On the Ethics of Reconstructing Destroyed Cultural Heritage Monuments

ABSTRACT: *Philosophers, archeologists, and other heritage professionals often take a rather negative view of heritage reconstruction, holding that it is inappropriate or even impermissible. In this essay, we argue that taking such hardline attitudes toward the reconstruction of heritage is unjustified. To the contrary, we believe that the reconstruction of heritage can be both permissible and beneficial, all things considered. In other words, sometimes we have good reasons, on balance, to pursue reconstructions, and doing so can be morally acceptable. In defending this claim, we discern a number of arguments made against heritage reconstruction and demonstrate that these arguments are either exaggerated or lack support.*

KEYWORDS: cultural heritage, reconstruction, ethics, authenticity, respect, aesthetics

Introduction

In the sixth century CE, two statues of the Buddha were carved into the cliff of the Bamiyan Valley in Afghanistan. These colossal sculptures stood thirty-five and fifty-three meters high and survived until 2001, when they were blown to pieces by the Taliban in a deliberate act of destruction. Fourteen years later, in 2015, the world was shocked again when ISIS forces demolished several sites in the ancient Syrian city of Palmyra. Among the structures lost were the Temples of Bel and Baalshamin and the towering Triumphal Arch, all dating back to the first or second centuries CE. At present, all that remains of these achievements are piles of rubble and empty niches in the cliffs. Nevertheless, each case has provoked a debate. Should these sites be left as they now are? If not, what should we do with them? Would it ever be appropriate to try to rebuild the monuments that have been lost?

Philosophers, archeologists, and other heritage professionals often take a rather negative view of what is known as heritage reconstruction, the complete rebuilding of a cultural heritage site or monument that has been destroyed or seriously damaged. Some have suggested that reconstructions amount to little

CrossMark

more than the 'Disneyfication' of heritage (Cunliffe 2016; Khunti 2018). Others stress that reconstructions, as mere copies, cannot be as valuable, or valuable in all the same ways, as originals (Janowski 2011; Korsmeyer 2019; Sagoff 1978). There is also a fear that reconstructions might convey erroneous information about the past or even disrespect the heritage that was lost (Janowski 2011). In light of considerations like these, it has been argued that the reconstruction of heritage is impermissible. Jonathan Jones (2016), for instance, asserts that it 'is never legitimate . . . to rebuild ancient monuments using modern materials to replace lost parts—to essentially refabricate them—even though today's technology makes that seem practical'. Similarly, the Venice Charter for the Conservation and Restoration of Monuments states, 'all reconstruction work should . . . be ruled out a priori' (International Council on Monuments and Sites, as cited in Scarbrough 2020: 229).

We argue that taking such hardline attitudes toward heritage reconstruction is unjustified. To the contrary, we believe that the reconstruction of heritage can be both permissible and beneficial, all things considered. In other words, sometimes there are good reasons, on balance, to pursue reconstructions, and doing so can be morally acceptable. (It is of course possible to investigate the desirability of reconstructions purely in terms of their aesthetic value. Indeed, some of our later discussions will touch on this. Nevertheless, we believe that there are both moral and aesthetic considerations that bear on the choice to reconstruct and that this decision can have morally significant consequences. For instance, mismanaging heritage sites might unjustly harm stakeholders by damaging or defiling something they cherish, misleading them about their history, or disrespecting them and products of their culture. This is why we investigate the *moral* acceptability of heritage reconstruction rather than narrower, purely aesthetic, questions.)

In making this case, our primary strategy is to reject the arguments leveled against reconstructions that we believe to be weak or unsound. Nevertheless, throughout our discussion, we also draw attention to some of the benefits of reconstructions and the valuable features they can hold. While we conclude that there are a variety of considerations weighing both in favor and against reconstructions, our aim is to show that there is no reason that reconstructions should always be considered impermissible or ruled out a priori, and that the positive reasons in favor of reconstructions can be sufficiently weighty to make them an attractive prospect, at least in some cases.

We believe that the arguments and claims we make in this essay are compatible with various underlying theories of value and normative approaches. For instance, although many of our discussions indicate that we are interested at least partly in the resulting benefits and harms of reconstructions, we are not necessarily adhering to a consequentialist framework. If a reconstruction would lead to various positive outcomes, we consider that to be a reason counting in its favor, but we are open to such reasons' being potentially overridden by deontological prohibitions or obligations as well.

In what follows, we briefly examine the value of cultural heritage monuments, with a particular emphasis on the type of value that these objects are held to possess in virtue of their authenticity or genuineness. Our view is that one can

(and perhaps should) endorse reconstructions, under certain conditions, even if one accepts this kind of value. We also briefly describe the difference between restoration and reconstruction. We then discuss to what extent replicas might have a positive or negative impact on the value remaining in the sites of the original monuments. In contrast to critics of reconstruction, we argue that replicas might have a largely positive impact on the overall value of a cultural heritage site. Next, we discuss the argument that reconstruction is morally wrong because it would be disrespectful toward originals. We distinguish two versions of this argument and raise skepticism about both. Following that, we discuss the objection that reconstructions are morally problematic because they suggest that a morally significant event never took place, such as when the original was destroyed as an act of war. While we grant that it might be possible to view some reconstructions in this way, we raise doubts about whether it is true in general. We also suggest the fact that a reconstruction can deny that a morally significant event has taken place might sometimes support rather than speak against reconstructions.

1. The Value of Originals qua Originals

It is frequently argued that a replica of a cultural artifact is not as valuable, or at least not valuable in the same way, as the original. But what is it exactly that gives originals *qua* originals this special type of value?

According to Carolyn Korsmeyer, certain old and rare objects might be valued in part because of a particular 'aura' they possess that would not be possessed by modern-day replicas (2019: 49). More precisely, she argues that such historical artifacts are valuable in part because they offer a kind of aesthetic experience associated with the 'real' thing. She argues thus: 'the experience of being in contact with the real thing conveys an impression that the act of touching possesses a sort of transitivity: that by touching, one becomes a link in a chain that unites one with some original object, with a creative hand, with a remembered or historical event, or with others who have touched the same thing' (Korsmeyer 2012: 372). This 'transitivity of touch' gives objects of this sort the capability 'to bring the past into the present, providing an aesthetical encounter of a particular charm or thrill' (Korsmeyer 2019: 162). Such aesthetic experiences of the past, Korsmeyer argues, are possible only insofar as one is in contact with *genuine* objects and cannot be transferred to any replica, regardless of how accurately it replicates the original.

