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The Ethical Criticism of Art: A New Mapping of the Territory

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Abstract The goal of this paper is methodological. It offers a comprehensive mapping of the theoretical positions on the ethical criticism of art, correcting omissions and inadequacies in the conceptual framework adopted in the current debate. Three principles are recommended as general guidelines: ethical amenability, basic value pluralism, and relativity to ethical dimension. Hence a taxonomy distinguishing between different versions of autonomism, moralism, and immoralism is established, by reference to criteria that are different from what emerging in the current literature. The mapping is then proved capable of (1) locating the various theories that have been proposed so far and clarifying such theories' real commitments, (2) having the correct relationship with actual art making and art criticism practices, and (3) showing the real weight of the alleged counter-example to a moralist position of a work that succeeds artistically because of its immorality.

Keywords Ethical criticism · Art criticim · Literary criticism · Autonomism · Moralism · Immoralism · Noël Carroll · Berys Gaut · Matthew Kieran · Daniel Jacobson

Ethical criticism – the art critical practice of considering a work's ethical status or value in the assessment of its artistic worth – is a practice as widespread as it is controversial amongst literary critics.[1] The recent debates on the legitimacy of this art critical practice have certainly improved our understanding of the structure of artistic value. Yet, the conceptual framework emerging from the current discussion is still far from being comprehensive or free from ambiguities. Hence, I here take on the methodological task of offering a comprehensive mapping of the possible theoretical positions on the relationship between the ethical and the artistic value of a work of art. I will not defend any particular

[1]For an opinionated survey of the attitudes towards literary ethical criticism, see the Introduction to (Booth 1988). Cf. also Isenberg's (1973, 266) gloss on ethical criticism as a "nearly unanimous practice," albeit one he criticizes.

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position on the legitimacy of ethical criticism (though perhaps my own sympathies for a defense of it might eventually show). Rather, the conceptual framework I propose should be acceptable to *both* those who defend and those who oppose ethical criticism.

It is natural for any mapping of this kind to include an element of stipulation. Hence, what I present will have to be judged mainly for its *explanatory power*, as well as for its connection to the *actual practices of the artworld*. The philosophical literature I refer to is that of works by Carroll (1996, 1998a,b, 2000), Gaut (1998, 2001), Kieran (1996, 2003), Jacobson (1997, 2006), and Anderson and Dean (1998), although other interesting accounts have been proposed. I will especially refer to the influential distinctions and characterizations put forward by Carroll, which only recently have been rejected by Jacobson (2006). Yet, for the most part, the conceptual framework I propose differs in important ways from what has emerged from the philosophical literature so far.

My mapping is made of a taxonomy and of a few general guiding principles. I begin with the principles.

First Principle: Ethical Amenability

The first principle or general guideline for debating the legitimacy of ethical criticism is that of looking at theories that, no matter how different their conclusions, at least agree on the fact that art *can* be subject to ethical evaluation. Although basic, this principle allows us to set aside a thesis that Carroll discusses under the label of "radical autonomism." According to Carroll, radical autonomists – he refers, e.g., to Wilde's (1974, 107) famous claim in the Preface to *The Picture of Dorian Gray* that "there is no such thing as a moral or immoral book" – hold that works of art cannot be judged ethically without making some sort of "category error" (Carroll 1996). The radical autonomist, Carroll glosses, claims that "the ethical evaluation of artworks is always conceptually confused" (Carroll 2000, 360); that "the fact, if it is a fact, that we spend so much time talking about morality with regards to so many artworks appears to be virtually unintelligible" (Carroll 1998a, 127). This characterization has been accepted by others. Gaut (2001, 343), for instance, refers to an "extreme version of autonomism" as holding "that it makes no sense morally to evaluate works of art, in the same way that it makes no sense for instance morally to evaluate numbers" (see also Anderson and Dean 1998).

