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**Objectivity and Shared Experience: Art and Morality**

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Our responses to art and our moral thought and practice share an impulse to objectivity. The sources are different: artistic practice answers to a norm of communicative fidelity; morality imposes a demand of answerability. Nonetheless, the objectivity of our judgements in these two domains forges several important connections between them.

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When we consider judgements about art and about morality, three familiar questions arise concerning their objectivity. First, in just what sense do judgements of either kind claim to be objective? Secondly, what metaphysical conditions must be met in order to vindicate such claims? And thirdly, what epistemic justification do we have for accepting them?

This chapter begins with a brief discussion of the first question. The discussion here is brief since it consists simply in laying down some assumptions. I spell out the two main respects in which, I shall be assuming, judgements about art and about morality do indeed claim to be objective. Moreover, I shall assume without any argument that some such claims are correct. Rembrandt’s *The Jewish Bride* *is* a great masterpiece; morally atrocious things *have* been done in war. Such judgements make claims to objectivity, and those claims can be correct – I shall mark the conjunction of those two features by saying, more simply: judgements about art and about morality are objective.

From there, I shall pass over the second and third questions (about metaphysics and epistemology) entirely. Those questions, of course, are both contentious and important, but they are not dealt with here. Instead, this chapter focuses on a fourth question. What is the relationship between the objectivity of these two kinds of judgements? How does their objectivity differ; in what ways is their objectivity connected? Both the differences and the connections must be appreciated in order to arrive at a good overall picture of the relationship between the two.

The chapter is structured as follows. Section 1 introduces the two objectivity-constituting features that are shared by judgements about art and about morality. However, although they share these features in common, their objectivity has different sources. In the case of art, Section 2 argues, it comes from the way in which artistic practice is disciplined by a norm of communicative fidelity: the production of a work of art is a communicative act, and its execution is subject to the possibility of success or failure. Section 3 turns to morality, which requires us to treat each other in ways we can justify to each other: here, the pressure towards objectivity comes instead, at least in part, from the demand that we respect each other by giving good reasons to others for the ways we treat them. However, despite these differences, there are important connections between the objectivity of our judgements in these two domains. Four of these connections are set out in sections 4-7. First, when art is good its appreciation can be a constituent of a person’s welfare, which is morally important. Secondly, the reasons we have to preserve and protect precious works of art can ground demands of unselfishness that are continuous with the demands of interpersonal morality. Thirdly, art can reveal to us the plurality of valuable human experience, showing us the necessity of making practical choices between values with competing claims to our allegiance. And fourthly, successful art is a vehicle for shared experience, revealing a deep connection between the justifications we have for caring about both art and morality.

**1. Objectivity: two commitments**

Judgements about a subject-matter claim to be objective, I shall say, when two things are true.[[1]](#footnote-2) First, they are judgements that invite assessment in terms of correctness: judgements for which there is a distinction between what seems to be so and what is so. In this first respect, judgements that claim to be objective are committed to the possibility of error. That is not to say that in order for a particular judgement to be objective, the person making it must believe there is a chance he is mistaken. Judgements about whether a person is thinking are objective; but according to Descartes, the probability that he was mistaken in judging that he was thinking was zero. However, it is still true that, as a class, judgements about whether a person is thinking are subject to the possibility of error, and assessable in terms of correctness. So they have the first distinguishing feature of judgements that claim to be objective.

The second feature is a commitment to the possibility of convergence, and not just coincidence, of judgement. In forming judgements about the contents of our physical surroundings, we presuppose that what we judge to be so is accessible from different points of view. When we agree with each other, we take it that this is not just a matter of the contents of our experience being similar – rather, our shared experience is directed towards a common object.

When judgements about a subject-matter possess these two features, I shall say they claim to be objective. So judgements about reincarnation claim to be objective. When at least some judgements about the subject-matter are correct, I shall say that judgements about that subject-matter *are* objective.