Korsmeyer is not alone in arguing that authenticity or genuineness matters when it comes to the value of cultural artifacts or heritage monuments (see Janowski 2011; Sagoff 1978). Yet, to our minds, her account is the most careful analysis of this sort in the existing literature. It also has implications for questions concerning cultural preservation, restoration, and reconstruction. Insofar as people value historical artifacts because of their genuineness or authenticity, they have a reason to preserve them and to do so in a way that does not threaten this value or disrupt the transitivity of touch. Importantly, not all of the values possessed by such objects can be reproduced: even the most careful copy or replica would not embody the same value as the original historical artifact (Korsmeyer 2019: 8).

Korsmeyer applies her account to the replica of Palmyra's destroyed Triumphal Arch, which toured many Western cities during 2016: 'The resurrected Palmyra arch does possess many of the properties that are characteristic of the arch before destruction . . . But one can no longer stand before the arch where the legions of Septimus Severus paraded. No replica is the real thing, and this one can only refer to the old one now destroyed. On the other hand, it has other virtues: informative, beautiful, and marvelous as an achievement. Moreover, insofar as its recreation gives hope and sustenance to those whose material past was destroyed, it stands defiant and resilient' (Korsmeyer 2019: 158).

We agree with Korsmeyer on this point: Whatever value the new Palmyra Arch has, it cannot fully replace the old one. However, this is not to say that all things that are destroyed or seriously damaged will irretrievably lose the value they had in virtue of their genuineness. In at least some sense, transitivity of touch might persist even after a cultural heritage monument has been severely damaged. To see how this is so, we need to say more about the notion of reconstruction.

In his discussion on the Bamiyan Buddhas, James Janowski provides a helpful list of possibilities for exploring this issue: 'there are several different ways resurrection might proceed. Indeed, there seem to be (at least) the following possibilities. The sculptures might be resurrected: 1) on the same site using the same (numerically identical) materials; 2) on the same site using the same type of materials; 3) on a different (presumably proximate) site using the same (numerically identical) materials; 4) on a different (presumably proximate) site using the same type of materials; 5) on the same site using completely different type of materials; 6) on a different site using completely different type of materials' (Janowski 2011: 46).

Janowski uses this scheme in order to explore whether the Bamiyan Buddhas can be *resurrected*. He argues that this might be possible if the statues were to be restored on the same site using numerically identical material. This is not to say that the restoration cannot involve any new material. Rather, what Janowski has in mind is what is sometimes called *integral*, as opposed to *purist*, restoration. The aim of integral restoration is to hide the damage as far as possible and to replace the lost fragments with new material. In the case of purist restoration, the underlying principle is that the restorative work ought to be restricted to the original material. When original fragments are missing, the work should be left in its damaged state (Lamarque 2016; Sagoff 1978). If either integral or purist restoration is successful, there might be a sense in which it can be meaningfully said that the Buddhas would be the same as those that were destroyed in 2001 (Janowski 2011: 50–53). Following Janowski (2011), we refer to this as *restoration*. In contrast, if one were to rebuild the statues using entirely new material, this would be a *reconstruction* of the Buddhas, even if the 'new' Buddha sculptures were to be placed in the same site as the 'old'. In this sense, the old Buddhas would have been replaced rather than restored.

It is fair to assume that many people will consider restoration—when possible—to be preferable to reconstruction. The reason for this, we think, is that restored objects can potentially retain what Korsmeyer calls the transitivity of touch. If restoration is successful, we can once again have a genuine aesthetic encounter with the past. Whether restoration is possible, however, depends on a range of different factors,

such as how much of the original material remains, whether the material can be used, and the strength of the public will to carry out the restoration work (Janowski 2011: 52). Reconstruction is likely to be easier than restoration. Nevertheless, the result will not be genuine in the same way as is restoration. As suggested above, a reconstruction could reasonably be described as a mere replica. Thus, while a reconstruction of the Buddha sculptures would embody some of the values of the originals, such as those associated with aesthetic beauty, they would not be the same objects and might lack some of the value that the originals had *qua* being the originals.

That acknowledged, the argument so far does not imply that it is necessarily morally problematic to reconstruct cultural artifacts or monuments that have been destroyed. On the contrary, there are reasons to believe that a reconstruction can have substantial positive value overall despite having lost the transitivity of touch. Yet this sort of claim is also disputed. For instance, it is sometimes argued that reconstructing a heritage monument only makes things worse and, if placed on the same site as the original, reduces the value of that site. Reconstructions are therefore seen as both undesirable and even impermissible. In the following section, we challenge this view.

2. Reconstruction and Its Impact on the Value of Cultural Heritage Sites

According to Korsmeyer, the replication of Palmyra's Arch does not have the same value as the original that was destroyed. This is not to say, however, that reconstructions are worthless. On the contrary, we agree with Korsmeyer (2019) that reconstructing heritage monuments might help serve a number of important ends. It might also help to retain and sometimes even enhance the value remaining in a damaged cultural heritage site.

Our view is controversial. One concern raised in this context is that reconstructions are at risk of exhibiting historical inaccuracies—which is especially likely in the absence of good documentation of the original. As a result, there is a risk of communicating erroneous information about the object that was destroyed (Khunti 2018). Nevertheless, we should note that even if some reconstructions might be inaccurate and convey misleading information about the original object, other reconstructions can be more successful. Therefore, we need to keep apart the question of what constitutes a good or successful reconstruction and the question of whether heritage reconstruction is ever a morally permissible option. With this distinction at hand, it seems false to criticize reconstruction as such merely on the basis that there have been inaccurate, hasty, or overly simplified reconstructions.

