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## **When Artists Fall: Honouring and Admiring the Immoral**

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**Abstract:** Is it appropriate to honour artists who have created great works but who have also acted immorally? In this paper, after arguing that honouring involves picking out a person as someone we ought to admire, we present three moral reasons against honouring immoral artists. First, we argue that honouring can serve to condone their behaviour, through the mediums of emotional prioritization and exemplar identification. Second, we argue that honouring immoral artists can generate undue epistemic credibility for the artists, which can lead to an indirect form of testimonial injustice for the artists' victims. Third, we argue, building on the first two reasons, that honouring immoral artists can also serve to silence their victims. We end by considering how we might respond to these reasons.

**Key Words:** honour, admiration, epistemic injustice, condonation, silencing

**Word Count: 9991**

Roman Polanski is widely regarded as one of the world's greatest film directors. His film *Chinatown* has been judged to be the best film of all time (Pulver 2010). He has received over 80 international film awards. In giving him the honour of being the president of the César Awards in 2017, the Académie des César expressed their, "admiration and enchantment" for Polanski (Henley 2017). Those who work with him also hold him in high esteem. Ewan MacGregor described Polanski as, "a legendary filmmaker, he's one of the best filmmakers there is," (Marikar 2010). Similarly, Christoph Waltz said, "I love Roman Polanski, and I really learned to admire him," while Kate Winslet described him as, "the great Roman Polanski," (Singh 2011).

In 1977 Polanski was arrested for the sexual assault of 13-year-old Samantha Gailey. Polanski was indicted of six counts of criminal behaviour, including rape. As part of a plea bargain, Polanski pled guilty to the charge of “Unlawful Sexual Intercourse with a minor” (equivalent to statutory rape). Polanski fled the country ahead of sentencing. Four more women have subsequently accused Polanski of sexual assault.

Is it appropriate to honour an artist such as Polanski who has created great works but also acted immorally? Opinions are divided here. When Polanski was named president of the César Awards, Claire Serre-Combe of Osez le féminisme (Dare to be feminists), a leading French feminist organization, said, “We cannot let this pass. Making Polanski president is a snub to rape and sexual assault victims. The quality of his work counts for nothing when confronted with the crime he committed, his escape from justice and his refusal to face up to his responsibilities” (Henley 2017). In Polanski and the Académie’s defence Aurélie Filippetti, a former French culture minister, said that Polanski is a “great director ... who should be allowed to preside over this ceremony. It’s something that happened 40 years ago. One cannot bring up this affair every time we talk about him because there was a problem back then. It is just an awards ceremony” (Henley 2017).

The question of whether it is appropriate to honour immoral artists is of crucial importance given the number of recent debates concerning how to respond to prominent cases of artists – including Louis CK, Kevin Spacey, R. Kelly, Woody Allen, Bill Cosby, Casey Affleck, Bryan Singer, Asia Argento, and Bertrand Cantat – who have been accused of morally outrageous behaviour.<sup>1</sup> While some question whether the art has been tainted by the artist’s behaviour

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<sup>1</sup> For a discussion of the ethics of honouring those who have committed grave injustices with statues see Burch Brown (2017)

(see Dederer 2017, Stock 2017, and the contributions to Weinberg 2017), we take for granted that at least some such works are excellent (though this is not to say that artworks can never be tainted by an artist's immorality, a point we return to in §1). The question of whether it is appropriate to honour immoral artists arises once we accept this.

But this question is ambiguous. Appropriate might either mean *fitting* or *all-things-considered appropriate* (D'Arms and Jacobsen 2000: 71-72). This distinction is often made with respect to emotions; we propose a similar distinction between being a fitting target of honour for X and it being all-things-considered appropriate to honour a person for X. To say that an emotion is fitting is just to say that it represents its object properly. Fears fits something fearsome simply because it properly represents the object as fearsome. But just because an emotion is fitting does not mean that it is all-things-considered appropriate to feel that emotion. Suppose that you see a bear on the path ahead of you while walking in the woods. Fear is certainly a fitting emotion in this case, as the bear is a potential threat to your safety. However, it could be that your best chance of safety in this case is to fearlessly stand your ground in order not to startle the bear and cause it to attack you. While fear is fitting here, feeling fear is not all-things-considered appropriate. So, fittingness is not sufficient for all-things-considered appropriateness. Fittingness only provides a *pro tanto* reason to feel or express an emotion. Similarly, an individual being a fitting target of honour doesn't mean that we ought to honour them. There are further (moral, prudential, epistemic) reasons that come into play in determining whether we should actually honour them. So even if Polanski is a fitting target of honour for his artistic talents and works, this doesn't necessarily mean that we ought to honour him for those things.

In this paper, we identify three moral reasons *not* to honour immoral artists. In §1, we argue that honouring involves picking out a person as someone we ought to admire and that

immoral artists may also be worth honouring for their art. In §2, we argue that honouring immoral artists can express condonation for their behaviour, through the mediums of emotional prioritization and exemplar identification. In §3, we argue that honouring immoral artists can generate undue epistemic credibility for the artists, which can lead to an indirect form of testimonial injustice for the artists' victims. In §4 we argue, building on the first two reasons, that honouring immoral artists can also serve to silence their victims. In §5, we discuss various ways to respond to these moral reasons and the various factors that will influence which response is most appropriate.

