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ART, MORAL EPISTEMOLOGY, PSYCHOTHERAPY

1. INTRODUCTION

It is important to remark some details regarding the background of the dispute about the cognitive value of art. First, many authors assume that if art offers a cognitive contribution, than it must be identical to that offered by philosophy, science and history. One of the authors that we discuss in the paper and who offers one of the relevant grounds of the debate, James Young, indicates why art's contribution is distinctive. Second, the cognitivist thesis is widely assumed (and so assumes David Davies, another author of central relevance for the discussion in this paper) as saying that all the process of learning must be fully internal to engagement with artworks, and not include, for example, further evidence external from the engagement with the artwork. We will try to show that this is not the best formulation of the cognitivist thesis and that, therefore, it is not the best strategy for the supporter of the cognitivist thesis to reply to criticisms of this formulation. Third, frequently the cognitivist thesis is not only about whether we can learn through artworks, but about whether this learning constitutes part of the artistic value of artworks, as well. In order to support this thesis it seems that the process of learning must be internal to the engagement with the artwork and not based, for example, on further evidence. We do not enter in the debate about the artistic value of art.

2. ART AND MORAL EPISTEMOLOGY

As Young shows, (Young, 2001) art does not contribute to knowledge in the same way as science, philosophy or history, but in a distinctive way. Science, philosophy and history contribute to

knowledge by semantic representations, i.e. by offering us propositional truths. If this was the only contribution that arts can offer, the result, many say, would be lethal for the cognitivist thesis about art. Authors appeal to various reasons: the demonstration of the truth of such propositions is either external from artworks (and so artworks would offer us at best useful hypothesis that must be tested independently, contrary to what happens in science, where the testing of hypothesis is internal to the practice of science), or even dubiously appropriate for the practice of art (this is a position defended by Peter Lamarque). (Lamarque, 2009) In our opinion, the most important objection appeals to the banality of the direct propositional knowledge that we can receive from art and to the fact that other sources of knowledge are clearly better sources of such knowledge than art.

Young denies that art's contribution to knowledge is represented by semantic representations. In his view, art offers a kind of representation, i.e. illustrative representations that serve as specific demonstrations, i.e. illustrative demonstrations. Their specificity consists in offering a particular perspective on something. It is through these perspectives that we acquire knowledge or understanding of something.

Now, the question for Young is whether his view of art's contribution to knowledge really overcomes the problem faced by other proposals, i.e. the problem represented by the fact that it seems that potential knowledge offered by artworks needs further support, i.e. evidence external from the practice of art. Davies thinks that Young's proposal avoids the objection in virtue of how, in his view, artistic demonstrative illustrations contribute to knowledge. (Davies, 2007; Davies, 2010) Such demonstrations operate with our previous knowledge, or, more precisely, they reinterpret the experiences we had by using the perspective of the novel. As a consequence, the rightness of perspectives of artworks is ensured by the previous knowledge that they reinterpret. This reinterpretation, then, contributes to improve our knowledge of something, and to put light on other aspects of our experience.

Let's start to explain with the example represented by *Born on the Fourth of July*. Engagement with the film may be a reliable contribution to knowledge because of the previous beliefs we have: beliefs about the war in Vietnam, and about the dramatic experi-

ences of soldiers coming home from the war. But Ron Kovic's story helps us to reinterpret the concept of patriotism that is endorsed by many. The reinterpretation of 'patriotism' offered by the film consists in showing that sometimes a good patriot must strongly oppose the official politics of the country, even by denying support to the country in a war situation.¹

