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The Ethics of Singing Along: The Case of "Mind of a Lunatic"

I. INTRODUCTION

In 1990, a Houston-based rap group called Geto Boys released their third album, *The Geto Boys*, bearing one of the recently introduced parental advisory stickers along with a disclaimer from the record label: "Def American Recordings is opposed to censorship. Our manufacturer and distributor, however, do not condone or endorse the content of this recording, which they find violent, sexist, racist and indecent." The album was clearly designed to arouse controversy; critics took the bait. The album went gold. Within a year, it was blamed for at least one death.[1] Two songs on the album, "Mind of a Lunatic" and "Assassins," feature narratives of hideously immoral action—rape, necrophilia, murder, and kidnapping—as well as exaggerated, comically overblown nastiness—stealing from the poor, beating of the blind, and the killing of an innocent grandmother.

Throughout the album, the members of the group—Bushwick Bill, Scarface, and Willie D—tell stories of their evil misadventures. The violence in "Mind of a Lunatic" approaches that of a slasher movie. In the first verse, Bushwick Bill makes explicit reference to the genre. Later in the song, Willie D says that he will leave the listeners with worse nightmares than Freddie Kruger. Midway through, Scarface describes himself as sitting in a candlelit room "Dreaming of the people I've dismantled."[2] What are we to make of this?

Although I think there are reasons to worry about the Geto Boys, on a plausible interpretation their music is not nearly as morally bad as it first appears. Their songs are filled with the typical bravado of the genre amplified by slasher-gore. What could be tougher, more dangerous, and all-around bad than a lunatic-serial-killer-rapist-maniac! I will take a closer look at "Mind of a Lunatic," but my concern is not so much with the morality of the song as with the morality of listening to it.

I am not entirely sure what the prescribed mode of listening might be, but I am sure that a common mode is problematic. Often audiences do not simply listen to popular songs; they sing along. This encourages a curious mode of engagement that is far different from the way people typically approach other kinds of narrative artworks, such as film, theater, and literature. Most important, this mode of engagement is sometimes morally problematic. It is problematic when it involves the enjoyment of evil, more particularly, the enjoyment of imaginatively doing evil.[3] This is morally problematic because it is bad to take pleasure in imagined suffering. And it is even worse to take pleasure in thoughts of doing evil.[4]

II. LISTENING TO "MIND OF A LUNATIC"

"Mind of a Lunatic" is designed to shock. It features extreme violence, including a brutal rape narrative in the first segment. The song opens with these words: "The sight of blood excites me; shoot you in the head sit down, and watch you bleed to death."[5] The speaker is Bushwick Bill. He is clearly not a very nice guy. Things get much worse. In the second verse, he describes watching a woman through a window. He decides to brutally rape and kill her. As the song progresses, we

learn that not only is Bushwick a murdering rapist, he is something straight out of a horror movie. He has sex with the corpse of his victim and writes his name on the wall in blood. On the charts of evil, this is hard to top.

The remainder of the song describes several other violent episodes. Each is recounted in the first person by the various members of the group. They maintain their personas throughout. But when Scarface tells us how he killed the grandmother of his strung-out girlfriend, we learn that "she was screamin' out, 'Brad!'"— Scarface's first name, not his stage name.[6] The song does not merely attribute the violence to the stage-name persona, but to the actual person—Brad Jordan. Similarly, after giving his actual birth date, Willie D closes the song, saying that the events are not fictional. We are dealing with a strange form of slasher fiction. The characters in *Halloween* (John Carpenter, 1978) do not refer to Michael Myers as Tony Moran, the actor playing the adult killer. Nor do we learn that Myers was born on the same day as the actor. The Geto Boys are different. Apparently, they want to be thought of as monsters.

It would be easy to denounce the song as the product of a group of, well, lunatics. Who else would tell stories like this about themselves? On first blush, the music looks like immoral garbage. Maybe the distributor was right. Perhaps they should not have sold the album. But this is too quick, too simple. Although it is plausible that the song might be morally problematic, it depends on how it should be interpreted. And this is not so clear.

"Mind of a Lunatic" is more complex than it might at first appear. I doubt that the Geto Boys intend to endorse, much less encourage, rape, mass murder, and all manner of exaggerated violence. It is inconceivable that they would adopt this as their goal. They are not monsters. Nihilists of this sort could never have produced three albums together! They are not here to promote evil. No, their goals appear to be more innocuous: "Mind of a Lunatic" is part slasher fiction, part persona boasting, part shock the bourgeoisie, and part comment on how white America sees young black men. It implicitly says: so you think we are bad; you could not even imagine just how bad we are.

