



Artworks are Valuable for Their Own Sake

ABSTRACT: *To hold that artworks are valuable for their own sake—regardless of whatever secondary value they may have, such as entertainment, formation, education, or a pleasurable experience—is to hold that their final worth is not derived from external or secondary ends. I call this collective set of views the end-in-itself view (or EI view). Nicholas Stang recently leveled a twofold charge of reductio ad absurdum and operating from a double standard against the EI view. In this article, I refute Stang by showing that the charges do not obtain for at least one variation of the EI view that holds artworks to be valuable for their own sake as internally purposive ends-in-themselves (the IP view).*

KEYWORDS: artworks, aesthetic axiology, final value, end-in-itself, ethics, knowledge

To say that artworks are valuable for their own sake draws on the teleological tradition of valuation, where an end may be pursued for itself (end in itself) or as a means to some further end. Either way, value is derived from an end in itself. Within such a tradition of valuation, we can differentiate potentially distinct teleological ends in themselves, such as natural ends (organisms), supersensible ends (reason), and moral ends (flourishing). This means that not all value is necessarily moral value. For example, to identify an organism as a natural end does not necessarily entail an equation with other kinds of ends, but it does entail that the organism is valuable for its own sake because all value (on such a view) is end-dependent.

To say that art is valuable for its own sake is to hold that some fundamental worth is not derived from a further end—call this the end-in-itself view of artworks (or EI view). If artworks are valuable insofar as they yield a valuable experience, pleasure, idea, or social commodity, then they are taken as valuable for the sake of that further end. On the EI view, an artwork may have such further ends (experiential value, educational value, commodity value), but insofar as they are external to it, they are not the basis of its value *qua* artwork. Further ends may be attendant, correlate, or resultant, but they do not determine the artwork's value in itself. There are many variations of the EI view. I will defend a particular variation or

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species of the EI view that I will call the internally purposive view (IP view). The IP view is a particular account about what makes artworks valuable for their own sake and how this inner purposiveness can serve as the normative standard for experiencing and understanding an artwork on its own terms.

There are a variety of reasons for denying that artworks are valuable for their own sake. Call these collectively the contra-connate view of artworks. First, we are told by contra-connate advocates that holding artworks to be valuable for their own sake (EI view) is incompatible with a compelling experiential view of art, where what matters is the experience afforded by the work of art.¹ As I argue, however, the IP view is not inherently opposed to an experiential view since it holds the experiential potential to inhere in the nature of the artwork. Thus, theoretically, experientialists like Levinson and Budd could find common ground with the IP view. Second, we are also told that all such EI views result in a *reductio ad absurdum*, which proves artworks are necessarily *not* valuable for their own sake. Third, so Stang's version of the contra-connate critique goes, the EI view necessitates an 'originalist attitude' toward all artworks; the originalist supposedly holds that the original film, for example, is artistically more valuable than indistinguishable copies because the inherent value in the work of art stems from the authentic particularities of the given work.

Against the contra-connate charges, I suggest that we have good reason to understand artworks as valuable for their own sake. In section 1, I will outline the contra-connate defense of an experiential view of art recently advanced by Nicholas Stang and his critique of the view that art is valuable for its own sake on the grounds that it entails a *reductio ad absurdum*. Against his critique, I will show that there are no such entailments of the kind, nor is the defining thesis of the experiential view *necessarily* at odds with the EI view because the former is not at odds with the IP view, and the IP view is a species of the EI view. More directly, on at least some variations of the EI view, such as the IP variation I defend, those charges do not obtain. My aim is not to defend the relative worth of the IP view, but rather to show that this view offers a reasonable account of artworks as valuable for their own sake without falling prey to the contra-connate critiques. In this article, I am concerned with *artistic value* alone, not aesthetic value.²

In section 1, I outline key contra-connate charges. In section 2, I then describe how the IP view understands artworks to be valuable for their own sake as internally purposive wholes (where 'internally purposive whole' is a general term that includes other wholes like an organism or self-consciousness). In section 3, I briefly identify some key historical adherents of the IP view to suggest that while it is not the majority view in the history of aesthetics, robust variations of the IP

¹ The experiential camp includes Levinson (1996: 12) and Budd (1995: 11); I focus on Stang's variation (2012) because of the direct nature of his contra-connate critique of the EI view. For a critique of Levinson and Budd, see Sharpe (2000:324, 330).

² For a good neo-Kantian affective view, see Keren Gorodeisky (2019: 200); see Carroll's critique of the affective view (2016), Gorodeisky's defense (2019), and Epley (2019) for an account of emotions and attitudes that lends credence to the affective view. If a Kant-derived affect theory were to understand 'the pleasure and the judging as one' as Hannah Ginsborg defines it (2015: 52), then the IP view might be seen as compatible with such a theory.

view have been worked out and defended by several notable philosophers. I then turn in section 4 to some entailments of the IP view for art criticism and experience of artworks before concluding in section 5 that the IP view gives reason to think that artworks are valuable for their own sake. Regardless of agreement with the IP view, it proves that not all EI views are subject to the contra-connote charges.