Davies supports the epistemological value of Young's proposal by discussing thought experiments with a focus on thought experiments in science. Davies calls his response to the epistemological puzzle represented by thought experiments moderate inflationary. "Such a response stresses the way in which thought experiments allow the scientist to mobilize cognitive resources not available in ordinary scientific reasoning". (Davies, 2007, 159) So, the thought experiment mobilizes the researcher's "everyday understandings of the world, based on practical experience, and other forms of tacit knowledge, such as individual expertise, practical know-how, and 'embodied familiarity' with the world, and geometrical intuitions. It is in virtue of the role played by these unarticulated (and often unarticulable) cognitive resources in the mental modeling of TEs that TEs yield determinate conclusions and have a bearing on the real world. [...] In constructing and manipulating this model, we can mobilize various kinds of cognitive resources in ways not possible if we were to work directly on a regimented propositional account of that problem". (Davies, 2007, 159)

Such a description implies the need of being careful in relation to the epistemological contribution of art. By using the same resources that may be used in improving our knowledge, artworks can corrupt our knowledge. "So, in the case of fictional narratives, we should admit that there is genuine learning through the reading of such narrative only to the extent that we also allow that the unarticulated knowledge of the world, upon which the reader's intuitions of rightness are based, is itself adequate to validate those intuitions. [...] The claim is, in this respect, an externalist one, depending upon how the agent in fact stands in relation to the knowledge

1 The example that we show is based on a film, but, although there may be disanalogies between films and literature, in the present context the analogies are sufficient, and they are related to the fact that in the relevant examples, both films and exemplars of literature are narrative expressions of art.

claim, rather than how she sees herself as standing in relation to it". (Davies, 2007, 162-163)

We endorse most of what Davies says. Our primary interest is represented by applying Davies's description of art's cognitive contribution to issues of moral epistemology. In our discussion we rely on authors who indicate that abstract knowledge of moral principles and other moral concepts is not sufficient, and that understanding is needed, as well. More precisely, here we are focused on the thesis on the cognitive contribution of art as related to the development of understanding, more than to the acquisition of new truths. What is represented by understanding, over the abstract knowledge of principles and other moral concepts (and even of abstract knowledge of the reasons behind them)? Alison Hills explains the distinction between the abstract knowledge of principles and understanding of principles. Understanding implies grasping the reasons behind a principle and the ability of orientation in the moral space unavoidable with mere abstract knowledge of the principles. As Hills says, "if you understand why p , then in the right sort of circumstances, you can successfully:

- (i) follow an explanation of why p given by someone else;
- (ii) explain why p in your own words;
- (iii) draw the conclusion that p (or that probably p) from the information that q ;
- (iv) draw the conclusion that p' (or that probably p') from the information that q' (where p' and q' are similar to but not identical to p and q);
- (v) given the information that p , give the right explanation, q ;
- (vi) given the information that p' , give the right explanation, q' ." (Hills, 2009, 102)

In our opinion, art can function as a way of refining our understanding of moral principles and other moral concepts, and consequently of our capacity of providing proper judgments. We have offered an exemplification of this with the film *Born on the Fourth of July*, where the principle of patriotic duty and the concept of patriotism are better understood through such an artwork.

Here, however, it is useful to introduce a specification. Davies says that the cognitive contribution of art regards general principles operative in real events and new classification of real entities and events. As concerns the moral domain, we agree that one of the

contributions of artworks is represented by new classification of real entities and events. So, in the case of the hero of *Born on the Fourth of July*, i.e. in Ron Kovic's case, the behavior that is frequently classified as unpatriotic is classified by the help of the film as patriotic – this is enhancing a part of what we indicate with the expression 'understanding'.

What about the propriety of speaking about the contribution to the knowledge of general principles? In Davies's opinion, art may contribute to the full acquisition of a new principle (for example, the principle of equality, in opposition to a previously embraced hierarchical conception of justice), and not only to the part of learning a principle that consists in what Hills classifies as understanding, and that most importantly regards a new classification of events, actions and psychological features.² We agree with this thesis. We endorse a position perhaps even stronger than Davies's, i.e. we think that engagement with artworks can be the source of a radical change of moral seeing, but we shall develop and discuss this thesis in another paper.

