resulting moral pathologies in the community do they recognize the other's law as their own as well. As Hegel puts it, "Only in the downfall of both sides alike is absolute right accomplished."³³⁸ But Derrida argues that "when Hegel thinks he is talking about history, he is not; he is talking about history as he desires it to be. . . . which is why, like all desires," his claim that the violence of distributive injustice can be fully recognized and thereby eliminated, is "violent and suppressive."³³⁹

So, is there an alternative to Kantian ugliness and Hegelian fantasy, a way for the artist to represent the limits of distributive justice without restricting herself to a dark picture of the present or allowing herself a rosy picture of the future? Derrida's thought suggests that the political community designed for justice should be represented as something which always has to be "made and unmade."³⁴⁰ The artist featured in such representations will produce pictures of political communities that are clearly marked as provisional, subject to challenge by, or on behalf of, those whose claims remain inevitably and unjustly

unrecognized within them. The artist will still desire fame and wealth in return for producing these pictures—for she values highly these external goods—but she will acknowledge that she can't ever fully merit them. On the basis of this acknowledgment she will not be excluded from the community because of conceit, and conceit will not be the explanation for her inability to wholly reconcile her happiness with her duty. There will still be something tragic about such narratives, but they will be tragedies mixed inseparably with at least some hope, drawing attention as they do to the inescapable escapability of characters' fates.

The charge of mediocrity won't hold as much water in this new genre, but if the charge is to be laid on the shoulders of any artist, it should be laid on those of the artist conceited enough to consider himself wholly worthy of fame and wealth.

Chapter 12: Conclusion

This dissertation has been an attempt to account for the characterization of the modern mediocre artist as conceited in an era of disciplinary independence, when attempts have been made to set art upon its own foundation, devaluing if not eliminating altogether art's ethical function. Joshua Scodel, in fact, has sketched a history of modern aesthetics in which the rejection of mediocrity in favour of the extreme leads to the progressive evacuation from art of its former didactic element. My study has, I hope, drawn attention to a different and apparently neglected critical strain in modern art.

I've explained this characterization of the modern mediocre artist as a consequence of modernity's principle of freedom of subjectivity, a principle which grants the moral agent the right to develop the extreme inclinations of her appetitive faculty—a right not accidentally contemporaneous with the rise of the merchant class.

But as I've shown, one reason Aristotle prescribes a mean disposition for the appetitive faculty or lower faculty of desire is the divisibility of external goods—the fact that when one person gets more of these goods, another gets less. So, although modernity's preservation of Aristotle's notion of relative merit goes some way towards justifying an unequal distribution of goods, it still risks promoting an unjust social order when it grants the moral agent the right to pursue his extreme inclinations. In an attempt to avoid this risk, modernity insists equally upon the autonomy of the higher faculty of desire, the faculty which prescribes the laws of duty towards others. The result of this move, however, is that the moral agent is now faced with an antinomy in practical reason, contradictory commands to pursue his happiness and do his duty.

Unable to resolve this antinomy in ethical terms, modernity must turn to art instead for a solution. Modern art isn't expected to legislate directly—that is, prescribe action—in the realms of the sensible and the supersensible, but it is expected to cultivate simultaneously and without contradiction the spectator's feeling for happiness and her sense of duty. Kant's aesthetics do provide a needed bridge between the sensible and supersensible realms, but his insistence upon the spectator's disinterest vis-à-vis the existence of represented objects means that Kantian art can only cultivate in the spectator a sense of duty, not a feeling for happiness.

I've argued that in the quest for an aesthetics which can simultaneously cultivate a sense of duty and a feeling for happiness, modernity implicitly adopts certain Stoic aesthetic assumptions including the continuity of impulsive and reasoned action, which in Stoicism are both oriented by the same law of nature. In making this argument, I hope I have suggested a new approach to the influence of Stoicism in modern literature, previous studies of which have focussed primarily on the Stoic goal of apatheia in the face of external vagaries. What I have tried to show is that, despite the fact that modernity promotes strong desires towards external goods, there is a theoretical affinity between the modern and the Stoic rejection of mediocrity: both positions, for all intents and purposes, assume the unitary nature of the soul. For when the modern moral agent is artistically engaged, his lower and higher faculties of desire are operating by artistic proxy as one unitary faculty and in accordance with a single law. It makes as little sense in this modern case as in the Stoic case to moderate the artistic faculty's judgments about the value of external goods, for at a given moment that faculty is either generating a rational judgment or an irrational one, one which either accords or fails to accord with its own law. An irrational judgment should be eliminated entirely, a rational one

wholly embraced. Only if a judgment about external goods arises from a separate, irrational principle can one justify subordinating one's desires to reason and moderating them.

