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A functional view of artistic evaluation

Jonathan Gilmore

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Abstract I develop and defend the following functional view of art: a work of art typically possesses as an essential feature one or more points, purposes, or ends with reference to the satisfaction of which that work can be appropriately evaluated. This way of seeing a work's artistic value as dependent on its particular artistic ends (whatever they may be) suggests an answer to a longstanding question of what sort of internal relation, if any, exists between the wide variety of values (moral, cognitive, aesthetic, etc.) that may be possessed by works of art and their value qua works of art.

Keywords Art · Aesthetics · Evaluation · Function · Ethics and aesthetics · Art and cognition · Intrinsic value · Constitutive functions

1 Introduction

In what follows I develop and defend a functional view of art and its evaluation. My suggestion is that a work of art typically possesses as an essential feature one or more points, purposes, or ends, in the satisfaction of which the work can be evaluated qua art. I hope to show that the construal of art in this manner as a functional kind offers a plausible response to a longstanding question of what sort of internal relation, if any, exists between the wide variety of values that may be possessed by a work of art (such as moral, cognitive, religious, political, educational, historical, and pleasure-related values) and its artistic value. In some cases, for example, moral flaws seem to count as artistic flaws. In other cases, the artistic value of a work seems immune to criticism that the work is morally defective. I will show how a principled and systematic explanation of that sort of

J. Gilmore (✉)
Yale University, Connecticut Hall, New Haven, CT 06520, USA
e-mail: jonathan.gilmore@yale.edu

distinction emerges when we evaluate works with reference to their essential aims, ends and purposes—what I will call their *constitutive functions*.[1]

My proposal, to anticipate, is the following functional view:

> Works of art have constitutive functions. To evaluate a work of art with reference to its constitutive function is one way to evaluate it as a work of art. Here, if an artwork has a constitutive function, and one of its artistic properties counts against the satisfaction of that function, then that property is a defect in the artwork considered as the work of art that it is.

Section 2 diminishes the force of two major philosophical perspectives on art that stand in opposition to the functional account that I defend: one of those views is that it is never appropriate to evaluate art qua art with reference to the satisfaction of a function; the other is that it is sometimes appropriate to evaluate art qua art with reference to a function, but that there is only one such function, such as furnishing aesthetic value. In place of those two views, I claim that artworks possess essential functions but there is no one function or set of functions that works of art share qua works of art.

Section 3 elucidates what I mean by a constitutive function—a function essential to a work of art as the particular work that it is. Section 4 treats the source and determination of such constitutive functions in art in its creator's intentions. With those items in place, Sect. 5 offers a full statement and defense of the functional view of artistic evaluation: just as ordinary artifacts should fulfill whatever constitutive functions they have, so works of art should fulfill their constitutive functions. Section 6 shows how the functional view leads to some interesting consequences for an account of when a given value possessed by a work of art (moral, aesthetic, expressive, documentary, etc.) bears an internal relation to its value as art.

2 Functional theories of art

Any functional view of art needs to contend with the position held by many philosophers of art that, although artifacts typically have functions, artworks belong to a special class of artifacts that have no function. That position is not plausible as stated, if only because at least some artifacts clearly do have functions and are paradigmatically works of art (e.g., statues to commemorate persons or events; paintings designed to decorate rooms; music written for dances; satires designed to mock public figures; fables written to convey moral platitudes; stained glass designed to instruct the illiterate). A more apt proposal is that works of art do not have such functions qua works of art. This claim can most plausibly be construed in an evaluative sense: the satisfaction of a function is relevant to the evaluation of an ordinary functional object, such as a tool, but not to the evaluation of a work of art.

[1] One might wish to adopt a more felicitous way of describing the ends, purposes, points of works of art than "functions" but I will preserve the term because I want to show how in certain ways (e.g., in how their purposes and evaluation-relevant properties are related), the ends of a work of art are like the functions of an ordinary artifact or tool.

One motivation for denying the relevance of functions to the evaluation of art is that, if it were correct to say that we evaluate a work of art in light of the satisfaction of a function, this would counter-intuitively suggest that it is only whatever good is instrumentally furnished by the satisfaction of the function that we care about, not the work of art.[2]

It is true that the value of an ordinary functional artifact is typically exhausted by its value in satisfying its function. If two corkscrews remove a cork equally well (i.e., cleanly, easily, reliably, etc.), they are equally good as corkscrews. An ordinary artifact, to the extent that it is evaluated as an instance of a functionally defined kind, is typically judged for its success in satisfying the ends characteristic of that kind, not for the material or mechanism by which those ends are satisfied.

However, when we evaluate the function or end of a work of art, that evaluation is typically not based on merely the discharging of those ends, without regard to how that happens to occur. Our interest is rather in the ends *as realized* by the means: that is, how the material or structural medium of the work discharges a function. This is not always the case; our concern, for example, for whether a lullaby is good instance of its kind might address only whether it helps a child to sleep. However, usually our evaluation of a work of art addresses what the work achieves *and* the manner in which that achievement is realized. One takes pleasure in the reflection on the past prompted by an elegy, but that pleasure lies not only in the reflection but in how the particular poetic construction elicits it. Two films might produce feelings of fear or dread in audiences, and yet one be judged a greater work for causing that response in a more subtle manner. Our appreciation of a work is in part an appreciation of its ends in light of the means by, or in which, they are achieved, not just of its ends.

