
Reclaiming Truth in Art: Imagination as Means of Ontological and Moral Engagement

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Abstract

Being human has long implied fascination with truth; nevertheless, the contemporary condition finds humankind in a post-truth position where truth has become corrupted by an overreliance on rationality. How does one reclaim truth? Nietzsche provided an answer to this question which contemporary society ignored: art. This paper follows Nietzsche's advice and explore the ways in which art provides insight to truth. By first surveying the history of rationality that led to the separation of art and truth, then by investigating the ways in which art reveals ontological truth both aesthetically and, ultimately, through imagination, this paper shows that a reclaiming of art as a means to truth is significant to once again access a sense of truth that humanity has lost. Additionally, in the imaginative mode of thinking evoked by art, one may come to access not only a reconnection with Being as such, but an additional connection with fellow beings, implying that art may provide a particular extension of imagination into morality. Arguing for a reconsideration of truth as humanity knows it, this paper suggests that art may be a vital means of reclaiming a more truthful truth.

Keywords: Art, Rationality, Ontology, Aesthetic Experience, Morality.

Introduction

When rational truth becomes corrupted, where does one turn? Being human has long implied an interest in truth, however, the dominant mode of accessing truth, namely through rational thought and a reliance on reason, has left truth in a difficult position. Truth in modern times can only be accepted if it is rational, and thus, in light the subjectivist post-modern position of the 21st century, subjective thought has become backed by the only thing it could turn to for justification: a sense of objective rationality. Such a confounding of objectivity and subjectivity in the contemporary age has led to the purporting of false truths in press, politics, scientific communities, and academia. Where does society turn when truth has become so corrupted?

Perhaps an answer lies in art. Philosopher and film scholar Tal S. Shamir writes, “our culture has largely distanced itself from the idea that art or aesthetics can serve as a viable means for perceiving and exploring reality or truth, and therefore, the idea that art can present truth or confront chaos requires a defense.”¹ Following Shamir, this paper provides the defense of the notion that art can reveal truth. By employing thinkers such as Friedrich Nietzsche, Martin Heidegger, Gianni Vattimo and Paul Ricœur, this paper contends that although art has been marginalized in the face of dominating rationality, art can reveal ontological truth through an aesthetic experience mediated by imagination, and thus a turn towards art and a recovery of imaginative thinking proves vital in the contemporary age. To fully characterize the ability of art to reveal truth, the first section of this paper explores the problem of rationality from ancient to contemporary times in order to show the subordination of art and the rise of reason which led to humanity’s contemporary position. The second section looks at the ways in which art reveals truth ontologically through aesthetic experience and a recovery language. Finally, the third section expands the notion that art can reveal ontological truth in aesthetics by noting that such a revelation occurs by means of imagination, an imagination which also engages with morality.

I. The Separation of Art and Truth or A Preference for Rational Thinking

¹Tal S. Shamir, *Cinematic Philosophy* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 135.

For as long as it has engaged with philosophy, humankind has held keen interest in rationality as a mode of thought. Indeed, "the history of philosophy is in many ways a history of how we understand rationality."² Rationality is related to reason in so much as to think rationally is to formulate thoughts founded in or agreeable to reason. By exploring the history of rational thought, particularly the ways in which rational thought has continuously prevailed over art as a means of revealing truth, this section establishes several problems arising from the reliance on rationality to which art may offer solutions. This paper utilizes the following definitions of art and truth so as to avoid confusion or incoherence with such large concepts: The term 'art,' where employed, implies a sense of both aesthetics and imagination, where the art-experience is a combination of subjective, aesthetic feeling and imaginative thinking. The term 'truth,' entails an ontological sense of the word, the aim of which is the reconciliation of beings with Being.³

