

Museums Must Reject Tainted Money

WHEN it comes to blood money for the arts, how bloody is too bloody?

On Wednesday, the Metropolitan Museum of Art decided that money made from selling the opioids that have killed several hundred thousand people is too bloody. It announced it would no longer take donations from “members of the Sackler family presently associated with Purdue Pharma, the manufacturer of OxyContin.”

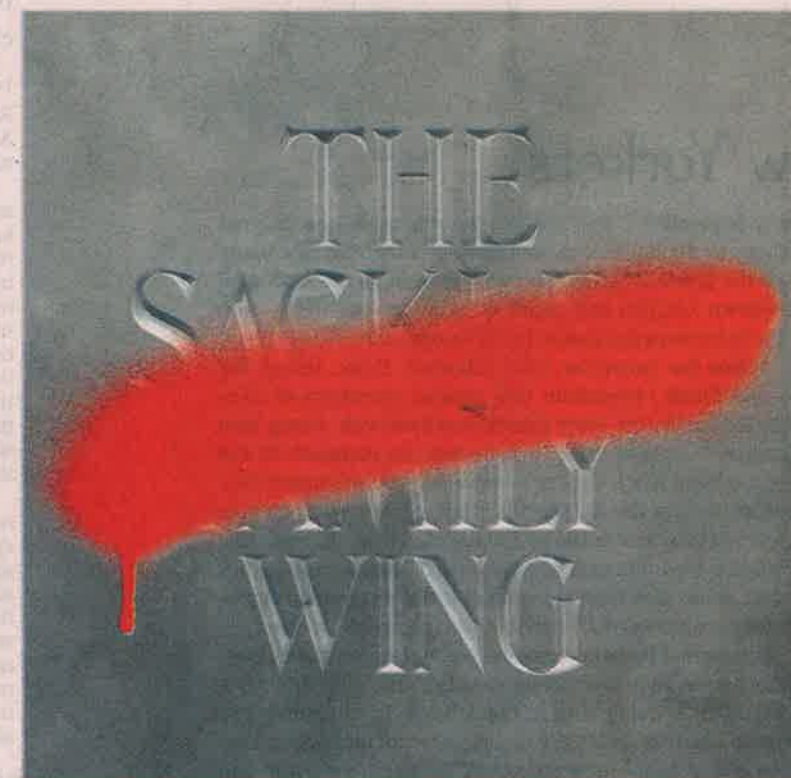
“On occasion, we feel it’s necessary to step away from gifts that are not in the public interest,” said Daniel H. Weiss, the Met’s president.

“Gifts that are not in the public interest.” It is a pregnant, important phrase. Coming on the heels of similar decisions by the Tate Modern in London and the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in New York, the spurning of Oxy-cash seems to reflect a growing awareness that gifts to the arts and other good causes are not only a way for ultrawealthy people to scrub their consciences and reputations. Philanthropy can also be central to purchasing the immunity needed to profiteer at the expense of the common welfare. Perhaps accepting tainted money in such cases isn’t just giving people a pass. Perhaps it is enabling misconduct.

This was the startling assertion made by New York State in its civil complaint, filed in March, against members of the Sackler family and others involved in the opioid crisis. It accused them of seeking to “profiteer from the plague they knew would be unleashed.” And the lawsuit explicitly linked Sackler do-gooding with Sackler harm-doing: “Ultimately, the Sacklers used their ill-gotten wealth to cover up their misconduct with a philanthropic campaign intending to whitewash their decades-long success in profiting at New Yorkers’ expense.”

It was strong stuff: The State of New York was claiming that arts institutions had allowed themselves to be used as lubricant in a death machine. “It’s a remarkable statement,” Benjamin Soskis, a historian of philanthropy at the Urban Institute in Washington, told me, “the sort of thing we heard from critics of philanthropy on the periphery of power but rarely, in recent decades, from those at the center.”

Are museums, opera houses, food pantries and other nonprofits to be held responsible for how their donors have made their money? It is a question being asked more and more as a century-old taboo shatters. “No amount of charity in



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spending such fortunes can compensate in any way for the misconduct in acquiring them,” Theodore Roosevelt said after John D. Rockefeller proposed starting a foundation in 1909. It was not a lonely thought at the time.

But in the decades since, not least because of the amount of philanthropic coin that has been spent, a deeply complicit silence took hold: It was understood that you don’t challenge people on how they make their money, how they pay their taxes (or don’t), what continuing misdeeds they may be engaged in — so long as they “give back.”

