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IS THE MORAL CHARACTER OF AN ARTIST RELEVANT IN THE AESTHETIC EVALUATION OF THEIR WORK?

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Supervised by Professor Samantha Vice

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UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND JOHANNESBURG

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HONOUR PLEDGE

I, **Amelia Aitken**, a registered student for the degree **Master of Arts Philosophy** at the University of the Witwatersrand with student number **2391548,** pledge that the assessment task that I am submitting as part of **PHIL7020 Research Report** is entirely my own work, except where I have indicated that I obtained information from other sources, such as books or internet sites (where allowed). I pledge that I have not consulted with anyone else, including other students, while completing the assessment task or copied information from any source without referencing it.

I acknowledge that if I am found to have cheated in any way or plagiarised other people's work, I will be subject to disciplinary action, which may lead to suspension or expulsion.

Signed:

Date: 03 March 2022

INTRODUCTION

Throughout history, examples can be found of society being willing to overlook the immoral behaviour of artists on the grounds that they are or were considered to be *creative geniuses*: Benvenuto Cellini (1500-1571), a Florentine sculptor, goldsmith and writer, murdered a rival goldsmith but was given a papal pardon (Pope-Hennessey, 2020);[1] Caravaggio (1571-1610), an Italian painter, was arrested on a number of occasions and committed murder, but due to his brilliance as an artist he was allowed to work for cardinals and other important people in the Catholic Church (Graham-Dixon, 2020); Paul Gauguin (1848-1903), a French Post-Impressionist artist, raped underage girls in Haiti and fathered children with them, yet his work is revered as an important contributor to early 20th century avant-garde developments in the art world (Cooper, 2021). The moniker *creative genius* seems to provide artists with a kind of protective shroud: because of the creative genius that lies within artists are allowed the "eccentricity, melancholy, madness, addiction, neurosis, reclusiveness, egotism, penury" or any other flaw that is considered contributory to the creation of art (Wilson, 2020). In 1587 Giovanni Battista Armenini, an Italian art critic and historian stated:

> An awful habit has developed among common fold and even among the educated, to whom it seems natural that a painter of the highest distinction must show signs of some ugly and nefarious vice allied with a capricious and eccentric temperament, springing from his abstruse mind. And the worst is that many ignorant artists believe themselves to be very exceptional by affecting melancholy and eccentricity (cited by Wilson, 2020).

In contemporary times this tradition continues: Roman Polanski (1933-), a Polish-French film director, producer, writer and actor, pleaded guilty to drugging and raping a 13-year old girl, fled from justice in the United States yet continues to work in the film industry from Europe (Freeman, 2018); James Brown (1933-2006), an American singer-songwriter, was arrested on a number of occasions for driving under the influence of drugs or alcohol as well as for domestic violence, yet he is revered for his musical genius (Latson, 2014); Woody Allen (1935-), an American director, actor, writer

[1] Where no page numbers are indicated in the reference, the information was retrieved from articles on websites or electronic books which do not contain page numbers.

and comedian, accused of, but not formally charged with, sexually abusing his 7-year old adopted daughter in 1992, continues to work in the film industry (Orth, 2014).

A turning point regarding the acceptability of immoral behaviour of artists and powerful men came with the publication of a *New York Times* article on 05 October 2017 that detail sexual harassment allegations, spanning decades, against Harvey Weinstein, a powerful and influential producer in Hollywood (*Harvey Weinstein timeline: How the scandal unfolded*, 2020). The backlash against Weinstein proved to be a catalyst in the amplification of the *#MeToo* movement.

Originally founded in 2006, the initial aim of *#MeToo* was to effect social change primarily organised through social media. To a large extent, this aim was achieved when it became the banner under which multiple high-profile actresses expressed their experiences of sexual harassment in the entertainment industry (*Understanding the Me Too Movement: A Sexual Harassment Awareness Guide*, n.d.). By 27 October 2017 it was reported that 87 women came forward accusing Weinstein of sexual abuse, and only a year later, on 23 October 2018, *The New York Times* reported that 201 powerful men were brought down by the *#MeToo* movement (Moniuszko, 2017; Carlsen, et al., 2018).

A word that continuously made its appearance when the behaviour of these men is described is “predatory” and, although it is not a new term to be linked to sexual assault, it is only with the advent of the *#MeToo* movement that it has come to be used in a more expansive manner “to describe a general pattern of unwanted [sexual] advances and harassment” (Bock & Berkley, 2019). According to the World Health Organisation (WHO) sexual assault or sexual violence can be defined as

> Any sexual act, attempt to obtain a sexual act, unwanted sexual comments or advances, or acts to traffic or otherwise directed against a person’s sexuality using coercion, by any person regardless of their relation to the victim, in any setting, including but not limited to home and work” (Carcia-Moreno, Guedes, & Knerr, 2012).

Coercion here is understood to encompass “varying degrees of force, psychological intimidation, blackmail [and] threats” of any kind, including but not limited to physical harm or of not obtaining a job/grade (Carcia-Moreno, Guedes, & Knerr, 2012). Child sexual abuse “is described as inappropriate sexual activities that a child does not

understand, give consent to, or is insufficiently developmentally prepared for, and these sexual actions do not conform to the standards of society" (Barajas & Smith, 2017).

The history of the relationship between art and ethics is a complex one, which falls outside the scope of this study, save to mention that up to the 19th century an intimate relationship between aesthetics[2] and ethics in the West was assumed, primarily based on the fact that most art was associated with the church (viz. Christianity) or some other kind of authority (Carroll, 2010:248). During the 19th century philosophers questioned this hitherto assumed relationship between aesthetics and ethics and advocated for Kant's notion of "aesthetic autonomy" which he presented in *The Critique of Judgment* (1790), whereby art, or more specifically, judgements of beauty, is separated from ethics, utility or pleasure (Carroll, 2010:248; *Encyclopaedia*, 2018). This gave rise to the movement known as aestheticism, which holds that no direct relation exists between art and ethics and popularised the phrase "*l'art pour l'art"* (art-for-art's sake) (Carroll, 2010:249).

For most of the 19th century and beginning of the 20th century aestheticism was considered as the only way by which to evaluate art. However, the question regarding the relationship between art and ethics has been revived in contemporary debates in the form of ethical evaluation of art (Devereaux 1998:242; Peek, n.d.). The ethical evaluation of art promotes the idea that an ethical component should be incorporated in the "interpretation and evaluation of art", or, as Matthew Kieran contends, we should consider "the moral character of art" when we engage with (some) art (Kieran 2006:141; Peek, n.d.).

With these contemporary theories in mind, along with the knowledge we have of the immoral behaviour of some artists, the question I aim to investigate is whether we should consider the moral character of an artist as being relevant to the aesthetic evaluation of their work. Can we, knowing that an artist abused their position in society to cause harm[3] to others, continue to view that work of art as separate from the artist?

[2] Aesthetics is defined as "the philosophical study of beauty and taste" which deals with both "the nature and value of the arts [as well as] those responses to natural objects that find expression in the language of the beautiful and the ugly" (Munro & Scruton, 2020). In other words, aesthetics does not only encompass art but also anything that we perceptually find beautiful, for instance a sunset over a calm ocean. This essay deals with art, and hence, when I mention aesthetics it should be read as meaning *art.*

[3] For the purposes of this paper most of the examples and discussions will centre on sexual abuse and misconduct perpetrated by artists in powerful positions, however I recognise that there are other immoral behaviours such as racism or political/religious extremism that warrants attention.

To attempt to answer this question, the next section will provide an outline of the theoretical framework of aestheticism. I will then illustrate how this theory is inadequate when considering certain works of art, with a particular focus on Mary Devereaux's critique of Leni Riefenstahl's film *Triumph of the Will.* This will be followed by a discussion of some of the leading theorists in the contemporary field of ethical evaluation of art, viz. Noël Carroll, Berys Gaut and Matthew Kieran.

THEORIES CONCERNING THE MORAL CHARACTER OF ART AND ITS IMPACT ON ARTISTIC VALUE

For most of the 19th century and beginning of the 20th century the thesis that we are required to compartmentalise aesthetic evaluation from moral evaluation whenever we consider a work of art that raises moral questions, has been employed to resolve the conflict that was created by the juxtaposition of the demands of morality and those of art (Devereaux 1998:242 & 243; Kieran, 2006:130). This thesis is known as formalism or aestheticism (from here on in I will be using the term aestheticism).[4] What is important in such an aesthetic evaluation is the formal aspects of a work, such as harmony, complexity and intensity, the coherence of the imagery, development of themes and the vividness of style (Kieran 2006:130). With this theory the formal aspects of an artwork should be kept conceptually distinct from the moral character of the content of a work, viz. what it represents as well as the attitudes it seems to convey or recommend, which is "strictly irrelevant to its value as art" (Kieran 2006:130). Compartmentalising this way enables us to put morally objectionable elements to one side, freeing us to appreciate the formal features that make a work of art aesthetically good (Devereaux, 1998:243).

[4] In art history, the terms aestheticism and formalism are not interchangeable, and I recognise that formalists in art history would not consider the various modes of production employed as examples in this proposal, such as art, stand-up comedy, documentary films, films etc, under the same umbrella term. I accept that the examples employed do not all conform to the same mode of production, however, the aim of this study is not to enter into the area of art history nor the specific form or content of each example, but to consider the *general* issue underlying all the differences, namely how much and how should non-formal aspects, particularly information regarding the artist's moral character, matter in aesthetic evaluation.

The notion of art for art's sake (*l'art por l'art*) has its origin in 19th century France and Britain as a response to the stifling and moralistic tone of the Renaissance artistic tradition prevalent at the time (*Art for Art's Sake*, n.d.). The Renaissance tradition championed works of historical and mythical scenes that held ethical messages related to religion or state power, which, it was argued, stifled the artistic autonomy of artists and artworks (ibid.). Victor Cousin, a French philosopher and chair of philosophy at Sorbonne, is most associated with making aestheticism more mainstream during the 19th century with a series of lectures he gave at Sorbonne between 1828 and 1831 (*Art for Art's Sake - History and Concepts*, n.d.). Cousin presented very popular lectures during his tenure at Sorbonne with an emphasis on compartmentalisation and aesthetic separatism (Bell-Villada, 1986/1987:427). These lectures were based on a "minimal reading of Kant – deciphered in the main from poor Latin translations – as well as much clever guesswork on his part" and held that art should be judged purely on its own terms, separate from social, political and moral values (Bell-Villada, 1986/1987:427 & *Art for Art's Sake - History and Concepts*, n.d.). This resulted in the incorporation of "diluted Kantian notions of artistic genius" such as disinterest, beauty, form and sublime, into a new aesthetic doctrine by the 1830s (I will expand on these notions in later sections) (Dowling, n.d.).

