

“Immoral Artists” forthcoming in *The Oxford Handbook of Ethics and Art*, ed. James Harold.
Draft, 8.2.21. Please cite final version.

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Abstract: This chapter will offer an overview of issues posed by the problem of immoral artists, artists who in word or deed violate commonly held moral principles. I will briefly consider the question of whether the immorality of an artist can render their work aesthetically worse (making connections to chapters in the Theory section of the handbook), and then will turn to questions about what the audience should do and feel in response to knowledge of these moral failings. I will discuss questions such as whether audiences have reason not to purchase or consume work by these artists, whether their shows and exhibitions should be canceled, and how fans might grapple with the emotional turmoil they feel when artists whom they love act or speak in ways that are morally condemnable.

Keywords: ethics, art, ethical criticism, boycotts, cancel culture, immoral artists, emotions, grandstanding, fans

I. Introduction

There are seemingly endless examples of successful artists who have committed morally condemnable acts, including rape, murder, and molestation, as well as those who have made morally condemnable statements espousing views that include racism, misogyny, fascism, and transphobia. What do the (im)moral lives of artists mean for our relationship to their artwork?

While there is a long philosophical tradition focused on the relationship between ethics and artworks, philosophical focus on the specific problem of immoral artists is relatively novel.

This chapter will begin by briefly considering how the ethical criticism of artists relates to the existing philosophical literature on the ethical criticism of art. We will then turn our attention to moral and practical questions about how we should act in response to revelations about the immoral actions of artists, focusing specifically on questions about ethical consumerism, institutional responsibility, and fan culture. I argue that we have substantial moral latitude when it comes to our individual engagement with the work of immoral artists, but that arts institutions can and often should play a more active role in responding to the immoral behavior of artists. Finally, I briefly turn to questions about the emotional turmoil many fans experience when they learn that the creator of a beloved work has acted immorally, and argue that the artwork itself is a useful tool for grappling productively with these conflicting feelings.

II. Ethical Criticism of Artists

The central question motivating work on the ethical criticism of art is this: are the moral flaws of artworks also aesthetic flaws of those works? There are a range of answers to this question in the literature. Some deny the premise of the question (there's no such thing as a morally flawed artwork!) (For discussion, see Carroll 1996, Harold 2011, Clavel-Vazquez 2018a). Some propose a strong *pro tanto* relationship according to which the moral flaws of artworks are to that extent also aesthetic flaws (Gaut 1998, 2007). Others turn this relationship on its head and argue that the moral flaws of artworks can in fact be aesthetic merits (Eaton 2012, Clavel-Vazquez 2018b, Li 2020). These positions and others are discussed in the chapters AUTONOMISM, MORALISM, ETHICISM, and IMMORALISM AND CONTEXTUALISM

in this volume. But we can also ask an analogous question about the ethical criticism of artists, namely: are the moral flaws in artists lives also aesthetic flaws in the artworks they create? The existing literature on the ethical criticism of art has offered a natural starting point for philosophers investigating the ethical criticism of artists. Can we use the frameworks developed in the former case to illuminate the issues that arise in the latter?

In his paper, “Ordinary Monsters,” Christopher Bartel attempts to do just this using Berys Gaut’s ethicism as an organizing framework. Bartel begins his discussion by reflecting on another recent essay, “Art by Jerks” by Bernard Wills and Jason Holt, where the authors try to motivate an autonomist position according to which the moral lives of artists are independent from the aesthetic quality of their work (Wills and Holt 2017). However, Wills and Holt claim that there are exceptions to this position when the artist acts in ways that are particularly morally egregious. As Bartel notes, this purported exception belies the purported independence of the moral lives of artists from the aesthetic success of their work, suggesting instead that Wills and Holt’s view might be characterized more accurately as accepting interaction between the moral and the aesthetic, but with a very high bar when it comes to the moral lives of artists (Bartel 2019, 5).

