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THREE FACES OF HUMAN EXCEPTIONALISM: GENIUS, SAINT, MONSTER

by

Mary Clare F. McKinley

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Philosophy in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York

2015

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This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Philosophy in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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## **Abstract**

### **THREE FACES OF HUMAN EXCEPTIONALISM: GENIUS, SAINT, MONSTER**

by

Mary Clare F. McKinley

Advisor: Professor Nickolas Pappas

An exposition of the artistic genius invokes the perennial challenge to determine intersections between ethics (or morality) and aesthetics. As the human figure of the aesthetic realm, the genius meets its match in two counterparts of the ethical realm: the saint and the monster. Indeed, the genius shares traits with both figures, drawing closer to the saint in its communicative capacity while also revealing a prodigious nature more akin to the monster. This dissertation poses the following question: between the saint and the monster, does the genius resonate more with one than with the other? As one strategy to find an answer, the dissertation identifies and develops criteria to structure a comparative analysis. Ultimately proposing a stronger alliance between the genius and the saint than between the genius and the monster, the dissertation explores the ways that humans define these three figures, and how through those definitions humans consider and revise their own dispositions and capacities.

## Acknowledgements

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I would like to extend deep thanks to my colleagues and friends at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, where I have been working simultaneously while pursuing this degree. In particular, Rebecca Rabinow, whose leadership and sense of humor were (and still are) invaluable to me, allowed me to remain optimistic that art historical research and exhibition planning are perfect complements to dissertation work in philosophy.

Most importantly, I would like to thank my family and friends for their enduring support. My parents remain infinite sources of love and encouragement. My dad's philosophical interests stimulated him (perhaps now regrettably) to act as an unofficial reader of several drafts of this dissertation, and many of his suggestions shaped the final product. My thanks to him for always believing that this was an important endeavor and strategizing with me on how best to accomplish it. My mom, whose vicarious dissertation experience is vast, wisely and calmly reassured me that I could juggle an academic career, work, and family, and helped me do it. My siblings continued to cheer me on at every stage, offer sound advice and provide fun distractions along the way. I relied heavily on them at many critical junctures. I am grateful for my in-laws, cousins, and friends, near and far, who patiently endured my complaints year after year and deferred plans to lend a sympathetic ear (and so much more) whenever I needed them.

My warmest devotion and thanks to my husband, John. His gentle and unflagging support enabled me to finish this project. He read many versions of the manuscript, diplomatically offering suggested revisions that substantially improved the outcome. The final year of this dissertation coincided with the birth of our daughter, August Wells. Her sweet and sunny disposition makes every day brighter and made finishing this dissertation easier.

# THREE FACES OF HUMAN EXCEPTIONALISM: GENIUS, SAINT, MONSTER

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## **Part I. In Search of Criteria for the Genius**

Plato and Kant provide the salient features of the genius as philosophy has understood that conceptual figure over time.

### **Introduction**

All of us have some conversations and situations, sometimes just a bit we have overheard or read, that the mind cannot let go; it continues to wrestle with the ideas and the frustration of being unable to either dismiss or resolve them. It is precisely this condition that accounts for the origins of my dissertation. After careful study of foundational aesthetic texts by Plato and Kant and interpretations of them, I recognized a persistent concern about the contemporary use of the term “artistic genius.” Furthermore, a storm of readings, conversations, and experiences kept swirling around, sometimes violent and other times quiet, yet still unsettled. The association of these disparate experiences eventually coalesced into a thesis organized around a central concern.

The concern derives from the growing usage and yet persistent lack of clarity around what is meant by the word “genius” when used to describe an artist.<sup>1</sup> The term is familiar in philosophical treatments of it, particularly that proposed by Immanuel Kant. However, since that time, the term has enjoyed numerous and varying uses and applications resulting in its having inscrutable meaning. My discussion is focused on the ways that the term is used in combination with other labels as well – namely, when it is linked with the moral figures of the saint and the monster. All three conceptual figures, the genius, the saint, and the monster, are extreme or

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<sup>1</sup> “And so geniuses multiply in the media, while dying an ignominious death in academe.” (McMahon, Darrin M. “Where Have All the Geniuses Gone.” *Chronicle of Higher Education*. October 21, 2013. <http://chronicle.com/article/Where-Have-All-the-Geniuses/142353/>)

exceptional types of human beings.<sup>2</sup> What is most perplexing is the way that the word genius can be connected with the two extreme moral figures that traditionally occupy diametrically opposed ends of the moral spectrum. And yet the frequency of these combinations persists.

The following three examples are representative of the artistic genius as it enjoys definitional ambiguity and differing moral associations. They will frame the discussion, acting as major, outlining brushstrokes on the proverbial canvas.

The first conflicting use of the term took place during a gallery tour I gave in an exhibition that featured early twentieth-century paintings by Henri Matisse and Pablo Picasso. While explaining the legendary and productive rivalry the two artists are said to have enjoyed, a visitor interrupted me: “Picasso is the genius; Matisse was great, but never did anything innovative.” Overhearing a conversation in the galleries the following week, I heard a visitor make the opposite declaration in favor of Matisse’s artistic merit. Even scholarship on the two artists still uses comparative language to distinguish between them, for example, when Matisse is described as “less obviously gifted and certainly less precocious than Picasso.”<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, on top of the disagreement over their artistic skills, descriptions of the artists are often tainted with

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<sup>2</sup> On this point of the three figures being human types and yet altogether exceptional cases of human beings, Aristotle’s categories of “difference” and “diversity” may not resolve the confusing status these figures enjoy. Since all are human, they seem to resist the label of being “diverse,” since such a categorization would require that they are in fact of a different genus. However, since each figure exemplifies some extreme or exceptional human, merely considering them “different” from other human beings suggests a duller contrast than is intended. In this way, Aristotle’s distinctions highlight the productive tension this dissertation takes as its focus. I propose that the second interpretation of Aristotle’s term, “contrary,” may function well: “The term ‘contrary’ is applied...(2) to the most different of the things in the same genus” (Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, Book V, Ch. 9, 1018a26-27, trans., W.D. Ross, in *The Basic Works of Aristotle*, ed., Richard McKeon (New York: Modern Library, 2001). Though they are in the same genus, they are at the most extreme margins of it. My thanks to Peter Simpson for provoking the Aristotelian connection.

<sup>3</sup> Jack Flam, *Matisse and Picasso: The Story of Their Rivalry and Friendship* (Cambridge: Icon/Westview, 2003), 4.

moralizing language. The following was written by French poet Guillaume Apollinaire about his friend, Picasso: “Everything enchants him, and his incontestable talent seems to me to be at the service of a fantasy that justly blends the delightful with the *horrible*, the abject with the refined.”<sup>4</sup> The horrible, the horrific, and the monstrous – these are terms that reappear in descriptions of artworks<sup>5</sup> and sometimes of the artists themselves. Relatedly, Matisse’s stylistic shifts in the early years of the twentieth-century were considered so outrageous that the movement they gave rise to was called *Fauvism*, derived from the French word for “wild beast.” Whereas genius can be used to signify an artist’s ability to capture beauty, it can also mean original or inventive. At times, moral language also creeps in.

Another instance of how descriptions of artists and geniuses can be perplexing occurred while reading an interpretation of Michelangelo’s composition on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel. One scholar compellingly argues that Michelangelo’s *Creation of Adam* has been insufficiently analyzed by art historians and proposes a revised interpretation.<sup>6</sup> Paul Barolsky refers to Michelangelo’s inventive and ingenious approach evident in the artist’s ability to capture a moment of tension just before Adam has made contact with God, which – as the moment of human creation – is of particular significance. He offers several pieces of evidence: Adam’s horizontal orientation emphasizes a repositioning of humankind vis-à-vis God, one that

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid, 5, quoting Apollinaire, my emphasis.

<sup>5</sup> See in particular a conference co-hosted by faculty from Harvard’s Divinity School and the Whitney Museum of Art on February 7, 1970 entitled, “Conference on the Grotesque in Arts and Literature.” James Luther Adams, one of its organizers, wrote the following in preparation for the event: “The ‘grotesque’ in the arts calls attention to the monstrous, the absurd and the beastly...” in *The Grotesque in Art and Literature: Theological Reflections*, eds., James Luther Adams, Robert Penn Warren, and Wilson Yates (Grand Rapids, Michigan: W.B. Eerdmans, 1997), xiii.

<sup>6</sup> Paul Barolsky, “Michelangelo and the Gravity of God,” *Notes in the History of Art* 21, no. 3 (Spring 2002): 23-25.

is less hierarchical than his precedents and peers depicted; the composition centers around God's finger; and by filling God's drapery with air/wind/*spiritus* (gust of wind) while Adam's attire lays limp, Michelangelo presents a visible depiction of the concept of the Holy Spirit. The artist's achievement may not only suggest how he stands, as a genius, superior to his peers; Michelangelo's representation and interpretation of a theological point makes him akin to a saint. By facilitating reflection on mankind's relationship to God and view of creation, the artist takes on a saintly role. Barolsky suggests that Michelangelo encourages a viewer to reflect not only on God's spirit, but also on humanity's relation to and dependence on it; is that not dissimilar from the role that saints play in various religions? The plot thickens.

The final example involves a twentieth-century artist whose 1977 work, "Shot Dog" remains controversial and problematic for the artist's reputation to this day. In 2011, American artist Tom Otterness was considered for a commission to create a public artwork in San Francisco<sup>7</sup> and, again in 2013, in Lincoln, Nebraska.<sup>8</sup> In both instances, however, as facts about Otterness's past were revealed in the press, the public became wary of endorsing his art making. As a twenty-five year-old, Otterness filmed himself shooting a dog as performance art. Since filming such a violent act had never been done before, it was an "original" piece. Originality, oftentimes connected with genius, however, may not stand unqualified as a criterion for geniuses. At the time and to this day, Otterness's attempt at originality is judged as brutal and monstrous.

After some reflection, these examples formed a constellation of reference points, each representing the ongoing confusion with the concept of the artistic genius. The divergence

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<sup>7</sup> Carol Vogel, "Dead Dog Returns to Haunt Artist," *New York Times*, Nov. 18, 2011.

<sup>8</sup> Nancy Hicks, "Controversy kills 'Train Set' sculpture for West Haymarket," *Lincoln Journal Star*, October 4, 2013.

among people's views of Matisse and Picasso reveals the inherent confusion about what definition of genius a person must assume in order to state an opinion, supporting one artist or another as deserving of the label.

Michelangelo's *Adam* and Otterness's *Shot Dog* present artists whose approach to their respective projects and the content of those projects encourage us to consider the relevance of moral categories in an aesthetic framework. I could not pass up the opportunity to think of the ways that some philosophical analysis might apply to scenarios such as these. In one, an artistic genius was claimed to be divine or saintly and in the other, the genius was seen to be monstrous. There are countless examples of descriptions of the genius that pull him either closer to the saint or closer to the monster, and that got me thinking: What accounts for disagreement (or agreement) about who counts as an artistic genius and does the artistic genius exhibit more similarities with the saint or the monster?

It is often more useful to identify a question and lay out a general procedure for addressing it, than to defend an answer against all corners. In what follows I progress toward an answer, though I would also like to describe the path I took to reach that answer. The presentation of my topic, therefore, follows the trajectory of the essential questions and proposes a conclusion with a simple organization. In the first part, I direct my attention to two philosophical figures whose theories have shaped our concept of the genius. Plato and Kant provide the salient features of the artistic genius as philosophy has understood that conceptual figure over time.

Plato's poet functions as the fundamental origin of the artistic genius. According to Plato, artistic genius is a natural endowment. Further, though the artistic genius possesses knowledge, it is distinctly unlike other kinds of knowledge. Finally, Plato stipulates that the genius has

access to divine inspiration; access that in some ways removes the genius from the domain of human communication and even from ordinary human expectations.

In the second chapter, Plato's artist becomes the foundation for an exploration of Kant's concept of the genius. According to Kant, artistic genius is both innate and acquired. The genius maintains a disposition with regard to nature and the divine, and further, enjoys a unique freedom that enables him to create beautiful art. The chapter's last section examines Kantian aesthetic judgment and its implications for encounters with beautiful art.

The legacy of the genius as it is outlined in the first two chapters makes possible the second part of the dissertation, which includes chapters three, four, five, and a conclusion. From the survey of Plato and Kant emerge identifiable criteria that we can name and address one by one. Chapter three comprises an elucidation of five major criteria that constitute the genius: communication; prodigy; rarity; fresh application of conventions; and commitment. These five criteria become the basis for the comparison with each of the moral figures, which are undertaken in chapters four and five. In chapter four, I evaluate how the figure of the saint fits or does not jive with the five characteristics. Chapter five studies the monster with regard to the five criteria.

Based on my analysis, the dissertation concludes that the genius and saint are more aligned. The two figures are similarly disposed across four of the five criteria; they differ only with regard to the prodigious category, where the genius is often a prodigy and the saint is not. Though the genius and the monster share some features, an impasse emerged between the two that hinged on the extent to which each figure would go to achieve his desired end. The genius demonstrates commitment, but that commitment is not unrestrained; the monster stops at nothing. The monster's viewpoint, then, exceeds human norms, but not in a way that entices us

to join him there. The concluding chapter interprets the significance of the genius-saint alignment and the genius-monster schism, and suggests that some monsters, namely, those of the fictional sort, may possess a redemptive quality.

## Chapter 1 Plato's Poet: Conceptual Origins of the Artistic Genius

### Introduction

Perhaps Whitehead's oft-quoted statement that all philosophy is a footnote to Plato is an exaggeration, or maybe it is true and partially accounts for why a discussion of Platonic dialogues seems like the right way to begin this inquiry. Whatever the case, the specific reason for starting this dissertation with Plato lies in the fact that it is within his Socratic conversations that fundamental questions about the artist are asked and thereby the origins of the genius concept can be traced. These questions cover several topics, including: the artist's aptitude for creativity and the artistic or creative process, natural endowments, inspiration, imitation [*mimesis*] and knowledge, the work of art itself, the possibility of beauty, and the influence of aesthetic experience. Hence, as our goal is to explore the artistic genius, we start with his oldest ancestor: Plato's poet or artist.

Plato's Socrates asks and entertains questions about art making in the *Ion*, *Apology*, *Republic*, and *Phaedrus*. The possibilities suggested by his questions are organized here into themes rather than by dialogue. First, we will address the fundamental characteristics at stake in the discussions about Plato's conception of the poet. These aspects will be presented in light of Plato's general method, as well as with an eye to the modern developments that will become relevant when interpreting Kant's position in the following chapter.

Plato's poet is situated within a web of interrelated philosophical concepts. Understanding the poet's potential connections to the genius requires untangling these threads, which is attempted in the following presentation. The discussion proceeds in sequential fashion by addressing the possible answers Plato offers to two central questions: what distinguishes the poet's creative capacity and explains the poet's power over its audience? I will frame answers to



this question by posing the following, which will be discussed in this order: What does the poet have in the way of natural endowments? What must the poet know, and consequently, what can be learned to create his art? To what extent does inspiration play a role in the poet's creative pursuits, and what is the nature of this inspiration?

### **Nature and Natural Endowments**

I begin this section with an analogy of the natural world that Plato himself offered in the *Ion*.

For of course poets tell us that they gather songs at honey-flowing springs, from glades and gardens of the Muses, and that they bear songs to us as bees carry honey, flying like bees. And what they say is true. For a poet is an airy thing, winged and holy, and he is not able to make poetry until he becomes inspired and goes out of his mind and his intellect is no longer in him. (*Ion* 534b1-c1)<sup>9</sup>

Plato offers a vivid visual image of a bee flitting from flower to flower, collecting and then disseminating sweet nectar, essentially its purpose in life. Though this image will be evaluated again in the context of artistic inspiration, it bears review here because it invokes an image of natural order and function to be applied to the poet. The bee's proclivity to collect honey is what the bee is wired to do – this is about as basic, genetic, instinctual as a being can get. If, by analogy, the poet's role as a creative force in society is just as natural as the bee's role in distributing honey, it would seem that any removal or disturbance of the poet's position in society would be unnatural.

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<sup>9</sup> Plato, *Complete Works*, ed. John Cooper (Indianapolis, Indiana: Hackett Publishing, 1997), 942.

In addition to its consisting of an image from the natural world, Plato's bee description and function are paramount to discussing the poet's connection to nature. Not only is the bee *naturally* inclined to collect nectar from the flowers, the bee guarantees the sustenance of its own community while also ensuring the perpetuation of the flower species with its pollinating role. It is the bee's natural mechanism that works on the nectar to make it into honey. But, you may ask, how do these aspects apply to the poet?<sup>10</sup> This metaphorical image gives great insight into the way that Plato views the poet's role in society. If the poet is *like* the bee, the poet is naturally endowed with a mechanism and capacity to function in its role as an artist. This is not to say that the poet may also draw inspiration from others as well (which will be discussed in due course), but it is important to highlight the way that Plato has elected to compare the poet to nature's bee, an animal that begins with a product of nature and makes it into something else. The poet, too, begins with some entity, we could call it raw material – which could be seen as either natural or as something that is supplemented by an injection of some divine source – and from that material creates a new entity. The product is sweet, just like the nectar. In other words, the poet is not merely a passive conduit through which the product travels, but instead is an active agent, working with its natural endowments and with the products of the natural world to make its poetry.

A bee bringing us honey (unlikely though that event may be) is not bringing us a sample or copy of nature, but rather a transformation of nature which the bee itself has wrought.

The same role is ascribed to the artist when he is compared to a bee, gathering his art

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<sup>10</sup> See Arthur Bernard Cook, *The bee in Greek mythology* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1895). and Kenneth Dorter, "The Ion: Plato's Characterization of Art," *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 32, no. 1 (1973): 65-78.

from rivers of honey: his works are taken not ready-made from ordinary experience, but only from the fruits of his own catalysis.<sup>11</sup>

Dorter's interpretation of this passage in the *Ion* seems just right. The analogy drawn in the text takes the bee's place in a natural order and also the bee's work to emphasize the poet's position in and contribution to human society. This comparison seems to place a certain amount of power and credit in the hands of the poet. Dependent as he may be on the Muses (and to what extent will be discussed later), the poet has emerged not as an observer of this artistic, creative process, but as a participant in it.

Furthermore, it seems that this subtle analogy may contain more allusions to poets' and poetry's importance than previously thought. An investigation of the bee in Greek history reveals a symbolic significance attached to the animal.<sup>12</sup> In Cook's late nineteenth-century survey of the topic, he concluded that "the bee was a sacred animal closely associated with the birth and death of the soul,"<sup>13</sup> and its honey was considered nourishment for gods and men. More recently, Frederick Simoons<sup>14</sup> presented convincing evidence for the reverence ancient

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<sup>11</sup> Kenneth Dorter, "The *Ion*: Plato's Characterization of Art," *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 32, no. 1 (1973): 74.

<sup>12</sup> See also: Cristopher Hollingsworth, *Poetics of the Hive the Insect Metaphor in Literature* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2005).

<sup>13</sup> Arthur Bernard Cook, *The bee in Greek mythology* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1895), 23.

<sup>14</sup> "Freese includes honey among the foods banned at the Haloa festival. In ancient Greece, honey was thought to possess many virtues, purificatory, preservative, and cathartic. At the same time, the bee, perhaps because of its nesting habit (e.g., in hollows of trees, under stones, in caves, crevices in rocks, and even in animal carcasses), had special ties to Demeter and to other deities with chthonian associations. In ancient Greece, caverns and gorges were considered entrances to Hades. Thus, honey was offered especially, though not solely, to underworld forces (sometimes in caves) and to souls of the dead." Porphyry observed that, among other things, honey and beans were linked as symbols of death and genesis. He also observed that the ancients offered honey to underworld deities, that the priestesses of Demeter were called bees, and that Persephone was called honey-sweet." Frederick Simoons, *Plants of Life, Plants of Death* (Madison, Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1998), 203.

Greeks reserved for honey, and also the bee's connections to the underworld. Gregory Nagy's research focused on Hesiod's reports on the role that honey played in ensuring that bee maidens would tell the truth.<sup>15</sup> Historically, the bee also enjoyed divine connections to Zeus, who was reported to have been fed by the bee's honey just after his birth in a Cretan cave. Cook explains that this mythologized story likely comes from an historical fact that Cretan king, Melisseus, was the first to introduce rituals into Greek religious practice. As a sacrifice to the gods, he had his daughters, Amalthea and Melissa, offer goat's milk and honey. The sweetness of honey is still associated with birth, according to a practice still maintained whereby an eight-day-old infant is blessed with honey.<sup>16 17</sup>

The bee also maintained a prominent position in ancient Greek society as it was seen to absorb the soul of the dying body and thereby become a symbol of immortality.<sup>18</sup> Whether Plato had in mind all of these associations with the bee is unknown. But, it is safe to assume that he would have at least had a general understanding of the divine and powerful positions the bee maintained. That Plato chose to draw this comparison with the poet also seems significant since

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<sup>15</sup> "These Bee Maidens also *krainousin* 'authorize' (599): when they are fed honey, they are in ecstasy and tell aletheie 'truth' (560-561), but they *pseudontai* 'lie' when deprived of this food (562-563). Such ecstatic divination is achieved with fermented honey—a pattern typical of an earlier phase when *aoidos* 'poet' and *mantis* 'seer' were as yet undifferentiated." Gregory Nagy, *Greek Mythology and Poetics* (Ithaca: Cornell Press, 1990), 59-60. Perhaps Plato's references to the poet is in connection to this notion of Hesiod's bee maidens, which consequently emphasize the role of honey for nourishment and truth-telling.

<sup>16</sup> Arthur Bernard Cook, *The bee in Greek mythology* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1895), 3-4.

<sup>17</sup> In addition to this link with Zeus, bees enjoyed other divine associations including the claim that the second Delphic temple was built by them. Furthermore, poets reported that Dionysus/Bacchus was also fed honey as an infant, and elsewhere that he believed himself to be the discoverer of honey. Dionysus is often represented by the symbol of a bee, together with his traditional association with wine symbolized by vines.

<sup>18</sup> Cook's research revealed the use of bees on tombs in the Etruscan times and long after. The symbol, therefore, exists both in literature and in the artistic practice of a culture that originated before Plato came along.

the bee appears so rarely in his dialogues. Notably, in addition to its reference in the *Ion*, the bee or its hive is cited once each in *Statesman* and the *Republic*, and twice in the *Laws*. In *Statesman*, Socrates uses the “king-bee” as “one individual immediately superior in body and mind” (*Statesman*, 301e1).<sup>19</sup> Bees, and in particular, the excellent or “king-bees” among them, had innate traits of superiority. If the artist is to be seen in terms of the bee, it is possible that Plato is subtly suggesting that artists, too, possess something innate that determines their superiority.

The passage in the *Ion* quoted above also contains an ode to Nature’s inconceivable power.<sup>20</sup> To demonstrate this, Plato has selected the bee as the prototypical example of an animal whose design and function Nature endowed it with are both to be admired (almost) as objects of beauty and certainly of wonder. Using the bee, then, in discussion about poets suggests the parallels and metaphors between bees and poets were intentional and are substantive.

In the *Republic*, Plato invokes the bee by drawing an analogy between the polis or civilization and the bee’s hive. In a warning about who to keep out of the polis, Plato claims that “idle and extravagant men” are to be banned since they are like poison to civil society.

Now, these two groups cause problems in any constitution, just as phlegm and bile do in the body. And it’s against them that the good doctor and lawgiver of a city must take advance precautions, first, to prevent their presence and, second, to cut them out of the

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<sup>19</sup> Plato, *Complete Works*, ed. John Cooper (Indianapolis, Indiana: Hackett Publishing, 1997), 346.

<sup>20</sup> The artist’s innate abilities – evidence of that which nature has given to the artist – will later be treated in the “prodigy” criterion.

hive as quickly as possible, cells and all, if they should happen to be present. (*Republic* 564b7-c3)<sup>21</sup>

The implications Plato intends to make with the above analogy between the hive and social order and other references to bees in the *Republic* have been interpreted many times before.

Particularly important to note is that Plato's emphasis on the power of the poets' sweetness is generally accepted, though some interpret this emphasis as evidence of Socrates' attempt "to exploit various traditions of bee-related metaphors to strengthen his case against poetry" by making the point that "poetry's sweetness is revealed to be delicious, to be sure, but toxic."<sup>22</sup>

Whether potentially destructive in Socrates' opinion or not, the poets and their products are explained through terms and images of the natural world. It is this point that is essential to this analysis by underscoring the collective impression from Plato's dialogues that bees were of great value in Greek culture for their didactic and symbolic legacy. Plato was demonstrably aware of the many facets of the bee's contributions, a fact that only serves to validate an interpretation of his work that further develops our understanding of his poet.

In addition to being placed in this garden image, the poet's connections to nature and the poet's natural endowments surface elsewhere in the dialogues. What makes the poet inclined, like the bee, to flit about and sip up inspiration? Is the poet innately or naturally close to divinity or a divine source from which he can draw? Or, does the poet uniquely tap into the emotional sensitivities of the audience, tailoring his performance to their needs and desires? Plato's position emerges with the derivative of the poet, the rhapsode *Ion*. Indeed, the rhapsode

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<sup>21</sup> Plato, *Complete Works*, ed. John Cooper (Indianapolis, Indiana: Hackett Publishing, 1997), 1174.

<sup>22</sup> Rana Saadi Liebert, "Apian Imagery and the Critique of Poetic Sweetness in Plato's *Republic*," *Transactions of the American Philological Association*, 140 (2010): 99.

describes this sensitivity to the audience's reactions and how that sensitivity influences his performance.

I look down at them every time from up on the rostrum, and they're crying and looking terrified, and as the stories are told they are filled with amazement. You see I must keep my wits and pay close attention to them: if I start them crying, *I* will laugh as I take their money, but if *they* laugh, I shall cry at having lost money. (*Ion* 535e1-5)<sup>23</sup>

Evidently, the rhapsode's skill in performance, and what we can safely assume is the poet's skill in composition, complicate the role natural endowments play in a poem's success (or lack thereof) for an audience. Yet, they appear to center on just what Ion mentions when he tells us that he "pay[s] close attention to them." The "them" that Ion refers to – the audience – are other human beings that either are or will be experiencing the work of art, in this case the audience for his poem. I argue that Plato maintains that the artist has a deep understanding of human experience. It is precisely this sensitivity that constitutes the artist's natural endowments. It is also this aspect that makes Plato wary of the artists – for it is with this knowledge of humanity that great power can be wielded, but also with it that manipulation and deception are possible.<sup>24</sup>

Whatever the most apt characterization of the artist's natural endowments, the basis of them is that they are innate. The artist is born with a certain predisposition.

The present discussion deepens when probing Plato more specifically to learn his perspective whether and how the artist's life – the experiences he has, the decisions he makes, the environment in which he develops – also affects the artist's creations. The following section

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<sup>23</sup> Plato, *Complete Works*, ed. John Cooper (Indianapolis, Indiana: Hackett Publishing, 1997), 943.

<sup>24</sup> Ion's description is an example of manipulative communication, not the transparent communication that we will later discuss as a criterion of the genius.

will uncover the extent to which Plato thinks that the artist may also acquire practices or skills – in this way, whether or not any knowledge of art-making exists, in his opinion – in addition to the artist’s innate qualities.

### **Artistic Knowledge**

Socrates presents Ion with a direct challenge on the topic of knowledge, “...you are powerless to speak about Homer on the basis of *knowledge* or mastery” (my emphasis, *Ion* 532c5-7).<sup>25</sup> Settling the question of whether or not rhapsodes, poets, or artists generally possess knowledge, and if so, what sort, requires approaching the topic from a variety of textual perspectives.

One can have knowledge of particulars, of the whole, or of both; there is procedural knowledge and technical knowledge, there is knowledge considered innate, similar to a natural endowment, and acquired knowledge, like that we learn from a teacher or in school, and all these different applications of the term only make the topic of poetic knowledge more complicated. And already even the question of knowledge links back to the question of nature’s role in poetry’s viability within Plato’s scheme and anticipates the role of inspiration and the divine in poetry making.

For our approach to this term in light of the excerpt from *Ion*, Penelope Murray offers an instructive interpretation. Murray takes the role of knowledge in poetry to be linked with the

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<sup>25</sup> Plato, *Complete Works*, ed. John Cooper (Indianapolis, Indiana: Hackett Publishing, 1997), 939. Similarly to the image depicted in the allegory of the cave in Plato’s *Republic*, wherein the craftsmen are removed by several levels or blocked by intermediaries from the knowledge of the forms.



Muses.<sup>26</sup> In her view, the Muses are involved in the artist's creative process because they encourage and assist the poet's ability to remember whatever information or story is relevant to the composition or performance at hand. This interpretation admits that knowledge or know-how exists, but it does not place that knowledge exclusively in the poet's hands. If the poets possess knowledge of subject matter, the Muses are partially responsible for helping them to recall the details of it. Murray's view is that the Muses have a dual role in artistic creation, assisting the poet to gain access to information and provide inspiration. Murray's model maintains a complementary relationship between the poets' agency and the poets' dependence on divine sources, which together underline the knowledge required for creative pursuits. On this interpretation, even though he may require assistance, the poet possesses a certain body of knowledge.

Nickolas Pappas<sup>27</sup> arrives at a similar conclusion in his elucidation of the image of the stone and iron rings (see *Ion* beginning in 533),<sup>28</sup> offering a view that is compatible with Murray's. Pappas refers to the string of people connected by a figuratively magnetic force as recipients not of the Muses' knowledge per se but instead as recipients of charisma. Pappas specifies that charisma can be transferred in the way that Plato intends by the image of the rings; specific content or knowledge cannot be. It is therefore a further point that the rings illustrate the

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<sup>26</sup> This point will be discussed at greater length in "inspiration" section; Murray's focus is on the nature of inspiration specifically, but it pertains to knowledge since overemphasizing the inspirational aspect of the poet's success undermines if not altogether removes the poet's visibility as a figure capable of knowledge. Penelope Murray, "Poetic Inspiration in Early Greece," *The Journal of Hellenic Studies* 101 (1981): 87-100.

<sup>27</sup> Nickolas Pappas, "Plato's Aesthetics," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2014 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2014/entries/plato-aesthetics/>.

<sup>28</sup> Plato, *Complete Works*, ed. John Cooper (Indianapolis, Indiana: Hackett Publishing, 1997), 941.

nature of poetic inspiration rather than an explanation of the poets' defense as knowledge-holders.

If we agree with Pappas that the poets possess Muse-generated charisma, this reinforces the view that the poet is an exception to the human norm. It is with this connection to the Muses that the poets gain insights that are otherwise inaccessible to most humans. The poets are human, but the Muses are not. Instead, the Muses hover in that semi-divine realm. Since the poets can access the Muses, the poet maintains a marginal or fringe status that imbues him with a power to produce works that engage with a non-human realm. This engagement suggests two things: first, the poet's proximity to what could be seen as a divine or universal point of view and, second, this point of view can afford the poet an ability to speak with more universal appeal. Rather than seen as a deficiency on the part of the artist that he does not have mastery of warfare in order to recite Homer's epic poems and the battle scenes contained therein, this explanation instead suggests that what the poet or artist uniquely does or can do is not defined or proven by his possession of knowledge as it is traditionally understood.

So the poets indeed deserve credit for a particular disposition with regard to the divine or universal perspective, but that point of view cannot be encapsulated exclusively in terms of knowledge. At this point, then, we turn to a more detailed discussion of poetic inspiration.

### **Divine Inspiration, Human Communication, and Expectations**

By using a catch-all term such as "inspiration," we expose ourselves to several related issues that require attention, including the extent to which divinity is involved in art making, how much responsibility the poet deserves for his creations, and whether a poet's ability and productivity are innate or acquired. Plato's dialogues suggest a variety of images that illustrate

how he envisions inspiration working in art making, ranging from the stone and iron rings to honeybees and the divine. These images will be reviewed with specific attention to what insights they provide in our search for a unified Platonic view of inspiration's role in poetic creation, composition and performance.

