Chapter 1
Introduction: Ethics and the Arts

Paul Macneill

This book sets out to explore many facets of a relationship between ethics and the arts in (almost) all the arts: literature, music, painting, photography, film and documentary, dance and theatre. There is a section dealing with the relationship between ethics and the arts from philosophical perspectives—and a chapter in that section considers the role of the media in framing ethical issues. Ethics and the arts are also explored in relation to bioart—a new mode of art that draws on the biological sciences and techniques for manipulating life forms. The final section considers uses of the arts in relation to science and medicine. In particular: the arts as they are employed within the medical humanities; rhetorical devices in supporting 'medical progress'; and artists and their works in response to climate change.

The contributing authors write from many different disciplinary perspectives and discourses. These include discourses from within the various arts, and the authors' different philosophical positions and commitments. Many of the authors are both academics and practitioners. Philip Alperson, for example, is both a philosopher and a saxophonist. Debora Diniz is an anthropologist and documentary-film maker. Rachael Swain is a theatre director who drew on her own work for a doctoral dissertation on theatre practice. Both James Thompson and Phillip Zarrilli are university professors and theatre practitioners. Zurr and Catts are artists within an academic research laboratory.

The book is inter-disciplinary in approach and composition: drawing on the arts in practice and theory, philosophy (from analytic and European perspectives), and many other disciplines. This, I claim, is one of the books strengths. However, such diversity may attract criticism from purists who stand firmly in any one of the fields covered: which is the fate of many interdisciplinary works. However the collective strength of these chapters is that they relate the arts—including a broad range of current and original work—to aesthetic philosophy, science, medicine, perceptual

P. Macneill (✉)
Centre for Values, Ethics and the Law in Medicine, Sydney Medical School,
The University of Sydney, NSW 2006, Australia
e-mail: paul.macneill@sydney.edu.au

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psychology, cognitive science, and (to some extent) law and politics. This is to take a broad approach to what counts as knowledge by including both cognitive and experiential approaches. A possible outcome is that *ethics* itself could be re-conceived (at least in part) as *aesthetic practice* and *experience*, informed by this wide-ranging theoretical discussion.

Throughout the book, the terms *ethics* and *morals* or *ethics* and *morality* are used interchangeably. Whilst some authors draw a distinction between these terms (as may be appropriate for their purposes) the approach adopted here is to treat them as addressing much the same thing. These are words that derive from Latin or Greek and the original terms have similar meanings in both languages. The origin of *ethics* is the Greek ἠθικός, which has the sense of manners and character, and the origin of morals is Latin mōrēs meaning habits, or modes of conduct (OED). This usage is similar (especially if we accept that character is formed in part by habits). There are two reasons for distinguishing *ethics* and *morals.* One is that the word *moral* has an association with moralising and sexual morality, which the word *ethic* is relatively free from. However at no point is a more prurient meaning for *moral* or *morality* intended or implied in this book (unless directly referred to). The second is a tradition within academic ethics, to distinguish *ethics* as an abstract study of morality and *morals* as concerning norms of behaviour. Walker traces this distinction back to Henry Sidgwick's *Method of Ethics* [1]. I am persuaded by Walker's rejection of the notion that *ethics* is an abstract and separate discipline (and her rejection of Sidgwick's *Method*) and prefer to understand *ethics* and *morality* as an aspect of engagement in life (and art).[1]

The book has four parts: The first and largest part of the book contains chapters from a wide range of the arts including literature and film, which are two art-forms amenable to 'considering' ethical or moral dimensions. It also includes chapters where the relationship is less apparent. Music for example, is not obviously related to ethics until one considers (as Philip Alperson does in Chap. 3) how music plays a major role in all our cultural events, and at significant times in our lives. Dance is another area where a relationship with morality is not immediately apparent yet Philipa Rothfield (in Chap. 9) draws on Spinoza's philosophy to consider dance as an ethical expression of 'the good' manifested through a dancer's body.

Chapter 2 begins with an account of how the novelist Flaubert was summoned to court to face charges that his novel *Madame Bovary* was a moral affront—a summons that was dismissed by the court. In this way Iain Bamforth opens a discussion about moralising in literature, and Flaubert's refusal to morally judge his characters and to subordinate a work of literature to moral or political causes. Literature, following Flaubert, was influenced by his stance toward moralising.

