



Department of Analytic Philosophy, Institute of Philosophy, Czech Academy of Sciences is pleased to invite you to

THE 1ST ART & ETHICS PRAGUE CONFERENCE

WHAT FUTURE FOR THE ETHICAL CRITICISM OF ART? CONTEMPORARY DEBATES, ARGUMENTS, AND IDEAS

April 25 and 26, 2022

Academic Conference Center, Husova 4a, Prague

Programme

Monday, April 25

9:00–10:30 (Chair: Tomas Koblizek)

Keynote speech

Ted Nannicelli (University of Queensland)

The Ethical Criticism of Art and the Relativism of Distance

10:30–11:30

Daisy Dixon (University of Cambridge)

On Immoral Artists

Coffee break

11:40–12:40

Benjamin Matheson (University of Valencia)

Immoral Artists and the Moral Function of Artworks

Lunch

14:00–16:00 (Chair: Elisabeth Schellekens Dammann)

Iris Vidmar Jovanovic (University of Rijeka)

In Defense of the Interpretation-Oriented Ethical Criticism of Art

Panos Paris (Cardiff University)

Production-Oriented Ethical Criticism, Character, and the Importance of Perspectives

Coffee break

16:15–18:15 (Chair: Enrico Terrone)

Nils-Hennes Stear (University of Hamburg)

Artistic Production and the *Qua* Problem

Petr Kotatko (Czech Academy of Sciences, Prague)

Moves in the Games of Make-Believe: Moral Responses they (May) Evoke and Moral Obstacles They (May) Face

18:30

The presentation of the Dobrovsky Medal to Petr Kotatko.

Tuesday, April 26

9:00–10:30 (Chair: Ted Nannicelli)

Keynote speech

Elisabeth Schellekens Dammann (Uppsala University)

Destroying Value(s): War, Cultural Heritage and Aesthetic Obligations

10:30–11:30

Maria Jose Alcaraz Leon (University of Murcia)

On the Possible Aesthetic Harms of Arrogated Artistic Expression

Coffee break

11:40–12:40

Matej Cibik (Czech Academy of Sciences, Prague)

Representation of Minorities in Art

Lunch

14:00–16:00 (Chair: Maria Jose Alcaraz Leon)

Enrico Terrone (University of Genoa)

Four Kinds of Values in the Representational Arts

Silvia Caprioglio Panizza (Centre for Ethics, Pardubice)

Imaginative Resistance and the Statues We Cannot Stand

Coffee break

16:00–18:00 (Chair: Daisy Dixon)

Laura Candiotti (Centre for Ethics, Pardubice)

The Ethical Value of Disruptive Affective Habits in Aesthetic Experiences

Antony Fredriksson (Centre for Ethics, Pardubice)

Shared Attention in Murdoch, Merleau-Ponty and Cézanne: The Work of Art as an Ethical Guide

Abstracts

Expressing the Views of Others:

On the Possible Aesthetic Harms of Arrogated Artistic Expression

Maria Jose Alcaraz Leon (University of Murcia)

In recent years there has been some debate concerning the problematic nature of appropriating others' culture or cultural traits. In particular, the debate has concentrated on the kind of harm that that kind of action may produce either upon the group whose culture is subject to appropriation or to the very way in which that practice or culture evolve or sustains itself. Within this larger framework, a more specific debate has focused on aesthetic appropriation and its effects both on those for whom a particular aesthetic expression is central and to the very genuineness of the expressive character of that aesthetic expression. This line seems to suggest that a work's expressive character may be sensitive to facts about the artist's identity, beliefs, and attitudes. And that to produce an artwork that is truly expressive the artist must occupy a particular position and/or possess a particular identity, beliefs, legitimate concerns, or intentions.