First, when I use the word inspiration, I am using Penelope Murray's characterization: "Inspiration seems to be the feeling of dependence on some source other than the conscious mind."<sup>29</sup> According to this view, by granting that he is inspired, the poet acknowledges that something external is operating on him when he performs his poetry. In other words, it *seems* to the poet that there is something other than his own brain or mind that is responsible for the process. I italicize "seems" because historically, there appear to be different entities that the poet claims as his source. For some, the inspiration is divine, and the poet is channeling the Muses for its artistry. In this scenario, the poet is merely a divine mouthpiece.<sup>30</sup> To get to the heart of the issue, I first want to present the images and analogies Plato offers of these modes of inspiration for the insights into the topic they might provide, before probing deeper to investigate whether the poet is more active or passive.

Socrates puts divine source front and center, telling Ion:

...it's a divine power that moves you, as a 'Magnetic' stone moves iron rings. [...] This stone not only pulls those rings, if they're iron, it also puts power *in* the rings, so that they in turn can do just what the stone does – pull other rings – so that there's sometimes a very long chain of iron pieces and rings hanging from one another. And the power in all

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<sup>29</sup> Penelope Murray, "Poetic Inspiration in Early Greece," *The Journal of Hellenic Studies* 101 (1981): 88.

<sup>30</sup> "The god himself is the one who speaks, and he gives voice through them [poets] to us" (*Ion* 534d4-5). See also Suzanne Stern-Gillet "On (Mis)interpreting Plato's *Ion*," *Phronesis: A Journal for Ancient Philosophy* 49, no. 2 (2004): 178.

of them depends on this stone. In the same way, the Muse herself inspires some people, and then through those who are inspired a chain of other enthusiasts is suspended. (*Ion* 534d3-e4)<sup>31</sup>

The image of the magnetic stone is reminiscent of other analogies Plato has used in other dialogues.<sup>32</sup> In this particular case, the image places the source of power solely in the hands of the divinity; the Muse as Magnet. By setting up a derivative power-sharing structure, the iron rings (read: different and inferior solid) are dependent on that original source and therefore are not autonomous, powerful entities but are only recipients of the power put into them by the stone. The rings are analogies for the poets, who therefore are also dependent, though they *seem* autonomous, the way that the rings *seem* to be magnetized when really their magnetic powers depend on the stone's originating charge. Appearances are deceiving; the poet is not in fact in possession of inspiration but a conduit for it. By introducing this distance between the poet's iron-ring status and the Muse's powerful stone, the analogy bespeaks a hierarchy as well that resembles some discussions of mimesis in the *Republic* (for example, in Book X),<sup>33</sup> wherein a chasm exists between the poets and artists and the Form of beauty. In that context, the artists are at a distance from the Forms – the virtues of authenticity, truth, and whatever other traits are to be admired in Plato's estimation – and increasingly forced away from the divine as well.

Furthermore, the image of the Magnet seems altogether problematic for the present inquiry since it assumes a false understanding of magnetic force. The issue has been raised

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<sup>31</sup> Plato, *Complete Works*, ed. John Cooper (Indianapolis, Indiana: Hackett Publishing, 1997), 942.

<sup>32</sup> For example, in a conversation about whether or not he should give in to death, Socrates offers Crito an analogy that personified the laws of Athens as parents in a family (*Crito*, beginning 50c3).

<sup>33</sup> Plato, *Complete Works*, ed. John Cooper (Indianapolis, Indiana: Hackett Publishing, 1997), 1199-1223.

before,<sup>34</sup> though I offer a slightly different image: As a kid in the waiting room of a doctor's office, I often played with what was a small magnetic black box and tiny stick-figure metal objects. If each object was placed near the black box with only its abstract feet touching the box, the figure would remain standing, and one could attempt to continue to stack additional figures in a human tower of sorts. But, in fact, the overwhelming force was for each figure to lay flat on its side. So, as any builder observed, the human tower would eventually collapse and cling to the black box in big clumps. This experience serves as a reference for how Plato's image of the Magnetic stone and iron rings does not reflect natural magnetism. There would not be such a clear chain of objects – the hierarchy he prefers – and instead, the stone would be covered with whatever was attracted to it at whatever points of contact the attractors could achieve. This observation is not to pin Plato as having poorly selected his example, but only to highlight how it may lack instructive relevance for our purposes.

What remains of interest to us, however, is that there apparently exists for Plato a conflict between the poet's being intellectual and being a poet. By being dependent on the Magnetic stone, in Plato's imagery, the poet may also not be responsible any intellectual content or possess intelligence himself. Plato seems to suggest that inspired performance depends on the poet lacking intellect.<sup>35</sup> Even the simplest example of the artist whom I see painting portraits on the sidewalk next to Central Park – even if his work is not *beautiful* – is impressive, if relatively little inspired, but in no way would I assume that he lacked intellectual capacity. So the question is: is it simply that Plato is terribly wrong, or does he conceive of the role of intellect to be

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<sup>34</sup> Nickolas Pappas, "Plato's Aesthetics," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2014 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2014/entries/plato-aesthetics/>.

<sup>35</sup> The poet can only make poetry when "he becomes inspired" and "*his intellect is no longer in him*" (*Ion*, 534b6-7, my emphasis).

something other than the brain-activity, academic, or other intellectual characteristics that we take it to mean?

Plato seems to be operating with a different definition of intellectual activity. I understand Plato to mean that intellect is the act of being in control or controlling oneself (that is, in control of one's emotions, not affected by external experiences or by others). This is not a unique definition to him, but it is also different from the way that the term is typically understood in the modern sense. This seems an important point of clarification since it drives home the idea that though Plato may have questioned the ability of poets to remain in control, he may not see them as lacking intellectual capacity as we conceive of it. Furthermore, as Pappas has already noted, though the rhapsode Ion may not be intelligent, artists of other expertise were not questioned on the basis of their intelligence. "The character Ion is a performer and interpreter of Homer's poems, not a poet himself; meanwhile, most of what are classed as arts today—painting, sculpture, music—appear as activities for which the problems of irrationality and knowledge signally *fail* to arise."<sup>36</sup> For Plato, then, the artists that could qualify as the artistic genius (our present topic) may indeed claim rationality and knowledge in addition to being inspired as previously described.

The other prominent image offered of inspiration is that of the bee, discussed earlier in connection with the artist's link to nature. Recall that the poets say that they:

...gather songs at honey-flowing springs, from glades and gardens of the Muses, and that they bear songs to us as bees carry honey, flying like bees. (*Ion* 534b1-3)<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Nickolas Pappas, "Plato's Aesthetics," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2014 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2014/entries/plato-aesthetics/>.

<sup>37</sup> Plato, *Complete Works*, ed. John Cooper (Indianapolis, Indiana: Hackett Publishing, 1997), 942.

Sipping inspiration from the helpful nectar-laden flowers, the poet-bees pose a different question for us in the present section. Just how much responsibility does the bee have if it cedes power and control to some other entity? Is the statement being made here one about the poet as a hollow instrument in which contents are merely stored? This is the recurring question of activity versus passivity, wherein it appears that perhaps Plato has cast the poet as the mere passive recipient of whatever the Muses or other potential sources of inspiration provide. Characterizing the poet as passive is another way of Plato suggesting a demeaning view of the artist.

The receptivity of the poet is also a charge that is sometimes lobbed at the poet when the poet admits his inspiration derives from an external source as in the *Ion*, in one instance referred to as *pharmakon* or divine gift (*Ion* 534c2, 534c8)<sup>38</sup> and in another, *enthusiasmos* or filled with the gods (*Ion* 535c2).<sup>39</sup> We will focus on the latter.

By having *enthusiasmos* – being filled with the (spirit of the) gods – the poet’s association with the divine resonates with our earlier discussions of the poet’s connection to the Muses. And being filled with the gods means that one is specifically not oneself. To have the feeling that one is not oneself could be seen as the feeling of being out of one’s mind or experiencing madness. However, this is a unique type of madness since it is brought on or caused by a divine gift.

The *Phaedrus* offers several points that seem to clarify the way we can understand divinity’s presence and why madness is connected with it. Poetic madness derives from a close association with divinity. The contribution of the divine is a mark of distinction – the way in

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid, 942.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid, 942.

which the poet is not merely “crazy” in some uncontrollable way, but is outside the typical or traditional bounds of human behavior. Plato repeatedly refers to the concept of madness in *Phaedrus*: “the best things we have come from madness, when it is given as a gift of the god” (*Phaedrus* 244a4-8),<sup>40</sup> madness was not “something to be ashamed of or worthy of blame” (*Phaedrus* 244b5),<sup>41</sup> in fact, “fine achievements...due to god-sent madness” (*Phaedrus* 245a6) and “madness (mania) from a god is finer than self-control of human origin, according to the testimony of the ancient language givers” (*Phaedrus* 244d2-4).<sup>42</sup>

When the poet is described as being filled with gods and madness in this way, this form of madness differs from its appearance in popular references to the mad genius.<sup>43</sup> The description refers not to a psychological disorder but to the way in which the poet is not himself. The poet is not exhibiting unfamiliar behavior or abilities because he is experiencing an alternative mental state. The poet is not himself because he is filled with someone else, namely, filled with the divine.

Plato’s emphasis on the poet’s having *enthusiasmos* gives rise to an extension of his thought, which I will expand on here. When an artist creates a work that attracts an attribution such as this – that the artist is filled with the gods or the divine – it of course is in keeping with the obvious: that the poet is regarded as near, but outside, the realm of normal human behavior. This view, that the poet has proximity to human behavior but is an exception to human expectations, results from the dual-proximal status the poet enjoys with regard to humanity and

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid, 522.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid, 522.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid, 522.

<sup>43</sup> There are numerous sources for a discussion on the poet’s connection to madness or *mania*, a term used in the *Phaedrus*, and this dissertation does not outline all of them. Though coincidences of madness and creativity can be cited, psychological problems or madness (in a popular sense) are not an essential criterion of the artistic genius as I understand it.



divinity, a status that enables the poet to see “from both sides now,” a phrase made popular by a song written by American singer-songwriter Joni Mitchell. Mitchell claims the phrase was inspired by reading a Saul Bellow novel<sup>44</sup> and the experience of flying, which enabled a view of clouds from above rather than the usual view from the ground. The lyrics of the song address the way that changing one’s viewpoint of an aspect of the world (i.e. clouds) or one’s life (i.e. love) allows for endless thought provocation. Mitchell’s description of her point of inspiration, and the specific experience outlined in Bellow’s book (which she then echoes in her song), illustrate this point about the poet’s (artist’s) dual existence.

First, Mitchell’s statement about the song’s inspiration highlights the way that reading Bellow’s book encouraged her to look at clouds in a different way. From both the human (from the ground) and other (aerial) perspectives, Mitchell was enabled to view the world differently. Her lyrics describe this literal and figurative revision of perspective.

Second, Bellow’s description of flying also points to this blended experience or dual disposition the poet occupies. In the passage that Mitchell describes as her inspiration, Bellow’s main character, Henderson, thinks about attaining a level above the earth such that the ocean’s water below and the clouds surrounding and below are both of the world that humans inhabit and also otherworldly in some way as well. He writes, “...I couldn’t get enough of the water, and of these upside-down sierras of the clouds. Like courts of eternal heaven. (Only they aren’t eternal, that’s the whole thing; they are seen once and never seen again, being figures and not abiding realities...)”<sup>45</sup> However, the other passengers on the plane are absorbed in their books, uninterested in the world around them in the same way. Like the novel’s character, the poet sees

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<sup>44</sup> Bellow, Saul. *Henderson, the Rain King: A Novel* (New York: Viking, 1959).

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid*, 333.

things around him – aspects of the natural world or human experience – that other human beings seem to ignore on their own. The poet's disposition, hovering both in and at the fringe of human experience, encourages him to create works of art that in turn encourage other human beings to look at the world differently as well.

The poet is using human capacities like intellect, understanding and knowledge and sometimes, divine insights, to look at the world and life from a distinctly different perspective than the one that most human beings enjoy, specifically, poets see without the confines of human organization and strictures in place – be they time, cultural divine, or any number of other principles. Hovering over the world in a plane could be another descriptive image of the poet's disposition. In addition to seeing the world and life differently, the poet's work of art somehow emanates from or captures this different worldview. This liberated and informed position gives the poet unique power – power that can be used to influence those with whom he comes into contact. Recognizing this dual and powerful position, audience members can be entranced by the experience for it is through it that the viewer, audience or reader can also be brought out of his regular, subjective experience and into an intersubjective, universal, or divine one.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter's goal was to develop Plato's functioning concept of the poet. Exhibiting both human and non-human qualities, how is the poet exceptional? Does the poet validate our assumptions about human intellectual or creative capacity or violate or exceed those expectations? These general questions about the poet's inspiration, humanity, connection to nature and the divine, drive the remainder of this dissertation as they apply not only to the genius, but also to each moral conceptual figure. As a result, the poet serves as a representative

artist that can be a touchstone for future topics in this dissertation: qualities of Plato's poet are natural and some are acquired; the poet lives in the human realm and also channels divine insights, and it is this hybrid disposition that explains how an audience or reader gains new perspectives and transcends human experience when encountering the poet's work of art. For these reasons, Plato's poet exceeds human norms, and this exceptional status implies that the poet has great power at his disposal. And because of this realization, Plato warns against the free reign of that power and the persons who possess it.

Kant's genius also defies human norms. As our inquiry shifts its spotlight to this Enlightenment philosopher and the ways in which the genius disrupts or strays from assumptions about human capacity, Plato's treatment of the poet serves as an abstract foundation for Kant's genius. But do not mistake this as a conflation of their views. Ultimately, we look to these two central philosophical figures for cues on how to think about the aesthetic figure of the genius – the paradigmatic artist – and what criteria, even if apparently conflicting, can be associated with him. It is only after we have reviewed these positions carefully that we can compare the genius with figures of the *saint* (Chapter 4) and the *monster* (Chapter 5).

## Chapter 2 Artistic Genius According to Kant

### Introduction

Plato's poet serves as a primer for Kant's genius. That is not to say that Kant depended heavily on Plato for his own conception, but rather that for our purposes the issues that Socrates' questions fleshed out have in essence prepared the canvas for Kant's more specific brushstrokes. As did Plato, Kant claimed that artistic geniuses "strive after something lying beyond the boundaries of experience and attempt to approximate a representation of concepts of reason (intellectual ideas) ... The poet dares to render sensible ideas of reason of invisible beings, the realm of the blessed, hell, eternity, the creation, etc."<sup>46</sup> In this description alone, Kant refers to the poet's hybrid condition that combines human with divine access, and it is this condition that further substantiates the relevance of Kant's explication of aesthetic judgment. Aesthetic judgment, according to Kant's proposal, provides the framework for how the artist's creations instigate or foster communicative exchange between human beings.

Kant's aesthetic judgment not only sets the stage where genius and beauty are the central characters, it also gives us reason to consider the audience at Kant's carefully constructed performance. The audience, or the aesthetic judges, are human beings. Like the artist, they experience the work of art with particular human senses, faculties, intellectual, emotional and otherwise. Like the artist, Kant reminds us that the audience is also required to be original. Kant's take on aesthetic judgment unites the genius and the audience-members as well.

Significantly, for this paper, Kant's aesthetic judgment also enables us to understand where Kant places the genius with regard to morality. Since our goal remains to identify which

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<sup>46</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, ed. Werner S. Pluhar (Indianapolis, Indiana: Hackett Classics, 1987), 182-3 (§49, 314).

moral figure – the saint or the monster- more closely aligns with the genius, we cannot pass up the opportunity to review the Kantian context in which all three are implied.

Kant’s aesthetic judgment of beauty and its delineated four moments have been analyzed and presented extensively before. This paper will rely on standard interpretations of general points, and will focus instead on the areas from which Kant’s perspective or silence might inform the genius and the comparison of figures as well. I will present two of the four moments and offer interpretation of how Kant connects the genius to morality.

The first moment of Kant’s aesthetic judgment focuses on the feeling, referred to as “delight,” associated with this type of judgment. It is clear that Kant sees the feeling of pleasure as a double-edged sword, so this element of his theory in effect guards against the two possibilities. On the one hand, by emphasizing feeling, Kant is taking aesthetic judgment away from the object and instead bringing it into the realm of the subject. The requirement that the feeling is disinterested also moves the judgment away from the object. On the other hand, Kant is keen to prevent the possibility that the subject’s feeling is entirely closed off from other judges or the world around it.

The second moment reinforces this point when Kant inserts the requirement of universal liking. This moves judgment out of the private world of the individual and into what some have called an intersubjective realm.

Kant’s explicit moral connection arrives when he links the feeling of encountering beauty with a moral feeling. He writes,

We call buildings or trees majestic and magnificent, or landscapes cheerful and gay; even colors are called innocent, humble, or tender, because they arouse sensations in us that are somehow analogous to the consciousness we have in a mental state produced by

moral judgments.<sup>47</sup>

What Kant means by connecting the aesthetic and moral has been addressed before<sup>48</sup> and it will be addressed here specifically regarding the parallel he asserts exists between them. For Kant, the feeling of pleasure associated with beauty is also a feeling that carries with it universality. By making an aesthetic judgment of beauty, one is united with all other judges in agreement. The universal liking or agreement about beauty then, is akin to the universal agreement about moral goodness. This suggested parallel will be relevant when we compare the genius with the moral figures, since that comparison is an opportunity to test in what ways Kant conceived of the relations between the aesthetic and moral realms.

In this vein, another Kantian passage brings out the possible connections between the moral and aesthetic realms: “beauty as the symbol of morality.”<sup>49</sup> Again, the language is obscure, but it reinforces that Kant envisioned some type of moral-aesthetic connection.<sup>50</sup> This view will be carefully considered when attempting to sort out the similarities and differences between the moral and aesthetic figures.

Along Platonic lines, Kant also states the importance of encounters with fine art not only for individuals, but also for collective benefit. He points out that purpose of fine art is to

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid, 230 (§59; 354)

<sup>48</sup> “But the very fact that either the disposition to moral feeling or the disposition to aesthetic response can be regarded as the pro-paedeutic to the other shows how intimately connected the two dispositions are, and how the perfection of each goes hand in hand with that of the other.” (Paul Guyer. *Kant and the experience of freedom: essays on aesthetics and morality*, [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996], 140.)

<sup>49</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, ed. Werner S. Pluhar (Indianapolis, Indiana: Hackett Classics, 1987), 225 (§59).

<sup>50</sup> Unlike Plato’s clearer or simpler scheme where artists should all be moral since their works of art are inherently educational.

“facilitate social communication.”<sup>51</sup> I would argue that this claim does not diminish art to be merely the means to other (i.e. social or moral) ends. Rather, by mentioning fine art’s social value, and given that the genius is the creator of this art, Kant reveals that his artistic genius occupies a privileged position in society. Further, all this comes from an artist whom Kant never required to undergo moral training or whose objects had to promote particular moral views.

Furthermore, as with Plato’s, Kant’s discussion of the genius raises questions about nature, training, and connections to beauty and fine art. Kant, distinguished between the two in this respect, offers a detailed account of aesthetic judgment, emphasizing the reception of the works of art created by the genius. The forthcoming chapter examines each of these Kantian components, developing them in relation to Plato’s position and pointing out where Kant offers a new direction.

As a philosophical figure hailing from the eighteenth century, Kant is often interpreted or understood in terms that predetermine his irrelevance to twenty-first century art when many artists deny the importance of beauty in art, and quick conclusions are made implying that Kant’s theory therefore has nothing to say about the reception or practice of contemporary art. Though it is not an explicit intention of this chapter, it is a possible consequence that the views presented here may allow for some reconsideration of how his theory applies to works of art made in the present day.<sup>52</sup> Take, for example, the claim that beauty is simply not an essential ingredient for art making in this century, nor was it considered such in much of the last. *Guardian* art critic Jonathan Jones expressed just this sentiment in a post entitled: “When did modern art become so

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<sup>51</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, ed. Werner S. Pluhar (Indianapolis, Indiana: Hackett Classics, 1987), 173 (§44, 306).

<sup>52</sup> Others have made similar efforts though on slightly different grounds, for example, see Thierry De Duve, *Kant after Duchamp* (Cambridge: MIT Press, reprint 1998).

reluctant to embrace beauty?”<sup>53</sup> He wrote, “Today... [beauty] is simply treated by the art world as a joke, a con, an idiotic, old-fashioned idea.”<sup>54</sup> If true, it is easy to see why looking back to an eighteenth-century thinker whose theory of genius depends on beauty would seem pointless. This chapter requires the reader to temporarily suspend judgment about Kant (or interpretations of him) and reconsider his treatment of beauty and genius. I wager this will be a worthwhile exercise.

A less obvious but no less interesting place to start the conversation about Kant’s views on artistic genius is with contemporary examples in the New York art world. For example, consider Marina Abramović’s *The Artist is Present*, a performance piece at The Museum of Modern Art in New York that lasted for three months.<sup>55</sup> Every day, the artist sat silent across the table from a chair. Throughout the day, the chair was filled by random visitors who would sit for a length of time of their own determination. This was “shocking” for many reasons, among them, 1) the artist is on view in the gallery; 2) identifying what the art is about is not obvious; 3) the visitor enters a relationship or interacts (without words) with the artist; 4) the concept challenges many norms put in place by artistic practice and museum-going behavior: the art is not an object installed in a case or frame; the artist is in the flesh. As we will learn, Kant’s theory emphasizes originality, and Abramović’s work presents innovative challenges to artistic norms.

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<sup>53</sup> Jonathan Jones. “When did modern art become so reluctant to embrace beauty?” *Guardian*, May 2, 2012.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>55</sup> Museum of Modern Art. “Exhibitions, Marina Abramović: *The Artist is Present*.” Accessed March 20, 2012. <http://www.moma.org/visit/calendar/exhibitions/965>



Consider another experience orchestrated by contemporary artist Tino Sehgal, who developed an installation at the Guggenheim Museum in New York.<sup>56</sup> Sehgal's work involved mini-interviews conducted by carefully selected volunteers who were stationed along the ramp of the Guggenheim to confront visitors. In this design, a visitor becomes a vocal participant in the work and is subject to inquisition on an unknown topic (or topics). Sehgal's concept inverts the typical relation established by museum-going, specifically, that a viewer asks and attempts to answer questions about what s/he is seeing. In the Guggenheim presentation of Sehgal's work, visitors became objects of inquiry, "a visitor is no longer only a passive spectator, but one who bears a responsibility to shape and at times to even contribute to the actual realization of the piece."<sup>57</sup> In sum, the artist has disrupted the conventional aesthetic experience.

A third artist evinces Kant's aesthetic theory when he breaks out of the mould. A traditionally framed canvas was met with great fanfare when Chris Ofili's *Madonna*, fabricated with a medium that contained elephant dung, incited Mayor Giuliani to (in)famously claim the work of art was a religious insult.<sup>58</sup>

Each instance entailed an element of shock, whether it is a museumgoer that meets an artist face to face, is interrogated by a recruited participant, or sees an artwork made from elephant dung. These disrupted expectations constitute shock value, in addition to the many other considerations prompted by these works of art. To create a work of art that contains shock value – achieved by creating an unexpected experience – connects to originality. Now considered a trend in contemporary art, an emphasis on originality was present in Kant's theory,

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<sup>56</sup> Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum. "Exhibitions: Tino Sehgal." Accessed February 10, 2010. <http://www.guggenheim.org/new-york/exhibitions/past/exhibit/3305>

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> For more on this topic, see: William Bruce Johnson, *Miracles and Sacrilege*. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008), 354-355.

which among other things required that to be called a genius, one must break with tradition, creating art making anew, not simply following others' rules. Just how Kant lays out this view will be explained later in greater detail.

With an introduction to Kant behind us, the of the discussion will next approach Kant's views on the role of nature and training (possibility of acquisition) before leading into what the genius actually makes and how Kant thinks that those objects are judged or received. These aspects of Kant's genius build on Plato's artist and further develop criteria that define the genius (or the supreme artist) in order to stage a substantive comparison between that figure and its extreme counterparts in the moral realm, the monster and the saint.

### **On the Innate and Acquired**

Though<sup>59</sup> the term *genius* has colloquially come to mean an individual that possesses some extreme abilities in just about any possible area, Kant's *genius* is much more specifically defined. In order to create fine art, that is, beautiful art, an individual must possess genius. In this chapter's first section, we dig into the ways Kant envisions the genius with regard to nature. In some interpretations, Kant leaves no room for debate: he places *genius* squarely in the natural realm. He writes that genius is,

...the talent (natural endowment) that gives the rule to art. Since talent is an innate productive ability of the artist and as such belongs itself to nature, we could also put it

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<sup>59</sup> Kant asks the same question of taste: "...Is taste an original and natural ability, or is taste only the idea of an ability yet to be acquired and [therefore] artificial...?" (Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, ed. Werner S. Pluhar [Indianapolis, Indiana: Hackett Classics, 1987], 90 [§22, 240].)

this way: *Genius* is the innate mental predisposition (*ingenium*) through which nature gives the rule to art.<sup>60</sup>

Again,

...the artist's skill...must be conferred directly on each person by the hand of nature...<sup>61</sup>

In these few sentences, Kant has woven nature into the essence of the genius.<sup>62</sup> On further reflection, the passages suggest that there are a couple threads, however, that may be of different colors. First, the word “innate” makes us think that Kant's artist possessing genius is an individual who possesses genius from birth. As a natural product, genius is not something the individual acquired on his own, not within the human being's control. Kant also seems to be presenting nature as a force that uses the genius to create rules for or to dictate to art. The setup in the second half of the first passage, which Kant seems to see as merely a paraphrase of the first sentence, instead suggests that the artist is subject to nature and so is art. The genius is akin to a medium through which nature controls art or art making. Both slightly different permutations of nature's relation to genius emphasize nature's control and consequently perhaps the individual's lack of control over art.

However, Kant's view of *genius* grows out of his perspective on fine art. In fact, it is in the section preceding the one quoted above that arguably reveals what Kant is getting at with nature's connection to the genius. As Paul Guyer summarized, “a work of artistic genius cannot

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid, 174 (§46, 307).

<sup>61</sup> Ibid, 177 (§47, 309).

<sup>62</sup> Similar to Socrates' descriptions in Plato's *Apology* (22c) (Plato, *Complete Works*, ed. John Cooper (Indianapolis, Indiana: Hackett Publishing, 1997), 22.

be derived from any of the concepts involved in its production, but can only be furnished by nature.”<sup>63</sup>

Kant appeals to nature as the basis for judgments of beauty. In this way, nature’s products are the most beautiful. Since human beings make them, works of art are in way artificial or contrived creations by comparison. Because of the hierarchy inherent in Kant’s aesthetic view, artworks aspire to nature’s creations. Though Kant is careful to establish that art and nature are two different entities, fine art must seem as if it is just as nature had created it. Kant means by this that the fine art must seem as if it is not constrained by rules, it is free.<sup>64</sup> It must “have the *look* of nature.”<sup>65</sup> In other words, the fine art is *not* specifically “a product of mere nature,”<sup>66</sup> but must appear to be that way; he goes further, that “beautiful art, although it is certainly intentional, must still not seem intentional.”<sup>67</sup> Again, Kant endorses a view that though art is made by an artist, who presumably made it with certain intentions in mind, artworks must not seem as if they are made intentionally. Based on the direct links between the artist and nature, Guyer reminds us that “a work of artistic genius does not merely *look like* a product of nature but *is* one....”<sup>68</sup> According to Kant, fine art and its maker, the genius, are closely connected with nature. Specifically, he wants fine art and genius to exhibit that a free disposition such as the one

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<sup>63</sup> Paul Guyer, *Kant and the Claims of Taste* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 356.

<sup>64</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, ed. Werner S. Pluhar (Indianapolis, Indiana: Hackett Classics, 1987), 173 (§45, 306).

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid*, 174 (§45, 307).

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid*, 173 (§45, 306).

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid*, 174 (§45, 306-7).

<sup>68</sup> Guyer reinforces his view by restating Kant’s own point: “judgments on the fine arts are never pure—they always involve recognition of the human intentionality...” (Paul Guyer. *Kant and the experience of freedom: essays on aesthetics and morality* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996], 141 and 356).

that nature enjoys. His point is that artists should enjoy a free disposition that in turn allows them to create artworks that exhibit a free quality that resembles nature's freedom.

Kant places central emphasis on nature's freedom: it is not inhibited or confined by rules. He wants fine art to be free too, but he also wants the maker of that fine art, the artist, to be free in this way. Yet, neither fine art nor genius are nature – they are not mere product[s] of nature.<sup>69</sup> Creating fine art and developing one's genius involve rules or constraints of some sort. This point we will return to, but must be simply noted here. Before getting to it, more careful attention must be paid to Kant's conception of nature and how the genius interacts with confronts or plays with it.

Since the genius is a human being, it is important to understand how far the connection with nature extends and in what ways the genius is an exception to nature. Revisiting a discussion in chapter one in which Plato's poet is both in the human world and yet connected to the divine, the present discussion approaches the same question for Kant's theory. Kant's genius is of the human realm and acts freely in the natural world. Yet, by creating beauty, the genius is also an exception to the typical human standard.

If aesthetic experience of the genius's artwork gives a viewer, audience or reader access to another realm – an intersubjective, supernatural, divine realm – then an important question must be considered: does the genius operate exclusively in the human world or does s/he somehow also occupy or reside in the divine realm?

Kant's assertion that art is based on the premise of nature seems to imply that the genius must also inhabit that natural or human world. It seems to imply that Kant's genius, then, is not a

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<sup>69</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, ed. Werner S. Pluhar (Indianapolis, Indiana: Hackett Classics, 1987), 173 (§45, 306).

figure that derives its skills or talents from a God-like source. Unlike Plato's poets whose status as a mouthpiece for the gods renders them powerless with regard to their own art making and also unreliable as moral teachers, Kant's genius is not discussed in these terms and therefore could be more autonomous and therefore more accountable for its creations.

The other option is that Kant's genius is an exception to nature, but outside of the realm of nature. As an exception to nature from outside of nature, the genius would derive from some external, unnatural or other realm. This would mean that Kant envisions the genius as originating from a supernatural, divine, or transcendental essence. Not only would this place Kant's genius perhaps in closer relation to Plato's poet (an artist with less independence and maybe lacking knowledge of its own craft), this scheme also presses into the issue of Kant's view of God's, god-like, or divine presence in the genius.<sup>70</sup>

It is important to recall, however, that Kant's genius is not entirely determined by its relation to nature. Its artworks should *look* like they are completely dictated by nature, implying that they are not actually entirely determined by nature. Kant does not state precisely what he means by this in the section on fine art, so I would argue that the meaning instead could be found in some comments a bit later on. He writes, "...there is no fine art that does not have as its essential condition something mechanical, which can be encompassed by rules and complied with, and hence has an element of *academic correctness*."<sup>71</sup> Kant is pushing two seemingly

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<sup>70</sup> The position that Kant's genius enjoys with respect to nature generally and human nature specifically ultimately determines with which moral figure he more closely aligns. Though all three figures lie at the edge of human experience and some other realm, enabling them to attain alternative views of the human condition, the monster's viewpoint is one we specifically want to reject whereas the views offered by the genius and the saint are considered better views than we normally have, so we are inclined to enjoy those views, to aspire to join those figures in the space from which they created their works and did their deeds.

<sup>71</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, ed. Werner S. Pluhar (Indianapolis, Indiana: Hackett Classics, 1987), 178 (§47, 310).

divergent routes that he presumably takes to be complementary: on the one hand, that the genius and his fine art are closely linked with nature and appear as unconstrained and free as nature; while on the other, that they are essentially rule-bound and judged against some academic standard. It seems, then, that there are some qualities that correspond to norms, yet these qualities are not beauty itself (since beauty has no concept under which it falls, and therefore is not predetermined by any standards).