At times, the song borders on a parody of how white America sees black men. A distinctly white-sounding voice repeats: "that guy is crazy."[7]

Accordingly, one might think that the song is a politically motivated parody. Although it would be nice if we could see it as an extended parody, this is unlikely. The Geto Boys appear to have simply taken certain elements of the genre to their logical extension. The songs are seldom funny. And there is little overt irony. This is not pure parody.

Parody or not, the song clearly uses a horror narrative to develop the personas of the band members. As is common in the genre, the members attempt to play up their putative authenticity. But the fact that Scarface uses his given name does not mean that he has left his persona behind. Scarface (Brad Jordan) is a persona. The song is reputation building, big talk, of an unprecedented sort. Properly considered, the song does not condone, at least not in any obvious way, rape and murder. Hence, it is not nearly as bad as it first appears.

But my purpose here is not interpretation. Instead, I am principally interested in how people listen to the song. The morality of the song and the morality of listening might diverge. Regardless of how we should interpret a song, not everyone will respond in the intended way. This is not a phenomenon unique to music. Just think of the cult of gangster worship around *Scarface* (Brian De Palma, 1983). My Italian cobbler in Park Slope, Brooklyn, had a small shrine to the movie in 2010! Nearly three decades after the movie was released, gangster-worshiping kids across the country could be seen wearing T-shirts covered with dollar signs featuring Pacino in the final scene holding his "little friend." The lessons have been incorporated into numerous hip-hop songs. Apparently, the most important lesson is the first: "Lesson 1. Don't get high off your own supply."[8] Although the film tells a Cinderella story, it does not idolize the gangsters. Rather, it is a movie about an incestuously jealous drug smuggler who shows a few Greek virtues (and even more vices). This gangster worship is morally problematic. It is equally unexpected. Surely it was not De Palma's intention to develop a subcultural icon.

Regardless, with "Mind of a Lunatic" we do not need to look for aberrant modes of reception. Instead, a common form of listening to the song is morally problematic. Although film and theater audiences may occasionally recite the lines of campy midnight productions, it is common for people to sing along with songs. In the case of

"Mind of a Lunatic," the song gives the listener the words to be as bad as the persona, to eloquently express anger and pronounce on their own fierceness with style. The problem is that, unlike merely acting out a part on the stage, this kind of listening encourages a mode of engagement where audiences visualize the content they describe from the first person.

My claim might sound implausible, but it has phenomenological support. This mode of engagement is unlike reading a novel written in the first person. Listeners are not just hearing someone else's thoughts; rather, they assume the persona of the speaker. Singing along is closer to portraying a part onstage, but subtly different. Perhaps it is akin to channeling a demon, at least when the words are those of the Geto Boys. When people engage with songs in this manner, they tend to visualize acting out the content as they talk themselves through the narrative. As a result, the song encourages listeners to imagine doing evil. Moreover, it provides an occasion for listeners to enjoy imaginatively doing evil. To be clear, I do not think that this is the only mode of listening to music in this genre. But it is common. Call it the "angry teenager mode." It is far from unusual and it is morally problematic.

At this point, one may balk. One might be willing to grant the empirical claim that this mode of listening is common, but deny my conclusion. It is not as if the Geto Boys really killed any grandmothers. And it is not as if by reciting the lyrics audience members thereby rape and murder.[9] No one is harmed. No harm, no foul. In the following section, I address this worry. I defend the claim that it is bad to enjoy evil, regardless of whether or not it is merely fictional.

III. ENJOYING THE BAD

In one of few sustained discussions of the morality of fictional engagement, Allan Hazlett argues that "an emotional reaction is never wrong, however, merely in virtue of how it is directed at merely fictional events and characters."[10] He argues that if it is wrong to delight in fictional suffering, we must show that "our emotional reactions are directed *at reality*," not merely fictional content.[11] This sets a steep challenge. Hazlett comes to this conclusion via a theory about the scope of morality: "Morality concerns how we think about, feel

about (i.e. emotionally respond to), and treat (in action) other people."[12] If we think that emotional responses to fiction are not directed at actual people, then we should conclude that such reactions are outside the scope of morality.

To meet the challenge, Hazlett tries to show that our reactions to fiction are in fact directed at reality. But I see no need to proceed in this fashion. His fails to establish the need. His key claim about the scope of morality is dubious. Here is why: in order to establish the challenge, Hazlett must intend the statement to be a claim about the exclusive scope of morality. There is no problem to solve unless we assume this reading: "Morality [only] concerns how we think about, feel about (i.e. emotionally respond to), and treat (in action) other people." This is a sweeping theoretical claim about a complex phenomenon. Accordingly, it has a high burden of proof; Hazlett does not meet the burden.