Some theorists would say this means-end evaluation of works of art demonstrates that what we really care about are the means by which a work of art achieves its function, not that the function is satisfied. Our identifying the function of a work might help expose what its artistically relevant properties are, but we evaluate those properties, not the end they contribute to. For example, we may recognize an ancient statue of Apollo as a great work of art for its sculptural qualities, even if we place no value on its function, to have been discharged through those qualities, of honoring the god. But this sort of example shows just that even if we do not find an end of a work of art valuable, we may find the means valuable for reasons (say, aesthetic reasons) that are independent of their being the means to that end. One can marvel at the cinematic techniques of D.W. Griffith's influential *The Birth of a Nation* and still condemn the film's point, to which those ends are marshaled, of glorifying the KKK. Indeed, we can assign distinct evaluations to (1) a work of art's successfully realized function; to (2) the means by which that function is realized; and, to (3) the function-as-realized-by or in those means.

A proponent of the non-functional view could respond that while art may be properly evaluated with reference to the satisfaction of a function, there is a (more

[2] Budd (1985, p. 29) writes "[i]f music is of value as a means to an independently specifiable end…, then it must be possible that there should be other, and perhaps even better, means for achieving what music aims at; so that music could be dispensed with and replaced…".

central) source of artistic value that does not correspond to a function. That value is typically identified as aesthetic value: the intrinsic value of one's experience of a work of art's aesthetic properties. The view that art ought to be evaluated on *exclusively* aesthetic grounds finds few contemporary defenders (except, indirectly, among those who equate aesthetic value with whatever value art has as art). However, we can see that *even if* it were true that the proper evaluation of works of art is only, or primarily, for the aesthetic value they furnish, such aesthetic criticism could not ignore all points, purposes, or functions of art. For it can be an aesthetic property of a musical work that it expresses a certain emotion; of a minimalist work that it provokes a certain kind of awareness of one's body or stance; of a joke that it makes one laugh. To evaluate these works for such aesthetic features, if genuinely possessed, is to attend to the points, purposes, or functions that they are designed, created, or proffered to achieve.[3]

Some philosophers suggest that furnishing such aesthetic value is not just a function of art but an *essential* function of art. The idea here would be that the statue of Apollo, in virtue of being a work of art, has the essential function of furnishing aesthetic value, whatever capacities and other—say, religious—functions it might have. It might appear that such an account is a non-starter in light of the obvious objection that there are many works of art that furnish no aesthetic value, or for which aesthetic value is irrelevant to their identity as art. However, that objection on the basis of counterexamples would not, in itself, be decisive. For an artifact may have a function yet be unable to satisfy that function. A broken iron is still an iron. So, just because something doesn't satisfy a function that is attributed to it, does not entail that that function is wrongly attributed.

It should be noted that if works of art *always* satisfy a function simply in virtue of being works of art then reference to that function cannot explain why one work of art is a good—or comparatively better—instance of its kind. If, say, art as a kind has the putative function of enhancing social ties, as in some anthropological accounts, or grounding class distinctions, as in some sociologists' views, then successfully discharging those functions, because a property of all art, does not enter into determining the value of any particular instance of art qua art.[4]

In any case, the problem in treating an aesthetic function as an essential feature of all art concerns the causal and historical commitments such a functional attribution

[3] Carroll (2004). Davies (2006) argues further that the aesthetic evaluation of a functional object (or work of art with a function) that has non-incidental aesthetic properties *always* takes into account the contribution of such aesthetic properties to the satisfaction of its function.

[4] Some philosophers rely on that point to distinguish between those putatively "descriptive" functions (the role art plays within a larger system) from the more typical normative functions (what art ought to do or is good at doing) such as furnishing aesthetic pleasure (e.g., Novitz 1992). However, it is a mistake to see the two types of functions as distinguished by being normative in one case and non-normative in the other. For the distinction is between where the normativity applies. The normativity of ordinary functions applies to the value of individual works; the normativity of sociological, anthropological, psychological, etc. functions applies to the practice of art, the art world, or some general kind of art, as a whole. If we call the enhancement of social connections a function of art, it is because we have a background normative assumption that such cohesiveness is good from some (e.g., society's) point of view. Otherwise, that result would be called just an *effect* of art, not a function. It is a further question, of course, whether the attribution of a function to a practice that was not designed or preserved to serve that function has explanatory worth.

must make. Insofar as the function of any given work of art is derived from the intentions from which it was created, the proponent of an aesthetic function of art must hold that that all works of art are created from intentions that have some aesthetic purpose. However, that would not be consistent with any plausible empirical account of the history of art. The point is not just that many works of art have been created that do not aim at beauty, for aiming at ugliness is, indeed, to aim to achieve a kind of aesthetic effect. Rather, the point is that many works of art are not created in light of aesthetic concerns. Many medieval works of art, conceptual works, and works of other sorts are centrally organized around cognitive, spiritual, and other non-aesthetic ends. Appropriation art, for example, is in many cases designed to have the appearance, but not the aesthetic properties, of the artwork that it copies (the aesthetic properties of the original are only referred to, not possessed, by the work of appropriation).