So, how are we to accurately characterize the contours of this interaction? According to Gaut’s ethicism, when it comes to the ethical criticism of *art*, works that manifest immoral attitudes are *to that extent*, aesthetically flawed (Gaut 1998, 182). As Gaut notes, this is consistent with the work in question being all-things-considered aesthetically excellent. On the ethicist framework, the manifested attitudes of a work are a function of the attitudes that the work prescribes the audience to have. When the audience ought not have the prescribed response, because it would be unethical, that is a failure of the work on its own terms, and hence

an aesthetic flaw. Bartel's aim is to see how we might expand the ethicist framework to account for the moral lives of artists, and not just the moral content of their work. The argument goes like this. Understanding the attitudes prescribed by a work of art depends in part on understanding the work's point of view, which is produced within a particular socio-historical context. This means that the point of view of the work is always underspecified when we confine our focus to the work alone: bringing this context to bear on the work's point of view requires a broader lens. As Bartel notes, it is common practice in art criticism to consider features related to the artist's biography in determining that socio-historical context. Viewed in this light, it seems arbitrary to preclude the moral life of the artist from being considered as part of the effort to fill in the point of view of the work. As Bartel puts it, drawing on a comment from Richard Wollheim (1980), "if we allow ourselves to consider some background knowledge from the artist's life, then why stop short at the artist's own personal morality?" (Bartel 2019, 8-9).

Bartel's discussion focuses on how our knowledge of the moral life of the artist can in turn inform our understanding of what attitudes the work prescribes (Bartel 2019, 9). Facts about the moral life of the artist can moreover influence whether the attitudes prescribed by the work are morally merited. For example, we might judge that a satirical perspective on violence is merited by a work until we learn of the artist's own predilection for violence; this wouldn't necessarily alter our understanding of what attitudes the work prescribed, but rather, raise the bar for whether they would be morally acceptable for the audience to adopt (Matthes 2021, 21). This is particularly important for the advocate of a view such as immoralism, that is more friendly towards the potential of immoral artworks to present unique opportunities for aesthetic success, but wants to explain why such aesthetic merits might be undermined when the immorality in question extends beyond the artwork and into the artist's life. For instance, we might be perfectly

open to the sadistic charms of Hannibal Lecter, but not if the role was portrayed by an actual cannibalistic serial killer (Matthes 2021, 38; Cf. Wills and Holt 2017, 4).

On an approach such as this one, where we look to the moral lives of artists to aid interpretation of their work, the aesthetic significance of artist's immorality will be limited (Harold 2020, 61). While there are some clear examples where an artist's life offers a plausible lens for interpreting their work (Woody Allen's *Manhattan*, R. Kelly's "Age Ain't Nothing But a Number," (performed by Aaliyah)), these cases seem exceptional. This approach does not, for example, give us any clear reason for thinking that Hitler's egregious immorality has anything to do with his unobtrusive cityscapes. However, we might view this as a salutatory feature of the view rather than an objection. As we will see, there are a range of other moral questions we might ask about how we relate to the work of immoral artists, and we should be wary of trying to shoehorn that diverse set of issues into our account of the relationship between an artist's moral life and their work's aesthetic success.

III. Consumer Ethics

Independently of whether or not the moral transgressions of artists compromise the aesthetic quality of their work in some regard, many art consumers have begun asking questions about whether this immoral behavior should influence their engagement with that work anyway. Should we stop listening to Michael Jackson hits such as *Thriller* due to the artists' alleged molestation of children? Should we give up on Morrissey because of his seeming embrace of fascism?

The first kind of answer to this question takes a consequentialist approach. Consider this comment by TV critic Emily Nussbaum: "My job is actually to respond to the art itself and find a

way to do that. But I definitely understand the idea that, for instance, you don't want to fill Bill Cosby's coffers—that makes total sense to me” (Gross and Nussbaum 2019). Here, Nussbaum claims a moral permission to engage with Cosby's work due to her professional role as a critic, but acknowledges that another consumer might be disinclined to give their money to Cosby due to his history of serial sexual assault. You might think about this in terms of not wanting to *benefit* an immoral artist, of avoiding the *enabling* of future harms they might perpetuate, or *signaling* your disapproval to them. But each of these reasons seems to depend on the ability of your consumer decision to bring about a particular result, and the prospects for achieving those outcomes, especially when it comes to successful artists, are grim.

It's first worth acknowledging the limited scope of application for approaches to our individual relationships with the work of immoral artists that focus on our purchasing power. For one, they have no clear bearing on cases where the artist is no longer living, and those cases do comprise a substantial set of popular concerns about immoral artists. Moreover, plenty of our engagement with the work of beloved artists doesn't involve purchasing; rather, it concerns art that we already own. So, whatever other moral reasons might bear on our engagement with these works, considerations grounded in our market behavior don't seem to apply (Willard 2021, 35-36, Matthes 2021, 45-46).