The two features just described are different. The first feature gives the respect in which objectivism about a class of judgements (the claim that the judgements in that class are objective) contrasts with subjectivism. Subjectivism concerning judgements that *p* denies that there is any standard independent of one’s judging that *p* with respect to which one’s judgement can be assessed as correct or incorrect. The second feature gives the respect in which objectivism contrasts with relativism. Relativism concerning judgements that *p* asserts that one’s judgement that *p* can only be assessed as correct or incorrect relative to the standard of a particular perspective. Judgements about whether one thing is to the right or left of another are capable of being correct or incorrect, but the relevant standard of correctness is relative to the orientational perspective of the speaker. So such judgements are relative, but not subjective. Subjectivism about a class of judgements holds that that class of judgements is not subject to standards of correctness; relativism, that it is subject to perspective-relative standards of correctness; objectivism, that it is subject to perspective-independent standards of correctness.

So understood, judgements about art and about morality claim to be objective. This is true of both our normative judgements about the actions and attitudes that we ought to take, and our evaluative judgements concerning goodness and badness. Artists (and their teachers) make judgements about the additions and revisions that ought to be made during the process of creating a work; critics make judgements about the value of the finished work. When we act, we as agents (and our advisers) make judgements about how we morally ought to treat each other; and observers make judgements about the goodness or badness of our actions and attitudes. Judgements of both kinds contain the two features just described: they are committed to the possibility of error and the possibility of convergence. Here is a description by one of Titian’s contemporaries of his working methods:

he turned the picture to the wall and left it for months without looking at it, until he returned to it and stared critically at it, as if it were a mortal enemy … If he found something which displeased him he went to work like a surgeon … Thus, by repeated revisions he brought his pictures to a high state of perfection and while one was drying he worked on another.[[2]](#footnote-3)

And here is a description of Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s anguished decision to return to Germany in 1939 to resist the Nazis:

I have made a mistake in coming to America. I must live through this difficult period of our national history with the Christian people of Germany. I will have no right to participate in the reconstruction of Christian life in Germany after the war if I do not share the trials of this time with my people.[[3]](#footnote-4)

Serious thought in both domains is concerned with the avoidance of error, with making the *right* decisions, with correcting one’s earlier misjudgements, and with holding oneself to standards which are accessible to others and are imposed from without, not generated from within by one’s own inclinations.

So judgements of both kinds claim to be objective. And, I assume, some are correct: so judgements about art and about morality are objective. This assumption commits me to the claim that whatever metaphysical presuppositions are required to vindicate the correctness of such judgements are met. But I set such metaphysical isses aside, along with the associated epistemological questions concerning how we can be justified in thinking that there are correct judgements of these kinds.

Instead, I want to focus on a question that arises if we accept these assumptions. What is the relationship between the objectivity of judgements about art and the objectivity of judgements about morality? I shall start with the differences. The objectivity of judgements of these two kinds has a different source in each case. I explain this in the next two sections, and then turn to the connections.

**2. Artistic objectivity and communication**

Artistic practice is a communicative activity. Noticing this, theorists have often attempted to produce an Aristotelian, genus-and-species, definition of art by seeking to identify the species of communicative activity that it consists in. The usual strategy has been to specify some particular kind of content that it is definitive of art to communicate – a copy of reality [Plato 2000], an emotion or idea of the artist [Tolstoy 1897; Croce 1909; Collingwood 1925], a relationship to an institution or tradition [Dickie 1974; Diffey 1991; Carroll 1993; Stecker 1997]; a prior intention [Levinson 1979], a meaning [Danto 2013], an aesthetic experience [Schopenhauer 1859; Beardsley 1982; Iseminger 2004], or a perception of beauty [Zangwill 1995; Zemach 1997] – together with some particular, distinctively artistic, means of communicating that content. This project provokes the search for counterexamples – and indeed, has provoked the *production* of counterexamples by artists themselves. The novelty of artists seems to outrun such attempts at definition. One credible view is that any work that produced solely to serve as a counterexample to a proposed Aristotelian definition of art would thereby qualify as art; and if so, the project of producing such a definition must fail (compare Weitz [1956]).

However, one need have no such ambitions when one observes that art is structured towards the activity of communicating; and although this simple observation is not theoretically contentious it is important. Even with the most formal of artworks, the idiom we naturally resort to when referring to their content is to speak of what an artist is trying to *say*. In speaking this way, we do not commit ourselves to the idea that there is some independently describable target by reference to which the success of a work as a communicative vehicle is to be assessed. This way of speaking still makes sense in those cases where we might want to insist that what is communicated is internal to the artistic medium itself, which contains its own standards of success or failure: cases such as a Bach fugue, a Kapoor sculpture, a Japanese sand garden.

