

Contemporary Aesthetics

Volume 15 (2017)

1-1-2017

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Art by Jerks

Bernard Wills & Jason Holt

Abstract

Is it wrong to enjoy art created by immoral people? Some people express discomfort with listening to or reading the works of artists who have been abusive to others in their personal lives. In this paper, the authors argue that, generally speaking, moral and aesthetic judgment should be kept distinct, as authors and their works formally differ. Indeed, works by morally dubious artists may well contain crucial acts of moral imagination we should not deprive ourselves of as ethical beings. Nonetheless, the authors argue there are limits to how far the ethical and aesthetic can be divorced. Art that is completely divorced from the good ceases thereby to be art no matter what its formal beauty. Thus, it is possible, in principle, to identify works of art whose authorship would be an obstacle to aesthetic appreciation.

Key Words

art; beauty; evil; imagination; judgment; morality

1. Introduction

One of the pleasures of social media is finding oneself debating complete strangers on fundamental questions of philosophy. One of the present authors' encounters in the agora of the internet concerned the question of morality and art. It is well known that many first-rate artists are also first-rate jerks.^[1] Some seem to believe that this must be an illusion. Whatever appears to be the case, it must be that these artists are, in fact, overrated. Thus we have those who argue that Wagner, say, was not such a great composer after all. We, however, have ears and can tell that the moral stature of the man hardly registers on the scale of so monumental an achievement as the *Ring*, even if some of what bothers us about the man can be read into certain parts of that particular *Gesamtkunstwerk*. We will proceed from the assumption that this is a real issue, that great, inspiring art can come from perfectly horrid people.

Some people, such as DJ NDN of the hip-hop/dance/electronica group A Tribe Called Red, are bothered by this. In a recent CBC article that sparked the interesting little online debate mentioned above, he informs us that he has stopped playing publicly or listening privately to a host of artists, including David Bowie, Led Zeppelin, James Brown, Afrika Bambaataa, and Chris Brown.^[2] The reason he gives is that these artists have behaved or are suspected of behaving abusively towards minors and/or women. As a man with young daughters, he is rightly bothered by this: "There's all these people who have done harm.... Everybody seems okay with that as long as they make good music." In this paper we will defend just this proposition. Note that we are not okay with bad behavior. We are however okay with enjoying the artistic creations of people who behave badly, within certain limits that will be discussed below.

This is not an obvious or easy question to answer. Indeed, there are, in fact, a number of distinct questions at play here, as there are at least five different kinds of artist in question. There are artists who, on the balance, seem to have been admirable people, and others, like Homer, whose moral sensibilities are often remote from ours by reason of their great antiquity. We obviously deprecate the piratical tendencies of Odysseus but it is far from clear that Homer does. Chaucer's *Prioress' Tale* may be abhorrent to us but that Jews were child killers was, as far as his audience was concerned, often believed.^[3] Secondly, there are artists, like Tolstoy or Dickens, who managed to be flawed people in spite of the fact that their authorial voices are humane and indeed a crucial source of moral insight for their readers. Thirdly, there are morally ambivalent artists, like Wagner or Céline, people whose art seems unquestionably important but who also embody cultural and political values that are dubious, in the first case, and downright cracked in the second. Fourthly, there are artists, like Eric Gill and Caravaggio, whose works are of undeniable merit but who are reprehensible as people. Finally, there are artists, like Sade and Genet, who revel in depictions of criminality and bestial behavior. Like the first group, they lived or are reputed to have lived just as they wrote or painted or composed.

The first group is not problematic, obviously. We take the last group to also be unproblematic. People who live their art are inviting judgments on their character and their art together, as they make no separation between the two. That Sade actually attempted the sadistic deeds described at such length in *Justine* and *120 Days of Sodom* kills his books for many people, for they then become not fantasy but an implicit apology for his own brutishness. Consequently, many readers steer clear of them.^[4]

Before proceeding further, though, it will help to draw certain relevant distinctions. First, as a matter of principle, works and their creators are normally distinct entities. A moral flaw in one need not, by itself, imply a corresponding flaw in the other, and naively supposing otherwise is to commit either the guilt-by-association or the genetic fallacy.^[5] The legitimacy of supposing some connection between the moral status of a work and that of its progenitor will depend on such criteria as the potential explanatory value of such a connection. An artist's character flaws and strengths will often reveal themselves strikingly or subtly in art.