Not only does Hazlett's exclusivity claim lack positive support, but it also begs a variety of questions in ethics, not just about the ethics of the imagination. The most obvious problem is that the thesis excludes nonhuman animals. Surely, morality concerns how we treat and feel about other sentient creatures. Further, most plausibly, ecosystems are not persons, no matter how broadly you define the term. But I take it that it is a live question whether or not nature has intrinsic moral significance.

A more plausible version of the claim holds that "Morality [only] concerns how we think about, feel about (i.e. emotionally respond to), and treat (in action) [real things]." I suspect that this is what Hazlett intended. According to this claim, mere fictional objects are outside the scope of morality. Although this is prima facie plausible, I think it is wrong. There are compelling reasons to reject this version of the exclusivity claim. I turn now to show why.

If it is bad to delight in fictional suffering, most likely it will have to be bad to delight in actual suffering. I simply cannot see how it could be bad to take pleasure in fictional suffering otherwise. So this is where I begin. Obviously, it is not a great idea to spend a lot of time taking pleasure in the suffering of others. It requires a rotten character to enjoy suffering in the first place, but it is bound to make a person worse. The habitual enjoyment of evil is likely character destroying. One might even be led to do evil as a result of the corruption. It is plausible that taking pleasure in suffering can

be instrumentally bad. But since this is largely an empirical question, I will say nothing more about it here.

My concern here is not with whether our engagement with artworks can be corrupting, nor am I concerned with whether our reactions to fiction can reflect poorly on our characters, for surely they can.[13] Instead, what I want to know is whether it is intrinsically bad to enjoy evil.[14] G. E. Moore thinks so. He argues that there are three principal kinds of evil: (1) enjoying or admiringly contemplating things that are themselves evil, (2) hatred of the good, and (3) pain.[15] We do not have to accept Moore's entire axiology to agree that it is intrinsically bad to enjoy evil. We merely need to consider a few cases to see that Moore is right, at least in this regard.

Imagine slipping on a banana peel at the local supermarket. You spin to brace your fall, but on the way down the corner of your mouth catches on the sharp lip of a shelf. It rips your mouth wide open. Through the gaping flesh of your torn cheek, most of your teeth are visible. You scream in agony. The blood fills your mouth, pours down your face, and pools on the floor. The paramedics arrive quickly. As they tend to your wound, a crowd gathers. Some softly snicker; others just watch. Unbeknownst to you, most of the crowd quietly admires the scene, taking pleasure in your sobs of pain and the sight of the red oozing out of your wound. As with Bushwick Bill, the sight of blood excites them.

This is certainly a scary crowd. We worry that they might be flesh-eating zombies or, worse, psychopaths. But this is not the only source of unease. Even if you did not notice the snickering, even if you falsely believed that the crowd was thoughtfully concerned, their pleasurable reactions would be morally bad. They should feel guilty or, at least, ashamed for having such reactions. We would frown on them for feeling this way. Most plausibly, the crowd is worthy of disesteem.

To be clear, I do not think their reactions would be bad for you. I do not think that unnoticed pleasure in your suffering has any impact on your welfare.[16] We need not settle the issue here. Even if it does, even if the undiscovered pleasure can be said to have some negative impact on you, the harm is slight. It cannot account for the badness of the enjoyment. Most plausibly, the crowd's enjoyment is morally far worse than it is prudentially bad for you. Hence, the badness cannot be ac-

counted for in terms of its welfare impact, unless we think that the crowd is also harmed.

Again, I see no reason to think that this is the case, but it is beside the point. The welfare impact on the members of the crowd cannot account for the badness of their pleasure. Even if we think that the moral value of our reactions has an impact on our welfare, this would not show that it is not intrinsically bad to delight in evil. Quite the opposite: the putative welfare impact on the crowd requires that it be independently bad to enjoy evil. On this account, it would not be prudentially bad for them otherwise. Either way, the welfare of the crowd is not the source of our concern. We are not worried about the poor crowd's loss in welfare. We do not feel pity for the crowd; we feel disgust.[17] If anyone is harmed, it is you!