The reason, then, that the modern mediocre artist is said to have a mean artistic disposition is that the law which should inform his work in its entirety extends only to the extreme limits of the sensible realm, to the sensible objects he represents, and these limits are merely the mean point of an aesthetic territory which spans both the sensible and supersensible realms. Although he accurately judges external goods to be highly valuable, he shows no appreciation of duty or other goods of the soul. His work therefore has a pernicious effect on the psyche of the uncritical spectator or reader, inculcating in the latter beliefs which when acted upon result in distributive injustice. By contrast, the genius' aesthetic judgment is said to accurately span the sensible and supersensible realms, resulting in work which educates even the uncritical spectator in how to be happy and dutiful.

However, distributive injustice isn't said to be caused by bad art alone. Unable to give the antinomy in practical reason as an alibi for his failure to reconcile happiness and duty in the medium of art, the mediocre artist's failure gets attributed to his character—more precisely, to his conceit. For in the first place it is because he wrongly estimates himself to be a genius that he undertakes morally educational work for which he is not fit, with socially damaging results. Secondly, in undertaking this work, the mediocre artist demands—and sometimes receives—the fame and wealth with which society rewards such work, even though he doesn't deserve them. The genius, by contrast, is said not to suffer from conceit because he undertakes morally educational work to which he is eminently suited. His work therefore inspires distributive justice, and the fame and wealth he receives in return is no more than his fair share.

I've tried to show through close readings of my primary texts, however, that even the genius fails to attain the modern standard of distributive justice. The implication is that character isn't the real reason for the mediocre artist's failure. Rather, the reason is the insufficiency even of art to resolve the antinomy in practical reason which arises from the principle of freedom of subjectivity. When the smoke screen of character is dispelled, it is possible to appreciate the insight which this principle offers into the limits of distributive justice. In making such a claim, I have joined the debate on the possibilities still inherent in modernity. I propose that instead of searching for an entirely new principle or returning to an abandoned one, as Jürgen Habermas has suggested, critics can productively continue to elaborate the ethical and aesthetic implications of the antinomy which freedom of subjectivity generates.

Not that character isn't important: how one reacts in the face of the antinomy in practical reason—whether one insists optimistically upon the possibility of its resolution, whether one backs away from it, or whether one attempts to draw out its implications—is no doubt dependent in part on one's character, as Nietzsche insisted when, in his effort to cultivate a different critical strain, he prescribed an active rather than a decadent, reactive nihilism. But a psychological profile alone—especially one with such a distractingly prominent feature as conceit—isn't a sufficient ground for the critique of mediocrity. As Theodor Adorno says of his own brand of criticism, where it “finds inadequacies it does not ascribe them hastily to the individual and his psychology, which are merely the façade of the failure” but to the “insolubility of the task itself.”³⁴¹ Resolving aesthetically the antinomy in practical reason is just such an insoluble task. Hopefully, my dissertation will encourage less hastiness in ascribing the failures of the mediocre artist to his character.

Of course, I didn't undertake this study primarily for the purpose of exonerating the mediocre artist, who is generally male, white, well-to-do, and consequently in little need of my help. I undertook the study to make legible the pretension for which he is sacrificed: the pretension of a wholly just community, which in reality is composed of many victims of injustice who are far less visible than the mediocre artist. When his lot is compared to theirs, the mediocre artist does indeed seem rather egocentric, obsessed with his happiness alone. Still, he isn't conceited in the way my primary texts would have it—that is, conceited in comparison to the magnanimous genius, who is represented as a visionary of justice. It is as if the merchant or middle class has sacrificed in spectacular fashion one of their own in order to glorify another. The genius is their emotional champion, embodying their all-encompassing passion, revealing the essential fairness of their extreme but only apparently selfish pursuit of happiness.

NOTES

¹ Katherine Arens, "Mozart: A Case Study in Logocentric Repression," Austria and Other Margins: Reading Culture, by Katherine Arens, Studies in German Literature, Linguistics and Culture (Columbia, S.C.: Camden House, 1996) 59.

² Erik Gray, "'Out of me, out of me!': Andrea, Ulysses, and Victorian Revisions of Egotistical Lyric," Victorian Poetry 36 (1998): 1, passim.

