

James Harold. *Dangerous Art: On Moral Criticism of Artwork.* Oxford University Press 2020. 208 pp. \$65.00 USD (Hardcover 9780197519769).

The debate concerning the relationship between aesthetic and ethical value is a popular one among aestheticians, yet the last decade has seen precious few monographs on it. James Harold's *Dangerous Art: On Moral Criticism of Artworks* is one of these (the other being Ted Nannicelli's *Artistic Creation and Ethical Criticism*, Oxford University Press 2020), and it is thus a welcome contribution that promises to change the debate in at least three ways: by broadening and diversifying the philosophical backdrop against which the debate plays out; by shifting our focus from artworks' intrinsic or inherent moral flaws and ethical evaluation to a concern with causal effects and the consequences of producing and engaging with different artworks; and by offering a novel account of autonomism. It's a thought-provoking read that takes its promises seriously, and it will be useful in both teaching and research contexts, thanks to its diverse array of views and compelling discussions.

The book is organized into two parts. In the first part, Harold explores what it is to morally evaluate artworks in general, and how we should go about doing so. There's much to learn, not least from Harold's illuminating discussions of three debates from different traditions in chapter 1—which help diversify the aesthetics and ethics discourse—and his insistence that the morally relevant effects of art should feature more prominently in that discourse. These debates also serve as the thematic bedrock of the book's first part.

The first debate, between Mengzi and Xunzi, who disagreed over the benefits of art when compared to its costs, provides the basis for chapter 2, where Harold argues that philosophers have ill-advisedly paid inadequate attention to art's moral effects on us, focusing almost exclusively on artworks' intrinsic moral character. Harold argues that there's a *prima facie* case for thinking that art can affect our character and behaviour, sometimes for the worse. If so, he argues, given that philosophers of art do care about the nonmoral effects of art on its audience, simplicity and consistency should compel them to also consider the moral ones.

Chapter 3 takes its cue from another debate between W.E.B. Du Bois and Alain Locke, who disagreed over what the duties of black artists are vis-à-vis their works' moral character, to consider 'whether the moral character of the artist affects the moral status of the work' (52). He distinguishes two versions of this question. The first is whether such artists' works themselves are somehow morally bad. Harold answers this in the negative. Secondly, Harold asks whether it's morally problematic for audiences to continue associating themselves with the work of such artists. Here, Harold says yes, at least sometimes (53). The author's discussion of both questions contains interesting ideas, including discussions of phenomena like 'magical contagion' and the role of aesthetic communities formed by 'people who care about artworks and the artists that produce them' (63). Harold argues that there are three important features to such communities—the role of the artist; the importance of moral themes in their work; and the community's public salience—which partly determine how audiences ought to respond to artworks by immoral artists.

The next chapter takes on the issue of moral understanding, drawing on the famous debate between Plato and Aristotle. Here, Harold argues that any propositional moral knowledge to be gained by art is trivial, and that approaching art with a view to gaining such knowledge is at odds with key aspects of aesthetic engagement. Instead, he thinks that art is more promising when it comes to non-propositional knowledge and closes the chapter by suggesting that art is no less capable of clouding our moral understanding than it is of enlightening us.

Many of Harold's claims in these chapters are plausible and convincing, though some more than others. For instance, Harold is surely correct to point out that most art should be approached for its playfulness, for piquing our curiosity, or for getting us to think about something, rather than for teaching us, and hence that we should not approach or evaluate artworks as 'moral teachers or debate partners' (95). But this should not blind us to the fact that art was designed to be didactic and to teach us propositions and that this doesn't necessarily compromise its value. Indeed, storytelling as a whole has plausibly partly evolved for this purpose, and many fables and fairytales are clearly meant to drive lessons home.

The fifth chapter largely crystallizes the arguments of the first half of the book, focusing on the purported link between artworks and persons that underlies views focusing on artworks' intrinsic moral qualities. Such views standardly hold that artworks, being purposefully made and often with an intention to communicate certain ideas or emotions, can manifest or express certain attitudes or perspectives on their subject. But how can inanimate objects—artefacts—communicate emotions or attitudes, which are ordinarily reserved for minded agents? According to many philosophers, such attitudes are traceable to a 'manifested artist' and their discernible choices in artworks, which amount to evidence of such attitudes or emotions. Thus, insofar as artworks can express the emotions or attitudes of their manifested artists, and given that such attitudes or emotions are amenable to moral praise or criticism depending on whether or not they are morally appropriate given the subject, or given the purpose they are serving, such works can be said to possess an intrinsic moral character.