If the possibility of a welfare impact on the object of suffering muddies the previous example, consider Moore's thought experiment. To see the badness of enjoying cruelty, he asks us to imagine a world of people solely occupied with cruel thoughts:

If we then consider what judgment we should pass upon a universe which consisted *solely* of minds thus occupied [with thoughts of cruelty], without the smallest hope that there would ever exist in it the smallest consciousness of any object other than those proper to these passions, or any feeling directed to any such object, I think that we cannot avoid the conclusion that the existence of such a universe would be a far worse evil than the existence of none at all.[18]

Although it is difficult to imagine a universe composed only of minds occupied with cruel thoughts, it is even more difficult to imagine a good reason to think that such a universe would be better than an empty one. Just as it seems clear that a universe occupied only by a single suffering creature is worse than an empty universe, it likewise seems bad if the universe were occupied solely by someone thinking cruel thoughts. This suggests that enjoying the bad is intrinsically bad. It is not bad merely for what it leads to. No, it is bad in itself.

If the immaterial nature of the previous example confounds things, consider a third scenario: imagine two worlds, each having just one inhabitant, say a sole survivor of a nuclear holocaust.[19] In world A, the survivor spends her free time thinking nice thoughts. She often imagines cats playing

with rubber bands on sunny windowsills. In world B, the survivor lives a similar life, but rather than imagine cats, he has the fantasy life of Bushwick Bill: he spends his afternoons imagining torturing children with a pair of pliers and a blowtorch. Is either world preferable?

The cat fancier in world A is a bit precious, but she is not hideously repulsive. In contrast, the survivor in B is repugnant. I doubt that the repulsion stems from worries about the consequences of his fantasizing. Yes, compulsive fantasies of child torture are probably indicative of inclinations that we would rather not see realized. But we can put this aside. We do not have to live in either world. We are merely asked to decide which one is better. If we were given a choice to bring one or the other into existence, we should choose A. Most plausibly world B is worse. Not because we worry that a child might be tortured, or that we might be injured by this freak, but because the child-torturing fantasist enjoys evil. That is bad enough.

Once again, this scenario suggests that it is intrinsically bad to enjoy evil. In fact, the universe of cruel thought and the two worlds examples give us reason to think that enjoying merely imagined evil is bad. Plausibly, engaging with fiction is a kind of guided imagination. Hence, it appears that in the process of making a case for the intrinsic badness of enjoying evil, we found a reason to believe the same about enjoying fictional evil. And the events portrayed in "Mind of a Lunatic" are no less evil than those envisioned by the child-torturing fantasist.

IV. FICTION AND AUTONOMOUS FANTASY

One might argue that there is an important difference between the kind of imagining found in the previous scenarios and that involved in engaging with fictional works. For instance, in the third case above, we might think that the child-torturing fantasist takes pleasure in what Christopher Cherry calls a "surrogate fantasy."[20] Surrogate fantasies are those that the fantasist would like to take place. They are surrogates for reality. The survivor in world B likely wishes there were children around to torture. But not all fantasies are like this. Some fantasies are "autonomous."

Cherry argues that autonomous fantasies are unlike surrogate fantasies in that the fantasist does not desire the fantasy to be actualized.[21] For instance, as Thomas Hurka notes, it is perfectly conceivable that someone could enjoy rape fantasies, but not want to rape. Nor would he want to witness a rape. He would be horrified by the violence.[22] But he is not horrified by merely imagined violence. On Cherry's taxonomy, his fantasies are autonomous, not surrogate. Autonomous fantasies appear to be far less morally problematic; perhaps they are morally innocuous.

Plausibly, most of our encounters with fiction are more like autonomous fantasies than surrogate fantasies. There may be many cases where the audience uses the fiction as a surrogate. But this is not typical, at least outside of the genres of pornography and erotica. If we consider the kind of imagining involved in most other types of fiction, it is clear that fictional engagement is typically akin to autonomous fantasizing.

To see that this is the case, it will help to make some distinctions between a few kinds of imagining. Although there are a variety of taxonomies of imagination in the literature, Bernard Williams's is most useful for present purposes. He distinguishes between four different kinds of imagining: (1) as a spectator not in the visualized world, (2) as an actor in the imagined world doing things, (3) as an outside observer watching oneself do things, and (4) the dream-like state of inhabiting the sphere of action, but merely observing.[23] The first and third kinds are from the outside: one imagines oneself outside of the fictional world. The second and fourth are from a perspective inside the imagined world.