³ P. M. W. Thody, "Le Neveu de Rameau and the Awareness of Mediocrity," Studies in Eighteenth-Century French Literature, ed. J. H. Fox, M. H. Waddicor, and D. A. Watts (Exeter: U of Exeter, 1975) 287.

⁴ Friedrich Nietzsche, Twilight of the Idols/The Anti-Christ, trans. R. J. Hollingdale (1889, 1895; Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1990) 81-82.

⁵ Joshua Scodel, Excess and the Mean in Early Modern English Literature (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2002) 2, passim.

⁶ Scodel 12.

⁷ Scodel 285.

⁸ Scodel 285.

⁹ Scodel 146.

¹⁰ Scodel 285.

¹¹ Scodel 285.

¹² Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, Hegel's Philosophy of Right, trans. T. M. Knox (1820; London: Oxford UP, 1967) 286.

¹³ See Sebastian Gardner, Kant and the Critique of Pure Reason, Routledge Philosophy Guidebooks (New York: Routledge, 1999) 316-18.

¹⁴ John Halperin, Gissing: A Life in Books (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1982) 148, cited in Lewis D. Moore, "The Triumph of Mediocrity: George Gissing's New Grub Street," The Gissing Newsletter 23.1 (1987): 7.

¹⁵ Philip J. Gallagher, "Milton's 'The Passion': Inspired Mediocrity," Milton Quarterly 11 (1977): 44-50. The inspiration of the title is not the speaker's, but Milton's. According to Gallagher, Milton's depiction of artistic mediocrity is inspired.

¹⁶ David Ellison, Ethics and Aesthetics in European Modernist Literature: From the Sublime to the Uncanny (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge UP, 2001) 5.

¹⁷ Ellison 6.

¹⁸ Ellison 7. It should be said that Ellison seems to be more interested in the contradictory values granted to aesthetics and ethics in Kant, than he is in the contradictory values granted to sensible and supersensible activity, but Ellison's argument is easily adapted to my purposes. Kant's claim that aesthetic activity allows a free play of the faculties (including the sensible and supersensible faculties) conforms more closely to the claims made for aesthetics by the critical strain I am attempting to isolate, than it does to the other Kantian claim that aesthetic activity leads to and is surpassed by ethical (i.e., supersensible activity).

¹⁹ From Kant's Critique of Judgment, cited in Ellison 13.

²⁰ In Chapter 4, I will cite a well-known passage from Cicero's Tusculan Disputations, in which he makes it clear that Stoics of the time took issue with the Peripatetics' continued promotion of the mean.

²¹ R. M. Wenley, Stoicism and its Influence, *Our Debt to Greece and Rome* (New York: Cooper Square, 1963) 107.

²² Steven Strange and Jack Zupko, introduction, Stoicism: Traditions and Transformations, eds. Steven Strange and Jack Zupko (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge UP, 2004) 1-2.

²³ Charles A. Hallett, Middleton's Cynics: A Study of Middleton's Insight into the Moral Psychology of the Mediocre Mind, *Salzburg Studies in English Literature*, ed. Erwin A. Stürzl (Salzburg: Institut für Englische Sprache und Literatur, U of Salzburg, 1975) 1.

²⁴ Hallett 12.

²⁵ Theodor W. Adorno, Prisms, trans. Samuel and Sherry Weber, *Studies in Contemporary German Social Thought* (1955; Cambridge, Mass.: MIT P, 1981) 32.

²⁶ Rosalind Coward and John Ellis, Language and Materialism: Developments in Semiology and the Theory of the Subject (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1977) 72.

²⁷ Coward and Ellis 74.

²⁸ See Susan Buck-Morss, The Dialectics of Seeing: Walter Benjamin's Arcades Project.

²⁹ These terms do an injustice to the complexity of Derrida's thinking. As Derrida has pointed out, they have been repeatedly marshalled with variations in the service of a metaphysical discourse that cannot simply be left behind or affixed with a "post-", but only

“solicited”, i.e., questioned and destabilized. There isn’t room here for a summary of this way of reading, so I beg the reader’s indulgence for my shorthand use of quotation marks, a practice which Derrida borrows from Heidegger.

³⁰ Fredric Jameson, Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism, Post-Contemporary Interventions, eds. Stanley Fish and Fredric Jameson (Durham: Duke UP, 1997).

³¹ Iris Marion Young, Justice and the Politics of Difference (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton UP, 1990) 19.

