

Unatoč ovim problemima, knjiga *Galileo's Error: Foundations for a New Science of Consciousness* poticajno je štivo vrijedno čitanja. Zbog jasnoće stila i neakadenskog karaktera, knjigu bih svakako preporučio čitateljima koji do sada nisu imali doticaja s ozbiljnim znanstvenim i filozofskim tekstovima. Također, zahvaljujući provokativnim prijedlozima i originalnim argumentima, u knjizi će svakako uživati i iskusniji čitatelji.

ANDREJ TOMIĆ
andrejtomic6@gmail.com
doi: 10.26362/20210109

Ted Nannicelli, *Artistic Creation and Ethical Criticism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020), 288 pp.

Ted Nannicelli has already established himself as an aesthetician who pushes the boundaries of philosophical exploration of art and art-related practices. Having developed a framework for a philosophical approach to television aesthetics in his previous work, in his new monograph he turns to the ethical criticism of art. His main concern is to establish the legitimacy of what he calls the production-oriented approach (hereafter POA), which is based on the premise that, when it comes to the ethical criticism of art, certain artworks should be evaluated from the standpoint of their production. In other words, it is the “medium of the artwork that is partly determinative of the sorts of ethical criticism to which it is open” (p. 72). Thus, what matters with photography, performance art, stand-up comedy, and environmental and animal art is not the perspective expressed by the work but the circumstances of its production. Most relevant among these is the moral character of the maker: when it figures into a causal explanation of the form or content (i.e., the identity) of the particular work, then the work’s artistic value can be marred by an ethically flawed character.

With its emphasis on production circumstances, the POA is advanced as an alternative to what Nannicelli perceives as a philosophically more dominant form of ethical art criticism, namely the Gaut/Kieran/Carroll-inspired perspectivism (P hereafter), itself a variant of the in-

terpretation-centered approach. According to P, an artwork is ethically evaluated according to the attitude or perspective advanced by the work. This approach is grounded in two debates dominant in contemporary philosophy of art: aesthetic cognitivism (AC) and the value-interaction debate (VID). According to AC, art is a source of knowledge, and one can learn something from it by attending to what it expresses. The VID centers on the conceptual issues regarding the mutual influence of the ethical and aesthetic dimensions in a work of art: does, can, or should an ethical flaw in the work (i.e., a morally blameworthy perspective that the work advances) mar the work's overall aesthetic/artistic value?

Both AC and the VID face certain issues, and the first part of the book is dedicated to exposing them. As Nannicelli points out, ethical criticism based on P is a "philosophers' only" game, which neither reaches a wider audience nor has any effect in the social/legal/political domain in which art evaluation matters. This is because it is hard to show that there in fact is a morally relevant impact of artwork on the audience, whether in terms of moral improvement or in terms of moral degradation. Nannicelli pointedly presents difficulties involved with empirical research on art's alleged influence on spectators' moral sensibility and overall behavior. These range from difficulties of designing the experiments to those regarding the techniques to measure the actual impact. A second reason for P's exclusion from the public space relates to theoretical difficulties underlying it: in order to claim that a certain work presents a certain perspective, one first needs to properly identify that perspective, which, in turn, implies that there are no competing interpretations of the work. Yet, as art lovers know too well, there is never a consensus on any interpretation. Furthermore, to support some such interpretation, we should know the author's intentions, which we rarely do. So, Nannicelli concludes (after much insightful discussion of the nature of interpretation and intentionalism/anti-intentionalism debate) there are no good reasons to assume that we can ever justifiably claim that a work advances a certain perspective.

Having thus exposed the troubles with P, Nannicelli turns to defend the POA. A crucial theoretical advantage of the POA is its alignment with our folk-critical practice regarding ethical evaluations generally: it assigns moral responsibility to artists, which is what we want our ethical criticism to do. Given that artworks are the products of intentional activities, their ethical assessments should take into consideration those who made them, which P cannot achieve. There are two theoretical claims

underlying the POA: virtue ethics, which attaches the moral value of the action to the character of the person performing the action, and contextualism, which sees the identity of a work of art as dependent on the context of the artistic creation. The challenge for Nannicelli is establishing the role of the artist's characters within that context, primarily in cases where the contexts of art creation and art evaluation differ. As he sees it, much more research, including research incorporating anthropology, moral psychology, and history, might be needed here.

In the second part, Nannicelli demonstrates the application of the POA. The five chapters dedicated to concrete instances and Nannicelli's analysis of them are an impressive body of work, highly enjoyable and thought-provoking. Nannicelli examines a remarkable array of cases, extending from photography (e.g., works by Hampus Lundgren and Sebastião Salgado) to animal (e.g., *Dogs that Cannot Touch Each Other*) and environmental art (*Endangered Garden*), to Marina Abramović and Suzanne Lacy's performances and stand-up gigs by Anthony Jeselnik, Dave Chappelle and Louis C. K. This part is extremely informative in giving context to the complexities involved in ethical criticism of art, and Nannicelli is to be commended for providing such a substantial analysis of these issues, ranging from photo-journalism to issues of child consent, word meaning, responsibility, etc. We also find pointers here on where not enough work has been done, as in Nannicelli's directing attention to the lack of critical discussion regarding animals in contemporary art within the art institution. The chapter on environmental art is particularly relevant for strengthening the ethics of the environment. Given the current issues with climate change, Nannicelli's manner of raising awareness of these issues is an immensely praiseworthy achievement.