1. Recent Contra-connote Charges

In his 2012 article titled, 'Artworks Are Not Valuable for Their Own Sake', Nicholas Stang compellingly critiques the EI view. As Stang defines it, the EI view holds that 'objects that possess artistic value are valuable for their own sake in virtue of their value as art' (Stang 2012: 271). His aim is to defend something like Malcolm Budd's (1995) variation of the experiential view while denying the EI view. When he speaks of the experiential view, part of what Stang has in mind is the claim that 'art is valuable as art if it is such that the experience it offers is intrinsically valuable; and it is valuable to the degree that this experience is intrinsically valuable' (Stang 2012: 271). He denies the EI thesis for the following reasons:

- (1) If an object possesses a value in virtue of its contribution to a finally valuable whole, then the former object is not valuable for its own sake in virtue of its contribution to the finally valuable whole. The object may be finally valuable, but not in virtue of its contributing to the finally valuable whole. (2) If experiential theories of artistic value are correct, then a work possesses artistic value in virtue of its contribution to a finally valuable experience of that work. (3) If experiential theories of artistic value are correct, works are not valuable for their own sake in virtue of their contribution to the value of experiences of them. (Stang 2012: 273)

Against Stang, I submit that it does not follow that to hold an experiential theory of artistic value necessitates that artworks 'are not valuable for their own sake'. Stang's argument is based on an assumption about the separability of the artwork from the experience of it or from its experiential value. This is an assumption that not all EI views grant, including the IP view. Stang's argument here would be sound only if experiential value were something external to what the artwork is. His argument is thus begging a question. Consider the following: If the artwork X is such that $X = EY$ (where E denotes the experiential value, and Y denotes everything else), then X includes the experiential value as something inherent and essential, such that to remove E (which must be possible in Stang's argument because it is predicable of X) would result in Y , not X . So, Stang's argument is only valid if we first assume that the artwork is Y , not X . However, since the question is precisely whether the artwork is X or Y , the argument is not sound.

The problem is not self-evident. It stems from the fact that Stang employs a sharp distinction between the work of art and the experience of the work of art, a distinction that evidences his problematic assumption of what counts as a work of art. In Stang's defense, the distinction is both an intuitive one and one made by

many art theories. However, it is a distinction denied by some EI views and specifically by the IP view. To successfully critique such views as irrational, the contra-connote argument cannot assume as true the very premise that these views deny.

Further, we need not accept the IP view to see that it is at least theoretically possible that a work of art is partially demarcated by being in some way experiential, such that its experiential value is not something distinct from its artistic value but is rather a part of it insofar as what it is to be a work of art is to be an experiential whole. Further, while the value of a work of art may include its experiential value, it does not necessarily follow that the experiential value of the work of art includes the value of the work of art itself. In other words, to set the experiential value as the final end may be to miss the experiential value of the work itself if the experiential value is attained only by engaging the artwork as valuable for its own sake (which then yields the experiential value as part of that end-in-itself whole).

This is possibly the case for artworks if they are kinds whose inherent value includes experienceability. If this is the case, as the IP view holds, then to be valuable for its own sake includes the dynamic possibilities of experiencing such a work of art, that is, the totality of its experiential value is included (essentially) in its being valuable for its own sake. Indeed, it is possible that the value of the experience of the work of art, which may change depending on the participant's own current experience, perspective, vantage point, context, and so on, is a valuable experience precisely because that value is inherent in what makes a work of art valuable in itself. Section 2 will concretize this vague and formal response to the contra-connote critique.

In addition to arguing that if the experiential view of art is right, then the EI view that art is valuable for its own sake is necessarily wrong, Stang argues further that the EI view results in 'unacceptable consequences'. The unacceptable consequences, he argues, are that taking a work of art to be valuable for its own sake commits us to the view that the original work of art yields a more significant experience than an 'identical copy' could. Stang uses the example of film enthusiasts, whom he labels 'cinemaniacs', who claim that no experience of a Woody Allen film can be as valuable as experiencing the original (indistinguishable) in Paris where it was originally screened (Stang 2012: 274). I do not understand how the EI view commits anyone to a view like that. Any number of variations of the EI view could agree with Stang that such *universal* originalist claims are irrational. Stang thinks that for an EI view to say that the original matters in some cases but not all is to apply a double standard. However, that objection stems from his own unwarranted presupposition about what an artwork must be on an EI view. As discussed above: $X = EY$, where Y is not a universal, but a particular instance of a particular kind, such that if originality matters for that kind, then it matters for X . Originality does not typically matter for film, and thus presumably would not matter for X -film. Yet, originality typically matters for a painting, and so originality presumably matters for X -painting. What Stang misses in his critique is that categories like originality are not universal on at least some EI views, such as the IP view. Stang acknowledges a logical possibility that the EI view could

recognize equal artistic value between ‘originals of nonmultiple works’, but he suggests that this logical possibility could not be a real possibility without undermining the intuitive appeal of EI view, an appeal he takes to be bound to this originalist priority in all ‘nonmultiple works’ (2012: 276). (There are relevant related terms such as ‘uniqueness’; I focus on ‘originality’ as defined by Stang because this is one of his primary contra-connote charges.) For the IP view, the relevant criterion for evaluating a piece is always informed by the individual work and its kind, such that originality matters where it is a determinative quality of the kind of artwork that it is.

Thus, while I do not see this as an ‘*unacceptable* consequence’ of the EI view—since it is not a consequence of the EI view at all—I do think it raises a key point that will further support the IP account of a work of art as valuable for its own sake. In particular, in rejecting the irrationality of the so called ‘cinemaniacs’, Stang claims that the original may have ‘artifactual’ or historical value but not artistic value. I think that this absolute separation of originality from artistic value is a mistake. For certain works of art in certain media, such as the Pergamon Altar, the originality of the work might be vital to the artistic value of the artwork itself even in the face of indistinguishable copies. To claim that this is so in some cases but not others, Stang suggests, is to apply a double standard.³ However, this might be the case if and only if our standard for the value of a work of art were external to the work itself. This, too, is an assumption denied by the IP view, which holds that the proper standard for recognizing the value of a work of art as art is *internal* to the work itself, as we will see in the next section.