Unfortunately, Carroll's characterization of radical autonomism is problematic in many ways, including the fact that, extreme as it is, no one seems to hold it, certainly none of the epitomes of autonomism, that is, of the view that the value of art is independent of values of other sorts. Not Wilde (1974, 107) himself, who talks ethically about artworks in the very Preface, if indirectly, when he refers to morality as offering the content upon which an artist creates: "The moral and immoral life of man forms part of the subject matter of the artist [...]. Vice and virtue are to the artist materials for an art." Not Gass (1993, 113) who, defending an arguably even more radical version of autonomism, claims that the various spheres of value regarding an artwork are "different, independent, and equal" and that "the artistic value of a book is different" and "differently determined" than, say, its economic value. Not Bell (1987, 116), who writes that "moral judgments about the value of particular works of art have nothing to do with their artistic value." Admittedly, Bell adds that ethically judging artworks treats them "not as works of art, but as members of some other class, or as independent and unclassified parts of the universe." Yet, that is precisely the point: to claim the irrelevance, in some way, of ethical value to artistic value, an autonomist need not claim that works of art cannot even be judged ethically. One of the exemplars of

autonomism, Isenberg (1973, 268), certainly was not banning ethical talk about artworks when claiming that a "'proper' ethical judgment" of an art object is "one that judges the object itself and tells us whether *that* is [ethically] good or bad"; he only insisted, in autonomist fashion, that a judgment of that sort is always irrelevant to the object valued as art.

Of course, banning ethical talk about works of art does result in opposing ethical criticism. Yet, by no means need the case for autonomism depend on such a ban. The same is true of other interpretations of the claim Carroll attributes to "radical autonomism," such as the ethical thesis that artworks are never immoral, or the overriding thesis that artistic value trumps all other values, or, again, the prescription, proper of a poetics, that art making should avoid attaching any moral function to an artwork, for that cannot but ruin the work's artistic value (for the latter claim, see, e.g., Gautier 1981). So, if the label "radical autonomism" is to be employed in this debate, it will have to refer to something other than what Carroll has suggested.

Second Principle: Basic Value Pluralism

A taxonomy of the possible positions on the artistic/ethical value relationship will have to be a taxonomy of theories accepting what we can call "basic value pluralism": that works of art are subject to evaluations that are at least prima facie different. Hence, the taxonomy must be independent of reductionist claims of any sort regarding artistic value: *cognitive* reductionism (e.g., Nelson Goodman's or, perhaps, Plato's), *moral* reductionism (e.g., Sir Philip Sidney's for poetry or, for art in general, a simplified Tolstoyan theory), or any other view identifying artistic value with some other form of value. Certainly, some reductionists may oppose ethical criticism because of their views on how one sort of value is just a form of another. Yet, other reductionists may instead favor ethical criticism for that reason. The reductionist/non-reductionist distinction is orthogonal to distinctions between different positions on ethical criticism, and the debate on ethical criticism is best framed as encompassing views on the relationship between ethical and artistic value, independently of whether one value might ultimately be reduced to the other.

Reference to this guiding principle also suggests being skeptical of Carroll's (1996, 229) characterization of the position he names "radical moralism": "the radical moralist or Puritan – someone, perhaps, like Plato – [...] maintains that art should *only* be discussed from a moral point of view." Yet, someone who wants to defend even the most generalized application of ethical criticism, and claim that an artwork's ethical value always bears on its artistic value, need not endorse reductionism, as instead Carroll's reference to Plato suggests. Nor does she need to endorse other theses Carroll may be referring to, such as some puritans' ethical claim that art must pass a test of ethical admissibility, or the descriptive generalization that all works of art have an ethical dimension, or the aesthetic claim that the only type of evaluation artworks are amenable to is the ethical one, or, again, the overriding thesis that ethical considerations trump all others. Accordingly, one of the ways in which Carroll (1996, 229) distinguishes his own limited defense of ethical criticism from more "radical" positions turns out being uninstructive: "radical moralism is not my position, since I freely admit that some works of art may have no moral dimension, due to the kind of works they are, and because I do not claim that moral considerations trump all other considerations, such as formal ones." A strong and general defense of ethical criticism need not claim either omnipresence or primacy of the ethical dimension amongst works of art. Once again, for the label "radical moralism" to be usefully employed in this debate, it will have to refer to something other than what it means in Carroll's taxonomy.

Finally, the principle of basic value pluralism allows us to set aside Gaut's (2001, 345) characterization of what he calls "extreme immoralism": "Extreme immoralism would hold that the only aesthetic merits of a work of art are its ethical flaws." Such a characterization is obviously objectionable for reasons analogous to those just put forward vis-à-vis Carroll's "radical moralism." Below, I will recommend reference to what I call "radical immoralism" as a position that, though very extreme (and implausible), more properly belongs to the logical space of views relevant to a discussion on the legitimacy of ethical criticism.