Philip Alperson observes, in Chap. 3, that philosophers have had little to say about music and morality. Their focus has been on purely musical features and this has obscured an appropriate recognition of the many functions that music serves in

[1] In both Latin and Greek there is a meaning relating to 'the science of' (either morals or ethics respectively) so there is no good etymological reason for restricting ethics to the study of morals and morals to moral behaviour (OED).

our moral, social, cultural, and political lives. He also brings a moral focus to the process of music making itself.

Following this are two chapters on the visual arts. In Chap. 4, I discuss modern painting, in its movement away from 'moral storytelling' in early modern painting, and increasingly toward abstraction in the twentieth century—which provided little basis for any moral reflection—and back to figurative works in the late twentieth and early part of this century. Not all figurative works have moral undertones but there is an openness to moral questioning in the enigmatic works of some contemporary painters. In Chap. 5 Sarah Sentilles explores the paradox of photographic images that appear to capture the 'real' when, on closer analysis, the subjects of photographs are elusive. She takes an observation of the 'unknowability' of photographic images as a basis for advocating a different kind of looking that allows for ethical relationship to emerge from mystery.

In the first of three chapters on film (movies and documentary film), Brian Bergen-Aurand traces a turn toward studying film from a number of different ethical perspectives. Whilst there are many ethical pathways discussed in Chap. 6, Bergen-Aurand focusses on two film theorists who examine what is good about films that are concerned with redemption. Henri Colt, in Chap. 7, discusses the use of movies for highlighting social issues and for teaching medical ethics. His chapter outlines the many advantages of using film and he offers examples of particular films, and practical approaches to teaching in this manner. Debora Diniz's Chap. 8 is about her film 'The house of the dead' which is a documentary that gives an insight into institutions of incarceration for the criminally insane in Brazil. Diniz is an academic and a filmmaker and, in making this film, she faced a number of ethical and aesthetic quandaries. She traces her own process as a basis for considering the broader ethical implications of making activist documentaries that are aimed to stimulate political action.

Chapter 9 by Philipa Rothfield (already mentioned above) is the first of two chapters on dance and ethics. Rothfield draws on Spinoza's ethics, and discusses dance as accessing the body's energy toward expressing and experiencing empowerment and (potentially) virtuosity. Ethics and 'the good,' from this perspective, is an experienced quality of expression in the 'corporeal moment' rather than a determination according to normative principles of good and bad. Rothfield's essay is followed by Rachael Swain's chapter, which comes from her work in producing and choreographing dance theatre performances within an Aboriginal community in Western Australia. Swain's focus in Chap. 10 is on the ethics of 'art making' and 'culture making' that requires 'listening differently' to Indigenous approaches to meaning and knowledge and she illustrates this approach from her field notes recorded in the making of the dance-performance piece, 'Burning Daylight.'

There are four chapters on the performing arts and theatre. Phillip Zarrilli, in Chap. 11, gives an overview of the literature on theatre and ethics as a basis for looking at one of his own plays 'Told by the Wind' from an ethical perspective. He discusses the interaction between the two actors (himself and Jo Shapland) in phenomenological terms as 'intersubjectivity' in which each of the two actors 'awakens' to the 'Other'—a relationship he considers from the ethical perspective

of Emmanuel Levinas's philosophy. James Thompson works in 'applied theatre' as a socially engaged art form in marginal areas such as prisons and war zones. He argues in Chap. 12 against assuming that large public events should be given priority over participatory theatre in more intimate workshop settings. He takes Levinas's call to responsibility for the other and re-considers that call in affective terms as being sensitised to another through beauty and aesthetic engagement. My two chapters on performance discuss 'presence' in performance. Chapter 13 responds to philosopher Jacque Derrida's influential critique of 'presence.' My claim is that, notwithstanding Derrida's deconstruction of presence, it continues to be a significant element in performance. Chapter 14 draws on discourses within perceptual and cognitive studies to propose that 'presence'—as a created (or 'enacted') quality—identifies a 'moral ideal' in art that has relevance to encounters in life. This notion suggests a different understanding of ethics as dynamic and creative activities whereby ethics itself is enacted.