When I speak privately with people working in nonprofits, especially younger people, I hear this complaint again and again: They agonize about having to stay quiet not only about their donors’ membership in a class that has benefited from an age of inequality but also about specific conduct by many donors that often worsens the problems the donors and nonprofits are working to solve.

And so the decision by the Met and the other museums may be a small sign that this compact is cracking — and perhaps

Donations go in, and whitewashed reputations come out.

that nonprofits are taking a broader view of their role in public life.

“Turning down money runs against the grain of the thinking that’s long governed charitable boards — that they are stewards of the interests of particular institutions, with considerations of broader public interest being peripheral,” Mr. Soskis, the historian, said when I asked him about the Met. “What we are seeing more and more of, through the spread of social media, and an increased willingness to critically engage major philanthropic gifts, is the assertion of the public’s interest in the philanthropic exchange.”

It remains to be seen whether other arts institutions will follow the lead of the Met, Tate and Guggenheim — and more broadly, whether the nonprofit sector will begin asking itself some deeply uncomfortable questions.

Should anyone working to make cities

better and more equitable take money from JPMorgan Chase, which paid a huge sum for its role in helping to bring about the 2008 mortgage crisis? Should anyone working to help families affected by President Trump’s immigration policies take money from Mark Zuckerberg, whose soft-pedaling of Russian interference in the 2016 election potentially helped Mr. Trump gain votes? Should any health institution take money tied to Pepsi or Coca-Cola?

Make no mistake: To ask these questions opens a can of worms. The Sacklers are an easy case. Once the complicity turns more diffuse, it is hard to say whether a nonprofit is participating in an injustice by taking money — or doing the best it can in a flawed reality. What’s next after this? Is there a statute of limitations on looking for blood money? What kind of moral purity test are these institutions supposed to use? Once you begin to raise these questions, how do you actually draw those lines around what’s acceptable? At the very least, there ought to be more transparency about all donated money.

The Met has already drawn some lines. It won’t remove the Sackler name from its galleries; it won’t return money already donated. What it should do is model a new process for evaluating money.

Past and future donations could be judged on various criteria: Was the money legally and fairly made? Is the donor actively using the money to whitewash continuing activities, or was the money made long ago and inherited, altering if not eliminating the concerns about provenance? Is the money derived from tax evasion or extreme legal tax avoidance? Is the museum effectively selling a modern papal indulgence for a sin that shouldn’t be so easily pardoned? Do the donors have a duty of reparation to people they have exploited or harmed?

And the public should be brought into the process. Institutions like museums enjoy the privilege of being untaxed, so citizens should be able to comment on and scrutinize prospective donations.

These questions will long be with us. These museums have forced an essential conversation. For far too long, generosity has been allowed to serve as a wingman of injustice; giving back disguises merciless taking; making a difference becomes inseparable from making a killing — sometimes literally. It is high time to reject these alibis for treachery.

Religious Dads Can Put the Kids to Bed, Too

“BLUE marriages are better — or at least that is the conventional wisdom. Couples who live according to egalitarian values, sharing domestic responsibilities like housework and cooking, have long been seen as superior by most academics, journalists and public intellectuals engaged in the national conversation about the American family.

“We have every reason to believe that new values about marriage and sex roles will make it easier for parents to sustain and enrich their relationships,” the feminist family historian Stephanie Coontz wrote in 1997 in “The Way We Really Are: Coming to Terms With America’s Changing Families.” At the end of the last century, Ms. Coontz believed, the arc of American family life was bending toward a better and brighter future — a progressive one.

Today, this view retains considerable currency. A 2016 report from the Council on Contemporary Families suggested that in “today’s social climate, relationship quality and stability are generally highest” in more egalitarian relationships. The Bloomberg Opinion columnist Noah Smith has speculated that “maybe liberal morality is simply better adapted for creating stable two-parent families in a post-industrialized world.”

But consider Anna and Greg, a couple that one of us (Mr. Wilcox) recently interviewed for a book on marriage. When Anna started having children, she had no wish to work full time outside the home. Anna is not alone in this regard: The Pew Research Center reported in 2013 that about two-thirds of married mothers would prefer not to work full time — a fact that is often overlooked in our public conversation about work and family, which is heavily influenced by progressive assumptions. Anna says she is grateful that because Greg works hard at his small business, she has been able to make this choice.