Since the genius is the creator of that fine art, Kant also explains: “Genius can only provide rich *material* for products of fine art; processing this material and giving it *form* requires a talent that is academically trained,”<sup>72</sup> So genius, the “natural talent” is not independent of any striving, refining, development or other influences brought on by the individual’s life or experience. Instead, this passage points to a crucial humanizing and empowering element of Kant’s theory. Despite the heavy emphasis on the role of nature, human effort also contributes to the creation of fine art. This not only marks a departure from Plato’s poet, it firmly establishes an artist who is also an agent, actively participating in his own success and creations, presumably also met with some sense of responsibility.

Aside from the allusion to a type of scholastic training, Kant is vague about what comprises the training the genius must pursue. He writes poetically that *taste* is responsible for the training,

Taste, like the power of judgment in general, consists in disciplining (or training) the genius. It severely clips its wings, and makes it civilized, or polished; but at the same time it gives it guidance as to how far and over what it may spread while still remaining purposive. It introduces clarity and order into a wealth of thought, and hence makes the

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

ideas durable, fit for approval that is both lasting and universal, and [hence] fit for being followed by others and fit for an ever advancing culture.<sup>73</sup>

The language is clear; a process involving discipline and polishing is required to make the fine art suit “ever advancing culture,”<sup>74</sup> that is, changing times. Kant has assigned the training task to *taste*, which he defines as “an ability to judge,”<sup>75</sup> but provides no details of how this training happens. The first question that pops to mind is, so how does one acquire taste or train it? This question is left unanswered.

Kant goes on to say that both genius and taste are required in fine art, but prioritizes *taste* over genius. “Therefore, if there is a conflict between these two properties in a product, and something has to be sacrificed, then it should rather be on the side of genius....”<sup>76</sup> A further complicating factor is that given this language, one presumes it is the artist that possesses genius and taste. It is likely that appreciation of art would also require the audience to possess taste. To suit the “ever advancing culture,” it seems at least possible that the artist would need to be surrounded by others who also possess taste. So that the audience is, in essence, assisting with the artist’s cultivation.<sup>77</sup> The artist could then use his tasteful audience to test or shape his developing technique and talent. Though it is clear that Kant thinks that some training mechanism is in place since he states several places that certain rules are both involved and are strictly *not* involved in creating fine art (something to be discussed in greater detail later), the contents of the training are not described.

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<sup>73</sup> Ibid, 188 (§50, 319).

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid, 181 (§48, 313).

<sup>76</sup> Ibid, 188 (§50, 319-20).

<sup>77</sup> This discussion pertains to what is later referred to in this dissertation’s third chapter as the communication criterion of the artistic genius.



Further, whereas Plato repeatedly emphasized the hazards involved in artists who were not trained in morality, Kant seems to offer no specifics about whether the artist should undergo moral training or exhibit moral behavior. Plato was concerned with the ways the artist's creations could mislead or misinform the audience because of immoral conduct displayed or because the poet lacked the ability to know truth (and was, therefore, incapable of knowing just what would and would not enlighten his audience); Kant makes no mention of the artist's moral responsibility.

Interestingly, Kant brings up morality and its connection to his aesthetics not in the person who creates the art object (production of the object) but instead in how that object is judged - specifically, whether it is beautiful and therefore whether an aesthetic judgment is made about it. Although Kant makes several connections between aesthetics and morality,<sup>78</sup> there is no evidence that he thought that an artist needed to undergo moral training in order for his/her artworks to contain the possibility of being morally instructive.

About other training the genius is supposed to undergo, however, Kant advocates apparently divergent paths. For whereas training is essential, Kant characterizes the genius figure as distinctly averse to following rules. In contrast, though the artist must presumably learn rules when being trained, the artist cannot follow them if he or she is to be a genius. The genius cannot simply apply what he learned in the classroom or as an apprentice in a studio; he must make his art without prescribing to convention or rules. From that art "the rule must be

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<sup>78</sup> See, for example, chapters 2, 3 and 4 in Paul Guyer's *Kant and the Experience of Freedom: Essays on Aesthetics and Morality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996) in which Guyer presents his view of the meaning of the concept of aesthetic disinterestedness and its connections to moral judgment.

abstracted from what the artist has done,”<sup>79</sup> but the rule is not known in advance nor can it be described, even after the artist effectively makes it.

Rule breaking,<sup>80</sup> occurring either within an established art form or by creating a new art form (e.g. break dancing), is accepted in contemporary circles as evidence of creativity and perhaps even genius in art making. For this reason, just as it was suggested at the beginning of this chapter, the importance Kant places on rule-breaking and originality in art making can be viewed as the direct forebear to the present emphasis on shock value in contemporary art. A Kantian viewpoint could easily lead to the idea of shock in the way that beauty, according to Kant, does not operate under any concept. We, the judges of a work of art, could be shocked if for no other reason except that we are without concepts under which the new experience can be subsumed. This aspect of the genius, breaking rules that it learns by training, also implies that the genius is inherently a rule-maker.

Due to the fact that this apparently conflicting yet complementary relationship between training and rule-breaking poses questions about the artist acquiring art making skills and teaching them, this seems a good place to investigate how or whether communication, either as

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<sup>79</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, ed. Werner S. Pluhar (Indianapolis, Indiana: Hackett Classics, 1987), 177 (§47, 309).

<sup>80</sup> The history of art is replete with examples of works that break out of the conventions that preceded them. In the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries, musician John Cage’s composition entitled *4’33”* was a musical piece that involved Cage walking onto a stage, sitting down at a piano, and not playing music for precisely four minutes and thirty-three seconds. No artist had ever done that before. Music concerts following the same format typically involve the artist musician sitting down at the piano and tickling the ivories. Cage’s hands never struck the keys. Other instances include the artists who later became known as the Impressionists; their visible brushstrokes were considered anathema to French Beaux-Arts tradition; similarly, the areas of exposed canvas that Paul Cézanne incorporated into his compositions frightened his viewers; and, of course, several twentieth-century movements like Cubism, Dada, and Abstract Expressionism all exploded artistic concepts previously held as essential to any given medium. These were the “shocking” moments, at least when initially conceived. They revealed a demonstration of originality.

some interaction between genius and audience or as genius-teacher, exists. If in fact the genius has to be trained in some way, someone in school or in a studio must teach him that. He must learn by some means of communication. However, Kant explicitly prohibits the possibility that one can learn how to make fine art and that the genius is capable of articulating that which makes his art fine. The reason the genius cannot learn is because no rules exist. They would confine the art making. Once the rule is replicated by another artist, that second artist is just copying the first and therefore not original. Kant clearly states, "...one cannot learn to write inspired poetry, however elaborate all the precepts of this art may be, and however superb his models."<sup>81</sup> "Inspired" in this instance is operating as an adjective that means the object it is modifying is created with "geist" or with the spirit or talent of the genius.

Further, it is an essential feature of the genius that his, that is, "the artist's skill cannot be communicated."<sup>82</sup> The only possibility for learning from another – a master artist, for example – is if the master and apprentice have both received from nature a similar disposition, or what Kant calls "a similar proportion in [their] mental powers."<sup>83</sup> In other words, unless the pupil is already a genius with the innate (naturally endowed) talent, there is no way to teach someone to create fine art and therefore to be a genius.

In addition, the genius cannot articulate how he makes his art. As Kant explains in the previous section:

Genius itself cannot describe or indicate scientifically how it brings about its products, and it is rather as *nature* that it gives the rule. That is why, if an author owes a product to

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<sup>81</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, ed. Werner S. Pluhar (Indianapolis, Indiana: Hackett Classics, 1987), 177 (§47, 309).

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

his genius, he himself does not know how he came by the ideas for it; nor is it in his power [*Gewalt*] to devise such products at his pleasure, or by following a plan, and to communicate [his procedure] to others in precepts that would enable them to bring about like products.<sup>84 85</sup>

The genius's apparent communication failure differs from Plato's poet's inability to communicate. Namely, Plato's poet seems to either lack intelligence or, and this is more likely, is dependent on the gods for his artistry, which renders him incapable of describing it when left to his own devices. Simply by being human, the poet is confined by the limits of human understanding. For Kant, the restriction placed on the genius's communicative ability seems to come from an intense need to preserve the genius's originality. If Kant's genius could communicate precisely what is entailed in being a genius, everyone could be like that genius, which would render none of them a genius because once rules can exist for creating beautiful works of art, a rule-following artist is no longer a genius. By extension, the requirement may be seen as a means to ensure an ever-increasing diverse and original body of artworks (and maybe art forms) as well. Though this point about the genius's unsuccessful or frustrated communicative efforts is significant, it must be viewed in connection with another, major point about communication with respect to the genius. That point derives from Kant's conception of aesthetic judgment.

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<sup>84</sup> Ibid, 175 (§46, 308).

<sup>85</sup> Kant illustrates this point with the example of Isaac Newton, who is not considered a genius because he was skilled at articulating his working method (Ibid, 176 [§47, 308–309]).

## The Genius's Freedom

*What does the genius make and what do these products tell us about the figure?*

Kant states in clear terms what he calls the seven fine arts: poetry, oratory, painting, sculpture, architecture, music, and art of color.<sup>86</sup> With examples such as poetry, music, and painting, few present readers would object to their inclusion under the heading of fine arts. In the twenty-first century, however, additional and varying art forms are considered fine arts as well. This ranges from examples in the visual arts – not only painting with oil on canvas, but photography – and panoply of dance forms – ballet and tap to break-dancing – to conceptual art and happenings. Certainly there is continued debate around what makes an art form qualify as a fine art, but for Kant (aside from his specifications naming the art forms) it was relatively simple: if the object was beautiful, then it was a fine art. Kant's emphasis is on the object's potential for possessing beauty – not just a specific set of formal relations (which is how Kant has been interpreted by some in the visual arts, for example).

In addition to Kant's insistence on the object's beauty content, and thereby the object's connection to the genius ("fine arts must necessarily be considered arts of *genius*"<sup>87</sup>), a brief discussion about what else Kant envisioned for the object is important. Given Kant's qualification for genius needing taste to adapt to the "ever expanding culture," one could argue that he explicitly allows for the evolution and creation of art forms.

Kant specifies that,

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<sup>86</sup> For example, the works of fine art are, "a poem, a piece of music, a gallery of pictures..." (Ibid, 181 [§48, 313]).

<sup>87</sup> Ibid, 175 (§46, 307).

...the product of a genius (as regards what is attributable to genius in it rather than to possible learning or academic instruction) is an example that is meant not to be imitated, but to be followed by another genius. (For in mere imitation the element of genius in the work – what constitutes its spirit – would be lost.)<sup>88</sup>

The genius produces an *example*. Kant is stating here a position he claims elsewhere. The point is that the object is not the result of rules, which would allow others – pupils, other aspiring artists – to imitate them. Instead, (most of that which makes) the beautiful object results from the qualities of the artist that are *not* trained; the object comes from the spirit of the genius – that most natural and unique, non-imitable part of the genius. Furthermore, if there were rules at all preexisting the work of art, there would be no genius since an artist that follows rules cannot be a genius.

In art, specifically, that object is created “through freedom, i.e., through a power of choice that bases its acts on reason.”<sup>89</sup> An interesting contrast to the discussion of bees in Plato, Kant specifically distinguishes between the bees’ honeycomb, seen by analogy as their “product,” and art. He claims that whereas the bees make honeycomb but “not based on any rational deliberation on their part,”<sup>90</sup> art is created as the result of rational deliberation. Kant’s distinction that the object is the consequence of a deliberative rational process is both indicative of his view of art as well as his genius. For Kant, the product or artwork is not a product of chance nor does it merely exist without any causal connection. Art, to be further restricted as *fine art*, requires a genius whose ability to reason has shaped its creation.

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<sup>88</sup> Ibid, 186-7 (§49, 318-9).

<sup>89</sup> Ibid, 170 (§43, 303).

<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

Kant also specifies that art products are not to be considered the result of labor. In this way, Kant distinguishes between fine art and craft, which he calls “*mercenary art*.”<sup>91</sup> <sup>92</sup> Though Kant addresses how we classify the art form, he does so by suggesting it is how the creator regards his creative process and presumably also how the audience or viewer regards the object. With this concept of freedom, Kant tells us something about the disposition of the genius and the way the object should be received. He does not state features of the object that tell the viewer that it is created out of *freedom*, but he emphasizes the role of freedom nonetheless. Kant asserts that fine art is produced by geniuses that are free to create the work – not following rules, not following instructions – in keeping with the way that fine art should resemble nature. According to Kant, the genius pursues the artwork for its own sake, not for any other purpose – and in this way, the artwork seems to take on the same type of status that other human beings take on in moral judgment. When making a moral judgment, a human being cannot treat another human as a means to some other end.<sup>93</sup> By this analogy, when creating art, the genius must treat his work of art as an end in itself – just like the moral agent must regard other beings.

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<sup>91</sup> Ibid, 171 (§43, 304).

<sup>92</sup> This point is connected to Plato’s denigration of the poets since Plato specifically says that an artist cannot be a professional; fine arts cannot be created by those for whom rules and professions govern the creation.

<sup>93</sup> See Kant’s categorical imperative discussed later in this dissertation.

## **Aesthetic Encounters**

*How does experiencing the genius's artworks illuminate or further question our understanding of Kant's genius?*

Kant's outline of aesthetic judgment, which unpacks the meaning of a beauty claim, provides us with greater insight into the ways that the artistic genius is communicative and just what that communication entails.

Kant's emphasis on beauty and the related role of the genius could constitute a substantial obstacle for those looking to his work to increase their understanding of contemporary art. Does the theory of genius make sense for a time in the history of art when beauty is not a requirement for art? Do we drop the requirement that a genius produces beauty? If so, then what is the genius responsible for?

It may help to consider explanations to the resistance to or frustration with beauty in art. A simple answer in Western art could be the rigid and state-controlled art schools in Paris, for example, that determined who would be propped up as artists and who would be rejected. Some artists were reluctant to subscribe to what they saw was dictator-like control over the creation of art. In the nineteenth century, artists later known as Impressionists, came together mostly as the result of being rejected by traditional state-sponsored salons. The rejected artists who chose to set up their own exhibitions independent of the state may not have thought of themselves as creating non-beautiful art. But, their actions were rejecting the presumption that beautiful art could only look a particular way (and that way was determined by the state). They are one group of artists who could be seen as evidence of a definition or concept of beauty that does not squelch their individual or creative trajectory. Several artists now known as part of the Impressionist movement are now regarded as geniuses.



In addition to the rejection of state-sanctioned art competitions, other established artists have questioned the idea of beauty by rejecting the claim that visual art was only about pleasing the eye (which includes, of course, the assumption that beauty is defined by what is pleasing to the eye). This stance could take many directions; perhaps art should be more about intellectual engagement; or maybe art should be morally educational instead. Both comprise challenges to beauty's definition or place in art.

The explication of Kant's aesthetic judgment in the first part of this chapter establishes the foundation for a central point for this dissertation. Specifically, Kant describes how a genius creates a beautiful work of art, which a viewer then puts on display:

...If he proclaims something to be beautiful, then he requires the same liking from others; he then judges not just for himself but for everyone, and speaks of beauty as if it were a property of things. That is why he says: The *thing* is beautiful, and does not count on other people to agree with his judgment of liking on the ground that he has repeatedly found them agreeing with him; rather, he *demand*s that they agree.<sup>94 95</sup>

The demand of others – sometimes referred to as universal assent – is key to understanding the genius as a communicator, albeit in an unconventional sense. Demanding that others agree with a beauty claim assumes a great deal about “others.” Specifically, the viewer (in this case) maintains an assumption that he can judge “for all men.” This assumption is only possible when the judge simultaneously holds that all men are, some substantial respect(s), similar to him. In this respect, Kantian aesthetic judgment relies on a fundamentally egalitarian perspective that all

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<sup>94</sup> Ibid, 55-6 (§7, 212-3).

<sup>95</sup> For more on this particular passage, see also Nick Zangwill, “Aesthetic Judgment,” *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2014 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2014/entries/aesthetic-judgment/>.

judges maintain with respect to other human judges. Due to the fact that the viewer is claiming universal assent, his judgment confers an intersubjective claim on the object, that is, he demands that others would agree with him and on the basis of that universality, there is consensus or agreement on the object's beauty value.

Bradfield further clarifies the point,

The call for assent with respect to judgments of taste is the demand for agreement in subjectivity, or subjective universality, as Kant puts it. It is a call to turn communication with others into community. While there is a demand that we respond to works of art, the demand is structured in such a way that, at bottom, *it is a demand to respond to and communicate with other people*. We strive to communicate ever more perfectly to make ourselves understood by other people. Seen in this light, the demand to respond to art is a demand for intersubjectivity and sociability.<sup>96</sup> (my emphasis)

Aesthetic judgment, however, implies human relations not only among the judges but also with the creator of the artwork that is the subject of judgment. With the assertion of a beauty claim, the viewer identifies an artistic genius, since the artistic genius is defined by the creation of a beautiful work of art. The identification of the artistic genius signifies that the viewer is aware that another human being created the object that elicited the beauty claim and thereby the egalitarian assumption regarding and connection to other human beings. Attributing to the genius the power to facilitate this encounter and connection with other human beings signifies the unique ability of the artistic genius, which is therefore an exceptional human being. Both human and also super-human ("super" in his ability to incite the beauty claim and call forth

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<sup>96</sup> Erin Bradfield, "Productive Excess: Aesthetic Ideas, Silence, and Community," *Journal of Aesthetic Education* 48, no. 2 (2014): 13.

feeling toward other humans), the genius proves his label as an example of human exceptionalism. Furthermore, the complex network of implications that follows from Kantian aesthetic judgment proves critical to the elucidation of the communication criterion in the next chapter.

## **Conclusion**

Kant's genius builds on Plato's version of the artist and also adds key developments to the conceptual figure. Kant's main additions include the genius's training, connection to nature, emphasis on originality, and unusual moral connection. These contributions remind us of how this survey of genius has laid groundwork for systematic accounts of the essential criteria of the artistic genius. By using Plato and Kant as the foundation, the next (third) chapter will specifically articulate the five criteria of the genius.

## **Part II. Elucidation of the Criteria**

### **Chapter 3 Five Criteria Associated with the Genius**

This dissertation entirely depends upon whether convincing, justifiable, and illuminating characteristics of the genius are identified within its pages, but identification alone is insufficient for its general success. This discussion has already invited two other figures into the conversation: the monster and saint. These additional parties challenge us to further specify the goal, meaning we are striving not only to discover characteristics applicable to the genius, but traits that resonate with these other figures as well. Consequently, I have proposed criteria derived from the concepts Plato and Kant put forth in the preceding chapters. They are elucidated in greater detail in the present chapter, which explores not only their philosophical background, but also cites the popular critical mention of them while proposing their relevance to the moral figures. One may object to the five criteria presented in what follows, but given the requirements that they simultaneously possess philosophical support, popular currency, and applicability to moral figures, this selection constitutes an initial attempt to open up the conversation about the possible ways to compare these figures in order to provide more contours of and nuance to the genius and his moral counterparts.

#### **Communication or the Feeling that You Have Been Communicated with**

Plato's poet and Kant's genius leave their viewers, audience or readers with an impression. Although this criterion pertains to both Plato's artist and Kant's genius, it is primarily from the latter that it derives its meaning.

Kant's genius creates a beautiful work of art. Judging the work as beautiful – making a beauty claim is serious business for Kant – means that the person who encountered it has made a

claim that all others should agree with them about the object's beauty. This move from one person to all people is essential to this criterion: it is due to the genius's unique ability that the aesthetic encounter enables the person to go from personal experience to an intersubjective one. It is possible because, as Kant explains, we judge a work of art beautiful on the basis of human interests that we assume all other humans have. This fact explains that we come to the aesthetic judgment with a fundamentally egalitarian disposition. To claim that a work of art must appeal in this universal way explains both the feeling that the person has been communicated with and also the way that a genius creates a work of art that causes us to reflect on the human condition.

When I determine a work of art is beautiful, I am brought out of the confines of my own personal experience and into a more general human realm. The genius is responsible for this broadening experience. It is therefore within the communication criterion that it is thanks to the genius that a viewer/audience/reader is encouraged to reflect on the human condition. The genius makes this possible by creating an object/experience that the v/a/r judges as beautiful. The beauty claim, as Kant outlines, comes with an assumption that others *ought* to agree on the object/experience's beauty. This assumption goes hand-in-hand with another, which requires that the v/a/r maintains that any other human being has the same interests. The fundamental similarity of interests allows the v/a/r to enter an intersubjective realm, where he is not merely making a judgment about a work of art that satisfies his subjective preferences or interests. Instead, the v/a/r's aesthetic experience activates his egalitarian predisposition toward others and brings him into intellectual (if not real) conversation with others whose assent he demands. Furthermore, by applying the genius term to the artist, the v/a/r recognizes the genius has this unique capacity to foster or encourage engagement with other human beings. Whether the v/a/r ever starts up a conversation with someone else or not, the v/a/r presumes and engages with their

interests. Within the aesthetic encounter, the v/a/r is both reminded of an egalitarian predisposition and human exceptionalism in one fell swoop.

This criterion is called communication because, as we recall from the earlier discussions of Plato's poet and Kant's genius, the genius possesses some disposition that gives it special access to the divine or a more universal perspective. As we just described it, the v/a/r has also been able to attain some level of universality as well. By means of a mechanism contained by the artistic or creative process, the genius has communicated this perspective or access such that the v/a/r can also participate in it in some way.

Essential to understanding the meaning of communication in this criterion is that the artistic genius and the v/a/r are enjoying or experiencing the same thing. In this way, the communication is transparent, not obscure or manipulative. Transparent communication is distinct from other forms of communication, particularly some in the context of the Platonic dialogues.

The reader is offered two versions of how the artist communicates: first from Ion, the rhapsode, the stand-in artist in the dialogue, who attempts to defend himself against Socrates' baiting. Ion describes how he performs for an audience. Contrary to the charges we see Plato/Socrates making against the poets – namely that they are out of their minds and do not have their wits about them – Ion explains that he feels he is in complete control of the situation and how his deliberate performative choices lead to different outcomes.

I look down at them [the audience members] every time from up on the rostrum, and they're crying and looking terrified, and as the stories are told they are filled with amazement. You see I must keep my wits and pay close attention to them: if I start them

crying, *I* will laugh as I take their money, but if *they* laugh, I shall cry at having lost money. (*Ion* 535e1-5)<sup>97</sup>

Ion claims that he massages the emotional state of his audience in order to gain the greatest financial reward for his performance. His description – or the first part of it about his sense of control - flies in the face of Socrates’ prior claims in other dialogues and presents a challenge for us as well. Generally speaking, Ion could be asserting that he, as an artist, has specific intentions in mind when performing and that these intentions have a communicative quality to them: he, the artist, plans to affect an audience in some way and makes decisions in order to achieve a certain effect. Ion’s view, then, offers one sense in which the artistic genius could be seen as motivated by and capable of pursuing communication through the means of his art.

However, the further repercussions of what Ion says would presumably make Socrates run the opposite way (and probably offend the sensibilities of many contemporary readers as well). By this I mean two separate but related strands in Ion’s explanation seem problematic: 1) the manipulation Ion mentions and 2) the financial reward he explicitly seeks for his work.

First, I will discuss the “manipulation,” a term that sounds laced with bad intentions from the get-go as if Ion fancies himself some master puppeteer, pulling certain strings to make his puppets do as he wishes. It could be more innocuous than that; this may be Ion’s attempt to assert his autonomy and therefore authority as an artistic figure, in order to bolster his “kind” in the eyes of Socrates. He may simply be trying to make himself invulnerable to Socrates’ charges that poets are like lovers who have lost their minds. It is, however, a concern about the position

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<sup>97</sup> Plato, *Complete Works*, ed. John Cooper (Indianapolis, Indiana: Hackett Publishing, 1997), 943.

of rhapsodes that Ion can think of no better defense. Furthermore, the communication that he describes (if it can be called that) is certainly not transparent.

The additional problem with the term manipulation has more to do with the disconnect between Ion and his audience. A general definition of communication involves an individual clearly expressing the meaning of a particular utterance so that the other party (or parties) understands what is being communicated. In this arrangement, A feels X, communicates X to B, and B feels/understands X. In cases like the one Ion describes, however, Ion (A) is not feeling and communicating X to his audience (B). He is feeling X, communicating in such a way that his audience feels something else entirely, namely Y. In other words, Ion and his audience are not experiencing or feeling or understanding the same thing, but are experiencing different things. Ion's word choice and performance are dictated by a mission to communicate not what he is feeling, but something else.

This scenario is further complicated by Ion's mention of money. As we well know, Socrates views knowledge and wisdom as sacred, essential goods, not commodities, reducible to monetary value. The suggestion of payment for disseminating knowledge is, for him, an offense against his core principles. Recall that Socrates himself wanders the streets of Athens, engaging in educational dialogues with youths and citizens for no pay, for him the thought of monetary reward would be seen as an attempt to put a price on truth – a corrupt view of the world in his opinion. To Socrates, Ion's financial motives are disdainful. For it either reflects poorly on Ion as an individual that he would be so crass as to charge for his art, or, it confirms Socrates' suspicions that artists are not involved in the knowledge-business at all. If art can be reduced to financial transactions, it is not an essential good nor should it be venerated – furthermore, artists



should not be upheld as educational figures or as capable of leading others toward truth. And it is important to note that contemporary readers would likely find offense in Ion's claim as well.<sup>98</sup>

Objecting to Ion's view, Socrates offers an alternative with the analogy of the Magnetic Stone. He explains that it is some divine power that enables Ion to speak well about certain topics.

It's a divine power that moves you, as a 'Magnetic' stone moves iron rings... This stone not only pulls those rings, if they're iron, it also puts power *in* the rings, so that they in turn can do just what the stone does—pull other rings—so that there's sometimes a very long chain of iron pieces and rings hanging from one another. And the power in all of them depends on this stone. (*Ion*, 533d3-e3)<sup>99</sup>

This image provides a deep place to dig for the meaning of communication in Plato's dialogue. The Magnetic stone is the Muse, the next ring is the poet, the next ring is the rhapsode, and the chain continues with “an enormous chain of choral dancers and dance teachers and assistant teachers hanging off to the sides of the rings that are suspended from the Muse” (*Ion*, 536a4-6).<sup>100</sup> In general terms, the Muse – the semi-divine, semi-human source is attractive to certain artists/poets, audience members and whoever else attaches themselves to the long chain of iron rings. The artists or poets who are “possessed” by this magnetic pull to the Muse are in a sense electrified themselves, capable of luring followers to himself. Significantly, the links of the chain that originate with the Muse are all experiencing or under the same influence. The

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<sup>98</sup> How much skepticism abounds contemporary artists like Damien Hirst for that exact reason? Is he merely hoodwinking the public (and wealthy art market) into purchasing his art with the mere intention of profit? (More on this in “Commitment”)

<sup>99</sup> Plato, *Complete Works*, ed. John Cooper (Indianapolis, Indiana: Hackett Publishing, 1997), 941.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid*, 943.

originator (in this case, Muse, but can be interpreted as a genius as well) of a thought or feeling creates a work of art, which becomes the manifestation/form/representation of that thought or feeling. The viewer/audience/reader experiences the same thought or feeling.

For us, Socrates' magnetic stone image reinforces what we interpreted from Kant's theory of aesthetic judgment that an artistic genius practices a form of transparent communication.

So it is within this criterion that we confront the genius's hand in inciting the v/a/r to reflect on the human condition. The genius creates an object/experience that the v/a/r judges as beautiful; the beauty claim, as we have learned, signifies that an intersubjective or universal level has been attained.

Linking Plato's artist to Kant's genius right away, the descriptive metaphor of the magnetic stone also gives currency to the notion that there is in fact some following or attraction that transpires between the artist and those who encounter his creations. The audience or viewers sense whatever this is that has transpired and feel(s) drawn toward the source of the feeling through the artist. Whether the artist's creation, the object, or the artist himself is seen as the entity with which the viewer senses that a communicative experience has taken place, there is an underlying reason that the viewer gets the impression that he has been communicated with. It is this reason or foundation – both the content of the communication and the mechanism for it – that will constitute the following section.

Whatever the source of the magnetism, in the artistic realm, I argue that the possibility for this communicative exchange hinges on an underlying similarity in the humanity of the viewer and the artist. The human connection can be seen in both versions of artistic communication in *Ion*; in *Ion*'s own version, his description of sensing what the emotional

reactions of his audience members would be – the emotional intelligence he is describing, is a trait that in this context is something we understand to be uniquely human. It is a human being who created the artwork or experience, and it is a human being who is experiencing it, understanding it. And it is through the experience, through the connection felt to the artist, which the viewer or audience member feels as if he or she is being communicated with. Before we dive further into Kant’s relevance in this criterion, allow me a quick diversion to address the concerns about the content of what that communication might be.

First, there is the classic charge (found in Plato, among others), that artists can hardly be expected to communicate anything of educational value. Some argue that this is because artists have no expertise and therefore are not in a position to transfer this knowledge to anyone. If someone says they “learn” something from an artistic experience, then, Plato would argue this is impossible because artists are not in a position to be authorities and are not in control of the situation (remember that the Muse is in control) and therefore cannot be transferring anything of value to their audience. Other related arguments became more specific, claiming that art cannot, does not, or should not present logical truths. Art is not science, is the claim.<sup>101</sup> A great counter-argument to this position was advanced by Catherine Wilson.<sup>102</sup> She argues that readers of literature can gain knowledge from reading fiction. Her argument suggests one way of thinking

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<sup>101</sup> This divergence of intellect and art appears in Kant, who writes: “Geniuses do not increase cognitions the way that scientists do” (Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, ed. Werner S. Pluhar (Indianapolis, Indiana: Hackett Classics, 1987), 177 [§47, 309]) and in Plato: “As long as a human being has his intellect in his possession he will always lack the power to make poetry or sing prophecy” (*Ion*, 534b5-6 in Plato, *Complete Works*, ed. John Cooper (Indianapolis, Indiana: Hackett Publishing, 1997), 942.)

<sup>102</sup> Catherine Wilson, “Literature and Knowledge,” *Philosophy* 58 (1983): 489-496.

about the notion that the audience feels that it has been communicated with and just what the content of that communication might be.

Wilson essentially suggests that “truth” can come from fiction. Since we are talking specifically about the way in which the genius – the artist – is involved in the communication business, I claim that Wilson’s reader gives us a way into this dialogue. Wilson contends that the reader can gain knowledge by digesting literature:

A person may learn from a novel, I want to argue, if he is forced to revise or modify, e.g. his concept of 'reasonable action' through a recognition of an alternative as presented in the novel.<sup>103</sup>

Furthermore, she states,

I want now to argue briefly that the term 'learning' applies primarily to a modification of a person's concepts, which is in turn capable of altering his thought or conduct, and not primarily to an increased disposition to utter factually correct statements or to display technical prowess.<sup>104</sup>

It is this coming to realize that one is revising one’s own views about a certain perspective or about a particular issue, or fact of life – whether it is a conclusion achieved by engaging with a fictional character who experiences a tragic event or the way that a painter captures the light in a room – that constitute, in my view, reflection on the human condition enabled by our encounters with works of art. (Wilson is focusing here on literature.) Wilson admits this is a bare-bones account of what could be going on, but I think it relates to our account of communication.<sup>105</sup>

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<sup>103</sup> Ibid, 494.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid, 495.

<sup>105</sup> For related discussions of this topic, see: Anoop Gupta, “Rethinking Aristotle's poetics: The pragmatic aspect of art and knowledge,” *Journal of Aesthetic Education* 44, no. 4 (2010): 60-80 and James O. Young, *Art and Knowledge* (London: Routledge, 2001).

