

Rethinking autonomism: Beauty in a world of moral anarchy

Introduction

In his essay “Against Ethical Criticism”, Richard Posner notes that what we take to be classic works of literature, notable for their great aesthetic value, are full of moral atrocities:

Rape, pillage, murder, human and animal sacrifice, concubinage, and slavery in the *Iliad*; misogyny in the *Oresteia* and countless other works; blood-curdling vengeance; anti-Semitism in more works of literature than one can count, including works by Shakespeare and Dickens; racism and sexism likewise; homophobia (think only of Shakespeare’s *Troilus and Cressida* and Mann’s “Death in Venice”); monarchism, aristocracy, caste systems and other illegitimate (as they seem to us) forms of hierarchy; colonialism, imperialism, religious obscurantism, militarism, gratuitous violence, torture (as of Iago in *Othello*), and criminality; alcoholism and drug addiction; relentless stereotyping; sadism; pornography, machismo; fascism and communism, and for idleness; contempt for the poor, the frail, the elderly, the deformed, and the unsophisticated, for people who work for a living, for the law-abiding, and for democratic processes. The world of literature is a moral anarchy. (Posner 1997, 5)

Yet, all this seems to have little to no effect on our appreciation of works. On the contrary, it seems that when engaging with what we value as great works of art, we tend to suspend our moral sensibilities. This does not necessarily mean that we fail to notice that some of these great works of art are morally flawed. Rather, it means that when we engage and evaluate them *as artworks*, moral criteria do not seem to be part of our considerations. Sure, we might think that *some* artworks have ethical value – the entire literary canon is not a moral wasteland –, but it is questionable whether this value is bound to their status *as art*. Further, it is questionable whether this ethical value directly affects their aesthetic value.

Advocates of the ethical criticism of art claim that moral considerations *should* be part of the criteria used to evaluate works. To say that an artwork is subject to ethical criticism means that its ethical defects or merits have an impact on its aesthetic value¹. An account of the ethical criticism of art therefore encompasses two different claims: first, that works are subject to ethical evaluation (amenability claim); second, that considerations of ethical value are relevant for considerations of aesthetic value (value interaction claim)².

¹ Berys Gaut refers to aesthetic value as “the value of an object qua work of art” (Gaut 1998, 183). Robert Stecker, on the other hand, distinguishes between aesthetic and artistic value, and claims that the notion of aesthetic value refers to the capacity to deliver an aesthetic experience (Stecker 2005, 139). Following Gaut, in this paper I talk about aesthetic value in a general sense, but further discussion on the ethical criticism of art might find that distinguishing between aesthetic and artistic value of works actually matters for the debate; see for example (Dickie 2005).

² Robert Stecker identifies two different types of interaction between ethical and aesthetic value: ethical-aesthetic, and aesthetic-ethical interaction. The *ethical-aesthetic* interaction refers to the effects of the ethical defects or merits on the aesthetic value of a work. The *aesthetic-ethical* interaction refers to the impact of a work’s aesthetic value on its ethical value (Stecker 2005, 138). The discussion on the ethical criticism of art has mainly focused

There are several ways in which an artwork can be ethically assessed. We can evaluate an artwork for the effects it has on its audience, or we can evaluate the conditions under which it was produced. These types of evaluation, however, are directed at external features of the work. The amenability claim refers to an *intrinsic* ethical assessment that has an artwork's *intrinsic features* as its object. An artwork can be intrinsically ethically assessed according to whether we can identify *intrinsic ethical merits and demerits*; intrinsic ethical flaws are "ethical flaws in the attitudes that works manifest toward their subjects" (Gaut 2007, 229). That is, the intrinsic features that are relevant for ethical assessment are the attitudes manifested in works' perspectives. Ethical critics thus focus on *narrative/representational* works, in which we can identify attitudes towards represented events and characters. Further, the ethical critic is interested in an intrinsic ethical assessment of artworks *qua* artworks; that is, ethical criticism is interested in whether the ethical value of works is tied to their status *as artworks*.