However, Harold thinks that such proposals anthropomorphize artworks (96), and rely on too elaborate a theoretical structure to be worth their salt. Let me explain. Harold tells us that ordinary folk discussing art and morality are mostly concerned with art's effects on us, which is a pretty straightforward affair, at least in the sense that art can have effects on us, and we don't need sophisticated theories to explain this. By contrast, since inanimate artefacts can't express emotions or manifest attitudes, those who think art can be criticized morally in light of manifested attitudes, emotions, and perspectives, resort to elaborate theories to make sense of how art can manifest such things, given that artworks are inanimate artefacts. But Harold thinks that this is unnecessarily baroque, and that it fails to view artworks as what they really are: artefacts, which, like other artefacts, should be judged on the basis of their effects on us. Instead, views that insist on focusing on their intrinsic moral character mistakenly treat artworks as persons.

This is an interesting argument, that, like previous ones, seeks to get philosophers to focus more on the effects of artworks on their audiences and the appreciative communities they form, than just the works themselves. But, first, importantly, these approaches aren't mutually exclusive. Moreover, I suspect that Harold's argument is unlikely to convince those who already approach art for, at least partly, the attitudes it manifests. (It's worth saying, perhaps, that—contrary to Harold—I suspect that this includes most people, though I'm not so sure how to resolve this disagreement without asking people.) This is because, like other artefacts, artworks are of a specific type. They have certain functions and are surrounded by practices of criticism and appreciation, which themselves ground reasons. Since time immemorial, artworks were thought to be imbued with emotional qualities, particularly, though not exclusively, in non-Western traditions. Japanese landscape painting, for instance, conveys the wisdom and virtues of the painter through a sense of peacefulness, serenity, and a feeling of being at home in nature. Christian painting aims at conveying piety and religious vision. Whether it makes sense to see works in these ways cannot be tackled independently of the practices against which such artworks are produced and appreciated.

Harold's argument draws on an analogy with engagement rings, writing that under the approach whereby we morally evaluate artworks for the attitudes they display, it's 'hard to see how one does not end up morally criticizing other artifacts, like engagement rings when they are used to celebrate bad marriages and morally excellent when they celebrate good ones' (43). If an engagement celebrates an immoral marriage, are we to morally criticize the ring? Of course not, but that's because moral criticism is not part and parcel of engagement ring appreciation, in the way that it is of artistic appreciation. Moreover, engagement rings—at least most of them, which presumably aren't works of art—differ from artworks that are communicative of, *inter alia*, perspectives, ideas, attitudes, etc., via intentions, or interpretations that postulate intentions of manifested artists (cf. Nils-Hennes Stear, 'Autonomism,' in *The Oxford Handbook of Ethics and Art*, ed. James Harold, Oxford University Press, forthcoming). These points are commonplace in much discourse in aesthetics and art theory, and for the analogy to work, Harold will need to challenge this orthodoxy, a momentous task, if achievable.

In the second part of the book, developed over three more chapters, Harold turns to more mainstream, second-order questions concerning the place of moral evaluation in the aesthetic evaluation of artworks. The author first offers some reason to think that there is, in fact, a difference between moral and aesthetic value, which, he acknowledges, not everyone accepts. Thus, in chapter 6, Harold discusses 'value scheme relativism' (100), which concerns cultural differences in ways of carving out the domain of value. For instance, cultures like that of ancient Greece, Yoruba, or Classical China, maintained a conceptual and metaphysical link between moral and aesthetic value. If there were no difference between aesthetic and moral value, and corresponding evaluations, then there would be no question as to whether artworks' aesthetic value is affected by their moral value. Harold's response to this form of relativism is to take it seriously as a threat to the debate, and develop an expressivist account of value, influenced by Alain Locke, on which value judgements are constituted by 'the "feeling mode" that accompanies them' and are 'distinguished from one another in terms of the different types of feelings and dispositions that accompany them' (109). Harold thinks that this account makes sense of much that goes on in making judgments of value and helps explain at least some phenomena that might lead us to adopt a more unified account of moral and aesthetic value. Thereby Harold offers some reason for thinking that distinguishing between ethical and aesthetic value is at least potentially a good idea.