Most dreams are like the second type of imagining. Dreams are typically experienced in the first person. They are unlike the first and third kinds of imagining; we are not mere observers in our dreams. Dreams are episodes of doing and suffering. In contrast, the experience of watching films and plays and reading novels is more like the first kind of imagining, as an external spectator.[24] We merely observe the action occurring on the page, stage, or screen, even when the fourth wall is traversed. We do not imagine ourselves as actors in, or even as impotent occupants of, the fictional world. That would be very strange. Indeed, this is the stuff of science fiction.[25] Instead, we merely observe from the outside.[26] We may be startled, we may fear for the safety of a character, but we seldom, if ever, fear for ourselves.[27]

When we imagine things in the second sense, from a first-person perspective, it is unlikely that our fantasies are autonomous. More likely than not, first-person imaginings are surrogate fantasies. We are fantasizing about doing things, not merely watching them being done. In contrast, third-person imaginings are more often than not autonomous fantasies. Given that most fictional experiences are akin to third-person imaginings, they are likely autonomous. When we reflect on our experiences with fiction, this seems to be the case. I certainly do not wish it were the case that Freddie Kruger haunts the dreams of actual suburban teenagers. Hence, if autonomous fantasizing is not morally problematic, then neither is most fictional imagining. How could it be morally bad to take pleasure in the observation of something in a fictional world that we do not want to be manifest in reality?

V. SONGS AND THE MORALITY OF AUTONOMOUS FANTASY

The autonomous fantasy objection holds that since autonomous fantasies are intrinsically morally unobjectionable, and since engaging with fiction is typically a form of autonomous fantasizing, it too is typically morally unobjectionable. Further, one might argue that since people engage with songs in the same way as they do other kinds of fiction, we should think that listening to songs such as "Mind of a Lunatic" is morally unobjectionable. There are two general ways to respond to this objection: (1) deny that engaging with songs is typically akin to autonomous fantasy, or (2) deny that autonomous fantasizing is morally unobjectionable. I will take both routes. I start with the second, since it has implications beyond music.

i. The morality of autonomous fantasizing. The objection is wrong to suggest that autonomous fantasy is morally innocuous. Cherry concurs. He asks us to consider an autonomous fantasy where the fantasizer imagines hurting someone he encounters. Cherry thinks that this kind of fantasy constitutes a slight harm to the person he imagines hurting: "the harm caused by the imagined doing is very different from but no less a harm than that caused by the actual deed."[28] If this is right, if autonomous fantasies can constitute harms, then they are not always morally unobjectionable. If

anything is morally objectionable, harm is. Hence, the fantasizing itself can be bad, not because of its instrumental effects on the fantasizer, but because it harms the object.

But this suggestion cannot solve our problem. Regardless of whether or not we can be harmed by someone else's fantasies, fictional characters cannot be harmed. They do not exist. They have no welfare. Accordingly, Cherry's claim has no interesting implications for fiction. If there is anything morally objectionable about enjoying the suffering of fictional others, it will not stem from the fact that our enjoyment harms the inhabitants of fictional worlds.[29] No grandmother was harmed in "Mind of a Lunatic."

We can put aside Cherry's suggestion. We already have the resources at hand to answer the autonomous fantasy objection. Earlier I offered a compelling account of the badness of enjoying imagined suffering, whether surrogate or autonomous. It is intrinsically bad to enjoy evil. The universe of cruel thought and the two worlds examples show as much. The implications for fiction do not require much elaboration.

On a plausible account of fictional engagement, when we engage with fictions we take it to be the case that a variety of things are true of a fictional world.[30] When we take pleasure in the suffering of a fictional character, we imagine it to be true in the fictional world that a character suffers. Although we believe that Anna Karenina suffers, we need not believe that she exists in the real world. She suffers in the world of the story. In most realistic fictions, we assume that the characters suffer as do people in the real world. Accordingly, enjoying their suffering is akin to enjoying guided cruel thoughts. If malicious pleasure in cruel thoughts is bad, it seems that it would be bad regardless of whether it is accompanied by a belief that the object exists in the real world. Why would that make all the difference? The universe of cruel thought and the two worlds examples appear to be morally problematic even though the imagining was not accompanied by a belief in the reality of the objection.

Absent an explanation for why a belief in the reality of the object makes all the moral difference, I see no reason to think it unobjectionable to enjoy the evil in a fictional world. In the case of most fiction, the badness is not, at least not primarily, in wanting to do bad things. It is in enjoying the bad. And the bad is enjoyed in both

cases. It is merely accompanied by a different, and arguably irrelevant, belief. This explanation also accounts for why cartoon violence is unobjectionable. Unrealistic fictional worlds are different in important ways. The violence is not bad for children's cartoon characters or the Three Stooges. It is not true of the fictional cartoon world that pain causes lasting physical damage, or that the characters are in much danger. Bugs Bunny is not threatened by Elmer Fudd. Wile E. Coyote appears to be indestructible. The Three Stooges feel pain, but they recover quickly. They do not suffer. Pain in these fictional worlds has little of what makes it evil. When we enjoy cartoon violence, we are not enjoying suffering.