Even for that subset of cases where we are concerned with *purchasing* work by *living* artists, the prospects for a good consequentialist reason to refrain will be weak. The explanation is familiar from other cases that share a similar structure concerning individual action and collective responsibility. We can assume that *everyone* deciding to boycott a particular artist's work would have a substantial impact on them, but your individual decision is such a miniscule contribution to that effort that it will have no discernible effect. And if it has no discernible

effect, then from a consequentialist perspective at least, it will seem to lack moral significance. Even if you think the action retains some tiny amount of moral significance, it then seems easy for it to be outweighed by competing considerations. It's easy to boycott an artist's work if it's already meaningless to you, but as Mary Beth Willard explains, such decisions are often not *cost-free*, especially when they focus on artists whose work we care about, or that play a role in our individual aesthetic projects (Willard 2021, 22).

Moreover, if the strength of our moral reason to boycott an artist's work depends on our ability to make a difference to the artist, this will have the unintuitive consequence that our reason to boycott an unsuccessful immoral artist will be *stronger* than our reason to boycott a successful one. So, if you think there's a particularly important moral imperative to take a stand against the Bill Cosbys of the world, the consequentialist approach to our individual consumer behavior will have a hard time explaining that moral impulse (Matthes 2021, 45).

In a recent article, Bradley Elicker argues that we should take a page from the literature on collective harm to argue that even if my individual purchasing decisions make an imperceptible difference, this does not entail that they are "inconsequential" (Elicker 2020, 2). Elicker suggests that we can think of our decision to provide public or financial support to certain immoral artists as *enabling* the harm that they cause. In brief, predatory artists make use of their "wealth and influence" to engage in predation, and we enable their ability to do this through our support of their celebrity. We will return below to questions about the responsibilities of arts institutions that control some of the most direct means of affecting an artist's celebrity (through, for example, canceling the dissemination, performance, or support of their work). For now, though, we are faced with the same concerns about individual action and collective responsibility we have faced before: even if we grant that our decision to financially or

publicly support an artist contributes to their celebrity and thus enables harm, it appears to do so in an inconsequential way (Elicker 2020, 7).

Elicker builds on Parfit's famous "Drops of Water" case to argue that "If I know that enough of us supporting a [harmful artist] enables them to cause a significant amount of harm (and that more of us supporting them would cause more harm) and I reasonably believe that others would withdraw their own support, then I have a moral obligation to withdraw my public or financial support [for that artist]" (Elicker 2020, 9). Elicker suggests that the increased attention to the moral lives of artist supports a reasonable belief that others will in fact withdraw their support, but this supposition is not clearly supported by the available evidence. For instance, the release of documentaries chronicling the alleged abusive behavior of R. Kelly and Michael Jackson seem to have substantially spurred engagement with those artists' work (R. Kelly streaming activity increased 116% the day the finale of "Surviving R. Kelly" aired) (Zellner 2019). Elicker suggests that even if we can't form this belief in the actions of others, we may still have an obligation to withdraw our support of harmful artists if that action is relatively low-cost (Elicker 2020, 10). However, as we have noted, this may further limit the applicability of this framework, since for many consumers the decision about what artists to engage with may play a significant role in their aesthetic projects: it's not as low-cost a sacrifice as Elicker seems to assume (Willard 2021, 22). Even if we are not already attached to a particular artist whose behavior turns out to be immoral, we may worry about the cost of making our aesthetic lives *subservient* to our moral lives in the way that this framework suggests (Matthes 2021, 59-60).

However, there are other, non-consequentialist ways of thinking about consumer ethics that don't depend on your purchasing behavior on its own actually making a difference. We can

divide these into considerations that focus on *complicity* and those that focus on *expressive significance*.