Nick Zangwill addresses such counterexamples to his qualified aesthetic functionalist account by suggesting that such non-aesthetic works have at least a derivative aesthetic function: they are often a response to (i.e., a rejection of) aesthetically functional works of art.[5] Although it is no doubt true that many works are parasitic in that manner, this is not true of art that is no longer fueled by the avant-garde rejection of beauty nor of works of art created before an aesthetic function came to be (wrongly) posited as essential to art. In any case, having a property x that is parasitic on (say, via the rejection of) property y is not to have property y. Being divorced is not a mode of being married.

Where Zangwill's account proves more enlightening is in characterizing how "*if* something is a work of art *and* it has an aesthetic function *then* it has some aesthetic function that is essential to it."[6] Here, the idea is that an aesthetic function is essential to many particular works of art; they would not be those works of art and could not continue to be those works of art without that aesthetic function. In what follows, I rely on that account. However, I see it as describing a special case of a phenomenon that should be captured at a more general level: my claim is that artworks possess essential functions but there is no function or set of functions that works of art share qua works of art.

This claim that the functions of art are multiple allows that in some cases an aesthetic function is a function of a work of art, but the possession of such an aesthetic function is an empirical, not metaphysical or conceptual, truth. There is no answer to what the function of art qua art is other than the historical fact of what functions art has had or has. Those functions fall into a variety of kinds and, presumably, works of art will be created with new functions as yet unidentified.[7]

[5] Zangwill (2007). For a related argument that the institution or practice of the art world since the eighteenth century has an aesthetic function, see Iseminger (2004).

[6] Zangwill (2007, p. 64), his emphasis.

[7] It is consistent with there being no necessary function of art that there are constraints on what can be a function of art. There are, of course, some artistic ends that it would not be possible to satisfy—meaning that no intention that a work have that function could be successfully realized. The artist Piero Manzoni once installed a pedestal upside down on the earth and declared the planet-and-base his work of art. Although this succeeded in being a work of art, it was not as a sculpture which succeeded in making the actual earth a genuine constituent.

Before I offer a more specific characterization of such constitutive functions, I should address an important objection to the very possibility of evaluating a particular work of art qua art—that is, as a good instance of its kind—without there being a single function or set of functions that all art shares. If art as a kind is associated with no particular function or set of functions, and yet a work's function is a relevant source of its value, how can one say that any given work of art is a good instance (paradigm, model, successful example) of that kind?

Such kind-relative value has been taken by many philosophers to be a central form of normativity. Judith Jarvis Thomson, for example, defends the view that, "[T]here is such a property as being a good K if and only if K is a goodness-fixing kind" (Thomson 2008, p. 21). So a given toaster has the property of being a good toaster only if there is a kind—toaster—associated with a specification of what it is to be a good member of that kind. A worry is that if, as I suggest, art is a kind that is not associated with any particular function or functions among its good-making characteristics, how is it possible for the function of any work of art to enter into the evaluation of it as good *qua* art? If there were no particular function associated with being a good toaster, one could not say that any given toaster is, *by virtue of satisfying its function*, good qua toaster. If works of art have functions but art as a kind is not associated with (the satisfaction of) any particular function, it seems that a work of art cannot be good qua art by virtue of its function.[8]

However, even if *art* is not a goodness-fixing kind, the function of a work of art can enter into an appraisal of it qua member of some more specific artistically relevant kind. That is, even if a work of art cannot be evaluated qua art, it can be judged with reference to its function qua a member of a style, movement, genre, or other category, subordinate to that of art as a kind.[9] The idea here is that works of art have ends indexed to the genres, styles, or other categories they belong to (e.g., classical temple, picaresque novel, neo-impressionist painting), in addition to whatever particular, work-specific ends they have. Or, rather, works of art often satisfy their category-specific ends in and through satisfying their particular ends. So we may evaluate any given work with a function, in part, in light of how well it satisfies the functions associated with its category. But this reference to a work's category or categories is not ad-hoc, for identifying a work as belonging to a category—such as cubist painting, still-life, sonata, political propaganda, romance novel, royal portrait, satire, body art, and so on—often depends upon an explanatory hypothesis about the kinds of ends, problems, and projects the work was designed to pursue.[10]

[8] One potential way of avoiding that conclusion is to embrace a particularist form of evaluation that rejects the demand that the evaluation of a work of art qua art appeal to general reasons (such as the possession of a particular function) for why any instance of art is good. Purely procedural definitions of art (as in Dickie 1997), for example, do not require such particularism but allow that what makes something a work of art may be independent of what makes a work artistically valuable.

[9] See Walton (1970) for a defense of the categorical approach in evaluation and Carroll (2008) for a defense of the approach in both evaluation and interpretation.

[10] Such identification of one of a work's categories does not *always* identify the work's aims. The identification of a work as a photograph, for example, tells us that it was made through a particular kind of physical and chemical process, but not for what ends. But the identification of a work as, say, a surrealist or WPA photograph tells us to some degree what its animating concerns are, as well as some of the criteria for success their creators looked to in making those works.

Because any given work may, and usually does, belong to more than one category, it is possible for a work to be successful as one type of thing but unsuccessful as another. And it is possible for a work to fall short of satisfying all of its functions because they are mutually incompatible. In any case, such evaluation seems to allow the evaluation of functional works of art qua functional works of art without appealing to any function characteristic of *art* as a kind.

