

# Preface

There are two threads from my life that come together in this book. One concerns ethics and the other is about the arts. Delight in the arts began with my father. After being jailed during World War II as a conscientious objector, and mixing with artist-conscientious-objectors in jail, he came out as an oil painter. It was part time for him. It had to be as he and my mother (eventually) had seven children to support. His ‘day job’ was in sales but he was far from enthusiastic—unlike his approach to painting. He worked as an obsessed painter whenever he could. Yet he was too embarrassed to exhibit the paintings he produced. On one occasion I swapped—for a magnet, with a boy across the street—one of his small canvasses. My father was not upset that I had parted so easily with one of his paintings. He was embarrassed that the neighbouring family had an example of his work. His first exhibition was a one-man show in the Canterbury Society of Arts (Christchurch, New Zealand—in the early 1960s) and it was galling for him. I was too young to learn what had upset him most about the experience. On their side, the Society probably did not appreciate receiving oil paintings, the day before an opening, that were still wet. I still remember Dad touching up paintings on an easel on the front lawn, before packing them into the car to take them to the gallery.

While he subsequently hid his paintings from the world,<sup>2</sup> he nevertheless revealed a great deal to me (and my siblings). It was with my father that I learnt to discriminate. Although he refrained from actively directing my tastes, at the end of every visit to an art gallery, he would ask me which paintings I liked. At first I didn’t know, but gradually I could point to one or two and say why I liked them. It was his influence that led me (and still does) to visit galleries in major cities—and see the originals of paintings he loved, but only ever saw in reproduction. And I still have the practice of going back to those few standout paintings, to explore further why they appeal to me. Often it is colour. Painting was a visceral thing for him, and became so for me.

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<sup>2</sup> With the exception of an exhibition of a dozen of his paintings in a gallery in Sydney in the late-1970s.

He was a *fauve*. Heavily influenced by Matisse, Cézanne, Raoul Dufy, van Gogh, and Georges Rouault. He painted like a passionate *fauve*. He was a *fauve* in his emotional life also, veering from singing-whistling joyfully to himself, with passionate absorption in his art; to sullen moods, and outbursts of anger. In putting this book together, and particularly in preparing my chapter on ‘Modern painting and morality,’ I have found a capacity to re-own and re-love my father and to accept both sides of his passion. There is a photograph of Mark Rothko that was pivotal. It shows Rothko sitting on a garden chair in front of one of his big red paintings in his garage studio at East Hampton in the summer of 1964 [2, p. 95]. It reminded me so much of my father Ivan—who would sit for hours in front of one of his paintings, contemplating. Seeing the photo of Rothko gave me a warm appreciation of my Dad: a flawed human being like Rothko—like all of us—and absorbed in his art. Although I dearly wanted to find an ‘expert’ to write the chapter on painting and morality, my lack of success was an unanticipated gift. It was a chapter I needed to write.

The other ‘arts’ influence was theatre. Not repertory theatre, but street theatre, the clown, mime, *commedia dell’arte*, bouffon, and neutral mask. My teacher, Francis Batten, had trained with Jacques Lecoq—a master of mime—in the Le Coq international school of theatre in Paris. Francis, as teacher and subsequently dear friend, introduced me to a world of spontaneity, improvisation and presence. I loved the world of the clown, and the ‘truth’ I found there. It was more than spontaneity. I learned that (in the best moments) one could be both inside the action on stage, immersed in the drama, and—in parallel—blissfully watching, detached, yet masterfully directing. It was a taste of what Stanislavsky meant (I believe) by ‘*experiencing*’ in “dividing of oneself” as a character on stage and, at the same time, observing oneself as performer [1, pp. 142–143]. The ‘*experiencing*’ for me was integrated. I felt completely at one. I wanted to be a clown, to go to *Le Coq école*, but unfulfilled academic desires and a mortgage kept me from moving to Paris.

The other thread is ethics. I have been teaching ‘bioethics’ in medical schools in Australia, and now Singapore, for the last 22 years. The major influences on bioethics—a sphere of applied ethics in medicine and other health professions—have been philosophy and law. The field is overly theoretical, philosophical, and legal—if not downright juridical. Even practising clinicians, who publish in bioethics, are obliged to pay respect to philosophy and the law, rather than found their views on clinical experience. For some time, I’ve been dissatisfied with this approach and prefer more practical methods of research—including watching what physicians actually do. These observations have led me to a conviction that medical practice is an art form. Whilst it is a truism that medicine is an *art* and a *science*, there is little substantive material on medicine as an *art*. It is not easy to research or write about. So much of this art is a synthesis of theory and practice, individual nous, and the experience of dealing compassionately (as most doctors do) with real patients in the midst of life’s crises.