Against ethical critics, *autonomists* claim that moral criteria *should not* be part of the considerations when evaluating works of art as art. Autonomism refers to the view that an artwork's aesthetic value is independent from its ethical value. We can identify different versions of autonomism depending on how they articulate the two claims comprised in ethical criticism: depending on their stance on the ethical amenability of works, and on the interaction of such ethical value with their aesthetic value.³

This paper focuses on how autonomism has been defended in the contemporary discussion in analytic aesthetics. I present three versions of autonomism: radical, moderate, and robust autonomism. The first section examines radical autonomism as defended by Richard Posner, and presents objections both to Posner's view and to versions of autonomism that take the denial of the amenability claim as a starting point. Section two presents moderate autonomism as defended by James C. Anderson and Jeffrey T. Dean, and James Harold, and raises some difficulties for their accounts. The third section proposes what I call robust autonomism, and examines Francisca Pérez Carreño's autonomism as a viable alternative to previous moderate accounts; this section shows that robust autonomism presents a stronger argument against the ethical critic. Finally, I point to some difficulties for Pérez Carreño's account, and I conclude by suggesting how further work in autonomism might go around them.

1. Radical Autonomism

Autonomism can be defined as the view that an artwork's aesthetic value is independent from its ethical value, and that thus moral criteria are not part of the relevant considerations when determining the value of a work of art *qua* art. *Radical* autonomism argues that moral criteria

on the ethical-aesthetic interaction. For an overview of the discussion see (Carroll 2000) and (Giovannelli 2007); for a critique of the debate see (McGregor 2014).

³ Daniel Jacobson thinks that the amenability and the value interaction claims are two independent claims. He takes ethical criticism in general, and classical autonomism in particular, to be concerned with the value interaction claim exclusively. For this reason, he does not think that what I identify in what follows as *radical* autonomism is a genuine form of aesthetic autonomism; according to Jacobson, aesthetic autonomism is concerned with the relation between moral and aesthetic values (Jacobson 2005). However, while it might be the case that classical autonomists focused on arguing against the value interaction claim, I believe understanding the value interaction claim in light of the amenability claim is necessary for understanding a version of moderate autonomism, that I call robust autonomism. As I will argue in the final section, robust autonomism can accommodate the challenge of immoralism and respond to some of the criticisms by moralists in virtue of how it articulates the amenability claim.

are *never* relevant for the value of art as art because artworks possess no ethical value.⁴ Radical autonomism denies both claims of ethical criticism: it denies that works are amenable to ethical assessment; and, therefore, it denies that a work's ethical value impacts its aesthetic value. According to radical autonomism, because an artwork cannot be ethically assessed, ethical criticism is always inappropriate and irrelevant.

Oscar Wilde has been often identified as the paradigmatic example of a radical autonomist; his remark that "there is no such thing as a moral or an immoral book" has practically become a slogan to identify autonomists. Nevertheless, radical autonomism has been dismissed by the philosophical literature on ethical criticism as highly implausible. Alessandro Giovannelli goes as far as claiming that, in fact, we cannot find examples of radical autonomist accounts because no one denies that works are amenable to ethical assessment; he notes that even Wilde accepted that moral life is part of artists' subject matter (Giovannelli 2007, 118). However, we can find in the contemporary discussion at least one defender of radical autonomism: Richard A. Posner.

Posner's aestheticism is in fact a version of radical autonomism (Posner 1997; Posner 1998): he denies that artworks are amenable to ethical assessment; and he argues that because works have no ethical value, their moral content does not affect their aesthetic value nor the pleasure to be derived from them (Posner 1998, 394). Like Wilde, Posner acknowledges that moral life is part of art's subject matter. But a work having moral *content* is not the same as a work having moral *value*: an artwork's moral content is only its "raw material", and thus morality is no more relevant for artworks, than clay for sculpture (Posner 1997, 7).

Posner argues that a work with moral content can be said to have moral value *only if* it educates morally. However, it cannot be said that artworks educate morally; thus, even if we can identify works with moral content, artworks have no moral value. He gives several reasons to support his claim. First, experience shows that works fail to morally educate their audiences: "Cultural people are not on the whole morally superior to philistines. Immersion in literature and art can breed rancorous and destructive feelings of personal superiority, alienation, and resentment" (Posner 1997, 5). Second, works *might* provide some psychological insight, but a better understanding of people does not necessarily make someone better or more just (Posner 1997, 10). Third, only a small subset of works with specific overtly liberal themes *could* be said to be edifying (Posner 1997, 16), and this would leave out some of what we value as great works of literature.