Though we realize that Wilson is specifically talking about a reader who evaluates that his or her knowledge and perspectives are being altered through the artistic experience, this revision of one's beliefs is enabled by the artist's decisions to make characters or situations in the novel unfold in such a way that the reader is drawn in by them. In other words, the reader feels that his personal beliefs are revised as the result of an encounter with the artistic genius's creations. I suggest that Wilson's position supports what we are arguing for in this section, namely, that a genius creates a work of art that results in the audience sensing that he or she has been affected by the encounter or communicated with. If I am revising my personal beliefs because of an artistic experience, something is touching or moving me to make these revisions – some may say that the artwork or performance “really spoke to me” – and it is this language about feeling as if I have been communicated with that explains this criterion.

Looking back to Kant, we find a couple ways in which he refers to communication that pertain to this discussion. In the first instance, he acknowledges that it is a feeling that is communicable. His description of aesthetic judgment involves the judge making a claim to universal liking – that all others will assent – and this would be from an aesthetic judgment of taste.

We could even define taste as the ability to judge something that makes our feeling in a given presentation *universally communicable* without mediation by a concept.<sup>106</sup>

It is this assumption that one's judgment is universal – would be agreed upon by all – that furthers our understanding of the communicative act taking place in the artistic experience. The experience is shared by the judge and the genius, the maker of the object or performance, and

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<sup>106</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, ed. Werner S. Pluhar (Indianapolis, Indiana: Hackett Classics, 1987), 162, (§40, 295).

other audience members – these hypothetical (or real) individuals that the judge imagines will share his or her judgment by the claim to universality.<sup>107</sup> What accounts for this assumption that others will agree with our aesthetic judgments? It seems that Kant assents to a shared humanity that he terms the *sensus communis*.<sup>108 109</sup> This shared human experience gets to the heart of the meaning and human intentions that are wrapped up in artistic creation and encounter.

Kant specifies that through one's aesthetic experience (i.e. encounter with beauty) by way of universal assent, the individual is participating in the universal human community. This is possible only because the genius has made a work of art that mediates this relation between the audience and himself – the work, only when beautiful, allows the audience to gain access or to be reminded of shared humanity. The substance of what is shared by human beings is hard to summarize, though not difficult to recognize when confronted by it. I would argue that Wilson is pointing out this vagueness or difficulty to summarize, but has provided constructive language for our goal. The access and participation granted by the aesthetic encounter allows for the transfer of knowledge (as defined above), enabling communication to take place.

Kant's aesthetic judgment, the fact that art can communicate and that this function depends on the humanity of the genius, reminds us of other features of the genius that are important to discuss at this juncture. In particular, by definition Kant's genius cannot teach his

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<sup>107</sup> Ibid, 159 (§39, 293).

<sup>108</sup> Ibid, 159-60 (§40, 293).

<sup>109</sup> See Ryan J. Johnson, "An Accord in/on Kantian Aesthetics (or the *Sensus Communis*: Attunement in a Community of Diverse Sites of Purposiveness)," *Kritike* 5, no. 1 (2011): 117-135 and also Erin Bradfield, "Productive Excess: Aesthetic Ideas, Silence, and Community," *Journal of Aesthetic Education* 48, no. 2 (2014): 1-15.

students how to be geniuses.<sup>110 111</sup> First, “Genius itself cannot describe or indicate scientifically how it brings about its products.”<sup>112</sup> But even if he could describe rules for how to make his own art, by definition, the genius does not follow rules, but breaks them. Therefore, any genius teacher who teaches certain rules to his students does not provide the content for the students to become geniuses on their own. Instead, the students must break the rules they are taught and create new rules for themselves – it is this distinction that ensures that art making, art itself, and the geniuses are all constantly evolving. By these descriptions, it seems as if Kant’s genius is explicitly *not* a successful communicator. However, at this point in the dissertation, after discussing the content of the communication, we see Kant was making a point about what the genius can and cannot communicate as much as he was describing whether or not the genius was an effective communicator in general terms.

This brings us back to Plato’s second description of artistic communication with the allegory of the stone. Plato’s language allows for multiple interpretations, since the operative verb in the following sentence is clearly a visual and therefore physical “movement” that is

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<sup>110</sup> “Genius itself cannot describe or indicate scientifically how it brings about its products, and it is rather as *nature* that it gives the rule. That is why, if an author owes a product to his genius, he himself does not know how he came by the ideas for it; nor is it in his power [*Gewalt*] to devise such products at his pleasure, or by following a plan, and to communicate [his procedure] to others in precepts that would enable them to bring about like products” (Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, ed. Werner S. Pluhar [Indianapolis, Indiana: Hackett Classics, 1987], 175 [§46, 308].) Kant reminds his readers again, “...the artist’s skill cannot be communicated...” (Ibid, 177 [§47, 309]).

<sup>111</sup> Kant: no matter what you can describe, the student must already be a genius for the teaching to stick (Ibid, 177 [§47, 309]). For Plato, the situation is different, since the limitation on the poet’s creative ability has to do with what the Muse dictates: “Each poet is able to compose beautifully only that for which the Muse has aroused him” (*Ion* 534c3-4) (Plato, *Complete Works*, ed. John Cooper [Indianapolis, Indiana: Hackett Publishing, 1997], 942).

<sup>112</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, ed. Werner S. Pluhar (Indianapolis, Indiana: Hackett Classics, 1987), 175 (§46, 308).

implied, but that artistic experience has something to do with “moving” others that is non-physical.

‘Magnetic’ stone moves iron rings (*Ion* 533d3-4)<sup>113</sup>

Magnetic force is a natural or scientific concept, but what one sees of magnetism is a mysterious force of attraction between two objects that draws them together. In artistic experience, the communicative power of art that can be analogized to this “drawing together,” and it is none other than shared humanity or common fragment of human experience that is the magnetic force that draws two beings (or more) together. In addition to this account in which we see Socrates essentially refuting Ion’s story of manipulation for financial gain, the magnetism is unidirectional. The poet, rhapsode, and audience are all enjoined by this attraction toward the stone. This does not allow for the rhapsode (like Ion) to manipulate the audience; he cannot feel something different from his audience so that he can make more money off of his performance. The unidirectional force means they must be feeling the same thing. By defining the artistic experience as something entirely different than what Ion describes, Socrates’ stone imagery directly refutes Ion’s explanation. Communication is not manipulation for money; artistic communication is a much deeper and nobler undertaking involving the core of human experience.<sup>114</sup>

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<sup>113</sup> Plato, *Complete Works*, ed. John Cooper (Indianapolis, Indiana: Hackett Publishing, 1997), 941.

<sup>114</sup> It is important to note that the image of the magnetic rings illustrates the connection to the source of inspiration whether that source is the Muses, divine realm, or something else. Maintaining the thread of connection with the source enables the artist to create. It also serves to the point of communication between artist and his followers: there remains a transparent form of communication such that the audience are able to gain insights from the artwork’s creator – the



What accounts for this unity, however, is something about human nature and the human condition that cannot be reduced to logical propositions. It is the imprecise stuff of humanity (human expression) that are seen as being the content of the arts; what Wilson referred to as beliefs and revisions thereof. It is the genius's ability to create a work that suggests real, though hard-to-articulate truths that in Wilson's language force us to revise or modify our positions about certain issues or experiences. It is a communion, so to speak, of the viewer with the artist and with other judges – it is an interpretation of the Kantian judgment that includes considering how the object was made (connection to maker, how the maker conceived of the idea), considering how others will respond to it (agreement), and other conclusions about one's own or the general human condition that result from the aesthetic experience.

Where does this leave us? The upshot of Socrates' visual allegory is that we are presented with a sequence of parties who are aligned with the "magnetic" force of the originating inspiration. The muse, artist, and audience – they are all united, all facing the same direction. They are communicating, feeling the same thing. As a counter-argument to Ion's scheme, Socrates' is more palatable and is more in line with a communicative power of the genius that is inspired by nature or divine source. The remaining question is whether by consenting to this version, the artist is demoted from a position of power and control: is he merely swept up with the rest of the iron rings?

This confusion about Socrates' version prompts the bigger overarching question: which version is Plato advocating? If not one or the other, some combination of the two? Furthermore, which is correct according to our understanding not only of Plato's artist but also of the artistic

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artist and the audience are experiencing the same feeling. The image of the magnetic rings does not, however, restrict the artist from creating something new and being innovative.

genius, primarily developed by Kant for our purposes in light of the other criteria we discuss in this chapter? Although we will continue to entertain both possibilities in the course of the chapter for a more comprehensive analysis, my hunch is that the second arrangement – Socrates’ Magnetic Stone – is where we want to land. The reason is this: though it could be seen as disempowering the artist who has no control but to orient himself toward the Stone, human agency is still involved. It is entirely up to the artist to be oriented to the *right* stone and oriented in the proper way for him/her to be promoting the good/inspiration/beauty. Exerting control by means of choosing toward which source of inspiration one will face while creating art could be seen as the artist’s dilemma. And this is the human dilemma regardless of vocation/profession in a Platonic view – aiming at the right things. It is important at this juncture that based on an understanding of the poet from Murray’s analysis, the genius is likely not the ultimate cause of his own thoughts. As Murray states, poets commonly describe the creative process as if its origins or the inspiration for it were external in some way. Whether the inspiration is traced back to a Muse, a divine source, or some other entity outside of the poet’s “conscious mind,” the statement is in keeping with the notion that the poet in one way or another becomes a channel or mouthpiece through which a certain mysterious experience (or series of experiences) are made possible. Despite the poet giving credit to someone or something else, the poet is in this mystical sense “out of his mind” since he senses that he is not acting alone but somehow assisted by some other power that is *outside* of his mind.

It bears mentioning here a related theological concept. Kenosis is the practice of self-emptying required for or accompanied by being filled with a divine entity. This image of emptying and filling, similar to the way that poets describe themselves in Murray’s analysis and elsewhere, a figure views himself as a mechanism through which a divine source operates.

Rather than taking credit for one's actions, this concept captures the way a divinely inspired religious figure defers full responsibility for his actions. Whereas it may suggest a parallel between the artistic genius and the saint, and further, may explain some associations between the artistic genius and the psychotic, the concept would not apply to the figure of Satan (perhaps the monster supreme), who operates independently and autonomously (and certainly would not give credit to someone else for his actions).

This interpretation of Socrates' version also aligns with Kant's genius – which is or could be nothing if not in control – since he is singularly focused on the “good” of creating beauty. Kant also, however, suggests in his exploration of the genius-connection to the viewer/audience another nuance crucial to this category of “communication.”

It is something akin to what we could say about imagining oneself as one of the iron rings attracted or pulled toward this (presumably) “good” Magnetic Stone. The result of an encounter with a genius' work of art is that some type of communicative exchange has taken place: I am left feeling or with an impression that I have been communicated with. When we look to the ways Kant describes the experience of aesthetic judgment from the perspective of the viewer or audience who has engaged with what the genius made, we find not an explicit statement (e.g. the artist intends to communicate to the audience that...X) but instead, in more mysterious terms Kant's articulation of that feeling one is left with as a result of the encounter. The feeling is one by which you feel connected with all of humanity. By virtue of claiming a work is beautiful, your claim to universal assent is included. This presumption of universal agreement is a means of transcending out of one's own personal experience and into an intersubjective one – this transition, I argue, indicates the feeling that one has been communicated with. And it is made

possible only by the genius' creative act, which left an artwork or experience to which the viewer could respond in this way.

Plato's origination, Kant's extension, and our extrapolation of how the genius is connected with communication tells us that it is not simply that an artwork must effectively "communicate" a particular message that all viewers must understand for it to be "good" art and the artist a genius. Many of us know too many examples of art that attempt to reduce their content and power or influence to a series of symbols, which we all know carry predictable meanings and have particular effects. These would be works that fall under Ion's first suggestion – and, true to his description, can easily become a simple cost/benefit analysis either for what will create the most dramatic effect, or produce the most revenue, or both. Our picture of the communicative possibility of his artwork rests firmly on the way an audience member feels as if he has been touched, as if the recipient of some particular idea or insight about relatable or universal human experience or condition, and through this feeling also senses a deeper understanding of and connection to that human community in which he, the maker, and fellow audience members are participants.

## **Prodigy**

Now, we will discuss the way that the genius is sometimes attributed power and whence that power is derived. This begins our next criterion, the prodigy. The concept of the prodigious genius is hardly new. It is most often invoked in the classical example of Mozart who reportedly began composing music at the age of five.

In colloquial conversation, the terms "prodigy" or "child prodigy" appears frequently. It can refer to a child who reads at age two, rather than five; or it could be an apt description of the four year old who plays the piano with skill that far surpasses her teacher's. Or, displaying

intellectual superiority to her peers, the child may be accelerated through elementary school and skip to college courses in her teenage years. All these examples, however, do not fully prepare us to understand what the term “prodigy” means in the context of the artistic genius. Though conversational uses certainly point to some of its components, we will turn first to what I consider the philosophical roots of the term as well as the contemporary critical invocation of it in an effort to flesh out the concept.

The significance of youth and prodigious<sup>115</sup> behavior makes a subtle appearance in Plato’s discussions of the poets. Rather than discussing the poet’s talents as a toddler, however, Plato addresses it by emphasizing the role of nature in the poet’s formation. Plato does so in two ways, first, by proposing direct connections between poets and nature and second, by inserting analogous language referring to poets and other natural beings. An example of the former is pretty clear: “...poets...compose their poems...by some *inborn* talent/*nature*” (*Apology*, excerpt from 22b5-c5).<sup>116</sup> The operative word, *nature*, tells us an important feature of poetic talent: it is naturally endowed or innate. From Plato’s perspective, the poet possesses something from birth that accounts for his art making but for which neither the poet nor any teacher is fully responsible. This innate artistic ability comes into existence, even if in rudimentary form, without training and without any apparent effort on the part of the poet. Plato further illustrates the natural association he attributes to poets with the repeated imagery of bees, which derive their power from nectar just as the poets depend on divine inspiration for their creations.

The prodigious poet is more faintly suggested elsewhere in the Platonic dialogues. In the *Phaedrus*, it is claimed that a poet simply cannot achieve supreme status by excelling at

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<sup>115</sup> I want to express gratitude to Mary Wiseman to reinforce that the “prodigy” category is primarily about nature’s role in the artistic genius.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid*, 22, my emphasis.

technique or merely mastering a certain body of knowledge (*Phdr.* 245a).<sup>117</sup> This negative qualification – stating how *not* to expect to attain poetic skill – leaves the reader with an increased sense of the weight Plato puts on nature’s positive contribution to the poet’s composition. If training or education does not sufficiently equip the poet for his vocation, something must supervene on that training. In Plato’s view, either nature or divine involvement is supplanting the poet’s hard work. For the purposes of this section, it does not matter whether it is nature, a divine nature, or divinity specifically that puts this artistic talent into the poet’s being. What is essential is that the talent is apparently in place from birth. Even if it is alterable, can be developed to a greater or lesser extent, or can remain altogether untapped, Plato’s position could be seen as continuous with the popular notion of child prodigies.<sup>118</sup> In other words, the superior poet has always possessed his talent or skill; he either has it or he does not, and that something predates any training or schooling.

Kant advances this idea of the prodigious genius using terms similar to Plato’s. On the one hand, he states very clearly that artistic “talent is an innate productive ability”<sup>119</sup> and that it “must be conferred directly...by the hand of nature”<sup>120</sup> on/to the individual. Kant’s descriptors of “innate” and “by nature” are essentially extensions of Plato’s views. On the other hand, Kant gives backhanded support by insisting that the genius creates works that are enjoyed only as if

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<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*, 523.

<sup>118</sup> In one chapter of his book entitled “The Genius and the Child,” Kivy pins Kant as “indirectly...responsible...for the Romantic version of the Platonic genius, which I identify...with the child-genius, exemplified for the Romantics...by Mozart,” Peter Kivy, *The Possessor and the Possessed: Handel, Mozart, Beethoven, and the Idea of Musical Genius* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 57-77 and 157 (respectively).

<sup>119</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, ed. Werner S. Pluhar (Indianapolis, Indiana: Hackett Classics, 1987), 175 (§46, 307).

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*, 177 (§47, 309).

“unstudied.” (CJ sec. 49, 317).<sup>121</sup> In other words, similar to Plato’s negative qualification, Kant disallows the possibility that effort or schooling can create a genius out of an individual who otherwise lacks some naturally endowed talent or nugget thereof. Though neither Plato nor Kant completely ignores training’s role in developing talent, they both offer views that reserve a special (if/though vaguely defined) place for the innate.

As with the frequent invocation of the three conceptual figures, the term prodigy appears often and in particular with the early Modern artist, Pablo Picasso. By now, Picasso’s life has been carefully researched and published in extreme detail by art scholar John Richardson, among others. In fact, the first volume of Richardson’s biography of the artist, *A Life of Picasso: The Prodigy, 1881-1906*, offers a subtitle rich for our present discussion. Its content further justifies the label, since it is by the age of fourteen Picasso’s paintings (*First Communion*, 1896, Museu Picasso, Barcelona) and drawings (*Study of Plaster Cast*, 1895 for entrance exam, Museu Picasso, Barcelona), taking up traditional subjects from religious symbolism and antiquity, could themselves stand up to the likes of the Old Masters. Picasso is reported to have effortlessly and quickly mastered the techniques and compositional rules of Western art making, distinguishing himself from his peers. According to an older classmate and friend, Manuel Pallarès:

He [Picasso] was way ahead of the other students, who were all five or six years older.

Although he paid no apparent attention to what the professors were saying, he instantly grasped what he was taught.<sup>122</sup>

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<sup>121</sup> Ibid, 185 (§49, 317) and also consider just before when Kant writes of the things we think might be considered fine art because it appears to us, as fine art does, “without its seeming *studied*.” (Ibid, 181 [§48, 313].

<sup>122</sup> John Richardson and Marilyn McCully, *A Life of Picasso: The Prodigy, 1881-1906* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2007), 67.

Pallarès's impression of Picasso as a young artist substantiate this criterion in two ways: first, the mention of Picasso's youth; and second, that Picasso's class work reflected what the teacher's taught even though Picasso apparently picked up these skills with ease. The prodigious theme is ubiquitous in narrative and critical accounts of Picasso and is an extension of Kant's position. Popular contemporary critics writing about Picasso also endorsed this view. Evidence of this account is found in an exclusive issue of *Life* magazine from 1968: "Propelled by the times, self-propelled by his own genius, he forced the world—which he repeatedly outraged—to recognize itself the way *he* saw it. But equally astounding as his impact and influence is the phenomenon of the man: the prodigious creator who attacked every art medium, enriching all of them, inventing new ones—a sovereign through all the years, answering only to himself."<sup>123</sup>

Peter Kivy<sup>124</sup> offers an alternate interpretation of the way that Kant's positions could be linked to the prodigy criterion. Specifically, he argues that Schopenhauer wove together strands of Kant's thought and added his own distinct aspects. The resulting Schopenhauerian figure has "a distinctly exotic character, and is connected with such far from ordinary individuals as the madman, the religious mystic, the child prodigy, and the *genius*."<sup>125</sup> Kivy sees Schopenhauer as drawing parallels between the child prodigy and the genius because they both possess the same gift, "freedom from the dominance of the will."<sup>126</sup> Without fully subscribing to Schopenhauer's philosophical system, however, the resemblance could be re-stated as taking the natural element in the child as being unrestrained or free. This notion recurs several times in our analysis of Kant's genius, who has already been described as free from rules and free like the natural world.

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<sup>123</sup> George P. Hunt, ed. "The Power of Picasso," *Life*, December 27, 1968, 11.

<sup>124</sup> Peter Kivy, *The Possessor and the Possessed: Handel, Mozart, Beethoven, and the Idea of Musical Genius* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001).

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid*, 65.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid*, 75.



I take this to imply something about how certain exceptions are made for children in terms of the social expectations applied to them and am reminded also of how children are encouraged to view the world, others, and imagine worlds in a more open or “free” way. Certain rules are suspended or somewhat relaxed and therefore in some senses greater freedom is afforded to children. This freedom applies to everything from the manners they display, the clothing (or lack of clothing) they wear, or the expectation of their attention span. Children are exempt from certain social rules as well as from some moral rules they are seen as too young to understand. Sometimes the different rules for children are refreshing, too, as when children are free to walk right up to someone who looks kind or smiles at them and give them a hug or kiss if they decide to, whereas adults would rarely be caught acting this way. In these simple examples, we are reminded that we view childhood as existing under a different set of conditions from that which governs adulthood.

With varying ways that prodigious behavior can be extrapolated from the genius, whether they are innately gifted or have greater freedom to act on certain “free” or natural impulses, we see a common thread in the development of the genius. The prodigy represents a connection to nature, a freedom from certain rules, an ability to do before one is carefully taught, and an excessive ability at that. And it is precisely this excessiveness that makes the genius more unusual.

## **Rarity**

The title of this dissertation in some ways makes this category obvious. To be an “exceptional” human type is to be rare by definition. Though I can acknowledge it is in some ways the premise of the central arguments, there are a few aspects that seem important to mention here.

In both Plato and Kant, the complicated way that the artistic genius is seen as exhibiting an innate quality distinguishing him as such calls to mind the idea of a “freak of nature.” As a human being, the genius is inherently natural and yet an exception to nature.

Plato refers to the poet’s natural disposition. The poet is a human being and yet is simultaneously disposed to receive divine inspiration. In this way, the poet is natural and unnatural, unnatural for his unusual ability to access non- or super-human perspective. Additionally, the Socratic dialogues previously reviewed contain various exceptional standards that must be present in the poet. Since the poet must encapsulate all of these standards, the number of poets that exhibits all of them must dwindle to only a few. Consequently, Plato’s poet is a rare entity.

Kant’s genius evidences the rare criterion on various fronts as well. In particular, it relies again on something innate about the genius, which requires that he cannot learn that genius from anyone else – it simply cannot be taught. Kant also emphasizes that the genius’s creative efforts, which, by definition, cannot follow any existing rules. By requiring that the genius must create an object of beauty, which itself is not constituted by any existing concept, Kant underscores the criterion that an artistic genius must exhibit rarity.

### **Ability to Freshly Apply Artistic Conventions**

Though Plato and Kant put heavy emphasis on the rare, prodigious genius, their theories also state clearly that the genius does not garner that title exclusively because of inborn talent. This is most clearly articulated by Kant’s reminders about the role of academic training and awareness of conventions and rules of art making. The genius is not born knowing these rules – he must learn them. He possesses innate qualities essential for being or becoming the genius, but he must also be exposed to the traditions of his medium. What distinguishes the genius from his

fellow art-school classmates, however, is how he orients himself toward these conventions. This orientation – namely, one with healthy respect for the rules and simultaneously that he will reinvent the artistic traditions he learns – will be called an “ability to freshly apply conventions.”

This concept is derived from Kant’s discussion of “rule-making” power. The genius must learn the rules of painting just like any art student would. However, his own production does not mimic or follow any acquired skills; instead, the art products reflect an impulse to improvise or to make new rules for his production. He extends, he challenges, and he freshly applies these principles to create a new standard.<sup>127</sup> It is unique to him – he cannot describe just how he does it, nor can other pupils, hoping to be as successful as he, merely copy him – for once established, the new art making rules are conventions against, with and to which the next artist must wrestle, react and reinvent in order to become a genius himself.

Kant’s emphasis on academic training, academic correctness, and discipline in general provide the prerequisite background knowledge and experience against which the genius is supposed to react; in a sense, the parents’ rules against which the teenager rebels. The genius as both acquainted with order and discipline while by definition rule-defiant is another interesting way in which the genius can be viewed as analogous to nature, which has both a defined order and yet simultaneously exists as an unregulated, at times chaotic, entity.

The requirement that Kant’s genius demonstrates discipline and skill in the mechanical training of art making subjects him to a rather traditional course for artists. In the Western art tradition of the twenty-first century, the elements of drawing, for example, are taught in much the

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<sup>127</sup> One compelling direction for this criterion, which would require more space than this dissertation allow, would further develop the ways in which the notion of rule-breaking, rule-defiance, and rule-creation may find a compelling comparison with R.M. Hare’s concepts of fanaticism and moral holiday. This connection is briefly mentioned in reference to the monster (Chapter 5) as well.

same way they always have – still life arrangements in the studio, graphite on sketch paper, progressing toward sketching the life form from sculpture, and eventually working from a live model in a studio. The routine established to learning technical drawing ability constitutes the background of even the most abstract painters both from the early modern period<sup>128</sup> and from the contemporary one.<sup>129</sup>

A compelling example of a non-Western contemporary artist combining traditional art training and transforming it into a new style or art form exists in the work of Imran Qureshi. Having undergone rigorous training in Mughal miniature painting, the 2013 commission on the roof of the Metropolitan Museum bears witness to his reinterpretation of this tradition. By extending the foliate pattern into the concrete panels of the roof's surface, channeling both the historic tradition of the style and infusing it with a new scale, injecting political and social commentary, and doing so in an entirely new environment: on a building, in a park, in the urban jungle of New York City, Qureshi's work contains a perfect example of this criterion.<sup>130</sup>

Interestingly, the insistence on some formal academic training – despite how abstract or simplified the artist's style may appear – seems to remain important to the contemporary viewer. Alex Katz, speaking about his own painting, said that he was often criticized by reviewers who believed he lacked basic drawing skill,<sup>131</sup> despite the fact that his works of art on display were not rendered in a style that were ever intended to demonstrate “realistic” or “accurate” representations of objects or people in the natural world. Yet, contemporary appreciation of art

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<sup>128</sup> Consider, for example, Picasso's sketches at age thirteen and Matisse's works completed when he was a student at *Académie des Beaux-Arts*.

<sup>129</sup> Alex Katz's early drawings also serve as evidence of this training.

<sup>130</sup> For more information, see: Ian Alteveer, Navina Najat Haidar, and Sheena Wagstaff, *The Roof Garden Commission: Imran Qureshi* (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2013).

<sup>131</sup> Alex Katz, Video of panel discussion “Sunday at the Met,” held at The Metropolitan Museum of Art, February 3, 2013.

continues to encourage us to expect from Jackson Pollock or Willem de Kooning, the very definitions of abstract expressionism, works (if only from early in their careers) that demonstrate familiarity and even mastery of naturalistic or realistic representation. Central to this aspect of the artistic genius' creation is the notion that in order to demonstrate fresh application, or in order to reinvent representational means or stylistic conventions, the artist must have an understanding of what historical conventions preceded him and be skilled at representing it accordingly.

We see the artist's struggle with conventions very clearly in the history of British and French painting. Descriptions of British landscape painter J.M.W. Turner hint at this tension with regard to the academic establishment.

...he [Turner] encompassed the need to pursue radical, independent ends, while maintaining his allegiance to the presiding academic institution; he presented imagined realities as vividly as if they were documentary reportage; and he opened up dynamic new avenues of subject and style, while also imitating and celebrating the best of the past.<sup>132</sup>

This description of Turner, whether or not it is even true, serves as an example of the way that the reception of art and the perception of artists assume this criterion of fresh application of old conventions.<sup>133</sup>

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<sup>132</sup> Franklin Kelly and Ian Warrell, *J.M.W. Turner* (London: Tate Publishing, 2007), 13.

<sup>133</sup> In some ways, this criterion is an alternative way of presenting the concept of improvisation, a concept that itself is at the heart of the creation of several art forms. For example, jazz as an art form grew out of this notion. Experimentation occurred by combining different types of musical forms. Jazz effectively broke down the compositional rules – timing was different, as were harmonies, new instruments and different emphases in the lyrics (if any lyrics at all) – these were all innovations or improvised music making.

Discussing the visual arts in France, one historian described the *Académie des Beaux-Arts* tradition as a “rigid academy tyranny”<sup>134</sup> and as such effectively served as a foil encouraging extreme reactions by the young artists inside looking to break out of it, for example, Camille Corot, Eugene Delacroix, Paul Cezanne, and Henri Matisse. Yet, it was nevertheless accepted as the premier place to receive the artistic training one needed, even if one felt either frustrated (by failing their annual qualifying Beaux-Arts exams, as Matisse did twice before he finally passed on the third) or stifled by the assignments and structure. Matisse would later look back at this period in his life describing the feeling this way: “I was like someone who arrives in a country where they speak a different language. I couldn’t melt into the crowd, I couldn’t fall into step with the rest.”<sup>135</sup> It is precisely this restlessness or insatiable appetite for changing habits and innovating materials that explains our understanding of this capacity.

The idea is echoed further in the contemporary visual arts. Reflecting on an exhibition of Richard Serra’s work at the Gagosian Gallery in the fall of 2001, art critic Calvin Tomkins wrote,

What amazed many others and me was how far Serra, at the age of sixty-two, had moved beyond the breakout innovations of his Gagosian show two years earlier. Once again, it seemed, he was carrying the art of sculpture into new areas, taking great risks and pulling them off, and there was something thrilling and deeply reassuring about that.<sup>136</sup>

Beyond needing to break out of the conventional wisdom acquired in academic training or apprenticeships as an emerging or young artist, the genius continues to innovate over the course

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<sup>134</sup> Hilary Spurling, *The Unknown Matisse: A Life of Henri Matisse, The Early Years, 1869-1908* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2001), 67.

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid*, 67 (quoting Matisse).

<sup>136</sup> Calvin Tomkins, *Lives of the Artists* (New York: Henry Holt Company, 2008), 69-70.

of his career. Tomkins notes this of Serra's work, which evidences active changes despite his age. The genius pushes to continually adapt with new materials or new subject matter, new color combinations or new social conditions. It is this constant evolution that demonstrates his fresh application.

It is in relation to this capacity described above that we understand from Kant the genius cannot teach others to be like him. This is due to the genius's inability to explain his procedures and process to others, but it also maintains that the pupil (any potential genius) cannot merely derive his talent by copying the master's work – this restriction therefore has twofold consequences. It ensures that the genius remains at a distance, isolated, a rare entity, from his peers. It also means that others who may want to paint like him, to be geniuses, too, can do so only by inventing some new way of creating beauty. These followers cannot simply imitate his work, but instead have to continue to innovate.

Kant discusses this aspect of innovation in terms of the artist not being a rule-follower but as creating an object through which a new rule is made. It is as if each genius re-writes the rulebook for how to make beauty, but that the rulebook can never apply to anyone else other than him. Like rules written with vanishing ink, they only apply once.

This criterion shares some features with the concept of originality, but it distinguishes itself as well.<sup>137</sup> Yet, freshly applying old conventions is somehow more than originality because there is nothing in originality that says one has had exposure to and understanding of what has come before. To be merely original, to be one-of-a-kind, does not suggest that the person has come into contact with what has been made by his contemporaries or his precedents. The fresh

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<sup>137</sup> For a thorough discussion of originality, see John Hoaglund, "Originality and aesthetic value," *British Journal of Aesthetics* 16, no. 1 (1976): 46-55.

application capacity reminds us that the individual has adapted from what he has learned – there is some basis of art making or knowledge or experience that he is going beyond, developing, or pushing further.

However, originality is contained in fresh application and is prioritized as an aspect of beauty. (This was discussed in this dissertation’s second chapter.) In Kantian terms, the ingredient of originality suggests that the artistic genius confronts his art making with freedom necessary to think of solutions or projects that have never been thought or done before. The artist’s object, as Kant explains, is created “through freedom, i.e., through a power of choice that bases its acts on reason.”<sup>138</sup> Operating freely in this way, the artist’s only choice is to be innovative – to adapt to the circumstances, to the medium, to the new physical or environmental circumstances or to new conceptual networks (in terms of ideas) in order to create a new object or experience. With no rules to follow, the artistic genius makes his own rules that will, only for him, lead to the creation of fine/beautiful art.