Art critic Clive Bell, a well-known proponet of aestheticism, claims that art's function is to be found in its beauty, and that beauty can only be found in the formal aspects of a work (Dowling, n.d.). Thus, nothing else is required in the valuation of a work (Dowling, n.d.). Bell writes

> [w]hat quality is shared by all objects that provoke our aesthetic emotions? What quality is common to Sta. Sophia and the windows at Chartres, Mexican sculpture, a Persian bowl, Chinese carpets, Giotto's frescoes at Padua and the masterpieces of Poussin, Piero dell Francesca, and Cezanne? Only one answer seems possible – significant form. In each, lines and colours combined in a particular way, certain forms and relations of forms, stir our aesthetic emotions. These relations and combinations of lines and colours, these aesthetically moving forms, I call "Significant Form"; and "Significant Form" is the one quality common to all works of visual art (Bell as cited by Dowling, n.d.).

The aestheticist doctrine was readily adopted by artists of the time. Théophile Gautier writes in the 1832 book *Premiéres Poesies*, "[w]hat [end] does this [book] serve? – it serves by being beautiful…In general as soon as something becomes useful it ceases to be beautiful"; James Abbot McNeill Whistler, an American painter, writes that "[a]rt should be independent of all clap-trap – should stand alone […] and appeal to the artistic sense of the eye or ear, without confounding this with emotions entirely foreign to it, as devotion, pity, love, patriotism and the like"; American writer and poet Edgar Allen Poe writes that "there neither exists nor can exist any work more thoroughly dignified, more supremely noble, than…this poem written solely for the poem's sake" (Gautier as cited by Dowling, n.d.; Whistler and Poe as cited by *Art for Art's sake*, n.d.). Another well-known champion of the movement, arguably the most recognisable, is Oscar Wilde, who writes in the "Preface" to *The Picture of Dorian Gray* that "[t]here is no such thing as a moral or an immoral book. Books are well written or badly written, that is all" (Wilde as cited by Bell-Villada, 1986/1987:415).

One branch of aestheticism that exemplifies the desire of artists to break with the stifling bourgeois values that were prevalent in Europe can be found in the dada art movement. In direct response the atrocities of World War I, dada artists vehemently rebelled against a society that, on the one hand revered beauty and the beauty embodied in art, while on the other hand was capable of starting and prolonging the most savage war that was up to that point known to man (Danto, 2002:46). The dada movement embarked on a project of disconnecting beauty from art with the aim "to destroy traditional values in art and create a new art to replace the old" (DADA, n.d.). In direct opposition to the elevated status given to beauty in art and to keep beauty at bay, dada artists deliberately produced work with the intention to elicit disgust in the normal viewer. German artist Max Ernst, who served in the war as an artilleryman, writes

> To us, Dada was above all a moral reaction. Our rage aimed at total subversion. A horrible futile war had robbed us of five years of our existence. We had experienced the collapse into ridicule and shame of everything represented to us as just, true, and beautiful. My works of that period were not meant to attract, but to make people scream (Ernst as cited by Danto, 2002:46)

Dowling observes that "it remains obscure why [purely formal qualities] should be our only interest" and since I am unable to find much writing on the philosophical reasons

for the adoption of aestheticism during the 19th and 20th centuries, other than dada's philosophical significance in its refusal to be seen as beautiful, I will be drawing my own conclusions based on the above history and Bell's writing (Dowling, n.d.; Danto, 2002:47). The first conclusion that I come to is that by bringing Kant into the conversation regarding art, albeit not necessarily accurately presenting his ideas, philosophers were provided with a justification to apply his notions and ideas to art appreciation. Considering Kant's influence on, and importance in, philosophy, I can certainly see why it would be beneficial to use his philosophy to stamp some kind of authority on a subject, thus influencing the thinking of others in the same field. Kant's notions of disinterestedness, beauty and form tie in nicely with Bell's argument that art in and of itself has its own value, and that the only common denominator in all art is its significant form, separate from all other values and considerations. Although Kant's position is more complex and, arguably, these notions apply more to pure judgements of natural beauty than to artistic beauty, they were taken up by the aesthetics of art. Thus, with the gravitas of Kantian philosophy and the logic of Bell's contention, there was little left to argue against the adoption of aestheticism. I am unable to defend these very loosely drawn conclusions in this paper. Regardless, the fact remains that art came to be regarded as an autonomous realm of value to be judged on its own merit, or as Bell-Villada writes that "[o]nce the aestheticist ideal was launched, it assumed an ideological life of its own, and today it survives as a subjacent but determining presence in all cultural debate" (Bell-Villada, 1986/1987:416).

Aestheticism fell out of favour during the 20th century and although the idea it stood for, that art in-itself is valuable separate from all other considerations, remained highly significant, arguments were made that this doctrine, in fact, had serious flaws due to its emphasis on art as a separate realm of value (Jensen, 1953:97). Hannay argues that the compartmentalising ideal of aestheticism may have contributed to the amoralism found in the art world, since artists came to believe that nothing other than the search for beauty mattered, resulting in "a lot of self-indulgence" justified by the pursuit of beauty (Hannay, 1954:44). Jensen criticises the all-encompassing focus on the "uniqueness of aesthetic feelings" (Jensen, 1953:97). In the 1953 paper 'The Autonomy of Art', Jensen criticises Bell's argument that one of the functions of art is to *express* everyday life emotions, which can only be achieved through the quality of a work, viz. "its significant form" (ibid.). Jensen argues that if expressing the emotions of

everyday life is a function of art, it then becomes difficult not to bring morality into our evaluation of art, because everyday life emotions are

> motives, and their value depends on the goodness or badness of the deeds they tend to produce; in other words, these feelings are to be judged by moral standards. The goodness of a work of art would then consist in its power to arouse virtuous feelings, and its badness in its power to arouse vicious feelings leading to all manner of wickedness (Jensen, 1953:97).

Jensen may perhaps be regarded as a forerunner of contemporary debates in the ethical evaluation of art of Carroll, Gaut and Kieran, which I will return to later in this section. First, I will show how aestheticism falls short when considering certain works of art.

Aestheticism's limitations become evident when it is applied to a work of art such as Leni Riefenstahl's 1934 film *Triumph of the Will.* In this work, which Devereaux describes as "a work of artistic mastery – perhaps, I dare say, of genius", Riefenstahl employs her considerable talent to portray Adolf Hitler and National Socialism, something morally abhorrent, as beautiful (Devereaux, 1998:244;241). It is perhaps also worth noting that the film techniques used by Riefenstahl were groundbreaking, some of which are still being used in the making of films today, thus she has a lasting influence on how films are made, rendering it very difficult to merely disregard and/or discard her work (Willard, 2021:86).

The aestheticist strategy fails, however, when we are confronted by a work such as *Triumph of the Will* because in "distancing ourselves from the morally objectionable elements of the film…[we are] distancing ourselves from the features that make it the work of art it is", which results in us not being able to understand the film's artistic value (Devereaux, 1998:243). From an aestheticist viewpoint, we should compartmentalise and put aside our knowledge of the horrors of Nazism and only evaluate the film on its aesthetic merits (Willard, 2021:87). Viewing this particular work in such a compartmentalising way is not possible, according to Devereaux. She argues that in order for us to see this film "for the work of art it is and to fully grasp its beauty, we need to pay attention to its content", viz. exactly those elements that aestheticism tells us to put aside (Devereaux, 1998:244). In this instance, then, it is not possible to create distance between the formal features and the morally objectionable elements of this film (ibid.).

A more complex formulation of aestheticism is sophisticated aestheticism, which does not require the compartmentalising of an artwork's content from its formal elements (Devereaux, 1998:244; Kieran, 2005:453). According to sophisticated aestheticism, a work of art can only be understood by understanding and acknowledging the existence of a relationship between the work's form and content, in other words the relationship between the work's message and the mode of communication (Devereaux, 1998:244.). It should be noted that according to sophisticated aestheticism, our aesthetic judgement of an artwork should not be influenced by our moral responses to the message contained in such a work, but it can be influenced by the expression of that message (ibid., 245). Thus, a work like *Triumph of the Will* should not present us with any problems since we have to pay attention to the formal aspects of the film along with how its content contributes to "its expressive task", without being swayed by our moral response to the message of the film (ibid.). Although sophisticated aestheticism recognises that works of art may exhibit some moral characteristics, the theory holds that artworks should only be evaluated in terms of how the moral content is expressed and not in terms of the work's moral characteristics since no intrinsic relationship exists between the moral character of the art and its value as art (Kieran, 2005:453).

The aestheticist view has come under increasing attack by recent writers, who have been heavily influenced by Aristotle and Hume (Kieran, 2006:131). British philosopher David Hume holds that we can engage with works of art from different eras which depict variations and deviations from what is customary in our society, but we find it more difficult to sympathise with art that goes against our deepest moral convictions (Zalta, 2020). In his 1757 essay 'Of the Standard of Taste' Hume states that

> where the ideas of morality and decency alter from one age to another, and where vicious manners are described, without being marked with the proper characters of blame and disapprobation; this must be allowed to disfigure the poem, and to be a real deformity. I cannot, nor is it proper I should, enter into such sentiments; and however I may excuse the poet, on account of the manners of his age, I never can relish the composition (Hume, 1985:246).

In contemporary philosophy this view is labelled *imaginative resistance*, which Tamar Gendler phrases in more neutral vocabulary as "the puzzle of explaining our comparative difficulty in imagining fictional worlds that we take to be morally deviant" (Gendler, 2000:56). Two contemporary theories that stem from this school of thought

are moderate moralism and ethicism, both of which attempt to connect artistic value to a work's moral character (Kieran, 2005:455).