Similarly, this explanation accounts for what is especially troubling about "Mind of a Lunatic." The song invites us to, or at least some listeners see it as an invitation to, enjoy suffering. The occupants of the fictional world that the Geto Boys haunt suffer tremendously. Bushwick slits the throat of the woman he rapes and watches her die. The violence is comically overblown, perhaps, but it is decidedly not cartoon violence. The Geto Boys' victims suffer.

Of course, listeners know that Bushwick Bill is not a knife-wielding rapist. But the ontological status of the suffering is not exculpatory. We do not think that pleasure taken in suffering falsely believed to be real is morally neutral.[31] If on hearing about a disfiguring car crash, someone takes malicious pleasure, the enjoyment is bad. It does not make it any less bad if the accident was falsely reported. Why would it? Similarly, if a subject in a Milgram-style experiment takes exquisite pleasure in administering what he believes to be high-voltage shocks to the confederate, we do not think his pleasure less bad than if the shocks had been real.[32] Hence, it does not seem that the suffering needs to be real for the enjoyment to be bad.[33] Of course, the suffering is thought to be real. Again, given the universe of cruel thought and the two worlds examples, I see no reason to think that the belief in the reality of the object makes all the moral difference. Either way, it is not actual suffering. This provides additional support for the thought that the ontological status of a bad state of affairs is largely irrelevant to the morality of the enjoyment.[34] If it is bad to enjoy nonexistent suffering, then it seems we lack a clear reason to deny that it is also bad to enjoy fictional suffering merely because it is not real.

ii. The morality of first-person listening. The autonomous fantasy objection rests on the likely conjunction of autonomous fantasy and non-first-person imagining. Conversely, it seems that much first-person fantasizing is surrogate. These are generalizations, but they seem largely correct. Further, the objection holds that engaging with fictions is typically a form of non-first-person imagining. This suggests that it is autonomous.

But listening to songs is often different. While listening to songs, people commonly vocalize. They sing or talk out the lyrics. The words sometimes become their own. In the process, listeners often assume the singer-persona. When this happens, it is not clear if they should be called "listeners," as this is not the principal mode of engagement. Instead, they are more like role-players. When singing along, listeners often adopt the persona of the singer, sometimes with embarrassing results, as in the opening scene of *Office Space* (Mike Judge, 1999).

This starkly distinguishes film, theater, and literature from songs. I cannot recall ever assuming the persona of a film character, much less the villain in a slasher movie. In cases like that of "Mind of a Lunatic," where the narratives are recounted in the first person, assuming the singer-persona in many instances gives rise to imagining performing the actions portrayed in the song. Here, the mode of imagining is that of Williams's second type—as an actor in the imagined world doing things: "Dreaming of the people I've dismantled."[35] When the actions portrayed are evil, listeners imagine doing evil. And they often enjoy it. Hence, while listening to songs, sometimes listeners take pleasure in imaginatively doing evil. This is bad. Although I do not know if the angry teenager mode is a form of autonomous or surrogate fantasy, it is morally problematic either way. It is bad to enjoy evil thoughts. And it is likely worse to enjoy thoughts of doing evil.

VI. CONCLUSION

The art and morality debate has been chiefly concerned with an aesthetic question: do moral flaws with works of art constitute aesthetic flaws? Far less attention has been paid to the ways in which artworks can be morally flawed. There are at least three promising contenders: artworks can be morally flawed by (1) endorsing immorality,

(2) corrupting audiences through means such as inculcating false moral beliefs, and (3) encouraging responses that are bad to have. In this article, I try to put some flesh on the third suggestion, but my discussion is not confined to the reactions sanctioned by artworks. Instead, my concern is broader. I want to know if our reactions to fiction can be bad, regardless of whether they are encouraged by the work.

I identify a common mode of listening to songs, the "angry teenager mode," and show where it might be problematic. But I have just scratched the surface of the morality of our engagement with popular music. I focus on one song in a sub-genre of rap. The wide variety of musical genres poses an equally wide variety of problems. But even in the narrow domain under consideration, a variety of directly relevant issues remain unexplored. The most important is this: we might accept the claim that it is intrinsically bad to delight in fictional suffering, but we need an explanation for why it is intuitively far less bad than enjoying actual suffering. A fully fleshed-out account of the badness will need to explain the difference.[36]

I agree that this issue is important. But it is out of scope to pursue a solution here. It would take at least another article. Rather than provide a comprehensive account of the morality of fictional engagement, my goal in this article is limited. I merely want to make a plausible case for the badness of a certain kind of musical listening. Although "Mind of a Lunatic" might not be as bad as it wants to be, it can be bad to listen to the song. It is bad when one enjoys the evil it represents. It is even worse when one enjoys imaginatively doing the evil, as many do when they adopt the personas of the Geto Boys.