When it comes to determining the value of artworks *qua* artworks, Posner emphasises their emotional power as the distinctive pleasure they afford (Posner 1997, 22). And in his view this emotional power comes from the work's formal properties. Against the value interaction claim, Posner argues that since the value of art stems from this emotional power and from the work's formal properties, the work's aesthetic value is not affected by its moral content (Posner 1997, 24). So, for example, since we do not come to see murder and human sacrifice as ethically appropriate practices as a result of our engagement with the *Iliad* (1260-1184BC), we cannot say that the work has any moral value. Further, the aesthetic value of the work does not stem from its moral content, but from the complexity of its poetic qualities.

⁴ The definition of radical autonomism I propose is different to that advanced by Giovannelli, who argues that no account denies that artworks are amenable to ethical assessment. For this reason, he defines radical autonomism as the view that works' ethical and aesthetic values *never* interact (Giovannelli 2007, 122).

The main problem with Posner's autonomism is that he identifies the moral value of artworks with the consequences they might have on their audience. Ethical criticism, however, is concerned with the intrinsic ethical value of works, and it concerns the experience of the work, regardless of its effects on appreciators. So even if Posner was right in noting that works do not morally educate their audiences, this would only show that works have no value in virtue of how they educate or corrupt audiences. But this says nothing about works' intrinsic value and about whether works are morally flawed by advancing morally flawed perspectives.

In addition to the problems found in Posner's account, critics of radical autonomism note that denying the amenability claim is highly problematic. Mary Devereaux notes that radical autonomists, like Posner, fail to acknowledge the centrality of the ethical to artforms such as the novel (Devereaux 2004, 8). Noël Carroll also notes that some artworks possess an ethical dimension that is not merely incidental, but constitutive; that is, we can identify in many works an ethical significance from their creative intent (Carroll 2000, 357). So while it might be possible that not all artworks are susceptible to moral criteria, those that exhibit this constitutive ethical dimension are susceptible to be intrinsically ethically assessed.

It can also be argued against radical autonomism that we often talk about art in moral terms. We treat art as directly tied to politics and social movements, and we do not take the artistic practice to be disjoined from the realm of moral value (Carroll 1998a, 132). Berys Gaut notes how art critical practice often includes an ethical assessment of works; as examples he cites individual critics, such as Bloom and F. R. Leavis, and feminist and political art critical practices that have recently undergone a renaissance (Gaut 2007, 95-97). Finally, Alessandro Giovannelli argues that denying the amenability claim amounts to aesthetic isolationism that attributes a massive and widespread error to our cultural practices (Giovannelli 2013, 337).

These objections, nevertheless, only stand for radical autonomism. These points are in principle compatible with a *moderate* version of autonomism that concedes the amenability claim, and focuses on contesting the value interaction claim.

2. Moderate autonomism

Moderate autonomism refers to the view that while artworks *can* be intrinsically ethically assessed, their ethical value is always irrelevant for their aesthetic value.⁵ Moderate accounts of autonomism concede the amenability claim but argue against the value interaction claim: ethical and aesthetic evaluations of works are independent from one another. In the

⁵ This definition of moderate autonomism also differs from Giovannelli's. Because he defines radical autonomism as the view that artworks' ethical and aesthetic value never interact, Giovannelli defines *moderate* autonomism as the view that artworks' ethical and aesthetic value interact on occasion but in an unsystematic way (Giovannelli 2007, 122).

contemporary discussion⁶, Anderson and Dean, and Harold defend versions of moderate autonomism.⁷

Anderson and Dean (1998) argue that, while ethically assessing artworks is a legitimate activity, ethical and aesthetic criticism of works are conceptually distinct. Ethical flaws do not entail aesthetic flaws. While in some cases moral flaws are in conflict with other aesthetic virtues of works, this does not mean that they become aesthetic flaws. The conflict is not internal to the aesthetic dimension; rather, it is our moral and aesthetic sensibilities that are in conflict (Anderson and Dean 1998, 166). Sometimes the conflict between moral flaws and aesthetic virtues justifies the overriding negative evaluation of a work. So, for example, it is not that *The Triumph of the Will* (1935) is less aesthetically valuable because of its endorsement of Nazism, but that its endorsement of Nazism causes a conflict between our aesthetic and moral sensibilities. It might be that its endorsement of Nazism provides overriding moral reasons that trump aesthetic considerations in our overall evaluation of the work, but it is still not the case that the work is less *aesthetically* valuable because of its moral defects. In other cases, nevertheless, moral flaws are overridden by aesthetic virtues of the work. This is what happens in all the cases noted by Posner: it is not simply that works cannot be ethically assessed, but that their moral flaws are overridden by works' overall aesthetic virtues. So it is not the case that *The Merchant of Venice* (1596-1599) is not anti-Semitic, but that its aesthetic virtues override its moral defects.