On the other hand, it is often assumed that what determines an artwork's expressive character is the particular perspective it embodies about some figure, event, or story represented by the work. In this sense, it would appear that, say, a work's racist or sexist perspective does not depend on the artist's actual beliefs or attitudes but on the features with which certain issues are presented. Thus, for example, it is often said that *Uncle Tom's Cabin* embodies a racist perspective to the extent that it assumes and projects some racist stereotypes, even though her author was a self-declared defender of abolitionism.

In my presentation, I will address this apparent conflict concerning the relevance, if any, of the artist's identity to the expressive character of her work and the extent to which an artist's attempt at expressing a particular view may fail due to her identity and not to her lack of artistic skills.

The Ethical Value of Disruptive Affective Habits in Aesthetic Experiences

Laura Candiotta (Centre for Ethics, Pardubice)

Habits are more or less flexible channelings of both organic energies and environmental resources features (Dreon forthcoming). Habits have social as well as individual aspects, i.e. that they are socially shaped but also inflected by personal histories. In a joint work with Roberta Dreon (Candiotta & Dreon 2021), I have designated habits as affective if they play an essential role in prompting human affectivity and are produced, nourished, and reset by our affectively charged transactions with the world. In this presentation, I will draw some implications of this concept to aesthetics. In particular, I will focus on affective disruptions that produce the breaking of habits in aesthetic experiences. In line with the Pragmatist tradition, I do not take affective habits as merely customary emotional responses; affective habits do not simply allow the agent to become absorbed by an affective niche. In special situations, such as aesthetic experiences, affective habits are transformative. This does not simply mean that habits can transform themselves through their own exercise. But also that there are certain habits that can trigger the transformation of other habits (Bertram forthcoming). This is the case of disruptive affective habits as dispositions to transformation through affective disruption. An example of them in the aesthetic context is the artist's creative disposition to deliberately provoke and shock the audience with unconventional artworks (<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/art/creative-bravery/shock-tactics-creativity-provocation/>)

As it has been argued by Josè Medina (2012), transformation requires emotional friction in order to disrupt consolidated habits. Imke von Maur (2021) has argued that affective disruption enables transformation of habitual affective intentionality and solidified emotion repertoires. With the concept of disruptive affective habits, I focus on those affective dispositions to disrupt (1) and being disrupted (2). Disruption has been one of the key aims of the avant-garde. It has been conceived as a force that can break habits (Alloa, forthcoming). By focusing on disruptive affective habits, on the contrary, I argue that aesthetic transformation through affective disruption is not simply a break of habits because the breaking of habits can be a habit by itself (1) and it requires the subject's openness to be disrupted (2). So, aesthetic transformation through affective disruption is a matter of negotiating new transactions with an unfamiliar environment. There is habit-change here, but it does not result in the elimination of habits. Instead, it is a matter of making new habits.

An important implication follows from understanding the breaking of habits in aesthetic experiences along with the concept of disruptive affective habits. Aesthetic transformation through affective disruption is not simply in the hands of the individual who is exposed to an artwork. In the case of disruptive artworks, aesthetic transformation is triggered by specific aesthetic cultures that, for instance, valorise the exposition to the unfamiliar and the exploration of alternative perspectives. These cultures are embedded in affective dispositions, the affective habit to disrupt and be disrupted among them. They can be sources of moral change as long as they expose the public to alternative worldviews and motivate transformation through emotional friction and critical inquiry. The final upshot is that understanding the breaking of habits through affective disruption in aesthetic experiences within this Pragmatist conceptual framework enables us to appreciate the ethical value of disruptive affective habits.

Representation of Minorities in Art

Matej Cibik (Czech Academy of Sciences, Prague)

When it comes to the production of art, one of the most commonly expressed grievances concerns the representation of minorities. The typical example occurs when an old franchise, which used to have very few speaking roles for women and almost none for minorities, announces its re-installment, this time with a much more diverse cast. An online outrage inevitably ensues. The presentation will focus on asking whether arts (in this case, film and theatre especially) have a duty to ensure that they properly represent modern societies in their diversity. Specifically, the possible analogies between political representation and representation in arts will be explored. While the broad idea that there indeed is a duty to ensure fair representation will be defended, the presentation will also explore some of the pitfalls of this position.