The second point we would like to remark is a divergence with Davies. We do not think that in learning from artworks we only reshape our previous experience. We agree with Young who says that we may need to test the perspectives offered by artworks by including additional evidence, as well: "Audience members need to ask themselves whether the perspective provided by an artwork is supported by their past experience. They may need to seek additional experience before they can decide whether some perspective is right". (Young, 2001, 105-106) Think about the two concepts of patriotism in *Born on the Fourth of July*. We test each of these opposed concepts of patriotism by other relevant information we have, among other, about wars and their consequences, as well as with various moral beliefs that we endorse, but we may need to add new reflection and look for new evidence. New reflection and new evidence may be needed in order to accept the perspective endorsed by the more mature Ron Kovic, in opposition to that of the younger Ron Kovic. Our thesis is that although an artwork can be a source

2 Davies has offered a further specification of this at the symposium dedicated to his book organized by the Department of Philosophy in Rijeka on December 8th, 2011. In the discussion, Davies has said that art can help to the acquisition of a new principle by providing a counterexample to the opposed principle.

of knowledge, it does not need to do this in insulation from other sources of knowledge. To the knowledge of facts, we add all other sources of knowledge that we have, including moral beliefs, but also comparison with other formative experience, as, for example those related to other artworks. The appeal to other sources of knowledge may be successive to the engagement with the artwork.³

We add now, to the previous discussion, some considerations related to the teachings of clinical practice in psychology and psychiatry that confirms the propriety of speaking about learning through illustrative representations such as those offered in artworks.

3. PSYCHOTHERAPY CREATES THE ABILITY TO THINK AND LEARN IN NEW WAYS

There are authors who say that there is no serious evidence for the thesis that art can contribute to moral as well as emotional formative experience. For example, Peter Lamarque says: “I am a bit wary of attributing broad psychological benefits to readers of literature or suggestions that such readers stand out in any way as more sensitive or emotionally mature or sympathetic than their non-literature-reading counterparts. This wariness is hardly an argument, I agree, but anecdotal evidence simply does not back up the positive claims for literature’s benefits, which I fear are more on hope that experience”. (Lamarque, 2010, 104)

We do not have direct scientific evidence for the claim that engagement with artworks helps moral learning in general, nor enhancing moral understanding in particular. However, we will show examples in psychotherapy that show how stories and illustrations help to change views, attitudes, or behavior. These cases are not exactly analogous to moral learning (in particular, when change of behavior and not of understanding appears to be involved), but we hope that they are sufficiently analogous to suggest that similar processes linked to stories and illustrations happen in morality. The main goals of the following discussion are to show in a general context the importance of formative experience through stories and

³ This discussion is developed in relation to two authors who discuss radical changes of moral seeing, i.e. Michael DePaul and Christopher Cowley, in (Baccarini, 2010).

illustrations, and the unconscious psychological mechanisms that provide a way of learning additional to explicit propositional knowledge.

Psychotherapists explicitly remark the irreplaceable role of formative experience supplied by narrative artworks, in opposition to rational argumentation and crude provision of empirical evidence. For example, Elizabeth F. Loftus says: "If you asked me whether I wanted to read a book on the politics, history and geography of Chile, I'd say 'forget it'. But reading the book *Missing*, a fabulous nonfiction tale about a man who searches for his missing son in Chile, causes you to absorb all this information without effort." (quoted from Perloff, 2004, 412) Bettelheim remarks the value of a particular expression of narration, i.e. fairy tales. As he shows us, they have therapeutic value, because they allow the patient to think about what the story reveals about her and her inner conflicts in a given period of her life. (Bettelheim, 1976, 38)

