

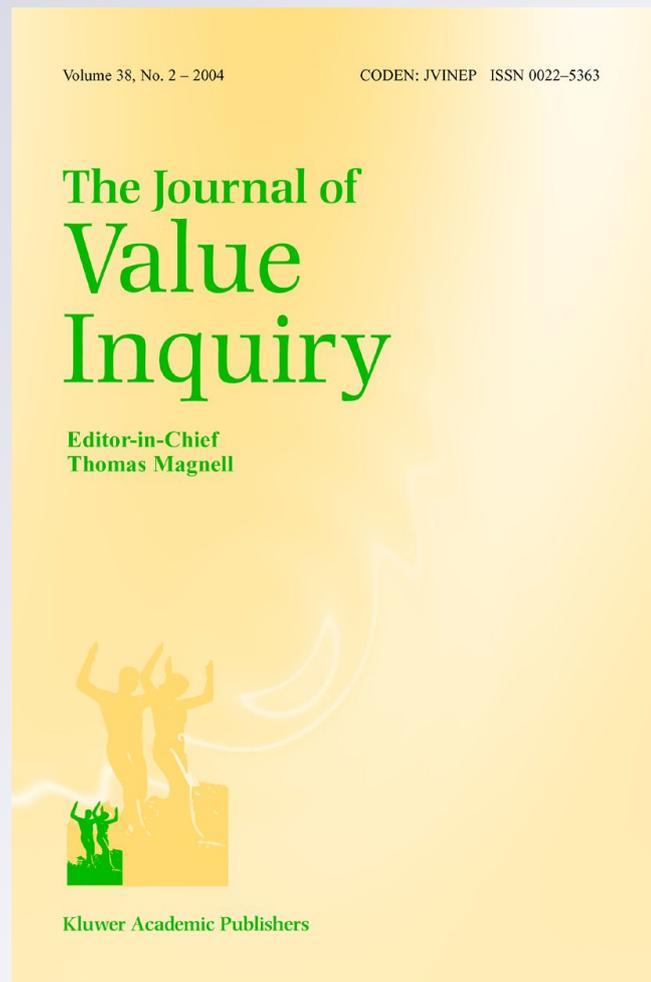
Ethics, Aesthetics, and Artistic Ends

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Ethics, Aesthetics, and Artistic Ends

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A work of art may be considered with respect to internal relations that may exist between the ethical defects of the work and its artistic or aesthetic value. In some cases moral flaws seem to count as artistic flaws. In other cases, the artistic value of a work seems immune to criticism that the work is morally defective. An evaluation in which reference is made to the constitutive aims, functions, or purposes of a work of art can offer a principled explanation that grounds that sort of distinction.

1 Abject Images

Ethical norms govern our treatment of other people, and the artistic representation of other people is just one mode in which the treatment of other people occurs. Sometimes such representations raise moral concerns through qualities that play an essential role in how the representations function as works of art. For example, Sebastião Selgado's beautiful and highly stylized photographs of indentured laborers and refugees suffering from famine, human depredation, and other situations of extremity show the individuals as if they were, variously, atomistic elements of a formal design, allegorical subjects in compositions that hark back to Old Master scenes of martyrdom, or merely symbols of their suffering. The general problem with the works, the critic Ingrid Sischy writes, is that such "beautification of tragedy results in pictures that ultimately reinforce our passivity toward the experience they reveal.... Beauty is a call to admiration, not to action."¹ The art and beauty of such depictions tend to encourage the formation of a morally defective attitude toward suffering, an attitude of complaisance or even pleasure.

¹ See Ingrid Sischy, "Good Intentions," *The New Yorker*, 9 September 1991.