Another common criticism of modern reconstructions is that they amount to little more than the Disneyfication of heritage (Cunliffe 2016; Khunti 2018). There are perhaps several concerns motivating this sort of objection, for instance, that the heritage has been over-commercialized or that it has been presented in a way that problematically simplifies or whitewashes the past. Yet, as with the above point about historical inaccuracy, it would be wrong to rule out all reconstructions as impermissible just because some were 'Disneyfied' in this way. A deeper concern

underlying the Disneyfication claim, we think, is the fear that reconstructions would inevitably provide a far shallower and less valuable experience than the originals. Moreover, that they would not only fail to compensate for the loss associated with the destruction of the original, but risk making things even worse. For example, Janowski argues in his discussion on the Bamiyan Buddhas that reconstruction is 'a value-subtracting or value reducing property' (Janowski 2011: 56). Whatever we decide to do about the Bamiyan Buddhas, he argues, we have a moral obligation not to reduce value further. Thus, granting that a reconstruction would amount to a reduction in value, Janowski holds that we are obligated not to reconstruct the sculptures. We call this the *reduced-value argument*.

The reduced-value argument is most plausibly interpreted as being about the value of heritage *sites* rather than the value of reconstructions themselves—for instance, as regarding the whole Bamiyan Valley rather than the Buddha statues alone. For example, in a footnote, Janowski writes of reconstruction with new materials being 'controversial because of the (arguably) sacrosanct nature of *the site*' (2011: 59, his emphasis). To explain: even if the value of the Buddhas are now gone, the ground where they once stood might retain some value simply because it is where they once stood. Moreover, the Bamiyan Valley, in particular, still contains many other significant pieces of heritage, such as a system of caves constructed and decorated by the same monks who built the Buddhas (Bartsch 2014). As such, one could argue that the enduring value of the site would be reduced by the installation of replica statues. More precisely, the site itself, including these other heritage elements, possesses a certain kind of valued authenticity in virtue of it having a genuinely ancient origin. Modern reproductions of the Buddhas, however, would not be authentic in this respect. Thus, one might think that populating the Bamiyan Valley with newly fabricated Buddha statues would harm the value that remains there by reducing the valley's overall level of authenticity, turning Bamiyan into 'Disneyland', as Janowski also puts it (2011: 56). As it is, the valley is entirely 'real', but the inclusion of replicas could be seen as rendering the site a mixture of 'real' and 'fake', and this might lead some to believe that reconstruction is never a viable option. In what follows, we critically examine this argument. In doing so we will continue to use Bamiyan as our example, even though our argument here is relevant for other cultural heritage sites as well.

2.1. Does Reconstruction Lower the Value of a Site?

While it is apparent that the reconstructed Buddhas would lower the site's level of authenticity in some respects—since they would no longer be made from the same stone that was originally carved in the sixth century CE—it is not clear that they would lower the site's *overall* level of authenticity. Authenticity, as Denis Dutton points out (2003: 258), is a 'dimension word', meaning that we can measure something's authenticity with regard to various different qualities. Indeed, the *Operational Guidelines for the World Heritage Convention* specify that authenticity can be expressed through a variety of attributes, including 'form and design, materials and substance, use and function . . . location and setting. . . . [and] spirit and feeling' (UNESCO 2019b: 27). The second kind of authenticity—

materials and substance—is the one at the heart of Korsmeyer's notion of the transitivity of touch. The reconstructed Buddhas, as noted, would lack that sort of authenticity and hence potentially lack the accompanying value. Yet, assuming we have sufficient documentation of the originals, the reconstructed Buddhas could still be authentic additions in terms of their form and design, *type* of material used, methods of construction, weight, color, location, setting, and possibly even spirit, depending on what that requires. As such, understanding authenticity broadly, the overall site could actually become *more* authentic with the addition of the reconstructed Buddhas given how they would bring it closer to its original state than it is at present. Of course, our judgment about this will depend on the weighting one gives to the different forms of authenticity. For some objects, or kinds of object, certain sorts of authenticity will probably matter more than do others. Nevertheless, it seems implausible to assume that maintaining pure material authenticity will be so important as to outweigh all other forms of authenticity for *all* possible cases of reconstruction. The Ise Grand Shrine in Japan, for instance, is burned down and rebuilt every twenty years (Munjeri 2006: 326). In this case, it appears that the authenticity of the rebuilt shrine depends primarily on its design and the methods of its construction, not on the authenticity of its physical substance.

Janowski also notes that the reconstructed Buddhas *themselves* could even be more authentic (in these ways) than were the original Buddhas prior to their destruction in 2001, as the latter had already been damaged by weathering at that point (Janowski 2011: 48). Yet he argues that reconstruction would still be misguided, essentially, because it could not bring back the original statues. Janowski's view, which we are tempted to share, is that authenticity of materials or substance is necessary for the Buddhas' numerical identity over time. If so, the reconstructed Buddhas could never count as *the* Buddhas. Yet, it is hard to see why material authenticity, or numerical identity, should be the deciding factor here, as Janowski suggests it should be. If our goal is to maximize the value of the site, then it might well make sense to reconstruct the Buddhas, regardless of the fact that they will count as brand-new objects. While there might inevitably be some value missing from them given they are not materially authentic and numerically identical with the old statues, there is no reason to think that they could not possess enough value of other sorts to be a net benefit to the site, as Janowski himself acknowledges (2011: 62n45). For instance, they could be educational, beautiful, and hold great commemorative value. Moreover, if our interest is in an aesthetic experience of history, then reconstructions might be a positive and beneficial option. After all, standing before a historically accurate replica Buddha could help us feel the presence of the past, and probably even more so than were we to stand before an empty niche filled with a small pile of materially authentic rubble.