Secondly, we should be clear to distinguish the moral status of a work from the moral status of its content. Presenting content that is morally good, bad, or indifferent is, by itself, irrelevant to the moral status of the work as a whole. Everything here depends on how such content is framed by the artist and, correspondingly, the attitude suggested by the work. Thirdly, and a related issue, is being clear about the difference between one's actual reactions to works and artists, or descriptive matters, and those that one should or should not and may or may not have, or normative issues. Some of our reactions may be obligatory or permissible but others may not be either. One need not justify failing to read Genet, as subjective preferences suffice here, but we might question whether avoiding him altogether out of moral compunction is fair. After all, some have found a great freeing of the mind in reading his work. Likewise, fourth, we should clearly distinguish moral from aesthetic standards. Even if we are right to believe that ethics trumps aesthetics, often, if not always, our verdict on a work need not be univocal. There is nothing inherently wrong in having divided moral and aesthetic verdicts on a work of art, just as with people or anything else.

2. Character flaws and propaganda

To return to the point above, it is the middle cases that interest us, and it is these that we will treat.^[6] First off, let us say that we are not unsympathetic to DJ NDN and others who have taken the same position. Indeed, we would be hypocritical if we were. Ages ago, one of us, too, renounced listening to a favorite musician out of religious scruples. More recently, the other of us has found his appreciation of a certain filmmaker to have ebbed significantly given unsavory revelations about the director's life, not as a conscious moral decision but rather because many of those films now inevitably appear in a somewhat different light. Yet DJ NDN and we are open to some telling objections.

The first and most obvious one is that good artists who are good people and have only sound opinions about the world are vanishingly rare. What art would we be able to enjoy under such moral hygiene? Indeed, where do we draw the line? DJ NDN mentions artists who have sexually abused minors or physically abused women, but why restrict our judgment to these forms of criminality? Villon was a thief and inveterate rogue. Nina Simone was a physically and verbally abusive parent. What about Dostoevsky's addiction to gambling? What about hard drugs? Are tax cheats, like Willie Nelson, off limits? What about artists we enjoy but whose biographies we have not yet read? Are we obligated to investigate their lives for potential crimes against women and children?

Secondly, this principle seems to ignore moral luck. Blues, jazz, and hip-hop are fundamental artistic forms in which African Americans have expressed themselves. Yet they are products of an oppressed people with many of the social and personal pathologies that often attend that oppression. Bourgeois liberal morality, admirable or not, may well be a luxury people from the underclass can ill afford, and the lives of many jazz and blues giants surely reflect this pressure. One of the complicating aspects of this debate is that the artistic forms most often brought up for censure, such as hip-hop, are forms created by and for the oppressed and disadvantaged. This surely complicates the profile of moral complaint.

At any rate, people are often inconsistent in these judgments. Why, for instance, do many people who disdain the films of Riefenstahl admire those of Eisenstein when both filmmakers performed comparable services for their respective tyrants? Of course, these cases are rather complex. In the Riefenstahl case, it is extremely difficult to watch *Triumph of the Will*, which documents the Nazi rallies at Nuremberg, celebrating the key figures and highlighting the speeches of the Nazi elite, despite the awesomeness of the spectacle and the aesthetic quality and power of the film.^[7] The morally abhorrent content and circumstances of this "docuganda" simply cannot be ignored, either as a matter of fact or as a matter of conscience.