My background of ethics in medical schools may make sense of the selection of some of the topics and contributors to this book. It is most obvious in the choice of chapters relating the medical humanities, movies and medical ethics, and myths

of medical progress and in the chapters on bioart. At a personal level, this book is a part of a larger project of tying the threads of ethics and the arts together. I am hopeful however that the book is more than personal, and offers to all readers insights into the arts, the arts and ethics, and perspectives on ethics from a vantage point of the arts. Some of the chapters, at least, may also offer insights into ethical practice.

The people I most want to thank for their support in editing and writing this book are the contributing authors. Each of them has been a pleasure to work with and to correspond with and I owe a great deal to them all in adding to my own understanding. The contributors include long-standing friends—among whom I include Rachael Swain (a dear friend from Sydney) and George Annas—a colleague and friend who accepted me as a visiting academic to his Department at the University of Boston, back in the 1980s. Other colleagues and friends who have contributed as authors include Debora Diniz, Claire Hooker, Ruth Little, Philip Rothfield, Ionat Zurr (and her partner, Oron Catts). They also include Henri Colt whom I met here in Singapore at a ‘grand rounds’ presentation he gave on ‘medical ethics goes to the movies’ in the National University (teaching) Hospital. Following his talk, he readily agreed to contribute a chapter on this topic. The contributors also include newfound friends and colleagues who responded generously to my request—arriving out of the blue—to provide a chapter. These include Philip Alperson, Brian Bergen-Aurand, Sarah Sentilles, James Thompson and Joanna Zylinska. They also include Phillip Zarrilli whom I have had the good fortune of spending time with in person, after he completed his chapter on the ethics of acting and actor training (Chap. 3). Phillip has offered me guidance and comments on my two chapters on theatre and ethics, invited me to observe one of his classes, and—with T. Sasitharan (Sasi), Director of the Intercultural Theatre Institute (Singapore)—invited me to participate in an intercultural Symposium in Singapore that I mention in the Conclusion chapter (Chap. 22).

I am grateful to Iain Bamforth, who wrote Chap. 2 on Flaubert’s *Madam Bovary*. I came to know Iain through his literary presentations at the Centre for Biomedical Ethics in the National University of Singapore. He has since guided me to broaden my horizons and given me suggestions for a number of apposite writers who have addressed problems I was facing at points in preparing my own chapters. I am very grateful to Miles Little—a surgeon poet, who—on retiring from his position as Head of Surgery at one of the Teaching Hospitals in Sydney (and from active surgery)—was so concerned about values in medicine that he set up the Centre for Values, Ethics and the Law in Medicine in the Sydney Medical School, University of Sydney. Miles is a font of wisdom and encouragement to all who know him. Earlier work of his, on the relation between ethics and aesthetics (which is the subject of his Chap. 16), was pivotal to my desire to produce a volume of readings on ethics and the arts. He has been helpful in suggesting authors (including his daughter Ruth, who wrote Chap. 21). Miles also reviewed two of my chapters, and guided me away from the precipices I was heading toward. He has continued to offer encouragement and wry humour to the end.

My wife Maja has given me both support and encouragement, not begrudging the long hours I have locked myself away, or my vacant screen on emerging from the study. Subterranean writing goes on even when one is apparently spending time

with the family—and Maja has been patient and tolerant. The Director of the Centre for Biomedical Ethics, National University of Singapore—Alastair Campbell—has been encouraging and gave me valuable comments on one of my chapters. I am also appreciative of the ready support and encouragement from the staff at Springer, Amsterdam, who accepted a skeletal outline for this volume, long before there was any meat on the bones, and have patiently waited for the manuscript to be delivered to them.

Singapore  
December 2012

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<http://www.springer.com/978-94-017-8815-1>

Ethics and the Arts

Macneill, P. (Ed.)

2014, XIII, 273 p. 8 illus., Hardcover

ISBN: 978-94-017-8815-1