On the IP view, as we will see, whether originality is essential to the work can only be determined through analysis of the artwork and its kind in question, not through abstract or universal ascriptions. For analogous reasons, it is not a double standard to say that a bird needs feathers to fly but an insect does not. This is because the standard is partially derived from the particular and its kind. Likewise, originality is just one of the many properties a thing may or may not have. More is needed to adopt Stang’s charge against the EI view of a double standard or ‘unacceptable consequences’, because it would only be a double standard if we already adopt Stang’s conception of an artwork. If the IP view is right, then there is no special problem with claiming the value of originality for some, but not all, artworks.

2. The Internally Purposive View of a Work of Art (The IP View)

In the preceding section, I denied the validity of the general charge of irrationality for at least some views that hold artworks to be valuable for their own sake because there are *some* such views for which the charges do not obtain. The IP view, being one such instance, evidences compelling reasons to take seriously the view that artworks are internally purposive wholes that must be experienced on their own terms.

³ For more on originality and identical reproduction, see Goodman (1976: 99–111); see also Grant’s critique of Stang’s originalist claim [2015: 420–22]; unlike Grant’s critique, my account is not at odds with experientialism.

2.1 Motivation and Scope of the IP View

The IP view that artworks are internally purposive wholes is not a claim to (i) an external purposiveness, where appeal to the artist's intent or artistic idea is necessary, nor (ii) is it a subjectivist appeal to one's unique experience, nor (iii) is it an objectivist appeal to real properties whose meaning is purely independent of perceiving subjects. Instead, it is a claim that the artwork is a self-contained and generative artistic whole whose extrinsic and experiential artistic value is made possible precisely by one's engagement with the artwork as valuable for its own sake. Moreover, this IP view makes sense of why originality can and should matter for *some* artworks but not for others, without such a distinction resulting in an inconsistency or double standard, as has been averred. One benefit of the IP view is that it simultaneously is capable of embracing kind-oriented theories of art such as Dominic Lopes's 'buck-passing theory of art' and is likewise well positioned to account meaningfully for hard cases or outliers in art (2014: 92). In contrast with Lopes's theory (2014: 129–30), however, the IP view does this while rejecting the dichotomy between empiricist-oriented 'bottom-up' approaches from particularities and kinds of art and metaphysically oriented 'top-down' approaches stemming from answers to questions like 'What is art?' (Lopes 2014, 79, 82). Lopes has critiqued historical adherence to what I call the IP view on the grounds that it does not count as a theory of art, but as I have argued elsewhere, his critique (e.g., 2014: 34) is valid only on a misreading of those who espouse the IP view, and thus it constitutes a strawman critique. Finally, in addition to the IP view's advantage of both resisting a reductive categorization to either the metaphysically leaning 'top-down' theories or the empirically leaning 'bottom-up' theories (Lopes 2014: 82), it yields a normative standard that is responsive to particularity and capable of effectively taking up outlier cases in art.⁴ These are some of the motivating reasons for, significances in, and advantages with the IP view. I turn now to an account of the IP view.

2.2 What is Inner Purposiveness?

We can say that an object is purposive insofar as the matter is determined by some form, where that form is the end or ground on which the matter is organized into the kind of whole that it is. Accordingly, a log home can be called an externally purposive whole because the matter (logs) is organized in such a way that the whole meets the formal conditions of a house (such as providing shelter, withstanding basic environmental changes, etc). That external purpose to which the wood is set becomes determinative of the parts such that we can say that some wood is better than other wood in virtue of its ability to achieve the end to which it is set. The concept of the whole (house) as the purpose of parts (wood) is itself external to the materiality of the wood. It is a concept that stands outside the wood and determines the parts according to ends that are not internally

⁴ This ability to take up outliers is the basis on which some theories, like Lopes's buck-passing theory of art, lay claim to their relative worth (2014: 33). Much more would need to be said to assess whose theory better accounts for outliers.

determinative of the wood itself. By contrast, there are internally purposive relations. The wood of a tree can be called internally purposive to the tree where this means the wood is necessary to the form of the tree. For example, some trees in some harsh conditions depend for their survival on the specific strength and capacity of the wood fibers that comprise them (allowing them to withstand storms or draughts better than others). The concept of the tree as the whole or end of the wood is not something external to the wood, but is precisely the ground on which it comes to be. That is, the wood would not grow to be the wood that it is if it were not a part of that specific kind of tree. The wood is thus internally purposive to the tree, and the tree is a concept of the form that is determinative of the parts without being an externally imposed form on those parts. External purposes, by contrast, are not contained in the essence of what makes the parts the kind of thing they are, but are rather purposes ascribed to them, a use to which the parts and whole are set by an external designer/agent.

For example, the roots of some trees, such as *Erica arborea* or tree heather, are particularly well suited for making tobacco pipes because the briar is hard, heat-resistant, and has a fairly neutral aroma. These qualities constitute an external ‘good’ or purpose to which such tree roots might be put. Such external purposes can be distinguished from the internal purposiveness of the *Erica arborea*. While these purposes are goods *derived* from its internal purposiveness, that is, from the kind of wood the tree has as the kind of tree it is, they not only do not contribute to the kind of whole the tree is, but actually necessitate the destruction of this whole (the tree is cut to serve that external purpose). To take another example, a computer is designed to perform a range of work, entertainment, and artistic functions. To that extent it can be called a purposive object, but short of the advent of artificial general intelligence (AGI), it cannot be called an internally purposive whole. In fact, a basis for distinguishing between narrow artificial intelligence (such as Alpha Go) and AGI is that the former is an externally purposive artificial whole functioning from predetermined algorithmic parameters toward given ends. The latter, however, would be an internally purposive artificial whole because it would be capable of setting ends for itself by writing its own core algorithms (i.e., by determining its ends for its own sake).