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In the case of Selgado's work, that criticism may be apt. However it would be a controversial psychological assumption to say that seeing a person under an aesthetic or artistic aspect always precludes seeing him under another description, as, say, that of a person deserving of aid or concern. Indeed, some beautiful pictures of suffering individuals may motivate us to respond in morally praiseworthy ways toward people whom we might otherwise ignore. For example, the paradigmatic historical representation of suffering in the Common Era is the depiction of Jesus, who can be shown by artists, the Council of Trent declared, as "afflicted, bleeding, spat upon with his skin torn, wounded, [and] deformed," for such suffering is central to the narrative of redemption.² Reformation and Counter-Reformation representations of the Crucifixion were often as ugly as Renaissance depictions were beautiful, but in most instances the artistic representation of that suffering was meant to draw souls in, not distance them through aesthetic mediation. The relevant question here is whether there is a sense in which some artistic depictions of suffering or abject individuals can be immoral, not just because of their putative effects on our character, motivations, and feelings, but because of their degrading effect on the represented individuals. If the depictions of the Crucifixion were only images of humiliation, what would count as a humiliating image?

Confining this discussion to photographs of actual persons, we may observe that if an individual's appearance were merely a kind of external cloth, independent of what is counted as essential to the preservation of a person's dignity, then visually accurate photographs or depictions could not in themselves be humiliating, since they would only record whatever humiliating conditions the photographed subjects undergo. However, how an individual visually appears to others may be a constitutive feature of his identity, construed in a substantive sense. Let us consider, for example, the significance a person may attach to his stance or bearing, dress, and cleanliness not just as manifestations of some state of character but as constitutive requirements of his self-respect. Likewise, we should note how discussions of end-of-life medical decisions may turn, in part, on what sort of appearance a person would recognize as still expressing her sense of herself as a person. Finally, we should notice how, of all the ways in which humiliation may be imposed, for example, through print, gossip, exclusion, and institutional or legal distinctions, it primarily operates through visual means, including dunce-caps, nakedness of prisoners, and stocks. Such exposures participate in the degradation of individuals through symbolic means by visually presenting them in ways that threaten a significant basis of their sense of their self respect and our treatment of them as persons. Such humiliating exposures exploit not just how we care about our status as persons, which we do not give up even as we are treated merely as objects, but how we sometimes see ourselves as persons in part through the recognition as such by others. This is a psychological, not metaphysical, phenomenon that features in the way in which bigotry sometimes affects its victims through corrupting their own self-conceptions.³

² See Rudolf Wittkover, *Art and Architecture in Italy, 1600–1750* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1958).

³ See Claude Steele, et al., "Contending with Group Image: the Psychology of Stereotype and Social Identity Threat," in M.P. Zanna, ed., *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology*, vol. 34 (San Diego, Calif.: Academic Press, 2002).

It is an open question how much content we ought to build into that concept of moral respect for a person's self-presentation. Where does respect for the dignity of persons shade into non-morally relevant respect for qualities of honor or social status?⁴ What one person considers a necessary basis of self-respect another person might see as only a matter of narcissism or exaggerated self-esteem. In any case, in works of art that visually represent actual persons, there are two systems of representation at play. There are the ways in which individuals represent themselves as persons, comprising the features of their external appearance that they take to be internally related to their dignity or autonomy. There are also the ways in which works of art represent such people. Moral concerns often emerge in the artistic representation of other people when the two modes or systems of representation come into conflict: when a work shows a person in ways that her own self-representation would not or should not sanction. Selgado's subjects are shown in a way that suggests that their degraded condition is the primary aspect or saliency under which they should be identified. The artistic achievement of such works thereby depends upon a kind of instrumental objectification that is in tension with full respect for the dignity of the individuals as persons.⁵ It should be noted that it is not obvious, when there is a clash between the moral respect owed to a work's subject and the achievement of certain artistic ends, that the tension should always be resolved in favor of avoiding any moral offense.

