The Art of Immoral Artists[*]

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Abstract

The primary aim of this chapter is to outline the consensuses that have emerged in recent philosophical works tackling normative questions about responding to immoral artists' art. While disagreement amongst philosophers is unavoidable, there is actually much agreement on the ethics of media consumption. How should we evaluate immoral artists' art? Philosophers generally agree that we should not always separate the artist from the art. How should we engage with immoral artists' art? Philosophers generally agree that we should not always reflexively turn away from them. In turn, these responses reveal that moral value is not wholly autonomous from aesthetic value, and neither dominates the other. The secondary aim of this chapter is to explore the ramifications of these revelations. I argue that, in addition to the ethics of media consumption, we need an aesthetics of media consumption that is fundamentally social rather than solitary.

Jeopardy! is an American trivia game show that draws a wide following, but also an especially dedicated fan base amongst those who think that that they are above trivialities and game shows. As culture reporter Aja Romano (2021) says, "Because the program combines intellectual curiosity with meritocracy in a way that makes geekery seem fashionable, *Jeopardy!* stands as America's most popular and culturally significant game show". The show's cultural status—that "sheen of being unimpeachable" (Jacobs 2021)—was recently challenged by a succession crisis. Its beloved host for the past 36 years, Alex Trebek, died of cancer in 2020. After a public audition process of rotating guest hosts, including fan favorite LeVar Burton, executive producer Mike Richards—with the support of his bosses, the Sony studio executives—selected himself as Trebek's successor. Shortly after the announcement of his selection, multiple blemishes to Richards' resume came to light via journalist Claire McNear (2021a; 2021b), who wrote the definitive history of *Jeopardy!* and was embedded in the show's community, including both its fans and its behind-the-scenes staff. First, Richards was tarnished by his transparent longstanding desire to become a game show host—not only *Jeopardy!*, but simply any game show, even *Wheel of Fortune*. Second, Richards appeared to have abused his executive producer power to secure himself a spot in the guest host rotation, even though he was not originally considered for the audition. Third, Richards had a history of gender discrimination and sexual harassment, as well as a record of anti-Semitic remarks, from when he was the executive producer on another game show, *The Price is Right*. Then, shortly after McNear's reporting on Richards's blemished resume, Richards

resigned as the host—and few days later, as the executive producer—of *Jeopardy!* in the face of growing backlash.

Jeopardy!'s succession crisis is only one amongst many similar cases in recent cultural discourse that prompted people to puzzle over the ethics of media consumption. Although this discourse is typically framed around the question of *how we should respond to immoral artists' art*, the *Jeopardy!* case shows that it is not only concerned with art but with media in general. Mike Richards might not be an artist and *Jeopardy!* might not be art—at least, not in any value-laden sense of the terms 'art' and 'artist' (Liao, Meskin, and Knobe 2020)—but the question of how we should respond remains. Over just these past few years there have been many timely books, chapters, and articles by philosophers that aim to theorize about, and to provide practical guidance on, how to live with and what to do with works of contemporary figures like Woody Allen, Roman Polanski, R. Kelly, Michael Jackson, Bill Cosby, Louis C.K., Aziz Ansari, Chuck Close, as well as works of historical figures like Caravaggio and Paul Gauguin.

In fact, we can disambiguate two distinct normative questions in the vicinity of this cultural discourse (Bartel 2019: 4–5; see also Harold 2020: 53):

> *Evaluation.*   How should we evaluate immoral artists' art?
> *Engagement*.   How should we engage with immoral artists' art?

These timely questions are linked to timeless philosophical debates. The evaluation question is a specific expression of a *value interaction* question about whether the domain of moral value interacts with the domain of aesthetic value, or whether moral reasons interact with aesthetic reasons. And the engagement question is a specific expression of a *value priority* question about whether the moral domain takes priority over other value domains, including the aesthetic domain, or whether moral reasons take priority over other normative reasons, including aesthetic reasons, when it comes how to live and what to do.