### **1. Honouring and Admiration**

We honour people in various ways. Sometimes we imitate them. Sometimes we give them awards. Sometimes we build statues of them. In honouring a person or group, we say certain things about them. Among other things, we pick them out as people others ought to admire. In other words, we pick them out as people who are admirable or fitting targets of admiration. For example, in announcing the musicians who would be receiving the "Special Merit Awards", at the 2018 Grammys, Neil Portnow (President/CEO of the Recording Academy) said:

These exceptionally inspiring figures are being honored as legendary performers, creative architects and technical visionaries. Their outstanding accomplishments and passion for their craft have created a timeless legacy. (Fabian 2018)

These awards therefore pick out the recipients out as people who ought to be admired for their talents and achievements. They are reasonably successful in this. A best picture or best leading actor nomination increases a film's audience significantly. According to one study, these nominations increase weekly box office revenue by 200% (Deuchert et al 2005). Of

course, not all of these additional audience members will go on to admire the artists involved but it is likely that some will do so.

Given that awards pick someone out as a fitting target of admiration, to be a fitting recipient of such honours one must at least be a fitting target of admiration. In this section, we will argue that given a plausible account of admiration, immoral artists may be fitting targets of admiration and so may be fitting targets of the honours they receive. We will not provide a full account of admiration, but will instead focus on the features that are most relevant for our current purposes.

The first feature is that admiration involves a positive feeling or judgement. Aaron Ben-Ze'ev claims that admiration involves, “a highly positive evaluation of someone,” (2001: 56), while William Lyons claims that admiration involves: “a pro-evaluation or approval,” (1980: 90). These claims should be uncontroversial. It seems hard to see how it could possibly be appropriate to judge that someone is admiring something if they lacked any positive evaluation of it.

Of course, all positive emotions involve a positive evaluation of some sort. Respect, for example, also involves a positive evaluation but seems to be importantly different from admiration. There are a number of different suggestions in the literature about the precise nature of admiration's positive evaluation. One is that the value possessed by the object of admiration is *rare* (Forrester 1982: 102). Another suggestion is that admiration involves a judgement of the object's *superiority* in relation to the subject (Schindler et al. 2013: 89). Admiration is also claimed to involve a sense of *wonder* or *surprise*. According to Adam Smith, for example, admiration just is “Approbation heightened by wonder and surprise,” (1759/

2007: I.i.4.3). Similarly, Charles Darwin (1998 [1872]: 269) claimed that admiration is, “surprise associated with some pleasure and a sense of approval.”

The second relevant feature of admiration is its link to a motivation to emulate. For example, Linda Zagzebski (2017) argues that admiration typically involves a desire to emulate. This claim is supported by a number of psychological studies on the motivational effects of admiration (see, e.g., Algoe and Haidt (2009), Immordino-Yang et al. (2009) and Schindler et al (2015); one exception is Van de Ven et al (2011), but this study is an outlier and Van de Ven himself (2017) has recently accepted the link between admiration and motivation to emulate). While it would be wrong to view this as a necessary feature of admiration (Archer Forthcoming; Compaijen 2017), it is at least a common motivational response to admiring someone.

A third feature of admiration is that it spreads. When we admire a person for one trait or action, we sometimes find ourselves subsequently admiring them for other traits or actions. Suppose you admire an excellent chef. Your admiration for her might colour some of your other evaluations of her. It may make you more understanding of her grumpiness, for instance. One explanation is that this is a form of the *halo effect*, the unconscious process through which seeing a person in a positive light leads us to continue to see them in that light.<sup>2</sup> This results in a positive judgement about a person’s abilities in one area leading to more positive judgements of that person in other, unrelated, areas (Gräf and Unkelbach 2016).

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<sup>2</sup> Thanks for Kian Mintz-Woo for suggesting the admiration’s spreading effect could be a form of the halo effect.

However, this spreading feature does not entail that admiration is a globalist emotion. An emotion is globalist if it typically takes the whole self as its object (Mason 2003; Bell 2013). But many implicitly deny that admiration is a globalist emotion. Indeed, it is a presupposition of the admirable immorality debate that admiration is not a globalist emotion. While contributors to this discussion (e.g. Williams 1981, Slote 1983, Baron 1986, Flanagan 1986) disagree about whether there is such a thing as admirable immorality (that is, whether a person can be admirable for traits that are conceptually inseparable from traits that issue immoral actions), each at least agrees that an immoral person may *also* be admirable. This shared presupposition strikes us as plausible. So, we take it that admiration is not a globalist emotion. It follows that immoral artists, such as Polanski, may also be fitting targets of admiration and honour for their achievements and talents.

However, although the immoral may still be admirable for their aesthetic achievements, there may be cases where an artist's moral flaws detract from the aesthetic merits of the work. A lively debate in aesthetics centres on the question of whether an artwork's moral value influences its aesthetic value. According to those who support ethicism (Gaut 2007) about this issue, a moral flaw in a work of art is always an aesthetic flaw. Similarly, Noel Carroll's (1996) moderate moralism holds that moral flaws can sometimes have a negative impact on a work of arts artistic value. While these views concern the morality of the work of art itself, it is not too big a leap to think the immorality of the artist may also detract from the aesthetic merit of the work. In some cases, this effect could be so severe that there is no longer anything to admire in the work. Claire Dederer (2017) could be interpreted as supporting this position when she says of Woody Allen's *Manhattan* and Louis C.K.'s *I Love You Daddy* that they cannot now be viewed "outside of the knowledge of [their] sexual misconduct." While we do not want to rule out the possibility of such cases we think that artworks where the aesthetic merit is completely destroyed, when it would otherwise be present, will be rare. Even those who

support ethicism and moralism about artworks tend to take the moral flaws to be *pro tanto* aesthetic flaws which need not completely destroy the aesthetic value of the work (Gaut 2007: 66). Again, we assume in the following that there are at least some cases where the work of an immoral artist remains excellent, and so the artist remains admirable for it.