However, things are rather different when it comes to Riefenstahl's *Olympia*, a double-feature-length documentary of the 1936 Berlin Olympics. *Olympia* was also commissioned by the Nazis and contains significant though subtler strains of Nazi propaganda, with an unsurprising focus on the achievements of "beswastikaed" German athletes and victories. In the pistol shooting sequence, for instance, most competitors are shot from similar normal angles, whereas a Nazi shooter is shot from a closer, much lower angle, creating a more imposing

impression that accentuates the size and threat of the Nazi figure.

Olympia, however, is comparatively easy to watch, and this need not imply a moral flaw in the observer, as would likely be the case if one reveled in *Triumph* while ignoring the relevant moral issues. This is, in part, because the propaganda is subtler, the real world more intrusive. *Olympia* might well have been intended to celebrate the Führer overseeing a showcase of Nazi superiority, but how moving, how profound, how sublime it is to see those historic gold medal performances by Jesse Owens through Riefenstahl's lens under Hitler's gaze! Clearly a work of art can become more compelling if it, even unconsciously, questions or subverts its own stated aims!^[8]

Still, we do not think these points are entirely decisive. This is because, in spite of all we have said above, there seems to be something sound about the intuition that the beautiful is related in some way to the good. A beautifully shaped sonnet that described in loving detail the torture and murder of a child would not win our admiration no matter how exquisite. Berys Gaut describes such ethicism as the view that "the ethical assessment of attitudes manifested by works of art is a legitimate aspect of the aesthetic evaluation of those works...."^[9] Similarly, perhaps, the discovery that a fine painting was actually produced by a Hannibal Lecter or an Adolf Hitler would diminish it in our eyes, especially as we would be keenly motivated to scrutinize the work for symptoms of their psychopathologies.^[10]

Clearly, the freedom of artistic creation from moral boundaries has its limits, however hard it may be to say just where those limits lie. We can all see that Lars von Trier's *Nymphomaniac* is one thing and the run of the mill products of the porn industry are another. Again, we may judge with a kind of dispassion that *Triumph of the Will* is a great artistic achievement but there would be something seriously wrong if, with our knowledge of history, we were able to *watch* the film and not have our aesthetic appreciation for its artistry clouded or compromised by an aversion to Nazi ideology.^[11] With this in mind, then, we will try to be true to two intuitions that both seem to us sufficiently firm if not absolutely solid: that aesthetic judgment is independent of moral judgment, and that this independence is not absolute but can legitimately be challenged in some instances.

3. Cultural distance and moral complexity

Let us deal with the categories of artist we mentioned above. The first is easiest to deal with. If the *Hebrew Bible* and the *Iliad* live for us today, it is not because of the slaughter of the Amalekites or the sacrifice of the Trojan prisoners to the ghost of Patroclus. To use an old-fashioned term, these texts live because they are sublime. They create secondary worlds that are both grandly inspiring and intimately human. Across the centuries we find our most fundamental questions about ourselves confronted and addressed, in spite of cultural barriers that would seem insurmountable. Is there any other poem about war as truthful as the *Iliad*? Has our yearning for justice ever found purer expression than the poetry of *Amos*? That the creators of these works have what we would now consider moral blind-spots means only that they are human like us. We should all be humbled by the thought that readers a thousand years from now may find us bizarre and repellent. On this point we are happy to cite Shelley's "A Defence of Poetry":

Nor let it be objected that these characters [i.e., in Homer] are remote from moral perfection and that they can by no means be considered as edifying patterns for general imitation. Every epoch, under names more or less specious, has deified its peculiar errors... but a poet considers the vices of his contemporaries as a temporary dress in which his creations must be arrayed, and which cover without concealing the eternal proportions of their beauty.^[12]

Shelley's language may seem quaint to the contemporary reader, but the idea he is driving at here seems to us apt. For Shelley, the aesthetic beauty of a character, even the moral beauty of a character, consists in the play of energy bounded by form. It does not exist in an arbitrary perfectionism. Achilles is thrilling for the authenticity and intensity of his passion and intellect, even though this may express itself in deeds of dreadful baseness as much as in acts that are beautiful. This spirit and energy is his character, which would be ruined for us as much by excessive goodness as by excessive evil. The free play of both is essential to the tension that makes for the energy and activity that manifests beauty. Indeed, essential to any drama is the struggle of personal character with the moral expectations of one's time and place. The "vices and errors" Shelley refers to are essential to the beauty of the effect. A poet of any age or culture is capable of beauty in this sense, and that is why we can appreciate *Beowulf* as much as we can Brodsky. Shelley points us in a direction that allows us to see the goodness or beauty of a poetic creation in terms not reducible to moral rectitude as this or that time or culture conceives it.