The primary aim of this chapter is to outline the consensuses that have emerged in recent philosophical works tackling these two questions. While disagreement amongst philosophers is unavoidable, there is actually much agreement on the ethics of media consumption. To start, there are two important assumptions that are widely shared: conceptual separation of ethics and aesthetics, and heterogeneity of cases (§1). In response to the evaluation question, there is general agreement that we should not always separate the artist from the art (§2). In response to the engagement question, there is general agreement that we should not always disengage from the art of immoral artists (§3). To return to the timeless debates, these responses reveal that moral value is not wholly autonomous from aesthetic value, and neither one dominates the other. The secondary aim of this chapter is to explore the ramifications of these revelations. I argue that, in addition to an ethics of media consumption, we need an aesthetics of media consumption that is fundamentally social rather than solitary (§4).

1. Terms of Debates

The evaluation question and the engagement question are *normative* questions, which means that they are not about how we actually respond to, but how we *should* respond to, immoral artists' art. But what is the nature of that 'should'? Amongst philosophers, it is standard to distinguish between different domains of human value, which give rise to different kinds of reasons. Indeed, the value interaction and value priority questions do not even make sense unless we do so. Very roughly, ethics is concerned with the things that we call 'right' and 'wrong', and aesthetics is concerned with the things that we call 'beautiful' and 'ugly'. Of course, these very rough characterizations of the value domains are far from accurate, but it turns out accurately drawing the distinction is also far from easy.

James Harold (2020: 123–130) reviews five candidate differences between ethics and aesthetics. First, ethics and aesthetics may differ in their *underlying sentiments*: some emotions, such as guilt and resentment, are distinctively moral. Second, ethics and aesthetics may differ in their *scope*: while ethics tends to involve general rules, aesthetics tends to involve particular judgments. Third, ethics and aesthetics may differ in their requirement for *direct acquaintance*: one need not witness a murder to judge it wrong, but one does need to see a painting to judge it beautiful. Fourth, ethics and aesthetics may differ in their *practicality*: while ethical judgments are linked to practical actions and choices, aesthetic judgments are not. Fifth, ethics and aesthetics may differ in their *strength of commitment*: ethics demands strong commitments from agents, but aesthetics does not. In addition, Moonyoung Song (in press) suggests two candidate differences that are more meta: compared to ethics, aesthetics may be less *amenable to realism* and more *amenable to naturalism*. However, none of these candidate differences are widely accepted, and each predictably faces a wide range of counterexamples and counterarguments. Yet the distinction itself seems sufficiently widely accepted, and so—like other participants in these philosophical debates—I will proceed with the assumption that there is a line to be drawn between ethics and aesthetics, but also acknowledge that the exact location of the line remains elusive.

Philosophers responding to the evaluation and engagement questions also acknowledge that the cases that these questions apply to are highly heterogeneous. As such, these questions resist blanket all-or-nothing answers. There are multiple dimensions of variation that are potentially relevant to how we should respond to immoral artists' art.

First, the cases can differ in their distance from the present (Willard 2021: 7–9). The temporal difference might affect our judgments of the artists' immorality. For example, while our moral standards straightforwardly apply to contemporary artists like Cosby, it is unclear that they straightforwardly apply to historical artists like Caravaggio. The temporal difference might also affect the efficacious actions that are available to us. For example, while a boycott might be a plausible way to punish a living artist like R. Kelly, it is an implausible way to punish a not-living artist like Michael Jackson. Finally, the temporal difference might affect our epistemic access to the circumstances of the cases. For example, while we tend to have access to

testimonies of contemporary artists' victims, we tend to not have access to testimonies of historical artists' victims.