In the twentieth century, originality was valued greatly by those who would come to be called conceptual artists.<sup>139</sup> Whether Marcel Duchamp’s 1917 submission to the salon<sup>140</sup> or Andy Warhol’s Brillo boxes,<sup>141</sup> the objects that were in fact *not* on their own objects of beauty and, more importantly, were ubiquitous, were nonetheless transformed by the artist’s fresh

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<sup>138</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, ed. Werner S. Pluhar (Indianapolis, Indiana: Hackett Classics, 1987), 170 (§43, 303).

<sup>139</sup> And the artist’s goal of making something that formerly was not art *into* art constituted one of Western artists’ primary goals. For example, see discussion in Blake Gopnik, “Modern Art’s Last Gasp at the 2013 Venice Biennale,” *Newsweek*, June 5, 2013.

<sup>140</sup> Marcel Duchamp’s *Fountain*, of which many examples exist, was a ready-made.

<sup>141</sup> Andy Warhol, *Brillo Boxes*, 1964. Philadelphia Museum of Art. Please note that this particular artistic example has received significant philosophical treatment since Arthur Danto focuses on Warhol’s boxes in his theory about the end of art. Philosophers of art such as Noel Carroll have critically questioned Danto’s argument; see, for example, Noel Carroll. “The End of Art?” *History and Theory* 37, no. 4 (1998): 17-29.



application of old conventions. In these cases, it was the artist's decision to take the objects out of their common context (a bathroom setting and supermarket aisles, respectively) and re-present them in an art fair or in a gallery that was the "new" application; something that nobody had done before. This example of genius renders someone like Duchamp or Warhol in a category distinct (and according to Kant's analysis, above and beyond) those who followed them. Those who repeatedly do the same thing, who do not change the concept or create new rules for art making are not geniuses for their work is derivative.

Kant laid the groundwork for this principle centuries before, reminding us that it is not only in the modern era that fresh application and originality are part of aesthetic appreciation. With beauty creation as the goal or end of Kant's genius, the fresh application capacity is the demonstrated ability to vary the means by which that beauty can be created. Adaptation of means is transferable to the moral realm since in these cases, again, there is an assumed end. In the case of the moral saint, the understood goal is moral goodness or excellence; in the moral monster, the result is some form of evil. In order for individuals to distinguish themselves from all others in any of these figural types, to stand out as examples of these extremes, they must employ innovative methods to achieve these ends, they must adapt to the times, keeping in mind what has already been done before, and break out of the prescribed conventions. This criterion also relates to two moral concepts associated with R.M. Hare: the concepts of the moral

holiday<sup>142</sup> and the fanatic.<sup>143</sup> Though the genius is regarded in terms of the artistic conventions that he does or does not follow, the other figures – the saint and the monster – are viewed in terms of moral rules. Hare’s ideas can be taken generally as two ways to think of rule-following. The genius explicitly defies rules that apply to most people. The saint, however, adheres more stringently to the rules that apply to most. The monster, as it turns out, appears more similar to the genius and dissimilar from the saint in this regard: the monster does not follow rules that most follow.

### **Commitment**

This next criterion, commitment, is connected to our assumptions about continuity or creating art over a long period of time. Its analysis reveals that in other ways we insist on a continuing presence of the artistic genius. Unless his production is brought to an abrupt end by premature accident or death, we expect there to be no “one hit wonders” in the ranks of the genius.

The artist must demonstrate a certain degree of commitment to his art making, but this is often neglected or only implicitly discussed in philosophical literature. I will define what the

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<sup>142</sup> “This amply explains why *prima facie* principles have to be overridable—why, that is to say, it is possible to go on holding them when one does not obey them in a particular case. This overridability does not mean that they are not prescriptive; *if* applied, they would require a certain action, but we just do not apply them in a certain case. Moreover, although I have so far considered cases in which one such *prima facie* principle is overridden in favour of another, it is likely that a principle which has this feature of overridability will also be open to being overridden by other, non-moral, prescriptions, as when we take, however reprehensibly, what has been called (though I do not much like the expression) a ‘moral holiday’.” R.M. Hare, “Moral Conflicts,” The Tanner Lectures on Human Values, October 5, 1978, 190.

<sup>143</sup> “The fanatic is characterized by Hare as one who is willing to press his ideals ‘in disregard of the interests of others’ . . .” and “we can expect that the advocates of these ideals will be quite willing to prescribe their universal application even to themselves.” Jan Narveson, “Liberalism, Utilitarianism, and Fanaticism: R.M. Hare Defended,” *Ethics* 88, no. 3 (1978): 250-251.

commitment could mean for us based on the various examples in which it is introduced. These examples include artistic appreciation that stems from the extent of excruciating detail that an artist demonstrates in a given piece of work, or the large scale of the artwork, or both. In these cases, the Gothic cathedrals built throughout Medieval Europe, or the seventeenth-century's Blue Mosque in Istanbul are emblematic, paradigmatic or instructive. On a smaller scale, the brushwork of 18<sup>th</sup>-century Rococo garden scene by Jean-Honoré Fragonard, who articulated each and every leaf on a tree, could be evidence of this idea. Another art form that exemplifies this is miniature painting, highly valued over several decades by the most prominent and wealthy of patrons throughout the world.

Commitment is also alluded to in the insistence on the fact that what artists do is work<sup>144</sup> and not simply a hobby. By this, I mean that whether or not detail is involved, viewers or an audience are seeking evidence that the piece created was the result of some intellectual or physical work, either way a time-intensive process. This harks back to the prodigy concept in that we want a genius that is both naturally endowed with gifts and also one that is trained or works hard to refine them. It also crept into some of Socrates' inquisitive dialogue, in which he seemed to imply maybe it was not work for poets to create poetry and instead that poets made art without effort and therefore had no control over their creations.

Questioning whether an artist's product reflects commitment or work lies behind a view supported by the significant backlash to conceptual artists as early as 1917 with Duchamp's submission of *Fountain*, can be extrapolated from Arthur Danto's analysis of Warhol's *Brillo Box*, and into the present day. Moreover, it is partially to blame for the ongoing discussions

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<sup>144</sup> The work concept cannot be fully explored here, but it has been treated before, for example, Lydia Goehr, "Being True to the Work," *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 47 (1989) 47: 55-67.

about the definition of art since in that language philosophy tries to define a work of art as distinct from any other work product. For though the effort is sometimes intent on distinguishing art works from other things that we encounter on a daily basis, it is still deemed necessary and important to prove that making art is cognitive and requires effort. In other words, it still involves a great deal of work or commitment (just like a craft), but it requires something else – *je ne sais quoi* – to make it art.

In some contexts, artistic commitment is quantified in the amount of work involved and in others is manifest in the recurring emphasis on artists' demonstration of sacrifice of one sort or another. This can take the form of personal sacrifices, such as giving up certain relationships, or it may consist in the type of financial hardship we expect young artists endure before (if ever) they are understood and appreciated by the world around them. Examples like these are seen throughout artist's biographies and reinforced by this excerpt from a 1965 interview with Robert Rauschenberg undertaken by Dorothy Seckler:

DS: As I recall, you were supposed to have been living on Fulton Street on fifteen cents a day. Is that right?

RR: Some days it was twenty-five.<sup>145</sup>

Despite inflation, this now globally recognized figure was apparently living in New York on pocket change during an intensely creative period.<sup>146</sup> A detail like this is, inadvertently or deliberately, included in the interview because it leaves a certain impression on the readership,

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<sup>145</sup> Robert Rauschenberg, *Oral history interview with Robert Rauschenberg, 1965 Dec. 21, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution*. [Available online: <http://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/interviews/oral-history-interview-robert-rauschenberg-12870>.]

<sup>146</sup> This period has been addressed in many sources, but is the particular focus of a recent volume: Carlos Basualdo, Erica F. Battle, eds., *Dancing Around the Bride: Cage, Cunningham, Johns, Rauschenberg, and Duchamp* (Philadelphia: Philadelphia Museum of Art and Yale University Press, 2012).

namely, affirming the assumption that an artist's determination is not frustrated by dire straits. If Rauschenberg produced his artworks because he sat on a family fortune and could toil away the days without any purpose, perhaps his art would not be appreciated in the same way. The financial stress is seen as some type of struggle that helps to motivate or stimulate certain inventive qualities. Rauschenberg himself admits that the struggle does not need to come with the lack of financial resources, but suggests that being forced to work within certain limits – of resources, for example, – as he put it, “that the creative process somehow has to include adjusting realistically to the situation,” is essential. Rauschenberg describes that some sort of struggle is an essential feature of the creative mind. Demonstrating commitment is seeing through that struggle to the creation of the work.

In some cases, art making requires commitment that forces its prioritization over not only financial or material success, but also physical comfort. Artist Ellen Altfest began a small painting of the bark of a decaying tree on site in the woods where it had fallen. She continued to paint on site through a harsh New England winter until she was satisfied with the outcome. It is this type of commitment that surprises people, even fellow artists, as a friend described her:

‘She’s probably the most committed artist I’ve ever met,’ said Mr. Saager.... ‘I have a huge amount of respect for her. She’s the real deal.’<sup>147</sup>

In this case, Jason Saager, fellow artist and sometimes model for Altfest, suggests a relationship between commitment and what it is to be a *real* artist. To be a real artist, that is presumably to be real and not an imposter, is to be committed to making art no matter what the challenge. If we link this to our previous discussion about rules, that the genius can be followed but cannot be copied, we are in somewhat familiar territory with the real versus the artificial artist. It is not a

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<sup>147</sup> Randy Kennedy, “Warming to Painting in the Cold,” *New York Times*, June 9, 2013.

commitment to following rules or some other prescribed behaviors, it is in fact more challenging than that. Because it is commitment to rules that are as yet undefined, it is the pursuit of an unknown set of methodological practices and creative outcomes that we want our artistic geniuses to be motivated by. Saager voices what we know to be a defining feature of the artistic genius: that s/he demonstrate commitment to art making in spite of whatever obstacles may present themselves in the process.

Commitment can also be seen as the summation of an artist's lifelong dedication to his or her art making. This is the type of commitment that is evidenced by someone receiving a lifetime achievement award, for exhibiting commitment at over many decades of one's life. Other examples suggesting commitment include references to personal sacrifice made to persist in making art. This is found in Vincent Van Gogh's biography, an artist who never received critical or financial support for his art during his lifetime; or in another post-Impressionist modern painter, Paul Cézanne, who was refused from the annual salon for twenty consecutive years before becoming considered the founder (or one of the few founders) of modern art only after his death. Another manifestation of commitment is the pursuit of art making despite continual rejection.

These various examples suggest that the commitment we expect of the genius borrows from, shares with, or lends to the concept of moral commitment, obligation, or duty that we see as fundamental to the figures of the moral realm. In particular, Kant's deontology requires obeying moral duty aside from consequences. In such a theory, all sacrifice – either personal,

financial, or otherwise – does not have any weight in moral decision-making. As such, the figure of the moral saint, as we will describe it, endures any number of sacrifices.<sup>148</sup>

## Conclusion

As the criteria suggest, the genius is both a relatively simple figure – “you know it when you see it” – while he is simultaneously an extremely complex one. With these five criteria expanded upon within the figure of the genius, it is now time to turn to the moral figures of the monster and the saint. Through an examination of their conceptual foundations in light of these criteria, they will become the dynamic point/counter-point to the genius.

The first three chapters focused on the figure of the artistic genius and what concept is being invoked when we use that label. The next two chapters present two figures that represent the idea of human exceptionalism in the moral realm. The genius was used as an entry into the idea, and I will now use the criteria developed for it in order to compare the genius with the saint and the genius with the monster.

The following chapters, therefore, present two comparisons – first, between the genius and the saint and, second, between the genius and the monster. The ultimate purpose is to uncover whether the genius leans more toward one or the other. The outline of each aesthetic-moral comparison will be guided by the five main criteria (prodigy, adaptive capacity, communication, rarity, and commitment), which will provide contours and nuance to the

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<sup>148</sup> There is a connection between feelings from moral actions and aesthetic experiences, though the feelings are not identical. “Pleasure felt from aesthetic judgment is not identical to that felt from moral – moral is law-governed whereas aesthetic is pleasure from mere contemplation” (Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, ed. Werner S. Pluhar [Indianapolis, Indiana: Hackett Classics, 1987], 158 [§39, 292]). Pleasure in this context is related to the feeling for humanity, not necessarily pleasure in the general sense.

presentation of each moral figure while simultaneously giving greater definition and depth as to how it compares to the genius. As we scrutinize first the saint and then the monster in the final chapter with regard to each criterion, we will begin to see where each figure draws closer to or pulls away from the genius as we interpreted the concept.



### Part III. Testing the Criteria on Moral Conceptual Figures

Equipped with an operable definition of the genius, a review of the saint and the monster reveals which moral figure aligns more closely with the artistic genius.

#### Chapter 4 The Saint

##### Introduction

Some recent discussions of geniuses and saints run along parallel lines: the terms are ubiquitous in journalistic and literary sources and yet they receive comparatively scant academic attention. As a result, there is a wide variety of meaning intended by the terms' usage. Darrin McMahon's recent book *Divine Fury*<sup>149</sup> refers to this in terms of the genius (though, it should be noted, not specifically artistic genius),<sup>150</sup> and John Coleman echoes the sentiment, as it applies to saints, in the concluding chapter of an edited book entitled, *Saints and Virtues*.<sup>151</sup>

Further, Coleman claims that discussions about saints or saintly figures, either conceptual or in actual examples, have been declining in substance and in number. Coleman laments, "...in losing our saints we have lost something not only unspeakably lovely but truly essential to human culture and imagination."<sup>152</sup> McMahon similarly worries that one consequence of the loss of genius-talk is the consequential loss of wonder from our understanding of the possibility of human greatness.

Interestingly, both suggest that the modern world's decreased academic focus on these figures and even general discomfort with them has something to do with Western societies'

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<sup>149</sup> Darrin M. McMahon, *Divine Fury: A History of Genius* (New York: Basic Books, 2013).

<sup>150</sup> "Genius: we are obsessed with the word, with the idea, and with the people on whom it is bestowed..." (Ibid, xi).

<sup>151</sup> John Coleman, S.J., "After Sainthood?" in *Saints and Virtues*, ed. John Stratton Hawley (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 205-225.

<sup>152</sup> Ibid, 225.

increasing interest in human equality.<sup>153</sup> The implication of this conclusion and perhaps a true reflection of the general population is that to discuss greatness or human exceptionalism, of which both the saint and the genius are examples, seems to endorse a hierarchy that seems fundamentally opposed to the Enlightenment ideals advocating human equality that gave birth to more democratic political and social structures most 21<sup>st</sup> century citizens enjoy or strive for today.<sup>154 155</sup>

If McMahon and Coleman's pieces are warnings against this drifting away and are intended as calls to action, my project is one reply. Though this dissertation hardly has the space to reconstruct a political and social system that includes egalitarian features and incorporates geniuses and saints as well, it can serve as one assisting effort to this end by clarifying and further developing these concepts for modern discourse. With the saint in particular, we uncover a figure whose prominence in nearly every religious tradition and across all social communities cannot be ignored. Whether the saint is venerated by Catholicism or Hinduism or stands for a community leader whose example has inspired his neighbors, these figures share common characteristics. Whereas some use religious language and definitions to identify these figures, there is certainly conceptual space in the secular sphere where these thoughts can also be adapted for the modern (more secular) era.

Whether or not we agree on what may or may not be lost due to the decline in conversations like these, the essential aspect of this inquiry is to point out the ways in which we

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<sup>153</sup> Ibid, 208-9.

<sup>154</sup> Edgar Zilsel is one among others that warned of the dangers of the overemphasis on the concept of genius, for example in his books entitled *Religion of Genius* (1918) and *The Development of the Concept of Genius* (1926).

<sup>155</sup> This discomfort is lodged within a political past in the 20<sup>th</sup> century that did in fact take notions of genius, greatness, supremacy too far – the Nazi regime and its devastating effects caused by a philosophy that argue for the supremacy of one race or set of traits over others.

in fact invoke these concepts all the time yet often do so without any precise conceptual framework within which to one could make sense of the examples offered by the thousands of newspaper articles McMahon cites. As he has put it, “And so geniuses multiply in the media, while dying an ignominious death in academe.”<sup>156</sup> By refusing to admit to and engage with the reality that the terms – genius, monster, and saint – persist in our public discourse, we (in academe) are allowing the words to float about without concrete meaning. Yet, since there is a rich history about each of these terms, we can recover meaningful discourse about these ideas and people who embody them.

Despite its ubiquity in historical texts and popular articles, the saint appears to remain a paradox in that everyone is (or at least potentially?) a saint and nobody is a saint at the same time. “...Saints are expected to be somehow moral and to serve as models for ordinary devotees. Yet their morality transcends ordinary ethical codes.”<sup>157</sup> In other words, they are entirely common and simultaneously supremely superhuman. “They are both like us and – so hard for individualists to conceive—above us.”<sup>158</sup> In colloquial conversation, the term *saint* often stands for that person who does no wrong. Like the genius, the saint exhibits extreme behavior – in this case, extreme moral behavior – always doing what is right. If we were to point to popular global figures, one might suggest Mother Theresa, whose service to the underserved and neglected was highly publicized, or Mahatma Gandhi’s nonviolent protests to combat poverty and hunger. Whether explicitly religious figures or not, these individuals embody the idea of the moral saint

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<sup>156</sup> Darrin McMahon, “Where Have All the Geniuses Gone?” *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, October 21, 2013, <http://chronicle.com/article/Where-Have-All-the-Geniuses/142353/>

<sup>157</sup> John Coleman, S.J., “After Sainthood?” in *Saints and Virtues*, ed. John Stratton Hawley (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 219.

<sup>158</sup> *Ibid*, 211.

to the general 20<sup>th</sup>/21<sup>st</sup> century public. Yet, these examples also draw criticism for their popularity. We find ourselves reducing figures to sound bites without identifying the complexity of the figure, motivations behind the exemplary behavior, and just how he was able to mobilize millions around committed actions such as his. And so the gauntlet has been thrown down: to discuss figures such as these without reducing them to fluffy conversations on television shows but instead by adding a level of analysis that gets to the heart of humanity's challenge to identify just what is involved in living a moral life.

To begin this endeavor, it is important to note that though I intend the term to be devoid of explicit religious content, I cannot help but trace its sources to some religious texts and begin with early Christians' texts. It is there and in ancient Greek philosophy that one finds preliminary descriptions that will help us shape the form of this conceptual figure. The vestiges and legacy of these early Christian and Greek traditions were alive and well in 18<sup>th</sup> century Germany, hence are suited to our discussion that is based heavily on Kant's figure of the genius.

During Kant's lifetime, Enlightenment and then Post-Enlightenment theological or religious struggle was playing out in the political and academic spheres of German culture. Kant himself is reported to have wrestled with the received traditions of his Pietistic education and the competing claims of the rationalists.<sup>159</sup> Kant was critical of mysticism and yet also dedicated to explicitly state the limits of human reason.<sup>160</sup> I mention this because in some ways Kant's struggle reflects our own: there are religious tendencies and definitions of the saint and there are secular or purely philosophical definitions and the Western origins of them trace back to the explicitly religious texts and the ancient Greeks. Trying to balance and understand the interplay

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<sup>159</sup> Allen W. Wood, "Rational theology, moral faith, and religion," in *Cambridge Companion to Kant*, ed. Paul Guyer, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 394-416.

<sup>160</sup> *Ibid*, 414.

of these concurrent discussions will help by giving us a full picture of the saint as it relates to today.

Some point to Socrates as the early example of the philosophical saint. The ultimate martyr, drinking the hemlock rather than going against his conscience, acting as the outsider, the simply dressed old man who wandered the streets educating Greek youths with his questions, Socrates evokes many of the commonplace associations with sainthood. Significantly, Socratic or Platonic sainthood is not a profession.<sup>161</sup> This is made clear in the distinction between Socrates (his approach to and method of thinking) and the Sophists, who are professional thinkers. Sophists are professionals who are compensated for their teaching. Plato's contributions could be seen as contributing initial general civic or secular descriptions of moral living. His student Aristotle more explicitly devoted a great deal of time and energy to specify just which traits were to be cultivated to achieve moral character.<sup>162</sup>

The Christian concept of sainthood likely borrows, among others, from these two figures' contributions. The Bible narrates Christ's life, which is one exemplary account of saintly behavior. These parables and those about his disciples, in essence the first "saints," present to the reader or follower a set of prescriptions for promoting the moral life. Offering everything from how to treat the beggar to how to demonstrate sacrifice to God, the Bible functions as a rulebook for how to be more like saints and how to live a holy life.

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<sup>161</sup> Nor is being a genius a profession. The monster, on the other hand, may distinguish himself from the genius and the saint on this point.

<sup>162</sup> Whereas Plato's writings have traditionally been seen as less egalitarian in nature and less meritocratic, especially in the gold/silver/bronze typologies offered in the *Republic*, Aristotle's are more often cited as giving the chance to all human beings with the potential to summon in themselves the morally courageous behavior and habits to promote the good life for oneself and for others as a whole.

Yet, the rulebook may not be the only key to our understanding of what it takes to be a saint. Certainly sainthood is typically defined as devotion to God or a religious entity, which will be “moral goodness” for our secular application of the term, and the behavior or traits associated with moral near-perfection or sainthood generally pertain to the holiness the individual is thought to possess. Yet, these behaviors and traits are not entirely prescribed in any rulebook. Instead, like Kant’s genius that lived in some liminal space with rules or traditions that he mastered and yet broke, we also see the figure of the saint may also hover in this nebulous space and in fact experiences some coexisting paradoxical position with regard to this common assumption about the saint being predictable, rule-following, and/or perfect.

### **Coleman’s Characterization of the Saint**

The idea of a saint emerges in many religious traditions, which Coleman surveyed for shared moral criteria. Coleman’s project is very similar to what was done in the preceding chapter, which sought to identify the criteria of the genius. Coleman set out to consolidate different religions’ descriptions of saints. In so doing, he proposed six major criteria for the saint referring to them as a means of discussing more or less universal traits of the saint across cultural and religious traditions.<sup>163</sup> These traits are:

1. Exemplary model;
2. Extraordinary teacher;
3. Wonder worker or source of benevolent power;
4. Intercessor;

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<sup>163</sup> John Coleman, S.J., “After Sainthood?” in *Saints and Virtues*, ed. John Stratton Hawley (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 214.

5. A life often refusing material attachments or comforts;
6. Possession of a special and revelatory relation to the holy

Coleman extrapolated the central characteristics of the moral saint from various traditions. I will use these as a compelling counterpoint to the criteria I proposed for the genius to jumpstart the comparative discussion.

On an initial pass, half of the criteria, numbers one, five and six, map quickly onto the genius discussion, number three to a lesser extent, and second and fourth not at all, or if so, in mostly opposing ways.

This analysis begins with the first and second of Coleman's criteria: the saint is an "exemplary model" and an "extraordinary teacher." Though the genius is the master, "exemplary model", he cannot describe how he brings his work into existence. This prevents the genius from being an extraordinary teacher unless his pupil is already a genius himself. Because he cannot, his followers can never, from learning from him alone, become geniuses on their own. The genius is only capable of helping another when that pupil already possesses "genius" – in other words, it is not due to the master genius's teaching abilities that his pupil also succeeds, it is due to the pupil's inherent gift.

This tension between genius and saint is a significant one. The reason has something to do with the nature of what is rare in the case of the genius and what is unique to the saint such that they are extreme figures in their respective fields. Whereas the saint can be both the exemplary model – behavior, treatment of others, comportment of one's life and affairs – and the extraordinary teacher – instructing others, leading them to the attainment of model behavior as well – the genius cannot. The saint's activity – holy or moral living – and the genius's activity – creating beauty – could account for this divergence.

Perhaps it is the social aspect and premise of moral living that more naturally lead to the social act of teaching. To be moral, one interacts with others – so being a good teacher is (no surprise) part of saintly life. Maybe creating beauty, however, can be done alone. There is no external requirement that others be involved in the creative process. However, where the genius’s world is social can be theoretically or imagined – or, it more obviously comes into play in the appreciation of beauty. The art’s reception is the moment at which the genius work can be seen as more comparable to the saint’s interactions. However, just because one witnesses or admires beauty does not mean one has then learned how to create it oneself. In contrast, the saint’s holy behavior, which includes actions, for example, washing the feet of the homeless man or sitting at the bedside of a child dying of AIDS, that can be replicated – or at least their physical requirements can be. What this comparison reveals, however, is a simplification of what is required to undertake those moral “simple” duties. If they were or are so simple, why doesn’t everyone just do them? The second saintly trait does not reconcile with what we have found to be true of the genius, leaving the genius and saint unresolved and somewhat inconclusive on this point.

It could be that the difference hinges on a point about communication. To teach requires effective communication. However, the genius’s display of communication is not about teaching in a traditional sense. The genius occupies a position through which he gains access or a perspective that is more than what the standard human being has. The saint also resides in this enhanced position of access, though the saint’s ability to communicate is expanded. The artistic genius (as previous explained, in particular by Bradfield’s explication of the intent of universal assent) enables a communicative exchange. However, fostering communication of this sort is very different than teaching. The genius is specifically prohibited from teaching others. His



genius cannot be articulated in logical terms or by scientific rules; it defies these categorizations and conceptualizations. Though the genius can create works of art that break down communication barriers as in the Kantian aesthetic judgment whereby a viewer catches sight of human community by means of the beauty created and by that recognition can be united with a community, the genius must only have created the object to enable the judge to have this aesthetic experience. S/he need not be present or even alive to instigate this communal experience.

The type of communication required for teaching is very different. The saint's life either involves actual teaching, that is, speaking to others, who listen and follow or are inspired by his example, or it is described in such a way that inspiration can be extracted from it. Consider the biographies of saints or saintly figures, which are read and re-read, reprinted on small devotional cards or in other similar materials. In these cases, reading the texts (indirect contact with the saint) may amount less to instructional learning of the traditional sort and more to an example of inspiration gained by reading about the saint's life. To learn from someone else in the traditional sense, one must be in direct contact with the other person. For most moral living, this potential of learning by moral example is increased by being in contact with the person whose example you want to emulate or by being in touch with others who seek to learn from that example (so that a collective of people is representing and trying to recreate the example of the one who is not present). The proximity of the saint and inspired follower likely has a profound effect on the longevity and success of the saint's power as a source of influence and inspiration. Plato's examples of the magnetic stone and his theory of Forms provide illustrations of the importance of closeness to the source or origin for the success of the saint's communications, for example, his ability to impress upon his followers an emphasis on moral living. In this way, the saint's

presence during the moral act seems pretty important – for the recipient or beneficiary of the moral act is substantially more likely to sense the communicative act if s/he is directly and personally connected to the saint.

Coleman's third requirement that the saint is a wonder worker or source of benevolent power has some compelling resonance with the genius. In Plato's accounts of the artist, he alluded to (or proposed) a special power to the artist as previously discussed. One difference is that Plato did not always see this power as benevolent. Nevertheless, Socrates himself referred to the concept of the *daimon* or spirit, something like a benevolent power we see in the saint. As with the question of whether the genius's "genius" comes at birth or can be acquired or developed later in life, it is similarly unclear whether this benevolent power is assigned at birth or attained by him or her later in life. In a religious setting or community, attributing such a power to an individual whether born or developed could still be viewed as a divine gift. As with Kant's genius, whose prodigious talent could be endowed at birth and yet requires certain basic training to flourish, the saint's wonder working is viewed in this mysterious, awe-inspiring way.

One parallel to consider in this regard is the genius's communication criterion. Hovering on the fringe of the human community, at once participating in it and simultaneously maintaining access to either a universal, super-human, or divine realm, the genius enables aesthetic experiences that allow viewers/audience/readers to also gain access to a universal realm. If viewed as his special power, the genius's enabling capacity begins to sound very much like the saint's role as wonder worker. The saint performs something that appears to the human community as super-human.

The fourth criterion that Coleman proposes, saint as "intercessor," takes us into relatively uncharted territory. Viewing the genius in this way would be problematic particularly for those

who do not believe in a divine presence, in which case trying to perceive the genius as a connection to divinity would not make sense. On the other hand, the idea is reminiscent of Ion's speech where he's the mouthpiece of the gods and an intermediary between human and god realms. This poetic function somewhat resembles the saint. Furthermore, it could be that an intercessory role is even found in Kant's genius. If Kantian aesthetic judgment enables the judge to transcend the individual human level to have a view of the entire human community to the noumenal/theoretical level, and if that space to which one has transcended could be taken as godlike or divine realm, the genius would become the intercessor, responsible for intervening and enabling the viewer (judge) to access to the transcendent. It would be incorrect to see the genius as deliberately representing others' views as in pleas or petitions (the way that the saint does), but the possibility of a genius somehow having one foot in both worlds, just like the saint, is precisely what was described in the communication criterion.

Coleman's fifth criterion – that saints often reject material comfort – also finds similarities in literature about artistic geniuses. The idea presented itself under the two criteria of the fresh application of conventions and that of commitment. The idea that an artist must struggle to be great – that Picasso's roommate's suicide, the poverty in Parisian streets and the poor living conditions he endured somehow provoked/inspired/motivated him to create famous Blue Period pieces<sup>164</sup> and the quote from the Rauschenberg interview – has frequently been invoked. In addition, there exists an ascetic model of artistic creation that reaches far back in Western art. In the famous depictions of Saint Jerome who lived alone in the desert, the analogy is laid bare: just as the saint denies himself the connection to a social community and endures the

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<sup>164</sup> However, few would argue that Picasso's creative genius dissolved when he gained great fame and greater financial stability. If that were the case, the works he produced for the next six decades would be considered of lesser quality.

dry, hot climate of the desert, but is sustained by a divine calling, so too does the artist depicting that saint<sup>165</sup> suggest that his artistic talent can thrive without the material comforts of ordinary life.

Though we just summarily reviewed how Coleman's criteria may or may not align with the genius concept, we will extend these brief discussions into more extended inquiry that allows us to incorporate them (or not) into the five criteria that we previously identified for the genius.

The preceding chapter illuminated five criteria that we must now test in the saintly waters of this chapter. In what ways do the characteristics fit this moral figure and in what ways would the characterization seem forced? In the coming pages, I aim to present an evaluation of the saint as it either participates in or relates to the ideas of communication, prodigy, rarity, ability to freshly apply conventions, and commitment. I begin with the first criterion of communication.

## **The Saint in Light of the Five Criteria**

### **Having the Feeling of Being Communicated With**

To understand communication in the context of the saint, we would need to consider what the substance of that communication might be. In the case of the genius, the work of art is an easy place to start. The "work" can become a product that contains, transfers, or is some vehicle for the communicative exchange between artist and audience.

The communicative exchange that the saint enables can either be narrow in scope, meaning that it pertains to one individual who is helped by her kindness, or so broad in scope, as when millions read and are moved by Gandhi's actions, that the topic of communication gets

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<sup>165</sup> For example, see Leonardo da Vinci's depiction of *Saint Jerome in the Wilderness* (c. 1480) now in the collection of the Vatican Museums.

increasingly complicated. This is due not only to the nature of the life of the saint, but also the history of the concept. It is worth noting at this point some of the background of the figure.

Throughout much of history and into contemporary life, examples of saintly behavior have been offered in the hermetic existence similar to the Christian and Buddhist monks or nuns, some of whom even take a vow of silence or self-imposed isolation. Paintings by major figures like El Greco of Saint Francis with his birds, or da Vinci's painting of Saint Jerome in the desert, and copies of them, that continue to be avidly sought by collectors. Yet, their writings or their devotion to doing good – whether in the form of growing crops for the needy or praying for the poor, assisting the dying, or writing about their devotion to doing good – can be inspiration to many. Many of the stories exist in biblical stories or other spiritual and historical documents recording an ascetic lifestyle. Interestingly, though, regardless of how isolated the individual saint's life was described to be, the fact that his or her life story was told and was so inspirational that it affected those who heard it substantiates the fact that a type of communication is taking place. It is the power of the narrative. When one is moved by the story of an individual who has performed saintly deeds, one feels as if he or she has been communicated with.