The separation between art and reason, and ultimately art and truth, may be traced back to Plato's banishing of the poets from his reason-founded republic. Tom Rockmore writes that to understand Plato's "multifaceted attack on poetry" which "points beyond itself to art in general," one must first understand Plato's views on mimesis and the theory of forms.⁴ Following Plato's belief under the theory of forms that the physical world was not as true as ideal, absolute, timeless, ideas or forms, there emerges of a dualistic universe where the ideal non-physical was exalted and aimed at while the physical world was taken to contain less truth. Such a dichotomy presents as troublesome for art, as art is a medium of the physical world that plays to the aesthetic, physical senses. On mimesis, or imitation, Plato worries that poets and artists in general do nothing more than imitate an already non-ideal physical reality, and in doing so, imitative art becomes not just an image, but an image of an image. The created artwork is "even less real, because even further from the eternal Ideas, than ordinary phenomena."⁵ In short, much art appeals "to an irrational part of the in-

²Deborah Heikes, "Out of the Cave: Understanding Rationality." *The Journal of Mind and Behavior* (2010), 237.

³For further exploration on such definition: Herman Rapaport, *Is There Truth in Art?* (Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1997), 1-19.

⁴Tom Rockmore, *Art and Truth after Plato* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2013), 44.

⁵Charles Karelis, "Plato on Art and Reality." *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 34, no. 3 (1976), 316.

dividual far from reason. . . . The imitative poet arouses, nourishes, and strengthens the nonrational part of the soul at the expense of weakening its rational part."⁶ Plato represents an ancient divorce of art and truth that initiated the irreconcilable dichotomy of these two concepts that continues in modernity.

Modern rationality finds its roots in the Enlightenment Era, also known as the Age of Reason, which emphasized the "overcoming of dogmatic traditions by means of rational insights."⁷ Descartes remains significantly influential on the development of modern rationality, and his thoughts further complicate the position of art. He writes, "I now seem to be able to lay it down as a general rule that whatever I perceive very clearly and distinctly is true."⁸ That which is perceived very clearly is that which is acquired through a firm sense of reason in one's thoughts. Therefore, information perceived via the bodily senses proves unreliable. Reason and thought become the essence of humanity, and thus the worldly, sensuous aesthetics of the arts are not to be trusted as distinctly true. In Descartes' reason based rationality, the arts and the imagination are forgotten in the shadow of clear, reasonable thought. While Descartes' notion of rationality was influential, it certainly wasn't uncontested. Kant's work in the 18th century expounds upon Descartes rationalist philosophy by clarifying the possibilities of reason. Kant recovers the physical senses condemned by Descartes when he notes in his *Critique of Pure Reason* that "sense experience and concept formation cooperate so that we can form empirical judgments," and further, in pure opposition to Descartes, "It is correctly said that the senses do not err."⁹ Nevertheless, Kant's thoughts revolve around the ability to make

⁶Rockmore, *Art and Truth*, 32.

⁷Such a historical jump from ancient to modern may seem to exclude thought from the Medieval and Early Modern eras. Providing a detailed history of rationality through all periods would be the significant subject of a much longer article if not a book; however, by highlighting brief accounts of rationality in ancient, modern, and contemporary thought, this paper provides several key points in the debate between art and truth. The selection of ancient, modern, and contemporary thought follows the divisions of major forms of rationality as found in: Vaclav Cernik, Jozef Vicenik, and Emil Visnovsky, "History of Rationality." *20th World Congress of Philosophy* (1998). <<https://www.bu.edu/wcp/Papers/Scie/ScieVisn.htm>> ; Axel Honneth, "Enlightenment and Rationality." *The Journal of Philosophy* 84, no. 4 (1987), 692.

⁸René Descartes, *Descartes: Selected philosophical writings* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1988).

⁹Garrath Williams, "Kant's Account of Reason." *The*

judgments on reality, and while the senses have returned to the realm of reason, reason's purpose as an arbiter of empirical truth must be distinguished from imagination. Judgments and perceived truths about the world are still founded in reason, although reason now encompasses the physical senses and cognitive thoughts. Reason, although expanded, remains the only way to know truth within the world.