## **2. Honouring and Condoning Immorality**

The honouring of immoral artists has been criticised for condoning or expressing condonation for their immoral behaviour.<sup>3</sup> Take, the French former minister Laurence Rossignol's claim that the decision to make Polanski head of the César Awards showed, "an indifference toward the charges against him," (Donadio 2017). This claim may seem puzzling. Polanski is not being awarded for his immoral behaviour, so how does this award condone it? We will argue that honouring immoral artists can condone their immoral behaviour in two ways. First, through emotional prioritisation. Second, through exemplar identification.

We begin by explaining what we mean by condoning. When we condone a piece of behaviour we are communicating that while we don't think the behaviour is morally good, we are willing to accept or tolerate it (Hughes and Warmke 2017). Suppose a friend behaves in a rude and obnoxious way towards us one evening and we then condone their behaviour. We are not saying the friend's behaviour is good, but we are willing to "let it slide". One consequence of an expression of such an attitude to wrongdoing, however, is that it might be *legitimizing* in certain contexts. That is, it might make the wrongdoer believe that they can get

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<sup>3</sup> Does honouring itself condone or merely express (already existing) condonation of immoral behaviour? Our arguments rests on the claim that honouring the immoral merely expressing condonation – indeed on honouring at least having the public meaning of expressing condonation – so we remain neutral on this in this paper. For ease of expression, we will use "condone" to refer to expressions of condonation unless otherwise stated. Thanks to an anonymous referee for pressing us to clarify.



away with acting in this manner. If we don't express to our friend that they have wronged us, they might think that there was nothing wrong with their behaviour. This is not only prudentially worrisome (e.g., they might not worry about behaving rudely to us again in the future), but also morally problematic (e.g., they might come to think they can get away with rude behaviour). Expressing some moral disapproval seems necessary then to avoid legitimating such behaviour.

*A. Emotional Prioritisation*

Honouring immoral artists involves choosing to pick them out as people we ought to admire rather than as people we ought to be indignant about. Given that these attitudes and emotions are all fitting, honourers are thereby communicating that this is the correct way to prioritise these attitudes and emotions. This can be communicated in more or less explicit ways. The first and most obvious way in which honouring can convey this is when this is part of the *intended meaning* of an honour, which is what honourers intend an honour to convey.<sup>4</sup> For example, Alain Rocca, who was part of the committee that made the decision to honour Polanski as president of the César Awards, dismissed protests surrounding Polanski's appointment as attempts to "sully an institution, and a man like Polanski" (Henley 2017). This defence of Polanski explicitly condones his behaviour in the process of honouring his work. While Rocca does not claim that Polanski's behaviour was morally permissible, he does suggest that it is behaviour that can be tolerated or overlooked.

Many of Polanski's honourers have not condoned his behaviour so explicitly. However, they may still communicate that the immoral behaviour should be condoned. One way in which

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<sup>4</sup> Intended meaning is similar to what Grice (1957) calls non-natural meaning and has become known as *speaker meaning*. Since we take intended meaning to go beyond speech acts, we prefer our terminology.

they might do so is through what we will call *attitudinal meaning*.<sup>5</sup> This meaning expresses a speaker's values and cares, but need not express what the speaker intends to convey. Take, for example, a man who interrupts a woman. The man may not intend this interruption to express sexist values. But it may express these values nevertheless, perhaps by conveying that he doesn't value women's contributions enough to let them finish their sentences. Similarly, honouring an immoral artist may communicate the honourer's attitude that the immoral behaviour is unimportant, even if this is not what the speaker intends to convey.

Even if honourers of immoral artists don't have such problematic attitudes, our actions also have a *public meaning*. This is the meaning that others can justifiably attribute to our acts given the context in which we perform them. Suppose a man interrupts a woman in an important business meeting. This interruption can have a sexist public meaning even if it lacks a sexist intentional or attitudinal meaning. In a patriarchal business culture, it is reasonable to understand this interruption as revealing sexist attitudes or intentions, even if in fact the man has neither. Similarly, the honouring of immoral artists can have a problematic public meaning even when it doesn't express any heinous intentions or attitudes. This can arise from the structural and institutional context in which it occurs (though it may also arise for other reasons).

Consider the example of artists who commit sexual harassment or sexual assault. These acts are wrong independently of any social context. But looking at sexual harassment without looking at the social context in which it takes place ignores a major part of what makes sexual harassment and sexual assault so problematic – namely patriarchal social systems that encourage us to condone the mistreatment of women by men. These systems inflict what

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<sup>5</sup> Our use of 'attitudinal meaning' is similar to McKenna's (2012) 'agent meaning'.

Johan Galtung (1969) terms structural violence on women – that is, violence that is built into the social structure. These social systems include the structure of a particular society that may facilitate this mistreatment.