On one level such attitudes may seem prejudicial, but that is not especially problematic if we concern ourselves with our own individual

tastes and the obvious fact that attention and time have limits. There is only so much art we can devote time and attention to, and there is nothing wrong with making such choices in terms of preferences that are themselves arbitrary at base. One's love of *film noir* licenses and explains watching with great interest and deep satisfaction quite mediocre examples of the genre, even though one thereby forgoes watching objectively better films from other genres. Nothing wrong there, so long as it is clear that one isn't making an objective claim about the relative merits of *film noir*. One may also choose not to engage certain artworks, again arbitrarily, not on the basis of the works themselves but because of what one feels or thinks of the artist. Such selection may not be fair either to the work or to the artist, especially the more persuaded we are that truly original and insightful art is a particularly scarce resource. If we never read Hemingway because we have heard he was some kind of macho chauvinist, we might be not only foregoing a rare literary pleasure but also mistreating both him and his work, him by uncritically accepting an unfair gloss on his character, and his work because of its aesthetic power and nuanced treatment of such issues as caricature Hemingway is entirely unaware. *The Sun Also Rises* alone kills the caricature.

At any rate, few works of art, ancient or modern, are lessened by the moral complexity and ambiguity of their characters but usually immeasurably enhanced. There are specific works like folk tales, parables, and fables, of course, that depend on simplicity for their effect but, in general, subtle delineation of the shades of human character is valued by readers and critics. However, can this effect be ruined by the personal life of an artist? Are there artists so objectionable as people that we cannot enjoy and indeed should not enjoy their art? As a matter of principle rather than preference, only in extreme cases.

An artist as a human may be callous, lecherous, vain, spiteful, or otherwise. Nothing of this is surprising, as we can all identify some or something of these traits in ourselves, not as outright evils but as the ordinary imperfections of life. That Keats was a nicer man than Tolstoy, and Tolstoy a nicer man than Dickens, reflects the ordinary range of human personality in which artists do not differ much, if at all, from most other people. This is why we accept, say, that Tolstoy's moral imagination, so powerfully expressed in his art, was not always so powerfully expressed in his daily life. The artist is not the person. The mind at play in the work is greater and freer than the mind of the empirical individual. It is at work in creating a moral landscape for characters to inhabit but this function is different, as Shelley says, from the capacity to make abstract distinctions about the good and from the will to enact them. It is entirely possible that the hypertrophic development of the first capacity may hinder the growth and development of the second, so that every great artist pays a price as a human being. Nonetheless, we think Shelley is probably right to emphasize that moral imagination, that is, the capacity to imagine significant moral conflicts and embody them in situations, is essential to the development of morality as a necessary but, alas, not sufficient condition. Such an imaginative capacity is one thing, a vital thing, but the will to act morally is another. The first has its own necessity and integrity, its own freedom that the moralist must respect.