³² Young 24. According to Young, William Galston mentions honour by name, Rawls lists the closely related “social positions” as one of the immaterial goods covered by the concept of distributive justice.

³³ Young 24-25.

³⁴ Jürgen Habermas, The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity: Twelve lectures, trans. Frederick G. Lawrence, Studies in Contemporary German Social Thought (1985; Cambridge, Mass: MIT P, 1987) 40.

³⁵ Habermas 40.

³⁶ Habermas 33.

³⁷ Habermas 40.

³⁸ See Richard Beardsworth, Derrida & the political, Thinking the Political, eds. Keith Ansell-Pearson and Simon Critchley (London: Routledge, 1996) xiv, xvi, 12, 20, 24, 46, 61, 63, 68-9, 101, 134, 154.

³⁹ Aristotle, The Ethics of Aristotle: The Nicomachean Ethics, trans. J. A. K. Thomson, rev. Hugh Tredennick (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1976) 102.

⁴⁰ Scodel 166.

⁴¹ Aristotle NE 76.

⁴² Aristotle NE 74.

⁴³ Hursthouse 107-08.

⁴⁴ Hursthouse 111.

⁴⁵ Hursthouse 108.

⁴⁶ Hursthouse 109.

⁴⁷ Hursthouse 106.

⁴⁸ Aristotle NE 155.

⁴⁹ Aristotle NE 153.

⁵⁰ Aristotle NE 154.

⁵¹ Aristotle NE 154.

⁵² Aristotle NE 153-54.

⁵³ Aristotle NE 154.

⁵⁴ Aristotle NE 113.

⁵⁵ Aristotle NE 90.

⁵⁶ Aristotle NE 97.

⁵⁷ Aristotle NE 97.

⁵⁸ Aristotle NE 337.

⁵⁹ Aristotle NE 189.

⁶⁰ Aristotle NE 78.

⁶¹ Aristotle NE 155.

⁶² Aristotle NE 78.

⁶³ Aristotle NE 73-74.

⁶⁴ Cf. Aristotle NE 177-80, where Aristotle distinguishes between the “geometrical” proportionality of distributive justice and the “arithmetical” proportionality of rectificatory justice. In using the latter term in the context of distributive justice, I am trying to get across in Aristotelian terms a concept of distributive justice that would be based upon the equal division of a good between a given number of people regardless of their relative merit. For Aristotle, on the contrary, distributive justice has geometrical proportion because it does involve ratios of relative merit.

⁶⁵ Aristotle NE 177.

⁶⁶ Bernard Williams, “Justice as a Virtue,” Essays on Aristotle’s Ethics, ed. A. O. Rorty (Berkeley: U of California P, 1980) 189.

⁶⁷ Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, Lectures on the History of Philosophy, trans. E. S. Haldane and Frances H. Simson (1805-06; London: Kegan Paul, 1894), Marxists Internet Archive, 4 April 2008
<<http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/hegel/works/hp/hparistotle.htm#s3ba>>.

⁶⁸ Habermas 35. According to Habermas, Hegel “displace[s] that ideal of art which, according to Schiller, modern art can only strive for but not attain, into a sphere beyond art... but then he has to interpret the art of his day as a stage at which, with the romantic form of art, art itself disintegrates.”

⁶⁹ Habermas 40.

⁷⁰ Vincent Descombes, Modern French Philosophy, trans. L. Scott-Fox and J. M. Harding (1979; Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1980) 45.

⁷¹ Hegel, HPR 286.

⁷² Habermas 17.

⁷³ Habermas 18.

⁷⁴ Aristotle NE 90.

⁷⁵ Allen W. Wood, introduction, Elements of the Philosophy of Right, by G. W. F. Hegel, trans. H. B. Nisbet, ed. Allen W. Wood, Cambridge Texts in the History of Political Thought (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1991) xi.

⁷⁶ Allen W. Wood, Hegel’s Ethical Thought (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1990) 45.

⁷⁷ Wood, HET 22.

⁷⁸ Wood, HET 22.

⁷⁹ A. A. Long and D. N. Sedley, trans., The Hellenistic philosophers Vol. 1: Translations of the principle sources with philosophical commentary (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1987) 58 B (1).

⁸⁰ Alfredo Ferrarin, Hegel & Aristotle (Port Chester, New York: Cambridge UP, 2001) 332.

⁸¹ Aristotle NE 221.

⁸² Aristotle NE 81.

⁸³ Aristotle NE 81.