I use the term ‘inner purposiveness’ to identify that purposiveness that is determined by and for the whole itself. Importantly, the existence of an internally purposive whole does not imply a claim about the origin of that whole or its kind. Instead, it is purely a claim about the hylomorphic (matter-form) and mereological (part-whole) kind of thing that it is. What is more, for a thing to be internally purposive does not even necessitate that it be capable of setting its own ends (as animals might). Both a plant and a mollusk can (on this definition) be called an internally purposive organism because their parts are operative (for example, through the process of cell-differentiation) for the sake of the whole (sustaining, regenerating, healing, etc.). To recognize this purposive mereology of wholes does not entail an ascription of intelligence or will to the self-determining structure of the cells and their operative process for the sake of the whole.

One common objection to calling an artwork an internally purposive whole is the thought that this commits us to the view that it is a tacit admission of an external

designer or that the whole itself must be viewed as self-consciously setting ends for itself. However, as we just saw, neither claim is entailed by the immediate concept of inner purposiveness.

2.3 Artworks as Internally Purposive

What then does it mean for the IP view to claim an artwork as an internally purposive whole where the parts are active for the sake of the whole, and the whole is not indifferent to the function of its parts. And how does the answer to that avoid being a merely externally purposiveness whole like any other designed artifact (e.g., a clock), and how can its being an internally purposive whole avoid anthropomorphizing the work as somehow possessing self-consciousness or self-directing agency? Some working definitions are needed here for clarity.

(1) Let us call artifacts externally purposive wholes because the aggregate of matter is not a mere heap; rather, it is bound together through a design of the whole by which the specific form of the parts (the shape of the gears, hands, etc.) is determined and set into specific relation. Let us call the purpose that for the sake of which the parts were made (the function of the whole toward the end that defines the normal function). In the case of the clock, this normal function is telling time. An artifact like a clock is thus an externally purposive whole, where the purpose is that external value of telling time. It is a matter of indifference to the clock whether it is able to tell time or not, but it is not a matter of indifference to the person using the clock. In other words, what the matter is in this case is determined by the purpose of the person, not the whole itself. It is possible for an externally purposive whole to have an internally purposive function. For example, the spring on a watch is an internally purposive function of a mechanical whole, but that is merely a *relative* inner purposiveness because it still derives its purpose from a higher end that is external (telling time). This external purpose allows us to speak of the parts as governed by a normative standard (being in the right place and functioning in the right way). The purpose or end of the clock is determined by the design of the clockmaker, and thus the function of the parts for the sake of the whole is always to function for the sake of an external end (the purpose of the clockmaker).

Assuming (1), if it is the case that what determines the purpose of the parts of an artwork is the purpose toward which the designer (artist) intended the whole (which we call artistic intent), then this would appear to fit the model of an artifact. On such a view, the artwork is a kind of artifact. While such a view of art is commonplace, it is also common to reject such an artifactual conception of artworks by denying that an artwork is a purposive whole. However, as the IP view evidences, we can deny that (1) includes artworks without thereby denying that artworks are purposive wholes.

By contrast with a clock and its design, the IP view does not hold artworks to be externally purposive with parts determined by an external design (i.e., the artistic intent). An internally purposive whole is that whose defining purpose is internal to itself, and thus is set by the whole itself. To call an artwork an internally purposive whole can appear to entail several claims that are not actually necessarily entailed. The following three are the most common:

First, for the whole to set its own end can appear to require intelligence or will. However, not all ends or purposes are those set by an intelligence or will. Mollusks, plants, or even bacteria are internally purposive where this means their parts are self-actively developing for the sake of the whole; yet, they possess no intellect. To call an artwork an internally purposive whole does not necessarily entail the inner presence of an intelligence or will.

Second, to call a whole an internally purposive whole does not entail that it is a biological organism. Artificial general intelligence is differentiated from narrow artificial intelligence (NAI) precisely on this basis. We have developed NAI, but we have not yet developed AGI. AGI is artificial intelligence that is capable of writing its own principles, setting its own ends, and pursuing those ends. A neural net or a NAI is not fully capable of such self-determination yet. Whether or not AGI ever comes to be actual, it is a common example of an internally purposive whole, but this does not entail that it is a biological organism. Likewise, the idea of nonorganic spiritual beings appeals to a concept of inner purposiveness; yet, this concept does not thereby entail the ascription of biological features. Likewise, then, to call an artwork an internally purposive whole does not necessarily entail biological features.

Third, to call a whole an internally purposive whole does entail (i) that it is an end in itself (for reasons given in the first paragraph), but this does not entail (ii) that it is an end in itself of equal worth to other ends in themselves. Substantial argumentation is needed for those who think that being an end in itself (i.e., bacteria, plant, deer, person, AGI) entails that each end is thereby equal to the other ends.

That is, to hold that artworks are internally purposive wholes does not entail inner intelligence, will, biological organism, or equal weight of such an end in itself with other internally purposive ends in themselves (such as humans). I leave unasked and unanswered how an internally purposive whole first comes to be. Such questions are not necessitated by or determinative of the whole being an internally purposive whole. Whether an artist, architect, or creator, or the fundamental forces of nature stand as the first cause by which the internally purposive whole came to be, determining this does not determine whether the whole is of such a kind. Knowing the possible first cause is no more necessary for artworks than for any other internally purposive whole. This does not mean such questions are irrelevant. They are just not necessary to saying something meaningful about the kind of internally purposive whole before us. There is a sufficient sense in which the parts and worth of every internally purposive whole are normatively determined (in part at least) by the kind of internally purposive whole before us. For example, we call a sickly dog diseased or not flourishing not by arbitrary external standards, but we do so by reference to the kind of internally purposive whole it is.