Relatedly, one can also argue that the reconstruction of the Buddhas could increase the Bamiyan site's overall value by increasing its *integrity*. According to the World Heritage Convention, both authenticity and integrity can determine the overall value of a piece of cultural property, and a site cannot be inscribed on the World Heritage List without possessing both to a sufficient degree. Integrity is

defined here as 'a measure of the wholeness and intactness of the natural and/or cultural heritage and its attributes' (UNESCO, 2019b: 27). Sites will lack integrity when they are damaged, scattered, or otherwise incomplete and so do not possess or exhibit their valued features as a properly unified whole. A statue missing its head, for instance, will be lacking in integrity relative to a statue that is fully intact. The same will be true for a church that has lost its spire or a tapestry half-eaten by moths. More relevantly, it could also be argued that the Bamiyan Valley, lacking the cherished Buddhas that had previously stood there for centuries, is now incomplete in a key aspect and is hence suffering a decrease in its overall integrity. Indeed, the World Heritage List entry for Bamiyan explicitly states, 'A major loss to the integrity of the site was the destruction of the large Buddha statues in 2001' (UNESCO, 2019a). Therefore, one might reasonably think that a reconstruction of the Buddhas could help Bamiyan to regain some integrity. Of course, we might assume that a site's integrity could only be restored by reconstructions that were *materially* authentic. By definition, reconstructions could not fulfil this requirement. However, we see no reason to grant it as of yet. Indeed, according to our intuitions, when an art restorer fills in the faded corner of a painting, its integrity or completeness seems to have been improved, regardless of the fact that new paint was used. Therefore, we think it is reasonable to say that while inauthentic in one sense, filling in the now-empty niches would return the Bamiyan value to its previous, higher standard of intactness.

Restoring the integrity of a site might be seen as valuable in its own right, if there is something inherently good about objects or places of value being unified rather than fragmented or broken. It could also be seen as straightforwardly enhancing the aesthetic value of the site. Simon Thurley suggests that we can interpret urban spaces, with collections of buildings standing together, as 'composite works of art' and, as such, encourages us to pay due attention to how the individual works of architecture interact with one another aesthetically (2017). The same could be said for heritage sites like Bamiyan or Palmyra: they are works of art that are missing one or more of their core elements. Thus, just as we might attempt to restore a painting whose principal subject had faded, we might similarly want to restore the crowning jewels of these cultural heritage sites. Although the modern interventions will not be genuine in one sense, we might still consider them justified overall on aesthetic grounds.

None of this is to say that modern reconstructions will always be beneficial to a cultural heritage site. Jones (2016), for instance, bemoans the 'arrogant over-restoration' carried out by professionals of the past, resulting in damage to archeological remains, or hasty and inaccurate 'completions' of ancient ruins. Indeed, what is called for here is specifically a balancing act: interventions (or the absence of them) designed to deliver the optimal result with regard to the value grounding properties of the site. Sometimes a site might be best left in a ruined state, its lack of integrity and authenticity of form made up for by its undiluted authenticity of substance. Few would now consider it an improvement if the Venus de Milo were given newly fabricated arms, for instance. Nonetheless, in other cases, maintaining pristine authenticity of substance might be less significant and other aims, such as restoring functionality, integrity, or authenticity of spirit

or design, might be comparatively better for the overall value of the heritage. The ideal strategy for Bamiyan would, we believe, involve an integral restoration of the Buddhas, thus restoring integrity *and* maintaining authenticity of substance. Yet, if that route was impossible and, for whatever reason, we were left with the choice to either reconstruct the Buddhas or do nothing, it appears a plausible case could be made for either option. The value of Bamiyan could potentially be increased or decreased by reconstructing the Buddhas, depending on the weighting given to different things. Hence the claim that reconstructions would inevitably reduce the value of the Bamiyan site is contestable, and the broader suggestion that reconstructions reduce the value of historic sites, always or in general, is insufficiently supported.

2.2. Is Reconstructing Cultural Heritage Always Wrong if It Reduces the Value of a Site?

Even if one assumes that the reduced-value argument is correct, however, it is important to note that this does not show reconstructions would be morally wrong, *all things considered*. If our obligation is, as Janowski puts it, to not further reduce value, then choosing the least bad alternative is arguably the morally required course of action. Nevertheless, it remains possible that reconstruction, even if it lowers the value of the Bamiyan Valley itself, might still be the least bad alternative. For example, when deciding what to do, one also needs to take into account how a *refusal* to reconstruct the statues might lead to further negative consequences, aggravating and amplifying the loss associated with the initial deliberate destruction by the Taliban regime. As Peter Lamarque points out, this thought provides a strong moral reason for repairing artworks that have been deliberately damaged: 'To attempt to destroy a work of such supremely exquisite aesthetic value—not to speak of its theological, historical, artistic values—is morally reprehensible. And to right such a wrong seems itself like a duty. Furthermore, to go only as far as the purist wants, leaving parts in their damaged state, would constantly and painfully—and surely gratuitously—draw attention to a moral outrage' (2016: 291).

Lamarque formulates this argument in relation to the much-discussed case of Michelangelo's *Pietà*, which was seriously damaged when attacked with a hammer in May 1972 (Lamarque 2016; Sagoff 1978). Yet, Lamarque's comment is relevant also to other cases, such as the Bamiyan Buddhas or Palmyra's Arch. It suggests that, in order to show due concern for those who care about cultural heritage, we are sometimes morally required to repair that which has been seriously damaged. One reason for this, we take it, is because it can serve to minimize further psychological or moral harm of the sort that the initial destruction gave rise to. We believe that this type of argument is also especially relevant for the reproduction of cultural monuments that have been deliberately destroyed as an act of war. Reconstructing maliciously destroyed heritage might, as Derek Matravers (2020) has argued, be motived by a general duty to compensate for an injustice. This is not to say that reconstructions can recapture all the features for which a certain heritage building was prized, such as the value

associated with Korsmeyer's notion of the transitivity of touch. But even so, there might still be a moral obligation to reconstruct as best we can in order to mitigate and compensate for the harms suffered by those who cared about the heritage.

The obligation to minimize psychological harm could also outweigh other concerns evoked in the debate on postwar reconstructions. For example, Elizabeth Scarbrough has recently argued that instead of restoring or reconstructing heritage sites we should allow at least some sites to remain in what she calls their 'post-bombed states' (2020: 239). According to Scarbrough, '[t]he empty niches where the Bamiyan Buddhas once stood are aesthetically powerful' (Scarbrough 2020: 238). She also argues that leaving sites in their post-bombed state serves as a reminder of the destructive forces of war. Leaving aside for now whether destroyed heritage sites should serve as reminders of tragic events, Scarbrough's view implies that postwar reconstruction could deprive a heritage site of a certain kind of aesthetic value that remains there. Yet, even if this is the case, it is not clear that the importance of safeguarding this aesthetic value outweighs the obligation to prevent further harm. To the contrary, if the most viable way to compensate for the destruction of cultural heritage and to prevent ongoing psychological harm is reconstruction, then it seems to us that reconstruction might also be the morally preferable option.