To argue against the value interaction claim Anderson and Dean consider two interactionist accounts: Gaut's ethicism and Carroll's moderate moralism. Gaut's argument focuses on merited responses (Gaut 1998; Gaut 2007). According to Gaut, works that manifest an immoral perspective prescribe ethically unmerited responses, and these unmerited responses constitute aesthetic defects. The argument goes like this. A work's perspective prescribes a set of cognitive-affective responses. These responses are subject to evaluative criteria, so it is not the case that responses are merited merely in virtue of a work prescribing them. Responses to immoral perspectives in artworks are subject to be evaluated under ethical criteria, and those responses expressing pro attitudes toward the immoral perspective are thus ethically unmerited. If the work prescribes a response that is unmerited, then the work has failed in its own terms. Any defect of a work in its own terms is an aesthetic defect. Therefore, ethical defects are aesthetic defects.

⁶ Formalists like Clive Bell and Arnold Isenberg defend versions of moderate autonomism. Bell argues that works can be ethically judged, but not *as works of art*. When judging artworks as artworks, what matters is significant form; content is irrelevant (Bell 1987). Isenberg also accepts that works can be ethically judged, but argues that content is irrelevant for aesthetic value, as is shown by the fact that we can find weak and powerful works with the same content (Isenberg 1973).

⁷ Rafe McGregor (2013) proposes what he labels a version of moderate autonomism that I do not examine here. McGregor proposes a distinction between normative and informative values of works. The normative value depends on whether works' prescriptions are virtuous or vicious; the informative value depends on whether works provide a serious and mature exploration of ethical issues. Following this distinction, he claims that a moral defect is never an aesthetic defect because the former belongs to the ethical-normative dimension and the latter to an ethical-informative judgement. The problem with McGregor's autonomism is that he offers no argument for why the aesthetic evaluation of works interacts with the ethical-informative dimension only; what moralists contend is, precisely, that the aesthetic value interacts with what he calls the ethical-normative dimension of works. Further, because his account allows for interaction between ethical-informative and aesthetic values, one might take his account as a version of moderate moralism.

However, Anderson and Dean note that *not all* unmerited prescriptions are aesthetic flaws. For example, works might be informative, and they might prescribe certain beliefs. But if they prescribed mistaken beliefs, this would not make them *aesthetically* worse. On the contrary, only certain prescriptions are aesthetically relevant; and, thus, only certain prescribed responses are aesthetically relevant. Gaut still needs to show that moral responses fall within the domain of the aesthetic (Anderson and Dean 1998, 160-161). Gaut claims that they are aesthetically relevant because moral features are features of artworks *qua* artworks. But Anderson and Dean argue that this reply only raises the question of whether they are indeed features of artworks *qua* artworks (Anderson and Dean 1998, 160).

Carroll's argument for the ethical-aesthetic interaction could show that moral responses are aesthetically relevant: moral flaws are aesthetically relevant because the prescription of an immoral perspective in a work of art precludes the possibility of uptake (Carroll 1996; Carroll 2000). This supports interaction because the reason for the work being aesthetically and morally defective is the same: the work prescribes an immoral perspective. The work is morally defective because it prescribes appreciators to adopt an immoral perspective; it is aesthetically defective because the prescription of an immoral perspective causes appreciators to fail to respond in the ways prescribed. However, Anderson and Dean argue against Carroll that his argument actually points to different reasons for works being ethically and aesthetically defective. A work is morally defective because it prescribes an immoral perspective. But it is aesthetically defective because in precluding the relevant responses according to the work's genre, the work subverts its own genre; and any work that subverts its own genre is aesthetically defective. Carroll's response, nevertheless, is that his argument does not appeal to genre. The aesthetic defect is not the subversion of genre, but the preclusion of emotional uptake: the work fails to secure its aims regardless of whether they are genre specific or not (Carroll 1998b, 423). And the reason why this happens is because the work prescribes an immoral perspective. Therefore, the reason for the work being ethically and aesthetically defective is the same. And the value-interaction claim stands.