Moreover, the communicative character of artistic activity – its being structured towards communication – is independent of whether an artist is concerned to reach a broader audience. Gao Xingjian [2006: 52] is speaking for many (if not *to* many) when he says:

A writer does not write because he hopes it will provide a livelihood, but because he experiences a real discomfort that needs to be alleviated through writing. This sort of writing does not require pandering to readers, and is in fact the essential purpose of literature.

The creation of a work of art need not involve a concern with its reception by others; but it does still involve producing something that, as a communicative vehicle, is available to a potential audience: something that presents itself as an object that is available to be appreciated by another. This is consistent with an artist’s making uncompromising demands of any audience that is to understand the work. Once produced, it is available to be appreciated by someone else who is suitably receptive (even if, at the extreme, only the artist’s own future self). It is not just a private occurrence, but a public production. Artistic creation is an activity that implies an audience, whether or not it is actually intended to be presented to a real audience.

When we assess the *success* of a communicative activity, one thing we might wish to measure is the extent to which it actually achieves uptake by an audience. But if we follow Gao Xingjian in disclaiming this as a criterion of the success of a work of art, what else might its success consist in? There are two answers to this. First, we can ask how successful the work is in saying something of its own: does it succeed in saying what it is trying to say, and is it merely imitative or original? And secondly, is what it says worth saying? We can call these two questions the question of success in execution, and the question of worth. Artistic practice is governed by the aspiration to success of both of these kinds, and artistic and critical practice are both governed by judgements about success in execution and worth. When Titian turned *Bacchus and Ariadne* from the wall and glared at it before resuming work, he was evaluating its success in these two dimensions and asking himself how to improve it – thereby committing himself to standards of correctness for judgements about execution and worth. This applies to the artist’s own evaluative judgements during the creative process; it applies to the judgements of a critic once the process is completed;[[4]](#footnote-5) and it applies whether the aim of an artwork is representational, expressive, formal, or (as it often is) some combination of these. It applies both to cases where there *is* some independently articulable content which provides a standard for the work’s communicative success – for example, the appearance or personality of a portrait sitter – and where there is not. What is said by an abstract work of art might simply be: *this* is beautiful. Even so, it can still be striving for success in execution and worth, in a way that presupposes the possibility of failure, and thus that judgements of success are either correct or incorrect.

In this way, it is through its status as a communicative activity that artistic practice invites judgements with a claim to objectivity. The judgements of artists and critics are committed to standards of success in execution and worth, and thereby invite assessment in terms of correctness. So they possess the first feature of judgements that claim to be objective. And they also possess the second feature: they are committed to the possibility of convergence, and not just coincidence, of judgement. As a communicative activity, artistic practice is committed to producing something that is available to a potential audience. This is not to say that what an artwork itself communicates must itself be an objective judgement. In some works of art, the communicative aspiration is to capture the artist’s subjective experience. But *that* it does so – that it says what it does – is a judgement that claims to be objective. And if the work does succeed, then in saying what it does it is available to be appreciated by others who are receptive to it, from viewpoints other than that of the artist at the moment of creation.

**3. Moral objectivity and reason-giving**

Turning to morality, we find a different source of pressure towards objectivity of judgement. Here, its source lies in the connection of morality to *justification*. Morality requires not just that we *have* good reasons for the ways in which we treat each other, but that we recognize others’ entitlement to demand them from us. To treat each other as bearers of this entitlement is to see ourselves as answerableto each other – as standing under a requirement to *give* reasons to others in connection with the actions that affect them [Darwall 2006: ch. 3].

I am not going to propose a definition of ‘morality’. I doubt that the ordinary concept has sharp boundaries, and for our purposes, a you-know-it-when-you-see-it approach will suffice. Much of morality is concerned with standards for interpersonal conduct. There are some obvious parts of morality of which that is not true – for example, the part concerned with our treatment of animals. But in the interpersonal part, I stand under the requirement just mentioned: a requirement to respect others by standing ready to give them reasons in justifying the ways in which I interact with them.