Standardly, attributions of complicity also depend on making a difference. For instance, if you fail to rescue the proverbial child drowning in the pond when it would only be a minor inconvenience to intervene, we might say that you are complicit in the child's death—you could have made a difference, but declined to act. However, more popular uses of the concept of complicity often move beyond contexts in which you can make an individual difference. It is common to hear objections to the effect that continuing to purchase the work of a predatory artist, for instance, makes you complicit in their behavior; the reasoning here is analogous to objections to purchasing clothing from companies that rely on child labor, or buying factory-farmed meat. You neither commit the wrong in question (being a sexual predator, exploiting child labor, cruelly slaughtering animals), nor do you make an individual difference with respect to whether these actions occur, and yet to many observers there seems to be something morally objectionable about your behavior. Adrienne Martin suggests that cases with this structure are akin to “contributing to an already flush collective fund to hire an assassin” (Martin 2016, 205). Because our contribution makes no difference, by hypothesis, we will need to employ alternative moral concepts to explain what, if anything, is wrong with our behavior in cases that share this structure.

Martin introduces the idea of “adopting a role” to address these cases. For the consumer of factory farmed meat, “she willingly participates as a member of a consumer group that has the function of signaling demand” (Martin 2016, 210). So, in the case of immoral artists, we might consider the ethics of adopting a role as a fan of the artist. What exactly you're signaling as part of this consumer group may be unclear. For instance, we might think that in your role as a Kevin

Spacey fan, you're just signaling demand for his acting, not for his alleged predatory behavior. However, what you signal through adopting a role might plausibly diverge from your intentions. James Harold, for instance, has argued that being part of an affective community surrounding the work of an immoral artist might plausibly shape the ethics of our engagement with that work (Harold 2020, 62). Harold notes that cases where an artist actively engages with their fan base, or where moral themes are key to their work, will provide natural avenues for the moral life of the artist to matter to their fans (Harold 2020, 63-5). These two considerations are primarily explanatory, offering an analysis of why fans might reasonably care about the moral life of the artist. To these, Harold adds a further normative consideration: the public salience of the affective community might shape what their actions communicate to others. As Harold puts it: "If an affective community is highly public, one's actions as a member of that community may communicate to others support for those artists, even if one privately disapproves of the artist's actions" (Harold 2020, 65). Adopting a role as a Kevin Spacey fan may well signal that concerns about his alleged predatory behavior simply don't matter, or at least are swamped by the quality of his acting.

Martin's idea of adopting a role still seems to be linked with the prospect of future harm, however. The moral weight of adopting a role that signals demand seems to rest on the role that such group demand will play in affecting future harms (such as further painful slaughter of animals, or further predatory behavior from an artist). This will limit the applicability of this model: in addition to not applying to deceased artists, it seems that it will also not apply to artists whose moral transgressions are agreed to be in the past. However, Harold's considerations about the role that affective communities might play in communicating both within and outside their group offers a way of thinking about the expressive significance of our consumer behavior that

moves beyond the limits of the particular model proposed by Martin. As Willard notes, *condoning* is a moral sense of complicity that is “fully after the fact” and could be applied both to cases where there is the prospect of future harm (such as Spacey’s) as well as to cases where there is not (such as Jackson’s) (Willard 2021, 50). While Willard agrees that condoning sexual assault is definitely wrong, she is skeptical that actions such as refusing to boycott an artist accused of sexual assault should be interpreted as condoning their immoral behavior. As she notes, there are other straightforward explanations of such behavior (such as not believing the allegations or not thinking a boycott can do anything about them) that do not entail attributing condonation of sexual assault to fans who don’t sign on for boycotts (Willard 2021, 53).

Alfred Archer and Benjamin Matheson, however, argue that we should not think about condoning as only a function of someone’s beliefs or intentions. They identify two ways in which a decision to *honor* an immoral artist (which we’ll return to below) might be interpreted as condoning their behavior: emotional prioritization and exemplar identification. While exemplar identification (picking out an individual for admiration and emulation) appears more specific to the bestowal of honors, the idea of emotional prioritization might be applied to our everyday public behavior. As the authors put it “Honoring immoral artists involves choosing to identify them as people we ought to admire rather than as people we ought to be indignant about. Given that these attitudes and emotions are all fitting, honorers are thereby communicating that this is the correct way to prioritize these attitudes and emotions” (Archer and Matheson 2019, 251). In addition to cases where an honor is bestowed with the specific goal of prioritizing admiration over condemnation, Archer and Matheson explain that a decision to honor an artist can have a “public meaning,” according to which social context makes condonation a justifiable interpretation, even where this goes beyond the “intended meaning” of the action (Archer and

Matheson 2019, 251). Analogous reasoning might apply to our decisions to publicly engage with or support the work of an immoral artist, even if we have no intention of condoning their behavior. Even if there are alternative explanations, as Willard notes, a broader social context in which artists' immoral behavior is standardly treated as if it is somehow justified by the greatness of their art might exacerbate the risk that our actions are reasonably interpreted as condoning.