On the other hand, public figures whose lives and works have been aimed at large groups of people also frequent the greater (global) imagination. Household names like Gandhi and Mother Theresa come to mind. Whether mobilizing thousands for a hunger strike or establishing homes for the dying like Mother Theresa, these modern saints demonstrate the communicative skill. Clearly there was a capacity that these individuals possessed that either transferred such a powerful message or bore such a compelling example of devotion, that others were drawn to him or her. There was something about the saint's actions or words that made those who witnessed

or heard feel as if they were being directly communicated with, encouraged, or inspired, to react to the saint's message.

The criterion of communication also finds echo in Coleman's second saintly characteristic: extraordinary teacher. Whereas the genius, according to Kant, was specifically not a good teacher, in that s/he could not explain his process to his pupils, the saint is. One common thread among those counted as extraordinary teachers is that their students must feel as if they have been communicated with. That feeling may be generated from the saint as a good teacher (the first trait Coleman mentions) – something more similar to the genius – or it may involve a student who feels as if the teacher encouraged him by uncovering his motivation or providing the opportunity to develop a personal and direct connection; either one of these experiences could account for the “extraordinary teacher” label. In the case of the saint, then, the communication criterion could be taken as revealing itself in the teaching trait that Coleman mentions.

Saintly communication has something to do with the inspiration and communicative experience that we ascribed to the artistic genius. The allegory of the Magnetic Stone is just as applicable to the saint as it was to the genius. This magnetic-like force is felt by followers of the saint, directing them to follow his example, to feel as if they are being pulled closer, to be communicated with. Despite the major distinction that the saint may very well be a great teacher and we know that the genius cannot, we do not know *how* the saint is such a great teacher. Similarly to the genius, the saint occupies a space that allows his humanity to cement his connection to the human community while simultaneously enjoying a position that enables access to divinity or universality. Simply by following or abiding by moral principles, the saint

encourages others to aspire to or to enter that space. This encouragement is proof of the saint's teaching ability.

## **Prodigy**

As with the genius, there are numerous examples in world history when we find the concepts of saintly behavior and youth to be intertwined. Some of the most prominent include the figure of the Christ-child in the Christian tradition as well as the young child who is evaluated to discern whether he embodies the new spirit of the Dalai Lama after the latter has passed. Though in different ways, both figures represent the notion that perhaps there is something innate or inborn, discoverable in youth, which reveals some saintly gift. Beyond the two individual figures in these cases, they serve as reminders in both of those faith traditions that something about holy behavior is captured and perhaps more evident in children.

However, despite the associations between childlike wonder and moral purity, it is worth noting that the figures seen as prototypes – Christ or the Dalai Lama – are not average human beings who are later recognized as saintly. Their roles in their respective religious spheres are as divine figures. Though saints are revealed to be saintly in their lifetimes, they are still fundamentally human. Their (average) humanity is what makes them relevant to the religious communities in which their influence is felt. Saints often emphasize their humanity and therefore their unworthiness, whereas Christ does not.

There appears at this juncture in talking about the saint to be a significant departure from discussions about the artistic genius, relevant to this section and to the next criterion, rarity. That is, though there are abundant associations made between children and saintly or moral behavior, we see a great deal of emphasis not on the singular or rare instance of goodness being present in a single child, but instead in the innate potential of all human beings to possess that goodness.

Goodness is ubiquitous, in other words, in youth, and the eventual corruption or the distraction from the good life is caused by interference from the world around them.

This is not to say that all children become saintly adults. We all know that the true saint remains a rarity, how many Gandhis and Mother Therasas have there been? However, the saint is not seen to possess an inborn gift. Instead, the saint's power (enabling access to the divine) could be seen as developing over time or acquired later in life. The genius and the saint diverge in this way.

The prodigy category is less applicable to the saint. This could also be due to the fact that there exists a tendency to prize the proverbial saint-turned-sinner. In other words, the youth who chose the wrong path – of destruction or violence – and then is re-formed and becomes the paragon of moral goodness. Though the re-born individual in some ways is trying to return to the purity of his childhood, which reminds us of the prodigious theme, he still was able to live an immoral life up to a certain point, suggesting the moral gift was not apparent from birth after all.

## **Rarity**

As mentioned when discussed with the genius, the rarity criterion is in many ways assumed by this dissertation to apply to all three figures. To be exceptional is to be rare, so of course geniuses, monsters, and saints – extremes from all angles – participate in this category to one extent or another.

However, the rarity feature figures in the saint in a different way. Whereas the genius makes beauty without a concept and therefore without rules, making his exceptionality that much more rare, the moral rules that a saint follows are fundamental principles that all human beings aspire to. However, consistently following all the moral rules is rare. It is because of this challenge that saints are rare, not because the moral rules themselves are nonexistent or cannot



be subsumed under a concept. This is a distinction between the aesthetic and the moral that comes to bear on the genius and the saint figures. The aesthetic is not governed by a concept whereas the moral is.

Mother Theresa is a simple example. She attended to the dying and disregarded members of society, offering medical services and providing basic needs to them. These are not physically demanding tasks, or at least not necessarily. Treating others with kindness and forgiveness, regarding others as equals, these are golden rules that (nearly) all believe are relatively common standards for moral living. And yet, somehow upholding those standards, no matter how much consensus we have that they are the right standards to uphold, is more difficult than we imagine. It is not merely having the idea of what is morally right that distinguishes the saint, it is executing on what is morally right at every turn. It is the combination of the traits and the consistency with which one continues to exhibit them that distinguishes the saint from the rest of us. It is not the rarity or inscrutability of the rules or actions themselves, as with the genius's behavior.

### **Ability to Freshly Apply Conventions**

The third criterion is derived from the special orientation that the genius maintains with regard to rules. That is, the genius must be academically trained, while he also distinctly creates works of art that cannot be recreated according to replication of any rules. Beauty does not fall under any concept and thereby is by definition rule defying. In this unusual way, the genius is both acquainted with artistic conventions and yet creates works of art that do not follow those conventions. Kant's genius exists in a world where he masters historic conventions and also produces groundbreaking artistic rules. This section seeks to understand whether this criterion applies to the saint: does the saint exhibit this dual existence with regard to rules and

conventions? A quick judgment would place the moral saint as a goody-two-shoes, obeying all the religious or moral rules expected of her. Kant would say that the saint can be subsumed under a concept (i.e. the good). This is a clear-cut way of distinguishing between the saint and the genius, for which there is no such concept under which it can be subsumed. But the next section proves that Kant's cut-and-dry definition fails to accommodate precisely what we mean by the moral saint.

We begin by reminding ourselves what it is that makes the saint rare – it is that s/he is able to make moral decisions that are expected of all of us, but that s/he is able to do that consistently and over time. They may not seem like Herculean tasks, but it turns out that to fulfill them takes a certain type of strength that most human beings cannot summon up for themselves. But what does this strength or ability amount to? I propose that it pertains to this category involving rules.

Kant's moral prescriptions and the Bible's Ten Commandments are codes by which moral citizens or Christian followers are expected to live. Even distilled to something as simple as the golden rule, to treat others as you would like to be treated, is a challenge for most of us to uphold one-hundred percent of the time. Part of the challenge of maintaining these standards is though they are general formulations (consider Kant's four formulations of the categorical imperative), they must be applied to varying situations on a daily basis. To take political examples in the US, recognizing the equality of persons of all races took over a century. And then it took several more decades before the extension of that principle of humanity also justified striking down laws that prevented interracial marriage.

For the saint, this criterion may be understood as an ability to interpret rules. A great deal of the rules are preexisting, in which case simply following them consistently is what the saint

does. However, times change and therefore the conventions governing social behavior evolve as well. It is up to the citizens of the world in any given era to see to it that the legal or social or political conventions that are managing institutions and social behavior are effectively interpreting those human principles. And it is up to moral leaders (i.e. saints) to identify which of those need to be altered or reinvented. This is the role of the moral saint, who sometimes must create new specific conventions for pursuing a moral life. It is in this way that the moral saint is adapting to the new social ills and challenges that present themselves in their lifetimes, and it is that adaptation or application of core principles that will determine what moral action is required to right those wrongs.

In the Christian religion, the fresh application of old conventions can be seen as one of its founding principles. The figure of Jesus Christ is someone who as a Jewish follower uncovered problems with the religious tradition into which he was born. Calling out those leaders for misleading their flock, he defied those rules and instead went off to establish a new religion.

Saints of modern times interpret overarching principles – for example, treating human beings equally – for a given society. The saint is not seen as inventing principles, but instead, is applying them to specific situations. Secular moral leaders like Nelson Mandela, who led the South African people to shed their apartheid past, or US presidents like Abraham Lincoln, who ushered through legislation to promote greater racial equality, fall into this category. Mahatma Gandhi’s protests and hunger strikes combated the caste-system that institutionalized discrimination against the “untouchables.” These examples substantiate a counter-argument to the assumption that all moral saints are simply rule followers,<sup>166</sup> when in fact they are more

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<sup>166</sup> My gratitude to Noel Carroll for challenging my interpretation of saints for, as he suggests, Catholic saints, for example, are traditionally viewed as rule-followers. I plan to develop this point and hopefully to reach a point where our views find resolution if not agreement. I would

accurately described as following fundamental principles while breaking with legal, political or social rules that have emerged as conflicting with those principles.

Therefore, the saint – just like the genius – may be seen as exhibiting an orientation from which he maintains respect for a given set of principles and also sees as changeable certain contemporary interpretations of those principles that are manifest as social, legal, or political rules that the saint deems are unjust. The saint is both a follower and a rule-breaker, in a sense.

### **Commitment**

By definition, religious practice of any sort involves devotion to some concept or divine entity. According to Greek myths, sacrificing oneself for the sake of the gods was the ultimate goal. In the Greek tragedies of the Golden Age, common themes featured main characters that exhibited hubris and offended the gods, which resulted in punishment. The characters served as examples for the audience, thereby shaping moral development. The story of Icarus, whose attempt to fly to the gods' realm was shattered by the heat of the sun, melting the “glue” of his waxed-on wings and forcing him to plummet to the earth is a prime example. The commitment to the religious figure and to the religious life it required were paramount and any distraction from that goal, in this case prioritizing oneself over the gods, was punishable.

Just what this commitment entails over the years and through other religious and philosophical traditions varies slightly, but in some ways is the most unified concept in the moral realm.

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submit that the requirement that saints must perform miracles, for example, illuminates this tension: performing a miracle is breaking with the rules of nature, though it is simultaneously a requirement for the saint.

The messy work of identifying just what conventions must be overturned in order to make a moral life was just mentioned, but seeing to it that those conventions are changed is a messy process as well – often one that takes years, if not decades, if achievable in one’s own life, to see through. Nelson Mandela, who endured decades of jail for his activism against apartheid, comes to mind. Eventually he was selected by the South African people to be their leader, but it was only possible because he survived the brutal treatment and psychological trauma of incarceration.

This criterion resonates with Coleman’s fifth criterion - the idea that the saint is supposed to endure a life often without material comfort. Determined to see through their goals – namely improving the livelihood of others – moral saints are not focused on the accumulation of material goods or wealth. It is this denial or choice *not* to pursue comfort that often creates discomfort or at least living conditions that some may find objectionable if not simply undesirable. Willingly subjecting oneself to these challenges because one values moral goodness or virtue over other creature comforts is one indication of this commitment.

Many religious and secular traditions involve this type of self-denial or commitment to morally “radical” or unconventional acts that require sacrifice of one sort or another. Socrates exerted a type of moral pressure exerted in his conversation with Ion that suggested artists should not accept money for their art. The reason given was that certain things – knowledge, if that is indeed what artists can disseminate – do not have monetary value, nor should those who distribute it be motivated by any financial reward. Moral knowledge, the “wares” of the moral saint, would presumably fall into this category as well. Socrates himself can be viewed as the perfect example of the secular saint. Educating the youths of Athens by wandering the streets, he

was a civil servant abiding by the duty he feels to improve society by dedicating his life to encouraging its citizens through questioning to uncover or reveal truth, the ultimate good.

Similarly, in seeking the moral good as defined by Christian doctrine, disciples are encouraged to give up their material goods in order to do moral good. Another iteration of this sacrifice is the vow of poverty taken by Catholic religious or similar instances of the renunciation of one's material wealth in order to pursue a religious calling. Numerous parables in the Bible have been interpreted to send just this message, specifically, that material wealth distracts one from the pursuit of the moral (religious) good.

## **Conclusion**

To summarize, this chapter aimed to review the saint along the five criteria established for the genius (this dissertation's third chapter). It is now important to survey just what conclusions may be drawn from the comparison between the genius and the saint. The most significant divergence between the two pertains to the criterion of the prodigy. It is hard to pin down the correct characterization of just how much discomfort is involved with assigning saintly or holy behavior to only a select few children. Though certain exceptions exist for the divine – like the Christ child or the Dalai Lama – otherwise, there is a general tendency to hold a belief something to the effect that all people are good or could potentially become good. By “good,” one would mean something like “could become a saint or already possesses necessary components to become a saint.” Obviously holding this belief could conflict with a statistician that would offer the figures for those who in fact commit some type of evil act or demonstrate behavior that could never be called saintly. In other words, believing all are good or could be good is not to say that all are in fact good. However, it remains a point of contention that I think

simply cannot be shoehorned into the saint's definition. The prodigious roots of the genius do not resonate with the saint's origins.

However different the prodigy criterion plays out with regard to the two figures, the remaining four criteria (communication, rarity, fresh application, and commitment) figured into the conceptual outline of the saint quite well. It remains to be seen how the monster stacks up against the genius, but there is certainly a foundation for understanding why some parallels have been made between the life-changing effects of aesthetic encounters in language that is more often found in descriptions of religious feeling. The individuals responsible for the experiences – the genius for the beauty and the saint for the goodness – reflect that we conceive of these figures in a similar way and receive their contributions similarly as well.

## Chapter 5 The Monster

### Introduction

Following a discussion of moral goodness and its paragon, the moral saint, a full account of the moral monster is in order. It will not only help to reinforce the criteria that were developed from our investigation of the genius, but will also provide an opportunity to evaluate the ways in which another moral figure – the monstrous figure – compares and contrasts with the genius.

Recall that the goal of this inquiry is to uncover whether the genius – the epitome of aesthetic productivity – is more similar to the saint or to the monster. It began with a full exploration of the figure of the genius. The extreme figure of the artistic realm, the genius has long been alluded to and treated directly in literature and philosophy alike. By surveying various sources, five criteria emerged and together form a set of characteristics to define the genius: 1) communication; 2) prodigy; 3) disruption or fresh application of conventions; 4) rarity; and 5) commitment. These criteria were elucidated in the third chapter.

The five criteria do not cover the unique essence of each figure, that is, they do not pretend to replace (and thereby diminish the significance of) each figure's unique definition and disposition. Rather, the criteria call out the aspects of this figure (the genius) that could be shared with other figures. Aside from each figure's unique essence, for example, the saint's goodness, the five criteria were developed in a way that they can be applied to different conceptual figures. In other words, we are not ignoring that the saint, monster, and genius have different definitions nor are we trying to define one in terms of the other. Instead, we are looking at traits and characteristics aside from each figure's central core.

Chapter four sought to uncover whether any criteria were applicable to the saint. According to these five traits, the genius and the saint differed most significantly with regard to



the prodigious nature of the genius (which was very different or altogether lacking in the saint, depending on one's perspective), though they were found to have resonant approaches with the remaining four traits.

This brings the paper to the last figural type we will evaluate in this dissertation: the monster. Does the monster exhibit all, some, or none of these five criteria? If so, in what ways does the monster share characteristics with the genius? The section opens with a conversation with one of the film industry's most imaginative directors.

In an interview with Charlie Rose, creator of *Pan's Labyrinth* Guillermo del Toro explained how he goes about developing concepts for the monsters for his films. When asked, "What is a monster?" del Toro responds, "a monster is something above or extra, out of nature, so the fact is you can base the monster on natural forms but you have to magnify them in a way."<sup>167</sup> He goes on to highlight the power of the monster as well as the intensity and fear that it can create in the minds of the audience. In particular, he notes that the audience's reception or anticipation is enhanced by the integration of human characteristics with beast-like or fantastical ones. Creating a mythical figure with no human aspects is less monstrous, for example, than the figure that possesses human features to some exaggerated extent or when those features are combined with animal traits. Del Toro's chosen example is the Pale Man character in *Pan's Labyrinth*. With humanoid skin and stature, Del Toro's character also possesses hands into which his eyes have been inserted. To resemble a human being, he must place the palms of his hands on his face so that the backs of his hands reveal eyes where we would expect them to be.

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<sup>167</sup> *Guillermo Del Toro on Charlie Rose*, THIRTEEN WNET, November 8, 2013, Film (available online).

Del Toro's succinct introduction of the monster concept with an example from film becomes an easy entry point to the discussion of the monster because, among other reasons, it refers to several themes discussed in previous chapters of this dissertation. His understanding of the figure includes a reference to the concept of nature, which emerged for the genius and the saint, supports a related concept of excess (extra and magnification), and alludes to the physical dimension of monstrosity (i.e. hybrid being).<sup>168</sup>

Monsters in film, however, are not identical to the monsters of the world in which we live. For this reason, the concept of the monster, as it is treated by some, is disregarded as mere fantasy. In *The Myth of Evil*, Phillip Cole argues that monsters do not exist.<sup>169</sup> Mythological figures or half-human and half-animal beings may never physically roam the earth. However, the ubiquity of the word "monster" suggests that even if appearances are deceptive, meaning that even if monsters in fact look like any other human being, they may still exist. If they do, they must exhibit certain characteristics. This section seeks to identify the meaning behind the use of the term, monster, and how the conceptual figure to which it refers compares and contrasts with the genius.

Cole's non-existent monster is the ultimate villain. One image immediately comes to mind: Francisco de Goya's painting *Saturn Devouring his Son* (1820-1823; Museo Nacional del Prado) provides the perfect visual reference for this type of monster. In the picture, a human-like figure's enormous hands grip the body of another human-looking figure, which is much smaller

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<sup>168</sup> For a full discussion of horror films and their monsters, see Noel Carroll, *The Philosophy of Horror, Or, Paradoxes of the Heart* (New York: Routledge, 1990).

<sup>169</sup> Cole specifies that he wants to reject the notion of evil he describes as a "psychological" and secular view for the reason that he believes it is "a highly dangerous and inhumane discourse and we are better off without it" (Phillip Cole, *The Myth of Evil: Demonizing the Enemy* [Westport, Connecticut: Praeger], 21). Consequently, attributing this type of evil to monsters is also to be rejected, according to Cole.

in size and appears to be the larger figure's meal. The smaller figure is already headless, and its left arm is inside the larger figure's mouth; red paint appears like blood and covers the smaller figure's shoulders.<sup>170</sup>

Cole's point about monsters, especially when considered in terms of those examples found in films and paintings, is well taken. That type of monster may never have or ever will exist on earth, as we know it. However, Cole's understanding of the concept highlights precisely what we want to chart through its mythological, historical, literary, religious, and political legacy. Despite the fact that there is no known "monster" with corresponding physical features, the term "monster" contains philosophical meaning and demands clarification.

For whereas Cole argues that no monsters exist, an almost opposite view could be extracted from Hannah Arendt's *Eichmann in Jerusalem*.<sup>171</sup> When she begins an assignment to cover Adolf Eichmann's trial, Arendt assumes that she will know what a monster looks like.

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<sup>170</sup> The history of art is rife with depictions of monstrous figures. For a thorough discussion of those present in early modern art, see Elena Lezzarini, "Wonderful Creatures: Early Modern Perceptions of Deformed Bodies," *Oxford Art Journal* 34, no. 3 (2011): 415-31. "Their bodies are hypertrophic and excessive; surplus anatomical expansion is reflected in obscene and monstrous variations. Bodies, which are dismembered, deformed, and in violent poses correspond with obscene and monstrous attitudes. The viewer is not only forced to measure his/her own body against these, but also to probe the more bestial and monstrous aspects of his/her own ego. They are bodies that both signify a total loss of connection with reality while at the same time recalling it. In doing so they drag the viewer into another place where it is possible, by getting lost, to find signs of a more primitive and bestial nature, where the self is immersed in a dimension of horror mixed with pleasure, and where seemingly irreconcilable aspects of daily life find an unexpected synthesis and harmony." (Ibid)

<sup>171</sup> The term "monster" was used even by the person who sat trial: Eichmann himself was aware that others thought he was a monster, "I am not the monster I am made out to be!" in Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* (New York: Penguin Books, 2006), 248. Furthermore, Arendt clarifies that her analysis was not about the actions of the individual but about the individual itself. "'The banality of evil' describes the character and motivations of the doer (Eichmann), not his deeds – the monstrous actions he committed, and for which he was fully responsible," (Roger Berkowitz, Jeffrey Katz, and Thomas Keenan, *Thinking in Dark Times: Hannah Arendt on Ethics and Politics* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2009), 131.

However, she ultimately determines that it is not in the outrageous but in fact in the apparently everyday or ordinary that the monster can reside.

Without taking sides, Cole and Arendt's analyses equally contribute to the framework within which the forthcoming chapter evolves. There is a set of characteristics that have come to be associated with the monster. The lineage of the term underscores non-human physical attributes that seem to push the monster outside of the human realm. However terrifying the features, this analysis presents physical descriptions but views them as figurative language intended as imagery portent of non-physical characteristics and traits. That is to say that both Cole and Arendt describe and characterize the monster in illuminating language that, together with the additional sources, provide a robust account of the monster.

The following chapter consists of two major components: the first constitutes a brief survey of three major sources in which we find the figure of the monster articulated; and the second presents an investigation of the monster with regard to each of the five criteria. Upon completion of this chapter, I will be positioned to conclude whether the genius draws more closely to the saint or to the monster.

There are many iterations of the monster throughout history, whether borne out in actual examples or present in literary or philosophical sources. Many of these examples have consistent features, such as the monster being associated to some extent with evil or possessing a physically repulsive appearance. By presenting a selection of monsters, I aim to offer a range that is limited yet sufficient for a productive discussion of how those monsters either exhibit or do not exhibit the five criteria of the genius. I will ultimately conclude that the monster shares similarities with the genius in two criteria (prodigy and rarity), and differs from the genius in the other three (communication, application of conventions, and commitment).

Before launching a wide-ranging survey, I must note the reason for its importance. Sometimes, philosophical analysis often fails to see or address the variety that a historical survey offers. It can seem as if a survey merely provides additional examples of a concept that someone already had a good grasp of. With human types, however, there are often many facets to what initially seemed to be a simple concept. I use my historical survey to avoid the easy generalizations that come of starting with a concept. Though there is significant philosophical discussion about the figure of the monster, much of the existing literature has defined the monster in terms of the saint. In other words, rather than offering a positive definition, the monster is presented more or less as the opposite of that which defines the saint.

In the philosophical literature on monsters, this issue has been identified and named by Peter Barry as the “mirror thesis,”<sup>172</sup> which maintains that whatever it is that defines the saint, its mirror “opposite” is that which constitutes the monster. The simplicity of the thesis is attractive for those whose focus is the saint. For those who, like us, need a full account of the monster, proponents of the mirror thesis offer characterizations of the monster that are reductive since they rely on the assumption that the monster *mirrors* the saint either in actions<sup>173</sup> or in disposition.<sup>174</sup> Steiner defines what we can consider the monster’s behavior, i.e. evil acts, as “simply the negative counterparts of supererogatory ones.”<sup>175</sup> For Colin McGinn, the saint and monster occupy opposite hedonic dispositions. Saints experience pleasure when others do and

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<sup>172</sup> Peter Brian Barry, “Moral Saints, Moral Monsters, and the Mirror Thesis,” *American Philosophical Quarterly* 46, no. 2 (2009): 163-176. Also, see

Daniel M. Haybron, “Moral Monsters and Saints,” *The Monist* 85, no. 2 (2002): 260-84.

<sup>173</sup> See, for example, Hillel Steiner, “Calibrating Evil,” *The Monist* 85 (2002): 183-93.

<sup>174</sup> Colin McGinn, *Ethics, Evil and Fiction* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997).

<sup>175</sup> Hillel Steiner quoted in Peter Brian Barry, *Evil and Moral Psychology* (New York: Routledge, 2013), 75.

pain with them as well; monsters experience pain when another is experiencing pleasure, and pleasure when the other experiences pain.<sup>176</sup>

Several philosophers have already noted the problems with the mirror thesis. In particular, Barry's concern is that casting the monster in this way results in a "'thin' conception of moral personhood."<sup>177</sup> He asserts that most characterizations of the monster amount to calling it the "morally worst sort of person."<sup>178</sup> Since a "thin" concept of the monster would not suffice for our purposes, we undertake the following excavation of the monster with the goal of approaching the figure from different angles, offering a more complex picture of what the monster embodies.

### **Monsters in the Round – Ancient Greeks', Religious, Kant, and Political**

Displaying a sculpture for museum or gallery viewing requires thoughtful attention and often involves a complicated series of judgments. The main consideration is how to give a viewer the maximum access without risking the safety of the object itself from being knocked over or run into. Whenever possible, the best option is to allow the sculpture to be on a pedestal far away from the wall so that the viewer can see it "in the round," meaning, from all different sides: to see the back, the sides, look down upon it, or up from underneath it. Since we are trying to gain full access to the monster and all its particularities, we will call this section an attempt to see the "monster in the round."

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<sup>176</sup> Ibid, 61.

<sup>177</sup> Peter Brian Barry, "Moral Saints, Moral Monsters, and the Mirror Thesis," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 46, no. 2 (2009): 163.

<sup>178</sup> Similarly, Haybron has argued that assuming that good and evil occupy opposite ends of a spectrum (parallel to the way that the saint and monster are viewed as opposites) is also problematic. As he puts it, "... it does matter where we draw the line: for the distinction between bad and evil is not merely one of degree. It is a qualitative difference" (Daniel M. Haybron, "Moral Monsters and Saints," *The Monist* 85, no. 2 (2002): 262).

The monster falls victim to the same charge that McMahon and Coleman made about geniuses and saints respectively: that is, the term is commonly invoked,<sup>179</sup> and yet its meaning remains nebulous<sup>180</sup> if not contentious. In the case of the monster, the figure often becomes the focus of disagreement when it does appear as a topic for critical analysis.<sup>181</sup>

As an example of human exceptionalism, the monster will receive its due attention. Before a survey of its various appearances, I point to a thorough and enlightening discussion of the entity by Phillip Cole in his book *The Myth of Evil*.<sup>182</sup> A summary of Cole's overarching argument has been discussed before.<sup>183</sup> Cole's significant claim that no monsters exist in human form is not problematic for this dissertation, which focuses on the conceptual figure above all else. Rather, Cole's descriptions of the monster remain constructive for the discussion.

In Cole's presentation of different theories of evil, his descriptions provide us with the general language that has come to be associated with the figure of the monster: the monster has "crossed the border beyond humanity" and is a "distinct class, different from the rest of humanity, with a different nature,"<sup>184</sup> "those described as evil...as not really *human*, the impossibility of communication and negotiation, reform and redemption."<sup>185</sup> These definitions

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<sup>179</sup> For a discussion of the many monsters in film, see Noel Carroll, *The Philosophy of Horror, Or, The Paradoxes of the Heart* (New York: Routledge, 1990).

<sup>180</sup> Monsters are also sometimes described in vague terms that, without explication, are of little help to this analysis. For example, without further qualification, "By monster I mean some horrendous presence or apparition that explodes all of your standards for harmony, order, and ethical conduct." (Joseph Campbell. *The Power of Myth*. New York: Doubleday, 1988, p. 222).

<sup>181</sup> Luke Russell, "Evil, Monsters and Dualism," *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice* 13, no. 1 (2010): 45-58.

<sup>182</sup> Phillip Cole. *The Myth of Evil: Demonizing the Enemy* (Westport, Connecticut: Praeger, 2006).

<sup>183</sup> Luke Russell, "Evil, Monsters and Dualism," *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice* 13, no. 1 (2010): 45-58.

<sup>184</sup> *Ibid*, 13.

<sup>185</sup> *Ibid*, 236.

clearly place the figure outside the human realm. Our monster, however, retains a hybrid status. It is human, but there is part of it that remains incomprehensible, “beyond humanity,” and maybe beyond “communication” – that is, seemingly inaccessible to us according to communication norms. The one-foot-in and one-foot-out disposition is familiar, since it applied to the genius and saint as well. Because we define our monster in this way, as sharing in both the human and non-human simultaneously, Cole’s language is very useful language for us.

With this thought in mind, the treatment of the third and final conceptual figure will be divided into four subsections, each of which highlights prototypical examples of monstrous figures. The first focuses on ancient Greek plays and philosophy that suggest the tendency to associate monstrous behavior with beast-like traits to further draw a distinction between the monster and normal human behavior. An explication of the tragic figure of Medea coupled with Plato’s tyrants provide us with traits of monsters that have maintained historical significance over two millennia.<sup>186</sup> The second subsection will elucidate biblical features and parables as well as related literary texts that represent how monsters exist in one (namely, Christian) religious context. In the third, revisiting Kant’s categorical imperative will provide a key to delineate between the merely immoral and the (exceptional) moral monster. Finally, observations by philosopher Hannah Arendt provide us with a more recent example of the use of the term *monster* in a political context.

The examples from these four main sources will give shape to a set of traits associated with the monster throughout time and across cultural and religious boundaries. By elucidating this range of monsters, we will have the resources we need to evaluate whether the monster

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<sup>186</sup> Even the three-headed dog named Fluffy in J.K. Rowling’s *Harry Potter* series finds an ancestor in ancient Greece as Cerberus, the three-headed dog that guards the entrance to Hades (Hell).



fulfills or does not fulfill each of the genius' five criteria. The second part of the chapter, drawing on the first, will undertake the evaluation as to whether the newly defined monster exhibits the criteria in a similar way to the genius.

### **Ancient Greek Definitions**

Ancient Greek culture offers many resources for this analysis in its myths, plays, and philosophy. In particular, its concept of the monster exists in physical descriptions that characterize the monster as possessing animal or beast-like features in mythology, with beast-like behavior in the tragic hero Medea, who is willing to sacrifice her children for revenge, and in Plato's tyrant, the power-hungry political leader who stops at nothing to achieve his goal.

### **Greek Mythology's Hybrid Beings**

It is in ancient Greek mythology where we first encounter the monster that is nonhuman, but partly human, easily identified as such by its association with animalistic traits and behavior. We begin with one archetype, which would have informed Greek philosophy and is in any case a rich source of monstrous behavior. Hesiod's *Theogony* contains a creation story with a rich description of the Underworld and the figures that rule it. There, we find Echidna, often referred to as the Mother of all Monsters, dwelling in a dark cave. Hesiod describes her in the following way:

Then Ceto bore another invincible monster,  
in no way like mortal men or the deathless gods;  
yes, in a hollow cave she bore Echidna, divine  
and iron-hearted, half fair-cheeked and bright-eyed nymph  
and half huge and monstrous snake inside the holy earth,

a snake that strikes swiftly and feeds on living flesh.

Her lair is a cave under a hollow rock,

far from immortal gods and mortal men;

the gods decreed for her a glorious dwelling there.