In such works, as in many others that manifest moral defects, the morally troubling aspects are internal features of the works. Such flaws are not only, say, properties of the motivations that the artists had in creating them. A response might be that moral flaws should be ascribed, not to works of art, but only to the actions an artist performs in creating such works. However, this is a false dichotomy. The action an artist performs may be morally defective because the work itself has such moral defects. Susan Sontag condemned Diane Arbus's celebrated and influential photographs of marginalized individuals such as carnival performers, the indigent, spiritualists, and the mentally and physically disabled, for showing "people who are pathetic, pitiable, as well as repulsive," from a vantage point "based on distance, on privilege, on a feeling that what the viewer is asked to look at is really other."⁶ Whether Arbus knowingly adopted that attitude as she created the works is uncertain, although she did regularly describe her subjects using the term, "freaks." However, that perspective is readily apparent as a feature of the works themselves. Her photographs, for example, are often composed as if her subjects comprise a taxonomy of deviants or oddities, and the images in many cases have an odd fisheye appearance, due to her use in close quarters of a wide-angle lens, that serves as a visual analog of the putative abnormality of her subjects themselves.

There are cases where moral criticism should, indeed, be directed only at the action an artist performs in creating a work, without the moral complaint extending to the works themselves. Walker Evans created a series of subway portraits in the

⁴ See Stephen Darwall, "Two Kinds of Respect," in John Deigh, ed., *Ethics and Personality* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992).

⁵ See Martha Nussbaum, "Objectification," *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, fall, 1995.

⁶ Susan Sontag, *On Photography* (New York: Macmillan, 2001 [1977]), p. 34.

1940s using a camera rigged to catch people unawares. More recently, Philip-Lorca diCorcia took street photographs that required elaborately triggered hidden setups. The works were created through some degree of invasion of privacy of their subjects and were created without the consent of their subjects. But even if some morally dubious behavior entered into the creation of the works, the depictions do not make thematic those aspects of how they were created. By contrast, other works of art may be said to expressively depend upon the very conditions of their creation. We see this in such works as a video the American artist Julia Scher screened in a public gallery in Hamburg that had been surreptitiously recorded in the men's room in the gallery, photographs secretly taken by the French artist Sophie Calle of the possessions of tourists at a hotel in Venice where she posed as a chamber maid, and the performance staged by the Polish artist Artur Żmijewski of a group of hearing-impaired students singing a Bach cantata, the exploitative core of the work coming into view with its cacophonous results. Those works, like the works of Selgado and Arbus, raise moral concerns in virtue of properties they have as art.

2 Merited Response

For works that possess genuine moral faults, we should ask whether the moral faults are such as to entail or cause artistic faults or whether the moral value of the works is distinct from their artistic value as works of art. The most significant recent attempt to show that moral appraisal and artistic appraisal are related in an internal fashion is the theory of merited response, which comes in several varieties.⁷ Philosophers who advance the theory hold that an intrinsic ethical feature of a work of art can make a difference in its aesthetic or artistic value in the following way. The author of a mystery story may solicit a certain response from her audience, such as suspense, but with a plot that is so clunky and a villain so obvious from the beginning, that no such response is warranted or merited by the design of the work. The work might otherwise be successful but, insofar as such features frustrate the aims of the author in writing the work, they are artistic flaws. The author of a work may also solicit a response from her audience that is immoral, such as an endorsement of the racist motivations for a character's actions. Such response, according to proponents of the theory of merited response, is or ought to be unmerited. The failure of the work to garner the response the author asks for is an artistic failure, but, importantly, an artistic failure explained by or identical to a moral failure. The equivocation here reflects a major distinction in theories of merited response over whether the central concept of merit should be understood in a descriptive or normative sense.

In the descriptive version of the theory of merited response, to say that a response is unmerited is to hold that, as an empirical matter, audiences just do not respond in accord with the attitude that the work is designed to provoke. In the normative version of the theory, the lack of merit is understood in a normative sense: the

⁷ See Noël Carroll, "Moderate Moralism," *British Journal of Aesthetics* 36.

audience ought not to respond as the author of the work solicits, even if as a matter of fact the audience does respond in such a way. Proponents of the normative account of merited response hold that when a work is designed to solicit an approving or endorsing response toward an immoral feature, the response is unmerited, *simpliciter*, however audiences happen to respond. Audiences have reasons of a moral kind not to adopt the perspective the immoral work is designed to elicit from them, even if as a matter of fact they do fully respond as mandated. Berys Gaut contrasts his normative version from the descriptive version this way: “it is not that the ethical demerits of works *bring about*, through their presence, some aesthetic demerits in work.... The claim is, rather that ethical demerits *are*, when manifested in prescribed responses, aesthetic demerits in works.”⁸ On his account, when a work is designed to solicit a given response and the response is not merited, there is an aesthetic flaw. If the response is immoral, it is always unmerited, and thus the solicitation of it by a work that endorses it is always an aesthetic flaw.