For example, the instruments of power in society, such as the police and the courts, may systematically give greater weight to the testimony of certain kinds of men accused of sexual assault than their female victims (Peterson 1977). There are also more localized social systems that may facilitate mistreatment. The film industry, for example, has been accused by many of having a particular problem with sexism, both in the way it represents women on screen (Cummings and Glessing 2017) and in the way it treats women working in the industry (Jones and Pringle 2015). According to Sophie Hennekam and Dawn Bennett (2017) sexual harassment is a particular problem in this industry due to its competitive nature, the culture within the industry, the industry's gendered power relations and the importance of informal networks for career advancement. In this patriarchal context of an industry that facilitates the mistreatment of women, choosing to honour rather than condemn an artist who is also rapist can reasonably be interpreted as condoning this behaviour. This is problematic, as it sends the message that immoral behaviour can be ignored when the person performing it is a sufficiently gifted artist.

Importantly, this message isn't only conveyed by a problematic culture, it also contributes to it. These expressions contribute to a culture of legitimation by reinforcing the message that gifted artists' immoral behaviour will be accepted or tolerated. This is particularly the case for major contributors to the culture – namely *authorities* (broadly construed). By virtue of being an authority, one is more able to contribute to the culture. Authority is a scalar notion – especially when it comes to normative authorities, whether of art, morality or something else. The more someone or something is considered an authority, the more influence they will

have on the culture they are contributing to. Take the Oscars as an example of a major authority on film. These awards explicitly rank the artistic talents of actors and directors. However, they also implicitly rank in another way. They support a culture that says that it is more important to honour immoral artists than to condemn them.

Polanski's case helps to show this. Despite confessing to the rape of a minor, he was awarded an Oscar in 2003. The fact his rape conviction didn't factor into the decision to either nominate or award him, together with the fact that he was until recently still a member of the Academy (which arguably constitutes another honour) suggests the Oscars support such a culture. Similarly, Casey Affleck's award for Best Actor in 2017 ignored outstanding allegations against him for sexual harassment and sexual assault. And allegations that Christian Bale physically assaulted his mother and sister were not taken into consideration when he won the Oscar for Best Supporting Actor in 2010, nor in his subsequent nominations for Best Actor in 2014, 2016, 2019.

By honouring these artists, the wrongs they are accused of are condoned so that the artist can receive recognition for their aesthetic talents. As such this legitimates immoral behaviour: we are taught that the artistic talents are more important than the immoral acts that have been performed. This means that authoritative organisations in the film industry, such as the Academy, have a special moral reason to consider the ways in which their decision about who to honour will influence this culture of legitimisation.

The decision to honour rather than condemn immoral artists can convey that immoral behaviour has been condoned, even when the honourer's intentions or attitudes don't express condonation. However, we aren't claiming that this public meaning will be conveyed whenever an immoral artist is honoured. We are defending the weaker claim that against a

background of structurally oppressive social conditions, honouring artists who have committed immoral actions that fit into this oppressive system may convey this problematic message. Again, this does not commit us to the claim that honouring has a problematic public meaning only when honours are given against a background of structurally oppressive social conditions.

But should we really be blamed if others read things into our actions that aren't expressive of our intentions or attitudes? One might object that the blame lies with others, and not with those bestowing the honours. First, note that we aren't claiming that these moral reasons constitute a duty not to honour immoral artists. Second, we accept that others may be blameworthy for reading things into actions that aren't expressive of the agent's intentions or attitudes. However, we see no reason why this precludes people from having a responsibility to thinking about what others might read into their actions (though this will likely depend on a person's social power). For example, if a comedian thinks their ironic racist joke, which they intend to lampoon racists, will be used as a slogan by neo-Nazis to galvanise a popular movement, then this could give them reason not to tell it. It is true that the context-sensitive nature of public meaning can make it difficult to determine. However, these awards are not difficult cases. Given the way that awards are typically given, with all the fanfare and celebration of the awardee, they can clearly be perceived as condoning the immoral behaviour. It is plausible, then, that such honourers have a responsibility to consider how others will interpret giving an award to an immoral artist.

One might also object that our argument assumes that we cannot honour and condemn an artist at the same time. We agree that this is possible and we will argue that this is one possible way to respond to this moral reason. This is no objection to our argument as it stands, though, because we are describing what the actual practice of honouring currently is.

Polanski, for example, has been given many awards without a hint of condemnation for his wrongdoings. We return to this point in §5.

*B. Exemplar Identification*

Honouring a person often has the function of identifying someone as an exemplar – that is, as someone to be emulated. In Polanski's case, his honour of being appointed as president of the César awards identifies him as an exemplar. Of course, because this is an honour for *aesthetic* achievement it seems reasonable to think that Polanski is only being identified as an aesthetic exemplar. Given this, it might seem that such an honour is unproblematic because it is only passing judgement on his aesthetic abilities and not his moral behaviour. However, there are two reasons to worry about the identification of an immoral artist as an exemplar. Key to both reasons is admiration's spreading tendency.