Noël Carroll's moderate moralism holds that there may exist an aesthetic failure in a work of art if that work fails to elicit the intended moral response from an audience (Carroll, 1996:233). Thus it is possible for a moral defect or virtue to be present in a work of art without it affecting the aesthetic value of the work (Kieran, 2005:455). However, it sometimes happens that a moral defect is also an aesthetic defect, as illustrated through Devereaux's analysis of *Triumph of the Will.* A morally sensitive audience may be able to appreciate the formal features of the film but might not be able to fully engage with the film since they cannot reconcile the central vision of the film (viz. the glorification of Hitler and Nazism) with the reality of Hitler and Nazism (Peek, n.d.). Thus, on moderate moralism, the intrinsic feature that makes this particular film morally defective is also the most significant aesthetic defect. Moderate moralism holds that a work's artistic value can never appreciate as a result of its morally defective character; it can only depreciate (Kieran, 2006:134).

Kieran lists three advantages of moderate moralism. Firstly, this view acknowledges that artworks do not have to have a positive moral character to be recognised as great art; secondly it apparently does not presuppose the cognitivist account of the value of art, viz. it does not assume that works of art "record, reveal or otherwise track and transmit truths about the world"; and, thirdly, the moral character of a work, when it has one, only influences the artistic value of the work when our capacity to be absorbed by the work is impeded by the work or we do not react to it as envisioned by the work (Kieran, 2005:455; Gibson, 2008:573).

Problems with this account include "that sometimes we are not in a position to judge how good an artwork is because of our reaction to its moral character" (Kieran, 2005:456). In other words as the viewer of the art, I may be in a defective epistemological position in believing that the work is defective because its moral content is preventing me from appreciating it as it should be. Thus, the fault lies with me and is not internal to the work of art. Kieran provides an example related to Catholicism:

> If I find Catholicism deeply repugnant, I may not be able to engage with and respond as prescribed to Dante's *Divine Comedy* or Evelyn Waugh's *Brideshead Revisited;* but this only shows that I am not in the best

> epistemological position to evaluate how good they are as art, not that they are no good (Kieran, 2006:456).

The second theory challenging aestheticism is Berys Gaut's ethicism, which holds

> that the ethical assessment of attitudes manifested by works of art is a legitimate aspect of the aesthetic evaluation of those works, such that, if a work manifests ethically reprehensible attitudes, it is to that extent aesthetically defective, and if a work manifests ethically commendable attitudes, it is to that extent aesthetically meritorious (Gaut,1998:182).

Aesthetic value here refers a work's artistic value, viz. an object's value "*qua* work of art" (Gaut, 1998:182). Thus, only if the work's moral character is relevant and intrinsic to its artistic value will a moral flaw reduce the value of the work as art and a moral virtue increase the artistic value (Kieran, 2006:134).

According to ethicism an artwork will be considered to be aesthetically praiseworthy or flawed based on the work's embodiment of "ethically admirable or reprehensible attitudes" (Gaut, 1998:182). Representational works of art, according to Gaut, both "manifest" attitudes and "prescribe" attitudes and responses, which, in turn, will count towards or against the "aesthetic merit" of a work (ibid.). For Gaut, it is not the content of a work of art that is of moral concern, but rather the attitude toward that content that the author is prescribing (Bartel, 2019:4). Ethicism holds that when a work of art prescribes a response that depends on the work's moral qualities (or lack thereof), those moral qualities are always relevant to its aesthetic value (Kieran, 2005:457).

An example of a work of art that successfully prescribes a certain attitude towards its content can be found in Darren Aronofsky's *Requiem for a Dream.* The film is a harrowing and disturbing depiction of how individuals can become caught up in a life of drug abuse, portraying characters getting high, committing crimes and making bad decisions (Bartel, 2019:4). The film neither glorifies drug abuse nor demonise addicts, but rather humanises the addicts, and in so doing successfully prescribes a warning to the dangers of drug abuse, rendering it aesthetically meritorious (ibid.).

However, if the audience is of the opinion that the responses prescribed by the work are not merited because the content of the artwork is morally wrong, then the audience will (probably) fail to respond to the work as it prescribes (Kieran, 2005:457). *Triumph of the Will* is again illustrative, since it

> is supposed to leave the viewer excited and favorably disposed toward the Nazi regime, but for a modern viewer, the film is a surreal experience. The bold swastikas draped over buildings are jarring. One can't appreciate the aesthetics of the film as cinema because one is continually reminded of the atrocities of the Second World War, which began four years after the film was completed (Willard, 2021:87)

The film wants the audience to adopt a positive attitude towards Nazism, which most people in contemporary society are unable to do. From an ethicist point of view, the work fails aesthetically because it fails to persuade the audience that the response it calls for is in fact a (morally) justified response, viz. it fails in its attempt to elicit positive responses from the audience towards Nazism (Kieran, 2005:457).

Moderate moralism and ethicism seem notably similar, but one of the key differences relates to the scope of these two views (Peek, n.d.). Moderate moralism holds that even if a moral defect or virtue is present in a work, this defect or virtue does not necessarily affect the aesthetic value of the work. In other words, moral features *as such* do not play a role in how artistically valuable a work is. Ethicism claims that when a work prescribes a response that depends on the work's moral qualities or lack thereof, those moral qualities are always relevant to its aesthetic value, viz. moral features *as such* are directly relevant to the artistic value of the work.

Another view to consider in this debate is that of Matthew Kieran, who holds that we are only able to make the right judgement of an artwork if we are aware of what the moral character of a work should be identified with, where the moral characteristics of a work of art are generally understood to be "the overall responses and attitudes that involve or depend on the characterisation of moral features and evaluations endorsed by the work" (Kieran 2006:141).

Broadly speaking there seems to exist a natural tendency to associate the attitudes expressed by a work of art with those of the actual author, frequently because the author tells the reader as much (Kieran, 2006:141). This, Kieran claims, is due to an underlying philosophical rationale and not merely an "unreflective prejudice" by the audience (ibid.). He explains by way of an example concerning actions in general: When we find ourselves at a social gathering, and someone, let's call him Jack, makes a faux pas that is obvious to all and an embarrassment to him, how another individual, Mike, responds to the faux pas provides information to others about Mike's moral

character. For instance, if Mike were to respond by telling a joke about a similar faux pas and the intention is to embarrass Jack, Mike's action will have a different moral character and be evaluated differently by the others in the group than if he tried to divert attention away from Jack. If Mike's propositional attitude is the intention to draw attention away from Jack, his moral character will be evaluated differently by the other members of the group than if his propositional attitude is to embarrass Jack. Thus, whether or not the rest of the group will laugh at Mike's joke is dependent on their perception of what he is trying to do (ibid.). Kieran generalises this judgement of propositional attitudes to artists (analogous to Mike) and their artworks through "parity of reasoning" by which we can conclude that "what the moral character of a work is must partly be fixed by the propositional attitudes under which it was made" (ibid.)

If we accept Kieran's generalisation of propositional attitudes to artworks, we may assume that what the moral character of a work is, is at least partially inextricably linked to the propositional attitudes under which the work was created (Kieran, 2006:141). If the perception exists that the "authorial attitudes" of a particular work attempt to influence the audience into endorsing a particular attitude by getting them to laugh at a certain race or class of people, the audience should not laugh (ibid.).

A counterargument to this might be the potential of unintended elements "that conflict with or undermine what was intended", or the artist might have intentionally created a work to contradict their actual attitudes (Kieran, 2006:142). We could even make the argument that we are evaluating a work as art and, hence, the authorial attitudes should be separated from the moral character of the artwork (ibid.). For Kieran, these arguments and counterarguments are indicative of the very complex nature of the link (if there is one) between the "actual author's character and attitudes" and the work of art (ibid.).

There seems to be a tension at play here, where on the one hand in normal social situations we value an action partly because of the underlying propositional attitudes of the person, whereas on the other hand, when we consider artworks we are told that the aesthetic value of the work is merely a "function of the value of the experiences an artwork affords its audience" and should be kept separate from its creator's underlying propositional attitudes (Kieran, 2006:142). Kieran explains the necessity of maintaining a link between the artwork's character and that of the artist through analogies with jokes. He writes

> Think about jokes that rely on or have as their focus disparaging attitudes about certain races, classes, religions or social attitudes. We might laugh at or gasp in horror at the same joke depending upon who's telling it and why. Take a joke that relies on assuming the fecklessness of black men. If Chris Rock tells the joke we might laugh but if someone from the Ku Klux Klan tells it we might be appalled (Kieran, 2006:142).

The joke is identical in each case, and told with the same zest, however we react differently depending on who the teller of the joke is because of the propositional attitude of the teller, which informs our reaction to it (Kieran, 2006:142). It follows then, according to Kieran, that because we pass moral judgement in everyday social situations based on the perceived underlying attitudes or character of people, we should have an account of art that, at least in some cases, considers the attitudes of the artist that is expressed in and through their work and, therefore, the artwork's moral character (ibid.).

This notion of an artist's attitudes being of concern when we evaluate an artwork's moral character has already been written about by Hume in 1757. As discussed before, Hume explores the problem of imaginative resistance to works depicting morally problematic content, and he extends this to how an audience might find "the lack of blame or disapprobation on the side of the author" problematic (Zalta, 2020). Hume writes that

> a very violent effort is requisite to change our [the audience's] judgment of manners, and excite sentiments of approbation or blame, love or hatred, different from those to which the mind from long custom has been familiarised (Hume, 1985:246).

Kieran's (and Hume's) argument that we should consider the attitudes of artists expressed in and through their work resonates with me, however I would take it one step further and state that the attitudes and moral character of an artist does not necessarily have to be expressed in and through their work in order for us to judge the moral character of an artwork as exemplary or lacking. It is not always possible for us to access an artist's character based on the authorial attitude expressed in their art. For instance, artist Zwelethu Mthethwa has been convicted of murdering a sex worker, but this attitude of his towards sex workers is not depicted in his art. My preliminary

view, which I am investigating to determine its plausibility, is that an original[5] work of art is inextricably linked to its creator, and if the creator of that work has a moral flaw, I believe it should be considered as at least one of the aspects that make up the aesthetic character of an artwork.