On Immoral Artists

Daisy Dixon (University of Cambridge)

Gauguin’s abuse of Tahitian girls seems relevant in a direct, clear way to his portraits of these child brides; this is an easy case. In a less easy case, even though we don’t wish to engage with Hitler’s landscapes, it’s less clear that Hitler’s atrocities are relevant to the content and artistic value of these artworks themselves – they are just landscapes after all. Similarly, Rolf Harris’s indecent assaults against girls do not seem relevant at all to his Australian landscape painting or portrait of two old friends, and yet we may still refuse to display these works: a hard case.

An artist’s immorality often affects how we appreciate and interpret their art. But as these above cases show, where do we draw the line, as Erich Hatala Matthes puts it? My paper does two things. First, I show that ‘virtue-based’ approaches (Nannicelli 2020) and ‘empiricist’ approaches (Gaut 2007) to the relevance of the artist’s immorality cannot accommodate less easy cases like the Hitler landscapes – and that they should. Second, after amending the virtuebased account to accommodate these cases, I then show that this improved version still cannot deal with hard cases like the Harris paintings – but that it shouldn’t. To explain and justify our persistent conflicted reactions to such cases, I introduce a distinction. Where there is no perceptible trace of the artist’s misdeeds or immoral motivation towards their art, the artist’s immorality does not taint their artwork qua artwork, but it does qua cultural artifact.

Shared Attention in Murdoch, Merleau-Ponty and Cézanne:

The Work of Art as an Ethical Guide

Antony Fredriksson (Centre for Ethics, Pardubice)

In this presentation I will exemplify a development in which a cultural understanding shifts from one way of seeing to another. I will follow Merleau-Ponty’s and Iris Murdoch’s interpretation of the work of Paul Cézanne and the Impressionist movement in painting during the second half of the nineteenth century. This example provides a description of how attention can be cultivated through the arts. Impressionist painting, as described by Merleau-Ponty and Murdoch, carries a task of *guiding* the attention of the viewer rather than constructing ideal representations of the visual world. Shared attention is in this way, an effort of guiding the other, and being grasped by the perception of the other, rather than of sharing the same perceptual content. This process also builds on an ethical task of the arts. Without the perception and attention of the other, we are stuck with our individual views, without the possibility of change and plurality in our perception. Both Murdoch and Merleau-Ponty highlight how Cézanne’s attentive gaze aided a whole culture in seeing in a new way.

In Defense of the Interpretation-Oriented Ethical Criticism of Art

Iris Vidmar Jovanovic (University of Rijeka)

My aim in this presentation is to defend interpretation-oriented ethical criticism of art against one of the worries issued at its most famous instance, perspectivism, by Ted Nannicelli. As he argues, in order for one to be able to claim that a work W prescribes a certain perspective P, one needs to show that (i) an artist intended W to mean P; and (ii) that P is the ‘single right interpretation’ of W. However, we can neither determine what an author intended W to mean, nor can we know what W in fact means. Consequently, we cannot ethically evaluate W by ethically evaluating P.

I agree with Nannicelli and my aim here is not to deny his skepticism regarding perspectivism. However, I suggest that rejecting perspectivism in favor of Nannicelli’s preferred account, a product-oriented approach, is not a good solution to the problem of ethical evaluation of *narrative* art and I seek to salvage interpretation-oriented approach by offering a modified account of perspectivism, which I develop in the first part. I then offer a different criticism of perspectivism, to show how it should be modified so as to make a more substantial contribution to the ethical criticism of art. I conclude by providing a rough sketch of how our ethical criticism of narrative art should proceed in order to contribute to art’s educational and cultural values and to gain relevance in a public domain.