3. Reconstruction and Duties of Respect

Even if we are right that reconstruction of destroyed cultural heritage monuments might enhance rather than reduce the overall value of a damaged cultural heritage site, some might argue that reconstruction is still wrong. The reason for this, or so the argument goes, is that it is disrespectful. For example, Janowski suggests that reconstructing the Bamiyan Buddhas and letting replicas act as stand-ins for the originals 'would be to disrespect the latter' (Janowski 2011: 56). He also holds that this might be disrespectful to human beings as well. This is in part because presenting a fake as the real thing is essentially misleading and seeks 'manipulate our response' and therefore 'fails to respect, indeed sullies, our rational nature' (2011: 56).

That reconstructions might be disrespectful toward human beings, such as those stakeholders who care deeply about the monument that was lost or severely damaged, is not particularly controversial. However, as noted above, respect and proper concern for the stakeholders might just as plausibly count in favor of reconstruction as against it. That reconstructions are disrespectful to the cultural heritage itself is therefore perhaps a better starting point for this type of argument; yet, it is unclear what it means to say that one is acting respectfully or disrespectfully toward an inanimate object, nor why reconstructions should be seen as disrespectful. One possible idea is that reconstructions disrespect originals because the decision to create replicas constitutes a failure to appreciate appropriately or respond to the value that the originals had *qua* originals. Instead, the respectful and (morally) appropriate response to the sort of value associated with old cultural artifacts of this sort involves acknowledging their irreplaceability and rejecting calls to reconstruct them. This appears to be what Janowski has in mind when he suggested that it would be morally inappropriate and disrespectful

to reconstruct the Bamiyan Buddhas. In his view, 'the indefinable quality of authenticity' that made the original Buddha statues *the genuine Buddha statues* 'makes it impossible for new sculptures to act as their stand-ins' (Janowski 2011: 56) and to think otherwise is to disrespectfully suggest that, whatever value the originals had, they are replaceable.

Note that this does not necessarily imply that things ought to remain as they are. Instead, if integral restoration is possible, then the correct way to respond to the destruction of cultural heritage monuments could be to restore them since this would bring *back* the original statues, rather than merely replacing them (see Janowski 2011). Yet, it seems to follow from Janowski's claims about reconstruction that, if the choice is between either leaving things as they are or making a replica of the heritage monument, then one should do the former because the latter would be impermissibly disrespectful. As we have already noted, Janowski holds that this disrespect renders reconstruction wrong regardless of whether it would help realize valuable economic and political goals.

3.1. What Does It Mean to Respect Inanimate Objects?

In order to be convincing, this type of argument needs to be accompanied with a plausible account of what it means to respect or disrespect inanimate objects. There are some suggestions in the philosophical literature that one might draw upon. For example, Simon James argues that respecting something involves having a particular attitude that it is called for by the object (or subject) in virtue of it having some 'respect-warranting characteristics' (2015: 315). Without going into detail about all the characteristics that might be 'respect-warranting', it is plausible to say that cultural heritage monuments can sometimes deserve our respect on the basis of their value-grounding properties. This includes their special historical or archaeological significance, but also the value associated with their genuineness or material authenticity. Cultural artifacts can also often warrant additional respect due to facts or features that are not themselves value-grounding properties. For example, an old pot from the Hellenistic period could warrant respectful treatment in part because it is fragile or rare, even if these properties do not provide any reason to value the object in themselves.

The fact that objects of this sort warrant our respect means that they should be given appropriate weight in our deliberations. Again, as James points out, to say that an object warrants respect implies that it has importance that 'it is in some sense incumbent upon one to acknowledge' (2015: 315). Respect also has an action or behavioral component. It calls for a certain response. What counts as an appropriate response might of course vary depending on the kind of object in question and its social context. For example, in the case of old cultural artifacts, respect arguably involves handling them with care to prevent further decay and to ensure that they are not harmed. This reflects the general presumption in favor of preservation amongst archeologists, though this is sometimes questioned (Cooper 2016; Scarbrough 2020). One might also think that respect for cultural heritage monuments requires that they are accessible and can be appreciated by people (Lamarque 2016). Yet, in other cases, respect can require the very

opposite. This is illustrated by the War God figurines of the Zuni people. These sculptures are created but then left to decay in the wild. This is intentional; the Zuni people believe that the sculptures must be allowed to decay otherwise the powers of the Gods will not return to the earth. Some of these sculptures found their ways into museums or into private collections but have since been returned (Young 2008: 19). We believe that the decision to return these sculptures was morally right. One explanation for this is simply that doing so is called for by these sculptures. Since it was the intention of the communities who created them, one can see it as built into the sculptures' very nature that they are meant to decay. Granting that the statues' primary purpose and value is to be obtained through this process, it appears that acting appropriately and respectfully with regard to their value means letting them deteriorate in nature. Even if they hold some value as aesthetic or historical objects, it would be disrespectful to preserve the sculptures and display them to the public in a museum since this would fail to respond to their primary value *qua* Zuni War Gods.

Other cultural heritage objects were not built with the express intention that they decay, however. What would respect require in these cases, or more generally? In the case of most heritage monuments, we here assume that respect requires, among other things, that we act in a manner that recognizes that these are genuine objects that are largely irreplaceable and irreplicable. Insofar as we act in ways that are antithetical to the values and respect-warranting characteristics of such objects, we are acting disrespectfully toward them by denying their value. As indicated above, this account fits well with the type of argument that Janowski appears to have in mind when he suggested that reconstructing the Buddhas would be disrespectful and wrong. Again, in his view, 'the indefinable quality of authenticity' that made the original Buddha statues *the genuine Buddha statues* 'makes it impossible for new sculptures to act as their stand-ins' (Janowski 2011: 56). Moreover, the act of creating replicas would disrespect the originals by incorrectly suggesting that they, and the values they held, were entirely replaceable.