Thus, when we have no knowledge about the artist and the work is not overtly offensive, we can employ Kieran's argument regarding "authorial attitudes" to comment and evaluate on the authorial attitudes of the work. For example, if we consider *Triumph of the Will*, we can plausibly detect Riefenstahl's authorial attitude and plausibly conclude from that that she (most probably) is a Nazi-sympathiser, which presents the audience with notable information regarding her character. This film was made with the intention to elicit a certain moral response from its intended audience, which it probably did at the time of its release. However, subsequent to World War II an audience will probably not respond as Riefenstahl intended, thus rendering the film an artistic failure on a reading of Gaut, Carroll and Kieran's theories.

However, sometimes it is not possible for us to divine an artist's character based on the authorial attitude or the (moral) responses the artist seeks to illicit from the audience. We are not able to determine Zwelethu Mthethwa's attitude towards sex workers from his works of art, nor are we able to infer the heinous actions of Bill Cosby while enjoying *The Cosby Show.* It is only when information regarding an artist's moral character comes to light after the fact that we can include it in our aesthetic evaluation of the artwork. Thus, and this is where my interest lies and which has not been discussed in detail by any of the theorists mentioned, how should we respond to works of art where damning information regarding the creator has come to light after their work was released and celebrated?

The view that I am defending is that when an artist has made themselves culpable of immoral behaviour it is legitimate to use the available morally compromising information about that artist when we evaluate their work. It is worth noting that the opposite may also be true in that if we are aware that an artist is a morally upstanding citizen who employs their elevated status in society to the benefit of society, we may evaluate the work of such an artist differently. This latter claim raises the argument that a formally flawed work could have high aesthetic value based on its link to the morally

[5] What I have in mind here are works that express the artist's own intentions, not works created on commission with specified content or form

upstanding artist, a claim that I am not able to accept. There seems to be an asymmetry at work where bad character is relevant to aesthetic merit, but good character not. I will return to this in the Potential Objections section later.

In order to defend my view regarding the artist's character being a legitimate evaluative tool when considering their art, I will, in the following section, consider Bartel's notion of extended ethicism as well as the disruptive framework of feminist aesthetics, which questions the boundaries set by orthodox, patriarchal systems within aesthetics.

A DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVE: EXTENDED ETHICISM AND FEMINIST AESTHETICS

Due to the myriad of scandals emanating from the artistic world in recent times, some theorists and philosophers are questioning the way we aesthetically evaluate art and the boundaries set by existing theories. In this section I will briefly consider Christopher Bartel's notion of expanded ethicism, which supports my view that we should include the moral failings of an artist when we aesthetically evaluate their work. I will also consider the potential of formulating theories within the framework of feminist aesthetics which, by its very nature, questions hitherto assumed positions and proposes new ways of looking at existing theoretical frameworks.

In line with my view that theories such as moderate moralism and ethicism do not consider the possibility of including the moral failings of (some) artists when evaluating their art, particularly when such failings are not manifested in the work itself, Christopher Bartel proposes an expansion on Gaut's ethicism in his paper 'Ordinary Monsters'.

Bartel's argument is based on the premise that it is not possible for us to truly appreciate and evaluate a work of art just by observing the physical art (Bartel, 2019:5). Bartel seems to agree that Gaut's ethicism has some value to add to the debate, but holds that in order for us to truly understand a work of art and its prescribed attitude it is necessary to understand the socio-historical context within which the art was created (ibid.). Accordingly some research into "social, political, economic and religious climate" of the period is required, which provides the context of the values and norms of the society in which the artist operates and this is research that already falls within

the ambit of art critics and art historians (ibid.). From an ethicist perspective it is a prerequisite to consider some background history of the artist since the prescribed attitude of a work forms part of the point of view of the work (ibid., 6). Such research, Bartel argues, automatically amounts to an intrusion on the personal life of the artist, which leads him to ask why only certain aspects of an artist's life should be considered relevant while others, such as the personal morality of the artist, is discarded (ibid., 5). In order to illustrate his point, Bartel provides the example of Darren Aronofsky's film *Requiem For A Dream* (2000).

As mentioned previously, this film is a disturbing depiction of the dangers of drug abuse, and the prescribed attitude of the film, according to Bartel, is a warning about the dangers of drug abuse (Bartel, 2019:4). However, if we were to do research into Aronofsky's biography and it came to light that he is "an unrepentent drug pusher",[6] this information will most probably have an impact on our understanding of the film's prescribed attitude (ibid., 6). Such a change in our perception of the film could potentially be negative in that we come to regard the film as insincere, or possibly positive where we view the work as a "brave form of confession" (ibid., 6). However, regardless of whether the impact of such information is positive or negative, the point that Bartel is making is that the knowledge gained from research into the artist's biography will have some impact on how we aesthetically evaluate the film (ibid.). This leads to Bartel's notion of expanded ethicism.

Bartel claims that ethicism's view that a work of art is aesthetically flawed or praiseworthy to the extent that its assumed point of view is morally flawed or praiseworthy, can be extended to include the artist's personal morality in our aesthetic evaluation of their work (Bartel, 2019:6). According to Bartel this extention can be made "because we may only come to understand the work's point of view, and therefore the work's prescribed attitude, by examining the implicit values and attitudes of the artist" (ibid.). Bill Cosby's *The Cosby Show* can serve as an example. The show presents wholesome, admirable ethical family attitudes and values, which are in stark contrast to the immoral behaviour of Cosby himself. Knowing that Cosby drugged and raped women in his personal life renders the prescribed attitude of *The Cosby Show* an insincere façade, and thus, on Bartel's expanded ethicism, an aesthetic failure.

[6] This is a hypothetical scenario since no such information regarding Aronofsky exists in the public domain.

I agree with Bartel's view that, at least for some of us, our perception of a work of art is influenced when we are presented with information pertaining to the artist's morality. Bartel's theory, to my mind, ties in with the contributions of feminist aesthetics, which actively encourage us to investigate and expose the patriarchal social systems within which exisiting aesthetic evaluation theories are framed. Feminist aesthetics provide us with the tools to expose potential faultlines in our interpretation and understanding of the prescribed attitude of a work, and present us with a contemporary theoretical framework within which a new method of aesthetic evaluation can be formulated.

Feminism, generally speaking, seeks to elucidate and disrupt "the fact of patriarchy", where patriarchy is understood as the socially constructed systems that elevate men's rights and interests above those of women, and in the process provide men with power and status that women are often denied (Devereaux 2003:647). Patriarchy, from a feminist perspective, is a social construct that promotes inequality between men and women which can only be rationalised by defending and supporting "false or distorted" views regarding male and female nature, thus rendering patriarchy unfair and dominating (ibid., 648). Due to this inherent unfairness and domination, patriarchy is regarded as an illegitimate social construct in feminist theory, a system that, despite its illegitimacy, is deeply entrenched in "nearly every aspect of human thought and experience" (ibid., 647). It is precisely the pervasiveness of this illegitimate system that provides feminist theorists with a central unified task, viz. to unmask and analyse how male "interests, beliefs and desires" are beneficially served through "social practices, institutional arrangements and patterns of thought" (ibid., 648). According to Devereaux this aim of unmasking patriarchy's true nature inevitably results in a political dimension, since the theoretical goal of feminism corresponds with the political goal, viz. the eradication of patriarchy by undermining its institutions (ibid.).

Feminist aesthetics, as a subfield of feminism, is defined by Mary Devereaux as "a diverse family of theories, approaches and models of criticism, united by resistance to 'male' privilege and domination in the sphere of art and aesthetic experience" (Devereaux 2003:647). Theorists in feminist aesthetics share the central task of feminism in general, recognising the importance of challenging the unacknowledged gender bias found in "the fundamental concepts and ideals of philosophical aesthetics" (ibid., 649). Based on the assumption of patriarchy within art history and aesthetics, feminist aestheticians seek to challenge and disrupt the orthodox ways of thinking

found in philosophical aesthetics (ibid., 648). The most notable way in which this challenge is mounted is through the introduction of gender to some of the foundational notions of the discipline of aesthetics, particularly aesthetic analysis and aesthetic valuation (ibid.).

Through the introduction of gender in aesthetic analysis, feminist aestheticians seek to expose the ways in which misconstrued notions of gender can impact on "the subject matter of art" by, for instance, showing the pervasive depiction of women as happy mothers and caregivers in art or, when women artists depict these subject matters, they are ignored or denigrated as not properly the subject of great art (Devereaux 2003:648). A second challenge is mounted to the analysis of categories (e.g., visual art, literature, performing art) and methods (e.g., painting, drawing, sculpting) of art, whereby, for example, the assumed male gaze often found in visual artworks is exposed (ibid.). The male gaze here refers to how women in media are portrayed from the eyes of a heterosexual white man, where the female bodies are regarded as "objects to be surveyed" (Male Gaze, n.d.). Laura Mulvey first used the term *the male gaze* in her 1975 essay 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema'. In this essay Mulvey analyses how "gender power asymmetry" plays a controlling role in cinema, claiming that cinema is "constructed for the pleasure of the male viewer, which is deeply rooted in patriarchal ideologies and discourses" (Sampson, 2015). Mulvey writes

> In their traditional exhibitionist role women are simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact so that they can be said to connote *to-be-looked-at-ness* … she holds the look, plays to and signifies male desire (Mulvey, 1989:837).

Regarding aesthetic values, feminists aim to bring to light the gendered notions embedded in how the perceiving subject views art, for example how the masculine model is central to the definition of pure judgements of taste, as well as those found in the "characterizations of the objects of aesthetic attention", exemplified by how femininity is often associated with natural beauty while masculinity is associated with "the more dangerous extremes of the sublime" (Devereaux 2003:648.). It is perhaps pertinent at this point to provide a brief outline regarding the notions of *judgements of taste*, *beauty* and the *sublime* before continuing the discussion regarding the feminist challenge to aesthetic values.