Second, the cases can differ in the relationship between the art and the artist (Wills and Holt 2017). On the one end of this spectrum, some art seems to directly imitate, if not depict, life. Paul Gauguin's painting *Manaò tupapaú* is a sexualized representation of his 13-year-old Tahitian "wife", who he almost certainly abused and raped (Nannicelli 2020: 216–217). Louis C.K.'s comedy features uncomfortable sequences that resemble his habitual unwanted masturbation in front of female coworkers (Willard 2021: 102–103). On the other end of this spectrum, some artists' biographies seem entirely irrelevant to interpreting their art. Jackson Pollock's non-representational action paintings seem to bear no relation to his abuse of his wife, Lee Krasner, even though she is an admittedly underacknowledged artistic influence (Nannicelli 2020: 218). Eric Gill's typeface Gill Sans seems to bear no relation to his rape of his sisters, his daughters, and his dog (Wills and Holt 2017: 2; Bartel 2019: 4). And of course, there are many more cases that are somewhere in between. In part, this spectrum exists because the immorality in immoral artists is ambiguous: it could refer to the artist's general moral character, to the morality of the production process, and to the structural injustices related to the artist's social positions (Harold 2020: 52–53).

Third, the cases can differ in the scope of social structure that is implicated. Understandably, most of the discussions have been on the most high-profile cases, as the examples above illustrate, that implicate the artworld at large. However, there are also low-profile cases that occur in local or subculture communities. Not only does this difference in scope correspond to differences in cultures and institutions, it also changes the potential impact of individual interventions. While it may seem like one's action can make no difference to, say, someone as well-known as R. Kelly, one's action might make some difference in, say, one's local punk community. For example, when the band PWR BTTM—which was known for its "commitment to creating safe queer spaces" (Geffen 2017)—faced anonymous allegations of sexual misconduct, the response from the queer-friendly punk community was swift, such that the band was abandoned by its tourmates, dropped by its label, and had its songs removed from streaming services. While high-profile cases command much more attention in the cultural discourse, statistically speaking there must exist many more low-profile cases.

2. Evaluating Immoral Artists' Art

As mentioned, the specific question of *how we should evaluate immoral artists' art* is linked to the general question of whether moral reasons interact with aesthetic reasons. In contemporary philosophy, this general question is primarily pursued under the guise of *ethical criticism of art*, which canonically asks whether an intrinsic moral defect of a work makes for an aesthetic defect (Clavel-Vazquez

2018).[1] Roughly, a moral defect is intrinsic to a work if it is a part of the work's content, rather than a part of its causal antecedent or its causal consequence.

However, the scope of ethical criticism is sometimes extended to include extrinsic moral defects (Giovannelli 2007; Nannicelli 2014). In ethical criticism of food, it has been argued that a moral defect in a dish's production process can make for an aesthetic defect—and, sometimes, an aesthetic merit (Korsmeyer 2012; Liao and Meskin 2018). For example, since foie gras cannot have the characteristic fatty taste without geese being force fed, the moral defect in the production process can make for an aesthetic defect that manifests in its taste. Along these lines, moral defects of the artist plausibly count as extrinsic moral defects of the art, and so plausibly falls under the extended scope of ethical criticism of art.

The evaluation question is also related to another general question of whether contextual information is relevant to art criticism, or to the practice of appropriately appreciating art. While *empiricists* say that only perceptible properties that are intrinsic to the work are relevant, *contextualists* say that non-perceptible properties that are extrinsic to the work are also relevant (Nannicelli 2020: 218–222). Nowadays, contextualism is by far the dominant position in art criticism, and artists' biographies are regularly invoked in understanding and evaluating artworks. Along these lines, moral defects of the artists are already, by default, relevant to understanding and evaluating artworks. In fact, it is the intentional exclusion of moral defects of the artist from art criticism that "seems like an arbitrary restriction on our critical practices" (Bartel 2019: 10).