2.4 The Mereology of Artworks as Internally Purposive Wholes

Artworks, the IP view holds, transcend whatever external benefits they may afford and likewise assert themselves (by their presence as the kinds of wholes they are) as valuable for their own sake. Indeed, some artworks cause discomfort, induce undesirable reflections, feelings, perspectives; yet, this ability to work on the person

experiencing it, to draw them out of themselves and into the world of the work, is precisely that ability of an artwork that makes it valuable for its own sake. The artwork asserts itself as an internally purposive presence that issues demands on those who experience it. As Goethe writes, ‘The great work of art restrains feelings and imagination, it robs us of our free choice, and so we cannot deal with it as we please. We are compelled to submit to it so that it can give us back to ourselves, elevated and enhanced (*erhöht und verbessert*)’ (Goethe [1798] 1998: 48).

One effect of this view of the artwork is that once created, the work of art transcends the intention of the artist. The artist may still be in a unique place to offer compelling insights about the work, but s/he ceases to be the authority on the artwork. The work itself is now its own authority, which is normative for anyone experiencing it. This is how, on the IP view, some great works of art are capable of significances that far exceed the intention of the artist. This is also how an individual may come to know the work better than the artist did. The final artwork takes a life of its own beyond the control of the artist’s original intent.

To be clear, I have not argued that the IP view is correct. Instead, my argument has been that the IP view is a reasonable, justifiable way of understanding the work of art as internally purposive, end in itself (EI view) that is valuable for its own sake. What I have been calling the internally purposive conception of a work of art (IP view) holds that an artwork’s parts are mutually determinative and constitutive of each other and are what they are in virtue of the whole. The whole itself is the unity of the mutually formative parts; it does not exist external to the parts but is self-emergent through the fluid interrelation of the parts. The unity of parts, then, is not a transcending form, but rather a unity immanent in the parts and emergent through them. On other views, it may be permissible to separate out parts of the artwork and still speak of the integrity of the work as a whole. On the IP view, however, precisely to call the work an internally purposive whole, means that the parts cannot be separated out and still count as parts of the whole. A part and the whole cannot be separated without ceasing to be what they were. A deer is not separable (*qua* whole) from its leg, heart, brain, and skin. Insofar as a part is damaged or removed, the whole is damaged or destroyed.

On this view, in an artwork the idea of the whole, the whole itself, inheres in the parts and their interrelation; the artwork *is* those parts and their mutually determining interrelation. The nature of the whole in turn becomes the basis on which its moments, parts, and effects are judged as successful or defective. On the IP view, what counts as a successful moment in one work of art due to internal considerations of that work may count as a defect in another work of art for the same reasons, just as the absence of the ability to walk is a defect in the deer (*qua* kind of organic whole that it is) while the same is not a defect in a tree for the same reason (i.e., by appeal to the kind of whole that *it* is). Such references to organisms do not constitute an appeal by analogy. Instead, the IP view takes what it is to experience and know a work of art to have the same conceptual form as experiencing/judging an organism.⁵ By the same conceptual form, I just mean the

⁵ There is not space here to discuss the judgment form. I am focused here on the basics of what a work of art is, such that it can be held to be valuable for its own sake without falling prey to the contra-connote charges.

concept of the whole by which an artwork can be called a purposive whole and thereby serve as a normative standard for further judgments of that whole. An artwork, then, as an artistic whole is alone the standard by which its parts, moments, and experiential effects are to be judged (*qua* work of art). To understand or experience the whole requires understanding or experiencing the parts, the moments, the effects, but to understand those in turn requires understanding the whole. There is no clear path into that circle of understanding or experiencing (this paradoxical circle shares its basic structure in common with the classic hermeneutical circle). It is a process into which one must step and begin to engage. In that process the work of art as a whole emerges more adequately for the perceiving subject. Likewise, the relative significances of the parts, moments, and effects continue to emerge. This is not a vicious circle, but rather a productive dialectic. Just as a deer is not knowable apart from the essential parts and functions of a deer even though those parts and functions are not intelligible without a concept of the whole, so, too, the work of art must be engaged with on its own terms so that both the whole and its parts may mutually self-disclose for the perceiving subject.

I have not claimed that this is the only or best understanding of an artwork, only that it is a coherent view that evidences that at least some variations of the EI view do not fall prey to the irrationality charges while holding that artworks are valuable for their own sake.

3. Historical Adherents of the IP View

While a minority view, the IP view is not a new one. It has an interesting history, with the particular strand I trace originating in the Enlightenment. These historical figures are worth noting in brief to underscore the various robust versions of the IP view that several prominent philosophers have developed. Despite being a teleological axiology, strictly speaking, the IP view does not trace its origin directly to Aristotle's conception of art though key features of Aristotle's thought directly influenced early advocates of the IP view (Gentry 2021: 379–90).⁶ Its early proponents include Goethe,⁷ and Moritz (1788: 69), as well as Hegel (1976: 64), later on Gadamer (2004: 102, 136; his conception of play [102] and autonomy of the work track with an IP conception of the work of art), and eventually Strawson (2008: 201); the contemporary defenders of the IP view (Pippin 2013, on this see Gentry 2022b; Nussbaum 2009, particularly her account of the specific way in which art can form the moral imagination) continue to offer compelling reasons for understanding a work of art as an internally purposive whole that as such is valuable for its own sake. This includes its ability to offer insight into outlier cases.⁸

⁶ For example, Gadamer (2004: 102–3) and Hegel (1976: 1178). Rather than Aristotle's poetics, it was his fundamental conception of the soul as a principle of life that influenced the historical emergence of the IP view (*De Anima* II.4:415b26–28).

⁷ While not an IP view adherent, Cassirer offers an informative analysis of Goethe's IP view (1970: 61–98). I take Goethe to hold an IP view—an interpretation of Goethe I understand to be espoused as well by Wellbery (2017: 16–31, 72–73) and Förster (2012: 360–62). For my account of Goethe's view of art, see Gentry (2022a).