Most of the narrations in psychotherapy, however, are not literary works. There are numerous examples in the form of stories, parables and anecdotes that are used by therapists to consciously and unconsciously help patients to make the change that patients want. Let us imagine, for example, a situation in which the patient comes to a psychotherapist with the problem of fear of flying in an airplane. The patient knows well that this fear is unnecessary, irrational and unproductive, and even understands the laws of physics that explain why the plane is in the air during the flight. It is meaningless for her therapist to explain all of this, or convince her not to be afraid, because she knows it. Any technical or statistical knowledge regarding the airplane safety is completely useless in changing the patient's attitude and behavior. What the therapist ought to do is to examine the patient's past experiences about why she was afraid of something in the past, of which she is not afraid now, so that she could learn more in her understanding of the situation and about the patient's ways of learning to overcome the inhibitions. Only then she will be able to tell the story that fits the patient's experience and which also offers the opportunity for new insight. This telling of the story is the crucial move that can activate the switch in the patient's perspective. For example, the psychotherapist may tell the story of one of her acquaintances who had a paralyzing fear of snakes. The fear was so strong that she could not

even see the picture of the snake without her heart pounding and palms sweating. As it happened, her husband got a job in an African country where, over time, after living in it for years, she gained new experiences: the heat, insects, new language, new customs and snakes. The experiences had ranged from the fact that she had parasites on her skin, which was her worst experience, up to the matter that after some time she would be quietly watching the snake going across the terrace while she was drinking coffee. Or she would be hanging the laundry for drying, see the snake approaching, and then push her with her foot and continue the task. Once upon a time she could not even imagine that it would be possible for her to stay completely calm and watch the snake pass near her. As the example shows, the therapeutic success is obtained not by providing explicit or direct advice to the patient about what to do. The practice of psychotherapy, as well as daily experiences, proved that this was not effective. Psychotherapy works best indirectly, suggesting a familiar experience in a new context or understanding.

The best known example for such approach in psychotherapy is represented by the work of Milton Erickson, in which, through the use of story, the solution is indirectly suggested to the patient. Most often it is through telling the parallel story and through telling multiple stories with the same topic that the therapeutic goal is achieved. The conclusion of the stories to which the patient arrives by herself can offer either a new perspective of the problem or the previously neglected solution. „Erickson would often tell a patient an anecdote that paralleled his problem but that provided a new perspective. For example, if a patient describes multiple failures in his life, he can be told stories about someone who experienced multiple failures. However, the therapeutic stories can be carefully constructed so that the final outcome is success”. (Zeig, 1980, 9)

We will represent this with extensively showing by a quotation Erickson's main example.

“A mother called me up and told me about her ten-year-old son who wet the bed every night. They had done everything they could to stop him. They dragged him in to see me – literally. Father had him by one hand and mother by other, and the boy was dragging his feet. They laid him face down in my office. I shoved the parents out and closed the door. The boy was yelling.

When the boy paused to catch the breath, I said, “That’s a goddam hell of a way to do. I don’t like it a damn bit”. It surprised him that I would say this. He hesitated while taking that breath, and I told him he might as well go ahead and yell again. He let out a yell, and when he paused to take a breath, I let out a yell. He turned to look at me, and I said, “It’s my turn”. Then I said, “Now it’s your turn”, so he yelled again. I yelled again, and then said it was his turn. Then I said, “Now, we can go right on taking turns, but that will get awfully tiresome. I’d rather take my turn by sitting down in that chair. There’s vacant one over there”. So I took my turn sitting down in my chair, and he took his turn sitting down in the other chair. That expectation had been established – I had established that we were taking turns by yelling, and I changed the game to taking turns sitting down. Then I said, “You know, your parents ordered me to cure your bedwetting. Who do they think they are that they can order me around?” He had received enough punishment from his parents, so I stepped over on his side of the fence by saying that. I told him, “I’d rather talk to you about other stuff. Let’s just drop this talk about bedwetting. Now, how should I talk to a ten-year-old boy? You’re going to grade school. You’ve got a nice compact wrist. Nice compact ankles. You know, I’m a doctor, and doctors always take an interest in the way a man is built. You’ve got a nice rounded, deep chest. You’re not one of the hollow-chested, slump-shouldered people. You’ve got a nice chest that sticks out. I’ll bet you’re good at running. With your small-sized built, you’ve undoubtedly got good muscle coordination”. I explained coordination to him and said he was probably good at sports that required skill, not just beef and bone. Not the sort of stuff that they any bonehead could play. But games that require skill. I asked what games he played, and he said, “Baseball, and bow and arrow”. I asked, “How good are you at archery?” He said, “Pretty good”. I said, “Well, of course that requires eye, hand, arm, body coordination”. It turned out his younger brother played football, and was larger than he as were all the other family members. “Football’s nice game if you’ve got just muscle and bone. Lots of big, overgrown guys like it”.