A difficulty with presenting the theory of merited response in such normative terms is that it seems to make the connection between moral value and aesthetic value too close to be informative. If we want to say that an immoral work that achieves all the aims of the author and garners the responses that it is designed to solicit is nonetheless aesthetically flawed because the responses are unmerited, the primary merit would be moral. But then we are saying that, in the relevant respect, the reason why the immoral work is aesthetically flawed is a moral reason. A pluralist about artistic or aesthetic values could accept this: for a pluralist, the evaluation of works of art appropriately depends on many kinds of reasons, among them moral reasons. But the point of the theory of merited response was to show why a feature of a work identified as a moral flaw is, in some distinctive way, also an aesthetic flaw, not just why a moral flaw is a flaw as a moral flaw. To recast the objection, we ought to consider the implicit generality of the normative version of merited response. Although it is meant to demonstrate how moral and aesthetic value are under certain conditions always internally related, the theory does not enable us to explain why or whether the specifically moral kind of merit, when characterizing a response to a work, offers a distinctive kind of reason to be considered in evaluating the aesthetic merit of a work. It is *prima facie* true that there are many different kinds of reasons why a given response to a work of art might be merited or unmerited. There might be, say, a prudential reason to resist responding to a work as the author of a work solicits. A person might resist responding as the author of a work solicits in order, say, to please his friends, or to avoid venting emotions that will make it difficult to fall asleep that evening. Although such reasons to abstain from responding as the author of a work asks are *prima facie* reasons why such a response is unmerited, they do not reflect the appropriate kind of merit that merited response is supposed to identify. What is required is some principled distinction between the kinds of reasons that should count in whether to respond in accord with how the work is designed and the kinds of reasons that do not count for or against the merit of the response.

⁸ See Berys Gaut, *Art, Emotion and Ethics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 234.

The problem here is not, as some critics have charged, that Gaut's use of the notion of merit trades on an ambiguity among different kinds of reasons for adopting or resisting the response the author of a work asks for, only some of which are appropriate to assessing whether the work merits the response it solicits.⁹ Even if some sorts of prudential reasons did count as appropriate reasons against adopting the attitude that the author of a work asks for, this would just show that the theory of merited response has a wide enough scope to cover such non-moral reasons, as well as moral reasons. Instead, the problem is that, no matter how broad the scope of the theory, some sort of distinction must be made between the kinds of reasons that count in favor or against adopting the attitude that the author of a work solicits and the kinds of reasons that ought not to play any such role.¹⁰

Proponents of the theory of merited response do have a ready justification for why we ought to hold that specifically moral reasons count in favor of adopting or withholding the response that the author of a work solicits, whatever we say about other sorts of reasons. That justification is that sometimes works of art have intrinsic moral properties and so the merit we assign to responding as the author of the work asks can adequately reflect the moral goodness or defectiveness of the work. That point may be used to satisfy the desideratum that the merit of the response appealed to by the theory is a merit that appropriately reflects the value of the object concerned. However, relying on that point appears to beg the question against the contrary position of philosophers who argue that the moral evaluation of a work of art is always independent of its aesthetic evaluation. If the charge of question-begging is correct, it does not follow that the theory of merited response is wrong. Perhaps the burden of proof rests with people who hold that the moral and artistic values of a work of art are never internally related. However, intuitively, the theory of merited response would seem to have us over-predict the circumstances under which a moral failure entails an aesthetic or artistic flaw. Some works of art do seem to be less good as works of art because of the morally flawed attitudes their authors solicit. However, with other works, including some funny but offensive jokes, cruel but apt satires, entertaining but grotesque horror films, and powerful but violence-celebrating hip hop songs, authors express and solicit morally flawed attitudes without that seeming to count in all cases against their artistic success. The normative theory of merited response does not allow the possibility of there being works in which a prescribed morally defective attitude makes no artistic difference: insofar as any work is morally defective in the attitude it solicits from audiences, it is necessarily artistically defective.