What kind of requirement is that, and why is there such a requirement? Two main candidate answers offer themselves: both are given powerful expression by Kant. To my mind, the second is much more compelling than the first.

The first is that this is a requirement of reason itself – of pure practical reason, as Kant puts it. Here, the ambitious idea is that it follows from what it is for there to *be* reasons for action – from what it is for reason to be practical – that reason must require of us that we treat each other in certain ways, and that those ways include giving reasons to each other. This is a formal argument, in the sense that it tries to derive the truth of certain substantive claims about the content of the reasons we have from the form of what it is to have a reason at all. It runs as follows.[[5]](#footnote-6)

In thinking that we *have* reasons at all, we presuppose that we have the capacity to respond to them, as reasons. Accepting that we have reasons requires us to think of ourselves as practically rational – as having the capacity to guide our actions through our own recognition of the reasons that count for and against them. If so, what *makes* something a reason must be its suitability for guiding such an agent. A reason for me must be something that has authority for me in virtue of the feature I possess in common with all other rational agents – namely, my rationality. A brute appeal to some other authority, external to that of rationality itself – an authority like the command of some dictator, or God, or my own desires – could not itself succeed in giving me a *reason* to do anything. So something will be a reason for me only if it could equally be a reason for someone else in the same circumstances. But if a reason for me must be capable of serving as a reason for any other rational agent, similarly situated, then there is a test that can be applied to anything that is proposed as a candidate reason for me. A given consideration can only be a reason for me if it is suited to serve as a reason for every rational agent. And this means that one fundamental requirement of reason will be this: that I respect others’ status as rational agents, acting in ways that are compatible with others’ rational acceptance of my actions. Respecting others’ rationality then requires me to give reasons for the way I treat them. It requires us to interact with each other by structuring our relations through the giving and receiving of reasons, forming what Kant picturesquely calls ‘a realm of ends’.

Now I actually think that that ambitious argument fails, in two rather prosaic ways. From the claim (a) that a reason for me must apply to any other similarly situated rational agent, it does not follow (b) that reason requires me to act in ways that are compatible with others’ rational acceptance of my actions. For the suggestion that reason requires each of us to do what is to his own greatest advantage is consistent with claim (a) but not (b). And from the claim (b) that reason requires me to act in ways that are compatible with others’ rational acceptance of my actions it does not follow (c) that it requires me to give reasons for the way I treat them. For the suggestion that reason requires each of us to do what most efficiently promotes *everyone’s* advantage is consistent with claim (b) but not (c).

However, there is a second, simpler, and I think much more compelling idea in Kant. This is the more modest idea that the requirement that we give reasons to each other is simply a *moral* requirement – part of the substance of morality itself – rather than a formal requirement of pure practical reason. The morally best way for us to relate to each other is by respecting each other as responsible, self-directing equals. In doing so, we live up to an important moral ideal – an ideal of respect.[[6]](#footnote-7) The failure to live up to this ideal may not be inconsistent with thinking of ourselves as having practical reasons at all. But it is a failure to live up to the special reasons provided by morality. The requirement that we respect each other in this way is one fundamental moral requirement among others (such as the requirement that we treat each other with compassion, showing a concern for each others’ welfare). Regulating our dealings with each other through standards of respect means being answerable to each other – recognizing a shared entitlement to demand reasons from each other for the way we interact, and holding each other to shared standards of reasonableness for the offering and acceptance of such reasons. Where harmful action is the primary violation of moral requirements of concern, coercive action is the primary violation of moral requirements of respect.

The reason Kant’s moral philosophy continues to be so significant is that it presses this ideal, the moral ideal of mutual reason-governed respect, on us so powerfully. And it also leaves us with the question: How can this ideal be vindicated, if not via the formal argument? However, we need not tackle that question here. The point that is important for us is that the substance of morality includes a requirement to respect others’ authority to demand that we give them reasons for the ways in which we treat them.[[7]](#footnote-8)

Of course, this allows for the possibility of disagreement and debate about just which considerations *are* good reasons being on our treatment of each other, and their relative strengths. But such controversies presuppose that there are indeed better and worse reasons for doing things, and that our assertions about them are evaluable in terms of correctness. Furthermore, in holding each other to a requirement to *give* these reasons to each other, we presuppose that the reasons we give are available to be convergently recognized as such. So again, this gives us the two objectivity-constituting features: the commitment to the possibility of error and the possibility of convergence.

