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# “We should be seeing life itself”: Wittgenstein on the Aesthetics and Ethics of Representing Selfhood

Tea Jankovic

In connection with Wittgenstein's remarks on theater, Michael Fried argues that art lends us a view of selfhood that would otherwise be unavailable to us, precisely because we always inhabit it. He explicates this by means of the aesthetic relation between the beholder and the beheld, between audience and theater. This essay probes the ethical implications of the aesthetic objectification of the subject by discussing Wittgenstein's remarks on the purported unity of the ethical-aesthetic perspective in the *Tractatus* and through a reading of Fyodor Dostoevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov*. Wittgenstein mentions Dostoevsky in his *Notebooks* in the context of considerations of ethics and aesthetics in the relation between subject and world. Central to both the *Tractatus* and the *Brothers Karamazov* is a negotiation of the ethical-aesthetic perspective in the address to the reader that establishes a relation to the reader comparable to Fried's account of visual art and theater, as well as a notion of the good life as a right perspective and right relation to the world.

In recent US scholarship, Ludwig Wittgenstein has been evoked on the paradox of the aesthetic representation of selfhood: how can a subject be an object of art? Arguably, this paradox has an ethical dimension, which is often not fully made explicit. Richard Eldridge in his “Rotating the Axis of our Investigation” and Garry L. Hagberg in “Autobiographical Consciousness” carefully reconstruct Wittgenstein's account of the subject-object and subject-world relation. Both apply an insight of his to literature: that the world is not simply given but that it is always seen through the locus of a consciousness. Eldridge reads Hölderlin's

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staging of poetic subjectivity as the ideal of living “both as independent shapers of our lives and in harmony with nature and one another” (213). Hagberg reads Frederick Douglass’s slave narrative as a growing self-awareness of the protagonist *as well* as increasing moral teleology in the plot, reflecting Wittgenstein’s dissolution of the false dichotomy between “inner” and “outer” world. On the American scene, Ross Posnock’s comparative study of Wittgenstein’s philosophical texts and the novels of W. G. Sebald further emphasizes the importance of relationality as a structuring principle of both selfhood *and* the text.

In “Jeff Wall, Wittgenstein and the Everyday,” Michael Fried discusses art in terms of Wittgenstein’s remarks on theater, the ideal that art can show selfhood in a way we cannot usually observe it (“Jeff Wall” 517-25). Fried’s text most clearly expresses the paradoxical quality of an aesthetic representation – or objectification – of the subject. According to him, Wittgenstein upholds the ideal of the anti-theatrical, “everyday” aesthetics, in which art is able to show selfhood, or “life itself,” by allowing the beholder – or the audience, or the reader, depending on the art form – to take up an imagined perspective “from outside” the represented subject’s involvement with her world.<sup>1</sup> Wittgenstein’s aesthetics is informed by the tension between acknowledging the artifice of the outside perspective of the beholder (for the actor must learn to ignore the audience; literary characters are fictional) and the claim that art is a privileged means of showing selfhood.

Fried mentions the ethical implication of the aesthetic objectification of selfhood only in passing, by referring to “good and bad modes of objecthood” (521). To explicate these further in Wittgenstein’s terms, I turn to the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* and the *Notebooks*, where I discuss his thoughts on the convergence of the aesthetic and the ethical perspective, the latter explicated in terms of good life as a perspective on the world. In my first section, I discuss Fried’s reading of Wittgenstein’s aesthetics. My second section centers on the intersubjective relation Wittgenstein seeks to establish by addressing the reader. My third section turns to a literary work, *The Brothers Karamazov*, to show how it performs the kind of relational ethical-aesthetic perspective Wittgenstein describes. The enormous impact this explicitly moral, even moralizing novel had on Wittgenstein’s intellectual development is largely over-

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<sup>1</sup> I am using female and male pronouns interchangeably, for the “subject” discussed here is the focal point of the (narrated) world. This means that the concept can apply to any subjectivity, including any gendered subjectivity.

looked in literary studies (Klagge 135-38).<sup>2</sup> Through a reading of several of the novel's key passages, I show how it performs Fried's reading of Wittgenstein's aesthetic conception of representing selfhood. Furthermore, I show how the aesthetic and the ethical converge in the novel's reflections on the ethics of aesthetic objectification in terms of the idea that "life is paradise," if only seen from the right perspective.