3.2 Will Reconstructions Create More Disrespect toward Heritage?

Before evaluating the argument from respect in greater detail, it is important to distinguish it from another argument against the reconstruction of cultural objects—namely, that reconstruction undermines the type of respectful treatment that is owed to these sorts of things in general. This argument holds that if it becomes widely accepted that destroyed cultural artifacts can be reconstructed, this might lead to less respect toward and appreciation of originals as a class of objects. Such a view appears to be implicit in a point made by archeologist Bill Finlayson regarding the 3D replication of Palmyra's Arch (Turner 2016). The act of reconstruction, Finlayson, points out, is dangerous because it might encourage the false belief that we can simply rebuild cultural heritage buildings as if they had the same authenticity and value as the original (Turner 2016). Underlying this claim, we think, is the worry that, if people come to believe they can reconstruct any destroyed cultural artifact without a loss in value, this might lead them to appreciate such artifacts less and fail to respect them properly.

This is a *slippery slope argument*. Such arguments suggest that if one allows for a relatively harmless act, then this will result in the acceptance of something that we now consider either harmful or unacceptable. As any argument of this type, it is potentially problematic because it is based on a series of empirical speculations that might be contested. For example, is it true that using 3D technology to make replicas of destroyed monuments could give rise to the false belief that cultural artifacts can be reproduced without loss? If so, would the use of 3D technology cause this false belief to become so widespread as to cause a substantial lack of respect toward cultural objects? Perhaps, but perhaps not. As Erich Matthes points out in a discussion on Palmyra, 'Recreating parts of the city through 3D printing can offer a robust sense of what's been destroyed. People can see and touch these replicas, and more easily grasp the magnitude of the loss' (Matthes 2017). If that were true, then 3D printing could potentially lead to *more* respect for cultural heritage monuments not less. We remain neutral on which empirical claim is more plausible. What we are proposing is merely that the factual claims underlying the slippery slope argument against reconstruction are contestable, and thus the argument has unstable foundations.

3.3. Against the Respect-Based Argument

The respect-based argument endorsed by Janowski differs from the slippery slope argument in important respects. As already noted, Janowski holds that the act of reconstruction is *wrong in itself*, regardless of what consequences the reconstruction might have. As such, he would be unmoved by our earlier argument that, despite the new Bamiyan Buddhas' numerical-non-identity with the old, their reconstruction could potentially be justified in virtue of the resultant increase in the value of the Bamiyan site itself and the wider benefits to the local community. As Janowski puts it, he sees the argument against reconstruction as grounded in a deontological moral theory, stating 'certain actions are wrong, full-stop, irrespective of the good that might be realized thereby' (Janowski 2011: 55). Thus, we should not reconstruct, even if this comes at the cost of neglecting, in his words, 'the economic and political needs of real, live human beings' (2011: 54). This part of Janowski's argument is rather opaque. Yet, we take it that the underlying assumption in his account is that a reconstruction would violate important moral constraints, including the moral obligation not to disrespect the original sculptures (see Janowski 2011: 55).

One problem with Janowski's account is the lack of an independent argument for why this supposed duty is *indefeasible*. Even if one agrees with Janowski that there are actions that are morally wrong, 'full-stop', the question remains whether acting disrespectfully toward cultural heritage monuments is such an act. This is, after all, a very controversial claim. Moreover, even if one agrees that we might have a duty not to reconstruct, grounded in a duty of respect, it is not clear that reconstructions are always disrespectful, or that this duty could never be overridden by other moral concerns. Admittedly, one does not have to go as far as Janowski on this point. Instead, one might accept that the duty to respect the original sculptures is a defeasible moral duty, and that it can be

overridden at least in rare circumstances. Yet, even if this view is less implausible, it is not clear to us that it is convincing.

Those who insist on the above grounds that it is morally impermissible to reconstruct cultural heritage monuments need to demonstrate two things. First, they need to show that the reconstruction of cultural heritage monuments in fact implies that we are acting disrespectfully. Second, they need to show that the moral duty not to act disrespectfully in this way trumps other concerns in the particular case being examined. Generally, we agree that whether some course of action counts as respectful or otherwise seems to depend on whether it responds appropriately to the values and value grounding properties of the site or object in question—especially its primary values *qua* the thing it is. For example, it could be disrespectful to deny or reject the values and irreplaceability of Palmyra's original Arch. Yet this would not necessarily render a reconstruction of the arch disrespectful because a reconstruction need not be understood as a denial of the original's unique and valuable qualities. Rather, it could plausibly be interpreted as a respectful attempt to recover the values that can still be recovered, without suggesting that these values exhaust the worth of the original.

Much of what we have said about the reduced-value argument has relevance here. For instance, a cultural heritage site might have been valued partly in virtue of its authenticity of substance but, as noted, that does not entail that a reconstruction which fails (as it must) to recapture this value would be inappropriate or disrespectful. It might, after all, recapture many other important and central values that the original possessed, and reintroduce lost integrity and authenticity of other varieties. In such cases, where much (even if not all) of the values of the original can be regained through reconstruction, it is conceivable that reconstruction could be the most fitting response to the destruction of these values, and hence the most respectful option after all. One might even think neglecting to undertake any reconstructive work in such cases would evidence a *lack* of respect for the heritage and the full range of values it possessed, as it suggests they are not worth saving. Of course, some reconstructions might be disrespectful, especially if they demonstrate an ignorance or corruption of the original's values. However, it is quite plausible to understand reconstructions of the kind outlined above as respectful attempts to recapture as much of the value of the originals as possible, whilst acknowledging that some values might be lost forever.