In chapter 7, he offers seven differences between aesthetic and moral judgements, based on his expressivist account of value. Of these, five are fairly standard in the literature, covering emotional content, scope, acquaintance, practicality, and strength of feeling. But two are less familiar, and are based on structural 'features of how we value and how we *reason* about and with our evaluations' (130).

These chapters contain interesting and remarkably clear discussions. And of course, the idea that there is an important distinction between moral and aesthetic value underlies much of the remainder of Harold's arguments, as it does much of contemporary Anglophone philosophy. So Harold deserves credit for going out of his way to offer reasons for accepting it, where others largely take it for granted. However, I did find myself somewhat surprised that although Harold saw value scheme relativism as threat, he did not discuss views within his own philosophical tradition that hold that at some moral and aesthetic properties are connected, as do those subscribing to the existence of moral beauty and ugliness.

Having accounted for the distinction between aesthetic and ethical value, chapter 8 finally asks whether the moral value of an artwork affects its aesthetic value and, if so, how, before chapter 9 recapitulates the key claims of the book, and applies some of the theoretical resources and

conclusions on the questions of whether entire genres can be morally criticized, how individual works can be criticized, and on the three debates from chapter 1.

Harold's answer to the aesthetic-ethical interaction question is autonomism, but with a twist. For while standard accounts of autonomism hold that, while amenable to both aesthetic and moral evaluation, artworks' moral merits and demerits do not contribute to or detract from their aesthetic merit, Harold defines autonomism as '[t]he view that a person who reaches a moral verdict μ and an aesthetic verdict α of the same object or event is not rationally required to adjust α in light of μ or to adjust μ in light of α ' (147). According to Harold, then, the truth of autonomism turns not on a descriptive question about the relationship between aesthetic and moral value, but on a normative issue, which boils down to whether a person in this situation is rationally compelled to shift her aesthetic evaluation. Harold here suggests that no reasons are forthcoming. The notion of rationality, moreover, itself turns on the notion of internal reasons, that is, reasons that one is sensitive to as a result of their affective and motivational profile.

In the second part of the book, then, Harold presents us with a refreshing perspective on a continuing debate, and offers us more novel angles and ideas on the debate than many other contributions to the topic. What's less clear to me is whether Harold's contributions really amount to much progress in the debate. For instance, I'm not sure that understanding autonomism normatively, and focusing on rationality, will get us very far. In this respect, Harold's account feels like it's passing a substantial buck—a move that's becoming fashionable in recent aesthetics—this time on the question of how individuals (or communities) should conceive of the ethical and aesthetic evaluations of artworks. This is because the turn from questions about the values themselves to question about reasons available to someone making an evaluation eschews some really difficult questions in aesthetics, ethics, and the relationship between them, viz., precisely the kinds of questions raised by, among others, Wang Yangming (discussed in chapter 6), and which concern how we decide to understand our key concepts, if we are to live our life best.

But, once seen in this way, some might think that the question of whether one has reason to alter one's evaluation of a work of art qua artwork in light of one's moral evaluation of it has an obvious answer: yes, if they want to be a better person in general. No, if we compartmentalize reason, and see it, for example, as being independent of virtue considerations. I too, of course, may be prejudging here. But this is precisely the lesson we should take away from this debate: our aesthetic responses, and views concerning aesthetic value, are based on our own experiences, values, and goals, viz., on our character. These will also determine what we consider to be the rational thing to do in such cases. We are, then, once again at a stalemate in the moralism debate. But at least this way of seeing the debate is different from that adopted by most participants. Whether others will accept the call to view the debate from this standpoint remains to be seen. If they do, however, I hope they won't ignore the deep, hard questions.

All in all, Harold's book contains important insights, displays broad scholarship, and offers clear, lucid discussions of many views obscured in the debate concerning the interaction between aesthetics and ethics. But there are omissions too. I particularly noticed the sparsity of citations of recent contributions to the aesthetics-ethics interaction debate. Moreover, the book sometimes reads more like three fragments—the first chapters on moral evaluation, the bits on value scheme relativism and expressivism, and finally the discussion of autonomism—than a unified account. Still, this may be a merit, particularly in teaching contexts, where it could be read selectively. Ultimately, though, Harold's introduction of a broad range of debates and questions, his case for considering the effects of art on us, and his shift of vantage point on the relationship between the ethical and aesthetic evaluation of artworks, are all valuable contributions to the debate and will likely influence its future

direction, opening up new horizons for discussion and research.

Panos Paris, Cardiff University