**4. Welfare and artistic appreciation**

We see that the pressure towards objectivity in our judgements about art and morality has a different source in each case: communicating a content, and justifying an action. Despite this, the objectivity of our judgements in these two domains forges various important connections between them. The remainder of the chapter describes four of these connections.

The first comes from the contribution that artistic appreciation can make to a person’s welfare – that is, to what is good for the person, in the sense of what is in her interests or benefits her. When we compile a list of contributors to welfare – a list containing goods such as love, fellowship, enjoyment, achievement, understanding, and freedom – something that also belongs on this list is the appreciation of what is objectively good. So if, as our judgements about art commit us to accepting, some works of art are objectively good, then appreciating them is a contributor to welfare.

A stronger view is possible. When theorists of welfare address the question, ‘What is the common feature possessed by the members of that list, which makes them into contributors to welfare?’, one popular answer is an appreciation-of-the-good theory of welfare [Kraut 1994; Darwall 2002: ch. 4; Rosati 2006; Kagan 2009]. What proponents of this kind of theory typically mean by ‘appreciation’ is a complex attitude combining positive evaluation with other forms of enjoyment or engagement that are appropriate to their object. On this view, the appreciation of what is good is not simply one member of the list of welfare-contributors, alongside others. Rather, it subsumes all the other members of the list: they acquire the status of welfare-contributors by being ways of appreciating the good.

However, whether or not that stronger claim is true, the appreciation of the good is evidently *a* contributor to welfare. One is enriched, and thereby benefited, by being properly appreciative of the value of the objective goods the world presents you with: not just works of art, but the beauty and integrity of the natural world, the goodness of people, societies, institutions and cultures, of virtue, justice, and peace. By appreciating these things, you participate in the goodness of what you appreciate, thereby making yourself better, in a way that benefits you.

If this is right, then the appreciation of art, as a form of appreciation of the good, is an important part of welfare. And this connects it to morality; since any recognizable account of morality must assign a prominent place within it to a concern for each other’s welfare, expressed in both our attitudes and actions.

The upshot is that the objectivity of artistic and moral judgement are not independent. If (as we are committed to thinking) there are objective values in art, then there are objective facts about which forms of appreciation really are directed towards what is good. If so, there are objective facts about what really does enhance the welfare of the appreciator. So there are objective facts about what we should care about for the sake of the person whose welfare it is. Morality includes our responsiveness to the reasons we have to promote each other’s welfare; and the content of those reasons depends on what really are the goods whose appreciation is welfare-enhancing. Therefore, at least in part, the objective content of our moral reasons is dependent on the correctness of the judgements we make about the value of art.

**5. Protecting what is precious**

The second connection comes from the way in which, in recognizing the value of a work of art, we see its preciousness as imposing constraints on us. A proper appreciation of a great work of art includes seeing it as calling to be cherished and protected. We can see this by reflecting on the way in which vandalism strikes us as wrong. According to some contemporaries, Leonardo da Vinci’s greatest masterpiece was the equestrian statue he created in clay, ready for casting for the duke of Milan. It was destroyed by French archers using it for target practice during the invasion of 1494 [Kemp 2006: 189-203]. When we are dismayed upon learning about this – or the sacking of Persepolis by Alexander’s army, or the present-day vandalism in Palmyra – perhaps one of the things that upsets us is the thought that the prospect of *experiencing* these treasures has been lost to ourselves and others. But this thought itself relies on a deeper value-judgement. Those experiences would have been worth having as ways of being in contact with something that itself had great value. What is more fundamentally upsetting than the lost personal opportunity is the attack on something that was itself precious. The preciousness of what was destroyed explains why the personal deprivation in not being able to experience these treasures is a deprivation. The reasons against doing what the soldiers did included reasons not to deprive art-lovers of enriching experiences; but these reasons derive from more fundamental reasons not to mistreat the works themselves, which call to be cherished and protected, not destroyed.