We have argued that whether reconstruction is disrespectful will vary for different things in different circumstances. Nevertheless, even if Janowski is right that reconstruction is always essentially disrespectful, it is not clear that a duty to respect cultural heritage is as strong as he suggests. While Janowski focuses only on the Bamiyan Buddhas, his claim, if taken seriously, equally implies that many past decisions to reconstruct cultural heritage buildings and monuments were morally wrong. The decision to rebuild the old town of Warsaw, for example, might have been morally impermissible. The old town was rebuilt after the Second World War, using materials of approximately the same age from two other Polish cities, Szczecin and Wroclow, so that it would look like it appeared in the seventeenth century. In this sense, the new 'old' town looks like the 'old' old town, but is not made out of the exact same material, and so we might plausibly assert

that it is *not* the genuine old town but something else (Korsmeyer 2019: 76–79). The same goes for the rebuilding of the Old Bridge of Mostar. Even though it is standing in the same place and looks identical to the original bridge that was deliberately destroyed during the war in Bosnia, it is not the *same physical thing* (Korsmeyer 2019: 151). If it is true that 'the matter matters', as Janowski sometimes puts it, for whether a restoration has positive moral value or not, then it seems he must also grant that the reconstruction of Warsaw was indeed morally wrong (Janowski 2011: 46). Yet, if reconstructions, such as these, can not only increase the overall value of the site (as we have argued in the above) but also secure important benefits for the local population as well as for other individuals, then it is hard to see why this wouldn't trump any supposed duties of respect and render reconstruction morally justified, all things considered. Thus, we are not convinced that respect always renders the reconstruction of things such as the Bamiyan Buddhas impermissible; considerations of respect might give us some moral reasons in favor of or against a particular course of action here, but we have seen no compelling basis for thinking that these reasons are always decisive.

4. Erasing History?

A final type of argument against reconstruction, which we have noted can be connected to the notion of respect for cultural heritage, is that creating replicas of destroyed artifacts would serve to deny or fabricate the past in a morally unjustifiable way. For example, as Emma Cunliffe points out in an article about the reconstruction of Palmyra, one could ask whether returning Palmyra exactly to its pre-conflict state denies a major chapter of its history (Cunliffe 2016). Similarly, Jones (2016) writes, 'The temptation to "fix" Palmyra and make it look like it did at the start of 2015 is understandable. This fascinating place has been subjected to a barbaric onslaught, the thinking goes. Surely it should be as if Isis never did their worst . . . . History is not like that. The Isis attack on Palmyra was not a counterfactual fantasy. It really occurred. This 21st-century tragedy is part of Palmyra's history now. This too, for the sake of truth and as a warning to the future, must be preserved'.

The idea seems to be that we have a duty to 'tell the truth', in some abstract sense, about what happened (a duty perhaps partly grounded in respect for the destroyed heritage), and fulfilling that duty precludes our reconstructing what was destroyed. Some versions of this argument are obviously too strong: for instance, an absolute prohibition on reconstructing *any* destroyed objects or buildings on these grounds would obviously be absurd. If your own house burns down, you are surely permitted to rebuild it, whether or not this 'denies history' in some sense. A better version of the argument, then, would simply hold that we may not reconstruct buildings or objects when their destruction was a morally or historically significant event *because* a replica would somehow distract from or gloss over that fact. This could perhaps be justified by a duty not to cause false beliefs about morally important matters, or by a more demanding duty to warn future generations about the tragedy that occurred. This argument is particularly relevant when heritage sites have been destroyed as an act of war. Leaving sites in

their 'post-bombed states', as Scarbrough (2020: 239) suggests, can serve as a reminder of the wanton destruction of historic sites that happens in war.

Nevertheless, it is difficult to make any of these justifications apply in all cases of reconstruction. For instance, one might think our duties here could be satisfied by merely adding prominent signs around any reconstruction informing the public about the site and its history. Janowski disagrees with this, however, arguing that a reconstruction of the Bamiyan Buddhas would be morally wrong *even if* one were to put up signage explaining that the rebuilt statues were replicas (Janowski 2011: 55–56). In reconstructing the Buddhas, we would be *pretending,* in effect, that they had not been destroyed, and this would be wrong, he says, because it would 'manipulate our response', and thereby disrespect and sully 'our rational nature' (2011: 56). We take his claim to be that replicas are problematic because they prompt inauthentic experiences by presenting something as if it is the original. However, provided the information given is adequate and easily accessible, it just seems incorrect to say that the reconstruction would be misleading. To think otherwise would be to underappreciate our rational nature. Thus, if the reconstructions are still morally wrong, it must be for some other reason. Even if we have a duty to warn future generations about disasters such as those that befell the Buddhas and Palmyra's Arch, then anyone opposed to reconstruction on these grounds will still need some argument as to why leaving these monuments in their ruined or post-bombed state would be a better option than a set of well-documented and signposted replicas. Indeed, if there is a chance we might forget what happened in Bamiyan and Palmyra, it seems likely that the risk is higher if all that remains of these treasures is dust and fragments of stone.

Finally, even if we grant that we have some moral reason not to reconstruct so that the ruins of our cultural heritage might accurately reflect their destruction, we doubt that this constitutes an absolute moral duty. As both Lamarque (2016) and Matravers (2020) noted, the destruction of cultural heritage can be incredibly painful to stakeholders who cared deeply about it, and its absence from their lives could cause continual sorrow. Perhaps such individuals have a right *not* to be confronted perpetually with what happened. Perhaps they have a right to reconstruct the heritage as authentically as possible and *forget* the initial loss as well as they can. Moreover, in cases where cultural heritage was deliberately damaged for iconoclastic reasons, we might have a moral duty to try to make it *as if* the attackers had not succeeded. As Janowski notes, in response to deliberate and malicious destruction, one could argue that, 'reconstructing on the very same site "wins"' (2011: 62). On the other hand, it is possible to interpret the indefinite refusal to reconstruct after these acts of vandalism as enhancing their impact, and perhaps even as encouraging similarly minded folk when they see that we will attempt nothing to address or rectify such destruction.

In short, we doubt that we have an obligation to tell the truth about the past which indefeasibly and necessarily counts against reconstruction. We are not the first to defend something like this position. Cornelius Holtorf (2012), too, argues in favor of reconstructions, contrary to the above 'erasing history' objection. Yet, while Holtorf's argument is grounded upon the democratic right of individuals to decide for themselves whether to reconstruct destroyed heritage regardless of whether it

is misleading, our argument here is, in part, that our duty to tell the truth can often be satisfied even in cases of reconstruction. For example, reconstructed Buddhas, with adequate signage informing visitors about their status as replicas and the story of the originals, could satisfy our duty to the truth (granting that we have such a duty), whilst also going some way toward countering the acts of terrorism that took the originals from us and soothing the loss experienced by those who cared about them.