James Harold (2011) also argues against interactionism: he claims that agents are not rationally required to adjust their aesthetic evaluations in light of ethical evaluations. Nevertheless, while there is no *requirement* that agents revise their aesthetic evaluations, Harold's moderate autonomism concedes that *some* audience members may decide to treat their ethical judgements as relevant to their aesthetic judgement (Harold 2011, 143). *Some* valuers might endorse evaluative coherence across different species of value, and thus might decide to adjust their evaluations accordingly. For example, if a valuer holds certain feminist values *and* endorses evaluative coherence, she might decide to adjust her aesthetic evaluation of *Manhattan* (1979) in light of her views regarding the problematic nature of a romantic relationship between a seventeen-year-old woman and a forty-two-year-old man. But what is key for autonomism is that ethical critics would need to show that there is a general norm for reconciling conflicting evaluations that *all* valuers are required to accept.

To show that valuers do not have reasons to revise aesthetic judgements in light of moral judgements unless they endorse evaluative coherence, Harold advances the "no-error argument". Following Bernard Williams, the no-error argument claims that "statements of the form 'A has a reason to ϕ ' can only be true – can only make sense – if A can deliberate to that reason from some motive in her current subjective motivational set" (Harold 2011, 143). Applied to ethical-aesthetic evaluations, to determine whether a valuer should revise her

aesthetic evaluation in light of an ethical evaluation, we would need to look into her second-order values to see whether she is actually committed to making such an adjustment. Since ethical and aesthetic correspond to two different categories of evaluation, and two conflicting ethical and aesthetic evaluations are not inconsistent, interactionists “must show that there is some norm (or set of norms) regulating how we make evaluations of art that all of us must accept, no matter what our values are” (Harold 2011, 145).

Nevertheless, while we might not find general norms regulating how we evaluate art that we all accept, one might argue against Harold’s autonomism that, as moral agents, we are obligated to take moral considerations into account. That is, the obligation to take moral considerations into account when approaching artworks does not depend on norms on how to evaluate art, but depends on valuers being moral agents. If this is indeed the case, interactionists might have reasons to argue that valuers have a moral obligation to adjust their aesthetic evaluations to fit their ethical evaluations. Interactionists could argue that, regardless of whether a valuer endorses evaluative coherence or not, she is required as a moral agent to adjust her aesthetic evaluation of *The Birth of a Nation* (1915) in light of antiracist values.

But, perhaps more significantly, Harold’s autonomism needs to be able to account for the fact that variations in the relation between ethical and aesthetic evaluations are not only found from valuer to valuer (depending on whether they endorse evaluative coherence), but also found across evaluations of different works made *by the same valuer*. That is, it seems that a valuer might endorse evaluative coherence in some cases and not in others. For example, it might be that a valuer does not feel committed to subsuming her aesthetic evaluation to her ethical evaluation of *The Godfather* (1972), but she might feel differently when it comes to the depiction of the KKK in *The Birth of a Nation* (1915).

This worry applies to moderate autonomism in general. One can argue that moderate autonomism fails to acknowledge, and account for the fact that in some instances there does seem to be interaction between ethical and aesthetic considerations of particular works of art. Autonomism needs to accommodate the challenge of immoralism: Daniel Jacobson (1997), Matthew Kieran (2006), Eileen John (2006), and A. W. Eaton (2012) have argued that sometimes moral flaws impact our aesthetic evaluations positively. And autonomists need to account for the fact that sometimes moral flaws seem to impact our appreciation of works negatively.