⁸ An 'outlier' on one view might not seem like an outlier on another. For instance, Lopes's (2014) examples of outliers in *Beyond Art* (e.g., 'Fountain' by Duchamp) strike me as not at all challenging to assess on the IP view,

In its early days, it stood as a contemporaneous alternative to the Kantian conception of a work of art. Kant (1900–) influentially contrasts a work of art with an organism (which he calls a ‘natural end’) by arguing that the artwork is a whole whose defining cause is the external, generative concept of the artist (5: 370; cf. 5: 373–74.), whereas, ‘a thing exists as a natural end [e.g., a tree] if it is cause and effect of itself’ (5:371; Zuckert’s account of formal purposiveness in subjective judgments of beautiful objects brings a Kantian account of art close to the IP view [2007: 181–230]). In contrast with Kant’s conception of art, in ‘Über die bildende Nachahmung des Schönen’, Moritz wrote that the fine or beautiful work of art has ‘no final purpose (*Endzweck*), no end for the sake of which it exists, aside from its own necessity; rather, its whole value (*Wert*) and ultimate purpose (*Endzweck*) for existing is itself’ (1788: 69).⁹

Similarly, Goethe notes a key entailment of internally purposive wholes for adequate vision and depth of understanding, in his 1798 ‘Introduction to *Propylaea*’:

The human form cannot be thoroughly understood by merely observing its exterior. We need to expose what is inside, distinguish the parts and note their relation (*Verbindungen*); we must be aware of variations (*Verschiedenheiten*), learn to recognize action and reaction and know the hidden, inert, fundamental elements. Only then can we actually apprehend and be formed by the beautiful, unified whole which moves before our eyes with the rhythmic grace of waves.¹⁰ (Goethe [1798] 1998: 43)

Goethe’s point is not that we bring predetermined knowledge to the artwork. Rather, adequate vision and experience is predicated on adequate knowledge, and that knowledge of the whole is emergent through the reflective engagement with the particularities and moments of the artwork as a whole. These adequacy norms governing this developmental process of coming to know an artwork are norms issued by the the artwork itself in virtue of its being an internally purposive whole. The norms are not externally prescribed, anymore than the requirements of coming to know an organism in its particularity and kind can be called externally prescribed. Recognizing that artworks are internally purposive wholes, the IP view holds with Goethe that ‘*Die Kunst an und für sich selbst ist edel*’ (artworks in and of themselves are noble; [1798] 1998: 492).

Relatedly, in his *Ästhetik*, Hegel writes: ‘the false position, already noticed, is . . . that art has to serve as a means to moral purposes (*moralische Zwecke*), and the moral end (*moralischen Endzweck*) of the world in general, by instructing and

whereas the IP view (taken on face value) seems to preclude architectural works that are finally defined by their artifactual utility and function (e.g., a building).

⁹ ‘*keines Endzwecks, keiner Absicht warum es da ist, außer sich bedarf, sondern seinen ganzen Wert und den Endzweck seines Daseins in sich selber hat.*’ For an exceptional account of this view of art in Moritz’s thought, see Pirholt (2020: 63–81).

¹⁰ ‘*wenn man dasjenige wirklich schauen und nachahmen will, was sich als ein schönes ungetrenntes Ganze in lebendigen Wellen vor unserm Auge bewegt*’ (1798: 43).

improving, and thus has its substantial purpose (*substantiellen Zweck*), not in itself, but in something else' (1976: 64).¹¹

Any natural product, a plant, for example, or an animal, is purposefully (*zweckmäßig*) organized, and in this purposiveness (*Zweckmäßigkeit*) it is so directly (*unmittelbar*) there for us that we have no idea of its purpose explicitly separate and distinct from its present reality. In this way the beautiful too is to appear to us as purposiveness. . . . The beautiful . . . exists as purposeful in itself (*zweckmäßig in sich selbst*), without means and end showing themselves separated as different aspects of it. (1976: 68; for an account of Hegel's theory of artworks as internally purposive wholes, see Gentry 2022b)

The IP view is not unique to this particular tradition. As Hegel himself notes, this view of art can arguably be traced back to moments in ancient Greece and further back still to ancient India (Hegel notes this in discussion of specific instances of ancient Indian architectural artworks as conceived of as '*für sich selber Zweck*' [ends in themselves; 1976: 33]). It is an old view, yet, it has never been a majority view in art history.

Some who maintain that artworks are valuable for their own sake might hold this view intuitively or might justify it through alternative means. Strawson (2008) rightly argues, however, that for those who, like Margret Macdonald (1949), adhere to the IP view that 'every work of art is unique and in the last resort, perhaps, can be judged by no standard but its own', ought to ask '*why* we can have no general principles of art in just the sense in which we have general principles in morals' (Strawson 2008:201). In agreement with Strawson's eventual conclusion, I think there is a principle that has much in common with the Aristotelian soul as a principle of life in *De Anima* (Aristotle 1995a) and that is constitutive of the general idea of what constitutes the virtue of a thing in the *Nicomachean Ethics* (Aristotle 1995b). What I mean by this is not at all that artworks ought to be understood as governed by a moral principle or as analogues to morality. Rather, just as a certain branch of morality can have governing principles that shore up the importance of the uniqueness of kinds and particulars instead of reducing these to abstract formulas, so it is possible to have a unifying principle for understanding what a work of art is and how to judge it. This principle does not reduce the process to abstract general requirements, but instead is one by which the

¹¹ Carroll wrongly claims that Hegel holds art to be 'about something' (2016: 4), where Carroll makes clear this means some content external to the work, which the work symbolizes or embodies in some way, as words embody/symbolize a concept(s). This is not Hegel's view: see Gentry (2022b). On Hegel's view, an artwork is not a vessel of meaning for something external but rather must 'have its end and aim in itself (*ihren Entzweck in sich*), in this very setting forth (*Darstellung*) and unveiling (*Enthüllung*)' (1976: 64). An artwork 'should unfold (*entfalten*) an inner life (*Lebendigkeit*), feeling, soul, a content and spirit, which is just what we call the significance (*Bedeutung*) of a work of art' (1976: 31). Cf. Speight's helpful account of '*Enthüllung*' (2008: 387). Wilson (2016) offers a helpful account of a similar role of the concept of life in the work of Shelley who was meaningfully influenced by German romanticism and was a key figure of British romanticism.

normativity for engagement with the particulars of the artwork is made fundamental and requisite. The IP view does precisely this.