### 1. The Subject as Aesthetic Object: *Culture and Value*

Fried's "Jeff Wall, Wittgenstein and the Everyday" discusses Wall's photography in terms of the problem of artistic representation of selfhood. The subject, being made into an object of art, runs the risk of theatricality – of merely posing for the beholder. Fried relates his own anti-theatrical aesthetic ideal to an observation made by Wittgenstein in *Culture and Value*:

Engelmann [Paul Engelmann, Wittgenstein's close friend and faithful correspondent] told me that when he rummages round at home in a drawer full of his own manuscripts, they strike him as so glorious that he thinks they would be worth *presenting* to other people. (He said it's the same when he is reading through letters from his dead relations.) But when he imagines a selection of them published he said the whole business loses its charm & value & becomes impossible I said this case was like the following one: Nothing could be more remarkable than seeing someone who thinks himself unobserved engaged in some quite simple everyday activity. Let's imagine a theatre, the curtain goes up & we see someone alone in his room walking up and down, lighting a cigarette, seating *himself* etc. so that suddenly we are observing a human being from outside in a way that ordinarily we can never observe ourselves; as if we were watching a chapter from a biography with our own eyes, – surely this would be at once uncanny and wonderful. More wonderful than anything a playwright could cause to be acted or spoken on the stage. We should be seeing life itself. – But then we do see this every day & it makes not the slightest impression on us! True enough, but we do not see it from *that* point of view. – Similarly when E. looks at his

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<sup>2</sup> A friend of Wittgenstein from World War I reports: "In [March] 1916 Wittgenstein suddenly received orders to leave for the front. [. . .] He took with him only what was absolutely necessary. Among a few other books he took with him *The Brothers Karamazov*. He liked this book very much." In 1929 or 1930 Wittgenstein told Drury: "When I was a village school-master in Austria after the war I read *The Brothers Karamazov* over and over again. I read it out loud to the village priest." On 5 August 1949, Bouwsma reports: "This led him to talk of *The Brothers*. He must have read every sentence there fifty times" (Klagge 136).

writings and finds them *splendid* (even though he would not care to publish any of the pieces individually), he is seeing his life as God's work of art, & as such it is certainly worth contemplating, as is every life & everything whatever. But only the artist can represent the individual thing [*das Einzelne*] so that it appears to us as a work of art; those manuscripts *rightly* lose their value if we contemplate them singly & in any case without *prejudice*, i.e. without being enthusiastic about them in advance. The work of art compels us – as one might say – to see it in the *right* perspective, but without art the object [*der Gegenstand*] is a piece of nature like any other & the fact that *we* may exalt it through our enthusiasm does not give anyone the right to display it to us. (I am always reminded of one of those insipid photographs of a piece of scenery which is interesting to the person who took it because he was there himself, experienced something, but which a third party looks at with justifiable coldness; insofar as it is ever justifiable to look at something with coldness.) [. . .] (6e-7e)

In this excerpt, Wittgenstein draws our attention to the manner in which art shows a person or an object. He makes a general aesthetic statement here in the sense that he applies it to different art forms: literature (that is, the contrast between a trivial biography and artistic texts), theater, and photography. The process of publishing a text or performing it in front of a theater audience are ways of “*presenting*,” literally “*giving*” (*geben*) something to other people. Consequently, something presented as art is deemed worthy of being given to others (“*es wert [sein] den anderen Menschen gegeben zu werden*”). It is because it is “so glorious,” “remarkable,” “uncanny,” “wonderful,” and “splendid.” He quickly discredits a biased view of what would count as presentable to others: for instance, as in Engelmann’s case, the publication of his relatives’ letters, or any biography we might deem remarkable solely because we have known its protagonists.