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- ⁸⁴ Wood, intro xi.
- ⁸⁵ Habermas 20.
- ⁸⁶ Hegel, HPR 37.
- ⁸⁷ Hegel, HPR 75.
- ⁸⁸ Wood, intro xiv.
- ⁸⁹ Hegel, HPR 84.
- ⁹⁰ Hegel, HPR 84-85.
- ⁹¹ Ferrarin 330.
- ⁹² Hegel, HPR 108.
- ⁹³ Hegel, HPR 107.
- ⁹⁴ Hegel, HPR 108. I'm indebted here to Ferrarin, whose text alerted me to this passage.
- ⁹⁵ Hegel, HPR 33.
- ⁹⁶ Wood, HET 109.
- ⁹⁷ Wood, HET 114.
- ⁹⁸ Hegel, HPR 33.
- ⁹⁹ Hegel, HPR 34.
- ¹⁰⁰ Hegel, HPR 29.
- ¹⁰¹ Hegel, HPR 161. I am indebted to Wood, whose book (HET) drew my attention to this passage.
- ¹⁰² Ferrarin 343.
- ¹⁰³ Scodel 48.
- ¹⁰⁴ Scodel 52.
- ¹⁰⁵ Scodel 57-58.

¹⁰⁶ Aristotle, The Politics, trans. T.A. Sinclair, ed. Trevor J. Saunders, rev. ed. (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1957) 1281a28.

¹⁰⁷ Trevor J. Saunders, preface to III.xiii, The Politics, by Aristotle, trans. T.A. Sinclair, ed. Trevor J. Saunders, rev. ed. (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1957) 209.

¹⁰⁸ Robert L. Heilbroner, The Worldly Philosophers: The Lives, Times, and Ideas of the Great Economic Thinkers, 6th ed. (New York: Simon, 1986) 65.

¹⁰⁹ Heilbroner 71.

¹¹⁰ Aristotle NE 97.

¹¹¹ Immanuel Kant, Critique of Practical Reason, trans. H.W. Cassirer, eds. G. Heath King and Ronald Weitzman, Marquette studies in philosophy 17 (1788; Milwaukee: Marquette UP, 1998) 21.

¹¹² Kant CPrR 26.

¹¹³ Gardner 310.

¹¹⁴ Kant CPrR 37.

¹¹⁵ Immanuel Kant, Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals, trans. Lewis White Beck, The Bobbs-Merrill Text and Commentary Series, ed. Harold Weisberg (1785; Indianapolis: Bobbs, 1969) 15.

¹¹⁶ Gardner 316.

¹¹⁷ Gardner 316.

¹¹⁸ Kant CPrR 142.

¹¹⁹ Kant CPrR 142-43.

¹²⁰ Kant CPrR 164.

¹²¹ Kant CPrR 162.

¹²² Monroe C. Beardsley, "The Instrumentalist Theory of Aesthetic Value," Introductory Readings in Aesthetics, ed. John Hospers (New York: Macmillan, 1969) 314, 315.

¹²³ Immanuel Kant, The Critique of Judgement, trans. James Creed Meredith (1790; New York: Oxford UP, 1952) 14.

¹²⁴ Kant CJ 39.

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- ¹²⁵ Kant CJ 15.
- ¹²⁶ Long and Sedley 57A (4).
- ¹²⁷ Long and Sedley 57A (4).
- ¹²⁸ Long and Sedley 57A (5).
- ¹²⁹ Long and Sedley 57A (5).
- ¹³⁰ Nussbaum 126.
- ¹³¹ Nussbaum 108.
- ¹³² Nussbaum 129.
- ¹³³ Nussbaum 137.
- ¹³⁴ Long and Sedley 58A (4).
- ¹³⁵ Long and Sedley 58B (3).
- ¹³⁶ Long and Sedley 58A (4).
- ¹³⁷ Long and Sedley 58B (3).
- ¹³⁸ Long and Sedley 58D (2).
- ¹³⁹ Long and Sedley 58E (2).
- ¹⁴⁰ Long and Sedley 58B (3).
- ¹⁴¹ Long and Sedley 58B (3).
- ¹⁴² Long and Sedley 53P (3).
- ¹⁴³ Marcus Tullius Cicero, Tusculan Disputations, trans. J. E. King (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard UP, 1945) III, x, 22.
- ¹⁴⁴ John M. Dillon, “Metriopatheia and Apatheia: Some Reflections on a Controversy in Later Greek Ethics,” Essays in Ancient Greek Philosophy, vol. 2, eds. John P. Anton and Anthony Preus (Albany: State U of New York P, 1983) 511.
- ¹⁴⁵ Those, at least, who adopt the cognitive theory of the passions propounded by Chrysippus.