3 Constitutive Artistic Ends

Let us consider an alternative account of how moral and artistic value can be internally related. In some cases we can discover an internal relation between the moral value and the artistic value of a work of art in the relation between the moral

⁹ See Daniel Jacobson, "In Praise of Immoral Art," *Philosophical Topics*, vol. 25, no. 1, 1997.

¹⁰ See W. Rabinowicz and T. Ronnow-Rasmussen, "The Strike of the Demon: On Fitting Pro-attitudes and Value," *Ethics* 114.3 (2004).

vision promoted by the author of the work and the point, purpose, or function the work was created to realize. We should consider that sometimes a work of art is designed to realize a given morally characterized aim, such as to express a morally enlightened point of view, convey a moral insight, or afford a morally praiseworthy experience to an audience, such as making it possible for members of the audience to identify imaginatively with people from whom they would otherwise be estranged. When the author of a work has such a moral aim but fails, for morally evaluable reasons, to achieve the aim, the flaw in the work is both moral and artistic. For example, Selgado no doubt intends via his imagery to bear witness and call attention to the suffering of the disenfranchised miners and refugees he depicts. That end is an essential artistic function of his works. However, with the refined beauty and dramatic composition of his images, he ends up treating his subjects in an objectifying manner that seems in tension with such morally praiseworthy ends. The avowedly moral ends, essential to the works as the particular works they are, turn out to be compromised by the morally flawed artistic means.

By contrast, the works of Diane Arbus we considered earlier seem largely devoid of any such moral function. Her oeuvre is far less animated by any essential moral purpose or end. Sontag may have been right in identifying moral flaws in the works, but, if they were not made in light of any correlative moral standards, the flaws need not count as artistic flaws. Some of Arbus's works may be morally flawed, but, if so, the flaws seem not to tarnish the value of the works as art. Nonetheless, the argument presented here is a defense of only the positive thesis that there is always an internal relation between moral value and artistic value when there are moral defects in a work defined by moral ends, broadly construed. In the practice of artistic appraisal we are considering, the standards invoked by which to evaluate a work of art are held to be relative to certain constitutive features of the particular work itself, the artistic points, purposes, meanings or expressions it was designed to realize or convey. One way of characterizing this approach is that it places the artifactuality of art at the center of a theory of artistic evaluation. In one widely held view, artifacts necessarily possess functions. Furthermore, functions are typically taken to be essential properties of artifacts. The functions are relational properties of a specifically historical kind. The relevant historical factors in the case of artifacts have to do with the intentions with which the artifacts are made.

As artifacts, works of art typically have functions. This is not to assume that there is any particular function or set of functions shared by all artworks. The point here of identifying artworks as artifacts is to stress that most if not all works of art have some function or functions as works of art, however minimally characterized the artistic functions may be.¹¹ A work of art may have other functions that depend on it being a work of art, without the functions being artistic functions themselves, such as to generate money or fame for its creator, hide an unsightly wall, or fulfill the degree requirements for a Master of Fine Arts. A work may also have a function as a doorstop, weapon, or some other kind of artifact where the realization of that function does not even require that the work be a work of art. Some philosophers hold that only some kinds of functions can be artistic functions. However, given the

¹¹ See Nick Zangwill, *Aesthetic Creation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).

wide variety of functions that art has, whether a function counts as an artistic function should be determined on a case-by-case basis.