So we talked about that and about muscle coordination. I said, “You know, when you draw back on your bowstring and aim your arrow, what do you suppose the pupil of the eye does? It closes down”. I explained that there were muscles that are flat, muscles

that are short, muscles that are long-and then there are muscles that are circular, „like the one at the bottom of your stomach; you know, when you eat food that muscle closes up, the food stays in your stomach wants to get rid of the food, that circular muscle at the bottom of your stomach opens up, empties out, and closes up to wait the next meal to digest.“ The muscle at the bottom of your stomach – where’s the bottom of your stomach when you’re a small boy? It’s all the way down.

So we discussed that for an hour, and the next Saturday he came in all alone. We talked some more about sports and this and that, with never a mention of bedwetting. We talked about Boy Scouts and camping, all the things that interest a small boy. On the fourth interview he came in wearing a big, wide smile. He said, „You know, my Ma has been trying for years to break her habit. But she can’t do it.“ His mother smoked and was trying to stop. I said, „That’s right, some people can break their habits quickly, other make a great big talk about it and don’t do nothing about it“. Then we drifted on to other subjects.

About six months later he dropped in socially to see me, and he dropped in again when he entered high school. Now he’s in college.

All I did was talk about the circular muscle at the bottom of the stomach closing up and holding the contents until he wanted to empty it out. Symbolic language, of course, but all that beautiful build-up of eye, hand, body coordination. The bedwetting went away without ever discussing it“. (quoted from Haley, 1986, 199-201.)

Where is the power of story-telling? Conscious knowledge, at the same time, consists of learned inhibitions as well, which a person cannot overcome by direct verbal advice. Erickson and Rossi say: „Most of the indirect approaches can be used in any form of therapy, education, or experimental procedures [...] Because they fixate attention, focus the subject inward, and initiate autonomous or unconscious processes.“ (Erickson, Rossi, 1989, 475) The psychodynamics of learning with the processes such as associations, similarities and contrasts involve more or less unconscious levels so that the indirect messages with illustrations tend to bypass the critical consciousness, biases and inhibitions, and therefore are more efficient in learning than direct advice and their semantic messages.

It is important to remark that such indirect activity is not manipulative, as an instrument of the psychotherapist with the patient in a passive role only. On the contrary, the client's individuality is very important. The indirect suggestion relies on the patient's individuality. The way in which she understands a certain object is a way of how she connects it with the parts of her experience. When a therapist tells the patient a story, the latter chooses unconsciously what matters for her and offers a change, by relying on what corresponds with her earlier experiences, i.e., in other words, she starts a search in her sensor-motoric experiences to find meaning for what was said. It is this process of linking sensory inputs with the experience of the patient that makes the illustrative example an agent of change (since all of this is happening in the context of therapy, the client begins the search for pain relief or the solution to the problem).⁴