In the (canonical) ethical criticism of art debate, there are three standard positions, each encompassing a family of views (Liao and Meskin 2018: 659–662). *Art autonomists* say that an artwork's moral value does not interact with its aesthetic value: moral defects cannot make for aesthetic defects or aesthetic merits. *Art moralists* say that an artwork's moral value monotonically interacts with its aesthetic value: moral defects can make for aesthetic defects, and while some moral defects are aesthetically neutral, they can never make for aesthetic merits. *Art immoralists* say that an artwork's moral value non-monotonically interacts with its aesthetic value: depending on the context, moral defects can make for aesthetic defects, be aesthetically neutral, *or* make for aesthetic merits. That said, there is much contentiousness with this taxonomy, given the wide range of views encompassed under each label, such that it is not uncommon to find, say, a self-professed autonomist who is classified as a moralist by others.

I contend that analogues of each position can be found in response to the question of *how we should evaluate immoral artists' art*. As they classify themselves, Bernard Wills and Jason Holt (2017) and Harold (2020) defend *artist autonomism*, on which moral defects of artists are irrelevant to the aesthetic value of their artworks. However, given that cases can differ in the relationship between the art and the artist, each of them also acknowledges that there can be cases—perhaps some of Gauguin's Tahitian paintings or some of Louis C.K.'s masturbation comedy

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[1] The expression 'make for' is intentionally vague to include the variety of connections that have been posited between moral and aesthetic reasons in the value interaction debate, such as: constitution, common cause, and counterfactual dependence (Liao and Meskin 2018: 661; see also McGregor 2014).

bits—in which moral defects of the artist do make for aesthetic defects of the art. As such, I am actually inclined to classify them as defenders of *artist moralism*, on which moral defects of artists can, in some cases, make for aesthetic defects of artworks. Indeed, Harold (2020: 67–68) seems to express some further sympathy with this position in his discussion of virtuous artists, whose moral merits can indirectly contribute to aesthetic merits of their artworks.

I am also inclined to classify Christopher Bartel (2019: 11–12) as a defender of *artist immoralism*, on which moral defects of artists can even make for aesthetic merits of artworks, even though he labels himself as an "expanded" moralist. Bartel distinguishes two kinds of cases. First, there are cases of *counter-morality artists*, in which the artist's moral defects contribute to the perceived authenticity of their works. In turn, in contexts where such perceived authenticity is aesthetically valued, such as gangsta rap and narcocorrido, these moral defects can make for aesthetic merits. Second, there are cases of *hardship artists*, in which the artist's moral defects—combined with their difficult life circumstances—contribute to the audience's sympathy. In turn, this sympathy contributes to an overall positive moral evaluation of the artist, which then contributes to a positive aesthetic evaluation of their art. For example, Bartel argues that while fans of Johnny Cash might view his amphetamine addiction as a moral defect, they also view it as part of an overall morally positive life struggle, which increases their aesthetic admiration of his work. In the same spirit, Alfred Archer and Benjamin Matheson (2021: 70–74) and Erich Hatala Matthes (2021: 37–39) have argued that there can be distinctive aesthetic achievements that are products of artists' immorality.

Looking beyond the contentious taxonomy labels, however, there is actually a surprising amount of agreement in philosophers responses to the question of *how we should evaluate immoral artists' art*. The consensus, I contend, is that the immorality of the artist cannot be always separated from the art. Far from a dichotomy, the relationship between the art and the artist involves the interaction between two functions: how immoral the artist is, and how relevant the immorality of the artist is to the art. The degreed nature of these reasons means that not only is there room for nuanced evaluation of immoral artists' art, but there is also room for debate as part of our art critical practice.

3. Engaging with Immoral Artists' Art

In popular discourse on immoral artists' art, the standard framing is around the question of *whether we are required to always disengage from immoral artists' art*. In response, philosophers generally agree that we are not. However, by asking a dichotomous question and getting the expected answer, the standard framing obscures subtleties in philosophers' analyses of the norms that govern our media consumption. An alternative, more nuanced, framing is around the question of *how we should engage with immoral artists' art*. True, in answering this question, philosophers do argue against a global requirement for disengaging with immoral artists' art because they find that moral reasons for doing so are to be weighed against aesthetic reasons, and inconclusive in themselves given the heterogeneity of

cases. However, they also acknowledge these moral reasons can have stronger or weaker normativity when it comes to public versus private engagements, and institutional versus individualistic engagements.