However, one caveat needs to added to the theory that the evaluation of a work of art is a matter of appraising it qua a member of its genre, style, or other category: it is a feature of the practice of art in Western traditions, and perhaps others, that, if a work of art is a member of one or more categories of art but does not conform to good-making characteristics (including functions) associated with those categories, the work may nonetheless succeed in instantiating great artistic value.[11]

The thought here is that, while at any given time a work of art can be a good work of art through possessing the properties currently identified as the good-making characteristics of its kind, the possession of those particular good-making characteristics is not *necessary* for the work to be a good member of its kind. By contrast, an ordinary, non-idiosyncratic artifact typically belongs to a kind associated with certain characteristics, in the possession of which its members are good or defective. A can opener is a good can opener if and only if it possesses the good-making characteristics associated with that artifact kind. A can opener that was designed to depart radically from the norm of enabling the opening of cans could not be a good example of its kind. However, a good work of art of some genre, style, or other category may be good qua art of that kind even as it rejects (modifies, elaborates, replaces, and so on) the heretofore good-making characteristics of that kind. The good-making characteristics (including functions) associated with categories of art are susceptible to revision through works that are instances of those very categories.[12]

Therefore, while the categories in which a work of art fits ground the evaluation of it, a correct identification of its membership in that category can offer only a defeasible reason for appraising it in light of the good-making properties associated with that category. For an artist may draw on the resources or capacities of a category of art without taking on board the norms of that category. Works might be created, for example, that defy the conventional expectations of their kind, as in Merce Cunningham's choreographed dances that reproduce the action of ordinary walking. Indeed, while we might think of an artist as typically intending to create a work in a given genre, a more apt characterization would be that an artist intends to create a work in a given genre so as to satisfy certain ends. Only sometimes are those ends the standard ends of the genre. Raz (2003, p. 31) remarks that "The very idea of opera… is a normative idea in that we understand the concept of an opera… in part by understanding what a good opera is like." The good-making

[11] This was Stoppard's (1973, p. 21) complaint: "There are two ways of becoming an artist. The first way is to do the things by which is meant art. The second way is to make art mean the things you do…"

[12] Sometimes the good-making characteristics before and after the revision can be characterized as different subordinate forms of a single higher order value (such as the higher order value of painterly realism achieved in the styles of Impressionism and Post-Impressionism) but often the values of art at different moments are incommensurable.

characteristics (including the satisfaction of aims or functions) of a given kind of art, such as opera, are supplied by the good instances of that kind. Such instances might, over the history of the art, be good for contrary reasons. While the identification of a work as a member of a category offers a *prima facie* reason for evaluating it in light of criteria associated with that category, the ends of the work furnished by the artist's successfully realized intentions can trump the ends of the category to which the work belongs.

In the above discussion, I showed why there is no conceptual or practical reason why considerations of a particular work of art's function cannot enter into its evaluation. In Sect. 5 I show precisely how a work of art's satisfaction of its particular function can always enter into its evaluation as art. But, for the moment, I want to better identify what sort of function is relevant in such evaluation. I call this function a *constitutive function*.

3 Constitutive functions

A constitutive function of an artifact is a function that the artifact possesses in an essential manner. The function is a property of the artifact without which the artifact would not be the particular artifact that it is. Let me stress that having a constitutive function does not entail being able to serve or discharge that function. Whether an artifact could lose *all* capacity to serve its essential function, and still be the same artifact, is unclear. In any case, the important distinction here is that between a constitutive function and merely accidental or passing function, i.e., a use to which an artifact is put but which is not the artifact's function. A non-essential function that is given to an artifact may manifest a disposition the artifact has, but it does not reflect the artifact's identity.[13] Indeed, there is a strong temptation to re-describe any non-essential function of an artifact as merely the purpose for which the artifact is used on a particular occasion. In any case, if an artifact loses or does not have a capacity to serve such accidental functions, it does not have those accidental functions. An iron has the constitutive function of ironing clothes but it may be given the only-accidental function of holding a door open. If it could not serve that accidental function, it would be odd to claim that it still has that function, nonetheless.

By contrast, if the iron broke or there was no electricity available and it thereby could not serve its constitutive function, it would still have that function. So a constitutive function is not "projected" onto or given to an artifact; rather, the artifact is such as to have that function. Of course, an artifact with one constitutive function can be employed in the constitution of another artifact with its own constitutive function, as a tire might be made into a playground swing or a urinal

[13] For the contrary view in which the function of a work of art is not a constituent of it but is accorded to it in the actions of an artist or an audience making use of the artwork, see Wolterstorff (1980).

into a readymade work of art.[14] Here, essential properties of one artifact (including functional properties) might not be essential to another artifact even though they are coexisting or realized in the same material.

A natural way of distinguishing constitutive and accidental functions that I've already appealed to is to identify the constitutive functions with those that the creators of the works intended them to have.[15] Such attributions of an essential function to an artifact imply historical and explanatory commitments as to how the artifact came about. By contrast, attributions of accidental functions are not in principle constrained by facts about the origin of the object, although they may be (like attributions of essential functions) constrained by facts about the object's capacity to serve the proposed function. (These facts pertaining to capacities may be historical; for example, one cannot give a fossil the accidental function of revealing the diet of prehistoric animals unless the item really comes from that period.)