As it appears from this description, the psychotherapist offers a story, but she cannot know which among the information that it contains will be relevant for the patient. It is up to the patient to establish why, with what goal, the story is selected, and search for an answer. Typically, the patient is offered a story about someone with a similar problem who has successfully used the solution, and then it is up to the patient to establish a connection and apply a similar solution in her life. In this manner, the person is given the ability to understand something – a point, meaning, a situation, without giving her propositional knowledge. There is no explanation of what needs to be learned from the story – the person herself draws conclusions and raises questions, and through this arrives into contemplation and stimulates learning. It is a creative process, where the imagination of the known elements leads to new solutions. Because the patient has a tendency to create her own response to the indirectly offered advice, she creates a personal insight into the solution. Here we have an analogy with the cognitive role of artworks. Just as Young says in relation to artworks that they do not contain the relevant information and we extrapolate the relevant information from them, the same happens with psychotherapeutic stories, where the patient extrapolates the relevant information from

4 In this process, it is not required that the story corresponds with truth. It is only important that it is plausible, that it may be coherent with what is known to be true and, in particular, that it corresponds with the patient's experience.

stories that are, in this way, primarily illustrative and not semantic but illustrative representations.

In generalizing the *modus operandi* of illustrations and related experiences in psychotherapy, we can say that illustrations act in a way that what they illustrate connects with some of our previous experience about what is illustrated and therefore trigger unconscious reconstruction of that experience, which then activates our body's motoric involvement in perception of what is illustrated, as well as our emotional reactions to the object of illustration. We can see here the analogy with what happens with moral learning through artworks. The illustration of discrimination connects with the person's previous experiences of situations of discrimination, triggers the unconscious reconstruction of the experiences, and then activates emotional reactions to these situations of discrimination. This helps to improve the understanding of discrimination.

To be sure, although stories operate at the unconscious level, reflection is not completely excluded. The patient reflects about the changes afterwards in order to see whether she accepts it. Here we have an analogy with the epistemological activity that we described above, when we were indicating the interaction between illustrations provided by artworks and reflective activity required for the endorsement of their perspective.

Today we have a neurophysiologic explanation of the potentialities of illustrative representations, and we show the explanation offered by Damasio. As he says, when objects appear in our mind this appearance also carries with it the motoric involvement of our body in the understanding of these objects and in our emotional reaction to the object. (Damasio, 1999, 183) The second basic fact is that our brain represents the objects in somatosensory maps regardless of whether it is a matter of remembrance of past experiences, direct observation of the external object, or planning of future actions. This renders possible that the reconstruction of the experiences that we have when we remember a certain object through illustrations reshape the experience and, therefore, link it with new understanding and emotional reaction. This is because our brain is apparently designed to understand the stories consciously and unconsciously and to 'think' through stories and this gives them the power to change attitudes, values and perspectives.

By telling a story, we are offering the patient an opportunity to present to herself the experience, which once used to be accompanied by fear, but now is accompanied by some new emotion, curiosity, hope, serenity, security, etc. In an analogous description of what happens in morality, we can say, for example, that reshaping can link an experience, previously accompanied with indifference or feeble condemnation with firm condemnation and a judgment of intolerance.

4. FINAL REMARKS ON EPISTEMOLOGY AND ART

A further problem that appears is the following. In the case of psychotherapy, the procedure appears as being legitimate because of the fact that there are no doubts about the legitimacy of what is intended to be achieved, i.e. the cure from the disease. But trying to obtain moral learning by applying methods similar to that of the psychotherapist may appear as a good practice in education of children, while it seems a manipulation in the case of adults.⁵

There is an answer, on the track of what we said above. The illustration is not a manipulation. It offers a solution, but does this in a stimulating and not in an authoritative way. Illustrations, in psychotherapy as well as in the case of high quality artworks, offer possibilities that interact with the patient or with the audience on the bases of their experiences, inviting them to reflect, compare the illustrations with other experiences and with the relevant beliefs that they have. Such an active attitude is required in good psychotherapy, as well as in relation to illustrations provided by artworks.