Nietzsche forecasts such a dependence on reason as seen in the modern period and warns of its faults, being the first to claim that alternative methods of thinking need to be reconsidered in order to reconnect humanity with truth. Nietzsche articulates that "different possibilities of engaging with reality" outside of reason remain "extremely crucial for understanding the world in which we live."¹⁰ Nietzsche's profound claims that "Truths are illusions which we have forgotten are illusions,"¹¹ because truth is merely the "sum of human relations which, after ages of use, seems canonical and solid, but is, in fact, blinding."¹² In short, humanity forgets that concepts and definitions are arbitrary abstractions, stand-in associations for the actual thing they are meant to represent. Nietzsche notes language to be the "realm of reason," and as such "language gets in the way of everything we know."¹³ Language becomes the tool of reason because it forgets the limits of itself. When one says, "this is a tree," Nietzsche worries that the word tree becomes synonymous with the tree itself, when in actuality the word tree is nothing more than a metaphorical verbal insert holding the place of tree in the mind. If there are enough of these abstractions perceived as truth, as Nietzsche believes has happened in the scientific mindset, truth, as we know it, becomes blinding. It is this lack of understanding that language and concepts are metaphor that gives language and ultimately rational science the illusion of objective truth. Truth for Nietzsche is better described as a subjective metaphor: "Truth consists of illusions about what we have forgotten that they are: metaphors without sensuous power."¹⁴ Understanding that truth as humanity knows it has become blinding and carelessly metaphoric, Nietzsche turns to art, writ-

Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Summer 2018), <<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2018/entries/kant-reason/>>.

¹⁰Shamir, *Philosophy*, 139.

¹¹Friedrich Nietzsche, *On Truth and Lies in a Nonmoral Sense* (1873), <http://ieas.unideb.hu/admin/file_7421.pdf>.

¹²Shamir, *Philosophy*, 139.

¹³Ibid., 140-141.

¹⁴Ibid., 140.

ing, “We possess art lest we perish from the truth.”¹⁵ The value of art for Nietzsche lies in the double meaning of perish and truth: art saves humanity from the reality of false truths and allows humanity to not perish of the truth, to not lose an honest, non-blinding truth.

Entering into the contemporary mindset, one finds that Nietzsche’s advice has been taken to mind, but not heart, thus producing a reality in which humankind has neglected to fully employ alternate modes of thinking and consequently remains bound to rationalism. The fears in the face of a disenchanting rationality of the 20th century, which demonstrated the advance of modern technology to be negatively exploiting the world and its resources, have resulted in a shift towards a non-classical type of rationality of the 21st century in which it is “possible to combine rationality with creativity.”¹⁶ Such a conceptualization may seem refreshing in light of the long history of rationality that has excluded creativity, imagination, and the arts as valid forms of accessing truth. However, even under such a rationality, problems arise. The arts, rather than becoming a means of knowing that is held as equal to rationality, become simply another form of rationality, that which is absorbed and assimilated into rational thinking, a tool to further access reason rather than its own respected form of understanding truth. One such example of this collapsing of artistic thinking into reason can be seen in the STEAM vs. STEM debate currently erupting in American schooling systems. In recent years the appearance of the STEAM acronym has become preferred by many organizations, placing Art within the realm, and presumably at the same value, as science, technology, engineering, and math.¹⁷ However, claims such as ‘studying music increases math skills’ distinctively show the preference for scientific thought as a form of higher thinking, the attainment of which the arts promote. Such an exploitation of the arts is seen further in universities of higher education, where majors such as English promote themselves not for the value of connecting with written art but for the skills such

¹⁵Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power* (Vintage Books, 1968), (https://archive.org/stream/FriedrichNietzscheTheWillToPower/Friedrich%20Nietzsche%20-%20The%20Will%20to%20Power_djvu.txt.)