(Hesiod, *Theogony*, 295-303)

Hesiod explains that Echidna is “in no way like mortal men or the deathless gods.” This claim thrusts us into interesting territory. Hesiod’s monster has a mythical status, made more “other” by Echidna’s physical appearance. She hovers somewhere between humans (mortals) and gods (immortals or poetically, “deathless”). Her status as partial- or half-human is like the genius and the saint, who also are humans and simultaneously non- or super-human. This hybrid nature is consistent to all three conceptual figures.<sup>187</sup>

Hesiod’s emphasis on Echidna’s non-human aspect is consistent with the way the term monster is used in current events as well. Displaying behavior that is non-human or inhumane typically attracts the monster label. The moral monster, though human, is one who represents something that we find so unlike ‘us’ or so inhumane that we want to distance him or her from being part of the human race. The distancing seems to be an attempt to convey that the monster does not live up to a certain human standard, performing instead as sub-human either in appearance, judgment, deed, or all of the above.

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<sup>187</sup> Tangentially related to this point, the partial-human status of the monster relates to what may make certain images particularly horrifying. Carroll writes, “Though not strictly horror images in the terms of my theory, Francis Bacon’s paintings often evoke descriptions as horrifying because they suggest virtually *formless* mounds of human flesh. See his *Lying Figure With a Hypodermic Syringe*” (Noel Carroll, *The Philosophy of Horror, Or, Paradoxes of the Heart* [New York: Routledge, 1990], 221, n. 38). Carroll states that many find Bacon’s work “horrifying” because they show something human, that is, skin, and yet in a non-human form. This hybrid appearance is another version of the one described here.

What further justifies the non-human element in Echidna is that she “feeds on living flesh.” Whether this is taken literally to mean that the figure is cannibalistic or is interpreted more generally – that the monster sacrifices human life – does not change the significance: the monster does not see the value of that human life.

In addition to highlighting that Echidna is neither fully human nor fully divine based on her actions, Hesiod furthers his point by using a physical description of the monster that (once again) defies our standard classification system. She is “half fair-cheeked and bright-eyed nymph and half huge and monstrous snake inside the holy earth.” Hesiod’s Echidna is half-human<sup>188</sup> and half-beast. This hybrid or mixed status drives home the point that a monster possesses some non-human qualities. One scholar highlights this confused combination of traits:

Generally speaking, Greek monsters are hybrid creatures that unite normally disparate elements, for example, the human and the bestial, or combine distinct species.

Frequently, too, they involve a multiplication of human or animal features or, conversely, a subtraction and isolation of features that usually occur in pairs. [...] Occasionally also, as we shall see, the monsters incorporate contradictory elements that violate fundamental categories, for instance, mortal/immortal, young/old, and male/female.<sup>189</sup>

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<sup>188</sup> And a beautiful human-half as well; for other monsters, the human part was beautiful, too, as with the example of Gorgon.

<sup>189</sup> Jenny Strauss Clay, *Hesiod’s Cosmos* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 151-2. Scholars from different fields, such as anthropologist Mary Douglas and myth scholar Joseph Campbell, have also studied cultures throughout the world and the prevalence of monsters in those cultures’ narrative stories. For example, see Douglas’s *Purity and Danger* and related discussion of it in Noel Carroll, *The Philosophy of Horror, Or, Paradoxes of the Heart* [New York: Routledge, 1999], 31. In her book, Douglas explores the notion that mixed types of beings create something akin to monstrosity.

Echidna is the epitome of a hybrid being – a beautiful woman and a serpentine creature. As Clay puts it, “she unites the anthropomorphic and the bestial.”<sup>190</sup> <sup>191</sup> Hesiod, much like other representations of monsters, relies on his physical description to suggest how revolting her behavior and actions are. A tendency shared with other contemporary depictions of monsters, physical descriptions are sometimes used as a (poor) substitute for deeper analysis. Although we must give ample attention to the physical descriptions offered, in hopes that they reveal subtle characteristics otherwise left unmentioned, the tendency to do so presents the case for why this chapter is an important contribution to the philosophical discussion of monsters. Physical descriptions are part of the monster’s legacy and the tendency to use physical attributes to suggest behavioral dispositions remains consistent throughout history. In particular, the animal-like, physical attributes of some monsters are intended to stand for beast-like, i.e. inhumane or sub-human, behavior. This persistent allusion to the beastly monster serves as a reminder that the monster inhabits some space tangential to or at a distance from the human realm; just where it resides is not clear, as it may seem at times to be super-human (trying to be like the gods – trying to challenge the gods, or use power like the gods, etc.) and at other times non- or sub-human.<sup>192</sup>

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<sup>190</sup> Jenny Strauss Clay, *Hesiod’s Cosmos* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 155.

<sup>191</sup> It is beyond the scope of this dissertation, but it bears mentioning that the description of Echidna’s physical environment, namely, that she is in a cave, could be probed for its symbolic meaning and implications for isolation. In particular, the relationship between physical isolation and the challenge of communication.

<sup>192</sup> Sub-human, as a term, applies because it is in many sources in Western literature that the Great Chain of Being placed all God’s creations on a ladder, the hierarchy of which represented how close – or how far – a certain type of human being or animal was to the divine at the top of the ladder. Descriptions for example of beast-like behavior attributed to human beings are intended (e.g. by Shakespeare and others writing at the period when this visual tool was prominent) to imply that the human being resides below the rung typically set aside for human beings.

In particular, the human that kills for one reason or another – like the animal predator that kills for food, defense, or entertainment – finds a literary representation in one of the great Greek tragedies’ character of Medea, the topic of the next subsection.

### **Ancient Greek Plays: Infanticide and Disordered Priorities**

Echidna is physically half-human and half-beast. The literary figure of Medea, physically a human (though a fictional depiction), represents the expanding concept of the monster. Medea’s behavior, not her physical appearance, is that which underscores her monstrous status.

Some of the great tragedies of ancient Greece can be read as dramatic representations of moral tales. Euripides’ *Medea* is one in which a tragic hero, who for our purposes is a moral monster, served as a warning of what could happen when a person went too far. Driven by revenge against her betraying husband, Jason, Medea devises a plan to kill their children. Human sacrifice generally is monstrous, but sacrificing one’s own family members is an even more extreme example of that sacrifice. Not only is Medea willing to kill others for her purposes, but she also devises a plan that sacrifices family members – and innocent children, at that.

Though there could be some discussion as to whether Medea’s priorities and values were merely confused – in a justifiably vengeful strategy to harm her husband, her reasoning capacity is jeopardized and she loses sight of the intrinsic value of her children – there is no doubt she embodies a monster for our purposes. Her children are merely instruments in her plan. She has, in a sense, fed on “living flesh” to elicit a specific response in her estranged husband.

However, Medea highlights an important aspect of monsters that we will discuss in the second section of this chapter, namely, how the figure is oriented within a notion of prodigious behavior. In other words, is a monster prodigious because he or she displays incapacity to correctly order one's responsibilities and desires, an immaturity with regard to prioritization and rational action, which is to be expected of children?

The monster's propensity to incorrectly organize or perversely prioritize wants and desires, which Medea demonstrates perfectly, also brings up another important point. The special world or sphere in which the monster's behavior could be understood and seen as logical is not the same world in which we live. Explicit disregard for or defiance of social/legal/moral norms is the monster's *modus operandi*.

### **Ancient Greek Philosophy's Tyrants**

From the ancient Greeks' plays to their philosophy, the monster emerges most evidently under the translated term, "tyrant." And so we turn now to the tyrants of Plato's dialogues that continue the monstrous traits we saw in Medea.

Plato's *Republic* offers useful language for our discussion of monsters. Particularly, it is in the discussions of tyrants that we see figures similar to the monsters. In the Myth of Er, the tyrants are described: "some of them had caused many deaths by betraying cities or armies and reducing them to slavery or by participating in other wrongdoing," for which they were penalized and "had to suffer ten times the pain they had caused to each individual" (*Republic* Book X 615b4).<sup>193</sup> The tyrants whose evil exceeded all others are "incurably wicked" (*Republic*,

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<sup>193</sup> (Plato, *Complete Works*, ed. John Cooper [Indianapolis, Indiana: Hackett Publishing, 1997], 1218.) The tyrant's punishment is reminiscent of the punishment of the debtor in Bible's Book of

Book X, 615e2)<sup>194</sup> and “savage men” (615e4).<sup>195</sup> In the discussion, one is reminded to choose “rationally” and live “seriously” (619b4-5),<sup>196</sup> though not everyone follows that advice: “...the one who came up first chose the greatest tyranny. In his folly and greed he chose it without adequate examination and didn’t notice that, among other evils, he was fated to eat his own children as a part of it” (619b6-9).<sup>197</sup> The man chose a tyrant’s life and subsequently realized he would have to kill his own children. Like Medea, the monstrous tyrant chooses a practice that defies both natural order (if all people killed others that would be the end of the world as we know it) and also human or moral rules.

That said, the tyrannical leader can sometimes command the attention and obedience of great numbers. Oftentimes, these leaders do so with the use of manipulation and fear. Without distracting from the main focus of this chapter, the monster - whether tyrant or guilty of infanticide - sacrifices human life for its ends. In his determination to achieve a particular end, the tyrant may mobilize troops that in turn inflict harm on anyone who stands in the way. Tyrants of this sort commit wrongdoing and sometimes on a massive scale. Though the killing may not be according to any particularly horrific method, the quantity of deaths marks the tyrant as a monster. Though the monstrous variety includes persons labeled as such for the sheer quantity of deaths they caused, as in the examples of ruthless dictators, that is not the exclusive use. Individuals can also be considered monsters “wicked” and “savage” in cases the single (or multiple) deaths or torture caused. The individual creates such a strong feeling of disgust – is so

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Matthew, Chapter 18. The debtor is charged with 10,000 talents (equivalent to decades of an individual’s annual salary at the time) for his wrongdoing.

<sup>194</sup> Ibid, 1219.

<sup>195</sup> Ibid.

<sup>196</sup> Ibid, 1221.

<sup>197</sup> Ibid.

inhumane, so unfathomable – that the individual’s humanity is almost beyond belief. The monster label captures the extreme violation of human norms – the excess or imbalance caused by the lack of social reasoning or judgment. For it matters not whether we want to discuss a dictator whose plans for taking over the world led to the death and destruction of millions of human lives (mere pawns of military strategy) or a particularly disgusting serial killer who murders ten people by gruesome means – both examples are monsters. It is the willing elimination of human life (or lives) in pursuit of something else – anything else – that distinguishes true monsters from the rest of us. They are willing to convert human lives into disposable commodities. The analysis now returns to Plato’s examples.

Plato gives us more specific descriptions of the tyrant in Book IX of the *Republic*:

I mean those which are awake when the reasoning and human and ruling power is asleep; then the wild beast within us, gorged with meat or drink, starts up and having shaken off sleep, goes forth to satisfy his desires; and there is no conceivable folly or crime --not excepting incest or any other unnatural union, or parricide, or the eating of forbidden food --which at such a time, when he has parted company with all shame and sense, a man may not be ready to commit. (Plato, *Republic*, Book IX, 571c3-d3)<sup>198</sup>

In just a few lines of text, Plato highlights several important points, including the individual’s rationality, allusion to beasts, connection to nature, and selfishness, which we can elucidate below.

First, Plato begins with a reminder that tyrants’ abilities to reason and rule their people are compromised. Instead, they operate irrationally and, it seems, without the proper orientation to one’s responsibilities. He does not specify whether the irrational behavior is the result of a

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<sup>198</sup> Ibid, 1180.



disturbed or deranged rationality or whether it is merely underdeveloped or immature, as in the case of a child or young adult. Either way, we are reminded of the monsters that we have already described, who devise a plan or strategy with a skewed sense of how to prioritize among their obligations and how to evaluate their actions' moral worth. Without an ability to reason, there is a high likelihood that the individual will make decisions that are bad or wrong. When human lives are involved, that improper judgment or immoral action gives cause to assign the monster label.<sup>199</sup>

Plato also employs a visual metaphor that we have seen throughout the examples we have already discussed. Namely, the “wild beast” that rages in the tyrant. Once again, the association between human and beast that gives rise to the monster label is restated. Even if it is not specifically defined, alleging a connection between a human being and a beast signifies something is amiss, something is wrong about this human being that displays beast-like behavior.

Hidden within that descriptive phrase is also a word whose meaning incites additional mention. The word “wild,” for Plato implies out of control, animal-like, not human-like, and is intended pejoratively. An example of what Plato means appears in the *Sophist*, in which the analogy between a wolf and a dog is instructive. There is something similar physically between the two animals and yet: “between a wolf and a dog, the wildest thing there is and the gentlest” (*Soph.* 231a5-6).<sup>200</sup> When something is “wild,” as in an animal that is raised in the wild and cannot be domesticated, the term implies something is of the natural world, but the natural world

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<sup>199</sup> This point is related to a similar one made by Hannah Arendt in her charge that one simple issue of not thinking allowed evil to become banal and, in a related inference, monsters to lurk in the commonplace.

<sup>200</sup> Plato, *Complete Works*, ed. John Cooper (Indianapolis, Indiana: Hackett Publishing, 1997), 251.

that is not understood or appreciated by the human world. This is the natural world that produces fierce, deadly storms, or the “freak of nature” accidents that take innocent lives. Further, the “wild” descriptor in the human world implies behavior that is not confined by norms and mores. The person’s actions do not reveal a person that is admirable for merely being unusual (e.g. thinking outside the box), but is judged for not being aware of certain rules of human behavior (e.g. respecting another person). “Wild” in this instance only further proves the monster’s behavior is in a sense out of the human realm and contains negative implications.

In other sources, this Platonic concept appears as the deceptive nature of appearance. For example, see the Bible’s Book of Matthew, Chapter 7, verse 15 about the danger of false prophets; the “wolf in sheep’s clothing. This duplicitous nature, which characterizes the monster, is to be avoided.

As with the genius and the saint, the monster’s disposition is complicated with nature; they operate within and without nature.<sup>201</sup> They are human and non-human; they defy natural order by their plans, which require human sacrifice. This dissertation posits that the monstrous traits, as they are understood in modern times, do reside in human beings. In this way, the monstrous is naturally occurring and yet, by definition, an exception to human nature as it is understood. We call out those individuals or their behaviors as monstrous when they violate our sense of natural order.

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<sup>201</sup> On this point, Saint Augustine’s theory is seen to offer one instance in which the concept of the monster and its disposition with regard to being natural and yet defying what seems to most like God’s natural laws may be considered part of the monster’s definition. For example, see discussion of the monster’s origins in a translation of Grigor Reisch’s *Philosophical Pearl* (trans. Andrew Cunningham and Sachiko Kusukawa), *Natural Philosophy Epitomised, Books 8-11 of Gregor Reisch’s Philosophical Pearl (1503)* (Farnham, Surrey, England: Ashgate, 2010), 47-8.

In light of the meaning of nature, the question about whether monsters are natural or are they made recurs, since it was a question also considered of the genius. Its relevance emerged early on when we uncovered the way that an artistic gift particularly that found in the genius is seen as an innate trait. Both Plato and Kant agree on this point, even if they differ in other ways. If the gift is innate, meaning that the individual is born with it, there is a keen sense in which the genius is intimately connected with nature. The trait was not acquired by training or education, but instead was pre-existent.

As Plato reminds us, the monster commits the worst of all crimes – “there is no conceivable folly or crime” that this person would consider out of the realm of possibility. One of Plato’s tyrants may have not been all rotten, so to speak, but in unthinkingly selecting the tyrant’s life, being monstrous – eating his own children – was one of the consequences. In this way, the monster’s series of decisions may initially begin as seemingly subtle aberrations from normal behavior, namely, making an imprudent decision. Other traits Plato points out, such as lacking “sense or shame” or operating selfishly, create room for the individual to make major and minor errors in his or her interactions with other human beings. The consequence of a series of decisions like this one, however, can be disastrous and result in the monster in its most egregious form.

Greek monsters are natural and simultaneously unnatural. Their monstrosity, it seems, is innate and yet it is furthered by certain decisions an individual makes for any number of reasons. Ancient Greek myths, plays, and philosophy have not been the only examples from which to trace the conceptual development of the monster in the Western world. The Bible has also contributed, though in different ways, so it should be addressed as well. Collectively, the ancient

Greeks and Christian religious doctrine comprise a significant part of the conceptual background of the monster in Western thought.

### **Biblical Examples: The Monster of Many Appearances**

Over the past couple thousands of years, the Bible has constituted another context where moral discussions have helped shape our understanding of monsters. What is interesting to note is that while the Bible certainly contains monsters,<sup>202</sup> it is more often seen as a source for parables in which immoral actions tells us what human behavior would be considered monstrous. For our purposes, we will focus on a few specific areas from which our discussion can benefit. In particular, the Bible provides more defined terms of the rules expected of human beings (specifically, Christian) and the ways an individual can violate those rules (namely, sin and its various types). In addition, the Bible provides narrative accounts that suggest readers use interpretive skills to identify moral choices.

The Bible's parables, its central monster, Satan, and literary representations of it also shed some light on the concept. The parables lay out a moral educational program in the form of contextual application of biblical codes or rules. Moral teaching can be extracted from simple stories, similar to the way in which the Greek tragic plays reinforced civic and moral duties. The biblical parable functions as an exercise to develop a deeper understanding of how to live according to the Christian moral code. By abiding by these rules – either explicit or implied – one can be moral. By violating them, one is immoral.

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<sup>202</sup> Mary Douglas, in her analysis of the creatures of Leviticus, claims that what we are considering the monstrous is implied in the beings that represent mixed types of beings, similar to the hybrid monsters we discussed in the context of ancient Greek texts. See, for example, Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger* (New York: Praeger, 1966).

One primary way to identify “monsters” in a moral sense is to look out for extreme ratios or proportions, for example, the unmerciful servant in chapter eighteen of the Gospel Matthew (18:23-35). A master forgives one of his servants an enormous amount of debt. When the debt-free servant has the opportunity to demonstrate the same type of mercy to those who owe him money (and by comparison, much less money), he does not follow that example. Instead, he threatens debtors to repay him or face violent consequences. In direct violation of God’s advice to be merciful and forgive others many times over and in contrast to the very example of the servant’s own master, the servant becomes the warning or counterexample to the readers or audience of this parable. Though not the traditional monster, this servant emerges as one way that the Bible highlights those who make immoral choices. The servant received compassion from his master, yet did not learn to show the same; though he himself was treated compassionately, the servant converted that into violence against others. This example demonstrates that one biblical approach is to highlight the extremity of the proportion or ratio (in this case, what the debtor owed and was relieved of, compared to what others owed him), which serves as a visual analogy for the monstrosity of the behavior.

In less subtle ways, if the Bible were seen as containing a single monstrous figure, it would be the devil. Introducing the devil here is important because it is a figure that exists both in physical forms and also in nonphysical ways as well, meaning it is often alluded to or is embodied by other characters. The devil can essentially take on different forms and enter into a human being in the form of temptation and bad thoughts.

In the Book of Genesis, the devil takes the form of a serpent, similar to Echidna. Though this serpent is not flesh-eating, by instigating the Fall of Man he effectively altered the disposition of humanity for eternity. The characterization of the serpent in Genesis brings to the

discussion a somewhat subtler form of the monster, thereby expanding our understanding of what the monster is or could be.

Since the devil can be seen as a presence or a force of influence, capable of manifesting itself in different entities, the concept of the monster possesses a non-physical or spiritual dimension. Examples of this transformation are suggested in the parables in which certain characters are tempted, i.e. by the devil (but without any serpents as in Genesis), to engage in immoral behavior. It is also frequently referred to in biblical interpretations offered in the form of warnings against certain behavior.

If the devil, the Bible's monster, can tempt and enter (by taking over control of) human beings, the monster exists not only as a physical entity, but also can be understood as a force within human beings that can motivate certain behavior. This shift is significant for several reasons. First, that it clarifies human beings can in fact be monsters since the devil can be present in them, meaning that a monster is not always revealed by one's appearance. Second, it reminds us that a monster's behavior cannot always be merely reduced to certain actions. Though the Commandments and other standards set in the Bible outline the actions that are sinful, the non-physical devil as source of evil behavior points out that there is perhaps something lost when only focused on the actions themselves. It serves as a reminder that several Commandments allude to intentions and feelings, but do not specify actions. A human being can be filled with certain feelings, intentions, temptations, and thoughts that lead to certain actions. In biblical terms, the devil overtakes the person's mental persuasions, which then motivate behavior.<sup>203</sup>

We are learning in this chapter that understanding the monster in the round has to do not only

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<sup>203</sup> This concept is reminiscent of the way that the other conceptual figures were seen as vessels filled up with that which made their actions or products what they were. In this biblical sense, the figure of the monster may also be "filled" – in this case, with Satan.

with a thorough understanding of how he is described in physical terms, but how the monster behaves and what internal – psychological activities – are going on as well.

This point is instructive since it allows for discussion about the uncertainty or unreliability of actions in determining a person’s moral character. Knowing what constitutes a monster is not a simple task and is not always a question with a black or white answer. Though to commit murder, at first blush, seems an obvious sin, there are deliberate or in legal terms “pre-meditated” murders and there are accidental deaths. To classify what is sinful or further, what is monstrous, it seems, has evolved from something evident by a certain action to that which may involve something that is not on the surface, not obvious, not as simple as looking at the being or simply identifying the action. It instead requires analysis and understanding of the individual, including mental evaluation. Several of the criteria, including the prodigy and commitment criteria, are directly related to this point about the monster.

A literary example drawn from biblical tradition is John Milton’s *Paradise Lost* – essentially an application of the Bible’s moral code. The volume presents a complex series of relationships between God, Satan, Adam, Eve, and other prominent biblical figures. As in the Bible, *Paradise Lost* has the figure of Satan presenting as a serpent. Again, the monstrous Devil is taking on the physical form of a beast. In this way, the monster is both existing in physical form but also has transformed – has become something of a mental power exerted over Adam and Eve such that they will be tempted to break God’s law. It is not the serpent that sins, it is the human beings that are overtaken by the power of the serpent’s question. In addition, for the questions we are considering about the monster’s development and influence over time, Satan and his accomplices, including Beelzebub, are relevant. In many ways, Milton’s Satan plays into the “mirror thesis” by maintaining an opposing position to God. There is an analogistic connection

between God and Satan: just as God reigns in heaven, Satan reigns in hell. Just as God aims at the creation and sustenance of the “good,” Milton’s tale professes that Satan aims at evil. At one point, Beelzebub makes the following assertion: “Evil be thou my good.”<sup>204</sup>

Such a claim sounds like the mirror thesis Barry dismisses. God aims at good and the Devil aims at evil. Milton’s character is cast as the opposite of God – his orientation is toward the opposite end of the good-evil spectrum. But when we consider that this paper wants to discuss not only literary characters but also real life individuals, we must take this assertion and apply it to the real world context. Is a human being – are these real, live “monsters” that we speak of – capable of aiming at evil? Perhaps an immediate reaction would consent to that view: the serial killer? Hitler? Yet, upon reflection, this claim is harder to accept. In a similar vein to Barry’s warning about the mirror thesis, defining the monster by identifying that it aims at evil, even if it is true, is to reduce the figure in ways that eliminate if not discourage the type of criteria we are trying to evaluate.

The larger point here, however, about orienting oneself toward that which will serve as motivation (or inspiration), resonates within the monster category and with the other figural types as well. Medea’s actions are monstrous because they reflect her inability to correctly prioritize her moral duties: in an effort to remove herself from what must be a difficult situation, living with her husband’s stinging betrayal, she is willing to sacrifice her children. Such a misguided course of action makes sense only in a world order that would seem reasonable to

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<sup>204</sup> John Milton, *Paradise Lost: A Poem in Twelve Books*, Book IV, 110. Originally published in 1667.



someone who lacks reason (as Plato's tyrant) and follows a different set of codes than our own. For these reasons, we find these figures are monstrous.<sup>205</sup>

### **Kant and a Proposed Perverse Counter-Imperative**

The thorough use of Kant in the development of the concept of the artistic genius in Chapter Two comes to bear in unpredictable ways for this treatment of the monster.

Kant does not explicitly describe the monster,<sup>206</sup> but offers more of what behavior would signal one doing evil. In this way, Kant may not fall prey to Barry's charges of simply offering the mirror thesis. To be the monster in Kant's terms involves something other than descriptions of possessing animal features. Kant suggests a detailed account of personhood, and Barry specifically states the fault of the mirror thesis is that it does not offer a full account of evil personhood, which would have to include what vices are to be expected of the evil person and how personhood relates to actions.<sup>207</sup> Whereas Kant's project is obviously not to describe evil personhood, his careful articulation of morality and moral living provides a rich background

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<sup>205</sup> In Hannah Arendt's language that describes Eichmann as nonthinking, we can consider Medea's monstrous character as not thinking as well. This lack of thinking allows Medea to behave in the way that she does. Furthermore, her willingness not only to act vengefully but to risk life, and specifically her children's lives, to attain that goal mark her as the monster. In the discussion of the monster's commitment trait, an inversion of Kant's categorical imperative will provide some guidance.

<sup>206</sup> Kant does make use of the term, "monstrous," in one notable instance in the *Critique of Judgment* though since it is not about a human being, we will not focus on it other than to mention it here: "An object is *monstrous* if by its magnitude it nullifies the purpose that constitutes its concept" (Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, ed. Werner S. Pluhar [Indianapolis, Indiana: Hackett Classics, 1987], 109 [§26, 253])

<sup>207</sup> Peter Brian Barry, "Moral Saints, Moral Monsters, and the Mirror Thesis." *American Philosophical Quarterly* 46, no. 2 (2009): 173.

from which to understand where evil falls and how evil behavior can be described with greater detail.<sup>208</sup>

In particular, Kant's categorical imperative is a useful roadmap in this regard. The categorical imperative exists in several formulations.<sup>209</sup> Its goal is to enable moral citizens to deontologically reflect on the action they are considering. In general terms, Kant's categorical imperative helps to drive home the point that human beings must be treated in a way that respects them as ends in themselves, not as means to some other end. Medea represents a violation of this imperative: she failed to treat her children as human beings with intrinsic value and instead saw them as instrumental to exact revenge on her husband.

When re-examined, the categorical imperative can be transformed into a tool to help us more easily identify monsters. If moral behavior is to treat other human beings as ends in themselves and to act in a way that everyone else should act, then the immoral monster is that figure who: 1) does not consider that his actions will be done by others (not universal) and 2) treats other human beings as means to his ends – as disposable – as instruments.

Reviewing the inverse application of the categorical imperative's formulations highlights how Medea has transgressed in the worst of ways. By killing her own children, Medea turns her children into the tools she needs to exact her revenge. Her end goal is to hurt Jason, to punish him for hurting her. Her means to this end are her innocent children. Kant's categorical imperative makes this cut and dry – Medea has violated moral law. Given the severity of her

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<sup>208</sup> On this topic, see Sharon Anderson-Gold and Pablo Muchnik, *Kant's Anatomy of Evil* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

<sup>209</sup> For example, "Act only according to that maxim by which you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law;" "Act as though the maxim of your action were by your will to become a universal law of nature;" "Act so that you treat humanity, whether in your own person or in that of another, always as an end and never as a means only."

action, that she not only used her children but also killed them, it seems as if she has demonstrated sufficient grounds to qualify as a monster. Had she chosen to use them in other ways – say she had prevented Jason from being able to visit the children either by having them carefully guarded or by absconding them to some remote location – this may be some less extreme measure, making her immoral but perhaps less obviously monstrous.

Kant's relevance here is not in the conventional sense. In fact, applying the categorical imperative could make us all immoral citizens. Yet, I would argue that the construct gives us a way to think of the monster as never before. A monster operates with an inverted categorical imperative. The monster manipulates the categorical imperative to create what could be considered a perverse counter-imperative. Rather than considering all other human beings are going to act in this way he deems "right," the monster must operate with the assumption that not one other person will act in this way; only he can. Medea falls directly into this category. Her successful implementation of the perverse counter-imperative assumes that everyone else operates differently than she does.<sup>210</sup> For this and other reasons, it may be helpful to remind ourselves that we set out on this dissertation making explicit that somehow these human types – the genius, the saint, and the moral monster – are somehow *not* human. Given Kant's parameters on the moral universe as prescribed by moral expectations and obligations, finding that the monster so clearly violates this order should not be surprising. Medea is in the human world and yet removed from it at the same time.

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<sup>210</sup> I see this point as addressing whether different extremely immoral actors are considered monsters. This perverse counter-imperative further clarifies the two (among many) types of monsters: the monster who kills on a massive scale but seems otherwise like an ordinary human being (i.e. has normal eating habits) as well as the citizen that kills maybe only one or two people but in a particularly gruesome way both count as monsters.

When an individual exempts oneself from the moral law by committing evil (whether egregious or less egregious in our opinions, the person is operating with skewed priorities), he is simultaneously removing himself from the type of equality of and participation in the human community that Kant's moral system suggests. The individual is demonstrating that he is in fact *not* part of that community and therefore the rules (morality) intended to apply to all human beings for some reason do not apply to him.<sup>211</sup>

Furthermore, to find the extreme evil case, we can return to what we previously discussed, that is, not only using another human being as means to my end by motivating action that is more self-interested, but by sacrificing a human being for that end. This seems like a simple way to extend the Kantian system to outline what is this most inhumane of actions.

### **Arendt: Deceptive Appearances and Sharing the Earth**

The descriptions from Greek, biblical and Kantian texts find a perfect example in the observations of political theorist, Hannah Arendt.<sup>212</sup> Arendt's language in *Eichmann in*

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<sup>211</sup> I am grateful to Peter Simpson for his suggestion of the relevance of R.M. Hare to this point about Kant. Hare's concept of "moral holiday" resonates to a certain degree with the perverse/inverse application of the categorical imperative. The monster is taking a temporary holiday from the (moral, social, etc.) rules that govern others. It is not a permanent holiday since if no adherence or assimilation to social order would call into question whether the individual was sane and therefore culpable or responsible for the evildoing. Additionally, Hare's notion of fanaticism is not quite what the monster is up to: the monster does not follow the rules prescribed for everyone else. Instead, he lacks the consistency or logic of the fanatic. Our monster maintains some understanding of mores and rules, which must be in place for him to exact his crime, and also from which he considers himself an exception. For additional discussion of Hare on fanaticism, see Jan Narveson, "Liberalism, Utilitarianism, and Fanaticism: R.M. Hare Defended," *Ethics* 88, no. 3 (1978): 250-259. For exposition of the concept of 'moral holiday,' see R.M. Hare, "Moral Conflicts," *The Tanner Lectures on Human Values*, October 5, 1978.

<sup>212</sup> A great deal of controversy surrounded some of Hannah Arendt's observations of the trial of Adolf Eichmann. Space does not allow nor do I think that the dissertation requires a full explication, but I wanted to acknowledge this fact. For a thorough discussion of that controversy,

*Jerusalem* could be interpreted as an application of the views expounded in earlier sources, and Eichmann could be the embodiment of a conceptual monster we need.

When she reported on Eichmann's trial, Arendt's expectations were disrupted on several levels. She was confronted with an average man. Already, the ancient Greek descriptions are useful since from them we learned that we could not judge by appearances. The half-human status, which can sometimes even be beautiful, tells us that we can think that we know what we are dealing with, when in fact, we can be fooled by appearances. Arendt was shocked by the normalcy of his appearance.<sup>213</sup>

She expected someone lacking in some way yet, what she found was "not a vacuous, empty vessel,"<sup>214</sup> but one filled. As with the biblical descriptions, whereby Satan – paradigmatic monster – can fill and take over the mind, Eichmann's disposition is reminiscent of this idea. Arendt's major claim of Eichmann – that he was not thinking – recalls the Platonic view that tyrants or monsters are not rational. Arendt goes further, seeing Eichmann as a "new type of criminal"<sup>215</sup> since he followed nonhuman laws. This monster, therefore, possesses originality, a characteristic that emerged in our discussions of the genius. Furthermore, following inhuman laws reminds us of the genius that creates according to a new process, not outlined in preexisting rules. The genius's beautiful creations defy existing concepts. The new type of criminal,

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see Amos Elan's introduction in the following volume: Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* (New York: Penguin, 2006), vii-xxiii.