These notions have their origin in 18th century philosophy which underpins many contemporary aesthetic theories (Korsmeyer & Brand Weiser, 2021). In this context, "[t]aste refers to a capacity that permits good judgments about art and the beauties of nature…[and] judgments of taste take the form of a particular kind of pleasure, one that eventually became known as 'aesthetic' pleasure" (ibid.). In theory, taste should be a universal phenomenon which could be considered to bridge the differences between people, male and female, however it has been established that gender distinctions are prominent in theories relating to the "exercise of taste" (ibid.). According to such theories on taste, women and men "possess systematically different tastes or capabilities for appreciating art and other cultural products", which are distinguished by "the two central aesthetic categories of the 18th century: beauty and sublimity" (ibid.).

Objects of beauty are considered to be "bounded, small and delicate" which equates to "feminized traits", while sublime objects "are drawn from uncontrolled nature, are unbounded, rough and jagged, terrifying, i.e. 'masculinized' traits" (Korsmeyer & Brand Weiser, 2021). In categorising feminised and masculinised traits, theories of taste provide aesthetic objects with gendered meanings, either through beauty or sublimity, or in Kant's words from his 1798 book *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View* "[t]he man develops his own taste while the woman makes herself an object of everybody's taste" (cited by Korsgaard & Brand Wieser, 2021).

By challenging philosophical aesthetics and their obscured gendered notions, feminist investigations go "to the foundations of aesthetics as a discipline", attempting to expose the "political content and political consequences" of philosophy of art and aesthetics as deeply entrenched in a patriarchal worldview (ibid., 648 & 661). Art historian Linda Nochlin's essay 'Why are there no great women artists?' proves to be instructive on how this can be achieved.

In this essay, Nochlin explores how systemic social, cultural and political norms prevented women from being recognised as great artists throughout history, and the fault, she claims, lies with our patriarchal institutions and education, "education understood to include everything that happens to us from the moment we enter this world of meaningful symbols, signs, and signals" (Nochlin, 2015). Nochlin criticises art history's unconscious and uncritical acceptance of the "white Western male viewpoint" as the norm, a viewpoint that is informed and enforced by "our institutional structures themselves and the view of reality which they impose on the human beings who are

part of them" (Nochlin, 2015). As John Stuart Mill wrote in 1869, "[e]verything which is usual appears natural. The subjection of women to men being a universal custom, any departure from it quite naturally appears unnatural" (Mill as cited by Nochlin, 2015). It is only when we investigate the underlying assumptions of a field, and in this case art history, that we can uncover the historical distortions that lead us to accepting the current status quo (Nochlin, 2015).

Nochlin comes to the conclusion that the answer to her question "Why have there been no great women artists?" does not lie in the "nature of individual genius or lack of it", but rather in what social institutions "forbid or encourage in various classes or groups of individuals" (ibid.). She uses the example of nude life drawing, regarded as essential training in the "development of talented beginners" from the Renaissance to near the end of the 19th century, from which women were completely excluded (ibid.). Nochlin writes that "[t]o be deprived of this ultimate stage of training meant, in effect, to be deprived of the possibility of creating major works of art", which left women with little choice but to turn to the "minor" fields of portraiture, genre, landscape or still-life (ibid.). Life drawing is but one example of "institutionally-maintained" exclusionary and discriminatory practices which have been overlooked by art history, but which is very informative in explaining the lack of great women artists in history (ibid.).

Nochlin reaches her conclusion by interrogating the framework within which the question "Why are there no great women artists?" is asked. She shows that the question, as it stands, distorts the issue at hand while simultaneously "insidiously [supplying] its own answer: 'There are no great women artists because women are incapable of greatness'" (Nochlin, 2015). It is only when we begin to investigate the assumptions and implications of this question that we begin to realise the extent to which our consciousness of "how things are in the world" has been conditioned and often falsified (ibid.). By exploring and exposing these underlying assumptions Nochlin, in true feminist fashion, questions and disrupts the very foundation of aesthetics as a discipline.

One of the consequences of disrupting the fundamental values and ideals of aesthetics is the creation of a link between art and sexual politics, thus paving the way for a fundamentally different way of "understanding and studying works of art" (Devereaux, 2003:650). In the field of philosophy, this radically different way of considering art results in feminist aestheticians being encouraged to "read against the grain", viz. to

push against the boundaries set by (inadequate) theoretical frameworks that do not take “the influence of gender and gender considerations” into account (ibid., 657). Of particular interest to feminist aestheticians, in this regard, is Kant and the tradition of neo-Kantian aestheticism (formalism) (ibid.).

Aestheticism, as discussed before, was employed for most of the 19th- and 20th centuries in aesthetic evaluation, asking the consumer of art to only consider the formal properties of the work when evaluating it and to adopt a *disinterested* approach. Disinterestedness requires the perceiver to discard and ignore all interests, be they ethical, political, racial, economic, personal or any other interest that interferes with the perceiver’s ability to appreciate the art for what it is (Brand 2007:257). A disinterested approach to art, from a feminist point of view, is seen as a “masculinist stance” that requires the viewer to be neutral, unbiased and selfless by self-consciously controlling and suppressing their natural and instinctive gendered responses to a work of art (Brand, 1998:7). Such a disinterested viewing of art, however, has two shortcomings according to feminist theorists, viz. that it creates a “misunderstanding of the nature of art” and that it promotes exclusionary and discriminatory systems of classification and evaluation (Devereaux, 2003:658). Feminism considers art to be intrinsically enmeshed with life, and as such, it is difficult, if not impossible, for a work of art to be truly appreciated if it is divorced from all considerations other than formalist ones, which ultimately creates a misunderstanding of the nature of art (ibid.). Regarding the second shortcoming, feminist theorists have exposed the existence of a gender bias in aestheticism in that standards of classification and evaluation are based on “male-defined assumptions about gender and art itself” and demonstrated that the accepted formal aesthetic criteria in actual fact “reflect local, historically specific attitudes and assumptions” (ibid., 659).

To address these shortcomings, some feminist aestheticists promote the idea of an *interested* approach to art, which is the antithesis of a disinterested approach since it advocates for a subjective or emotional approach, one which is interested in, identifies with and nurtures awareness when considering a work of art (Brand 1998:7). A hard-line feminist view holds that it is not possible for a viewer to be neutral and to be completely disinterested, and so this should not be recognised as a tool for the evaluation of art (ibid. 7). By holding such a view, feminist aesthetics challenge the foundational framework of aesthetics in three ways: 1) it seeks to undermine the

Kantian notion of disinterestedness and philosophy's preference for formalist evaluations; 2) it refuses to accept that disinterested aesthetic judgements are always fair and impartial; 3) it exposes the underlying gender biases that exist in artistic values and standards through the incorporation of viewpoints that *go against the grain* of traditional aesthetics (Devereaux 2003:661; Brand 2007:8-9).

Devereaux points out, however, that such a foundational challenge, important as it is, should not automatically translate into a complete abandonment and discarding of traditional aesthetics and the achievements made in the field (Devereaux 2003:661). Rather, she claims, it presents theorists with an opportunity to investigate, "draw upon, and extend, philosophical work on the relationship between aesthetic and moral value", an opportunity that Peg Brand, for instance, takes up in her essay 'Disinterestedness & Political Art' (1998) (ibid., 662).

Brand argues that it is not only possible, but even advisable, that a viewer of art should find a middle road between the so-called masculinist disinterestedness of aestheticism and the interestedness of feminist aesthetics, and that viewers of art should attempt to find a middle road between these two extremes in order to fully appreciate a work of art (Brand 1998:10). (I would like to note here that I am not of the opinion that disinterestedness is *always* a masculinist stance, since it can be a view held by both men and women when considering an artwork, and I believe that that is not Brand's claim either. Rather, the use of the word masculinist in relation to disinterestedness in Brand's discussion is used to highlight the assumption in traditional aesthetic theories that men are better at being disinterested than women.) Brand claims that there is value to be had from viewing art from both these perspectives, but it will require the viewer to mentally toggle between these two views in order to have a fuller experience of an artwork.

Brand differentiates between what she calls *Interested Attention* and *Disinterested Attention*, where the former equates to the feminist notion of interestedness and the latter to the masculinist notion of disinterestedness (Brand 1998:10). She argues that we always consider a work of art either with Interested Attention or Disinterested Attention, but we cannot hold both types of attention simultaneously and that we "toggle" between them, consciously or not (ibid.). One example she employs to illustrate her point is the well-known ambiguous illustration of the old woman/young woman (Figure 1), where you as the viewer must consciously decide whether you want

to see the old woman or the young woman, but you cannot see both of these women at the same time (ibid.)



Figure 1

Brand explains this choice that the viewer makes on the basis of the "perceptual construction hypothesis", according to which the choice made by the viewer is dependent on the "perceptual organisation", or the context within which the viewer *sees* the image (ibid., 11). This context may arise from the "stimulus pattern itself", or from the viewer's own expectations, and the point is that we are not merely "passive receptors of external stimuli, [but that] our sensory systems actively transform their stimulus inputs" based on experience and expectations (ibid., 12).

Brand extends her argument to the work of the "particularly provocative feminist art" of French artist Orlan, entitled "The Reincarnation of St. Orlan" (Brand 1998:9). Since 1990 Orlan has undergone a number of reconstructive surgeries in order to completely change her facial features to conform "with some art historically-defined criteria of beauty" (ibid.). Brand claims that when a viewer is confronted with the graphic and

bloody still pictures from Orlan's surgeries, the first reaction might be to empathise with the artist (ibid., 12). However, when one is made cognisant of the fact that these pictures are meant to be works of art as opposed to gratuitous pictures of someone's cosmetic surgery, the viewer might then disengage from the emotional reaction of the first viewing, shifting to an "intellectual engagement" with the work (ibid.). The viewer, according to Brand, is thus capable of "toggling" between their emotional and personal Interested Attention to a disengaged, intellectual Disinterested Attention (ibid.). For Brand it is important that both modes of attention are employed in order to meaningfully experience any work of art, since it opens the possibility of a wider variety of impressions for the viewer (ibid., 12 & 15).