Is vandalism *morally* wrong? A case can be made for saying so. Theorists of morality have often taken their topic to be what is required of us in being properly responsive to other-regarding reasons – contrasting morality with selfishness.[[8]](#footnote-9) This allows for a range of more or less inclusive ways of understanding ‘other-regarding reasons’, with correspondingly broader or narrower implications for the boundaries of morality. On a broad view, the relevant ‘other-regarding reasons’ are all those reasons which are generated by one’s relationships to anyone or anything other than oneself, independently of their effects on one’s own welfare. Morality, on this broad view, comprises the ways in which the proper treatment of others requires us to constrain the pursuit of our own interests. It allows that the ‘others’ that can include precious objects, and that their destruction can itself be immoral.

A narrower view draws the boundaries of morality more tightly. This restricts the other-regarding reasons to which morality responds to those generated by our relationships to *each other*, the possessors of those reasons; it conceives of morality as comprising the standards of interpersonal conduct that it makes sense for us to require each other to meet. On this view, the only kind of moral wrongness that destroying the contents of the Louvre would have is the kind perpetrated by blocking art-lovers from entering it – the vandalism would not itself be morally wrong. And there would be nothing morally wrong in destroying the contents of the Louvre, for fun, if you were the last person left alive.

In my view, ordinary linguistic practice does not clearly rule either use of the word ‘morality’ to be correct or incorrect; and even if it did, it is not obvious why that would matter. What matters is whether, amongst the topics for which we can use the name ‘morality’, any of those topics are themselves important. And these two views do pick out two important, overlapping topics. The narrower topic concerns the reasons we can properly expect each other to be responsive to in interacting with each other – and by reference to which we can demand justifications from others for the way they treat us [Scanlon 1998; Darwall 2006]. The broader topic concerns one’s proper responsiveness to whatever has importance independently of its relationship to one’s own welfare, and the reasons this gives us to constrain our treatment not just of other people, but of other precious objects too.

Whichever way we go on the merely linguistic question, two points remain unaffected. First, if we adopt the broad usage, we will be counting some of the proper responses to art as being included within morality; but this does not amount to turning the value of art into a species of moral value. Allowing that the protection of what is independently valuable is included within morality does not amount to the false claim that that judgements about art are themselves a kind of moral judgement. And secondly, if we adopt the narrow usage, and deny that mistreating artworks is itself immoral, we should still allow that there is an important *continuity* between the demands of interpersonal morality and those of proper reverence for artistic treasures. When I judge a work of art to possess its goodness objectively – to have a form of goodness that is independent of my recognition, and available for the recognition of others – I see it as imposing constraints on me: as calling to be cherished and protected in a way that is continuous with the attitudes of respect that are called for in interpersonal morality.

This leaves intact the earlier point, in sections 2 and 3, that the objectivity of artistic and moral judgement has different sources – sources in the communicative aims of artistic practice and the justificatory demands of morality, respectively. And it also allows for the ways in which some forms reverence for art can be morally grotesque – as with the SS officers who carefully swaddled works of art in Paris while sending people to their deaths in cattle trucks. Saying that our responses to reasons of the two kinds are continuous is not asserting their equivalence. However, it forges a second connection between objectivity in judgements about art and morality. The objectivity of judgements about art involves a recognition of the independent value of works of art, committing us to forms of respect that constrain our treatment of what is precious, in a way that is continuous with our respect for other persons.

**6. Brentano and Berlin**

In these first two respects, what I have said about connection between the value of artistic appreciation and morality could also be said about the appreciation of nature. We also enrich ourselves through being receptive to the majestic grandeur of a wild landscape, or the delicate perfection of a flower. Here, too, our appreciation of the good is welfare-enhancing, and we encounter precious objects that call to be cherished and protected. So these first two connections are shared by other objective value-judgements too. These connections between art and morality do not rely on the communicative nature of art, but only on the way in which our experience of it presents it to us as objectively valuable.

However, with the other two connections I am going to describe, matters stand differently. These are respects in which it is indeed through art’s communicative structure that links to morality are forged: links that are not shared by our recognition of objective values of other kinds.