As mentioned, the specific question of *how we should engage with immoral artists' art* is linked to the general question of whether moral reasons systematically override other normative reasons, including aesthetic ones, when it comes how to live and what to do. In contemporary philosophy, this general question is primarily pursued under the guise of *moral overridingness* (Gert 2013). Arguably the most influential argument against moral overridingness is Susan Wolf's (1982: 419) diagnosis that no one would rationally desire to be a moral saint: "a person whose every action is as good as possible, a person, that is, who is as morally worthy as can be". That is, the saintly moral life stands at odds with a flourishing life.[2]

Wolf's diagnosis is commonly cited in philosophers' responses to the engagement question. Mary Beth Willard (2021: 79–82) explicitly draws on Wolf's diagnosis of moral saints to argue that someone who systematically refrains from engaging with immoral artists art due to moral reasons ends up aesthetically impoverished. Matthes (2021: 57) echoes the belief that the pursuit of moral sainthood in media consumption is antithetical to the pursuit of a flourishing life. In particular, if there can be distinctive aesthetic achievements that are products of artists' immorality, then there can be cases in which moral and aesthetic reasons come into conflict. And so, if moral reasons do not systematically override other aesthetic reasons, then there will be scenarios in which even though the saintly moral life demands us to disengage from immoral artists' art, the flourishing life demands the opposite.

Let us, for now, set aside aesthetic and other non-moral reasons. Philosophers still generally agree that we are not morally required to always disengage from immoral artists' art. That is because the moral reasons that are commonly given do not systematically apply to heterogeneous cases that differ in their distance from the present, in the relationship between the art and the artist, and in the scope of social structure that is implicated. However, that same heterogeneity of cases also means that these moral reasons can have more or less normative force on how we engage with immoral artists' art, depending on the details of each particular case.

We might choose to disengage from immoral artists' art for *consequentialist* reasons: to prevent benefitting immoral artists, and to avoid enabling future harms that they might cause (Matthes in press). However, as Willard (2021: 30–56) and Matthes (2021: 41–53) argue, our individual actions are very unlikely to have any of these effects in many cases. Many immoral artists are too rich. Many immoral artists are too famous. Many immoral artists are too dead. Our ordinary consumer habits simply make no difference to them. So, if we are honest with ourselves about our impotence as individuals, these philosophers argue, then there is no *general* consequentialist requirement to disengage from immoral artists' art.

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[2] Not everyone agrees with Wolf. For example, Vanessa Carbonell (2009: 397) argues that the saintly moral life is compatible with a flourishing life—indeed, a life can be flourishing *because* it is saintly moral—by appealing to Partners in Health co-founder Paul Farmer as a real-life moral saint who is not miserable to himself and to others.

In this respect, the ethics of media consumption resembles the ethics of other collective action problems, such as climate change. The consensus is that our ordinary consumer habits simply make no difference on most complex or structural moral problems, because each of us is merely one amongst billions, and real change can only come from coordinated collective actions. Against this consensus, Bradley Elicker (2021: 306) argues that each of us do have personal moral responsibility to make contributions to collective actions, including disengaging from immoral artists' art, "when the cost is low or the degree of belief that others will contribute is high". On Elicker's account, even if each of our individual actions can only have imperceptibly small effect, they can still collectively accumulate into significant impact. And it is an open question for each particular case whether the cost of our disengagement is in fact low and whether the degree of belief that others will do the same is in fact high.