While Willard focuses primarily on what our actions might stand to communicate to artists or to victims, it may well also be morally significant for us to think about the expressive significance of our consumer behavior to our friends and family, which can come quite apart from moral analysis of the role we might play as part of a group that signals something to the artist or to victims or to the public in general (Cf. Willard 2021, 33). If you know that your friend is deeply upset by the allegations against Woody Allen, for instance, then dictating that *Manhattan* will be the film for your group movie night seems like an obnoxious thing to do, an action that would open you to plausible moral criticism. However, cases such as this center more around the ethics of friendship than any independent norms concerning our engagement with the arts—the wrong in these cases is of a piece with serving an entirely meat meal to your vegetarian friend (Matthes 2021, 71).

At this point, we have tentatively established that, other things being equal, individuals have substantial moral latitude in their individual engagement with the work of immoral artists, at least when that engagement is relatively private. In the quotation mentioned above, Emily Nussbaum claims this moral permission as a function of her professional role as a TV critic, but it seems that we all in fact share this permission. There may be reasons to avoid complicity with immoral artists, understood in terms of adopting a role as part of a group that signals demand

with adverse consequences, but the application of this framework will be extremely limited, applying only to the exercise of your purchasing power in relation to artists causing ongoing harm. And even then, since your individual contribution makes no difference, it might plausible be outweighed by the value of that artist's work to you and your aesthetic projects (Willard 2021, 42). The fact that considerations of complicity might, in certain circumscribed cases, give you a good moral reason to boycott an immoral artist does not entail that you have a decisive reason to do so. There are also ethical considerations arising from the expressive significance that our *public* artistic engagements might have for others, but these don't clearly bear on our *private* artistic preferences and behaviors.

IV. Institutional Responsibility and Cancel Culture

Beyond these considerations for individual choice and action, however, there are further questions to examine concerning the role of *institutions*.¹ What should those in positions of power in the art world do in response to revelations about the immorality of artists? Should exhibitions and concerts be canceled, books pulled from publication, songs stricken from the radio rotation?

Popular discussion of "cancel culture" tends to lump together individual and institutional responses to immoral artists, but it's worth prizing them apart for the purposes of moral analysis. "Canceling" a person via social media mobbing, for instance, has an overreaching metaphorical usage that can obscure more straightforward practical questions faced by institutions. For

¹ I use "institutions" in a very broad sense here to refer to the many and varied organizations of the art world, including, but not limited to, publishing houses, record companies, radio stations, movie studios, magazine, museums, galleries, art schools, etc.

instance, the influential American painter Chuck Close was accused of sexual harassment by multiple models who sat for him. It can be difficult to answer the question posed by recent parlance “should Chuck Close be canceled?” since it remains unclear precisely what that means, whereas the meaning of the question “should the National Gallery cancel their planned special exhibition of Close’s work” is unambiguous, however controversial the answer may be. The imprecision (and concomitant confusion) of questions about canceling a person are captured well in a recent *New York Times* article titled “Is it Time Gauguin Got Canceled?” (Nayeri 2019). Despite worries about boycotts expressed by curators, no one interviewed in the article actually advocates for a position stronger than making Gauguin’s immoral behavior explicit as part of exhibiting his work. It thus behooves us to be as precise as possible in what practical action we’re proposing when we ask after how we ought to respond to artists’ immoral behavior. I’ll first discuss institutional decisions about whether to work with an immoral artist or publicize their work before moving on to the issues surrounding social media activism in response to artist’s actions and statements.

The National Gallery did in fact cancel their special exhibition of Close’s work, and other specific examples of institutional responses to artist’s personal actions can be identified across artistic mediums. Hachette ultimately decided against publishing Woody Allen’s memoir (following employee protests). Kevin Spacey was removed from the final season of *House of Cards*, the show he had been headlining on *Netflix* for years, and director Ridley Scott decided to reshoot Spacey’s scenes in the movie *All the Money in the World*, recasting him with the late actor Christopher Plummer.