4. Entailments of the IP View for Art Criticism and Experience of Artworks

If the IP view is right, then it follows that the artistic value of experiencing the whole is derived from the possibility of experiencing that whole, but the whole cannot be experienced without experiencing the parts and moments by which the whole emerges as the kind of whole it is. Put simply, the relevant experience is possible only through genuine engagement with a work of art on its own terms, as something that is valuable for its own sake. The work sets the normative standard for an adequate experience of it. For the experience to be a genuine experience of the given whole, it must be an immediate experience of the whole on its own terms; otherwise it would not be an experience of *that* whole but instead would be an experience of an external purpose of the whole (i.e., some external utility, pleasure, or end).

Likewise, the adequate experience of the parts is dependent on the experience of the whole. The person who listens to the first 25 percent of Miranda's profound Broadway performance *Hamilton* before leaving is mistaken, on the IP view, in thinking that this was an experience of 25 percent of the artwork as a whole. That person would be as mistaken as individuals who, knowing nothing of leopards, saw the head of one mounted on a wall and took themselves to have experienced (part) of the living whole itself. They may be able to gain a sense of features of the whole through disconnected parts, but that is not an experience of the whole as an inner purposive end in itself. Such an experience by itself cannot lead to a meaningful experience of the kind in question or understanding of the norms that govern the successful part-whole relations of that whole. Seeing the claws of a cheetah and, knowing nothing of the whole, we may assume it ought to be capable of climbing trees as leopards do, an assumption made by applying an external standard to the kind it is instead of coming to know its own internal standard through experiencing the actual whole-type.

The parts cannot be active for the whole when held in isolation because the whole determines how the parts are understood, and the parts determine what the whole is. Without this reciprocal determination being present in the inner purposiveness of the whole, we lose the basis on which the whole is valuable for its own sake. It may still have uses (pleasure, erudite criticism, etc.), but it loses its autonomy as an internally purposive whole.

On the IP view, then, the experience of a work of art is central to the value of that work but not as something separate from the work itself. There is no work of art identifiable apart from the process of experiencing it, and that genuine experience is not a reductively subjective reception but an intimate entering into the domain of the work for its own sake, understanding it through the dynamic relationship of the parts and the whole. This means that the experience is not helpfully classifiable as either subjective or objective. Subjective and objective moments are

part of a purposive interplay that does not fit with standard categorical uses of those terms. The artistic value emerges as the whole emerges through the parts.

To understand what it means to say that the artwork itself yields the proper standard for its evaluation, consider the following example of parallel artworks. How are we to experience or assess the value of Tom Hooper's 2012 musical film *Les Misérables*? If we approach the work as a whole comparable to Victor Hugo's novel, then the film will be like the tree that is judged to be defective because it lacks the swiftness of a deer. If we approach it as a Broadway production, then again we hold it to a standard not its own, and if we approach it as a contemporary pop rendition of a classical novel turned Broadway performance, then we again fail to take it on its own terms. But what are 'its own terms'? How do we enter into the whole sufficiently to know what kind of a whole we are engaged with? The standpoint matters.

If we engage with the 2012 *Les Misérables* film with an expectation that the actors retain the vocal quality of Broadway performers, then we are right to experience the whole as a disappointment, at least on that score. The songs of the film are those of the Broadway musical *Les Misérables*, so this might seem a fair standpoint for evaluating the film. However, it is only after engaging closely with the film, experiencing it with receptivity to its own terms instead of predetermining terms for it, and reflectively re-experiencing it, that the aims of the director and the actors to draw out the fragility of the emotions in the depths of narrative inherent in *Les Misérables* begin to emerge as central to the kind of artistic whole it is. The director of the film intentionally shifted the orientation away from the ideal Broadway performance in favor of actors whose particular skills could visually evoke the emotional state of the characters. The availability of vocal talent was not an issue, so the casting choice to take skilled actors over ideal Broadway singers is key to the terms of the film. What matters here is not that the director intends this, but that it emerges as a central unifying characteristic of the film. For instance, this aim is evident in actor Anne Hathaway's reflection on her performance of the moment of despair for her character, Fantine, who sees no way out for herself. Hathaway reflects: 'There seemed to be something selfish about going for the pretty version [of the song 'I Dreamed a Dream'] in Fantine's moment of desperation and eminent loss. Instead, Hathaway says, she decided to 'apply the truth to the melody' (for these reflective choices by the director and actors, see the 'Featurette for *Les Misérables*' [2012]). The film seeks to draw viewers into a moment of empathy with the characters and story. It seeks to make real Fantine's raw despair, courage, and subtle strength of character when hope is not an option. If this is right, this becomes a part of the new standard by which we assess that work. Does it achieve this well? Is this really the most adequate way of conceiving of the whole, or is this but a part?