¹⁶Vaclav Cernik, Jozef Vicenik, and Emil Visnovsky, “History of Rationality.” *20th World Congress of Philosophy* (1998), <<https://www.bu.edu/wcp/Papers/Scie/ScieVisn.htm>>

¹⁷Anna Jolly, “STEM vs. STEAM: Do the Arts Belong?” *Education Week Teacher* (November 2014), <<https://www.edweek.org/tm/articles/2014/11/18/ctjolly-stem-vs-steam.html>>

a major can provide for other careers, such as analysis and literacy.¹⁸ Art, rather than being respected as a mode of thinking which accesses truth, has become enslaved to more 'rational' higher forms of thinking in the contemporary age.

Only in the 21st century, when such a dominance of rational thinking has evolved, does one see the ultimate pitfall of accepting only one mode of thought. This pitfall is the conflation of subjectivity and objectivity. With the introduction of a post-modern 'relativist' stance that idealized individual, experienced truth, subjectivity emerged as a primary paradigm for truth.¹⁹ Such an idealized truth of subjectivity becomes corrupted when paired with the dominance of rationality, which allowed subjective claims to appear as objective in light of the dominance of rationality. In the modern era, every person's prerogative is to claim rationality as their mode of thinking, as to do the contrary—to believe truths based on irrational claims—would expose their position to ridicule. Such a prerogative, mandated by the hyper-rationality of the times that demands everything be rational, leads to the perception of opinions, sensationalism, and satire as truthful, particularly in outlets such as social and traditional media. The extreme rationalism of the contemporary times has transformed the world into a stage where subjective conspiracy theories and 'fake news' are just as rife and believable as any objective facts. These 'thoughts' have no platform to be subjective and consequently must become 'objective.'

Kurt Anderson's article documents the emergence of this conflation of objective with subjective when he argues that a "national lurch toward fantasy" conquered the American mindset of the 1960's and 1970's and led to the 21st century post-truth condition.²⁰ Contrary to Anderson, one notes that it was not a sudden introduction of fantasy and non-rational thought which led to a current post-truth condition but rather the complete lack of fantasy and non-rational thought pre-

¹⁸In his article, "A Short History of Practical Criticism" Geoffery Hartman chastises English professionals for putting too strict a limit on what determines a 'practical' skills and argues that English needs to move away from only teaching literacy as skill. See Geoffery Hartman, "A Short History of Practical Criticism." *New Literary History* 10, no. 3 (1979), 495-509.

¹⁹See John Storey, "Postmodernism." *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture* (Harlow: Pearson, 2012), 187-217.

²⁰Kurt Anderson, "How America Lost Its Mind." *The Atlantic* (September 2017), <<https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2017/09/how-america-lost-its-mind/534231/>>

ceding contemporary times. When imagination and ultimately art are disavowed as means to knowing, then fantasy must always become rationality because rationality was all that it could have become in society. Rationality was all that there was and is.

II. Art's Ontological Truth in the Aesthetic Experience and Recovery of Language

This paper has thus far defined truth as the ability to reconcile man with his existence, or rather to bring together beings with Being. Throughout history, the access to this truth has come through rationality, although this reliance on rationality has led to a certain type of post-truth existence where rationality has become corrupted. How then, does humankind access truth? Following Nietzsche's assertion on art, this section explores the ways in which art is capable of revealing ontological truth, with reference to Heidegger and Vattimo. In order to rectify art as a means to ontological truth, this section aims to fulfill two necessary goals in the examination of Heidegger and Vattimo: to reclaim the aesthetic experience denounced by dichotomous historical thinking, and to recover language as it relates to art following Nietzsche's claim that language remains a source false truths.

Martin Heidegger posits that art holds the potential to disclose truth and thereby reveal Being from Being's own concealedness to the one who experiences art. Regarding the 1886 Van Gogh painting of the peasant shoes Heidegger writes, "Van Gogh's painting is the disclosure of what the equipment, the pair of peasant shoes, is in truth. This entity emerges into the unconcealedness of its being."²¹ In the experience of the art, Being moves from concealedness towards unconcealedness, and thus inasmuch as Heidegger understands truth to be "the presentation, or the unconcealment, of the being of a thing," then the experience of art becomes a disclosure of truth.²² Why is Being concealed and how exactly does art foster an unconcealedness of Being? Heidegger notes that concealment is a double denial of Being in both "refusal and dissembling" of the idea that beings, namely human beings, close themselves off from Being, hide from their own unconcealedness, and thereby conceal themselves from the extraordinary and uncanny

²¹Martin Heidegger, "Origin of Work of Art." *Poetry, Language, Thought* (New York, Harper Perennial, 2013), 35.