The third connection emphasizes the morally educative value of art. One kind of educative role in particular deserves close attention. This is the role that art plays in educating us about the breadth of the evaluative landscape – acquainting us with forms of value that must otherwise remain beyond our direct experience. It can do this in two ways. Most obviously, it can do so by providing compelling depictions of different valuable ways of engaging with the world – through drama, narrative literature, the visual arts, and song. Although I cannot myself live either the life of a Spanish Franciscan friar or an English Cavalier, Zurbaran can still introduce me to the severe austerity of the former and Van Dyck to the dashing flamboyance of the latter, powerfully enough to show me what there is to love in both. But, secondly, art can also introduce us to the variety of valuable ways of engaging with the world not by depicting but by expressing them. A Shaker chair and a Louis XV chair also issue two very different invitations to engage with their distinctive kinds of beauty, and express two different sets of evaluative attitudes: honesty, modesty, and simplicity, on the one hand; vivacity, elan, and a commitment to adorning the world rather than passing unobtrusively through it, on the other.

The educative power that art has in displaying the diversity of value depends on the application of a principle that is found in many value-theorists, but is most sharply articulated in Brentano’s dictum: Loving the good is good.[[9]](#footnote-10) A receptiveness and positive orientation to what is good is itself good. Art can teach us about the many forms that loving the good can take, either by depicting them or by exemplifying them. Art’s own goodness – the goodness we recognize when we make objective judgements about its value – is itself an exemplification of Brentano’s principle: it is a way of loving the good. And its appreciation by us is another, higher-order, exemplification of the same principle.

In the two ways I have described, art can educate us by showing us ways of being receptive to values that are beyond our own experience. In doing so, it can help us to appreciate the force of an important kind of value pluralism – the kind associated with Berlin. According to Berlin, our experience presents us with conflicts of value that admit of no easy resolution. We can face choices in which two important values conflict, we cannot accommodate both of them, and we cannot treat the situation as a simple tie, in which we have to choose between two equally desirable goods. In situations of the latter, Buridan’s Ass, type we can arbitrarily pick one alternative without sensibly regretting the *loss* of what has been forgone: we acquire something of equal value either way. But if, as a society, we must choose between freedom and equality, or if, as individuals, we must choose between a life of close family relationships or one of spontaneity and variety, then the goods between which we are choosing are not equal but incommensurate in value, and those we choose cannot straightforwardly compensate for those we forgo. In choices of this kind, there *is* a loss, whichever way we go [Berlin 1991].

If Berlin is right, then there are many values that *must* remain inaccessible to us in our own lives. Shaping a coherent life requires shaping it around a responsiveness to some values, to the exclusion of others. However, art can allow us to appreciate the value of what we cannot live. It can do this because of the way in which it combines a communicative aim with the aspiration to being objectively valuable. What a work of art can say is: *this* is a way of loving the good, too. It can be a vehicle for displaying forms of value that a conventional moral vocabulary may not equip us to describe. In so doing, it can make valuable ways of loving the good accessible from different points of view, although they cannot be lived from different points of view.

In one way, then, art can dull the sting of Berlin’s pluralism. When a good is inaccessible to us in life, we can be acquainted with it through art. However, in another way it only makes that sting sharper. The good of appreciative engagement with art is itself, after all, one more good to which Berlin’s pluralism applies. My engagement with one art form competes for my attention with all the others, and with all of the other relationships, projects and loyalties around which my life is shaped. Whichever way I turn, there is something to be gained; but also, something else is lost.

**7. Morality, art, and shared experience**

For a final respect in which the objectivity of artistic judgement connects it to morality, we can ask a deeper question. Why do artistic appreciation and responsiveness to moral reasons matter? What further justification is there for caring about them?

It is tempting to dismiss this question by insisting that the goodness of art and morality is *intrinsic* to them: it does not derive from the goodness of anything else. We might want to follow Elizabeth Anderson in saying that intrinsic goods ‘are rationally valued, apart from the value of any other particular thing. Intrinsic values thus mark the point where justification comes to an end.’ [1996: 541] However, this is a mistake. We can provide justifications for the attribution of intrinsic value to something, without deriving its value from the value of something else.