¹⁴⁶ Long and Sedley 65F (3).

¹⁴⁷ Long and Sedley 65F (2).

¹⁴⁸ Most studies of the Stoic legacy in modern literature emphasize the goal of apatheia, not the goal of a wholly rational and positive emotion. See, for instance, The Stoic Strain in American Literature: Essays in Honour of Marston LaFrance, ed. Duane J. MacMillan (Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1979) 3: “[I]t is possible to outline crudely a system of stoic belief which remains more or less constant, and constitutes its core down through the ages.... Such an outline must include the following elements: an emphasis on personal courage and endurance, the control or suppression of emotion, the curbing of sexual and other bodily appetites, indifference to pain, suffering and death....”

¹⁴⁹ One may be reminded here of the discussion of the scapegoat or pharmakos in “Plato’s Pharmacy,” Jacques Derrida’s reading of Plato’s dialogue the Phaedrus. In the latter dialogue, writing is the scapegoat, ritually banished as an unnecessary but subversive repetition to the outside of speech in Plato’s attempt to preserve the ideal of a speech that is fully present. There are undoubtedly affinities between Derrida’s discussion of the scapegoat and my own, but they would require more time and space than I have available.

¹⁵⁰ Le neveu de Rameau was actually written between 1761 and 1772, but the original manuscript was never published in Diderot’s lifetime. A German translation of it by Goethe came out in 1805, and was later retranslated into French, Diderot’s manuscript having been lost in the meantime. This retranslation was the basis of the French text finally published in 1821. Modern editions, however, are based on a manuscript in Diderot’s own hand, which was rediscovered by Georges Monval in 1890 and published in 1891. (This short publishing history courtesy of Wikipedia.)

¹⁵¹ Merle L. Perkins, Diderot and the time-space continuum: his philosophy, aesthetics and politics, Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century 211 (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 1982) 117.

¹⁵² Philip Knee, “Diderot et Montaigne: Morale et scepticisme dans Le neveu de Rameau,” Diderot Studies 29 (2003): 45.

¹⁵³ Knee 50.

¹⁵⁴ Hisashi Ida, Genèse d’une morale matérialiste: Les passions et le contrôle de soi chez Diderot, Les Dix-Huitièmes Siècles 53 (Paris: Champion, 2001) 330.

¹⁵⁵ Ida 383.

¹⁵⁶ Douglas A. Bonneville, Diderot’s “Vie de Sénèque”: A Swan Song Revised, University of Florida Monographs—Humanities 19 (Gainesville: U of Florida P, 1966) 33.

¹⁵⁷ Ida 10.

¹⁵⁸ Ida 19.

¹⁵⁹ Ida 337.

¹⁶⁰ Long and Sedley 22B (1).

¹⁶¹ Ida 370.

¹⁶² Ida 370.

¹⁶³ Ida 383.

¹⁶⁴ Denis Diderot, Le Neveu de Rameau et autres dialogues philosophiques, ed. Jean Varloot (1821; Paris: Gallimard, 1972) 36.

¹⁶⁵ Diderot 62.

¹⁶⁶ Diderot 62.

¹⁶⁷ Diderot 63.

¹⁶⁸ Diderot 62.

¹⁶⁹ Diderot 36.

¹⁷⁰ Diderot 65.

¹⁷¹ Diderot 36.

¹⁷² Diderot 58.

¹⁷³ Diderot 85.

¹⁷⁴ Diderot 70.

¹⁷⁵ Diderot 120.

¹⁷⁶ Diderot 37.

¹⁷⁷ Diderot 37.

¹⁷⁸ Diderot 37.

¹⁷⁹ Diderot 37-38.

¹⁸⁰ Diderot 78.