²²Shamir, *Philosophy*, 13.

aspects of being so as to live ordinary lives.²³

Art holds the potential to disclose truth because of its openness, or rather its exposedness to the place where Being as such is unconcealed, and for its constant setting-itself-to-work. In closing oneself off from Being, the being has turned away from the open place and thus turned away not only from being but also from the place where being can be taken up again. Art by its nature is "the setting-itself-into-work of truth," as it constantly "breaks open an open place, in whose openness everything is other than usual."²⁴ The art, as a work, is doing work by breaking open an open place whereupon Being is unconcealed and disclosed again to beings. Art then is always "*the becoming and happening of truth,*" in so much as art is always creatively working to reveal Being by unconcealing Being to the concealed beholder. For Heidegger, art, by its nature, always reveals something of Being, always connects beings with an ontological truth. Art is constantly working towards truth, constantly breaking into the place where Being is exposed as Being. Heidegger establishes a foundation for the reconnection of art and truth by demonstrating that art is inherently capable of revealing ontological truth.

Gianni Vattimo extends Heidegger's thoughts in two distinct ways which provide the next step to understanding the significance of art's revealing of truth. First, Vattimo argues that it is indeed aesthetic experience which facilitates the truth event when experiencing art. Second, Vattimo notes that beings' connection to Being is possible only through language. Vattimo, too finds himself in a battle against rational thought, particularly against a sense of art evaluation as laid out by Kant that the 'aesthetic consciousness' can judge, and therefore find truth in art, objectively. Vattimo claims, contrary to Kant, that the aesthetic consciousness is a circle of objectivity by which the aesthetic consciousness "never really encounters anything other than itself."²⁵ Vattimo concludes, "The experience of truth that takes place in art should not be understood as the recognition of the thing's aesthetic quality."²⁶ Such a statement demands the question: How should the experience of truth that takes place in art be understood? Vattimo notes that in-

²³Heidegger, "Origin," 52-53.

²⁴Ibid., 70.

²⁵Gianni Vattimo, *Art's Claim to Truth* (New York, Columbia University Press, 2008), 126.

²⁶Vattimo, *Art's Claim*, 128.

deed there is something about the aesthetic *experience* through which one experiences truth, but this experience must be divorced from aesthetic judgment. He writes, “if we are to defend the truth claim of aesthetic experience against aesthetic consciousness, we cannot suppose as possible an objective encounter with the artistic product.”²⁷ On the aesthetic experience, Vattimo concludes, “the structure of aesthetic experience reveals itself as the type of the hermeneutic situation itself, which is identical with the human condition.” Such a claim is significant as it reclaims aesthetic experience, the thoughts and feelings experienced when interacting with art, which had so long been rejected as a means to truth in favor of rationality. But, to understand the significance of the aesthetic experience to be identical to the human condition, one must understand what Vattimo means when he speaks of the hermeneutic situation.

The hermeneutic situation for Vattimo is the notion that humans find themselves in a condition that is always already linguistic, revealing an underlying connection between beings through language. To understand Vattimo’s turn to hermeneutics, one must break away from the traditional notion of hermeneutics as the interpretation of a written text. Such a narrow understanding of hermeneutics could easily conflate Vattimo’s turn to hermeneutics as a turn back towards objective judgment—that the job of the hermeneuticist is to reveal through interpretation an objective essential aspect of the text—or towards the Nietzschean view of language as a corruptible force that forgets its metaphors. Rather, Vattimo adopts a Heideggerian understanding of being-in-the-world as tantamount to ‘dwelling in language.’²⁸ He notes that the Being of beings belongs to a linguistic horizon, in which all beings are always already associated to one another in being-as-language. Vattimo takes this notion one step further, by saying that art, as well as humans, contains a being-ness also within this horizon. Through Heidegger, Vattimo presents us a world where “language ultimately is identical with Being” and the Being of beings may be extended to all things. Vattimo notes that one should not confuse his association of language and Being as “a matter of dissolving Being into language,” but rather that language becomes the way in which “beings reveal them-