If some works of art were identified as having no function as works of art, they would be anomalous. Furthermore, it is not possible to evaluate works of art as artistic achievements without some reference to the ends, points, and purposes, with which they may be designed. There would be in principle no distinction between their having succeeded as the particular works of art that they are and their having failed as such works of art. We may evaluate a work of art according to standards that the work was not designed to satisfy, but that would not be to evaluate the work as the particular work it is. While it is conceivable for works of art without any artistic functions to be created, we should also note that a work of art designed to evince no particular artistic motive or purpose would still have the function of instantiating such a work as one of its artistic ends. A work of art may be designed with a single artistic function; however, most works of art are defined by many functions, and the optimal satisfaction of one function may not be consistent with the optimal satisfaction of others.

Just as ordinary artifacts should fulfill their functions, so works of art should fulfill the ends with which they are designed. A bread knife is designed and created such that it should cut bread. A rocket ship designed to carry a satellite into orbit should be such that it satisfies that end. Such normative essences follow from the constitutive functional essences of artifacts.¹² By analogy, a work of art designed to inspire patriotic feelings should inspire patriotic feelings. It is an unsuccessful work in at least that one respect if it fails to discharge its function. Those points are compatible with saying that breadknives, rocket ships, and patriotic art should not be created. Proponents of the historical or etiological concept of functions stress how an object may have a function without being such as to realize the function. It may be a defective artifact. A work of art, likewise, can be designed and created to discharge some function, without being very good in that respect.¹³ The concern here is not with whether there is a common purpose or end associated with art as an artifactual category or kind. Instead, the point is that, as artifacts, works of art can have functions and, by virtue of their functions, can bear normative essences. Thus, when we ask what the functions of a given work of art are, and thereby ask what standards of success or achievement the artwork should be held to, we must refer to what ends, as art, the work is designed to achieve. This description may reflect moral, cognitive, aesthetic, practical, or other ends, but need not reflect a putative function all works of art share as members of a kind.¹⁴

We should consider how the internal ends of art may in some cases include moral ends. Among the aims, functions, or ends that may be internal to any given work of art are moral aims. Indeed, many works of art are defined by the moral ends they are designed to realize, just as they are defined by other ends, such as to appear a certain way, provoke a given response, provide aesthetic pleasure, or expose some deep

¹² See Kit Fine, "Ontological Dependence," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, 1995, pp. 276–278.

¹³ See Ruth Garrett Millikan, "In Defense of Proper Functions," *Philosophy of Science* 56.2 (1989), pp. 294 & 296.

¹⁴ See Stephen Davies *Definitions of Art* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1991).

truth. Thus, the moral value of a work of art may enter into the evaluation not only of how well such art happens to satisfy whatever external standards we apply, but how well it satisfies the standards for success it is supposed to realize. When a work of art is designed and created with a standard of success that includes some order of moral correctness then evaluating the work from a moral point of view is to evaluate it as the artwork that it is.

By contrast, many works of art do not reflect any concern for exhibiting or respecting moral values. A farce may be written only to mock an institution. A violent film of armed gangs stalking each other may be designed only to provide entertainment, not a lesson in how to settle differences. A cruel caricature or joke may appeal to prejudiced stereotypes but make a genuinely non-prejudiced audience laugh nonetheless. Such works can be appropriately criticized for morally obnoxious commitments they may express without the moral flaws making an artistic difference, if no moral standards are constitutive of the works. The moral judgment of the works may be merely external or adventitious, unmotivated by what the works are designed to be.

However, when a work is supposed to express some morally characterized end, it is germane to an evaluation of the work whether or not the aim is realized. When a work is created in order to convey some profound truth about the nature of human concern for other people but offers only a simplistic or false view of human caring as, say, motivated by solely egoistic ends, it exhibits a moral failing. Yet, significantly, the moral failing reflects a failing in the artwork it is meant to be. When the violence perpetrated by the title character of the film *Dirty Harry* is supposed to express an order of justice higher than what can be obtained through legal means, but shows only a confusion of justice with the satisfactions of vengeance, then the film has failed in respect of the moral aims, and hence, some of the artistic aims with which it was designed.