4. How immoral? How intrusive?

Nonetheless, this distinction can be sorely tested. We think this is the case when an artist's vices are not ordinary vices of passion but have a cold calculating aspect. The cool head and icy heart that plans a mass murder is just what we do not want in an artist.^[13] The art of a Hannibal Lecter could be a triumph of intellect in shaping intricate form, perhaps, but not of warmth or sympathetic imagination. If a mass murderer or serial killer were also a fine poet, this total disjunction would itself be a kind of ugliness or aesthetic imperfection. Art that ceases utterly to be good thereby ceases to be art. Under this limitation no painting of a Hitler or a Hannibal Lecter could possess an unspoiled beauty no matter how seemingly exquisite the brushwork, although short of such extremes we seem permissibly able to value Eric Gill's sculpture and typeface.^[14] Here we might agree with Simone Weil's assertion that the songs of the emperor Nero may have been technically fine but as art could only have been second rate, a decadent imitation of their betters.^[15] Compare this cold-hearted aestheticism to the wonderful poems of Francois Villon. Is it not plain that this thief and scoundrel wins our sympathy by being in the grip of self-destructive passions and mystifying compulsions just as we ourselves too often are? A great sinner can create great art, while an inhuman monster cannot.

Finally, what of the Wagners, the Pounds and Célines, those artists who challenge us by the repugnant nature of their political or social views? Wagner's political and social views are a matter of some interpretive complexity but the latter two were clearly and unambiguously racists. Moreover, their racism is part and parcel of their work. Indeed, Céline wrote genocidal tracts in the mid-1930s, when he was under no apparent compulsion to do so. Again one could make the obvious point that people show no consistency here. Associations with right-wing

totalitarianism put an artist's work in question but associations with left-wing totalitarianism do not. Nobody takes Hugh MacDiarmid to be a lesser artist for writing the *First Hymn to Lenin*, even though Lenin was a murderer. Does this reflect anything but the fact that Stalinists were on our side in World War II while Fascists were not? Perhaps, but perhaps it also reflects the fact that we can believe ourselves to have been attracted to Communism out of a noble sympathy for workers or the poor, whereas we like to think that we could never have been attracted to Fascism, which is probably untrue, as the current political climate suggests of surprisingly many people. Either way, the complacency of our attitude here may well give us pause.

This is only a partial answer, however. Controversy arises because the Wagners and the Célines obviously have done something very good yet, potentially, at least, very bad, to say nothing of unambiguous cases like the crimes of an Eric Gill or a Caravaggio. We suppose this partly concerns the fact that someone who thinks that Wagner's music is beautiful might be more kindly disposed to his anti-Semitism than they would otherwise have been. Frankly, we don't think this happens. There may be all kinds of reasons why someone becomes a pedophile but admiring Eric Gill's sculpture or Nabokov's fiction is not one of them. We could be wrong about this, but we strongly suspect that most admirers of these artists are generally well-educated people who would not be attracted to the deplorable crimes these artists have committed, as with Gill, or depicted, as with Nabokov. Conversely, we sincerely doubt that the average white supremacist would sit through even five minutes of *Parsifal*. More problematic, however, is the fact that respect for the victims of such ideologies seems incompatible with enjoying the art of their proponents.^[16] But one can indeed enjoy Wagner's musical works and still dismiss his anti-Semitic views. Anti-Semitism is not expressed in Wagner's musical works.

This problem is even more acute in the case of Céline's novels, for, unlike Wagner, he was alive during and complicit in the events in question. Here we must say that we would not blame anybody who refuses to read novels like *Castle to Castle* or *Rigadoon*. However, we feel compelled to say one thing in their defense. Unlike Riefenstahl's films, they are *not* propaganda; Céline's mordant wit and nihilistic zest spare no one, least of all his own side. Nor has anyone else quite so vividly captured the chaotic insanity of a crumbling Nazi regime. These admirable aesthetic qualities stay with the reader far longer than the anti-Semitic jibes and rants about the Yellow Menace peppering his works. One might ask how Céline could have chronicled the fall of Germany with such hallucinatory intensity if he had not been, at least partly, an insider. This is to say that even in very problematic works there can be a kind of integrity that moves us to proper respect, if not permissible love. As the theologians used to say, evil is always parasitic on some good, and if the corruption of Céline's genius is an issue, it is because he had a genius to corrupt. Readers and listeners retain the right to weigh the problematic aspects of these artists and others like them against the very obvious gains in appreciation and perception they offer. Someone who ignores Wagner on moral grounds may well be forgoing crucial insight into the power and nature of myth and the expressive potential of music. Moreover, *Parsifal* is a morally good tale, and *Siegfried* is an exploration of Romantic morality.