But more than Greg’s bread-winning, what makes Anna truly happy with her husband is that he is fully engaged on the home front. Not only does he diligently help with the kids’ nightly homework, he is also a fun father — flooding the backyard with water in the winter so the kids can ice skate, taking them on trail hikes in Shenandoah National Park in the summer. He also takes an active role in the family’s religious life: Every night, Greg prays with the children before bedtime.

“I feel so blessed to have Greg as a husband,” Anna said. “His involvement as a father and leadership in the family only adds to my level of happiness.” As research has shown, Anna’s marriage is illustrative of the experience of many women married to men from evangelical Protestant, Latter-day Saint, traditional Catholic or Or-

have such marriages.

And it turns out that the happiest of all wives in America are religious conservatives, followed by their religious progressive counterparts. Fully 73 percent of wives who hold conservative gender values and attend religious services regularly with their husbands have high-quality marriages. When it comes to relationship quality, there is a J-curve in women’s marital happiness, with women on the left and the right enjoying higher quality marriages than those in the middle — but especially wives on the right.

When we look just at women’s political ideology using the General Social Survey, another nationally representative survey of American adults, we see a similar

Faith, like feminism, sets high expectations for husbands.

curve in marital happiness for American wives. It turns out the bluest and reddest wives are most likely to report that they are “very happy” in their marriages. To be sure, the General Social Survey curve is closer to a U-curve, as the level of marital happiness for the group of extreme liberals and liberals and the group of extreme conservatives and conservatives is essentially the same. Together, these two groups account for about one-third of American wives: about 16 percent on the left and 19 percent on the right.

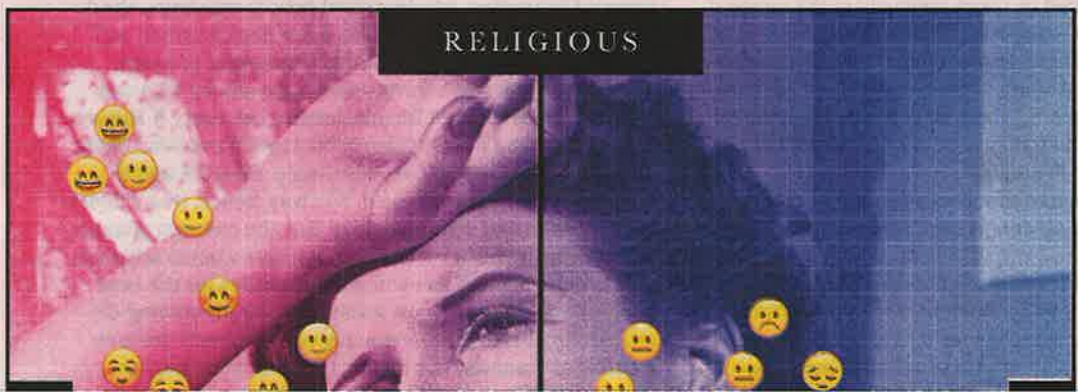
What explains why wives in the religious and ideological middle, as well as secular conservative wives, are less likely to enjoy high-quality marriages? We suspect

that part of their relative unhappiness, compared with religiously conservative women, is that they don’t enjoy the social, emotional and practical support for family life provided by a church, mosque or synagogue. We also suspect that these groups are less likely to have husbands who have made the transition to the “new father” ideal that’s gained currency in modern America — and they’re not happy with their partner’s disengagement.

In fact, in listening to the happiest secular progressive wives and their religiously conservative counterparts, we noticed something they share in common: devoted family men. Both feminism and faith give family men a clear code: They are supposed to play a big role in their kids’ lives. Devoted dads are de rigueur in these two communities. And it shows: Both culturally progressive and religiously conservative fathers report high levels of paternal engagement.

So while some may judge men’s advances on the home front as insufficient and inadequate, this generation of fathers and husbands is actually markedly more engaged in the lives of their families than the fathers of two or three generations ago. The average amount of time that dads devote per week to child care has risen from 2.5 hours per week in 1965 to 8 hours per week in 2016.

In this way, at least, the arc of American family life in the 21st century has indeed bent toward a better and brighter place. But for all the arguments between feminism and faith, it turns out that both have had a hand in sustaining and enriching today’s marriages by turning, as the prophet Malachi put it, “the hearts of the fathers to their children.”



OPINION

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OPINION

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