On the other hand, though art shows something remarkable, it is not in the sense of something yet unknown and unseen, as for instance, a snapshot of a hitherto unknown species of primates. Art does not inform. Rather, according to Wittgenstein’s harkening to “the everyday,” the object art presents is not remarkable in itself; it is remarkable because of the point of view we are granted on it. Wittgenstein’s theater scene is remarkable neither because it is a “chapter from a biography” of any one particular person, nor because it somehow provides new information on the human condition. It is a truly everyday scene, one observable in mundane circumstances. And yet, what we are given is a view “on a human being from outside in a way that we can ordinarily never observe ourselves.”

In drawing parallels between Wittgenstein and Denis Diderot, Fried reads Wittgenstein's remark about what it is that the aesthetic view grants us thus: it gives us a view of somebody who is unaware of being beheld, and thus going about his ways without posing for a potential audience (519-25).

Diderot was particularly interested in depictions of people absorbed in some activity and forgetful of themselves. Paintings offer us an impossible perspective: we are usually never in the position to gaze at someone for as long as we want while they are completely absorbed in something else. That is how the illusion of reality is created: the painting is done in such a way that it offers a seemingly impossible perspective on the image it represents, thus formally excluding the beholder (Fried, "Jeff Wall" 502-06). Thus it creates the illusion of a self-sufficient world (Kern 171-73).

Diderot expands the illusionist theory of painting to drama theory. He is famous for the conception of the "fourth wall" in theater: it is the space between the audience and the theater stage. Actors are trained to imagine an invisible wall separating them from the audience and to act as if there were nobody watching them. It is precisely the presentation of a scene in such a way that it excludes the beholder which allows for the spectator's necessary self-forgetfulness and absorption and makes the performance function as a work of art.

According to Fried's reading of Diderot, in order to grant this outside perspective, a theater piece must not be theatrical – the audience must not have the impression of the scene being staged for their benefit (519, 522).<sup>3</sup> Rather, theater shows us, in Wittgenstein's terms, someone "alone in his room," *not* acting in relation to a potential beholder – a view on ourselves (as human beings) that we normally do not have. Art happens when the actor can exclude the audience in such a way that the audience is free to behold him aesthetically, as if from outside his world.

The theater curtain going up *presents* us *that* view from the outside. It does not show us any new facts, for what we see is the everyday that usually "makes not the slightest impression on us!" Rather, what art shows is "*that* point of view" (Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value* 6), the aesthetic perspective that shows us the subject's very involvement with his everyday from an otherwise impossible perspective, from outside the subject's involvement with his world. In Wittgenstein's terms, it shows

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<sup>3</sup> One might criticize this as an outdated theory. On the other hand, even modern and post-modern art, which are very much based on the idea of breaking the fourth wall (as in Brecht's theater), precisely draw attention to their own aestheticity by means of self-reflective references to their own fictionality.



us “life itself”; Fried calls this “a *ne plus ultra* of realism, it would seem” (519). Fried continues:

In other words, only a work of art, precisely because it “compels us to see it in the right perspective,” can make life itself, in the form of absorption, available for aesthetic contemplation. (524)

Art shows us a person’s life, her selfhood in the world, by providing us a staging of an outside perspective, an imagined perspective where our beholding does not affect the beheld. This understanding of art is not limited to drama or to the nineteenth-century realist novel. Fried in fact applies it in his critique of minimalist art and photography, and his *Art and Objecthood* covers a wide spectrum of arts.

Fried refers to ethics only in passing, as sharing with aesthetics the disinterested perspective discussed above (“Jeff Wall” 521). However, it is possible to spell out further the ethical implications of Wittgenstein’s aesthetics along Fried’s lines. I argue that the kind of inferior art Fried criticizes as theatrical implies an attempt to coerce the beholder (i.e., the audience, the reader) towards a specific, predetermined interpretation of the artwork. By theatrically posing, a bad actor attempts to impose an interpretation to the beholder. In order to develop an ethical-aesthetic reading along Fried’s lines, I will focus on Wittgenstein’s subtle addresses to the reader in *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, which allows me to read the *Tractatus* as a work on aesthetics that showcases the ethical category of the good life.