Be that as it may, there may be little danger of adopting an artist's moral flaws just because we admire their works but there are other more likely tendencies against which we should guard, even setting aside longstanding concerns about art's potentially corrupting influence.^[17] There is sometimes a tendency to be more forgiving of artists as people because of their art, to cut them more slack because, despite their personal failings, on balance they have had a positive influence on the culture. Roman Polanski might be taken as a textbook case. We might say this of a Caravaggio, too. To forgive art the artist is one thing, but to forgive the artist because of the art is another.

A related pernicious tendency is that of unduly diminishing or denying the importance of the artist's immoral behavior when we happen to like their work. Even worse than this, we often cling to an unwarranted skepticism about allegations against our favorite artists, assuming so heavy a burden of proof that almost nothing could count as sufficient evidence of their guilt, despite the principled difference between the artistic status of the work and the moral status of the person who created it. Of course, our moral condemnation of an artist and his or her work is sometimes owing to what is later revealed to be bias if not outright prejudice. Formerly, much more widespread condemnations of homosexuality and other practices deemed decadent seemed to fit naturally with a failure to fully appreciate the work of an Oscar Wilde. Indeed, in such cases we see the power of art coming to redeem its artist from the unfortunate condemnation of a culture not yet enlightened enough to feel that no redemption is necessary. Sometimes appreciation of a work can open our eyes to moral progress in judging the artist themselves. Art can save artists from an otherwise undeserved fate.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, we think we have established that there are sound reasons for keeping ethical judgments and aesthetic judgments distinct, at least in most cases. At the same time, it must be admitted that this license cannot be absolute. There will remain works, or potential works, like an undiscovered masterpiece by a Hitler or a Hannibal Lecter, that we are probably wrong to enjoy. This depends, in the end, on what aesthetic qualities can be identified that are independent of or work contrary to the problematic aspects of an artistic vision. If Pound's poetic skills were spent entirely on elaborating anti-Semitic sentiments, then it is difficult to see why he should be read. In such a case, the style would merely be an ornament for objectionable content, and the work would fail aesthetically in addition to morally. Yet, as this is far from the case, each reader has a judgment call to make that cannot be universally prescriptive. Some may prefer to ignore Pound or other far-right leaning authors, such as Norway's Knut Hamsun, but nobody, as far as we can see, can be obligated to. In this way, we think that a balance has been struck between our right to freedom as appreciators of art and the genuine intuition that art that strays too far from the good thereby ceases to be art.

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Published on November 2, 2017.

Endnotes

Thanks to two anonymous reviewers for helpful comments.

[1] By 'jerk,' here we mean someone who, in him- or herself, or through his or her work, tends toward the negative side of the moral spectrum: ambiguous, flawed, or outright depraved. We will assume agreement on a common sense understanding of what things will count as artworks.

[2] "A Tribe Called Red's DeeJay NDN Takes Racist, Misogynistic Music off His Playlist," *cbc.ca*, last modified May 1, 2016, <http://www.cbc.ca/radio/unreserved/stepping-up-standing-out-and-making-change-1.3553520/a-tribe-called-red-s-deejay-ndn-takes-racist-misogynistic-music-off-his-playlist-1.3559459>, accessed November 11, 2016. As we shall see below, this is a question that bothers philosophers as much as pop artists.

[3] Even here Chaucer may be more contemporary than we think, as more than one reader has found some irony in the fact that the teller of this bloodthirsty tale is the delicate prioress.

[4] We have read some Genet, though only in translation. His works have merit but seem flawed in a way similar to William S. Burroughs, that is, both might have been better writers if they had been better people. Part of the problem seems to be that in their writing and/or lives some real flaws, for example, crime, are braided with what society no longer brands the same way such as homosexuality. Although what we see as the unevenness of Burroughs's writing is plausibly attributable to his drug use, for instance, such apparent connections might be only that, or it could be that his writing would have been inferior otherwise.