In considering these actions, we might start by asking what the relevant institutions aim to achieve. First, they might aim to stop abusive behavior. For instance, in the case of Spacey,

the public removal of the actor from prominent roles plausibly undercuts his ability to take advantage of this celebrity in order to prey on others (a more direct version of the argument Elicker made about consumer behavior). We might see an analogy here in the steps that any institution should take to address abuses of power within their organization. When an employee abuses their power over a subordinate, a natural step is to remove the offending individual from their position of power. While the roles aren't formalized in the same way when it comes to celebrity artists taking advantage of their social standing, trying to undercut their social power to exploit might be justified through a similar pattern of reasoning (Matthes 2021, 95-96).

The aim of prevention, however, underlines a significant difference between artists whose immorality is a function of serial abuse and those whose immorality consists in espousing bigoted attitudes. As Willard notes, one of the problems with "cancel culture" is that it lacks a sense of proportionality and nuance, applying the same consequence no matter the nature or extent of the misdeed, an issue that we'll return to in relation to social media below (Willard 2021, 114-16). We might add to this that if the goal is preventing bad behavior, canceling an artist who has only made morally objectionable statements seems to approach this goal even more indirectly than in the case of predators; even if we thought it was appropriate and proportional for a bigoted comment to be career-ending for an artist, this would only socially sanction the expression of those beliefs, not having them. And even if we thought that such as strong social sanction was desirable, what counts as an immoral belief is often substantially more controversial than what counts as predatory behavior. We might well support strong social sanctions against sexual exploitation and predation but be warier of equally strong social sanctions against the expression of objectionable ideas.

Apart from trying to prevent any particular future behavior, though, an institution might

decide that they don't want to *honor* an artist because of the artist's immoral behavior.² As noted above, Archer and Matheson argue that honoring an immoral artist can involve an objectionable form of *exemplar identification*. Even if the honor is only meant to refer to the artist's aesthetic achievement, admiration has a tendency to spread; picking out an immoral artist as an exemplar may thus, even inadvertently, be read as condoning their immoral behavior or even encourage emulation of that behavior (Archer and Matheson, 254).

Archer and Matheson also worry that honoring immoral artists can have ramifications for epistemic justice. In particular, they suggest that it can inflate the credibility of immoral artists and silence their victims (Archer and Matheson, 256-7). By singling out an immoral artist for praise, honoring can add to their sense of credibility, which can make listeners more inclined to believe their testimony, including denials of immoral behavior. This in turn contributes to an epistemic climate where victims reasonably fear not being believed, and so may decide not to come forward in the first place.³

However, a decision to cancel an artist's exhibition in order to avoid honoring them need not entail that institutions should all refuse to display their work. Declining to accord special honors to an immoral artist is compatible with making their work available for consumption, though navigating that line may be trickier in some artistic mediums than others. For instance, one might object that having an artist's work displayed in a museum or gallery is necessarily an honor, refusal to grant special exhibitions and awards notwithstanding. But depending on how

² For further discussion of Archer and Matheson's views on the ethics of honoring, see their forthcoming book.

³ Willard also discusses epistemic injustice, but her focus is on whether our individual engagement with the work of immoral artists risks contributing to a harmful epistemic climate surrounding sexual assault. Willard agrees that this culture should be addressed, but is skeptical that our personal decisions about what artists to engage with ought to play a key role in cultivating epistemic virtues (Willard, 67-82).

the institution in question treats the accusations against the artist, this might not be the case. As Daniel Callcut puts it: “Fame is no longer a shield from moral scrutiny: it’s a magnet for moral attention. The failings of famous artists are now examined and publicised to a degree far beyond the consideration paid to those who commit the same wrongs in ordinary life. The script, in this sense, has been flipped” (Callcut 2019). This is consistent with the actual calls for action highlighted in the *New York Times* article about “canceling” Gauguin; rather than wanting Gauguin’s work removed from museums, the activists quoted there want explicit discussion of Gauguin’s personal behavior alongside display of his work. This highlights a way in which continued engagement with the work of an immoral artist can actually facilitate communicative actions that takes the artist’s misdeeds seriously, rather than acting as if their artistic achievements should be understood as justifying or making irrelevant their immoral behavior, as the proffering of honors and awards might plausibly do. We might moreover believe that continued access to the work of immoral artists is important for the way it facilitates understanding of work by other artists that grapple with an immoral artist’s legacy. For example, Kehinde Wiley has painted a portrait series of Tahitian subjects that has been described as a “riposte” to Gauguin; understanding that artistic dialogue, and both its moral and aesthetic contours, would be challenging in the face of complete erasure of Gauguin’s work (Matthes 2021, 84).