First, identifying an immoral artist as an aesthetic exemplar can condone their behaviour. As discussed, honouring a person involves picking them out someone who ought to be admired. While this need not involve picking them out as a completely admirable person – that is, as someone who ought to be admired in all respects – honours may naturally be interpreted as doing so on certain occasions. While the honourer may only be intending to convey that the artist ought to be admired for their artistic talents, we may, due to admiration's tendency to spread, perceive them as conveying that we ought to admire their whole self. This does not entail they are being admired for the immoral behaviour, but rather that they are considered completely admirable despite such behaviour. Honouring immoral artists, then, may come across as condoning their immoral behaviour. Note that as with the emotional prioritisation, the condoning of the immoral actions need not be expressive of the intentions or attitudes of the honourers. It could instead be communicated via public meaning. The public outcry that

can occur when immoral artists are honoured with awards suggests that many do interpret these honours in this way.

Second, identifying immoral artists as exemplars has the potential to encourage others to emulate them. As noted, admiration often leads to a desire to emulate. This gives us reason to worry, as honouring immoral people conveys that they are people who ought to be admired. If people then admire such people this may lead to a desire to emulate their immoral actions. However, this doesn't fit with the usual way of viewing the link between admiration and emulation. On Zagzebski's view, for example, admiring someone, "gives rise to the motive to emulate the admired person *in the way she is admired*" (2017: 43; emphasis ours). While this would give us cause for concern if someone admired an immoral artist for their immoral behaviour, it doesn't give us reason to worry about those who admire them *despite* their immorality.

Unfortunately, things aren't so simple. Given admiration's spreading tendency, admiring one feature of a person sometimes leads people to admire other features as well. For example, a teenager's admiration for her favourite footballer's sporting abilities may lead her to admire her political views. A graduate student's admiration for his supervisor's intellectual abilities may lead him to admire the way he talks and dresses. Once admiration spreads to these features this may then lead to a desire to emulate these aspects of the person as well. Given that we pick immoral artists out as people we ought to admire when we honour them, we have reason to worry about such honours, as they may lead people to emulate such artists in other ways.

We aren't suggesting that anyone is going to commit sexual assault as a direct result of admiring Polanski's artistic talent. But emulating exemplars needn't involve straightforward

imitation. As Kristjan Kristjánsson (2006: 41) argues, the proper role of exemplars is to, “help you arrive at an articulate conception of what you value and want to strive towards.”

Emulation should therefore be seen as a process by which one attempts to achieve these values. Even if it doesn't lead anyone to imitate them, identifying an immoral artist as an exemplar can be problematic by encouraging people to pursue or uphold problematic ideals. In the case of Polanski, those ideals may include the patriarchal ideal of the male genius, whose mistreatment of women is justified by his artistic greatness. So, there is a strong moral reason not to honour Polanski, as this more clearly encourages others to attach themselves to problematic ideals.

### **3. Honour and Credibility**

In this section, we argue that a second moral reason against honouring immoral artists is that it risks making its target unduly epistemically credible. This can lead to an indirect form of testimonial injustice when a victim contradicts an honoured figure.

Celebrities are often taken to be authorities in areas for which they possess no expertise. Kyrie Irving, a basketball player, believes that the Earth is flat.<sup>6</sup> This has apparently led to some schoolchildren believing that the Earth is flat, leaving their teachers baffled. As one commentator puts it, “Kyrie saying the Earth is flat *is* hilarious, but this would definitely be a tough spot for a middle school science teacher. ... There's no way a teacher is going to be able to compete with an insanely good basketball player when it comes to influencing some students” (Maloney 2017). What appears to be going on in this case is that Irving is being given greater epistemic credibility with respect to the Earth's shape by his teenage fans than he merits. Indeed, there are many cases of celebrities being given greater credibility than they

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<sup>6</sup> Thanks to Mark Alfano for suggesting this example.



merit. This has led journalist Alex Proud (2014) to say that “the widespread acceptance of the notion that being good at acting/sports/pop music seems to mean the rest of us should listen to your opinions on Syria, Hugo Chavez or the plight of the Amazonian tribes” is “one of the most horrific developments of the 21st century.”

What explains these celebrities’ undue epistemic credibility? There are likely many factors. But one important factor, we submit, is our admiration and honouring practices – the central example of which we have discussed in this paper is the giving of awards. By honouring celebrities, we focus attention on them and elevate them above others. We thereby not only pick them out as people we ought to admire but also as people we ought to listen to. While many of us may not attribute excessive epistemic credibility to celebrities, it is clear from the use of celebrities in campaigns beyond their areas of expertise that many people do.

This excess credibility creates problems when a celebrity wrongs another person. In particular, it may lead to the victim not being believed even when the celebrity has admitted guilt, which is the case with Polanski and his victim. Miranda Fricker’s (2007) theory of epistemic injustice can help us see why. Fricker’s focus is on how that negative identity stereotypes about a group unjustly decrease perceptions of the epistemic credibility of that group. Associating a property with a group of people, even if only implicitly, often leads us to unwittingly attribute that property to an individual from that group when we interact with them. If that property concerns their sincerity or competence, we will judge them to be less epistemically credible. The result is that we often won’t believe a person when we ought to. For instance, those who hold that women are not as clever as men might be inclined to reject a suggestion from a woman as being misguided though they would accept the same suggestion from a man.