²⁷Ibid., 132

²⁸See Martin Heidegger, “Poetically Man Dwells.” *Poetry, Language, Thought* (New York, Harper Perennial, 2013), 211-227.

selves, and in which man always already has its collocation."²⁹

The hermeneutic situation of collocation is the connection of beings as Being in the horizon of language. In so much as language connects the Being of beings, then language takes on a form beyond the typical linguistic capacities one initially understand the term 'language' to entail. Language is not merely spoken or written communication in this context, but rather the mode in which one comes into Being and relational being-with-others. Language is recovered out of the Nietzschean sense that showed language to be unaware of its own relational, metaphorical position because language, in Vattimo's thought, is fully aware of its relationality; language is relation. Vattimo successfully recovers language into the realm of ontological truth.

Understanding the hermeneutical situation as being-in-language allows one to make sense of Vattimo's notion that aesthetic experience is the hermeneutic situation identical to human condition. Vattimo here attempts to reclaim the aesthetic experience as a means of doing something significant: accessing Being. To experience art aesthetically is to take part in the hermeneutical situation in which language and Being are equivalent and entwined. What one takes from this exploration of Vattimo and Heidegger is that art has the capacity through the aesthetic experience and setting-into-work of Being in the horizon of language, to reveal something of Being, to relate Being as such to other beings, and to place Being at stake in the experience of art. To view art is to enter into Being. To view art is to enter into ontological truth.

While Vattimo and Heidegger establish the position that art, via the aesthetic experience and dwelling-in-language, is meaningful as it relates to Being, what these two thinkers do not examine fully is the *means by which* the aesthetic experience of viewing art becomes an experience of Being. Understanding the fundamental reclamation of language as Being, one may ask *how* does the aesthetic experience speak of Being? To answer this query, the following section remains in the realm of hermeneutics, turning to Paul Ricœur to illustrate that it is via the imagination that the linguistic nature of art becomes a means of accessing Being, through precisely what Nietzsche foresaw—metaphor.

III. Imaginative Thinking as a Means to Truth and Morality

Thus far, this paper has investigated an ontological paradigm of

²⁹Vattimo, *Art's Claim*, 149.

truth that is capable of disclosing itself in art as aesthetic experience and the hermeneutic condition of language. This section examines precisely how the aesthetic experience and art itself speaks to the beholder, an idea that cannot be precisely located within Heidegger or Vattimo. By pairing these ontological truths with Paul Ricœur's work on hermeneutics, it is demonstrable that ontological truth is accessed through the mechanism of imaginative thinking.

Ricœur posits a new concept of interpretation in which interpretation is not merely an objective evaluation of a text but rather an appropriative response to a text, complimenting Vattimo's notion that aesthetic experience reveals truth when aesthetic judgment cannot. Importantly, text, for Ricœur implies artworks of any medium, and one can justify such a claim through the understanding laid forth by Vattimo and Heidegger that language is the horizon of Being.³⁰ Rather than a definitive act of judgment or 'act *of* the text' Ricœur proposes additionally a subjective 'act *on* the text.'³¹ This act *on* the text is appropriation: "One of the aims of all hermeneutics is to struggle against cultural distance. . . . In this sense, interpretation 'brings together,' 'equalizes,' render 'contemporary and similar,' thus genuinely making one's *own* what was initially *alien*."³² Thus, to view interpretation as appropriation implies a taking up of the foreign text into one's own life, collapsing any distance that may be kept open between text and interpreter.³³ Ricœur equates the act of reading a text to performing a musical score in so much as one makes real in present time, 'realizes,' the "possibilities of the text."³⁴ In addition to the collapsing of cultural difference by allowing one to take up the text, this realization is the feature of appropriation that allows the bringing together to become enacted in the world.