The fact that institutions have an important role to play in addressing the immoral actions of popular artists does not mean they have consistently risen to this challenge. Reforming arts institutions and diversifying their leadership may offer productive routes for ensuring that these institutions will have policies and procedures for addressing the behavior of artists in a thoughtful way, as well as leaders who will be sensitive to the range of objectionable behaviors

that might arise (Matthes 2021, 107). As is often the case with patterns of institutional failure, the public has sometimes stepped in to “cancel” artists in lieu of institutional action, typically employing social media as a vehicle. Ta-Nahesi Coates has observed that “canceling” is nothing new: powerful institutions have always had the ability to cancel, a power that they can also abuse, as he argues was the case with the NFL and Colin Kaepernick (Coates 2019). What we see in the “democratization” of cancelation via social media, he claims, is an understandable response to the failure of institutions to hold immoral actors responsible; but Coates also notes that this is a “suboptimal” situation. It would be better still if we developed trustworthy institutions that we could rely on to bring an understanding of moral accountability to their operations.

There are a number of reasons why social media cancelation is less desirable than institutional accountability. For one, as we’ve noted, social media cancelation lacks the ability to apply nuance or proportionality: it’s all or nothing (Willard 114-16). Furthermore, it’s very difficult to un-ring the bell of social media cancelation; it leaves little room to address mistaken accusations or provide avenues for reform, since it lacks any procedures for appeal or accountability (Rini 2020). Third, the focus of social media cancelation on particular artists can actually undermine the cause of institutional reform. It is subject to “elite capture,” where institutions can sacrifice a particular artist to appease activists without making any changes to institutional operations that might avoid similar situations in the future (Cf. Táíwò 2020). Journalist Helen Lewis captures the concern perfectly when she writes: “Those with power inside institutions *love* splashy progressive gestures...because they help preserve their power” (Lewis 2020).

The point here is not to be dismissive of protest or the use of social media as a protest

tool. Rather, it is to highlight the specific pitfalls of social media cancelation of particular artists as a mechanism for addressing the problem of predatory artists. Protest (including via social media) will no doubt be an important element in achieving the kind of institutional reform I have argued that we should pursue.

One further concern about social media cancelation focuses not on its effectiveness for creating appropriate forms of accountability, but on ethical worries about participation in such social media campaigns and their effects on moral discourse. Building on work by Justin Tosi and Brandon Warmke (Tosi and Warmke 2016 and 2020), we might worry that social media cancelation involves an objectionable form of “moral grandstanding” (Willard 2021, 123). When one “grandstands,” one’s contribution to public discourse aims primarily at demonstrating one’s own moral respectability, which can hence corrupt the quality of public moral discourse: it becomes about you rather than about getting at the moral truth. Willard illustrates how “every single characteristic that Tosi and Warmke identify as characteristic of grandstanding is actively promoted by the structure of social media (Willard 2021, 125). Thi Nguyen and Bekka Williams have similarly defined the concept of “moral outrage porn” to describe expressions of moral outrage that aim primarily at making the person expressing the outrage feel good, a phenomenon familiar from social media as well (Nguyen and Williams 2020). So, to the extent that one is worried about the adverse effects of moral grandstanding and moral outrage porn, those concerns appear to carry over to the phenomenon of social media cancelation.