Throughout this part, the author juxtaposes P and the POA and builds up a case for what, in conclusion, he calls applied ethics of artistic creation. While P can be valuable (primarily when narrative and representational art is concerned), Nannicelli insists that the POA is more attuned to popular criticism, and, more importantly, it "is more likely to result in real-world consequences" (p. 246) related to legal sanctions issued to the artists.

There is much to recommend in Nannicelli's book. We are sure it will open new pathways not only for aestheticians but, more importantly, for the public perception of art and its ethical dimension. Given the highly complex philosophical machinery that Nannicelli relies upon (e.g., speech act theory in his analysis of stand-up comedy), some might doubt how

approachable the book is outside philosophy. Regardless, the book will hopefully inspire conversation on the necessity of political treatments of morally problematic works of art, as it offers compelling reasons for public policymakers to acknowledge why the issues of art production matter.

On the theoretical side, perspectivists are likely to strike back. For one, Nannicelli argues that the plurality of opinions concerning an author's intentions is problematic in the case of P, since there is no consensus on the author's intentions and the work's true meaning. And while he acknowledges that a similar problem might arise with respect to the artist's character, he does not think it has the same bearing on the POA and insists that the POA's "objectivity is less contested" (p. 246). We doubt, however, if that is so. Disagreements regarding the (im)morality of an artist's character and its contribution to the ethical dimension of a work are just as persistent as disagreement regarding the intentions, as revealed by Nannicelli's analysis. The worry is all the more pressing given the public sanctions that Nannicelli wants the POA to deliver.

Furthermore, it is questionable whether Nannicelli's final verdict regarding the importance of character gets him as far as he sets out to go. "If the artists' moral behavior is not part of the generative context, or, is part of that context but still has no causal role in shaping the artistically relevant properties of the work, then it does not legitimately bear upon our ethical appraisal of *that* particular work" (p. 249), Nannicelli concludes, thus allowing for the possibility of morally blameworthy people doing fine art and not being held accountable. Works may well be created by bad people who happen not to be bad at the time of production of a certain piece, and the crucial philosophical issue is to see whether such cases should be exempt from moral blame. If this were an acceptable principle, one of the greatest designers ever, John Galliano, should not be held accountable for his anti-semitic outburst in a Paris restaurant, given that he was not creating any of his masterpiece collections at the time. Nannicelli's answer in such cases is to separate ethical criticism and artistic appreciation: one can choose to avoid works by morally problematic artists, as long as one is aware that such a choice is an ethical one based on personal preference, rather than a judgment of artistic value (p. 248). This is an important distinction, but acknowledging this solution greatly diminishes the ambition of the project: that of explaining the contribution of production to a work's artistic value.

Certainly, one of the most interesting aspects of the book is its willingness to address the contemporary controversy regarding the

aftermath of the Me Too movement. Nannicelli subjects himself to the challenging task of giving us a way to think of such artistically wonderful performances as those by Kevin Spacey in the knowledge of his moral transgressions. Indeed, for many people, this is still rather controversial, and what this book does – and does well, we think – is to offer pointers on how to engage with such issues without either rejecting the artistically valuable artworks or failing to acknowledge (implicitly at least) the moral harm committed by such performers. Needless to say, however, it is hard to expect that everyone will agree with Nannicelli, and much will depend on individual intuitions regarding these cases. To begin with, one may wonder how far ethical criticism should generally extend. Nannicelli's examples (of both real and imaginary cases) pinpoint why this is such a tricky question. If we hold artists responsible for what they do in the course of creating their art, should we do the same when it comes to the moral character of philosophers and other scientists? They too are not immune to the charges (and urges!) of sexual misconduct, and while it may be harder to show that a certain philosophical paper was written in morally reprehensible circumstances, the fact that certain highly respected philosophers have had their university status revoked shows that the character may matter more than Nannicelli claims. But, on the other hand, how far is too far or far enough? Should we also hold artists accountable for the topics they opt for and turn their artistic choices into a moral issue, as writer Aminatta Forna wonders (cf. <https://lithub.com/where-are-the-vests-political-novelists/>)?

Furthermore, should the questions of the ethics of production be extended beyond the context of art? Should we boycott different manufacturers for their apparently unethical treatment of animals (in research and fashion) or people – think of exploitation of children or manual labor workers all over the world who can barely manage to survive a month on their salary. While Nannicelli is to be praised for the ethical values we want social agents to possess, our social and political reality may be too messy for such a virtuous model.

However, Nannicelli is modest in his intentions, stating in conclusion that much more is needed for this project to get off the ground. For one, he sees metaethical issues as the most pressing: whether a certain work is morally marred depends on what is considered morally blameworthy. So far so good, but the trouble is, Nannicelli asks, how are we to determine that? By examining the (accepted morality of the) context of creation? Or the context of evaluation? Lacking such responses, the author con-

cludes, all we can do is not lose focus on the importance of what we as philosophers are doing and stay committed to further research. For sure, this book is a wonderful example of how to do so.⁵

IRIS VIDMAR JOVANOVIĆ
VALENTINA MARIANNA STUPNIK
Department of Philosophy
Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Rijeka
Sveučilišna avenija 4, 51000 Rijeka
ividmar@ffri.uniri.hr / vm.stupnik@gmail.com
doi: 10.26362/20210110

⁵ This work has been supported by the Croatian Science Foundation under project no. UIP-2020-02-1309.