By encouraging us to view art from more than one perspective, as advocated by Brand and Devereaux, feminist aesthetics provides us with new tools with which to consider and evaluate art, thus disrupting the orthodox thinking in aesthetics. Feminism challenges us to accept and understand that almost every aspect of contemporary society is influenced to some degree by patriarchal thinking, and by asking us to challenge and *read against the grain* that which has been assumed to be neutral and objective, for example, we begin to see how that there is, in fact, a gender bias at play. Aestheticism, as the prominent theory for the evaluation of art during the 20th century, sets boundaries according to which art should be evaluated and considered, promoting the masculinist stance. In doing so, feminist views, which advocates the incorporation of emotions and experiences in how we view the world, are constrained and subjugated. Feminist aesthetics pushes against these boundaries, showing these frameworks to be social constructions with patriarchal foundations which should be challenged and re-imagined, unmasking the politically and morally suspect interests and biases that ground various classificatory systems" (Mikkola 2017:2439). This does not mean, as both Deveraux and Brand argue, that we have to now swing the pendulum completely to the other side and discard the achievements of aestheticism in favour of a completely feminist approach. In fact, I would argue that it is not possible to disregard aestheticism in the evaluation of art, since its focus is on the physical object in front of us, the colours, lines, shapes, textures, styles, etc. used, without which it will be impossible to evaluate art. In other words, it is my view that formal features are always relevant, but not necessarily sufficient for proper aesthetic appreciation.

Brand advocates for a middle road, a way of thinking that incorporates both the masculinist aestheticism and the feminist aesthetics, proposing that we make intellectual shifts when we consider a work of art. But is it truly possible for us to "toggle" to Brand's Disinterested Attention when ethical and moral considerations have to be taken into account? One could argue that there are ethical considerations involved in Orlan's still images of her reconstructive surgeries, but to my mind, Orlan has bodily autonomy, and it is her decision to use her own body to create her art. She is not harming others in the process of creating her art and I do believe it is possible to engage Disinterested Attention when viewing her work. However, I am not convinced that we can easily switch to this view when we experience what Cheryl Foster calls "aesthetic disillusionment", due to an awareness of non-perceptual information, such as the immoral acts of an artist, that may, for some viewers, result in a reduced appreciation for the work.

Aesthetic disillusionment is described by Foster, an environmental ethicist, as something that occurs when non-perceptual information becomes known about an object, without there being any actual, direct changes in the perceptual features of the object (Foster 1992:205). In some cases, this non-perceptual information results in a reduced appreciation of the object, even though nothing about the object itself has changed (ibid.). Foster uses an example of a "finely-wrought object…believed to be the product of some primitive people", only to later find out that "it is an accidental natural product", which changes the perception of the receiver (ibid.). For my purposes I will use an example of Gauguin's *Manao Tupapau* (The Spirit of the Dead Keeps Watch) (1892) (Figure 2).



Figure 2: Paul Gauguin. *Manau Tupapau (The Spirit of the Dead Keeps Watch) (1892)*

The painting depicts a naked woman lying face down on a bed, with a dark figure standing to the side watching her. According to the website *The Art Story,* this is one of Gauguin's most famous works and "is an excellent example of how Gauguin relished combining the ordinary with suggestions of the extraordinary in a single canvas" (Paul Gauguin Artworks, 2021). The website states that Gauguin wrote in a "period diary" that the painting was inspired by an incident where he returned home late at night and startled his sleeping wife when he struck a match (ibid.). Gauguin was a celebrated artist of the post-impressionist era, whose "influence was immense and varied", inspiring the work of a "whole generation of artists" and "helped open the door to the development of 20th-century art" (Cooper D. , 2021). However, it has also come to light that Gauguin raped and "married" underaged girls while in Tahiti, "undoubtedly [exploiting] his position as a privileged Westerner to make the most of the sexual freedoms available to him" (Nayeri, 2019). To my mind, when we consider the painting

Manao Tupapau, armed with this information, there has to be some form of aesthetic disillusionment: nothing about the actual painting changed, but the new non-perceptual information that Gauguin was a sexual predator may result, at least for some people, in dampened appreciation of all his work. Once we have this information regarding Gauguin's paedophilic tendencies, we have to ask ourselves whether the model for this painting, and indeed for all his work, was in actual fact a woman or whether she was an underaged girl who was taken advantage of. For me, this knowledge creates cognitive dissonance, where my perception of the artistic brilliance of the work is in conflict with my (and contemporary Western societal) ethics. I find it very difficult to switch to Brand's Disinterested Attention in this, and many other cases where the artist has been shown to be immoral. While I am able to appreciate the mastery of the actual work, as well as how it might have influenced subsequent artists, I always question the (human) cost at which it was brought about. As Roxane Gay so aptly puts it: "We can no longer worship at the altar of creative genius while ignoring the price all too often paid for that genius" (Gay, 2018).

I am of the opinion that it is an instinctive human reaction to be morally troubled when confronted with information that calls another person's morality into serious question. This relates to Kieran's argument regarding propositional attitudes, where we make assumptions about a person's character based on the information at hand, which in turn informs how we respond to that person. When a person's actions lead us to make an assumption of a dubious character, the natural tendency is to generalise that assumption to other aspects of the person's life. For instance, while I was growing up our family doctor was a wonderful man who we turned to for all our ailments and problems, even non-medical issues. However, it later transpired that he was subjecting his wife to physical abuse, which caused me and the rest of my family serious disillusionment in him. As a doctor he did not change, as a person he did not change, but our knowledge that he behaved immorally behind closed doors had a serious impact on our perception of and relationship with him, which made us question everything about him. From experience we knew that he was a good doctor, but in light of the new information regarding his moral character, we could not return to him for medical treatment. Following Kieran this can be generalised to art: we appreciate the work for its brilliance, but once information becomes available that draws the artist's

character into question and we experience aesthetic disillusionment, most people will instinctively respond differently towards the work.

The question now is how do we determine what should be regarded as moral or immoral actions? To answer this question I will now turn to Kant's deontological moral theory which, I shall argue, to be the most fitting theory when analysing the morally relevant features of an artist's conduct.

KANT'S MORAL PHILOSOPHY

18th century German philosopher Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) is regarded as an influential figure in contemporary deontological moral philosophy (Johnson & Cureton, 2004). Deontological approaches hold that actions are to be judged based on the principles, intentions and motives behind the action, regardless of the positive or negative, intended or unintended consequences of the action (Alexander & Moore, 2020). The approach that holds the consequences of an action as the standard against which to morally evaluate an action is known as consequentialism, also an influential approach in moral philosophy (ibid.). Although there are consequentialist theories such as *motive utilitarianism*, which hold that we should assess the intentions of an action based on their proclivity to produce good consequences, I am of the opinion that deontology will provide a better framework for the purposes of this paper. Deontology places emphasis on intentions, and an immoral artist, or anybody for that matter, who chooses to bring their nefarious desires into the real world, has certain intentions, regardless of the consequences.

At this point it is worth mentioning that I am not intending to look for or settle on a unique normative theory to explain the behaviour of immoral artists. However, in order to provide some kind of framework, and for other independent reasons which I am not able to defend in this project, I turn to Kant's deontological ethics to provide clear guidelines on how to behave morally within a society. Furthermore, I acknowledge that Kant would very likely not endorse the notion of taking his ethics to art. Kant is generally regarded as the father of aestheticism, viz. the notion of separating the formal aspects of an artwork from its informal ones (Carroll, 2010:248; *Encyclopaedia*, 2018). The

general understanding is that Kant holds that ethics should not be employed to judge the aesthetic value of an artwork.

According to Kant all moral actions are based on a "supreme principle of morality", viz. things we ought to do due to a moral obligation, which is objective, rational, and freely chosen (Kant, 2018:xxii). In his *The Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals* (1785), the supreme principle or Categorical Imperative (CI) is given four formulations, namely the formula of humanity, the formula of the kingdom of ends, the formula of the universal law of nature and the autonomy formula (ibid.). This form of moral theory comes from Kant's *The Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals* (1785). For the purposes of this discussion I will focus on the formula of the kingdom of ends, which I believe is particularly relevant due to its emphasis on the interdependence of humans on each other.

This formula requires us to "[a]ct in accordance with maxims of a universally legislative member for a merely possible realm of ends" (Kant, 2018§4:439). Wood interprets this to indicate that a "mutually consistent, harmonious and reciprocally supportive" system will be formed by the ends of rational beings that constitute a realm (kingdom) (Wood, 1999:166). Moral laws, understood in this way, "have as their end the relation of [rational] beings to one another as ends and means", resulting in consensus and mutual extension of the collective ends of the rational beings "in a single unified teleological system" (Kant, 2018§4:433; Wood, 1999:166). Living in a "mutually consistent, harmonious and reciprocally supportive" community entails reciprocal responsibility, which, according to Korsgaard's interpretation of responsibility, means to treat another person as a "free and equal person*,* capable of acting both rationally and morally" (Korsgaard, 1996:198). When we hold someone responsible, we recognise that person as someone with whom a certain kind of relationship can be built: a relationship that can only be had between free and equal, rational people – "a relation of reciprocity" (ibid.).

Korsgaard is of the opinion that reciprocal responsibility lies at the heart of Kant's view of justice, which is best illustrated by Kant's view on sexual relations. Kant finds sexual relations "morally troublesome and potentially degrading", since it renders another person an object of desire (Korsgaard, 1996:194). When a person is regarded as an object in this way, the attitude towards that person is underpinned by desire, rendering the person as "something wantable, desirable, and, therefore, inevitably, possessable"

(Korsgaard, 1996:194-195). According to Kant, a person who surrenders to *that* desire allows themselves to be possessed, and in so doing undermines their respect for their own humanity (ibid, 195). It is only through reciprocity founded on equality, that this problem can be addressed. Kant writes

> If, then, one yields one's person, body and soul, for good and ill in every respect, so that the other has complete rights over it, and if the other does not similarly yield himself in return and does not extend in return the same rights and privileges, the arrangement is one-sided. But if I yield myself completely to another and obtain the person of the other in return, I win myself back; I have given myself up as the property of another, but in turn I take that other as my property, and so win myself back again in winning the person whose property I have become. In this way the two persons become a unity of will (cited by Korsgaard, 1996:195).

