The Role of Understanding in the Evaluation of Moral Value of an Artwork

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Introduction

When we are deeply moved by an artwork, it is by its narrative content that we are so impressed in most cases. The narrative describes a series of actions, thoughts, and feelings of characters, and their relations. Since a narrative artwork usually describes significant relations among characters, it must involve moral aspects of those characters and their relations. For, when our thoughts and actions are significant, they must have their own ends which must have some moral characteristics, and our feelings or emotions al-

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so have these features in the sense that they evoke our thoughts and/or actions. There are several different positions in explaining the moral value of an artwork. On the one hand, radical autonomism holds that the only value of an artwork is its aesthetic value, and moderate autonomism concedes that it can be evaluated morally, but holds that its aesthetic value has nothing to do with its moral value. On the other hand, radical moralism holds that the only value of an artwork is its moral value, and moderate moralism holds that its moral value has some relation to its aesthetic value. Both radical views are not accepted these days, so contemporary discussions focus on the plausibility of the moderate versions.

In this paper we will examine the relation between the aesthetic value and the moral value of an artwork, especially of narrative artwork, and the problem of so-called "imaginative resistance," the thesis that we can not or would not imagine a narrative prescribed by its text, when it endorses its immoral perspective as a whole. I will argue that imagining an immoral perspective is possible only within the limit that we can understand the evil character's way of thinking and feeling according to their circumstances given in the text. In other words, the immoral perspective of a narrative work can significantly contribute to its aesthetic value only in the