<sup>213</sup> This could be another sense in which the image of the wolf in sheep's clothing is applicable.

<sup>214</sup> Roger Berkowitz, "The Power of Non-Reconciliation – Arendt's Judgment of Adolf Eichmann," *Startseite*, 6, no. 1 (2011), n.p. Berkowitz describes Arendt's motivation in this way: "She suspected she would find Eichmann to be vacuous, an empty vessel, a 'déclassé son of a solid middle-class family,' uprooted and lonely, looking for meaning by joining a movement, whether the Freemasons or the Nazis." (Ibid.)

<sup>215</sup> Ibid.

Eichmann as monster, defies even previous concepts of immoral behavior. “Great crime offends nature”<sup>216</sup> – these monsters in this way are inherently natural and yet unnatural.

Judgment of the monster’s behavior does recall the universal assent of Kant’s aesthetic judgment of the genius’s beautiful works of art. Arendt’s claim boils down to the idea that everyone would agree on this matter; that nobody should have to share the earth with the person. Arendt gives language to the idea that we reject the world/rules/behavior that a monster’s approach endorses.

With these various positions and body of characters from which to draw, it is now important to turn to the task at hand, which is to evaluate in what ways we see the conceptual figure of the monster, defined in various ways as we have presented, may or may not participate in the five criteria that emerged from the definition of the genius.

### **The Monster in Light of the Five Criteria**

Now having traced the monster’s ancestry, so to speak, it is time to get down to the business of sorting through these traits and figuring out how the monster compares to the genius. We will take the same route we did with the other figures, by walking through the five main criteria and evaluating whether or not the monster exhibits them.

### **Communication**

The communication criterion for the genius and the saint derived from their disposition that hovered on the edge of humanity, giving them insight into the divine or universal realm.

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<sup>216</sup> Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* (New York: Penguin, 2006), 227.

The monster, too, shares this hybrid status. And the world or realm that their actions come from is something *other* than the human world in which we live.

The monster operates in a way that requires human sacrifice to achieve his ends. Therefore, the monster does not practice transparent communication that we described for the genius and the saint. The monster operates in a way that promotes a new world order, which requires victims in order for it to be realized. Therefore, the victims do not experience the same feeling that the monster feels; rather, the victims feel something else (sometimes, extreme pain or perish in death). When the monster experiences pleasure or joy or satisfaction at certain intervals approaching the overarching goal, the intermediary goals involve the sacrifice of human lives. Those individuals were certainly not experiencing pleasure, joy, or anything else remotely connected. In this way, the monster does not communicate with the victims who suffer because of his actions or proverbial success. This is not the transparent communication we saw with the saint and the genius.

Therefore, the monster's actions and communications conjure up a world that the human world wants to reject. We in the human realm do not want to reconcile our existence with the one that he envisions.

The opaque or blocked communication relates back to Kant's view of aesthetic judgment: we encounter beauty and we want to share this view with others, including the creator of it. We want to receive communication from the genius that points to an elevated state. We want this – the genius's perspective – to be transparent; we want to feel that feeling of universality and connect with the genius, who is the human that has exceeded our expectations for human possibility. The genius represents a greater or magnified sense of human capacity.

With the monster and his actions, we encounter actions we want to reject and a figure we also want to push away from ourselves. We do not want to be brought along with the view of the world that the monster espouses. We think others should agree with us about this identification as well. Reminiscent of Kant's aesthetic judgment, our judgment of the monster's actions force us to reflect on the human community as well. We demand that others agree with our view that the monster's world should be rejected. It is on this basis that we label the monster as such. There is a sense that universal assent has again been applied. And in recognizing that we assume others will uphold a similar perspective to our own, we are simultaneously asserting that the monster is not included in that same perspective.

Bradfield succinctly interpreted the aesthetic judgment of beautiful objects for its connections to communication. By inverting the relationship implied by such judgment (just as the categorical imperative was flipped) to think about the monster, the communication criterion for the monster figure differs significantly as well. First, encountering a monster does not increase what we think that we are capable of. Though we may also assume universality – that all other human judges will agree with us – the underlying assumption of agreement is based not upon something positive and desirable (namely, that we aspire to share the perspective with others and also look to enjoin ourselves to the genius creator or saintly agent). Rather, it is more like universal dissent; we want others to agree with us that the monstrous agent is markedly different from us and does not represent an example that we want to embrace (or emulate). Whereas communicative exchanges with others on basis of beautiful objects or supremely moral actions inclines us to want to include the geniuses and saints in our world, whatever communicative sharing goes on when we align with others on that which we see as monstrous is coupled with a block that we want to put up; we do not want to bring the monsters into our



world, we want them and their actions to be on the other side of some boundary. Even though we consciously know that they are human, we want them to be non-human, to occupy a realm pushed as far away from us as possible.

The monster communicates about and encourages fostering communication over barriers that we are reluctant to cross. Unlike the saint and the genius whose expanded viewpoints encourage us to want to connect with others and also to emulate the creators of that viewpoint (which was itself giving us access to a non-human realm), the monster advocates a viewpoint that we are disgusted by and want to push farther away from us. This distinguishes the monster's communications from those offered by the genius and the saint.

We also specified that the genius's communication is transparent: the genius experiences a feeling that he successfully conveys by creating a work of art, which in a sense is transferred to the audience (viewer, reader, etc.) allowing the audience to experience that same feeling. By contrast, the monster is not communicating transparently. The monster experiences some sense of pleasure by exacting pain on others. In this way, the monster's pleasure is antithetical to the destructive and horrific experience of his victim. Since the monster and his victim do not experience the same feelings, this relationship is not similar to the genius and the saint who experience the same thing as those on the receiving end of their communicative efforts.<sup>217</sup>

## **Prodigy**

The prodigious category for the monster does not focus exclusively on the question of whether or not there are prodigious monsters in the sense that there are five-year-olds who are

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<sup>217</sup> Monsters can attract a following and can, at times, be considered charismatic. A thorough treatment of this type of issue cannot be undertaken here. However, in light of this analysis, it seems plausible that monsters can still be considered effective communicators, however opaque and manipulative that communication may be.

capable of evil. Instead, we want to explore the ways in which what is considered prodigious – immaturity or irrationality as often displayed by children – is also found in the monstrous.

Many traits or behaviors commonly associated with being a child (therefore, childish behaviors) – something that an individual will outgrow – emerge in the characterizations of monsters. For example, a child for some indeterminate length of time lives in a state where he must exclusively look after his own personal needs, making demands of his parents and the world around him since he requires that support in order to survive. This selfishness is primary among monsters whose pursuit of a singular goal prioritizes it above all else (including human lives).

In addition, being a child is specifically to be an individual who is not fully developed physically, mentally, or emotionally. This undeveloped or underdeveloped state means that the individual is not capable of adult, rational thinking. Acting upon this underdeveloped type of rationality, especially in adulthood, leads to thoughts and actions that are seen as immoral or wrong by those judging from the perspective of having fully developed rationality. Monsters are also characterized in just this way; their actions seem irrational and unfathomable to others.

This irrationality or immaturity also leads to a tendency to be incapable of evaluating (in a way others would) among competing interests, or an inability to prioritize. In Medea's case, this would be her recognizing that revenge against her husband by harming her children places her desire for vindication above the welfare of her children. By placing greater value on getting back at Jason, she violates what could be considered a more appropriate hierarchy. The value of a child's life is an altogether different category from the interests one has in getting back at someone.

Furthermore, what is even more distinctive of the prodigy is the unusual combination of precocity (at a young age) with advancement (surpassing adults). This type of prodigious monster, then, would display an unusual combination of the irrational, illogical, or poorly developed sense of logic and rationality, with a very calculated, planned strategy; the coexisting traits of being immature and advanced. The prodigy category is the excessive development of one characteristic (intelligence, or mathematical reasoning) and relatively lackluster performance in another (or many others, e.g. young age). The monster is typical of this other form of a hybrid state. The monster must exhibit an excessive quality – just as a prodigy does – and this imbalance causes the justification of the label.

Another feature of how we think of a prodigy is that a particular skill or set of skills was never taught but was instead somehow natural or innate. Recalling the artistic genius, whose prodigious nature was indicated by the unexplained excelling artistic gift appearing at a young age, in Kant's terms, this "unstudied" genius is like the child who surpasses his teachers or parents. Without instruction, something natural or innate propels him that was not taught by someone else. This is what we see with monsters as well.<sup>218</sup> Alfred Hitchcock captures an application of this idea in a quote from a film. In *The Rope*, a teacher provides to his students a complete description of how to commit a murder. To the teacher's horror, a couple of his students follow the plan and commit it, which in turn shocks the teacher. He says to his students: "There must have been something deep inside of you from the very start that let you do this thing. But there's always been something deep inside me that would never let me do it." The

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<sup>218</sup> Recall Plato's views on the "wild," that is, how wolves are not trained, regulated or domesticated the way that dogs are. This is not exactly what Kant meant by his genius being "untrained," but the ideas are linked since the monster, too, is unrestrained and cannot simply learn from someone else. Some trait or traits that are naturally occurring in the monster account for that monstrosity.

teacher, played by Jimmy Stewart, described in detail how to carry out a murder, but never thought his students would follow the instructions. Just as Kant advised that one could not teach genius, one cannot teach a monster: there is something innate in the individual that precedes any instruction.

Two categories may converge here in that the monster is rare in one sense because he is prodigious. Distinguished by sharing a mismatched sense of rationality/logic (immaturity) and a calculating sense to cause harm (evil) there are simply not a lot of figures like this or human race would not go on. It is this unusual combination that brings us back to Plato's artist and Kant's genius. The artistic genius cannot be copied. If she is, that means she loses her title. The monster, similarly, loses some degree of extremity when his actions are copying someone else's.<sup>219</sup> We view monsters as possessing a degree of originality. Our justice systems even encourage this: once one particularly heinous crime is executed, we put in place restrictions that prevent it from being repeated. In essence, we ask our criminals to devise a more clever method in order to commit their crimes – to be rare.

## **Rarity**

As mentioned before, rarity is a trait at the core of any figure deemed to be an example of human exceptionalism. To be an extreme figure either in the moral or aesthetic sphere is to be rare. The monster is an example of rarity in that it is a human being who pursues non-social goals.

Similarly to our geniuses, monsters must be original. In order to defy all normal human behavior – to do evil for the sake of evil or to sacrifice human lives for some other end – this

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<sup>219</sup> In news accounts of horrific acts, those which are seen as “copycat” acts are those who have copied someone else's crime.

being must also be non-, sub- or un-human. To be human and yet do that which is considered specifically not human is unusual, rare, and original.

It is a form of extreme exceptionalism. The most compelling way to view this is in Kantian terms. The categorical imperative requires one to maximize his actions for all other beings in the human kingdom. A monster operates with an inverse or perverse categorical imperative. He must assume that no other person is acting in the same way. Humanity would cease to exist if everyone operated with the premise that human life can be seen as a means to some other end. Since humanity continues to exist, monsters must indeed be rare. In the sense that Arendt suggested, Eichmann was a new kind of criminal; unlike any type that had preceded him.

### **Ability to Freshly Apply Conventions**

The artistic genius was described as having academic training in the rules of art making and yet also creating beautiful works of art that cannot be bound by rules. In the moral realm, the monster does not follow any preexisting rules to commit his evil act. The preexisting rules are the human laws and social conventions put in place to govern a society and protect the interests of its citizens. The monster cannot follow them; he upends them, creating social disorder – an “order” all his own. Defying conventions and abiding by unwritten laws, the monster essentially creates perverse counter-imperatives. Arendt referred to them as non-human laws.

Monsters break rules and seek new means of pushing the boundaries of evildoing. There is an unsettling aspect to this aspect of the monster. Consider general evil actions like the killing of innocent civilians. Civic order is seen as under the collective protection and security of its citizens. No matter what specific method a monster may choose to commit some action, public

security is in place to prevent such occurrences altogether. With security or other deterrence in place for a given social community, a successful monster is required to devise a plan that circumvents that security. In that way, exhibiting traits of rule-defiance and innovation is fundamental to a monster (or monster-in-the-making). Furthermore, the notion of freshly applying conventions includes not only innovation but also awareness of the preexisting rules. In order to achieve his goal, he must know what actions are monitored and what measures are in place to prevent them. This advance knowledge is required because otherwise one's efforts would be thwarted. The upshot is that the monster must create or adapt some innovative process that has not been done, for which no security guard is watching out, in order to succeed. This also applies in the case of political or military strategy. If it has already been done, the enemy would be able to anticipate and therefore prevent the action from taking place.

However, we must note the difference between the conventions that are being broken by the genius and the monster. When we talk about the genius breaking artistic conventions, meaning he innovatively uses pieces of torn newspaper and pastes them onto his composition, these conventions do not have implications for human lives. The monster, however, is specifically breaking conventions that are morally charged. For example, in order to stage major attacks, sneaking firearms onto airplanes is breaking some rule or convention put in place for the safety of all passengers. The monster, which breaks this rule in order to stage an attack, has not just broken any convention, he is breaking a convention put in place to protect lives against harm and death.

Though the monster and the genius both defy conventions, the type of convention each is approaching differs too significantly to consider the two figures as similar with respect to this criterion.

## Commitment

By creating innovative (im)moral rules, essentially following unhuman laws, the monster willingly uses human lives in order to achieve his goal. The description of Plato's tyrant captures this sense,

I mean those which are awake when the reasoning and human and ruling power is asleep; then the wild beast within us, gorged with meat or drink, starts up and having shaken off sleep, goes forth to satisfy his desires; and there is no conceivable folly or crime – not excepting incest or any other unnatural union, or parricide, or the eating of forbidden food --which at such a time, when he has parted company with all shame and sense, a man may not be ready to commit. (Plato, *Republic*, Book IX, 571c3-d3)<sup>220</sup>

The monster is the supreme example of the committed individual: there is nothing that prevents the monster from following through with his plan.

By contrast, commitment for the artistic genius involves enduring personal or financial sacrifice in pursuit of their artistic end. But there is a line across which the genius cannot cross. This line prevents the genius from presuming he can risk human life in order to make his work of art. A genius must stop short of this line – short of that level of human sacrifice. The monster, as previously explained, is willing to sacrifice human life to achieve his goal. As Plato says, “there is no conceivable folly or crime” that the “man may not be ready to commit.” In this way, the nature of commitment between the genius and the monster is substantively different. The monster's commitment goes far beyond human norms. And the monster's commitment also is

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<sup>220</sup> Plato, *Complete Works*, ed. John Cooper (Indianapolis, Indiana: Hackett Publishing, 1997), 1180.

based on an operator that lacks full logic or sense, as Plato reminds us. The monster is not confined by any line or parameter when it comes to his commitment. All that he does is undertaken in support of or in order to achieve the particular and singular end. As Plato reminds us – the monster is willing to do anything.

## **Conclusion**

The important conclusions to draw from this chapter are the ways in which the monster draws close to the genius with regard to some criteria and pulls away from the genius in light of others.

The monster and the genius share the proclivity to display prodigious characteristics, though under slightly different definitions of prodigious. The genius is generally seen as possessing an innate artistic gift; from an early age and without being taught certain skills, the genius creates beauty. The monster does not typically commit his evil act at a young age. However, there remain several aspects of monstrosity that demonstrate that we apply similar childish standards to their attitudes or behavior. Whether it is underdeveloped rational capacity or extreme selfishness, the monster is prodigious in this slightly altered understanding of the term.

Similarly, they are also both rare figures in their respective realms and we expect from them originality when it comes to what they do and create.

There is also an expectation with both figures that they will defy or create new rules that define their behavior. In order to be a genius, an artist must invent something new or create beauty that does not follow rules that other artists established. This combination of defiance of tradition and innovation typify the genius. The monster, similarly, is basically required to create some new strategy to achieve his goals. This requirement is evidenced in the simple way that



once something evil has been done, criminal law (or just humanity in general) becomes aware of that possibility and does everything it can to prevent another person from doing the same.

The monster, however, deviates from the genius in the nature of the communication, conventions, and commitment that the monster is responsible for creating or promoting. The communication criterion exposes this divergence. The artistic genius is described as practicing transparent communication, whereas the monster does not. The artistic genius facilitates communication by means of presenting a beautiful work of art. As we learned from Kant, a beauty claim includes a claim to universal assent. The genius, therefore, has created a possibility for an individual to feel connected to the human community at large. The genius presents a realm that the audience (viewer, reader, etc.) would like to merge with his own world. The genius enjoys a special position that gives him insight into the divine or universal realm, which in turn is conveyed in his work of art. By his work of art, the genius enables the audience to also see from this vantage point. The genius experiences a feeling that he imparts to his audience; creator and recipient are experiencing the same thing. The monster, on the other hand, even though he, too, hovers somewhere between human and another realm, must experience pleasure of some sort while others (his victims) experience pain or death. The monster does not practice transparent communication.

Furthermore, the monster's vantage point is not desirable to those who encounter him. Those who encounter him do not want to welcome the monster and his realm (his rules, his perspective) into their human realm. Instead, they want to reject the monster and all implications about humanity and the human condition that he offers. Due to the monster's disposition, his defiance of conventions serves to further alienate him since he is willing to use other human beings' lives as the means to his end. For the monster, the conventions criterion goes hand-in-

hand with the commitment criterion: the monster transgresses some boundary that the genius does not.

#### Part IV. Conclusion

This dissertation's primary goal, to uncover whether the conceptual figure of the genius is more similar to one moral figure or another, is a foregone conclusion at this point: across four of the five criteria, the genius and the saint resembled one another (with the exception of the prodigy), whereas the genius and the monster exhibited similarities with regard to only two of the criteria (rarity and prodigy).<sup>221</sup> However predictable or surprising that conclusion may be, certain implications can be drawn that bare mentioning in this last chapter.

Scholars of geniuses and of saints agree that the disappearance of these two conceptual figures from academic conversations has led to unforeseen consequences. For the purposes of this analysis, Coleman's view provocatively summarizes the point: "we have lost something not only unspeakably lovely but truly essential to human culture and imagination."<sup>222</sup> The genius and saint, by virtue of occupying what is both a human and an exceptionally-human disposition, were revealed within the discussion of the communication criterion to offer a perspective that by its very nature removed from humanity and yet a part of it is distinguished from that of ordinary human beings. Their respective undertakings – aesthetic and moral – reflect that enhanced perspective, and in turn, those who encounter their efforts are given temporary access to it. Kant's aesthetic judgment, which entails universal assent, and the categorical imperative itself, which suggests an egalitarian view of the human community at large, underscore the way that artistic makers and moral doers can serve multiple roles as they not only encourage and reinforce a certain egalitarian attitude toward fellow human beings, but they also represent for us an

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<sup>221</sup> My thanks to Thomas Teufel for the suggestion to further elaborate on the extent to which the criteria may be weighted after the analysis has been completed. This will be the subject of future research, which will probe further into two criteria, communication and fresh application of conventions, which emerged as rich for further investigation.

<sup>222</sup> John Coleman, S.J., "After Sainthood?" in *Saints and Virtues*, ed. John Stratton Hawley (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 225.

example of human action to which we can aspire. Under this interpretation, Coleman's lament is clarified while also partially answered: what can be lost by disregarding the saint, and the genius – in my opinion – is the dual purpose that their disposition enables: being reminded of one's shared humanity with others and of one's possibility to exceed human norms. Consequently, it is with these feelings (and the hope of increased numbers of these feelings) that we want to draw closer to the figures – the geniuses and the saints.

One author has described an artist's depiction of human beings in this way: "he established a form of such nobility that it has never ceased to magnify us in our own eyes."<sup>223</sup> Indeed, it is feelings of magnification, expansion, and the feeling that we are more capable than we had thought, that collectively motivate us to seek out more experiences – whether aesthetic or moral – with the figures who are responsible for them. It is our desire to see ourselves magnified by their example that inspires us, at times, to strive for more in our own lives.

And in realizing the power that geniuses and saints<sup>224</sup> have to create these experiences, we rush to want those figures to be in our world with us – we embrace them as exceptional human beings, capable of leading us to new views of ourselves and the human condition, and we seek to do what we can to support their efforts.

By contrast, though by hovering preciously on a boundary between human and non-human the monsters also reveal access to behaviors and attitudes that are exceptional to human norms, they also represent to us the ways in which exceeding expectations can be undesirable.

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<sup>223</sup> Wallace Stevens, *The Necessary Angel Essays on Reality and The Imagination* when discussing Verrochio's statue/sculpture of Bartolommeo Colleoni, quoted in Paul Barolsky, Paul Barolsky, "The Genius of Michelangelo's 'Creation of Adam' and the Blindness of Art History," *Notes in the History of Art* 33, no. 1 (2013): 21.

<sup>224</sup> For a discussion of the way that moral saints alter our view of what we think we are capable of doing, Carbonell calls a related notion the "ratcheting-up effect" in Vanessa Carbonell, "The Ratcheting-Up Effect," *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly* 93, no. 2 (2012): 228-254.

As Arendt noted, determining that a certain example of a person is a monster, so to speak, is to admit that the human community wants to reject that particular human example. We do not want to, as she phrases it, “reconcile our world” with the viewpoint that the human offers. This analysis further suggests that we explicitly assign the label of “monster” to push someone outside of the world in which we live. We wish to do whatever we can to claim that they are not the human beings that we are.

Monsters of the world do not magnify us the way that the geniuses and the saints do; rather, they diminish and depress us by their example of what humans are capable of. And, so, as Arendt states, we do not want to “share the earth” with monsters.<sup>225 226</sup> In a sense, we are reluctant to admit that they, too, are human beings. And this is why Cole’s analysis (that no real monsters exist) and Arendt’s view, though at first blush seem contrary to one another, actually serve the same end: we do not want to reconcile our world to the world in which the monsters reign. Cole is right in a way, we do not want to believe that monsters exist. Yet, monstrous behavior does continue in the world in which we live and by people who look just like us; denying the monster’s existence does not eliminate monstrous behavior.

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<sup>225</sup> See Berkowitz, Roger. "The Power of Non-Reconciliation – Arendt’s Judgment of Adolf Eichmann." *Startseite* 6, no. 1 (2011), n.p. quoting Arendt: “...we find that no one, that is, no member of the human race, can be expected to want to share the earth with you.” Arendt is claiming a universal perspective that others would agree with her: “no member of the human race.”

<sup>226</sup> Kant may also provide some insight in that with the category of the sublime. In our encounters with the sublime, if it could be that the monster is creating something that may fall into that category, we are arrested in a way. Our ability to judge is in jeopardy and our existence itself is threatened. By rejecting the monster’s worldview, we are resisting the deleterious effects it might have; we are resisting the monster’s threatening power.

There is admittedly a wide-ranging use of the word monster, from its appearance to describe anyone who is doing something different or unusual<sup>227</sup> to serial killers and ruthless dictators. For the more innocuous “monsters,” such as those people who simply do something differently, there is an aesthetic sense in which the monster possesses redemptive value. Saint Augustine’s use of the term that reminds us of this application. Augustine traces the term back to its etymological roots when the word meant to demonstrate something or serve as a warning.

They say that they are called ‘monsters,’ because they demonstrate or signify something; ‘portents,’ because they portend something; and so forth. But let their diviners see how they are either deceived, or even when they do predict true things, it is because they are inspired by spirits, who are intent upon entangling the minds of men (worthy, indeed, of such a fate) in the meshes of a hurtful curiosity, or how they light now and then upon some truth, because they make so many predictions.<sup>228</sup>

It is perhaps in this sense that the idea of a monster is invoked in the art world. In an attempt to create an artwork, an artist can sometimes be chastised for their artistic process or the final product. When particularly controversial, their creations are subject to public scrutiny.

Three examples of controversy in the art world involve allegations that an artist is a monster of one sort or another. I suggest that they represent different ways in which, at a given point in history, the art world is attempting to define its own parameters or the so-called

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<sup>227</sup> See, for example, Émile Zola quoted: “I was thinking the whole time [while posing] of the destiny of individual artists who are made to live apart, alone with their talent. Around me, on the walls of the studio, hung those powerful and characteristic canvases that the public does not want to understand. To become a monster, you need only to be different. You are accused of not knowing your art, of mocking common sense, precisely because the knowledge of your eye, the pressure of your temperament lead you to singular results. If you do not follow the mediocrity of the majority, the idiots stone you, treating you as mad or arrogant.” (Alex Danchev, *Cézanne: A Life* [New York: Pantheon Books, 2012], 124).

<sup>228</sup> Augustine, *The City of God* (New York: Modern Library, 1950), Chapter XXI, Book 8.

boundaries of artistic production. In other words, the art-appreciating public is forced to figure out whether or not they will reconcile their world (in these cases, the art world) with the world of the creators.

The examples prove that the criteria we were discussing with regard to these figures gets thrown at artists, and that those criteria help us to better understand the reason for the controversy. They all have to do with the point on which the genius and the monster diverged: the monster is willing to sacrifice human life to achieve his ends.

Contemporary artists who are seeking to push the limits of creative production often test the line for what counts as acceptable behavior for an artist to exhibit. In each of these three examples, the artist pushes the boundaries by suggesting an assault on the value of (human) life. In the first example, some interpreted Chris Ofili's works of art to be sacrilegious since it was interpreted as violating the symbolic value of the religious figure of Mary Mother of God. With an artwork by Tom Otterness, the issue arose because the artist, though he did not kill another human being, made an artwork that devalued life, specifically the life of a dog. One work by Andrea Fraser approaches this issue not with sacrifice of human life per se but, in a related way, the sacrifice of human dignity.<sup>229</sup>

New York Mayor Rudolph Giuliani publicly insisted that Chris Ofili's interpretation of Mary Mother of God,<sup>230</sup> which Ofili made using elephant dung, be removed from an exhibition at the Brooklyn Museum. Giuliani considered the artwork to be morally offensive. There was, to be expected, backlash against Giuliani's charge. It is the heated discussion that for the purposes of this discussion serve as evidence that in fact the artistic genius is bound by a line with regard

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<sup>229</sup> Guy Trebay, "Sex, Art, and Videotape," *New York Times*, June 13, 2004.

<sup>230</sup> For a summary of this instance, see, for example, Carol Vogel, "Chris Ofili: British Artist Holds Fast to His Inspiration," *New York Times*, September 28, 1999.

to how far one can go in the commitment category. There is some line that protects human (or a related concept of) sacrifice, and there are artworks that constantly force us to reconcile just where that line should be drawn. If, for example, human sacrifice is not involved, but moral offense is caused, the issue is raised. One may consider Giuliani's reaction to be based on a concern that a figure whom he (and his constituents) regard as human and divine was being insulted or devalued by the artist due to the artist's chosen medium. Ultimately, Giuliani's reaction to artist's choice of medium was not sufficiently shared by New Yorkers, suggesting that applying a monster label is not appropriate. The circumstances did, however, force an evaluation that drew on the criteria developed for the artistic genius and then applied to the moral figures.

Tom Otterness came up with a concept for a work of art that involved killing a dog and he followed through with the plan. The final work of art, *Shot Dog*, was considered a performance in which the dog was a casualty of the artistic process. During the 1970s when performance art was new to the art world, Otterness could have conceived of this project with an eye to its originality, being unprecedented. His intuitions were wrong, and the reception of his piece was instead met with disgust and continues to be protested to this day.

A third contemporary artist, Andrea Fraser, proposed the specific terms of a new project to the gallery that represented her work. For an undisclosed amount of money, she would sell her "work" of art to a collector. For that amount, the collector would be purchasing an encounter with the artist, which would be filmed. The collector would receive a copy of the film. Similar to Otterness, Fraser was criticized heavily and even ostracized for this project. Though Fraser did not kill any animal or human being by her creative process, she did sacrifice herself for the work of art. The sacrifice could be interpreted as loss of humanity, the reduction of herself to a



financial exchange. Though she may have intended to use herself to embody what she sees as a bigger statement about the art world, namely, that art is prostitution, and she thought that she devised an original means of expressing that position, what in fact she found was that a substantial portion of the art world was repulsed by her project. Again, as with the Otterness example, Fraser's project proves that despite dogged commitment to attain a particular goal or convey a message, the artistic genius is at times blocked from sacrificing life (literally or figuratively) to achieve that end. On the grounds of our analysis, therefore, whether Otterness and Fraser merit the genius label on the basis of their given artworks seems doubtful. The reactions to the two works created by Otterness and Fraser in particular served as catalysts for a reevaluation of just where the line should be established identifying how far the genius's sacrifice can go in trying to achieve his goal.

Thus, the unintended consequence of the preceding dissertation is that sometimes an artist considered a monster is, in Augustine's words, representing a "hurtful curiosity," a viewpoint that is ultimately decided to be objectionable and therefore irreconcilable with the art world. Such artists are similar to general examples of the conceptual figure of the monster in that they can serve as warnings – they can reflect a certain tendency that the human community decides it should push away and discourage.<sup>231</sup>

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<sup>231</sup> Controversial figures in the aesthetic realm (whose actions push them toward the monster, according to our criteria) can serve in what could be seen as a positive way. Artists like Ofili, Otterness, and Fraser incited debates about the definition of art, which consequently helped to define the ways that originality (the rare criterion and the fresh application criterion) is involved with art making and how far the artist's commitment is supposed to go in aspiring to achieve it. These three artists, in attempting to break out of the mold, revealed that sometimes their efforts go too far. When we object to artists in this strong and repulsive way, we are in essence casting them as monsters. As such, their examples can serve as warnings of what to watch out for. In particular, by killing a dog (Otterness) and by prostituting herself (Fraser), the artists approach the monster category. The two artists were going too far, some believed, willing to kill (a dog or other human beings) or to present oneself as a commodity (means to an end).

The three faces of human exceptionalism – the conceptual figures of the genius, monster, and saint – all have non-human aspects or sides, but the geniuses and the saints depict worlds that we want to better understand; we want to join their visions and realize the worlds they occupy or describe. Because they are human, their worlds are, for us, considered possible and attainable for us. They are not cut off from us – we can benefit from their creations and actions – and their work extends into our lives making us think we have been communicated with.

So too are the actions and creations of the monster partially in our world. It is something we are reluctant to admit, and sometimes their inhumanity captures our attention explicitly for this reason. As a result, we have trouble conceptualizing the fact that a fellow human being did such a thing (or things). It is on this point that Arendt’s language drives home the major distinction in this regard. All three conceptual figures share traits – as the fourth and fifth chapters evidence. But whereas we are happy to reconcile our world with whatever seems otherworldly that the genius and saint can offer, we do not want to reconcile our world with what the monster can. In fact, we want to reject his offers. We do not want to “share the earth” with the person, hence, the monstrous label is applied – we want to push it outside our spheres, we want it to exist only figuratively. It is a deliberate choice to force the figure farther away – we want to remind ourselves of the humanity of saints and geniuses in hopes that we may draw ourselves closer to them by inspiration or proximity.

If a lesson is to be drawn from all this, perhaps Arendt’s analysis can point the way. If Eichmann’s ultimate fault, like Plato’s tyrants, is to demonstrate a lack of thinking,<sup>232</sup> we must

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<sup>232</sup> “She concluded that Eichmann’s inability to speak coherently in court was connected with his incapacity to think, or to think from another’s point of view,” (Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* [New York: Penguin, 2006], xiii (Amos Elan’s preface)).

continually do what we can to promote thinking and particularly the type of thinking initiated by the communicative exchanges and social interactions fostered by aesthetic and moral encounters with geniuses and saints. The geniuses and saints create work that uniquely encourages us to reflect on the human condition without sacrificing human lives or dignity. Our discussion of these three figures highlights the essential role they play in the formation and reaffirmation of not only what we as individuals are capable of but as a reminder of what other human beings can do as well. Encounters with beautiful art and moral actions can elevate our sense of our own potential and those of our peers. Why not do our best to promote such encounters for ourselves and others?

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