Third Principle: Relativity to Ethical Dimension

Quite obviously, works of art can be ethically judged in a number of different ways: most notably, for the way they are produced (say, Werner Herzog's *Fitzcarraldo* for the injuries suffered by crew members during the film's production),[2] for their consequences on their perceivers (H. B. Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* for its role in the American Civil War, or, say, a novel hurting someone's feelings by reporting details of her private life),[3] or for the point of view or perspective they embody (*The Triumph of the Will* for its celebration of Nazism). Defenders and opponents of ethical criticism must specify the ethical dimension – i.e., the specific sort of ethical judgment – they consider to be relevant or irrelevant to artistic value.

There are important reasons to insist on this. First, one may want to claim that artistic value is independent of one ethical dimension but not of another – that artworks, for instance, are affected in their artistic worth by the morality of the point of view they embody, but not by the morality of how they were produced. Second, the clarity and strength of an argument, say, in defense of ethical criticism, may be greatly affected by its mixing different ethical dimensions. Carroll (1998b, 419), e.g., proposes his defense of ethical criticism as the thesis that sometimes "a moral defect in an artwork can be an aesthetic defect, and sometimes a moral virtue can count as an aesthetic virtue" (see also Carroll 1996 and 2000). Yet, Carroll refers to "moral defects" and "moral virtues" having to do with *both* the work endorsing a morally blame- or praiseworthy perspective *and* the work being, because of its perspective, morally corruptive or ameliorative (see, e.g., Carroll 1996, 229). This may result in a view that, in fact, endorses *two* distinct types of ethical criticism, in which case, however, each type will need a distinct defense. Otherwise, for the view to be put forward as a unified position, it needs a supporting argument connecting the two ethical dimensions. Carroll (1996, 235) seems to opt for the latter strategy, by claiming that moral learning (the "deepening" or "enlarging" of the "moral understanding") is a regular "side reaction" of engaging with narratives that embody a morally praiseworthy perspective, while narratives embodying a blameworthy perspective "confuse" the understanding (see also Carroll 1998a). Yet those are risky claims for Carroll to make, given his argument in support of his thesis. In brief, Carroll's (1996, 1998b) argument is that morally sensitive audiences will fail to give "uptake" to morally unsound narratives. Yet, for an audience's understanding to be, e.g., confused by an immoral work, the audience must presumably *give* uptake; vice versa, if the audience does not give uptake, then presumably it is also *not* letting itself be confused.

[2] This is, however, a dimension of ethical evaluation that may be quite marginal to the evaluation of literature.

[3] As these examples suggest, artworks' consequences can be distinguished between *large*- and *small-scale* consequences, a distinction I have investigated in (Giovannelli 2004).

There is an additional reason for why insisting on this principle is important: failing to consider it has resulted in a misleading way of drawing differences in *scope* between competing theories. Specifically, Carroll (1998b, 419) has contrasted his view with Gaut's "ethicism," in the following terms:

> Gaut seems willing to consider virtually every moral defect in a work of art an aesthetic defect, whereas I defend a far weaker claim – namely that sometimes a moral defect in an artwork can count as an aesthetic defect, or, as Hume would say, a blemish. Thus you can see that ethicism is a very strong position, while mine is, well, moderate.

Yet, *any* theory claiming that ethical evaluation has (or has not) a bearing on artistic evaluation must be relativized to the dimension(s) of ethical evaluation it considers to be artistically relevant (or irrelevant). In this respect, Carroll's view is not much different from Gaut's, since both authors ultimately refer to the ethical evaluation that can be given of an artwork for the perspective it embodies.[4] The difference in strength between these two theories must lie elsewhere. To see it, the discussion on the legitimacy of ethical criticism needs a new taxonomy, one emerging from clearly stated, non-arbitrary criteria.

A New Taxonomy

The debate on ethical criticism has been shaped by the distinctions originally suggested by Carroll, between four possible positions, two of which I have already touched upon above: autonomism and moralism, each of them further divided into a radical and a moderate version. In brief, Carroll characterizes the four positions as follows. *Radical autonomism* holds that works of art cannot even be judged ethically. *Moderate autonomism* holds that, although artworks can be judged ethically, an evaluation of that sort has no bearing, ever, on the artwork's artistic value. *Moderate moralism* holds that sometimes the ethical evaluation of an artwork legitimately bears on its artistic value. *Radical moralism* holds that ethical evaluation always bears on artistic evaluation (or is the only artistically relevant evaluation for artworks).