We might also choose to disengage from immoral artists' art for *non-consequentialist* reasons: to avoid being complicit with, and to express our moral disapproval of, immoral artists (Matthes in press). The exact expressive significance of our choice to engage with or to disengage from immoral artists' art will depend not only on our intentions, but also on the context and the audience (Willard 2021: 61–65). That means what we express with our actions can depart from what we intend. For example, even if we only intend to honor and to admire an artist for their artistic achievements, our actions may nevertheless have the unintended public meaning of honoring and admiring their moral failings (Archer and Matheson 2021: 36–37). Nevertheless, there is no *general* non-consequentialist requirement to disengage from immoral artists' art because expressive significance is limited to our public engagements with immoral artists' art.

We now come to the first key distinction that can guide how we should engage with immoral artists' art. It is generally accepted that people behave differently in presentation of their selves in public than they do in private (Goffman 1959). In ethics, it is also commonly recognized that there are distinctive moral norms that apply to our public versus private lives. And philosophers argue that, in media ethics, there are also distinct norms that apply to our public versus private consumption (Matthes 2021: 53–56; see also Harold 2020: 65–67). Willard (2021: 67) acknowledges that there can be non-consequentialist moral reasons against publicly engaging with immoral artists' art: when doing so has the expressive significance of complicity, or even approval, of immoral artists, "the ethical and prudent thing to do will be to set aside their work temporarily or keep your aesthetic engagement of their work to yourself". Similarly, Archer and Matheson (2021: 11) say that "[s]ometimes private admiration will be appropriate when public admiration is not".

We then turn to the second key distinction that can guide how we should engage with immoral artists' art. The question of *how we should engage with immoral artists' art* is actually ambiguous between two readings. On the one hand, this is a question about what each of us, as individuals, should do. On the other hand, this is a question about what the institutional 'we' should do. Philosophers argue that the answers to the two disambiguated questions turn out to be rather different because of a significant difference in capacity to effect change. While philosophers generally

disagree that individuals have moral responsibility to disengage from immoral artists' art, they generally agree that institutions do.

Given the resemblance between the ethics of media consumption and the ethics of other collective action problems, it calls for structural solutions and not merely individual interventions. While the consequentialist moral reasons are often marginal when it comes to individuals, whose ordinary consumer habits are likely to make little difference, they are often significant when it comes to institutions. That is because institutions do have the power of preventing immoral artists from materially benefitting from their art, avoiding enabling future harms that immoral artists might cause, and publicly expressing disapproval of immoral artists' moral failings (Willard 2021: 41; Matthes 2021: 74–75). With greater power, as the saying goes, comes greater responsibility.

4. Agency and Community

Let's recap. Two normative questions frame our responses to immoral artists' art. On the evaluation question of *how we should evaluate immoral artists' art*, the philosophical consensus is that the morality of artists can sometimes be relevant to critical practices of their art, and so we should not always separate the artist from the art. Of broader significance, this consensus response suggests that ethics and aesthetics are not wholly autonomous from one another. On the engagement question of *how we should engage with immoral artists' art*, the philosophical consensus is that common moral reasons against engagement are not strong enough to apply globally and are sometimes outweighed by aesthetic reasons for engagement, and so we should not always disengage from immoral artists' art. Of broader significance, this consensus suggests that neither ethics nor aesthetics is prior to the other.

The upshot of philosophers' insights in this discourse is that, in thinking about how to respond to immoral artists' art, we need to examine not only our moral agency but also our aesthetic agency. As Willard (2021: 17) emphasizes: "We are aesthetic agents: we act aesthetically". To further their insights, I want to conclude by further examining our aesthetic agency. I will explicate and repudiate two myths that pervade the popular discourse on immoral artists' art and, in the process, revisit and interrogate the public/private and institutional/individualistic distinctions.