Moves in the Games of Make-Believe: Moral Responses they (May) Evoke and Moral Obstacles They (May) Face

Petr Kotatko (Czech Academy of Sciences, Prague)

We will go through some moves in the games of make-believe, prescribed by texts of narrative fiction to their readers, and ask whether they provide space for the readers’ moral engagement or, alternatively, can be blocked by the readers’ moral attitudes.

(1) The discussion will start with the requirements imposed on the reader by various ways of construing the narrator and the world in which her narrative performance is supposed_{AI} (= supposed in the *as if* mode) to be located. Here we will focus on (possible) moral dimension of the contrast between narration presenting the world as an ordered whole and narration presenting the world as a universal chaos (narrative performance being part and product of this mess). Samuel Beckett’s account of the conditions of serious and responsible approach to writing and related criticism of „naturalism“ in literature will be examined.

(2) Some of the assumptions_{AI} licensed and required by literary functions of a text of narrative fiction can be blocked by the reader’s moral attitudes. Then she may be able to specify the relevant portion of pretence, but unable to participate in it, so that the piece of fiction will not work for her. I will offer some examples meant as polemics with Francois Recanati’s claim that “The only way to access the internal content of a fiction is to *actually imagine* what the fiction prescribes its practitioners to imagine.”

(3) Some attention will be payed to Martínez-Bonati’s application of Husserl’s concept of “fulfilment” (“Erfüllung”) to propositions expressed by sentences used in texts of narrative fiction. He insists that they will play their role for the reader only if they are filled with images of the relevant states of affairs (specified in these propositions). I will suggest that the notion of fulfilment should be extended so as to include experiences of various kinds, among them moral responses to the assumed_{AI} states of affairs. Further, I will argue (against Gregory Currie) that while these responses react to certain assumptions_{AI}, they are not to be approached as *as if*-responses (approvals_{AI}, condemnations_{AI} etc.).

(4) Finally, we will discuss the relations and differences between moral attitudes to the assumed_{AI} flesh and blood referents of fictional names and to fictional characters, taken as elements of the construction of a work of narrative fiction.

Immoral Artists and the Moral Function of Artworks

Benjamin Matheson (University of Valencia)

The #metoo movement led to a reckoning for a number of artists. In 2017, Louis CK apologised for masturbating in front of junior colleagues without their consent. In 2018, after having been accused of assaulting over 30 women, Bill Cosby was convicted of 3 counts of aggravated sexual assault (though his conviction was later overturned on a technicality). In 2021, R Kelly was convicted of racketeering and child sex offences. Immoral artists are by no means a recent phenomenon. In the 1990s, Woody Allen was accused of molesting his daughter. In the 1970s, Roman Polanski pled guilty to raping a 13-year-old girl. In the 1960s, Alfred Hitchcock sexually harassed Tippi Hedren, ruining her career following her rejection of his advances. Going further back, Eric Gill molested his daughters. Picasso was a misogynist. Gauguin had sex slaves in Tahiti. Wagner was an anti-Semite. Caravaggio was a murder. And these are just *some* of the well-known cases.

In earlier work (Archer and Matheson 2019, 2021), Alfred Archer and I investigated the ethics of honouring and admiring immoral artists. In the course of that earlier work, it was suggested that the life of the artist could, in some circumstances, affect the aesthetic value of her work. In this paper, I develop and defend this suggestion. I argue that an artwork loses aesthetic value when it has the moral function of illicitly attempting to excuse, justify, or condone the artist's immoral behaviour. I then argue that we can sometimes salvage these works by *re-interpreting* them such that they do not have this moral function. The upshot is that even if we "cancel" an artist, we don't necessarily have to "cancel" her work. I also consider how this relates to the distinct questions of how we experience the work of immoral artists and the ethics of engaging with the works of immoral artists.