[5] For a rather extreme statement of the absolute divide between aesthetics and ethics, see William H. Gass, "Goodness Knows Nothing of Beauty: On the Distance Between Morality and Art," *Harper's*, 274, 1643 (April 1997), 37-44.

[6] Note though that if there can be a connection between moral failures in life and in art, there might also be a connection between moral successes in life and in art. What we like about Blake the person, to take one example, and what we like about Blake the poet might or might not be connected.

[7] For extensive discussion, see Mary Devereaux, "Beauty and Evil: The Case of Leni Riefenstahl's *Triumph of the Will*," in *Aesthetics and Ethics: Essays at the Intersection*, ed. Jerrold Levinson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. 227-256.

[8] We suppose one could say that at moments such as these, or the Odessa steps sequence in *Battleship Potemkin*, the artist triumphs over the propagandist so fully as to produce something human and moving irrespective of politics.

[9] Berys Gaut, "The Ethical Criticism of Art," in *Aesthetics and Ethics: Essays at the Intersection*, ed. Jerrold Levinson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. 182-203; ref. on 182.

[10] We know of course that Lecter is fictional and Hitler lacked the talent to produce such work, but that is beside the point.

[11] See Jason Holt, "Mumford on Aesthetic–Moral Interaction in Sport," *Journal of the Philosophy of Sport*, 44, 1 (2017), 72-80; ref. on 76-78.

[12] Percy Bysshe Shelley, "A Defence of Poetry," in *Selected Poetry and Prose*, ed. Harold Bloom (New York: Signet Classical Books, 1966), p. 425. One way of putting this is that "moral struggle" is more engaging aesthetically than moral perfection. Struggling towards the good makes a more satisfactory representation than simply possessing it.

[13] Even so, there does seem to be for artists acceptable variation on the spectrum between completely passionate inspiration and more concerted, reflective efforts, between what Nietzsche calls the Dionysian and the Apollonian in art. We should not denigrate a Bach in the face of a Beethoven, for instance.

[14] If we were to tease out what lies behind this assertion, we would say that part of the integrity of a work of art lies in its content, and, in line with what Arendt tells us of the banality of evil, it seems unlikely that the work of a sociopath or clinical narcissist would have the degree of insight or unclouded perception necessary to engage our interest no matter how much talent that person may possess. Having nothing to say about anyone but himself, the sociopath would bore us with his solipsism and his inability to perceive that things portentous to himself may be trivial to others. Putting aside one's ego for the integrity of the work of art seems to entail at least a minimum of virtue.

[15] Here is the full context of Weil's comment: "If the beautiful is the real presence of God in matter and if contact with the beautiful is a sacrament in the full sense of the word, how is it that there are so many perverted aesthetes? Nero. Is it like the hunger of those who frequent black masses for the consecrated hosts? Or is it, more probably, because these people do not devote themselves to what is genuinely beautiful, but to a bad imitation? For, just as there is an art which is divine, so there is one which is demoniacal. It was no doubt the latter that Nero loved." Weil: *Gravity and Grace*, trans. Crawford and Von de Ruhr (New York: Routledge Classics, 2003), p. 192.

[16] Right-wing extremists, for instance, spend little time discussing Céline's fiction. Their preference is for atrocious knockoffs like *The Camp of the Saints* and other works of no aesthetic significance. This, we suspect, is because hero worship is a core value of the far right and Céline's protagonists are relentlessly anti-heroic in conception. One might argue, for instance, that the true hero of Céline's war trilogy is his cat Bebert, who is no sort of Nazi but a creature innocently dedicated to his own survival.

[17] This concern may seem to apply whether art is either continuous or discontinuous with life. If the former, we risk being corrupted by immoral art; if the latter, we risk becoming aloof from life by engaging with any art at all. See Karen Hanson, "How Bad Can Good Art Be?" in *Aesthetics and Ethics: Essays at the Intersection*, ed. Jerrold Levinson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1998), pp. 204-226; ref. on 204-205.