The approach we are considering here and the theory of merited response will coincide in many cases over whether the moral flaws of a work of art count as artistic flaws. But that is to be explained by the merely contingent fact that many of the works that are morally defective in the responses they are designed to solicit are nonetheless shaped by moral concerns, broadly construed. Novels, for example, are typically, but not always, created with the aim of parsing what sorts of human motivations, desires, and behaviors are and are not appropriate or excusable. Popular films and television shows, likewise, are often composed as didactic morality plays in which certain kinds of people and ways of life are construed as deserving of moral praise and others of blame. If such morally inflected works are created to solicit an immoral response from audiences, say, endorsement of a character's misogynistic motivations, that would be counted an artistic flaw on both the merited response theory and the view proposed here. Where the merited response theory and the view offered here differ is in the explanation of why such moral defects count as artistic defects. On the normative version of merited response theory, such moral defects are artistic defects because artistic value is always constituted in part by such moral value when present in a work. On the view proposed here, such moral defects are artistic defects because, in the particular cases

the defects count against the satisfaction of the essentially moral ends with which the works as works of art are designed.

On the theory of merited response, a certain kind of moral defect in a work of art is always an artistic defect. We have seen, to the contrary, reasons for holding that it is only under some conditions that such moral flaws count as artistic flaws. The conditions under which the work has, as an essential artistic feature, a moral function. It is possible, absent the conditions, that a moral flaw could cause or explain an artistic flaw, as when a morally offensive depiction prevents an imaginative uptake by the audience, in which case the audience refuses, or is unable, to go along with what the work is designed to provoke them to imagine. However, that characterizes an external relation between a moral defect and an artistic flaw. If the moral wrongness of the depiction were effectively disguised, as it often is in powerful art, audiences could respond as the work is supposed to elicit and no artistic failure would occur. By contrast, the kind of internal relation between moral defects and artistic defects that we have considered will hold in a work in which it is instantiated even if the work, its insidious immoral perspective disguised, garners the responses it is supposed to solicit. The objectivity of the judgment that a work employs immoral means to achieve some morally characterized end is independent of the empirical question of whether such immoral means are recognized by audiences.

On the view considered here, it is clear not only why the immoral response that a work is supposed to solicit may be an artistic flaw but why many other sorts of moral defects may diminish the artistic value of a work. A work of art may be morally flawed, for example, in what it is designed to express, in causing audiences to behave in certain ways, in harming or invading the privacy of the subjects it represents, or through forgery or plagiarism. When a work is produced with morally characterized aims, but because of such moral defects fails to realize the ends it is designed to produce, such moral defects are artistic defects as well. Sometimes condemning a work for the morally obnoxious commitments it is designed to express is not an alternative to criticizing the work on artistic grounds, but a mode of such criticism on artistic grounds.

The manner in which moral value and artistic value are sometimes related should not be seen as peculiar. While we have considered the way in which a moral flaw in some works entails an artistic flaw, the structure of the relation holds more generally, for flaws of other, non-moral, sorts as well. If, for example, a work of art is designed and created to represent its subject in a revelatory or perspicuous way but the subject is, nonetheless, depicted in a manner that is inaccurate or clichéd, the artwork has, to that extent, failed by the cognitive standards it is supposed to meet. By contrast, a work of art that is not designed with any cognitive aspirations might be deeply misleading, but such a cognitive deficit need not, in itself, count as an artistic lack.

That we can appeal to the constitutive artistic ends of a work in evaluating it does not entail that our evaluation of a work must appeal only to criteria associated with its point or purposes. We may not think highly of the end itself, and thus we may not value its achievement in the work. An ambitious work of art may fall short of success while still being more highly valued than a modest work that satisfies the

standards by which its success is defined. For partial success in one arena might be more significant to us than complete success in another. Furthermore, evaluating a work of art with reference to the ends for which the work was designed and created does not exclude evaluating it from other standards that may apply. However, just as the function of an artifact typically plays a central role in what sorts of features the artifact has as an artifact, so the standards that a work of art was designed to satisfy typically organize its other features and determine which are central to it and which are not.