Some philosophers try to extend an etiological or "selected effects" account of biological function (in which the function of a trait is the effect of it favored by natural selection) to an analogous explanation of the function of artifacts.[16] Such an extension identifies the function of an artifact as a capacity, the desirable effect or performance of which explains why the artifact is reproduced. But this has the implausible consequence of making the attribution of an unprecedented or idiosyncratic function to an artifact wait on how history unfolds subsequent to the successful creation of the intended functional artifact. Attributing any naturalistic/non-teleological function to a biological trait may make sense only in assuming that the trait had been selected for, but an artifact may have a novel function without its possession being explained as an effect of its corresponding capacity being present in earlier artifacts. A more plausible account of artifactual function would identify it in the intention with which an artifact is created, whatever the subsequent history of that artifact's kind turns out to be. Although perhaps at the cost of a concept of function that ranges invariantly across artifacts and biology, the

[14] I assume that the relation between a work of art and its material object or structure is such that they are not one and the same object seen, say, under different descriptions, aspects, or saliences. Rather an artwork and the object that constitutes it are two numerically distinct co-existing objects or the artwork supercedes the object it is constituted from. Standard justifications for this view are that (1) the material object could exist before the work of art; (2) works of art are always *created or discovered* (appropriated, etc.) by artists whereas the material that constitutes a work of art need not be; (3) a work of art has intentional properties (expressive, representational, stylistic) that the constituting object typically does not have (or the work of art has intentional properties distinct from those of the material object, as in a collage made from newspapers). Each of those distinctions is compatible with a distinction merely in aspect perception, or attending to different saliences, or different identifying descriptions. In light of that, one way (but not the only way) to conceive of the work of art as distinct from the material object that constitutes it is to say that they differ in *essential properties*. Reference to *de re* essential properties allows us to distinguish the work of art from its material object independent of any description (Lamarque 2002; Baker 2004).

[15] McLaughlin (2001) defends a general intentionalist theory of functions.

[16] See, for example, Preston (1998); Millikan's theory of "proper function" (1984); and Carlson and Parsons (2008, pp. 73–89). Some etiological accounts propose a unitary notion of biological and artifactual function that allows for human intentions playing a role in the process of artifactual selection. But these also allow only a retrospective attribution of functions to original or once-idiosyncratic artifacts.

intentional account allows novel functions to be discovered, not just derived from functions that already exist.

4 Intentions as the source of constitutive functions

There is no direct entailment from an artifact having been intentionally created to it having a purpose or function. For one might intentionally create a wooden box just to practice one's skill in cutting dovetails or intentionally bake a cake to test the oven, without those products having any function or purpose in themselves. In such cases, the action has a purpose or function, but the object created in that action may not. And, of course, an artist might intend to create a work of art with a function but through, say, technical ineptitude or false beliefs fail to create such a work. However, the standard case is that an artist intends to create a work of art that has a function and some capacity to discharge it and acting on that intention explains (in the right way, i.e., without a deviant causal chain) why the work she creates has that function and capacity.

In explaining how a creator's intentions relate to the function of a work, we should adopt a liberal conception of creator. One can create a work of art through various means: by discovering—and reframing or giving a saliency to—an object without otherwise changing it; by appropriating an already created artifact; by employing others to fabricate one's work; by collaborating with others such that the creator is a corporate individual; and so on. What determines whether one is a work's creator is not the degree of labor one invests in the work but the degree of authority one has over what constitutes the work, e.g., what properties belong to it and what are properties that belong only to the material by which it is constituted; whether it is finished; whether a copy or token is an adequate instance of it; and so on. Different contexts endow different individuals involved in the making of a work with different degrees of such authority: a sculptor's judgment typically trumps anyone else's as to whether a carving is finished; a director of a film may have no say over whether a newly cut or colorized version of his film is the same film; an architect is not the sole authority over a building's design; the contribution of an editor to a text in the early modern period was considered part of the work, not, as now, an external intervention to be ignored in uncovering the original composition.

Can any kind of function that an artist intends a work to have be a constitutive function? Sometimes an artist intends to create a work of art with a particular function, and succeeds in creating a work of art, but the work cannot realize its intended function. If the reasons why the work cannot realize the function are external to it (such as would be the case if the work is no longer displayed or is written in a language of which there are no longer speakers) it seems plausible to say that it could have its function without being able to discharge it. Analogously, we can attribute to a person's vote the function of helping elect his candidate, even if there is little probability of that vote being among those that make a difference. However, if a work is created with no capacity to fulfill a given function, it would fail to have that function altogether. Barnett Newman said that, understood properly, his abstract paintings of the 1940s "would mean the end of all state capitalism and

totalitarianism." Because there is no practical way in which that work could discharge that function, we should say, like the putative function of a perpetual-motion machine, it does not have it.

Might a failure of fit between the intention and the artwork's possession of a function be due to the function not being an *artistic* one? If there are any such functions that are disqualified from being artistic, it seems that their identification must be made on a case-by-case basis. If, for example, a musician writes a pop song with the aim of making money, that aim would typically not be an artistic function of that work. One reason for this is that, in *most* cases, we would assume such an economic function is not essential to the particular work. It could have been the same work of art even if the intention with which it was made did not refer to that (non-essential) function. We might determine, accordingly, that the work achieved its artistic but not financial purposes. However, to stay with that example, such a function might not be disqualified from being artistic if making money was integral to the work's realization of, say, an expressive function in proclaiming art to be a commodity or artists to be only hucksters.[17] Indeed, the obverse economic function has some pedigree in works made so as to offer no remuneration, as in Russian Constructivism's photographic collages disseminated in cheap magazines. Striking a symbolic blow against the market's hold on artistic production was a bona fide artistic function (albeit unrealized as the objects were collected and curated, victims of their own success). Although there are competing historical and metaphysical approaches to the question of what *can be* an artistic function, I suggest that one condition of a given function essentially belonging to a particular work of art is that it be identified in some sense *as* an artistic function in the background or content of, the intentions with which the work is created. An artist may endow a work with some ends that she considers to be artistic ends, and with others that she sees as irrelevant to how the work functions as art.