Further, Gaut has contrasted, perhaps following the pattern informing Carroll's taxonomy, *extreme immoralism* with *moderate immoralism*. The former, somewhat analogously to radical moralism in one of Carroll's glosses, claims that the only artistically relevant evaluation of artworks is that of their ethical status, with immorality contributing to artistic worth (and, perhaps one might add, with morality detracting from artistic worth). Moderate immoralism, instead, claims that "the ethical flaws of a work can *sometimes* be aesthetic merits in it" (and perhaps ethical merits sometimes be aesthetic flaws) (Gaut 2001, 345).

At this point, some emendations to this conceptual framework, which has been shaping the current debate on ethical criticism, are obviously necessary: (1) what Carroll calls "radical autonomism" is a view that need not even occupy us; (2) what Carroll calls "radical moralism," at least for some of the characterizations he provides, also should be excluded from our discussion; (3) what Gaut calls "extreme immoralism" is also of no interest; and (4) each of the positions on ethical criticism must be conceived of as relative to whichever ethical dimension is claimed to be relevant or irrelevant to artistic value. However, the

[4] An obvious difference in scope between Carroll's theory and Gaut's is that the former is formulated for representational works only, specifically for narratives, while the latter is meant to apply to non-representational works as well (see Gaut 1998, 193). Yet this is not the difference Carroll is referring to.

problems with this framework run deeper, for the claim Carroll attributes to the moderate moralist view, that "sometimes" ethical evaluation matters artistically, underdetermines the distinction between two significantly different views of the relation between ethical and artistic value. One of such views, I will claim, should be categorized as an autonomist, the other as a moralist view. Likewise, Gaut's qualification of moderate immoralism, as claiming that "sometimes" immorality has positive artistic relevance, underdetermines the distinction between a bona fide form of immoralism and a version of autonomism.

Recently, Jacobson (2006, 345), also noticing inadequacies in Carroll's conceptual framework, has suggested that the debate really ought to be between autonomism and moralism, with no further subdividing between moderate and radical versions of them, and both contrasted to the "antitheoretical view" Jacobson himself favors – the view that "a moral defect or merit in an artwork can figure *either* as an aesthetic defect or merit, or can be aesthetically irrelevant" (2006, 344; see also Jacobson 1997). Jacobson (2006, 353) also remarks that the "cognitive immoralism" that Kieran (2003) has recently defended is in fact best described as nothing but the antitheoretical position. Although much truth can be found in Jacobson's criticism of Carroll and Kieran, the taxonomy he proposes oversimplifies the logical space of positions on ethical criticism. I suggest that we can fruitfully distinguish between different versions of autonomism and of moralism, and that positions worthy of being called "immoralist" can be identified. Hence, I now move to present my taxonomy.

Consider an analogy with the relationship between artistic and financial value. One may claim that whether an artwork is artistically better or worse than another never has anything to do with its financial value. The analogous claim with respect to the artistic/ethical value relationship is what I think deserves the name of *radical autonomism*. Without denying that works of art may be subject to ethical evaluation, the radical autonomist claims that such an evaluation never has a bearing on the value of the work as art.

On financial value, however, many would claim that some artworks are financially more valuable than others partly because they are artistically better. Yet most people would also want to claim that artistic and financial value do not map one onto the other in any simple fashion – not always is the artistically better work the more expensive one. The *moderate autonomist* makes an analogous claim, allowing for the ethical status of artworks to bear, on occasion, on their artistic value, but claiming that it always does so in an unsystematic way. Note that the claim of unsystematicity implies that, although sometimes a work may be, say, a worse work of art because immoral, in other instances the immorality may contribute to artistic value, and yet in other cases it may be irrelevant to it.

In contrast, a *moralist* is one who claims the ethical value of artworks systematically bears on their artistic value. For *moderate* moralists, however, such a relationship obtains only for works of certain *kinds* or *genres*: say, only for realistic fiction or political propaganda or didactic poetry. It is because of the kind of works they are that their ethical status matters to their artistic status. A *radical* moralist claims that the systematic relationship between ethical and artistic value obtains for works of art of all kinds or genres – albeit likely within a given genus: say, a given medium or a given transmedium type of works (e.g., for all representational or for all narrative works).