## 2. The Impossible Perspective: *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* and *Notebooks*

Wittgenstein’s *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* discusses ethics and aesthetics only briefly. In 6.421, Wittgenstein writes, “It is clear that ethics cannot be expressed. Ethics are transcendental. (Ethics and Aesthetics are one).” Despite the scarcity of material on ethics in the *Tractatus*, we learn from a letter to his publisher that “the point of the book is an ethical one. [. . .] My work consists of two parts: the one presented here plus all that I have not written. And it is precisely this second part that is the important one” (*Letters* 94). According to Wittgenstein, it is by remaining silent about ethics that he has shown us “the point of the book.” And remaining silent about a matter is consistent with his view quoted above – that ethics, along with aesthetics, cannot be expressed. While it would make no sense to simply go on to say what it is that Wittgenstein considered

unsayable, it is possible to provide a reading of the fairly technical sense of expressibility and inexpressibility in language introduced in the *Tractatus* and to conclude with the implications this technical discussion has for ethics and aesthetics.

In 6.43, Wittgenstein describes good and bad willing not as referring to a will to change isolable facts in the world but rather as an attitude to the world as a whole:

If good or bad willing changes the world, it can only change the limits of the world, not the facts; not the things that can be expressed in language.

In brief, the world must thereby become quite another. It must so to speak wax or wane as a whole.

The world of the happy is quite another than that of the unhappy.

Thus, ethics involves a change of perspective on the part of the subject in his relation to the world and cannot be exhaustively defined with purported isolable “ethical” facts found in the world. Note that though Wittgenstein partly uses Kantian vocabulary, such as referring to “good willing” and to ethics as “transcendental” (6.421), thus likening it to transcendental logic (6.31), he also introduces a *eudaimonic* aspect. Namely, under 6.43, he treats both “good willing” and “the world of the happy.” Given the meticulousness of his numbering system, he clearly considers these terms to belong to the same topic, a notion of *good life*, which in *eudaimonic* terms considers human flourishing to be conceptually inseparable from a life of virtue. However, Wittgenstein further develops the *eudaimonic* conception by denying that the good life is to be found within the sum of the facts that make up the world.<sup>4</sup>

Rather, ethics pertains to the “limits of the world” (*Tractatus* 6.43), a phrase Wittgenstein uses to describe the subject as well: “The subject does not belong to the world but it is a limit of the world” (5.632). Therefore, what makes ethical propositions such as “Thou shall not murder” valid pertains to the subject herself, in her relation to the world – and not to any facts such as rewards and punishments given.

Ethics and aesthetics are called “inexpressible” and “transcendental” (6.421), which I gloss as not expressible in language referring to isolable facts in the world, but rather to the subject’s relation to the world. This thought recurs in the *Notebooks*:

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<sup>4</sup> See the *Tractatus*’s definition of “the world”: “1. The world is all that is the case. 1.1. The world is the totality of facts, not things.”



The work of art is the object seen *sub specie aeternitatis*; and the good life is the world seen *sub specie aeternitatis*. This is the connection between art and ethics. (178)

The good life and the work of art are not defined by empirical criteria isolable among the sum of facts which make up “the world”; rather, they allow us to take up a specific perspective on everything else.

If the good life and the work of art were definable by a list of empirical facts from within the world, they would be expressible in language for, in the *Tractatus*, meaningful propositions represent possible facts in the world (4.022). However the *Tractatus* discourses on the world as a whole (in propositions starting with 1), on logic as representations of possible facts (in 2s and 3s), on thought as a meaningful proposition (in 4s), and on the manner in which propositions signify, including ethical and aesthetic propositions (in 5s and 6s) – even though all of these objects of investigation would, by *Tractarian* lights, require the subject to take up the impossible perspective from outside of her own language use and to represent her own relation to the world from outside, as a possible fact that can be empirically verified. Because saying anything about the world as a whole cannot be empirically verified with observable facts from within the world, we run up against a paradox. That the *Tractatus* self-destructs at the end, with the last sentence, “7. What we cannot speak about that we must pass over in silence” is merely the logical consequence, for it is a book that shows the limits of language.