First, there is the *myth of aesthetic individualism*: the assumption, often unstated, is that while ethics is fundamentally social, aesthetics is fundamentally solitary. That is, while ethics demands that we turn outwards to consider others, aesthetics only demands us to turn inwards to consider ourselves. This myth connects to some of the questionable candidate differences between ethics and aesthetics. One place that this myth surfaces is in a common reason for (continuing) engagement with immoral artists' art: the so-called *acquaintance principle* that roughly says that you cannot judge an artwork until you have experienced it for yourself (see, for example, Matthes 2021: 69–70). Despite its intuitive appeal in the abstract, as Jon Robson (2014) argues, there is extensive empirical evidence that the acquaintance principle is at odds with our concrete ordinary practices of forming

aesthetic judgments, which rely on social sources such as testimony. If this argument is sound, then it is not always necessary for us to engage with immoral artists' art in order to form aesthetic judgments about them.

Robson's argument against the acquaintance principle is in line with a general picture of aesthetic lives on which our aesthetic agency is essentially in relation to others in our communities (compare Lindemann 2014 on moral agency and moral communities). Amongst places where this general picture can be found, Brandon Polite (2019) has highlighted the importance of our shared musical experiences with others, and Nick Riggle (in press) has argued against an individualistic conception of aesthetic value and for a communitarian alternative. We do not merely connect with art; we connect with art *and* each other. As Willard (2021: 60–61) observes,

> Sharing characterizes our aesthetic lives. […] The social nature that's characteristic of aesthetic consumption is arguably even more central to other aesthetic actions. When we curate or criticize or collect or teach, we act with others. A meaningful aesthetic project is often a shared aesthetic project.

In the context of responding to immoral artists' art, Harold (2020: 63) argues that our responses to art—not just immoral artists' art, but all art—is standardly structured relationally to what Ted Cohen (1993) calls *affective communities*, "communities of people who care about artworks and the artists that produce them". While Cohen primarily characterizes them as aesthetic communities, Harold argues that they are also moral communities.[3] If this general picture of our aesthetic lives is correct, then we can have aesthetic, not just moral, reasons to disengage from immoral artists' art: we do not want to feel connected to them and/or with the people who engage with them.

More subtly, I contend that the public/private distinction is partly grounded in the myth of aesthetic individualism. Matthes speculates that this distinction is collapsing under social media habits, such as sharing playlists. He notes that his students "seemed to have trouble *conceiving* of an aesthetic decision that was private, that was just for you" (Matthes 2021: 57). But I am skeptical that his students' reaction is anything new. Long before social media, people have conspicuously displayed on their shelves the books they (aspire to) read. As Willard says, our aesthetic lives are characterized by sharing. To be sure, there are different degrees of publicity, but if our aesthetic lives are fundamentally social rather than solitary, then media consumption that is truly in private is the exception, not the norm. Even when we consume immoral artists' art by ourselves, we often still share that consumption with others through entirely ordinary practices, including critical disagreements, which can have various degrees of expressive significance. Moreover, if our aesthetic agency is essentially in relation to others, then Willard's (2021: 67)

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[3] Specific case studies show that these affective communities are at once aesthetic and moral, and inform their members aesthetic and moral agencies. Willard (2021: 150–152) discusses *Harry Potter* affective communities who divested themselves from J.K. Rowling due to her harmful anti-trans views. Harold (in press) discusses an affective community that emerged from Black women audience members' response to *The Color Purple*, which develops a non-standard critical interpretation that provides greater potential for moral learning from a flawed work.

recommendation that sometimes you should in fact "keep your aesthetic engagement of [immoral artists'] work to yourself" comes with a significant cost: it severely restricts our aesthetic agency. To undercut our own agency is no way to live a flourishing life. That is an aesthetic, not just moral, reason to not engage with immoral artists' art at all, if the alternative is to only do so secretly. In general, our responses to immoral artists are less private than we would like to believe.

Furthermore, I contend that the institutional/individualistic distinction is partly grounded in the public/private distinction, and so it too is—albeit indirectly—partly grounded in the myth of aesthetic individualism. A reason for attributing different moral responsibilities to institutions and individuals is that while institutions essentially operate in the public sphere, individuals do not essentially do so. To be sure, institutions have different degrees of formality, and there are often formal institutions to attribute moral responsibilities to in comparatively high-profile cases. However, in comparatively low-profile cases—ones that exist in local or subculture communities—such formal institutions do not always exist. Often, we are the institution: the informal institution is constituted by individuals exercising their agency—moral and aesthetic—in their own communities. In general, our responses to immoral artists are less individualistic than we would like to believe.