There is at least one more set of theoretical possibilities. *Immoralism* can be defined as the view that the ethical value of a work systematically bears on its artistic value, but in a reverse manner, such that when a work is ethically praiseworthy, that counts against its value as art, and when a work is ethically blameworthy, that counts in favor of its value as art. A *radical* immoralist view – claiming that the reverse relationship holds for works of any kind – hardly seems worth considering. However, a *moderate* version – claiming that the reverse

relationship only holds for certain kinds of works – is in fact germane to this discussion. One could with some plausibility claim that there are kinds of works or genres that derive artistic success partly from immorality (satire and other forms of humor may come to mind).

Notice that a natural way – though not the only one available – to be a moderate moralist is to claim – the way a moderate *immoralist* would claim – that, for certain kinds of works, immorality contributes to, and morality detracts from, the artistic value of a work, while claiming that, for other kinds of works, things go precisely the other way around.

The positions this taxonomy classifies are general.[5] Hence, theories corresponding to the same position may differ from each other in important ways, and often in ways that would amount to claiming a "stronger" or "weaker" relationship between ethical and artistic value, or else a "stronger" or "weaker" autonomy of one value dimension vis-à-vis the other. Naturally, the positions the taxonomy classifies as "moderate" allow for more variations. Moderate moralism, for instance, may take different forms. It may claim that the ethical/artistic value relationship obtains for many or rather for few genres; or that it obtains for genres with many or rather with just few members. Again, widely differing claims, on how important the ethical dimension is to artistic worth, are compatible with moderate moralism: moderate moralist theories may run the gamut from the claim that ethical value is the only artistically relevant dimension, to the claim that it is just one, marginal factor amongst many. Likewise, a moderate autonomist may claim that the ethical/artistic value relationship obtains unsystematically for works of all kinds. Yet, another sort of moderate autonomist may want to carve out artistic areas that more than others are autonomous from ethical value (e.g., by claiming that there are genres or kinds of works for which the ethical dimension is never relevant). Or, again, it is compatible with moderate autonomism to claim that ethical value is in fact almost always relevant to artistic value, hence that the relationship between them, though unsystematic, is quite pervasive in art.[6]

Further, as mentioned, any one of the positions mapped by the taxonomy may be defended as relative to some class of works or other, say, only to narrative works or to all representational works or indistinctly to both. And, of course, all the positions in the resulting spectrum of possibilities can be applied to each one of the possible ethical judgments of a work of art. Hence, someone may be a moderate moralist, say, regarding artworks judged for their ethical point of view but be an autonomist, say, regarding the ethical evaluation according to the means of production.

Advantages of this Mapping

This mapping – the taxonomy and the general guidelines – has some obvious advantages.

1. It is *comprehensive*, allowing us to locate within it the actual theories proposed, and *transparent* on the criteria from which it emerges, allowing us to see, in a non-arbitrary way, the relevant differences among such theories and the commitments of each one of them.

[5]Many of the theoretical possibilities I present in this paragraph are the result of conversations with my colleague Owen McLeod and helpful suggestions by an anonymous referee.

[6]By no means should my pointing to the range of theoretical possibilities be taken as suggesting that actual philosophical theories are, or ought to be, so specific about their claims.

For instance, Anderson and Dean, following Carroll, name their view "moderate autonomism." Yet, since they defend the thesis that "it is never the moral component [...] *as such* that diminishes or strengthens the value of the work *qua* artwork" (Anderson and Dean 1998, 152), their view is in fact best described as *radical* autonomism. Indeed, any claim more radical than Anderson's and Dean's would amount to the unoccupied position according to which artworks cannot be subject to ethical evaluation, a position that has already been set aside as irrelevant to this debate.

Jacobson's view is instead paradigmatic of moderate autonomism. Indeed the "antitheoretical" element Jacobson emphasizes is nothing but the combination of (1) denying any systematic relationship between ethical and artistic value, and (2) claiming that this is true of works of every kind. Without quibbling about words, calling Jacobson's thesis a form of moderate autonomism acknowledges, *pace* Jacobson, the *theoretical* nature of the thesis, as one that makes a general claim on the structure of artistic value, for works of all kinds, and that might be subject to counterarguments, if generalizations of a different sort were to be successfully defended.