The standard case is that a work of art is created with many functions, some constitutive and some accidental or external. Of course, a work may possess a constitutive function for the sake of serving an external function. It may be a constitutive function of a play to move its audience but its creator may have written it in order to realize the external function of selling lots of tickets. That end or purpose may belong essentially to the action the creator performs in writing the play, without belonging as a function to the play itself.

5 Normative essentialism

Correlative to having an essential function is to be subject to a norm associated with that function. To say an artifact or work of art has a function entails that it is *supposed to* serve that function. It is a necessary condition of an object having a function that there be a norm governing what capacities the object has.

[17] That expressive function is illustrated in art such as J.S.G. Boggs's exchanges of his highly finished drawings of banknotes for goods and actual currency; and the productions of Takashi Murakami (e.g., a handbag designed for Louis Vuitton) that thematize, as well as straddle, the line between retail commercial and high-art markets.

Our evaluation of objects with reference to the kind of thing they are often expresses this normative aspect of the assignment of functions. An object may have the capacity to serve as a weapon, paper-weight, etc., but to identify it as an instance of a given functional kind, say as a hammer, is to identify it as subject to norms associated with that kind of tool. These are the norms with reference to which *malfunctioning* of an artifact is possible.[18] Identifying a pill as an antidote implies that it should counteract a poison; identifying a machine as a toaster implies that it ought to toast bread. Such a norm is internally related to the object's essential function. The artifact's normative essence is entailed by its functional essence.[19]

Such normativity of artifacts designed to serve a function is derived from the familiar, if not entirely understood, normativity of plans, intentions, desires, and rational behavior. If someone has a given end, he should adopt the means, other things being equal, that he believes will realize that end. Because such instrumental imperatives seem to lead to counterintuitive conclusions, such as that a person with murderous ends *ought* to use really lethal weapons, many philosophers adopt a "wide-scope" interpretation of such imperatives, seeing the norm of rationality as applying to the conditional as a whole, i.e., that one ought to be means/end coherent, not that one ought to pursue whatever ends one has.[20] Extending the instrumental norm to artifacts: if someone designs a tool to realize some function, the tool *should* be such (should be so designed) as to realize that function. I should note that it is compatible with it being the case that an artifact ought to satisfy its constitutive function that there ought not to be any such artifact. Someone who thought romantic comedies had a baneful influence on contemporary culture, or nuclear weapons should be eliminated, could still say what features such artifacts as good instances of their kinds are supposed to (ought to) have.

When an artifact does not realize a constitutive function because of a feature essential to the artifact, that feature is a defect in the artifact qua a member of its functional kind. So if it is a constitutive function of a plumber's wrench to loosen nuts around pipes but a particular wrench has a handle too short to allow the necessary torque, that short handle is a defect in the plumber's wrench qua plumber's wrench. That defect counts against it being a good instance (paradigm, model, exemplar, etc.) of its kind. I understand the "counting against" as diminishing the value of the thing in a pro tanto fashion. Insofar as the artifact has a defect—a defect that limits its satisfaction of its function—it is less good as an instance of the kind that it was designed to be.

When there is no general kind to which the artifact belongs, as with idiosyncratic artifacts, a defect counts against its being a good instantiation of the artifact it was intended to be.

The functional view of works of art that I propose is that just as ordinary artifacts should fulfill whatever constitutive functions they have, so works of art should fulfill

[18] The importance of a concept of function allowing (via a norm) the possibility of malfunctioning is a central feature of etiological accounts of biological function. See, for example, Millikan (1989).

[19] See Fine (1995, pp. 276–278).

[20] See Broome (2004). Some philosophers argue that such instrumental imperatives are true only on the condition that the end is one the person ought to pursue. See, e.g., Korsgaard (1997).

their constitutive functions. Insofar as a feature of a work of art prevents it from satisfying its constitutive function, that feature is a defect in the work as a work of art. Specifically,

> If artwork A has constitutive function CF and an artistic property P in A counts against the satisfaction of CF, then P is a defect in A qua artwork A.

That last "qua" is intended to stress that I am speaking only of the relation between the properties of a work of art and the evaluation of the object as a work of art. Those artistic properties may have a different relation to the value of the object as an artifact of some other kind. The visually dramatic story of a stained glass window is internally related in a positive way to its value as a work of art but perhaps detracts from its value as a window. And the reference to an *artistic* property in A (rather than just any property) is redundant, but meant to emphasize that the criticism of a work of art qua art should be based not just on any properties that it possesses (such as the weight of a painting), but only those it possesses as a work of art. One might suggest that we limit the features relevant to such artistic evaluation to those that are intrinsic, but that would inappropriately exclude the extrinsic or relational properties—for example, how the work affects its audience; how it comments on other works of art; its degree of originality—that may count for or against its artistic success.