From a Kantian perspective it seems that Kant would object to the immoral actions by artists and who do not receive retribution from society as a consequence. Even if an artist is sanctioned by society, but their work (and by extension the artist) remains celebrated by playing down their actions as being part of the creative process, the artist, following Korsgaard's interpretation of the kingdom of ends formula, cannot be recognised as someone with whom a relationship of reciprocity can be built. Artists, along with all other members of a society, are moral agents who should respect the autonomy and humanity of their fellow human beings. Wood states that the kingdom of ends formula requires "the exclusion of ends that in principle cannot be shared between rational human beings", such as deception and coercion (Wood, 1999:169). Most will agree that artists should be judged just as any other person in society, which I concur with. My question is concerning the judgement of art created by an artist, who is found to be wanting from a moral point of view. An artist who does not abide by the tenets of the kingdom of ends chooses to disrupt the "mutually consistent, harmonious and reciprocally supportive" community of which he/she forms part (Wood 1999:166).

One argument that is often used by society to defend the immoral actions of an artist is that in order to develop and nurture their creative genius, the artist requires certain freedoms and are therefore entitled to their eccentricities. I am not an artist and as such cannot speak to the necessity of such freedom, but I am willing to concede that this might be the case. However, in line with the kingdom of ends formula, nobody is entitled

to unfettered freedoms, particularly when those freedoms have a negative impact on other members of society. In an online discussion on IAI TV entitled *The Good, The Bad and The Artist,* performance artist Emma Sulkowicz, herself a rape survivor, states that art should create the space in which the artist can live out their fantasies without impacting the reality of others (iai.tv, 2019). To be sure, artworks depicting morally problematic fantasies can and should be ethically evaluated for their morally objectionable attitudes, as per Carroll, Gaut and Kieran. However, when that space is no longer enough for the artist, and they choose to allow their nefarious desires to enter the real world, thus breaking with the kingdom of ends formula within society, it is they (the artist) who blur the lines between the art and the artist, not the society in which they live (ibid.). It is the artist themselves who chooses to undermine the reciprocity founded on equality that the kingdom of ends formula demands, thus compelling the society in which they live to reframe the aesthetic evaluation of art created by immoral artists.

The question can be asked whether we as consumers of art, who live in a society more or less following the tenets of the kingdom of ends formula, are under any ethical obligation to seek out information regarding the artist in order to better understand and interpret their work. I am not convinced that we are. Firstly, most ordinary consumers of art are not that invested in a work of art to really take the time to go and look for negative information about the artist to fully inform their reactions. For instance, when I hear a new song by an unknown artist on the radio, I appreciate the music and the way it makes me feel, but I do not think it is my responsibility to search their history to make sure that I am enjoying the music of a moral artist. I believe it is important to recognise that artists are human beings who, like all of us, make mistakes and will have something in their past that they are not proud of and, unless there exists probable cause for believing that an artist's moral character should be called into question, I do not see any reason that warrants a search for negative information. We live in an era where information becomes readily available, and if it comes to light that an artist has blurred the line between art and the artist by abusing their elevated positions, only then, in my view, do I have a moral obligation to reconsider my relationship to their work.

Another question that could be raised is whether morality and ethics trump other kinds of values according to which a person lives and shapes their life. In other words, should

we strive to become (and expect others to become) what philosopher Susan Wolf calls *moral saints*?

Wolf defines a moral saint as "a person whose every action is as morally good as possible, a person, that is, who is as morally worthy as can be" (Wolf, 1982:419). Wolf presents two models of the moral saint derived from what she regards to be common-sense morality prevalent in contemporary Western societies: the Loving Saint who follows the directives of Utilitarianism and the Rational Saint who lives a life based on the principles of Kantianism (ibid., 427). Regardless of which model a person chooses to strive toward, Wolf comes to the conclusion that neither way of life would result in a very appealing life, since such a person's life will be so consumed in its entirety to the devotion to others that there is no room for the enjoyment or cultivation of the non-moral but good things life has to offer, such as the enjoyment of a good novel, developing an interest in playing a musical instrument or participating in a sporting activity; activities that we generally regard to "contribute to a healthy, well-rounded, richly developed character" (ibid., 421). She writes that "a life in which *none* of these possible aspects of character [viz. non-moral activities] are developed may seem to be a life strangely barren" (ibid., emphasis original). The crux of Wolf's argument is that morality itself should not be regarded as the only guide to behaviour, that "the ideal of moral sainthood should not be held as a standard against which any other ideal must be judged or justified" (ibid., 435).

To be sure, morality should be an important, or even the most important value according to which one lives one's life, however it is very unlikely that one would find meaning in life only from morality (Wolf, 1982:438). It is only through a combination of (non-moral) interests and relationships (among other things), that the individual character of a person's life is given meaning, without the requirement of moral sainthood, in other words "a person may be *perfectly wonderful* without being *perfectly moral*" (ibid., 436 emphasis original).

I agree with Wolf's assessment of morality as being one cog in a system of values according to which a person lives their life, and should not necessarily be regarded as the most important value against which all else is judged. That said, I am of the opinion that in some instances the immoral actions are so heinous that morality overshadows other values that may play a role in our judgement of another's character. For instance, the very credible allegations of rape and sexual abuse of minors levelled against

Michael Jackson trumps, at least to my mind, any other values that he may have lived by (I will return to this in the next section).

I recognise that my view to include the artist's character in our evaluation of their art is a controversial one to hold, and several objections can and will be raised against it. In the next section I will attempt to anticipate potential objections and provide possible responses.

POTENTIAL OBJECTIONS

The view that an artist's moral character should play a role in the aesthetic evaluation of art is not one that many philosophers will agree with. In this section I will consider and attempt to address potential criticisms of this view. One of the most important questions that may arise is, I believe, with regards to censorship and whether it is necessary to impose a blackout on work created by immoral artists.

Censorship is defined as "the action of preventing part or the whole of a book, film, work of art, document, or other kind of communication from being seen or made available to the public, because it is considered to be offensive or harmful, or because it contains information that someone wishes to keep secret, often for political reasons" (*Censorship*, n.d.). In other words, some person in a position of authority decides on behalf of the rest of society what may or may not become public, thus infringing on other people's freedom to decide for themselves what is or is not valuable. Furthermore, it opens the door for the abuse of power by, for instance, suppressing dissenting views. It is my view that outright censorship of any kind should be guarded against in democratic societies, and as a result I am not convinced that the censorship of art created by immoral artists is warranted. In what follows I will discuss two arguments against the censorship of art, followed by considerations of possible alternatives.

The first argument against censorship is that it may result in the loss of genius and beauty of great art (Dixon, 2021). It is indisputable that some artists who have been exposed as having immoral characters displayed innovative genius in their creations, genius that made incomparable contributions to their specific artform and played an influential role on the work by those that came after them: Paul Gauguin's work

influenced the development of 20th century art; Leni Riefenstahl's film techniques are still in use today; Michael Jackson changed pop music, to name but a few examples. However, works of art are "historically informed objects that do and say things…created by people in particular times, responding to specific events and ideals" and to censor works such as these by removing them from public view or destroying them results in the loss of valuable aesthetic experiences (ibid.). Furthermore, since these artists had tremendous influence on the subsequent art world, it seems to be an impossible task to attempt to erase them from history.

The second argument against outright censorship is that it can result in the suppression of debate and engagement with the problems posed by the work and its creator. A recent example of this relates to the 1938 painting 'Thérèse Dreaming' by the Polish-French painter Balthus, currently on display at New York's Metropolitan Museum of Art (Met). The work features the approximately twelve- or thirteen-year-old Thérèse Blanchard, seemingly "unaware of her surroundings and lost in thought", her skirts lifted to her waist and her underwear exposed (Thérèse Dreaming, 2000-2021). According to the Met "Balthus, like countless modern artists, believed the subject of the child to be a source of raw spirit, not yet moulded by societal expectations" (ibid.).

Although Balthus has always denied allegations of paedophilia, this work is regarded by some in contemporary society as the eroticising of prepubescent girls (Ziv, 2017). Mia Merrill created an online petition requesting the Met to take down the painting, writing that "[i]t is disturbing that the Met would proudly display such an image…an evocative portrait of a prepubescent girl relaxing on a chair with her legs up and underwear exposed…it can be strongly argued that this painting romanticizes the sexualisation of a child" (ibid.). The Met disagrees. A spokesperson for the museum writes that "moments such as this provide an opportunity for conversation, and visual art is one of the most significant means we have for reflecting on both the past and the present, and encouraging the continuing evolution of existing culture through informed discussion and respect for creative expression" (ibid.). PEN America, an organisation protecting literary and artistic expression, agrees with this view, stating that "[s]ome advocates seem to have decided that artists and art institutions represent soft targets, more vulnerable to public campaigns than are the actual power structures that perpetuate the ills these campaigners are fighting against" (ibid.).

This latter quote sums up why I am loathe to accept a response of censorship with regards to art created by immoral artists. The fact remains that many works were created in different eras with different value systems to contemporary ones, and we cannot rewrite history by removing or destroying works that are now deemed to be problematic. Instead, we should be engaging with the underlying power structures, such as patriarchy, that legitimised and celebrated the creation of such work, through responses that encourage debate.

One such response is to engage in “curatorial activism” through “artistic interventions and better curation”, which avoids the issues that accompanies censorship of problematic art (Dixon, 2021). There are several ways in which curatorial activist strategies can be employed, of which I will present two. The first of these is the “manipulation of an artwork and its curated space” (ibid.). To illustrate how such a manipulation can be achieved Dixon presents the Robert E Lee Confederate monument in Virginia, which had the words “Blood On Your Hands” and “Stop White Supremacy” spraypainted over it by Black Lives Matter protestors in the wake of the death of George Floyd (ibid.). This vandalised monument is now regarded as “one of the most influential American protest artworks since the Second World War” (ibid.). Through manipulation of the work and its curated space, the monument has taken on a new meaning, one which allows for the recognition of the atrocities of history while simultaneously encouraging engagement with the changes in society.