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1. R. A. Dyer and Rick Mitchell, "Geto Boys' Music Blamed in a Slaying in Dodge City," *Houston Chronicle*, July 23, 1991.

2. Geto Boys, "Mind of a Lunatic," on *Grip it! On That Other Level* (1990, Rap-A-Lot Records).

3. My worry is closely related to Platonic concerns about method acting. But I will say no more about Plato here.

4. Thomas Hurka, *Virtue, Vice, and Value* (Oxford University Press, 2001), pp. 162–171; Berys Gaut, "The Ethical Criticism of Art," in *Aesthetics and Ethics: Essays at the Intersection*, ed. Jerrold Levinson (Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. 182–203, esp. pp. 186–187, 194, 199; Berys Gaut, *Art, Emotion, and Ethics* (Oxford University Press, 2007), pp. 231, 233, 236; Allan Hazlett, "How to Defend Response Moralism," *The British Journal of Aesthetics* 49 (2009): 241–255; Paisley Livingston and Alfred Mele, "Evaluating Emotional Responses to Fiction," in *Emotion and the Arts*, eds. Mette Hjort and Sue Laver (Oxford University Press, 1997), pp. 166–171; Richard Moran, "The Expression of Feeling in Imagination," *Philosophical Review* 103 (1994): 75–106, at p. 105; and Kendall Walton, "Morals in Fiction and Fictional Morality," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, Supplementary Volume 68 (1994): 27–66, are the only recent discussions that explicitly deal with the morality of engaging with fiction. Grant Tavinor, *The Art of Videogames* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), chap. 8, provides a reasonable take on videogames. Out of these, only Hurka and Hazlett are focused on the morality of fictional engagement. Hurka's discussion is by far the most nuanced treatment in the literature on fiction. Christopher Cherry, "The Inward and the Outward: Fantasy, Reality and Satisfaction," *Canadian Journal of Philosophy*, Supplementary Volume 11 (1985): 175–193; Christopher Cherry, "When Is Fantasising Morally Bad?" *Philosophical Investigations* 11 (1988): 112–132; John Corvino, "Naughty Fantasies," *Southwest Philosophy Review* 18 (2002): 213–220; Stephen Kershnar, "Is Violation Pornography Bad for Your Soul?" *Journal of Social Philosophy* 35 (2004): 349–366; Stephen Kershnar, "The Moral Status of Sexual Fantasies," *Public Affairs Quarterly* 19 (2005): 301–315; and Jerome Neu, "An Ethics of Fantasy?" *Journal of Theoretical and Philosophical Psychology* 22 (2002): 133–157, treat the morality of fantasy, but they have little to say about fiction.

5. Geto Boys, "Mind of a Lunatic."

6. Geto Boys, "Mind of a Lunatic."

7. Geto Boys, "Mind of a Lunatic."

8. The Geto Boys sample from the movie extensively throughout the album. Scarface takes his stage name from the movie.

9. Except for, perhaps, Christopher Martinez, who claimed to have been hypnotized by "Mind of a Lunatic" when he killed Bruce Romans in 1991. See Dyer and Mitchell, "Geto Boys' Music Blamed in a Slaying in Dodge City," p. 25.

10. Hazlett, "How to Defend Response Moralism," p. 253.

11. Hazlett, "How to Defend Response Moralism," p. 253.

12. Hazlett, "How to Defend Response Moralism," p. 245.

13. Mary Devereaux, in "Beauty and Evil: The Case of Leni Riefenstahl's *Triumph of the Will*," in *Aesthetics and Ethics: Essays at the Intersection*, ed. Jerrold Levinson (Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. 227–257, pp. 241 and 248–249, notes that certain kinds of enjoyment can be problematic, but she provides no elaboration.

Her concern is with character evaluation and character corruption.

14. On a virtue theory of goodness, these questions do not come apart. Since I do not think that virtue theories of the good, the right, or reasons are remotely plausible, I will not explore this further.

15. G. E. Moore, *Principia Ethica* (New York: Dover, 2004), pp. 207–214, sections 124–128. Hurka, *Virtue, Vice, and Value*, p. 15, defends a similar account, but with a larger list in the third category. He also includes false belief and failure.

16. This is controversial. For instance, Robert C. Roberts, "What's Wrong with Wicked Feelings," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 28 (1991): 13–24, at p. 22, argues that we can be harmed by the wicked feelings of others. And many, such as Thomas Nagel, "Death," in *The Metaphysics of Death*, ed. John Martin Fischer (Stanford University Press, 1993), and Steven Luper, "Posthumous Harm," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 41 (2004): 63–72, think that we can be harmed at a distance, even after our deaths.