It is not only negative stereotypes that can lead to epistemic injustice. There can also be an indirect testimonial injustice for those who contradict the celebrity. When the testimony of a celebrity conflicts with that of someone who lacks this status, the testimony of the celebrity is likely to be given greater weight. Honouring a celebrity leads those who challenge the celebrity's assertions to be seen as less credible in comparison. Honouring elevates the artist and in doing so contributes to inflating their credibility. By inflating their credibility, we in turn deflate the credibility of those who accuse them of wrongdoing.<sup>7</sup> This constitutes an indirect testimonial injustice for the victims. Being honoured, then, gives its target a kind of power. This power becomes problematic when an immoral person wields it, as it may increase their credibility at the expense of that of their victims.

Of course, in Polanski's case, we might think there is little reason to worry about this given that he pleaded guilty to his crime against Gailey and has subsequently apologised for it. However, we should not be complacent about the problems victims face in being believed even when their attackers have admitted guilt. Consider how Polanski's assault on Samantha Gailey was called a "so-called crime" by Harvey Weinstein (2009) or how Whoopi Goldberg said that it "wasn't rape-rape," (Kennedy 2009). The way in which high-profile celebrities were willing to question whether these acts took place, or at least to downplay their significance of these acts, gives us reason to be wary about the effect honouring immoral artists can have on the credibility of their victim. Moreover, it is worth pointing out that in addition to Gailey, four more woman have accused Polanski of sexually assaulting them when they were children, including Marianne Barnard whose accusations Polanski rejected as "entirely unfounded" (Mumford 2017). Whether or not these allegations are well founded, we

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<sup>7</sup> See Medina (2011) for an account of a general link between credibility excess and credibility deficit. We identify a more specific link that is compatible with Medina's account. See also Yap (2017) for a discussion of the role of credibility excess with respect to certain perpetrators of sexual assault.

might worry about the possibility of Polanski's word being given greater weight than it merits, due to his elevated position.

The recent wave of allegations against prominent artists through the #metoo campaign suggests that the power possessed by those who are admired and honoured can be combatted. However, it is noteworthy that the phrase 'me too' only came to prominence when it started being used by high-profile celebrities, such as Alyssa Milano, even though it was first used to raise awareness of sexual assault by the activist Tarana Burke in 2007. We may worry then about the problems those who lack this elevated status would have in contradicting the word of an honoured and admired celebrity.

By honouring artists who commit sexual harassment or sexual assault – and other acts that express and perpetuate structural injustices, such as racial or class-based injustices – we inflate their credibility and in doing so, perpetuate a background of injustices that their victims face. This gives us a moral reason against honouring artists whose acts express and perpetuate structural injustices. This moral reason will be especially strong in cases where accusations of such acts have been made but the artist has not admitted guilt, a point we return to in §5.

#### **4. Honour and Silencing**

We have argued that honouring immoral artists condones their immoral acts. Further, honouring can reduce the credibility of their victims. In this section, we present another moral reason against honouring immoral artists that builds on these first two reasons. This is that honouring can serve to *silence* the artist's victims and the victims of similar crimes.

Langton (1993) identifies three forms of silencing: locutionary (failing to even say words, perform actions), perlocutionary frustration (your acts don't have the intended effects), and

illocutionary disablement (you fail to even perform the acts you intend to perform). We will argue that honouring immoral artists encourages the first form of silencing by supporting two expectations.

First, victims of immoral artists may (often justifiably) come to expect that people won't believe them. This will often be an accurate belief given the effects on credibility we outlined in the previous section. However, it may be a reasonable belief even if the victim's credibility has not been deflated. In honouring artists, we are (as we argued in §1) picking them out as people who ought to be admired. The victim may then form the impression (correctly or incorrectly) that others see the artist as globally admirable. Such an impression generates the expectation that others will reject her testimony because it conflicts with the image she believes others have of the artist. Given this expectation, it makes sense that victims don't speak out.

Second, even when victims think they will be believed, they may come to expect (again often justifiably) that people won't care. This seems a reasonable response to the fact that their assailant's behaviour has been condoned. Once the idea that a great artist's talents are more important than the crimes they have committed, the victim is likely to form the expectation that people will be indifferent to their suffering. For example, in response in the recent controversy about Polanski being honoured with a retrospective the French Minister for culture dismissed Polanski's "ancient charges" whilst reminding people that he is a "brilliant director" (Zaretsky 2017). Given this kind of sentiment, it is hardly surprising that victims often don't speak out.

In short, honouring immoral artists supports the expectations that people won't listen and even if they do they won't care, which encourages victims to remain silent.

## **5. How to Respond**

We have identified three moral reasons against honouring immoral artists. Importantly, we have not claimed that these reasons constitute obligations not to honour immoral artists. In this section we consider how one might respond to these moral reasons. Our aim is not to definitively settle the question of how to respond but rather to highlight the advantages and disadvantages of the various responses and the kinds of considerations that would speak in favour of choosing one response over another.

### *5.1 No Award*

The first response to these moral reasons against honouring immoral artists is to simply refrain from doing so. If honouring the immoral is morally problematic then the easy way to avoid these problems is to simply not honour them.

While this is the most straightforward response to the moral reasons against honouring the immoral, it is not without its problems. In particular, it can be criticised for violating the purpose of these awards – namely to honour *artistic* merit not *moral* merit. We might worry that to let moral reasons play a role in deciding whose artistic achievements to honour would be to let morality overstep its proper bounds. In other words, one might object that not honouring immoral artists manifests the vice of moralism. This worry may be especially pressing if we accept autonomism (e.g. Lamarque 2006), according to which the moral character of a work never affects its artistic value. Those inclined to accept such a clear border between the aesthetic and the moral may well think this response would involve a failure to respect the proper boundaries of morality, though of course they are not the only ones who may worry about this approach.