Several scholars have pointed out the interpretative frame of the *Tractatus*, contained in its foreword and ending (Diamond, Kremer), in which Wittgenstein addresses the implied reader. The foreword stresses that what follows is “not a textbook” (*Lehrbuch*), but that “its object would be attained if there were one person who read it with understanding and to whom it afforded pleasure” (9). The *Tractatus* is not meant to convey information, but apparently to provide pleasure – which is an aesthetic category. Furthermore, the second to last sentence before the silencing exhortation in 7 reads as follows:

My propositions are elucidatory in this way: he who understands *me* finally recognizes them as senseless, when he has climbed out through them, on them, over them. (He must so to speak throw away the ladder, after he has climbed up on it.) He must surmount these propositions; *then he sees the world rightly*. (6.54; my emphasis)

The reader has been led up a ladder of propositions throughout the book. Here she is asked to throw them away. Her attention is snapped away from the propositions and to an interpersonal encounter with their author, for Wittgenstein claims that the reader “who understands *me*” will recognize the meaninglessness of *Tractarian* propositions, and she will “*then see the world rightly*.” Taken together with the foreword, this means that the *Tractatus* is not meant to teach us new facts; rather, it is meant to provide the aesthetic pleasure of intersubjectively showing the reader her own subjectivity. The *Tractatus* is not a book of facts, rather it is, in Friedrich Ludwig Gottlob Frege’s terms, a meeting of minds.<sup>5</sup> The “ethical point” (*Letters* 94) of the book is that the reader takes up the right perspective, the ethical perspective in intersubjective encounters, as opposed to reducing ethics to knowledge of facts.

In Fried’s aesthetic terms, the reader is allowed absorption in the seemingly self-sufficient world of the *Tractatus* – one that at first glance purports to teach her facts about the world as a whole. The first sentences of the book introduce this impossible perspective: “1. The world is all that is the case. 1.1. The world is the totality of facts, not things.” Having read the foreword carefully, the reader may already be aware that the book that starts with these sentences is no text-book. By the end of the book, its perspective on the world as a whole turns out to be staged: Wittgenstein concludes that we cannot represent facts from outside the totality of all facts (i.e., the world). Rather, “the object of the book is pleasure” (9), namely the kind of pleasure art gives by objectifying the world in a way that allows the beholder to exercise her capacities as an interpreting subject and an organizing force of the world in her own right. By breaking the fourth wall and addressing the reader, Wittgenstein reaches beyond the “limit of the world” of his own subjectivity to meet the reader, and throws her back to her own interpretative and world-structuring powers, as opposed to offering her ready-made “ethical facts.”

Arguably, the *Tractatus* shares affinities with the literary genre of the novel. The novel, too, shows us the relation between the subject and her world. Because it is capable of showing the protagonists’ thoughts, feelings, motives, inner conflicts, as well as their outward actions, the novel can show intersubjective ethical reflection particularly clearly – more so than a photograph. Take Fyodor Dostoevsky’s *The Brothers Karamazov* as an example.

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<sup>5</sup> Wittgenstein pays homage to Frege in his foreword to the *Tractatus* (9).

### 3. "Life is paradise": The Ethical-Aesthetic Perspective in *The Brothers Karamazov*

In the summer of 1916, Wittgenstein fills his *Notebooks* with reflections on the relation between the will and the world, between happiness, good and evil (166-68) that later flow into the *Tractatus* (e.g. 6.43). On July 6, 1916, he notes, "Dostoevsky was probably right, when he says that he who is happy fulfills the purpose of being" (168). This recalls the notion of the good life discussed in my previous section. The good life is not definable by a list of factual criteria but rather by an achievement of selfhood that manifests itself in the right perspective on the world. *The Brothers Karamazov*, a novel Wittgenstein was "certifiably obsessed with" (Klagge 135-36), contains a comparable notion that "life is paradise" (288, 298, 303). As I will argue, this notion suggests that nothing needs to be added to life to achieve "good life"; rather, life is paradise when viewed from the right perspective. Dostoevsky's novel also lends itself to an aesthetic reading that traces the role of art in the achievement of paradise along Fried's lines. As is usual in Dostoevsky's novels, most of the forward thrust of the plot is achieved via characters' interactive narration, their more or less coercive "scripting" of the world of the novel (Young 22-27). *The Brothers Karamazov* is filled with comments on relations between readers and authors ("From the Author") and theater actors and audiences (e.g., "The Old Buffoon").