3. Robust autonomism

Contrary to both radical and moderate autonomism, *robust* autonomism argues that only *some* artworks can be ethically assessed; further, it argues that while this ethical value might impact how appreciators *approach* such works, ethical value does not impact their aesthetic value. Robust autonomism denies both the amenability and the value interaction claims. Against the amenability claim, it argues that not all works that have moral content have moral value; some works that explore moral themes only *represent* moral perspectives. As a result, some works that prescribe immoral perspectives are only *content-immoral*: they fictionally represent morally inappropriate perspectives; while we use ethical language to describe these works, they have no ethical value. Some other artworks, however, do have ethical value. Contrary to radical autonomism, robust autonomism concedes that certain works that fulfil specific conditions *are*

in fact amenable to ethical assessment. But robust autonomism still argues that even in these cases there is no interaction between ethical and aesthetic value.⁸

The debate on the ethical criticism of art has mostly dismissed radical autonomism because the arguments against the amenability claim seem largely implausible, as we saw in the first section. So what could motivate robust autonomism? Denying the amenability claim can actually solve some of the difficulties faced by arguments for moderate autonomism. Denying that some artworks can be ethically assessed can explain why moral agents fail to take moral considerations into account when evaluating some works but not others, and why our aesthetic and moral sensibilities feel in conflict when approaching some artworks but not others. Robust autonomists argue that the reason why in some cases moral considerations have no purchase on our evaluation of works, and why in some cases moral and aesthetic considerations are not in conflict, is because some works that explore immoral perspectives are only content-immoral: they are representations of inappropriate ethical perspectives, and we use ethical language to describe them, but they have no ethical value.

Robust autonomism can also accommodate the challenge of immoralism. Although some works have no ethical value, their immoral content can impact their aesthetic value positively: even in the absence of ethical value, the successful prescription of a content-immoral perspective requires a great command of other formal features, such as character development, narrative structure, intensity, and expressive power, much in the same way other non-realistic fictions require.

Pérez Carreño's moderate account of autonomism is a version of robust autonomism. She argues that art as art is autonomous because of its fictional character⁹: representations *qua* representations are not committed to truth. Of course individual representations might have other cognitive aims, but what she wants to point out is that these individual cognitive aims are not found in representations *qua* representations (Pérez Carreño 2006, 86). Due to the lack of alethic commitments, the relevant criterion to assess representations *qua* representations is a criterion of verisimilitude, rather than truthfulness.

Taking verisimilitude into account, Pérez Carreño argues that the value of artworks *qua* artworks depends on composition, coherence, consistency, integrity, imagery, expressive power, and intensity. And just like their fictional character releases representations *qua* representations from considerations of truth, so it releases them from considerations of moral adequacy (Pérez Carreño 2006, 88-89). Artworks *qua* artworks have no intrinsic ethical value. Against the amenability claim, she argues that due to works' lack of alethic commitments, we cannot legitimately ethically evaluate artworks *qua* artworks. Against the value interaction

⁸ Although she does not explicitly argue for autonomism, Susan Feagin has argued against the amenability and value interaction claims. Against the amenability claim, Feagin argues that we cannot ethically assess films *themselves*: "attributing moral properties to works of art is *prima facie* problematic: generally speaking, moral properties are attributable to persons and their behaviour, but not to inanimate objects" (Feagin 2010, 20-21). While we can acknowledge that art as a cultural practice has social functions and implications, an evaluation of the social or political significance of art is different to an aesthetic evaluation. Against the value interaction claim, Feagin argues that while both evaluations might be appropriate, not only are they different, but prioritising a social or political evaluation might prevent viewers from appreciating certain artistic merits of works (Feagin 2010, 29). Her account could thus be seen as an example of robust autonomism.

⁹ Pérez Carreño assumes the Waltonian claim that all representational artworks are fiction.

claim, Pérez Carreño argues that the aesthetic value of a representation is determined by the consistency between a work's fictional ethical perspective and its aesthetic properties.

Nevertheless, Pérez Carreño recognises that *some* artworks are amenable to ethical assessment; namely, those artworks that represent real events and characters. The fact that these works represent real events and characters opens the door to considerations of truthlikeness and moral adequacy because being truthful is part of the intrinsic aims of these works. So while *qua* representations these works are to be assessed under a criterion of verisimilitude, works that represent real events and characters can only accomplish verisimilitude by being truthful (Pérez Carreño 2006, 89). When considering ethical perspectives, works that represent real events and characters can only accomplish verisimilitude if they are morally accurate because part of their internal aims is to be accurate (Pérez Carreño 2006, 90). For example, in representing real events and characters, it is part of the internal aims of *The Triumph of the Will* to represent a morally accurate perspective. For this reason, when evaluating *The Triumph of the Will* it is legitimate to use moral criteria to assess the verisimilitude of the work.