On the view of constitutive ends considered here, not just any moral dimension is relevant to the artistic evaluation of a work. Many works may be morally faulty without any moral concern entering into what they are designed to be. That does not mean that they are immune to moral criticism. They are subject to moral criticism as vehicles of moral attitudes or points of view. However, such moral criticism offers only an external evaluation, an important consideration in whether or not we should admire the works, share them with others, or take them as models for behavior, whether or not in an evaluation of their artistic success. It may be objected that if an immoral work of art is flawed as art when the work is motivated by a moral aim, a morally admirable work of art is flawed as art when the work has a wholly immoral aim. In response, it may be said that a morally admirable work of art that is designed to have a wholly immoral aim, may be appropriately criticized from two perspectives: for its artistic flaw, which results from a failure to satisfy its constitutive ends and for its moral flaw. However, the moral flaw need not be an artistic flaw in all works of art. It may also be objected that in the view we have considered there is no distinction between what an artist intended her work to mean and what the work means. Some theorists assert that the actual intentions of an artist in creating a work play an ineliminable role in determining the truth or aptness of an interpretation, while others hold that artistic intentions are irrelevant to the adequacy of an interpretation and stress the identification of artistic meaning with the meaning of the work itself.¹⁵ One significant point that might be advanced by an anti-intentionalist is that to speak of a work of art failing to realize the expression or meaning that it was designed to have seems to treat two works as one, the work the artist intended to create, and the work the artist in the end did create. To say that the actual created work is flawed or fails with respect to its design might appear to really mean, not that it is flawed in itself, but that it fails to be a different work, the work the artist intended.

Gregory Currie objects in this vein to the self-conception of artistic interpretation, what he calls realist interpretation, in which the meaning of a work of art is construed to be the meaning the artist intended it to have. Sometimes we know what an artist intended his work to mean but we cannot find the intended meaning in the work. If, Currie objects, a realist still assigns to the work the meaning the artist intended, then the “realist has ceased to be an interpreter of the work, and [his] intentional hypothesizing serves rather to interpret another, hypothetical work: the

¹⁵ See Annette Barnes, *On Interpretation* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1988); see also Gary Iseminger, “An Intentional Demonstration?”, in *Intention and Interpretation*, ed. Gary Iseminger (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1992), and Noël Carroll, “Art, Intention, and Conversation,” in Iseminger, op. cit.

work that would have been written had the author's narrative intentions gone well."¹⁶ In interpretation, Currie asserts, "we make inferences to narrative intentions so as to illuminate and render coherent the text we have before us, not some text the author might have written."¹⁷

There are two ways of responding to Currie's objection. First, we should note that his objection should not apply to cases in which the intention with which a work is designed and the features that count against the satisfaction of the intention are, indeed, evident in the work itself. We can often see how, for example, a television melodrama is designed to affect us without our feeling at all affected in the way it is supposed to affect us. The intentions fail but we discover them, nonetheless, in the work. We may compare this to how we can make reliable hypotheses about the function of a given artifact through attention to its properties and how they hang together. A bicycle that is useless in being too heavy to ride would still exhibit what it is designed to do.¹⁸ Second, and more significantly, interpreting a work of art with reference to the failed intentions of an artist need not assign to the work the meaning that the artist intended it to have. Instead, such interpretation can assign to the work an unrealized or faulty expression of the meaning that the artist intended it to have. Failures to express a given meaning are not themselves expressionless. Some of the works we considered earlier reveal artistic aspirations in their artistic qualities. We may need to posit or assume certain intentions to make sense of the way a work is composed, but it is the work we evaluate and the work which we may find morally faulty despite its morally characterized aims.¹⁹

¹⁶ See Currie, "Interpretation and Objectivity," *Mind* 102, 1993, p. 418.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ See Dennett, *The Intentional Stance* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1987), and Dennett, "The Interpretation of Texts, People and Other Artifacts." *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* (1990).

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