The foreword to *The Brothers Karamazov*, titled "From the Author," introduces the novel as a biography of Alexei Fyodorovich Karamazov. Here we find a dialectic very similar to Wittgenstein's remarks on theater discussed above: according to Wittgenstein, the object of art is something deemed presentable to other people and thus in some way remarkable; Dostoevsky starts by justifying his choice of Alesha as a hero of the novel in a similar vein:

While I do call Alexei Fyodorovich my hero, still, I myself know that he is by no means a great man, so that I can foresee inevitable questions, such as: What is notable about your Alexei Fyodorovich that you should choose him for your hero? What has he really done? To whom is he known, and for what? Why should I, the reader, spend my time studying the facts of his life? (3)

Like Wittgenstein, who denies that the object of art deserves its status because it lends us any new informative insight, Dostoevsky denies that Alexei deserves the status of a hero on account of any of his actions. It is not from any facts of his life that we might deduce his noteworthy-

ness. Just as Wittgenstein insists that, despite not telling us anything new, the everyday scene in the theater is remarkable, so Dostoevsky hopes that the reader might nonetheless agree with him about Alesha's noteworthiness.

In explaining his notion of the object of art, Wittgenstein points to that particular outside perspective that art renders on an object, which distinguishes the object from any other thing in the world. In Fried's reading, this implies a certain anti-theatricality on the part of the object: the actor is trained to present himself as if alone in his room, thus showing us his "everyday" without revealing by any of his gestures that they are staged for our benefit. Dostoevsky in turn introduces an ethical element to justify his hero, as I will argue in more detail below.

Dostoevsky goes on to explain that Alesha is worthy of being the hero of the novel, for it is he "who bears within himself the heart of the whole, while the other people of his epoch have all for some reason been torn away from it for a time by some kind of flooding wind" (3). Therefore, it is not any of the facts of his life that set him apart as remarkable, rather it is his relation to "the whole" – to his family, to his society, we might even say to the world.

It is clear that Alesha is an ordinary person – perhaps the only ordinary person in the entire novel. From his own activity as an author – Dostoevsky makes him the author of Book Six – we learn of the ethical ideal he has inherited from Elder Zosima, whose disciple he was at the local monastery. Book Six, "The Russian Monk," provides a philosophical key to the novel (Terras 73). Here, a notion of the good life is introduced, namely the dictum that "life is paradise": "We are all in paradise, but we do not know it, and if we did want to know it, tomorrow there would be paradise the world over" (288). This is proclaimed by Zosima's young brother shortly before his death, and in similar words by Zosima himself shortly before he endangers his life as he refuses to shoot at a duel (298), as well as by Zosima's mysterious visitor shortly before he ruins his reputation and his family's life when he confesses a crime he committed years ago, even though all the possible benefactors of his confession are long dead (303). For these characters, the closeness to death invokes a heightened awareness of the beauty of the world (297-98) and a notion of paradise as universal reconciliation and brotherhood of all (303).<sup>6</sup> Thus, the notion that Alesha is worthy of being the

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<sup>6</sup> The ideal of brotherhood, introduced by Zosima's mysterious visitor ("Until one has indeed become the brother of all, there will be no brotherhood" [303]), in fact implies a universal siblinghood, for one of the key scenes of the novel shows the main protagonist Alesha being able to view Grushenka, hitherto seen as a villain, as a "true sister" ("The

hero of a novel because he “bears within himself the heart of the whole” (3) should be read with this ethical ideal in mind, that of extending love to “the whole,” of maximal inclusiveness in one’s world. If this could be achieved, we would see that life already *is* paradise, if only people lived with the world as a whole in mind instead of asserting themselves at the expense of others.