The evaluative perspective on function that I describe here is similar to the idea in some eighteenth-century aesthetic theories of there being a degree of beauty in an object's "fitness for function." However, the value of such fitness in those contexts was explained typically as residing ultimately in the value of the realized function itself.[21] The view suggested in this paper is that a work's fitness for (its constitutive) function can be an artistically relevant object of evaluation in addition to the function, per se. In other words, we can evaluate a work of art as art from two interdependent perspectives pertaining to its functions: (1) whether it realizes its constitutive (essential and artistic) functions; and (2) whether its realization of those functions is worthy or valuable.

When applied to familiar kinds of artistic properties that frustrate the realization of the ends of a work, the functional view offers unsurprising results. If the constitutive function of a painting is to express some point of view on its subject, then it is an artistic defect in the work if that subject is so casually painted as to be unrecognizable. If an essential purpose of a particular mystery story is to elicit suspense but the identity of its villain is obvious, that feature is an artistic flaw—a flaw in light of the work's artistic ends.

However, the functional view has more *interesting* results when applied to the question of whether other—less obviously artistically germane—properties of a

[21] Hume ([1739–1740] 1978, 2.2.5), for example, observes that we can take pleasure in functional objects even though they are of no use to us: "This observation extends to tables, chairs, scritoires, chimneys, coaches, sadles, ploughs, and indeed to every work of art; it being an universal rule, that their beauty is chiefly deriv'd from their utility, and from their fitness for that purpose…" However, his point is that such pleasure is possible because we can, via sympathy, see the objects from the perspective of those for whom they are useful. Kant's view is closer to the idea that we can take pleasure in merely the fit between means and end.

work may constitute artistic flaws. Can, for example, the property of being immoral count as a defect in art qua art? Or is the value of art as art untouched by its moral or immoral value? I address this question from the functional point of view below.

6 The functional view and moral value

Works of art often elicit forms of moral criticism. Art may express racist, anti-Semitic, and homophobic points of view; objectify women; promote regressive politics; present violence in a seductive light; humiliate and degrade actual persons; violate privacy; destroy property; and so on. Some theorists argue that while a work of art may exhibit such immoral features, a work's moral value is distinct from its artistic value. Opponents of that evaluative version of artistic autonomy have sought for a way to show how, at least in some cases, moral and artistic value are not independent of one another but, rather, internally related.

Of course, a pluralist about the sources of artistic value might suggest that there is an obvious kind of internal connection between moral value and artistic value: moral value is just one among many of the sources of artistic value. Artistic value is the sum or collection (allowing for interaction effects) of the various sorts of values that a work possesses, among them moral values. Pluralism might be the right characterization in general of the structure of art's value. However, saying that moral value is internally related to—because it is one source of—artistic value does not explain under what conditions such an internal relation holds. Does any moral defect in a work count as an artistic defect or only certain kinds of defects under certain conditions? Many works of art (including funny but offensive jokes) seem to be immune to artistic criticism on the grounds of their moral defects; while other works of art seem to be less successful as works of art because of their moral flaws. If, as that intuition suggests, only in some cases does a moral flaw in a work of art make it less good as a work of art, how are those cases distinguished?

When a work is designed to realize a given meaning or expression, but fails in that respect, that failure is an artistic fault: it is a failure of the work to realize its artistic aims. I suggest that we see how in some works those aims include moral aims: such as to express a morally enlightened point of view, or to convey a moral insight, or to afford an experience that is morally praiseworthy, such as making possible an imaginative identification with people from whom we would otherwise be estranged. With the functional view, we can see an internal connection between moral and artistic value in a work of art when, as in those examples, the aims of the work of art include moral aims. That is, when a work has such morally characterized aims, but because of a moral defect fails to realize those ends, that moral defect is an artistic defect as well. A moral flaw in a work with constitutive moral function is a flaw in the work in light of its own ends. So sometimes criticizing a work for, say, rendering a subject in a morally offensive manner is not an *alternative to* criticizing the work on artistic grounds, but rather a *mode* of such criticism on artistic grounds.

For example, Pieter Bruegel's 1568 painting in the Louvre (variously titled in English as *The Cripples* or *The Beggars*) shows a group of amputees, perhaps lepers, awkwardly tumbling over their crutches. The work presents these men from an

immoral point of view: as fitting objects of ridicule and scorn (as such individuals with physical disabilities were often seen in Bruegel's time). The work's ultimate end seems to be to criticize the cheap dignity and aggrandizing self-conception of human beings *in general* through equating all persons with such objects of mockery as those in his painting. However, that morally defined end—condemning the vices of self-love and excessive pride—is pursued via means—the derisive representation of the abject and disabled—that are themselves immoral. In this way, the work's success in realizing its artistic ends is compromised by its immoral means. Its moral defect is an artistic defect as well.

Or consider how, even if there is no doubt that the photographs by Sebastiao Selgado of refugees, laborers, and others suffering from famine and human depredation are designed to achieve morally and politically admirable ends, it is still a fair question concerning the work whether the satisfaction of those ends is compromised by the beauty with which the works are composed.[22] If it is true that, as the standard criticism goes, such beauty suggests we see his subjects in an aesthetically disinterested light, there is a clash in these works between what the photographs are intended to express and what their visual form actually expresses. So the works fail to some extent with reference to their own morally characterized functions.