The experience of the whole becomes defined and guided by the whole itself. *This* claim does not mean that whatever *is* is good. For example, we might not recognize that an unfamiliar creature is sick or inhibited until we become more familiar with its kind. Nor does knowledge of the kind entail sufficient knowledge of a particular instance of that kind. Knowing the norms that govern abstraction in painting will help to experience and appreciate a Rothko on its own terms, but the success or

failure of a particular work is nevertheless always dependent on actual experience of the individual in question (its part-whole relations).

With adequate observation we begin to see that something is not as it should be because parts, movements, and activity evidence an incoherence internal to the creature. For instance, we might initially think we have stumbled on a ground creature, but through observation we realize that its efforts evidence the desire to climb or fly, but it is unable to do so. We judge it to be of a kind that can climb or fly, but it is prevented from doing so for some reason. As we enter into continued experience with a work of art, the inner purposiveness that characterizes its particularity begins to emerge. Likewise, in the work of art, we begin to perceive more adequately whether the parts are working together coherently, fluidly, and for the sake of the whole. This is part of how, on the IP view, we enter into a new work with openness to an experiential standard that may be foreign to our expectations of what constitutes good art.

The IP view's insistence on judging a work of art on its own terms is not to give it a relativistic pass any more than judging an animal on its terms lacks objectivity. There is a normative standard. That standard is the whole itself. This means that judging it on its own terms requires genuinely and adequately entering into the work of art for its own sake. By analogy, although leopards and cheetahs have much in common, to judge a cheetah's failure to climb a tree to escape the lion as a defect relative to the leopard is a failure to experience and know the kind of whole in question. Goethe, in his discussion of opera, makes a similar point about works of art and coming to know the whole in question:

[An opera] by no means represents as reality what it imitates. But can we deny existence of an inner truth which results from the inner logic in the work of art (*eine innere Wahrheit, die aus der Konsequenz eines Kunstwerks entspringt*)? . . . If the opera is good it becomes its own micro-world in which everything follows certain laws (*gewissen Gesetzen*)— a world which must be experienced on its own terms (*nach ihren eigenen Eigenschaften gefühlt*). (Goethe [1798] 1998: 70)

Moreover, to judge a work of art on its own terms means actually and adequately entering into the uniqueness that makes it the kind of whole it is. This adequate vision and understanding is not easy:

Unless special reasons demand it, truly profitable examination and impartial evaluation must . . . not expect roses in winter and grapes in spring. That is, the fair, discriminating art critic does not praise or find fault with a work according to his personal likes or dislikes. Rather, his judgment is always based on an awareness of the history of art (*sein Urteil hat jedesmal die Geschichte der Kunst zur Unterlage*); he carefully considers place and time of origin (*Entstehung*), the state of the arts at the time and the taste of a particular school and a particular master. (Goethe [1821] 1998: 204)

Having the adequate vision encompasses recognition of relevant particulars, including the history and embeddedness inherent in the work. The encounter with the work of art as a whole is valuable precisely insofar as we come to the work of art with adequate openness to the uniqueness of the kind of whole in question. In other words, the possible value in our experience of an artistic whole is dependent on our stance toward that whole, just as our experience of organic wholes in nature is dependent on our stance toward them.

One challenge in seeing this similarity is that we often begin with an openness to the unfamiliar in nature that we regularly resist bringing to artwork. When we encounter a new organic whole in nature, we hold clearly in view our lack of knowledge and experience of the kind in question, and so we leave ourselves in a better place to experience and learn the worth of the whole we are encountering. By contrast, when we encounter a work of art, we feel the need to have already or to form quickly a meaningful judgment, to reach a conclusion, to understand adequately the kind of work before us from a glance or two hours in an auditorium seat.


What the work is emerges through real experience with it. Our experience with art, just like our experience with other organisms or rational beings, is not what makes those wholes valuable; rather, the experience is valuable because it is an experience in and with an experiential whole that is valuable for its own sake.

5. Conclusion

I sought to show that there are some EI views of artworks as ends in themselves that do not fall prey to the fundamental contra-connote charges of irrationality. I have shown this by identifying the IP view of artworks as internally purposive wholes, which is one type of EI view, and which does not fall prey to those contra-connote charges. Thus, I have proved my thesis that the contra-connote charges of the irrationality of views that take artworks to be ends in themselves and thereby valuable for their own sake do not hold. Those charges depend on a narrow conception of EI view that becomes question begging. What I have not done is defended the IP view as the best theory of artworks. Rather, my sole, limited aim has been to show that it is an EI view variation that is coherent and compelling without falling prey to those charges. Thus, we have at least one coherent theory of art that seems capable of viewing artworks as valuable for their own sake, and this view takes artworks to be internally purposive wholes, which likewise becomes the standard for experiencing and critiquing artworks. Contrary to the contra-connote claims, while the value of artistic experience is immense, that immensity is reasonably held as shown to be conditionable by a genuine engagement with the work of art, on its own terms, as valuable for its own sake. In short, the IP view gives sufficient reason to think that artworks are reasonably held to be valuable for their own sake. Regardless of agreement with the IP view, minimally, it proves that not all EI views are subject to the contra-connote charges.

The kind of experience yielded by engaging the artwork as valuable for its own sake has the possibility to gain a richer formative worth for the self precisely

because it was an experience determined in and through an *other*, the experience of which may well not return the experiencer unchanged. On the IP view, when engaging a work of art, if one's final assessment turns out to be that it was not valuable for its own sake, and so fails in some respects as an excellent work of art, the judgment itself should be suspended at the outset. It has no business judging what it cannot know. Only experiencing a work of art as valuable for its own sake can yield the corresponding artistic value in the experience made possible by the artistic whole in question. Then, when such a judgment is deployed favorably or otherwise, it stems from the proper foundation, namely, genuine experience with the work of art as valuable for its own sake.

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