In the following, I argue that the ethical ideal of universal reconciliation and siblinghood is aesthetically performed by the novel’s various stagings of the relation between the reader and the work of art. In his foreword, Dostoevsky stages an author persona who hopes that the reader will also find Alesha noteworthy, without coercing him into any preconceived interpretation. The reader is thrown back to his own interpretative capacities – in another avid Dostoevsky reader’s terms, the critical reader is a *co-author* of the artwork (Bakhtin “Author and Hero” 29, 65). Dostoevsky’s aesthetic-ethical ideal can be described as non-coercive interactive authorship of the world leading to a paradisiacal community. Tension is created between the clear artifice of the text (it is, after all, a novel) and the aim of presenting an ethically worthy person, one who is brother to all.

The foreword ends with an apology for its own superfluity and with a short, “And now to business” [*κ δελν*, i.e., “to deed” or “to action”] (4). This remark has a similar function as the curtain raising in the theater or Wittgenstein’s notion of an art of showing as opposed to an art of saying. In the opening chapter, where we are introduced to Alexei’s family and his small town, we are shown his world. The perspective we are invited to take up is not entirely “from outside the world,” it is rather that of a newcomer being introduced into a community. However, the narrator’s gossipy and slightly incompetent tone, the pretense that we are being told about real people and events, only serves to amplify the artifice of our outside perspective on Alexei’s world. Similarly, an actor breaking the fourth wall draws attention to “*that* point of view” granted by aesthetics, namely that of a certain outsideness, precisely by violating it.

In focusing on Dostoevsky’s caricature of vice, Fried’s reading of Wittgenstein’s aesthetics helps explicate the workings of coercive authorship via an investigation of theatrical art. The very first character introduced in the novel is Fyodor Pavlovich Karamazov, Alesha’s father. He acts as a foil to Alesha, for he is introduced as “wicked” though

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Onion” 351). Furthermore, this ideal transcends ethnic boundaries. As Nathan Rosen argues, a German Dr. Herzenstuben’s small fatherly gesture in Dmitry’s childhood may have been the decisive factor in preventing the latter from becoming a murderer (730).



“naïve and simple hearted” (9). Fyodor seems to be a textbook example of theatricality, called “the old buffoon” throughout the novel. Everything he does is intended to induce a specific effect in all present, his “audience,” namely to outrage and enrage them.

In a family gathering at the local monastery, where Elder Zosima and other monks are present, Fyodor dominates the conversation, telling jokes and fictional anecdotes about historical figures, for instance about Diderot’s alleged baptism during his stay in St. Petersburg in 1733.<sup>7</sup> The other guests are provoked by Fyodor’s behavior and some are about to leave. To this Fyodor responds that he is only clowning to endear himself to others because he feels “lower” than them. It is by acting the buffoon that he at least gains some control over their opinion – by being so obnoxious that they are sure to despise him. In a moment of clarity, Fyodor admits:

That’s exactly how it all seems to me, when I walk into a room, that I’m lower than anyone else, and that everyone takes me for a buffoon, so Why not, indeed, play the buffoon, I’m not afraid of your opinions, because you’re all, to a man, lower than me! (43)

At Fyodor’s urgent, though theatrical confession and question as to how he should change, Zosima lists overcoming his alcohol addiction, his adoration of money, and his insatiable lust. But, he adds, “And above all, above everything else – do not lie.” He does not merely mean Fyodor’s made-up stories about Diderot, but his coercive imposition of his “script” on others.

At first, Fyodor is touched and admits to lying. But even this admission is theatrical: “and I’ve lied, I’ve lied decidedly all my life, every day and every hour. Verily, I am a lie, and the father of a lie! Or maybe not the father of a lie, *I always get my texts mixed up* (это я всё в текстах сбиваюсь); let’s say the son of a lie” (44; my italics). By referring to “his texts,” which he always gets “mixed up,” he reveals, though jokingly, that his words are “texts” of others and not his own, that he is lying even in his supposed admission that he is lying.