Or, finally, consider how the violence enacted by the title character in the film *Dirty Harry* is supposed to express a notion of justice "higher" than what the law affords, but what the film actually seems to endorse is a false identification of justice with vengeance.

In each of these cases, the realization of a constitutive function (expressing a moral point of view) is compromised by a morally defective execution or means. In that respect, these works demonstrate that an artistic success can be internally affected by a moral flaw. Of course, each work exhibits a failure of unity in expressing contrary moral attitudes, but a lack of unity need not be an artistic defect. Rather, the artistic flaw in each work is the feature that explains such disunity—the feature that conflicts with the realization of the work's artistic ends. In these cases the ends are moral ends, and certain aspects of the work—because they are morally flawed—frustrate the satisfaction of those ends. Thus, the moral flaws are artistic flaws as well.[23]

[22] A standard indictment suggests that, despite the photographs having been composed to discharge a morally admirable expressive function, their beauty solicits the wrong (contemplative or pleasure-seeking) point of view on the subjects they represent: Selgado seems, one critic explained, "too busy with…finding the 'grace' and 'beauty' in the twisted forms of his anguished subjects. And this beautification of tragedy results in pictures that ultimately reinforce our passivity toward the experience they reveal" (Sischy 1991).

[23] This account of how moral or other flaws may count as artistic flaws in a work assumes that what it is to be a work of art is to be specified independent of reference to the essential possession of any particular artistic value or set of values. Representative arguments for this view are Dickie (1997) and Danto (1981). Yet, it may be objected, without any specification of what can be (and cannot be) an artistic value, how is one to know in any particular case whether a given value that a work has is a genuine *artistic* value, and thus susceptible to being affected by the work's moral value? Because I don't believe that one can offer a non-question-begging account of what kinds of values are always—or never—artistic ones, I assume that the decision in favor of any candidate for such artistic value must be made with reference to the particular work in which that value is instantiated. Among the considerations that such a decision would take into account are: whether the work is created in and with reference to a recognized genre defined by already-accepted artistic values; and whether the realization of the candidate artistic value bears an integral relation to the design and creation of the work. I'm grateful to an anonymous reader for this journal for raising this challenge.

Although those works are artistically flawed in light of their, specifically, *expressive* ends, the functional view can apply to works of art designed with a wide range of artistically relevant purposes other than expressive ones. Works of art may be created to give audiences unusual experiences; persuade them to adopt certain beliefs; bear witness to some event; change their reader's character; bring about political reform; affect the lives of the subjects they represent; and so on. When those works are defined by a moral end, any correlative moral defects they have are artistic defects as well.

In the examples above, the moral defects count as artistic defects because they conflict with the aims of the works to express a moral attitude or stance concerning the subjects they depict. There are other ways in which moral defects might frustrate a work's realization of its defining ends, such as when a moral flaw causes audiences to refuse to engage imaginatively with a work. The functional view sees that as a genuine illustration of how a moral defect may count as an artistic defect too.

However, the functional view allows that even if audiences are ignorant of the moral defects in a work—so insidious and camouflaged as they are—and thus such defects have no effect on an audience's engagement with the work, the possession of such defects may still count (as a reason) against the work's artistic success. The objectivity of the judgment that a work employs immoral means to achieve some morally-characterized end is independent of the empirical question of whether such immoral means are recognized by audiences. By the same token, the functional view does not hold that, just because a work solicits an immoral attitude or expresses an immoral point of view, that moral defect is an artistic defect. Such moral defects are identified as artistic defects only when it is among the artwork's essential purposes, its constitutive functions, to express or encourage a morally acceptable point of view.

In the functional view, a moral flaw does not qualify as an artistic flaw under all conditions. A farce may aim only at making an audience laugh; a satire have the function only of attacking an individual or institution; a violent film of armed gangs stalking each other may aim only at entertainment, not at demonstrating how to settle differences peaceably. Such works may be criticized for the morally obnoxious commitments they express, without those moral flaws making an artistic difference if no moral ends are constitutive of the works.

As I describe it here, a functional view of art offers a systematic account of how an internal relation may hold between a work's artistic value and the many kinds of value, not just moral value, that it possesses. Take, for example, the question of whether a work's *cognitive* values count in favor of or against its artistic value. If, say, a work of art is designed to represent its subject in an enlightening way but the form in which that subject is depicted offers a distorting view, then the artwork has, to that extent, failed by its own lights. If the putative insight around which a work is organized is in fact flatly false or clichéd or if the putatively deep meditation that a work is designed to offer turns out to be ponderous not profound, these cognitive failures are, by virtue of the artwork's ends or purposes, artistic failures as well. By contrast, a work of art that is not designed to be true to life or to have the function of offering any knowledge about the real world might be cognitively worthless, indeed it might be deeply misleading, but such aspects of the work would not, in

themselves, count as artistic flaws. Analogous relations may hold between other sorts of values and a given work's constitutive functions.

In the view sketched above, among the norms that obtain in the evaluation of a work of art qua art are norms whose relevance is grounded in features of the particular work itself: the points, purposes, or functions that it was designed to realize. Evaluating a work of art as an end in itself—that is, for its specifically artistic value—is thus sometimes to evaluate it as an end in itself that has functions. Whether a work satisfies its constitutive functions, and whether those functions are worth satisfying, are questions of artistic evaluation.

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