There are (at least) two points to make in response to this charge. First, many of the decisions to honour one recipient over another are based on marginal judgements. Often several nominees are deserving of an award. So, not honouring an immoral artist with an award does not mean the person who gets the award is undeserving of that honour. Second, many artistically irrelevant factors play a role in determining the recipients of honours. For example, to be eligible for the Oscars a film must meet the following criteria (amongst others):

- a) Be over forty minutes long.
- b) Be “publicly exhibited by means of 35mm or 70mm film, or in a 24- or 48-frame progressive scan Digital Cinema format with a minimum projector resolution of 2048 by 1080 pixels”.
- c) It must have been shown in an L. A. County cinema, for paid admission for seven consecutive days. (Oscars.org 2015)

The third condition is artistically irrelevant and the first two are at least arbitrary. There is nothing to prevent a film of a different length or shot on a different format from being the best film of the year. Our point is not to criticise these arbitrary conditions; there are no doubt good reasons to place limits on what films are eligible for an Oscar. Rather our point is that we already accept artistically irrelevant or arbitrary conditions to play a role in determining who will win these awards. This should make us somewhat sceptical of the claim that allowing morality to play a role in influencing who receives an honour is a violation of their artistic purpose.

Despite the legitimacy of these responses, the worry about moralism does not seem entirely misplaced. It would certainly be problematic if any minor moral violation could lead to an honour being withheld. If this were the case there would be good reason to worry that these

honours are not fulfilling their role of awarding artistic merit. This response therefore seems like one that is best suited to cases where the moral reasons against honouring the immoral are strongest.

### *5.2 Do Nothing*

For those concerned that refusing to honour immoral artists is an overly moralistic response, the temptation may be to carry on as normal and to bestow honours and awards on the immoral in exactly the same way as anyone else. This response has the advantage of most straightforwardly respecting the thought that such honours should be bestowed purely on artistic merit.

However, if refusing to honour an immoral artist can be accused of being an overly moralistic response, simply carrying on as normal can be accused of not taking morality seriously enough. This approach does nothing to address the moral reasons against honouring immoral artists that we have outlined. As a result, this response may be seen as not taking the interests of those who may be harmed seriously enough, especially if adopted in response to the most extreme cases. Perhaps, then, this response is one that may be appropriate in cases where the moral reasons against honouring the immoral are weak.

### *5.3 Award with Protest*

If we are dissatisfied with the black and white nature of the approaches canvassed above, we may be tempted to find a response that allows for an artist's artistic merits to be recognized without sending a morally problematic message. One way to do this would be to make awards to immoral artists under protest. For example, when accused sexual harasser Casey Affleck was awarded the Oscar for Best Actor in 2017, Brie Larson, the award's presenter, refused to applaud him. Speaking after the ceremony, Larson, a vocal advocate for victims of

sexual assault, said her behaviour, “Spoke for itself,” (Chi 2017). This might be thought to be a best of both worlds approach. There is a clear response to the moral reasons that count against honouring the immoral, whilst allowing the award to be determined purely on artistic merit.

However, this approach can be criticised from both sides. On the one hand, it can be criticized for not taking the moral reasons seriously enough. For those paying close attention to Larson’s behaviour and who are aware of her history of advocacy, the reasons for her lack of applause may be clear. However, this message may have been lost for those paying less close attention or for those unaware of Larson’s views on this issue. On the other hand, some might maintain that this too is an overly moralistic response. If this became common practice, it could perhaps lead to a form of self-censorship where people do not submit their films for awards for fear of public criticism. We have little sympathy for this response, at least in the case of someone whose crimes are as horrific as Polanski’s. But perhaps if such a response were to be used in any case where an artist has acted immorally, no matter how minor the infringement, then we might agree that it could be problematic for this reason.

Another problem with this response is that it does not look like the kind of response it would be easy for an awarding body to enact. While it is relatively straightforward for a presenter to engage in a small act of protest, it would be quite odd for an awarding body to both present someone with an award while at the same time protesting their immoral behaviour. This is not a decisive objection because there may be clever ways in which an awarding body could do this. Perhaps an awarding body could name, for example, Polanski as the winner of an award without actually giving him the trophy or even inviting him to the award’s ceremony. But, again, it may be that this response is better suited to individuals or groups attending such ceremonies than to the awarding organisations.



In summary, this response offers a potential best of both worlds solution. But like many such solutions, it runs the risk of satisfying neither side.

#### *5.4 Focussed Admiration*

The final response we will consider is to honour immoral artists in such a way that they are clearly only honouring the recipient's admirable traits and actions and do not even appear to be a global endorsement of the person. This approach also has the potential to offer a best of both worlds solution that would allow awards to be made solely on artistic merit whilst also addressing the moral problems we have examined in this paper.

The problem with this approach is that it is far from clear how it could be achieved. What steps could an awarding body take to ensure that the award is only interpreted as honouring the recipient's artistic talents? One approach would be to explicitly state in the giving of the award that the organisation condemns the immoral behaviour. However, this approach seems very close to the previous one of awarding under protest and is likely to face the same objections. But, as with awarding under protest, this is far from a devastating objection. It is rather a challenge that can perhaps be met by some creative thinking on the part of the honouring institutions. Unlike awarding under protest, honouring institutions are arguably better placed to meet this challenge than individuals.