Beyond its purported effects on moral discourse, you might further worry that in the case of the arts in particular, grandstanding is objectionable because it instrumentalizes art. If grandstanding involves treating moral concerns about an artist and their work as an occasion just to demonstrate one’s own moral respectability or make yourself feel good, then it turns the art

into nothing more than a tool for one's own ends. At the beginning of this chapter, I argued that the moral lives of artists can bear in important ways on our understanding of their work; grandstanding, on the other hand, treats the work of immoral artists as an occasion for a moral statement about oneself that has no necessary relationship to the artwork as an object of aesthetic attention. While we have seen many ways that ethical considerations are salient to art and aesthetics, attending to ethical issues in a way that ignores or erases the fact that those issues involve artistic and aesthetic concerns is a failure to treat art as art. Morality matters to art, but if we treat our engagement with art as if it's *just* about morality, then something has gone awry (Matthes 2021, 59). To be sure, identifying instances of objectionable grandstanding may well be difficult. Practically, concerns about grandstanding and the instrumentalizing of art for purely moral aims may best be employed as a check on one's own thinking and actions. The point is not that aesthetic or artistic concerns should necessarily take priority over ethical ones, but that they shouldn't be completely eclipsed in our thinking about the problem of immoral artists.

V. Fans and Emotional Turmoil

Having considered various aspects of what we should do in response to the immoral behavior of artists, we will conclude by briefly considering the problem of how to feel. For many art fans, revelations about the immoral lives of beloved artists has been marked by emotional turmoil and conflict. Consider this passage from an essay by Constance Grady, where she reflects on her teenage love for *Edward Scissorhands* amidst allegations of domestic violence against actor Johnny Depp: "I loved this movie. It made me feel all kinds of deep and profound teenage feelings, and those feelings were real and I could not unfeel them. But now, whenever I thought about Johnny Depp, I felt a deep and profound disgust, a moral outrage. That was a real

feeling too, and I couldn't unfeel it either" (Grady 2019).

What might fans do in the face of such emotional conflicts? One approach is try to "separate" the art from the artist. This is what Daniel Radcliffe, the actor who played Harry Potter in the film adaptations of the series, recommended to fans who were hurt by author J. K. Rowling's transphobic statements. Focusing on the personal meaning that fans may have found in the books, he said: "that is between you and the book that you read, and it is sacred. And in my opinion nobody can touch that. It means to you what it means to you" (Radcliffe 2020). He thus suggested that the relationship between fan and artwork could be a private sphere protected from the artist himself. This may be a viable strategy for a fan who can perform such an emotional separation, but we should also not undersell its trickiness. Especially in genres such as film and television, many fans (such as Grady, above) report feeling *unable* to separate their experience of a beloved work from what they now know about the actors performing in it.

Another approach to the emotional turmoil in question is not to try to separate the art from the artist, but to throw out both together. Roxanne Gay, writing about Bill Cosby and *The Cosby Show*, adopts this approach:

Every time I think of Cosby's work, I remember the women he victimized and how their silence was trapped by the gilded cage of his fame. To me, Cosby's artistic legacy is rendered meaningless in the face of the pain he caused. It has to be. He once created great art, and then he destroyed his great art. The responsibility for that destruction is his and his alone. We are free to lament it, but not at the expense of his victims (Gay 2018).

So, for Gay, we might be saddened by the loss of the work, but the way forward is to reject the work altogether. Cosby "destroyed" it through his actions.

Whichever of these two approaches a fan might take, it's important to see that arriving at

it as a potential solution to emotional conflict would be facilitated by actually engaging with the art. Are you, as an individual, able to separate the art from the artist? Might you train yourself to do so? Has the artist's actions destroyed their work for you, such that you need to reject both together? Revisiting the artwork in question has the potential to be pivotal in exploring this difficult emotional terrain. It also has the virtue of offering an opportunity to reflect on the ways that the artist's actions have (or perhaps haven't?) influenced the aesthetic experience of their work. Art has the potential to be *cathartic* in this regard; not in the sense of *expunging* your emotional turmoil, but rather, of *clarifying* your feelings. By engaging with the artwork, you may even find that you can still appreciate it while disdaining the actions of the artist who made it. In this case, you neither separate the art from the artist, nor reject both wholesale, but rather situate your emotions in a kind of balance, even if it remains an uneasy one (Matthes 2021, 135).

What we have seen throughout this discussion is that art has a central role to play in our grappling with the problem of immoral artists. Whether we're thinking about the influence that an artist's personal life might have on their work, the moral or expressive significance of our engagement with that work, or the responsibilities of arts institutions with respect to the artist's behavior, the artwork itself continually reemerges as a source of both moral and aesthetic guidance. The discussion here suggests that an adequate solution to the problem of immoral artists in these various contexts has ultimately less to do with *what* art we engage with, and whether we do so, than with *how* we engage with that art.

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