Part II offers two chapters that are more philosophical in orientation. Chapter 15 is a 'critical review of the new moralisms.' These 'new moralisms' are the views of philosophers of art who have in recent times argued that there is a relation between morality and the aesthetic quality of works of art in some circumstances. One version of this argument is that a moral quality may add to the aesthetic value of a work of art. Equally, moral 'flaws,' expressed in a work of art, may detract from the work's aesthetic value. There are counter views explored, that moral 'flaws' may be the substance of a work of art and contribute positively to its aesthetic value. The position I take in Chap. 15 is that there is no theoretical position that can adequately capture the contribution (or otherwise) of morally relevant aspects to an assessment of the aesthetic worth of a work of art. In Chap. 16 Miles Little proposes that aesthetic and ethical judgments relate to different discourses that may overlap at times, but are distinguishable. Nevertheless they tend to intrude on each other and this is most apparent through the persuasive and manipulative power of the media in using aesthetic techniques to frame ethical issues in particular ways. In postmodern times we are beset by images creating a nexus between aesthetics and ethics, and need to be aware of this and to maintain a critical sensibility.

Part III contains two chapters on 'bioart' and ethics. Bioart is a more recent genre in which biological materials, and bio-scientific technologies, are used in creating works of art. In Chap. 17 Joanna Zylinska considers a different order of challenge posed by bioartistic experiments. Bioartists not only challenge life and our metaphysical understandings of life, they also challenge the adequacy of traditional humanist value-based frameworks of ethics for evaluating artistic projects that seek to manipulate life forms. What is required, Zylinska argues, is "a different ethics of life"—a re-conception of norms for taking responsibility for life that includes reflecting on how we value new life forms and any inter-relations between them. Zurr and Catts, two artist-researchers at the coal face of such art work, have provided a chapter that illustrates the challenge of bioart in meeting the need for approval according to a humanist value-based framework of ethics of the kind Zylinska

refers to. Research ethics committees function by considering proposed research projects according to guidelines, or codes of ethics, that prescribe what is ethical and what is not. When faced with proposals for bioart research projects, the guidelines are clearly inadequate, and the committee members charged with applying them, appear to be confounded. In Chap. 18 Zurr and Catts give examples of art-projects presented to committees, and the committees'—sometimes amusing—responses. The authors argue for alternative evaluative frames of reference for artistic research of this kind.

Part IV comprises a group of three essays dealing with art and ethics in relation to science and medicine. Two of the chapters relate to medicine—medical education, and the claims for medical progress—and the third chapter considers a collaboration of artists and scientists in responding to climate change. In Chap. 19 Claire Hooker discusses the medical humanities: an arena of medical educators who find value in the arts as a source of material for broadening and enriching medical education. She is concerned to identify a conceptual framework for the field, and is attracted by a notion of 'rich responsibility' from philosopher Martha Nussbaum and from Rita Charon (a doctor of medicine with a subsequent PhD in English literature). Hooker however is critical of the shortcomings of the medical humanities in not addressing the cultural hegemony of its sources within European literature and art. She advocates combining the medical humanities with postmodern scholarship and a questioning of the romantic and humanist moral traditions on which the medical humanities have been founded.

George Annas, in Chap. 20, tackles the myths and metaphors of medical progress that would have us believe in the human genome project, personalised medicine, and the quest to cure cancer and defy death. Opposed to these myths is the reality of dysfunctional health care systems, which are badly in need of stories to bring home the suffering of people who are denied adequate care. His point is that literary devices—quest myths, metaphor, and narrative—used in relation to new technology, can be employed for both ethical and unethical outcomes.

In Chap. 21, Ruth Little approaches climate as a cultural phenomenon as much as a physical reality. She describes projects in which artists engage with scientists to convey an aesthetic experience of transformations taking place in the oceans, landscapes and climatic systems. The artists in these projects take a role as agents of change in conveying the data and conclusions from climate science through the affective power of art. Some of the projects aim to promote a greater sensitivity to place; and others focus on cultural practices and their relationship to climate. Little proposes that climate art, in its collaboration with scientists and openness to different cultural practices, is contributing to a new contextualised ethics with the purpose of renewing our ecologies, technologies and societies.

The assumption I have made, in producing and editing this book, is that any relationship between ethics and the arts is two-way. Ethical concerns are considered in relation *to* the arts—but so too is ethics considered from the vantage point *of* the arts. This is to explore what the arts may have to 'say' about ethics. The concluding chapter takes up this theme in discussing the approaches taken by various authors

toward ethics and the arts and considers how these may enrich our understanding of ethics more broadly.

Reference

1. Walker, Margaret Urban. 2007. *Moral understandings: A feminist study in ethics*, Studies in feminist philosophy, 2nd ed. New York: Oxford University Press.