³⁰Rachel Mason, "Paul Ricœur's Theory of Interpretation: Some Implications for Critical Inquiry in Art Education." *Journal of Aesthetic Education* 16, no. 4 (1982), 74.

³¹Paul Ricœur, *From Text to Action: Essays in Hermeneutics, II* (Evanston, IL, Northwestern University Press, 1991), 121-122.

³²Ricœur, *From Text*, 119.

³³Appropriation in this context is not meant to adopt the colloquially definition of the term as 'misappropriation' in which one uses another's culture for personal gain. The colloquial 'appropriation' implies a lack of cultural understanding or respect which Ricœur is not supporting here. The 'sameness' of culture in Ricœur's thought is not a purposeful, oppressive homogenization as in 'misappropriation,' but a collapse of cultural difference in an attempt at understanding the other—the sameness is not an elimination of one culture but the coming together of two.

³⁴*Ibid.*, 119.

This appropriation may be seen as the actualization of meaning for the present reader of a text through assimilating and equalizing the text with the reader.³⁵

Texts that remain the easiest to appropriate and make one's own are those which use metaphor to incite *imagination*. How does metaphor incite imagination? In the moment when a metaphor is read "a new meaning emerges out of the ruins of literal predication," which is to say from the literal meaning of words as we typically know and overuse them, "imagination offers its specific mediation."³⁶ When words take on new meaning in metaphor, imagination is excited. One may claim that the subjectivity in Ricœur begins with the experience of the imagination stirring in response to the text. The imagination which is stirred by the metaphor "provides the milieu, the luminous clearing, in which we can compare and evaluate motives as diverse as desires and ethical obligations, themselves as disparate as professional rules, social customs, or intensely personal values."³⁷ Here Ricœur completes his thoughts on appropriation by showing that the collapsing of boundaries and the emergence of the similar happens through imagination. Imagination is the ground on which one can appropriate a text. Imagination can then lead to these appropriations becoming actions: "Without imagination, there is no action."³⁸ Therefore imagination is the basis on which action within society takes root.³⁹ If the action stems from a foundation of appropriation that attempts to dissolve differences and increase understanding, then such action takes on an ethical dimension.

Imagination, in Ricœur, becomes the means through which a sense of Being in beings is fully exposed, and ontological truth revealed, as imagination collapses all distance between text and interpreter. The imagination further allows for an appropriation of the Being of the text to be taken up by the beings that subjectively interpret, or rather aesthetically experience, via an act on the text. The imagination, once missing in a discussion of art and truth which only includes Heidegger's and Vattimo's conclusions, may now be seen in Ricœur's thoughts which posit not only that a sense of new metaphor incites the imagi-

³⁵Paul Ricœur, *Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning* (Fortworth, The Texas Christian University Press, 1976), 92.

³⁶Paul Ricœur, *From Text*, 172.

³⁷*Ibid.*, 177.

³⁸*Ibid.*, 187.

³⁹Ricœur discusses the possibility of a good utopia in this regard, created through inspired action.

nation—which successfully acknowledges and replaces a Nietzschean notion of the old, misused metaphors of a deceitful truth—but that such an arousal of imagination through an experience of art reveals truth and inspires action. Such an inspiring of action should be examined briefly as a significant effect of art, aesthetic experience, and ultimately imagination, which holds particularly relevance in the modern world. Not only, as seen in Vattimo and Heidegger, are beings connected ontologically through Being, but beings may be always connected to each other, as Ricœur suggests, in a moral sense accessed through the imagination.