If at least *some* works are amenable to ethical assessment, could we say that ethical flaws found in these works cause aesthetic flaws? No. Pérez Carreño argues that it is *aesthetic* flaws that cause further aesthetic flaws. Works that represent real events and characters, and inaccurate ethical perspectives are aesthetically defective because they are internally inconsistent. As said before, artworks that include real events and characters can only accomplish verisimilitude through truthfulness; moral inaccuracies impact truthfulness and, thus, verisimilitude. By presenting real events and characters but a morally inaccurate perspective, the work is no longer *internally* consistent. The lack of internal consistency corresponds to a formal flaw. That is, these works are not aesthetically defective because they are immoral, but rather they're aesthetically defective because in representing a morally inaccurate perspective they fail to fulfil their criterion of verisimilitude. So *The Triumph of the Will* is not aesthetically defective because it represents an immoral perspective, but rather it is aesthetically defective because it does not accomplish verisimilitude and is internally inconsistent.

Against Carroll's argument for moderate moralism, Pérez Carreño argues that it is not moral flaws that cause failure of uptake. She argues that works fail to elicit emotional responses because the lack of internal consistency of the work makes the perspective unintelligible (Pérez Carreño 2006, 83): the ethical perspective is not consistent with the rest of the work. The reasons for the work being ethically and aesthetically defective are not the same: the work is ethically flawed because it prescribes an immoral perspective; it is aesthetically flawed because the lack of internal consistency and verisimilitude prevents the possibility of uptake.

Although she does not address Gaut's ethicism, Pérez Carreño's account can respond to the merited response argument as well. Gaut claims that ethically unmerited responses are aesthetically relevant. However, Pérez Carreño can argue that unmerited responses are aesthetically relevant not *qua* ethically unmerited but *qua* aesthetically unmerited. When works represent real events and characters, verisimilitude is partly determined by truthfulness and moral accuracy; if the work prescribes immoral responses, these would be inconsistent with the rest of a work that aims at truthlikeness. Immoral responses are *aesthetically* unmerited because they are internally inconsistent with a work that aims at being truthful. What happens here is not an interaction between ethical and aesthetic criteria because it is not responses *qua*

ethically unmerited that are aesthetically significant; but rather it is unmerited responses *qua* aesthetically unmerited that are aesthetically significant.

Concluding remarks

Even though Pérez Carreño's account can respond to interactionists, her robust autonomism faces at least one important difficulty: the representation of real events and characters is not enough to determine the applicability of the amenability claim. That is, attending to the representation of real events and characters to consider whether moral criteria are relevant is not enough. We can find instances of representations of real events and characters that do not aim at prescribing a morally accurate perspective, for example Scorsese's *The Wolf of Wall Street* (2013). And we can find instances of representations that do not include real events and characters and that, nevertheless, aim at prescribing a morally accurate perspective and for which moral accuracy seems to be part of works' intrinsic aims, for example *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1984). Attending only to the presence or absence of real events and characters fails to acknowledge the complex interaction between art and morality.

Future research into robust autonomism would need to examine other narrative and contextual considerations that could help in determining whether moral criteria are relevant in our evaluation of works. For example, narrative and contextual considerations might show that *some* artworks include moral commitments regarding not only the content of the work, but the real world. Consider HBO's *The Wire* (2002-2008). The show partly aims at exploring inequality in America through the interaction of issues of race and class, and yet it erases black American women from the narrative and fails to acknowledge that they are victims of specific kinds of structural injustices. The ethical flaws found in *The Wire* are a product of the dominant immoral views in the context of production of the series in which black women are routinely erased from public narratives. The erasure of black American women from public narratives of racial oppression makes *The Wire*'s lack of gender diversity morally significant. The work's aim is to evidence patterns of oppression and inequality; and not only does it ignore an important part of these patterns, but it further contributes to the pattern of oppression of black American women that stems from their invisibility.

A contextual version of robust autonomism can argue that what is properly ethically assessed is not the work itself but actual views held by real people. Works' moral value stems from extrinsic features: actual immoral attitudes of real agents; and the ethical assessment is thus *extrinsic*, not intrinsic as required by ethical criticism. These contextual considerations could impact how appreciators approach some works because in some contexts they have overriding moral or prudential considerations. Nevertheless, moral and aesthetic evaluations of works remain independent from one another.

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