Within the logic of the novel, a lie is not the opposite of a factual truth, for Fyodor is accused of lying even when he is telling factual truth. Compare, for instance, Dmitry Fyodorovich’s exclamation in response to one of Fyodor’s comments, “It’s all a lie! Outwardly it’s the truth, but inwardly a lie!” (72). Factual truth can be taken out of context

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<sup>7</sup> This stay is factual: Diderot was invited by the Russian Empress Catherine the Great.



and reworked into a narrative that can cause great harm, for example when a crafty narrative reworking of factual evidence against the innocent Dmitry condemns the latter to hard labor in a penitential colony (Book Twelve, “Judicial Error”).

Remarkably, lying is condemned as the root of all evil within the framework of a novel – which is itself fictional. This is one of a series of self-referential clues that what is at stake here is not only Fyodor’s character but the role of art in general. It is arguably not a coincidence that Fyodor’s little fictional anecdote is about Diderot, a philosopher of art. Diderot is repeatedly mentioned throughout the episode at the monastery. For instance, right after Fyodor theatrically admits to having lied all his life, he adds, addressing Staretz Zosima, “Only . . . my angel . . . sometimes Diderot is alright! Diderot won’t do any harm” (44).

Fyodor Karamazov, the buffoon, is therefore via Diderot closely connected to “the West” that Fyodor Dostoevsky famously had a very ambivalent relationship to. Although Dostoevsky refers to eighteenth-century French aesthetics as a placeholder for decadent nihilism, he notes deriving “both benefit and pleasure” in reading Diderot’s philosophy during the whole winter of 1868-1869 (Lantz 94). The figure of Fyodor Karamazov in fact performs a parody of Diderot’s illusionist ideal of art. More importantly, he offers a reflection on the role of art and the aesthetic perspective that has clear ethical implications.

It is no coincidence that Fyodor shares Dostoevsky’s first name. For he, too, is an artist of sorts, somebody who seeks to present himself, other people, and events in a certain light. As an author, Fyodor Mikhailovich Dostoevsky runs the same danger of theatricality that Fyodor Pavlovich Karamazov exhibits in his coercive narrative – one that objectifies both himself and his audience in a manner unworthy of the self-aware subject. Bakhtin argues that Dostoevsky’s poetics show that aesthetic objectification is inevitable in our relation to the world. However, the self-aware subject has a privileged status in contrast to all the other possible objects of art:

At a time when the self-consciousness of a character was usually seen merely as an element of his reality, as merely one of the features of his integrated image, here, on the contrary, all of reality becomes an element of the character’s self-consciousness. (*Problems* 48)

In Bakhtin’s literary terms, the privative aesthetics of theatricality can be considered monological authorship, one that coerces characters as well as readers (*Problems* 68). In his theatricality, his monological search of control over others’ “readings” of himself, and his imposition of ready-

made interpretations of himself onto others – which are all in stark contrast to Alesha's paradisiacal perspective of universal siblinghood – Fyodor Karamazov loses sight of the intersubjective nature of the ethical-aesthetic perspective.

In conclusion, the idea in *The Brothers Karamazov* that “life is paradise” but that we usually “do not know it” and that this “paradise” is an ethical-aesthetic relation of non-coercive co-authorship of the world recalls Wittgenstein's reflections on ethics and aesthetics. According to the *Tractatus*, accomplishing “good willing” and realizing “the world of the happy” (6.43) does not amount to achieving specific facts in the world, but pertains to the “limit of the world,” another term he uses for the subject (5.632). The idea that the good life is a right perspective on the world that is intersubjective and cannot be reduced to factual knowledge is also aesthetic. It is in this vein that Fried's discussion of the aesthetics of representing selfhood hinges on an intersubjective relation to the implied beholder (or audience, or reader). The theatricality Fried criticizes in art involves an imposition of an interpretation on the beholder. Discussing Fried's aesthetic critique in ethical-aesthetic terms allows us to see that controlling others' interpretations ignores the intersubjective dimension of interpretation as co-authoring. This kind of “unethical” aesthetic objectification refuses to recognize others as limits of the world (*Tractatus* 5.632), it refuses to recognize them as structuring forces of co-authorship in their own right.

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