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- ¹⁸¹ Diderot 105.
- ¹⁸² Diderot 105.
- ¹⁸³ Diderot 40.
- ¹⁸⁴ Diderot 40-41.
- ¹⁸⁵ Diderot 41.
- ¹⁸⁶ Diderot 40.
- ¹⁸⁷ Diderot 38.
- ¹⁸⁸ Diderot 40.
- ¹⁸⁹ Diderot 41.
- ¹⁹⁰ Henri Peyre, "Qu'est-ce que le romantisme?" Collection SUP: Littératures Modernes 1 (Paris: PU de France, 1971).
- ¹⁹¹ Norma Rinsler, "Fromentin's Dominique," *Studies in French Fiction in Honour of Vivienne Mylne*, ed. Robert Gibson (London: Grant, 1988) 245-46.
- ¹⁹² Toyama 46.
- ¹⁹³ Jean Yamasaki Toyama, "Dominique or the Will to Fail," Selecta: Journal of the Pacific Northwest Council on Foreign Languages 5 (1984): 42.
- ¹⁹⁴ Jean Yamasaki Toyama, "Dominique or the Will to Fail," Selecta: Journal of the Pacific Northwest Council on Foreign Languages 5 (1984): 42.
- ¹⁹⁵ Toyoma 46.
- ¹⁹⁶ Fromentin 7.
- ¹⁹⁷ Fromentin 7.
- ¹⁹⁸ Fromentin 7.
- ¹⁹⁹ Irving Babbitt, Rousseau and Romanticism (Boston: Houghton; Cambridge, Mass.: Riverside P, 1919) 46-47.
- ²⁰⁰ Babbitt 46.
- ²⁰¹ Babbitt 42-43.

²⁰² Fromentin 83.

²⁰³ Rinsler 253.

²⁰⁴ Fromentin 7.

²⁰⁵ Rinsler 253.

²⁰⁶ Fromentin 8.

²⁰⁷ Fromentin 49.

²⁰⁸ Fromentin 6-7.

²⁰⁹ Fromentin 83.

²¹⁰ Fromentin 85.

²¹¹ Once again, with the theme of the “don” this time, Jacques Derrida is close by. A parallel reading of his L'éthique du don (1992) (English translation: The Gift of Death) could no doubt be productive, but also cumbersome. I once again have to hope that my own treatment of the theme is self-explanatory.

²¹² Fromentin 38.

²¹³ Fromentin 8.

²¹⁴ Fromentin 46.

²¹⁵ Toyoma 46.

²¹⁶ Quoted in Toyoma 46.

²¹⁷ Fromentin 83.

²¹⁸ Coward and Ellis 68.

²¹⁹ Loy D. Martin, Browning's Dramatic Monologues and the Post-Romantic Subject (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1985) 2.

²²⁰ Martin 35.

²²¹ Martin 38.

²²² Martin 39.

²²³ Martin 41.

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- ²²⁴ Martin 41.
- ²²⁵ Martin 38.
- ²²⁶ Martin 38.
- ²²⁷ Martin 23.
- ²²⁸ Martin 47.
- ²²⁹ Martin 40-41, 42.
- ²³⁰ Martin 43.
- ²³¹ Martin 37-38.
- ²³² Martin 102.
- ²³³ Martin 105.
- ²³⁴ Robert Browning, "Andrea del Sarto," 643-50 in The Poems, vol. 1, ed. John Pettigrew, The English Poets (New Haven: Yale UP, 1981) 29-32.
- ²³⁵ Robert Browning, "My Last Duchess," 349-350 in The Poems, vol. 1, ed. John Pettigrew, The English Poets (New Haven: Yale UP, 1981) 13-15, 21-24.
- ²³⁶ Browning, "Duchess" 9-10.
- ²³⁷ Browning, "Sarto" 97-100.
- ²³⁸ Browning, "Sarto" 111-17.
- ²³⁹ Browning, "Sarto" 122-26.
- ²⁴⁰ Browning, "Sarto" 177-79.
- ²⁴¹ Browning, "Sarto" 127-32.
- ²⁴² Elizabeth Bieman, "An Eros Manqué: Browning's 'Andrea del Sarto,'" SEL 10 (1970): 661.
- ²⁴³ Bieman 664.
- ²⁴⁴ Bieman 656.
- ²⁴⁵ Bieman 658.