The view that Kieran now favors is also a version of moderate autonomism. Originally, Kieran (1996) had defended what he, like Gaut, called "ethicism," the view that morally praiseworthy works "deepen our understanding and appreciation" (Kieran 2003, 58; cf. Kieran 1996), and are artistically better because of that. Now, Kieran (2003, 56–57) is willing to admit that some works succeed in part because of their immorality, and for the same reason: the work's immoral character can promote "the intelligibility and reward of the imaginative experience proffered by the work."[7] Notice that Kieran's new view would not be a type of autonomism, but rather a moderate moralist position combined with a moderate immoralist one, only if Kieran were to relativise his claims to different artistic genres.

Carroll's view is in fact a version of moderate moralism but not because of the mere claim that ethical value affects artistic value only some of the times – that is a claim autonomists of the moderate sort can make, too (and that in fact Kieran and Jacobson do make). Rather, Carroll is a moralist because he generalizes his claim, that moral considerations matter artistically, over relevantly similar works, hence implies the existence of a systematic relationship. The generalization is suggested, for instance, by Carroll's (1998b, 421) offering the example of a hypothetical novel that fails because of its immorality – in particular, fails because, being the kind of work it is, it aims at eliciting the readers' admiration for an immoral character who, however, morally sensitive readers don't find admirable. Use of the hypothetical example suggests that every work of a similar kind would similarly be affected by its ethical status, hence effectively generalizes the moralist thesis over kinds of works. Yet, Carroll's moralism is moderate, not radical, insofar as it is kind- or genre-relative. For other genres, Carroll (1996, 227) suggests, ethical value may relate to artistic value in fairly different ways:

> It is my contention that there are many kinds of artworks – genres, if you will – that naturally elicit moral responses, that prompt talk about themselves in terms of moral considerations, and even warrant moral evaluation. [...] Moreover, with some genres, moral considerations are pertinent, even though there may be other genres where they would be tantamount to category errors.

The taxonomy here proposed also explains how Carroll can in principle accept the claims a moderate autonomist or a moderate immoralist would make for certain kinds of

[7] I present a brief critique of (Kieran 2003) in (Giovannelli 2005).

works, *provided that those do not belong to the same kinds for which Carroll's moderate moralist position is formulated*. Hence, Jacobson's (2006, 344) statement, that that is something Carroll cannot afford, proves to be too swift. *Pace* Jacobson, between autonomism and radical moralism there lies moderate moralism as a real possibility. Moderate moralism is not incompatible with moderate immoralism, provided the artistic kinds or genres the two views refer to do not overlap. Nor is moderate moralism incompatible with the claim that, for works other than those belonging to the kinds or genres for which the moralist claim is made, the ethical/artistic relationship holds only unsystematically, or does not hold at all.[8] If fact, for a view to be a version of moderate moralism, it *must* admit of the existence of kinds of works for which the ethical/artistic value relationship holds differently from what the theory claims: systematically but in a reverse manner, unsystematically, or not at all.[9]

Jacobson (2006, 349) also claims that there is no significant difference between Carroll and Gaut: both of them are simply moralists. Yet, we now have the resources to distinguish between them: Carroll implies that the moralist thesis applies only to certain kinds of works; Gaut makes his claim for works of *all* kinds, and hence is a radical moralist (see especially Gaut 1998). Admittedly, Gaut (2001, 348–349) has more recently introduced the following proviso: "the ethicist should not allow any ethical flaw at all to count as an aesthetic flaw," but only those ethical flaws that are "aesthetically relevant." "So the ethicist should hold that ethical flaws are only *sometimes* aesthetically relevant" (Gaut 2001, 349, my emphasis). Yet, such a proviso risks confusing rather than clarifying the issue. Quite simply, it may just point to the fact that a moralist needs to select the *ethical dimension* she considers to be systematically relevant to artistic assessment, as according to one of the fundamental principles I have here defended. If *that* is what Gaut means, then his qualification of the moralist claim, that only *sometimes* are ethical flaws relevant to artistic assessment, uses "sometimes" in a different sense than Carroll when he qualifies his moderate moralism: in Carroll, the restriction is relative to kinds of works or genres, in Gaut to kinds of ethical evaluations.[10]

2. By reference to the notion of *genre* or *kind* of work, my taxonomy allows us to bind moralist theories to universal claims – stating that there is a systematic relationship between ethical and artistic value – while, at the same time, referring to no artificial, or artificially imposed (by philosophers) categories. What counts as a genre may vary with the development of art, and the introduction of new possibilities for art making and art criticism – hence the taxonomy's looser reference to artworks belonging to "kinds." Ultimately, an asset of my categorization is that, while mapping the logical space of positions on ethical criticism, it implicitly delegates to the actual art world – to art production and art criticism – the task of determining the kinds of works in which ethical and artistic value may intersect.