The connection of imagination to morality has experienced much of the same complications as the relationship between art and truth, specifically, that rationality has driven a wedge between the two. Mark Johnson, noticing such complications, writes,

For hundreds of years in mainstream Western philosophy it has been commonplace to regard ‘moral imagination’ as an oxymoron. The terms ‘moral’ and ‘imagination’ are often thought to be incompatible by those who conceive of morality as a system of rational moral principles and who regard imagination as a free play of images and ideas unconstrained by reason,⁴⁰

and often then related only to the perceived non-rational, dismissible realm of aesthetics. To heal such a rupture between morality and imagination, Johnson claims that humanity “must stop making the mistake of thinking of the aesthetic as an escape from the practical or moral,” and further humankind must note that “morality is not the search for moral laws to guide our lives, but rather the ongoing imaginative exploration of possibilities for dealing with our problems, enhancing the quality of our communal relations, and forming significant personal attachments that grow.”⁴¹ It is precisely the imagination for Johnson that makes morality possible.⁴² By extension, art, as an imaginative process, may be substantial for the actualization of morality.

Matthew Kieran offers a more direct examination of the role of imagination within art as a means for morality in so much as art allows one

⁴⁰Mark Johnson, “Moral Imagination.” *The Routledge handbook of philosophy of imagination* (Routledge, 2016), 355.

⁴¹Mark Johnson, *Moral Imagination*, (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1993), 209.

⁴²This is the general conclusion of Johnson’s book *Moral Imagination*.

to imagine situations otherwise unavailable to her or which could not be accessed in anything except art. Kieran writes, "artworks prescribe us to imagine particular characters, situations, dilemmas, actions, and their consequences."⁴³ Art works appear to inspire moral imagining in the everyday individual to connect with events occurring in the art and consequently to think morally about what the art is revealing. In such a response artwork does "not merely exemplify or tell us about the world; rather it should show us," and in engaging with art "we may come to learn and imaginatively understand aspects of the world to which we might otherwise have remained blind."⁴⁴ Such thinking that art offers one the experience of imagining situations other than one's own is reminiscent of Ricœur's notion that imagination via appropriation involves a co-mingling of cultures that connect the interpreter to the text. In Kieran's understanding, art seems to inherently connect the experiencer to the world and to others in the world, not just in the realm of Being, but also in the realm of morality. In short, art extends imagination in novel ways and by doing so can cultivate a deeper understanding of moral sensibilities.

Art now not only connects beings on an ontological level, but on a moral level as well precisely because art evokes the imagination. Art, by providing humanity with an imaginative understanding beyond that of typical reflection, "extend[s] or lead[s] us to modify what we ourselves value and how we want to be," while "deepen[ing] our understanding of what commitments to certain values and ways of understanding others and the world might involve."⁴⁵ Art not only reveals ontological truth to humankind through imagination, but fashions people into morally oriented individuals, capable of imagining others and the world in a new way. Art, via imagination, connects humanity at the level of ontological truth and morally.

Conclusion

Where should one turn when truth has become corrupted in the contemporary condition? One should turn to art, for in its aesthetic and imaginative aspects, it reveals not only Being, but inspires morality as well. Art retains the capability to reveal truth through the disclosure

⁴³Matthew Kieran, "Art, imagination, and the cultivation of morals." *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 54, no. 4 (1996), 338.

⁴⁴Kieran, "Art, Imagination," 339-340, 342.

⁴⁵*Ibid.*, 348.

of Being to beings in the aesthetic experience actualized through imagination. One can make such a claim after first exploring the history of the separation of art and truth as truth became coopted by rationality, by then recovering truth in art by means of ontological reflection in the aesthetic experience and a reclamation of language which makes the revealing of truth possible, and finally by examining the means through which such a reflection and reclamation can reveal truth: imagination. In light of such movements made in this paper, a solid defense of art and truth, as suggested was necessary by Shamir, has been presented. Art not only reveals a certain depth of life to us, but it encourages one to reflect on the connections and choices one makes and fulfills in such a life. Art becomes not only a means to truth, but also a vital means necessary for being human.

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