The Ethical Criticism of Art and the Relativism of Distance

Ted Nannicelli (University of Queensland)

This paper begins by reviewing the recent literature in folk moral psychology that suggests the folk are meta-ethical pluralists – objectivists in some contexts and relativists in others. Taking the case of ancient Greek art that celebrates pederasty as a touchpoint, it suggests empirical work on the moral appraisal of art is likely to mesh with and lend additional support to this idea. The folk psychological findings do not entail the truth of meta-ethical pluralism, but they do deprive meta-ethical objectivism of its putative *prima facie* support. I argue that moderate form of relativism about the ethical appraisal of artworks that is worth taking seriously – Bernard Williams's relativism of distance – and that could offer an account of folk meta-ethical pluralism that renders it more coherent than it might appear to be.

Imaginative Resistance and the Statues We Cannot Stand

Silvia Caprioglio Panizza (Centre for Ethics, Pardubice)

Recent years have seen a growing debate around the toppling of statues once erected to celebrate individuals who, besides being political or military leaders, or precisely in those roles, were also guilty of various crimes. Only, those actions were not at the time publicly considered crimes; but they are now. Arguments both in favour and against the removal of statues point, among other things, to the intention and message of the statues, which takes us back to their context of production. I propose to think about this question using ideas introduced in the discussion of imaginative resistance: the difficulty we have, in fiction, in imagining that something we consider evil is good. We can imagine all sorts of counterfactuals, but the moral case seems different. Applied to the question of statues, artworks that celebrate an individual we find morally despicable cause similar resistance: such resistance can be understood, I suggest, as the impossibility of transporting ourselves into a context — here the context of production—where what we now think of as abhorrent or cruel was considered laudable or heroic. Upon this framework, I will consider the nature and ethical implications of such resistance.

Production-Oriented Ethical Criticism, Character, and the Importance of Perspectives

Panos Paris (Cardiff University)

I will discuss three underspecified features of the production-oriented approach to ethical criticism: (a) its lack of a positive argument for how ethical flaws/merits detract from or contribute to a work's aesthetic value; (b) its openness about the possibility of immoralism; and (c) the degree of its distinctness from perspectivism. I will argue that one plausible way of developing these three aspects of the production-oriented approach—which builds on the moral beauty view and corresponding argument for ethicism—suggests that production-oriented ethical criticism should be construed in terms of ethicism rather than simply moderate moralism, and may turn out to be closer to perspectivism—as well as some of its interpretative difficulties—than it initially appears to be. And yet, far from undermining the spirit of the production-oriented approach, these considerations appear to further support the importance of taking into account medium-specific considerations and the context of creation in the ethical criticism of art.

Artistic Production and the *Qua* Problem

Nils-Hennes Stear (University of Hamburg)

Suppose a theorist shows an ethical flaw in an artwork that determines its aesthetic value in some way at least. The so-called "*qua* problem" is the problem such a theorist faces in showing that it is *qua* ethical value that this determination happens (rather than in virtue of some more incidental feature of the work). The *qua* problem has been thought to affect what Ted Nannicelli calls 'perspectivist' theories. In this paper, I consider whether and to what extent theories that focus on artistic production can avoid the problem.

Four Kinds of Values in the Representational Arts

Enrico Terrone (University of Genoa)

The paper offers a framework for discussing the ethical criticism of representational art. I characterize the latter as involving a twofold perspective which consists of an external perspective on the work of art and an internal perspective on the world represented. Traditional criticism aims to articulate the aesthetic value of the work of art from the external perspective while production-oriented ethical criticism aims to articulate the ethic value of the work of art from the external perspective. They both downplay the internal perspective. I will argue that, in the representational arts, aesthetic and ethic evaluations from an external perspective depend upon aesthetic and ethic evaluations from an internal perspective. I will consider the rough hero as a paradigm of the relevance of the internal perspective to the external evaluation. I will conclude that clarifying the relationship between internal and external values is crucial to understanding how representational works of arts can be evaluated in ethic and aesthetic terms.

The main co-ordinator of the conference:

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