We suspect that for this approach to work there would need to be a wider societal change in the way people respond to fame and celebrity. What is needed is a move away from the tendency to admire people globally as a response to their admirable qualities. As Earl Spurgin (2012) argues, we need an approach to role models that sees them as exemplars for particular *qualities* rather than exemplars *simpliciter*. However, this kind of approach, which we may think

of as that of developing an appropriate ethics of admiration, is one that is in tension with a celebrity culture that treats celebrities as heroes to be worshipped (Boorstin 1961: 43). It seems unlikely, then, that this approach is one that will succeed unless it is accompanied by a wider societal change in the way people engage with celebrity.

### *5.5 The Strength of the Moral Reasons*

We have only sought to highlight advantages and disadvantages of these approaches. We expect that there is no one-size-fits all response – that is, we might have to differentiate our response to these moral reasons depending on the particulars of each case. Here we highlight some considerations that arguably affect the strength of these reasons and note how this might affect the best approach to take.

As we noted earlier, the “no award” approach might be best when the moral reasons against honouring immoral artists are strongest and the “do nothing” approach might be better when the moral reasons are weakest. There are a number of factors about the wrongdoer that are relevant for determining when these moral reasons are strongest. First, the severity of the wrongdoing. For example, Bill Cosby was called a “sexually violent predator” by the judge who sentenced him to 3-10 years in prison (Levenson and Cooper 2018). Given this, we have reason not to honour Bill Cosby. But while tax evasion is wrong, there is much less reason not to honour Jimmy Carr even though he is guilty of such wrongdoing (Rayner 2016). Second, the likelihood that the honour will have a problematic public meaning. For example, will the honour be perceived as a global endorsement of the person? This will largely be determined by the social context in which the award takes place.

The nature of the award may also be important here. An award for Best Picture, for example, does not just honour the director of the film but all of the hundreds of other people who

worked on it from the actors, producers, script writers and editors to the runners, researchers and accountants. This award is therefore likely to be less problematic than an award that specifically honours someone who has behaved immorally, such as a best actor or best director award. There are even distinctions to be made between awards targeting individuals. For example, a best director award is more easily seen as targeting only someone's artistic merits than a lifetime achievement award. Which response we take, then, also arguably depends on the nature of honour in question.

The third factor that affects the strength of the moral reasons not to honour immoral artists is whether or not the wrongdoer has undergone any process of redemption. If an immoral artist has sincerely apologised or made amends with their victims, these acts of redemption could potentially weaken the moral reasons against not honouring them. This is because any honours would have less risk of being interpreted as identifying immoral artists as people who are deserving of admiration for everything they have done or the kind of person they have been across their entire life. In other words, honouring such artists may be a way to put the “focussed admiration” approach into effect. By admitting fault and taking responsibility, such artists in effect allow for their wrongdoings to be highlighted in the honouring process with the hopeful outcome that it seems clear that they are being picked out as admirable precisely for their artistic merits.

These points also apply to artists who have “merely” been accused of wrongdoing. This is of course a tricky area and there is good reason to worry about responding to mere accusations by withholding awards from the accused. However, there is also good reason to be concerned about the impact celebrating such people may have on perceptions of the credibility of those making the accusations, given the impact on credibility as a consequence of honouring that we outlined in §3. Importantly, even if the accusations turn out to be false, the falsity of the

accusations should not be determined even in part on how admirable we find a particular celebrity to be. Given that honouring picks out a celebrity as someone to be admired, continuing to honour an accused celebrity is therefore problematic. Notably, the British Academy of Film and Television Arts suspended, but did not withdraw, Bryan Singer's nomination for Best Director for the film *Bohemian Rhapsody* due to outstanding allegations against him. In a statement, the British Academy said that they consider "the alleged behaviour completely unacceptable and incompatible with its values". While they acknowledged that Singer denied the allegations, they said that the suspension would remain in place "until the outcome of the allegations has been resolved" (BAFTA 2019). This seems like a creative take on the "award under protest" approach, given that they waited until after voting on the awards was complete to announce their decision.

## **6. Conclusion**

We first argued that honouring picks out a person as someone we ought to admire. We then identified three moral reasons against honouring immoral artists, even granting that they are fitting targets of such honours. Some of these reasons applied to all such artists, while others apply only to those artists whose wrongdoings express and contribute to structural injustices. We then considered how we might respond to these moral reasons.

We realise our discussion raises lots of important questions that we don't touch upon. For example: Do the moral reasons we identify ever generate duties? Is it ever all-things-inappropriate to honour these artists? What are the grounds for these moral reasons? Are there moral reasons in favour of honouring immoral artists? Does honouring silence in other ways? How does this apply to other immoral figures? Is it appropriate for individuals to honour and admire immoral artists? Moreover, we do not wish to convey that the reasons we

have identified are the only moral reasons against honouring immoral artists. For example, honouring may also express disrespect for the victims and honouring may also make the honourers and those who support the honourers complicit in the wrongs suffered by the victims. We take these questions and further reasons seriously but we unfortunately lack the space to do them justice here. Our overall aim is to focus philosophical attention onto this important topic rather than to settle the many questions that this topic raises. We hope that future work will deal with these questions and develop the insights we hope we have made here.<sup>8</sup>

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