The second strategy is transparent curation, where galleries use appropriate descriptions of a specific work to include information that may be relevant to our appreciation of the work. The role of curation is to provide information about the work on display, and it is the responsibility of the curator to provide accurate and true information, not just what is easy and convenient (Dixon, 2021). Where in past exhibitions of Gauguin’s work the wall text read “his relationship with a young Tahitian woman”, The National Gallery of Canada edited this for a 2019 Gauguin exhibition to read “his relationship with a 13- or 14-year-old Tahitian girl”, which is a much more accurate description in light of the information we have available regarding Gauguin (ibid.). Such transparent curation provides the perceiver with information and context that may inform how they then perceive the work on display.

I accept that strategies such as the above are not always possible, for instance there cannot be a disclaimer of some sort every time a song by Michael Jackson is played.

However, when it is possible to provide information about an artist, it should be done in an honest and transparent way to give the consumer of the art as much information as possible.

Assuming that my approach to art and the artist is correct, the question can be raised regarding the role of art in society, and whether we should consider art as a distinctive kind of human practice or as just another output in the world, viz. does art have a special or distinctive role and status in society? My response to this question is that art unequivocally plays a distinctive role in society which renders it (the art and the artist) susceptible to scrutiny. We are surrounded by art, whether it is the music we listen to, the movie we go to see in the cinema, the television series that we watch, satirical cartoons in newspapers, theatre we choose to see or visiting museums, to name a few. Many reasons can be posited for this elevated status given to art, but for the purposes of this discussion I will concentrate on the idea that art and artists provoke the rest of society to become more aware of themselves and their surroundings, oftentimes by disturbing, provoking, shocking and inspiring consumers of art (Schein, 2001:81).

According to Schein, it is one of the most important roles of art and artists to encourage us to broaden our horizons and be more open to different experiences, “and to get in touch with both internal and external forces that we might otherwise not notice” (Schein, 2001:81). Schein notes that a part of artistic training requires the artist to “expand their perceptual and expressive range…to learn to see and hear before they can create”, skills that a good artist can transfer to consumers of art through their art (ibid). Schein holds that it is human nature to “seek stability and predictability in our environment”, creating a comfort zone of habits and relationships that inform and support our perceptions and what we regard as appropriate (ibid.). It is the role of art and artists to push us out of our comfort zones, to force us to confront societal and other issues that we tend to avoid because it makes us uncomfortable because it is “disturbing, anxiety producing, politically incorrect” (ibid.). The film *Trainspotting* (1996) can be illustrative. The film follows the journey of Mark Renton, a heroin addict, as he attempts to get clean and how this affects his relationships with his family and friends, often using disturbing and traumatic scenery. As someone who has never struggled with the realities of addiction myself, it is not a topic that I fully understand and perhaps even tended to be judgemental about. However, watching a movie such as *Trainspotting* or, for that matter *Requiem for a Dream*, forces me to confront my own prejudices

regarding addicts and to recognise that addiction is an intensely complex issue that cannot be merely brushed aside because it makes me feel uncomfortable. I do not think that I would have taken the time or made the effort to find out more about drug addiction if I was not confronted with it through art, and this is, I believe, what Schein is trying to convey.

Art, and by extension artists, form part of our daily lives and have the power to influence our thinking and perceptions. This places art and their creators in influential and elevated positions in society, which in turn should be handled with great responsibilty. Having this responsibility, however, does not automatically equate to the idea that artists should be placed on a moral pedestal and be expected to live and behave as Wolf's *moral saints*, since artists are human beings with flaws, like the rest of us and it is inevitable that they will make mistakes and transgressions, some of which may be regarded as immoral. What is important here is the degree of such mistakes and transgressions, or degrees of morality, on display.

As mentioned in the previous section I absolutely believe there exists degrees of morality which should inform our responses. For instance, I find it very easy to watch movies with actor Robert Downey Jr, who is a recovering drug addict with a history of serious drug abuse for which he was arrested on numerous occasions during the 1990's and was eventually given a 36-month prison sentence in 1999 (Recovery, n.d.). Although substance abuse is a very serious problem, Downey Jr did not abuse his position to cause harm to others, only himself and possibly his close family who had to live with his addiction. In contrast, I find it very disconcerting to listen to the music of Michael Jackson: I recognise the brilliance of Jackson's work and his lasting influence on the genre of pop music while simultaneously experiencing aesthetic disillusionment considering the harm he (allegedly) inflicted on minors.

Other objections may also arise, such as that a work of art can now legitimately be negatively evaluated based on a disagreement with the morals of the artist, or, as was alluded to earlier, that a morally upstanding artist who produces average to substandard work from an aesthetic point of view, can now legitimately be upheld as a great artist.

My response to these concerns is firstly that I am not claiming that the moral character of the artist is the only criterion that should be used in evaluating the art. It should, in

my view, form a part of a number of considerations when it comes to the aesthetic evaluation of art. This is potentially where the *middle road*, as discussed by Deveraux and Brand, can come to play. We recognise and acknowledge the artistic mastery and contributions of Bell's significant form in works of art (or the lack thereof), as per aestheticism, however we remain aware of and acknowledge the aesthetic disillusionment that somehow detracts from the work of a morally compromised artist. Secondly, with regards to the asymmetry objection, I would argue that adherence to the moral obligations of a kingdom of ends does not entitle a person, regardless of their occupation, to be recognised as good at what they do. For instance, if an architect is a morally upstanding citizen in their private and professional life, but produces average to substandard work, their moral character does not entitle them to be recognised as a good architect. At most, their moral character entitles them to a place in society and to be recognised as a good person. The same applies to artists. An artist who produces mediocre or average work is not automatically entitled to being recognised as a good artist because they are morally upstanding. Similarly, a gifted artist who is morally compromised can be recognised as a good artist and their work appreciated, albeit with a sense of Foster's aesthetic disillusionment which, for some, detracts from the artist's work. Morality does not equate to being good or bad at what you do, but, and this is where the asymmetry comes in, immorality does influence how society perceives you and your work.

Another question that warrants attention is with regards to a morally compromised artist who has "repaid" their debt to society, either through incarceration or any other sanction that results in their rehabilitation and reintegration into society, without using their access to resources and contacts to enable a superficial atonement. The obvious answer to this question is yes, the artist has paid their dues and deserves a second chance, although I am not quite convinced that some of us, at least, are ever able to completely disregard the behaviour that led to a sanction in the first place. Again, we might be able to recognise and acknowledge the brilliance of the work, but a sense of aesthetic disillusionment may continue to linger.

CONCLUSION

The question that I am pursuing in this paper is how we should respond to art that, in itself, does not contain morally objectionable attitudes, but whose creator has a morally flawed character which only becomes common knowledge after the fact, and whose behaviour has been enabled by society's willingness to look the other way. In other words, at the time of its release, the art is celebrated and enjoyed by many people since the work itself does not necessarily portray any immorality. However, subsequent to this it comes to light that the artist has engaged in immoral actions against others, often as a result of the fame they obtained due to the success of their art. An example of such a scenario is *The Cosby Show*, which was very popular during the 1980s and early 1990s. It is a wholesome comedy portraying the life of Dr Clive Huxtable, his wife Clair and their five children. Decades after the show first aired it came to light that Bill Cosby is a sexual predator who drugged and raped women and, in 2018, he was sentenced to imprisonment at the age of 81. The question now is whether the revelations of Cosby's flawed moral character have any bearing on a show enjoyed by many people?

Kieran argues that we are able to determine the authorial attitudes which are expressed in a work of art based on the perceived underlying attitudes or character of the artist, for example deducing that Leni Riefenstahl most probably held strong pro-Nazi views based on *Triumph of the Will*. But what about when the artwork does not portray an accurate authorial attitude? Nobody watching *The Cosby Show* could glean from that that Cosby is a sexual predator; when considering a painting by Gauguin it is not possible to determine just by looking at his work that he raped underage girls; listening to music by Michael Jackson does not alert us to his (alleged) paedophilia. Very often it is only after the success of an artwork that we become aware of the moral flaws of the artist, and I want to posit that it is often as a result of the success of their work that they gain the power and influence that provide them with access and opportunity to others who they then proceed to harm.

Gaut and Carroll rely on the audience's response to the work to determine its failure or success, but again, as per the example of *The Cosby Show*, if the work itself does not contain a moral defect, then the audience will respond neutrally to it, and it does not provide any indication of the artist's moral character which only later comes to light.

Existing theories concerning the moral character of art such as those discussed do not go far enough when it comes to the aesthetic and moral evaluation of works of art. These theories deal with the intrinsic moral character of a specific work of art, but do not consider the moral character of the artist when aesthetically evaluating a work of art. It is my view that there exists an intimate and indispensable connection between the analysis of aesthetics and morality and, consequently, the moral character of an artist should play some role when we evaluate their art. This view is supported by Bartel's expanded ethicism, holding that we already do research into the socio-historical context in which the art was created, in order to fully understand and appreciate the work, but only certain aspects of that information are regarded as relevant in the aesthetic evaluation of art. For Bartel it is equally necessary to consider the moral and ethical behaviours of the artist that come to light during research in our evaluation of art since these attitudes may have a bearing on the prescribed attitude of the work. This ties in with the work of feminist aesthetics, which aims to expose the patriarchal systems underlying existing theories which could have a bearing on how we interpret the prescribed attitude of a work.

Feminism encourages us to challenge the very foundations of orthodox theories, not by discarding existing theories, but rather to "draw upon, and extend, philosophical work on the relationship between aesthetic and moral value" (Devereaux 2003:661). It is my view that there exists an intimate and indispensable connection between the analysis of aesthetics and morality. Following Kant's kingdom of ends formula, we all live in communities that should strive towards a "mutually consistent, harmonious and reciprocally supportive" system where we have responsibilities towards our fellow community members. Although I agree with Wolf's argument that morality is not the be-all and end-all regarding values and that life would be dull if we attempted to live exactly according to the prescripts of the kingdom of ends, there exists a moral boundary which, when crossed, calls our moral character into question. As Emma Sulkowicz argues, artists who knowingly and willingly cross that boundary blur the line between art and artist. Since the art world has been hit by innumerable scandals in recent times, this blurred line between art and the artist compels us to reframe the aesthetical evaluation of art created by immoral artists, without discarding their important contributions.

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