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- ²⁴⁶ Martin 139.
- ²⁴⁷ Martin 140.
- ²⁴⁸ Browning, "Sarto" 133.
- ²⁴⁹ Browning, "Sarto" 139.
- ²⁵⁰ Bieman 656.
- ²⁵¹ John Maynard, "Speaker, Listener, and Overhearer: The Reader in the Dramatic Poem," Browning Institute Studies 15 (1987): 111.
- ²⁵² Maynard 111.
- ²⁵³ Browning, "Sarto" 99-100.
- ²⁵⁴ Browning, "Sarto" 136.
- ²⁵⁵ Browning, "Sarto" 1-3.
- ²⁵⁶ Browning, "Sarto" 6.
- ²⁵⁷ Browning, "Sarto" 8-9.
- ²⁵⁸ Habermas 7.
- ²⁵⁹ Habermas 17.
- ²⁶⁰ Habermas 17-18.
- ²⁶¹ Habermas 20.
- ²⁶² Friedrich Nietzsche, The Birth of Tragedy and The Case of Wagner, trans. Walter Kaufmann (1872; New York: Random, 1967) 163, 164.
- ²⁶³ Nietzsche 164.
- ²⁶⁴ Nietzsche 180.
- ²⁶⁵ Nietzsche 191.
- ²⁶⁶ Franz Werfel, Verdi: A Novel of the Opera, trans. Helen Jessiman (1924; New York: Viking, 1947) 87-88.
- ²⁶⁷ Werfel 87.

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- ²⁶⁸ Werfel 91.
- ²⁶⁹ Werfel 18.
- ²⁷⁰ Werfel 19.
- ²⁷¹ Werfel 367.
- ²⁷² Werfel 364, 365-66.
- ²⁷³ Werfel 155.
- ²⁷⁴ Werfel 217, 218.
- ²⁷⁵ Werfel 285.
- ²⁷⁶ Werfel 270, 271.
- ²⁷⁷ Werfel 89.
- ²⁷⁸ Werfel 284.
- ²⁷⁹ Nietzsche 177.
- ²⁸⁰ Nietzsche 177.
- ²⁸¹ Werfel 238.
- ²⁸² Nietzsche 174.
- ²⁸³ Nietzsche 188.
- ²⁸⁴ Nietzsche 187.
- ²⁸⁵ Nietzsche 165.
- ²⁸⁶ Nietzsche 166.
- ²⁸⁷ Nietzsche 164.
- ²⁸⁸ Werfel 194.
- ²⁸⁹ Werfel 122.
- ²⁹⁰ Werfel 123.

²⁹¹ Werfel 143.

²⁹² Werfel 347.

²⁹³ Werfel 346-47.

²⁹⁴ Werfel 143-44.

²⁹⁵ Werfel 94.

²⁹⁶ Werfel 270.

²⁹⁷ Werfel 258.

²⁹⁸ Werfel 258.

²⁹⁹ Werfel 202.

³⁰⁰ Werfel 290.

³⁰¹ Werfel 371.

³⁰² Werfel 388.

³⁰³ Werfel 388.

³⁰⁴ Werfel 399.

³⁰⁵ Habermas 94.

³⁰⁶ Werfel 438.

³⁰⁷ Werfel 437.

³⁰⁸ Nietzsche 160.

³⁰⁹ Nietzsche 155.

³¹⁰ Nietzsche 160.

³¹¹ Nietzsche 155.

³¹² Nietzsche 155.

³¹³ Nietzsche 22.

³¹⁴ Nietzsche 22.

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- ³¹⁵ Nietzsche 192.
- ³¹⁶ Habermas 40.
- ³¹⁷ Peter Shaffer, Amadeus (London: Penguin, 1980) 16.
- ³¹⁸ Shaffer 54.
- ³¹⁹ Shaffer 101.
- ³²⁰ Shaffer 55.
- ³²¹ Shaffer 103.
- ³²² Shaffer 18-19.
- ³²³ Shaffer 16.
- ³²⁴ Felicia Hardison Londré, "Straddling a Dual Poetics in Amadeus," Peter Shaffer: A Casebook, ed. C. J. Gianakaris, Casebooks on Modern Dramatists 10 (New York: Garland, 1991) 117.
- ³²⁵ Londré 117.
- ³²⁶ Londré 117.
- ³²⁷ Shaffer 16.
- ³²⁸ Shaffer 56.
- ³²⁹ Shaffer 97.
- ³³⁰ Shaffer 56.
- ³³¹ Shaffer 73-74.
- ³³² Habermas 2-4.
- ³³³ Habermas 295.
- ³³⁴ Habermas 40.
- ³³⁵ Habermas 95.
- ³³⁶ Beardsworth passim.

³³⁷ Beardsworth 53.

³³⁸ Quoted in Beardsworth 87.

³³⁹ Beardsworth 59-60.

³⁴⁰ Beardsworth 92.

³⁴¹ Theodor W. Adorno, Prisms, Trans. Samuel and Sherry Weber, *Studies in Contemporary German Social Thought* (1955; Cambridge, Mass.: MIT P, 1981) 32.

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