5. Concluding Remarks

We have considered whether it would it be morally wrong to reconstruct cultural heritage monuments or historical artworks that have been either destroyed or severely damaged. That reconstruction would be wrong per se is a position that is found in both public and philosophical debates. In contrast to dismissive claims of this sort, we have argued that reconstructing destroyed or severely damaged cultural heritage monuments can be both morally permissible and beneficial overall. This is so even if the replicas would not be numerically identical with the originals, and hence would lack an important part of the value that the originals had qua being the originals. More specifically, we think that the arguments often invoked against reconstruction—that it reduces value, results in disrespectful fakes, or denies an important part of history—fail to establish that the reconstruction of cultural heritage is morally impermissible. Recreations need not be disrespectful or cover up history, nor does the fact that they are inauthentic in the sense that they are modern fabrications mean they cannot hold substantial positive value. Moreover, even if a recreation *does* detract from the value of a site, *is* somewhat disrespectful, and *does* effectively mislead people, we have still seen no compelling reason to think that it *must* be impermissible or unjustified, all things considered. After all, recreations can help communities suffering loss to move on and prosper. They might also send the pragmatically useful message that iconoclastic actions are ultimately futile.

   This is not to say that reconstruction is never problematic, however. We should, for instance, be wary of calls for reconstructions that are driven by nefarious political motives. Moreover, as Korsmeyer points out in her discussion of the reconstruction and reparation of damaged cultural heritage monuments, such sites might sometimes be 'treated in well-intentioned ways that inadvertently damage them, sometimes gravely' (2019: 139). Thus, while we deny that reconstruction is always morally wrong—as both Janowski and Jones suggest—we do not claim that it could never have a negative impact on a heritage site. Last but not least, even if it is morally permissible to reconstruct cultural heritage that has been destroyed, our discussion leaves open who should decide whether reconstruction should be undertaken in individual cases. We have not discussed the problems surrounding the reconstruction of cultural heritage sites from the perspective of the various stakeholders that might have an interest in the fate of a damaged or destroyed site. What we have argued is that much of the strict resistance we see to the very idea of reproducing heritage sites is mistaken.

WILLIAM BÜLOW
STOCKHOLM UNIVERSITY
william.bulow@philosophy.su.se

JOSHUA LEWIS THOMAS ⬤
THE OPEN UNIVERSITY
joshua.thomas@open.ac.uk

References

Bartsch, Ilona. (2014) 'Bamiyan Buddhas'. In Claire Smith (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Global Archeology* (New York: Springer), https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4419-0465-2_208.

Cooper, David E. (2016) 'Should Ruins Be Preserved?' In Geoffrey Scarre and Robin Coningham (eds.), *Appropriating the Past: Philosophical Perspectives on the Practice of Archaeology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 222–36.

Cunliffe, Emma. (2016) 'Should We 3D Print a New Palmyra?' *Conversation*. March 31, 2016. https://theconversation.com/should-we-3d-print-a-new-palmyra-57014.

Dutton, Denis. (2003) 'Authenticity in Art'. In Jerrold Levinson (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Aesthetics* (New York: Oxford University Press), 258–74.

Holtorf, Cornelius. (2012) 'The Past People Want: Heritage for the Majority?' In Geoffrey Scarre and Robin Coningham (eds.), *Appropriating the Past: Philosophical Perspectives on the Practice of Archaeology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 63–81.

James, Simon P. (2015) 'Why Old Thing Matter'. *Journal of Moral Philosophy*, 12, 313–29.

Janowski, James. (2011) 'Bringing Back Bamiyan's Buddhas'. *Journal of Applied Philosophy*, 28, 44–64.

Jones, Jonathan. (2016) 'Palmyra Must Not Be Fixed. History Would Never Forgive Us'. *Guardian*. April 11, 2016. https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/jonathanjonesblog/2016/apr/11/palmyra-isis-syria-restored-3d-printers-vandalism.

Khunti, Roshni. (2018) 'The Problem with Printing Palmyra: Exploring the Ethics of Using 3D Printing Technology to Reconstruct Heritage'. *Studies in Digital Heritage*, 2, 1–12.

Korsmeyer, Carolyn. (2019) *Things: In Touch with the Past*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Korsmeyer, Carolyn. (2012) 'Touch and the Experience of the Genuine'. *British Journal of Aesthetics*, 52, 365–77.

Lamarque, Peter. (2016) 'Reflections on the Ethics and Aesthetics of Restoration and Conservation'. *British Journal of Aesthetics*, 56, 281–99.

Matravers, Derek. (2020) 'The Reconstruction of Damaged or Destroyed Cultural Heritage'. In Jeanette Bicknell, Jennifer Judkins, and Carolyn Korsmeyer (eds.), *Philosophical Perspectives on Ruins, Monuments, and Memorials* (New York: Routledge), 189–200.

Matthes, Erich Hatala. (2017) 'Palmyra's Ruins Can Rebuild Our Relationship with History'. Edited by Sam Dresser. *Aeon*. March 8, 2017. https://aeon.co/ideas/palmyras-ruins-can-rebuild-our-relationship-with-history.

Munjeri, Dawson. (2006) 'Tangible and Intangible Heritage: From Difference to Convergence'. In Laurajane Smith (ed.), *Cultural Heritage*. Vol. 4, *Interpretation and Community* (London: Routledge), 323–30.

Sagoff, Mark. (1978) 'On Restoring and Reproducing Art'. *Journal of Philosophy*, 75, 453–70.

Scarbrough, Elizabeth. (2020) 'Ruins of War'. In Jeanette Bicknell, Jennifer Judkins, and Carolyn Korsmeyer (eds.), *Philosophical Perspectives on Ruins, Monuments, and Memorials* (New York: Routledge), 228–40.

Thurley, Simon. (2017) 'Perfection or Pastiche? New Buildings in Old Places'. Presentation at the Museum of London, February 1, 2017. https://www.gresham.ac.uk/lectures-and-events/perfection-or-pastiche-new-buildings-in-old-places.

Turner, Laura. (2016) 'Palmyra's Arch of Triumph Recreated in London'. BBC. April 19, 2016. https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-36070721.

UNESCO. (2019a) 'Cultural Landscape and Archaeological Remains of the Bamiyan Valley'. https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/208.

UNESCO. (2019b) *Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention*. https://whc.unesco.org/en/guidelines/.

Young, James. (2008) *Cultural Appropriation and the Arts*. Malden: Blackwell.