Second, there is the *myth of aesthetic meritocracy*: that only aesthetic merits or demerits should determine our allocation of attention and time. Each of us should act like aesthetic meritocrats—promoting the aesthetically worthy and demoting the aesthetically unworthy, while setting aside irrelevant factors like the morality of the artist. The two myths are intertwined: the idea that we allocate our attention and time independently is most readily supported by the idea that we must each individually judge for ourselves what is aesthetically best.

One place that this myth surfaces is in another common reason for (continuing) engagement with immoral artists' art: if we do not, we lose out on something aesthetically valuable (Willard 2021: 17–23; see also Archer and Matheson 2021: 70–74 and Matthes 2021: 37–39). Even those who are sympathetic to aesthetic meritocracy as an ideal should recognize its divergence from our actual practices of allocating time and attention in our aesthetic lives. To recognize that aesthetic value is fundamentally communitarian is also to recognize the impact that contingent social and material infrastructures have on our aesthetic judgments. In the actual world, the social and material infrastructures of the artworld is inseparable from oppressive systems such as racism, sexism, ableism, and so on (Liao and Huebner 2021). These oppressive systems make it unlikely that artworld institutions can ever be good aesthetic meritocrats—that the very small percentage of the collections that they choose to publicly display are truly the most aesthetically meritorious ones. Indeed, these oppressive systems make it unlikely that we can ever be good aesthetic meritocrats, even relative to our own idiosyncratic aesthetic projects—that the artworks we discover via the press, via our friends' shares, via algorithms' recommendations are truly the most aesthetically meritorious ones.

In fact, in the actual world, oppressive systems make it unlikely that the artists we currently deem most meritorious are in fact the ones we would ideally deem most meritorious. The sexism that enabled R. Kelly's immoral predatory

behavior is also likely to have aided his achievements in the music industry over a counterfactual comparably talented female musician, and the colonialism that enabled Gauguin's immoral predatory behavior is also likely to have aided his status in the artworld over a counterfactual comparably talented Indigenous artist. If this common cause hypothesis is plausible, then it is not always necessary for us to engage with immoral artists' art in order to live a flourishing life of aesthetic value. There are aesthetic, not just moral, reasons to disengage from immoral artists' art: we can use that attention and time on other comparably talented artists who are currently disadvantaged by oppressive systems in the actual world.

To be clear, these aesthetic reasons have to be weighed alongside other reasons—aesthetic, moral, or otherwise—for and against engaging with immoral artists' art. For example, if artist immoralists are correct that an artist's immorality can make for an art's aesthetic virtue, then there can be an aesthetic reason for engaging *because* a work is the art of an immoral artist. And as many philosophers in these debates have already noted, the conflicts between all these reasons can only resolved by carefully examining the particularities of each case. My explication and repudiation of these two myths are only intended to—following these philosophers' leads—add more mountains and valleys to the varied landscape of reasons concerning our habits of media consumption.

The *Jeopardy!* case illustrates where these two myths fail to practically guide us in our habits of media consumption. Even when people watch the trivia game show on their own TVs, for many of them, the enjoyment comes from being situated in the affective community—a community that is at once moral and aesthetic—that exists beyond the screen. They do not merely want to answer trivial questions that pop up, but they want to connect with others who do. And for many of them, that is a reason to not want to connect with a show—and a community—that is associated with a host that robs *Jeopardy!* of its unimpeachable sheen. Although the internal process deemed Mike Richards the most meritorious successor to Alex Trebek, in retrospect it is easy to see that the same social forces that enabled his gender discrimination and sexual harassment also enabled his selection over other candidates. To respond to immoral artists' art, we need both media ethics, and a media aesthetics that recognizes its sociality.

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