17. Brad Hooker, "Does Moral Virtue Constitute a Benefit to the Agent?" in *How Should One Live?* ed. Roger Crisp (Oxford University Press, 1996), argues that moral worth does not directly impact our welfare. We do not pity the wicked. And appropriateness of pity is a good test of the loss of welfare.

18. Moore, *Principia Ethica*, p. 209, section 125.

19. W. D. Ross, *The Right and the Good* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1930), p. 140, offers various two-worlds arguments to support his alternative list of intrinsic goods: virtue, pleasure, the allocation of pleasure to the virtuous, and knowledge.

20. I assume that fantasy is a species of imagining and use the terms interchangeably.

21. Cherry, "When Is Fantasising Morally Bad?" p. 113, later uses the label "idle fantasy" to refer to autonomous fantasy.

22. Similarly, Susan Feagin, "Some Pleasures of the Imagination," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 43 (1984): 41–55, at pp. 42, 48, and 50, notes that we often pleasurably imagine things that we would not like to sense, or even desire to be the case.

23. Bernard Williams, "Imagination and the Self," in his *Problems of the Self* (Cambridge University Press, 1973), pp. 38–39. Hurka, *Virtue, Vice, and Value*, p. 169, n. 12, notes the relevance of Williams's taxonomy. Richard Wollheim, *Art and the Mind* (Harvard University Press, 1974), p. 59, and *The Thread of Life* (Yale University Press, 1984), pp. 71–76, draws a related contrast between "central" and "acentral" imagining, but his view is far from clearly stated. Gregory Currie, "The Moral Psychology of Fiction," *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 73 (1995): 250–259, at p. 256, draws a distinction between "primary" and "secondary" imagining that comes close to what I am looking for, but it brings with it too many theoretical commitments to simulation theory.

24. Simulation theorists, such as Currie, "The Moral Psychology of Fiction," disagree. I cannot address simulation theory here. For a critical overview of the debate, see Noël Carroll, "Simulation, Emotions, and Morality," in his *Beyond Aesthetics* (Cambridge University Press, 2001).

25. Walton, "Fearing Fictions," *Journal of Philosophy* 75 (1978): 5–27, at pp. 23–24, argues that we experience fictions as if we are "part of fictional worlds." I find this suggestion strange.

26. Carroll, "Simulation, Emotions, and Morality," pp. 311–313, argues for the same.

27. Noël Carroll, *The Philosophy of Horror* (New York: Routledge, 1990), p. 76, and Alex Neill, "Fiction and the Emotions," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 30 (1993): 1–13, mark the important distinction between fearing for oneself and fearing for others. Stephen Davies, *The Philosophy of Art* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2006), p. 156; Berys Gaut, *A Philosophy of Cinematic Art* (Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp. 278–281; and Tavinor, *The Art of Videogames*, p. 143, suggest that the phenomenology of videogame play may be an exception. Corvino, "Naughty Fantasies," p. 218, thinks that the participatory nature of videogames makes the possible moral problems more perspicuous.

28. Cherry, "The Inward and the Outward: Fantasy, Reality and Satisfaction," p. 193. Roberts, "What's Wrong with Wicked Feelings," p. 22, says something similar: "We may feel that even utter strangers—even other drivers on the highway—who get angry with us with insufficient cause have done us an injustice."

29. I take it that fictional worlds are not real and that even if they were, it would be impossible to harm in a cross-world fashion. The burden is on anyone who thinks otherwise.

30. Neill, "Fiction and the Emotions," defends a similar view.

31. Moore, *Principia Ethica*, p. 210, section 125, defends this claim. Hurka, *Virtue, Vice, and Value*, p. 165, seconds the view.

32. Hurka, *Virtue, Vice, and Value*, p. 163.

33. This serves as a reply to Kershnar's, "Is Violation Pornography Bad for Your Soul?" p. 354, and "The Moral Status of Sexual Fantasies," p. 309, objection that although it might be bad to love evil, merely imagined evil is not actually evil. And it is not bad to love something that is not evil. In reply, the false belief case shows that the ontological status of the object is largely irrelevant.

34. The ontological status of the object can indeed make some difference. For instance, one can be disrespectful of the dead, but not of fictional characters. You cannot add insult to fictional injury. Due to limitations of scope, I must put this issue aside.

35. Geto Boys, "Mind of a Lunatic."

36. Moore, *Principia Ethica*, p. 210, section 125, claims that appreciation of the bad is equally bad whether it is real or merely imaginary. Hurka, *Virtue, Vice, and Value*, pp. 168–170, offers an account of the difference.