By relying on this, we may find one of the features that distinguish high quality from low quality artworks (at least from the cognitive standpoint). The former (by a sophisticated employment of techniques of illustrative representation) correspond to the description we have given above, while the latter (frequently, but not always, by operating through mere assertions) try to enforce their worldviews. (cfr. Young, 2001, 129-130) Think about *Uncle Tom's Cabin* as an example. Although it offers an appreciable worldview, it does this with didacticism and that is unsuitable for

5 This objection was raised in relation to another paper by Alistair Norcross.

moral learning at least if not very naïve people are concerned. On the other hand, we have the example of Susanne Bier's *In a Better World* that offers stimulations and invites to afterwards reflection. Think about one of the motives of the film, that of violence. The film shows the complexity of the issue. Among else, there is on one hand the perspective of Elias's father who tries to show by illustrating with his own behavior that there is no need to respond violently to violence, and, on the other hand, the opposed perspective of Christian, Elias's friend, whose story illustrates that only his violent reaction was able to interrupt bullying, which Elias was a victim of at school. Although it appears that Susanne Bier wants to stimulate to endorse an attitude contrary to violence, she does this by illustrating the complexity of the issue, stimulating, and leaving ample possibilities to the personal reactions of the audience. This is part of what makes her film a relevant artwork, and certainly what constitutes the film's contribution to moral learning.

Finally, there are some points where Davies's and our view probably diverge. It seems to us that Davies, in conformity to the usual premises of the debate, would classify the requirement of further reflection that we indicate as needed before endorsing the perspective offered by an artwork as a concession to the thesis that art provides at best hypothesis, and, as a consequence, a weakening of the cognitive thesis. In fact, this indicates a relevant difference between artistic and scientific contribution to knowledge. Scientific theories include hypotheses, as well as all the evidence in favor of the hypotheses. Artworks need further evidence and further reflection external to them. But, there is no need, in order to support the cognitivist thesis, to say that the process of learning is fully internal to artworks and that there is no need of evidence external from the engagement with them. In our opinion, for a better formulation of the cognitivist thesis it is not needed to say that art's contribution is wholly internal to the engagement with the artwork, and it is sufficient to say that art offers a distinctive contribution that is very difficult to avoid, or very difficult to substitute with other resources for learning, i.e. that engagement with artworks appears as not having valid substitutes. Although it is true that artworks cannot provide knowledge by themselves, it is also true that they offer a precious contribution to moral learning, a contribution that cannot be offered by abstract reasoning alone.

Our thesis can be a problem not for saying that art has cognitive value, but for the thesis that the artistic value of artworks consists partly on their cognitive value. The reason is that by epistemologically evaluating with further evidence artworks' contribution to learning we make the epistemological concern external to artistic practice as such. (Davies, 2007; Davies, 2010) This, however, as we said at the beginning of the paper, is not our concern here. We are, nevertheless, aware, that by adding further reflection and experience as needed, successive to the immediate engagement with the artwork, we may render the intention to indicate in the cognitive value part of the artistic value of artworks more complicated. But, even if this is true, there is a gain on the other side. Davies related his account of learning through artworks to an externalist view in epistemology, as we have seen from a previous quotation. Our view, on the other hand, offers the possibility of an internalist account, as well. According to this account, we can say that artworks together with other sources of learning provide possibilities of learning on which the subject can reflect in order to endorse beliefs, or deepen understanding. By this, we can say that she may obtain one of the levels of justification admitted by internalists. More precisely, we link our view to the method of reflective equilibrium. (cfr. Baccarini, 2010)⁶

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Abstract

ART, MORAL EPISTEMOLOGY, PSYCHOTHERAPY

David Davies has offered a proposal that explains the possibilities of cognitive contribution of art, by identifying some artworks with thought experiments. Artworks in such cases contribute to the development of knowledge by reworking pieces of knowledge that individuals already have. James Young has indicated the distinctive way of artistic representation. Based on these results, in this article the cognitive contribution of artworks is analyzed primarily through the possibilities of understanding abstract moral principles. There is an empirical confirmation for such a cognitive contribution in the experience of psychotherapy that indicates that illustrative representations, such as those in narrative artworks, can cause changes in the attitudes of individuals that are not possible by direct messages.