[8]Many thanks to an anonymous referee for prompting clarification on this point.

[9]By the same token, the criteria generating my taxonomy show how Carroll (2000, 378) does make an autonomist concession after all, one that he cannot consistently make, when he allows for the possibility of immoral works that are "so subtle as to escape a morally sensitive audience." For, if such works belong to one of the genres or kinds the moralist thesis is stated about, the claim for a systematic bearing of ethical value on artistic value is contradicted and the view is, after all, ultimately autonomist.

[10]As further evidence of a perceived, although never clearly framed, difference, between his own view and Carroll's, see Gaut's parenthetical reference to "a related *though less general* argument in Carroll 1996" (Gaut 2001, 351, my emphasis).

3. Finally, spelling out the fundamental claims that theories of different kinds are committed to allows us to determine what counts as a counterexample to a theory. I conclude, then, with a brief discussion of the counterexample of choice of virtually any opponent of ethical criticism as a general practice: that of an artwork that appears to succeed artistically, at least in part, because of its immorality (see, e.g., Jacobson 1997, 2006; Anderson and Dean 1998; and Kieran 2003).

(a) Such an artwork would prove at most that *radical* moralism – claiming that the two values are systematically related for the whole range of kinds of works – cannot be right. Notice that such an artwork would disprove *radical autonomism* as well, given its claim that ethical and artistic value never intersect. Yet, more can be said.

(b) An artwork that succeeds because of its immorality would count as a counterexample to moralism, radical or moderate, only if the ethical dimension that allegedly contributes, though in a reverse manner, to the work's artistic value is the same the moralist is interested in. The point is theoretically trivial but may have some real consequences. Kieran, for instance, interprets Martin Scorsese's *GoodFellas* as succeeding, artistically, in part for its immorality, the immorality of a work with a morally "deeply defective" perspective (Kieran 2003, 60). Works like that, he claims, succeed in engaging our understanding, hence are artistically better for that, because of their immorality. Yet, looking at Kieran's argument, one might detect *two* different kinds of ethical assessment of the artwork: (1) the work is immoral because of its defective, flawed perspective, (2) the work is immoral because it (successfully) prescribes or invites immoral, i.e., defective, flawed responses on the part of the viewers (for instance, responses endorsing the Mafioso code of some of the movie's protagonists). The principle of relativity to ethical dimension, then, invites at least the suspicion that only a specific moralist view, one claiming artistic relevance for the ethical status of the responses elicited by a work, must face the counterexample of a work that artistically succeeds because of the immoral responses it elicits. In principle, such a work would not be a counterexample to a moralist view that were to focus just on the ethical status of artworks' perspectives, and not on the ethical status of the responses that works aim at eliciting.

(c) Furthermore, whether moderate moralism is proved false will depend on whether or not the alleged artwork is supposed to belong to one of the genres to which the moderate moralist refers. For a moralist position is moderate precisely when it admits of artworks for which the systematic relationship between ethical and artistic value does *not* obtain (either because no relationship obtains or because the relationship obtains in a reverse manner).

(d) In any event, the moralist, moderate or radical, may have resources to respond to this type of objection. First, she may protest that the alleged counterexample is ambiguous. Effectively shifting the burden of proof back onto the autonomist, the moralist might ask whether mention of works succeeding artistically for their immorality is anything more than putting forward the hypothesis of works that succeed because of a feature, an aesthetically relevant feature, which *happens to be* immoral. Hence, when encountering a work that appears to succeed partly because of, say, its immoral perspective, should we conclude that the work succeeds partly because the perspective it embodies is immoral or rather just because it embodies the perspective it embodies – a perspective that happens to be immoral? In the former case, we have a counterexample to moralism; in the latter, we don't. Second, even if one grants that an artwork really may succeed artistically in part because of an immoral feature – it is, for instance, a comedy achieving a certain kind of wit thanks to the immorality of its point of view – the

moralist, I suggest, could consistently admit such a fact while, at the same time, continue to claim that the immorality of the perspective *also* detracts from the work's overall artistic value. For nowhere does the general characterization of moralism provided above entail that the moralist could not admit of instances in which the same feature may both detract from (as per the moralist's argument) and contribute to (as per the alleged counterexample) the artistic value of a work.

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