In my view, a non-derivational justification can be given for the value of morality: in outline, it is this.[[10]](#footnote-11) When we respond to each other in the ways that are central to interpersonal morality, we create important relationships. Three of the most important of these are relationships of concern, respect, and cooperation. When you respond to others with practical and attitudinal concern – through actions that aim to promote and protect their welfare, and attitudes of sensitivity, sympathy and solidarity – you relate yourself to them in a distinctive way. Their welfare then matters not just to them but to you too: you *share* with them a concern for their welfare. Secondly, when you treat others with respect, this creates another relationship in which something is shared – namely, a recognition of the dignity we each have as recognizers of reasons who form our own decisions and opinions. And thirdly, when you join others as partners in a collective action, you are then sharing your agency with your co-participants, and sharing responsibility for what we do together.

So there is an answer we can give to the question, ‘What justification is there for caring about morality?’ The answer is that, in these different ways, morality amounts to the sharing of our humanity. When we say this, we are not deriving the value of morality from the value of something else: it is not as though ‘the sharing of humanity’ is a broader or more fundamental value from which morality derives its own value through some instrumental, or subsumptive, or expressive relationship. Rather, the claim is that sharing one’s humanity in *these* ways is valuable. It is these, distinctively moral, ways of sharing one’s humanity that constitute relationships worth having and caring about. Morality is intrinsically valuable because of its own valuable features, not because of a relationship it bears to the value of something else.

But if we can say this about morality, then our earlier discussion provides us with the materials for saying something similar about the appreciation of art. The claim to objectivity that is made by judgements about art comes from art’s aspiration to be a communicative vehicle that says something worth saying, and is thereby itself valuable (section 2). When I appreciate a fine work of art, I then relate myself to it in a valuable way, as an instance of loving the good (section 6). My appreciation is not just good; it is good for me – a part of my welfare (section 4). And because a work of art presents itself as an object available for convergent valuation, the contribution that its appreciation makes to my welfare is itself capable of being shared by others who appreciate the same object. When art succeeds in its communicative aspirations, it provides us with rich vehicles for the sharing of experience, and a focus for convergent and shared valuation.

This means that, when we ask, ‘What justification is there for caring about the appreciation of art?’ there is a parallel answer to the one we gave to the parallel question for morality. Artistic appreciation is another valuable way of sharing our humanity. It is not the same way: philistinism is not immoral. But through the shared appreciation of the value embodied in art, we not only enrich ourselves, but also our connection to each other.

**8. Conclusion**

What is the relationship between the objectivity of judgements about art and about morality? We have arrived at the following answer. The pressure towards objectivity in the two domains has different sources: in the case of art, it comes from its aspiration to communicate; in the case of morality, from the justificatory demand it makes. However, their objectivity forges four important connections between them. As an appreciation of what is good in itself, the appreciation of art is part of your welfare, and hence morally important; as a valuable object of experience, a work of art can have a preciousness we can require each other to protect, supplying practical reasons that are continuous with morality; in giving us access to the diversity of value, art can educate us in the plurality of valuable ways of shaping a life; and as a vehicle for the shared experience of value, it can matter in a way that parallels the way in which morality matters. A proper appreciation of the relationship between objectivity in art and morality requires attending to both the differences and the connections between them. If we are insufficiently attentive to the differences, there are two dangers. On the one hand, this can encourage an overly aestheticized picture of morality as a kind of self-cultivation, in a way that fails to do justice to the moral importance of respecting others as equals to whom we are answerable in justifying our treatment of them. On the other, it can leave us with an overly instrumental picture of art as a vehicle for moral improvement. However, if we are insufficiently attentive to the similarities, we will overlook the continuity of value-experience, and the significance of the way in which the sharing of our humanity through morality and art connects them – and us – together.[[11]](#footnote-12)

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1. This is a classification of judgements as objective by reference to their *contents* – what they are about. Another prominent way to classify judgements (acts of judging) as objective is by reference to how they are formed –identifying objectivity with the epistemic virtue of impartiality. See e.g. Gaukroger [2012: 4-10]. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. This description comes from Titian’s contemporary Palma Giovane, as recorded in his old age by Marco Boschini, cit. Humfrey [2007: 200-1]. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. This is Ronald Niebuhr’s recollection of the content of a letter sent to him by Bonhoeffer, cit. Sifton and Stern [2013: 69]. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. Compare M. W. Rowe [1999: sec. I], who cites endorsements of this idea by Kant and F. R. Leavis. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
5. [Kant 1785, 1788]: for discussion and defence, see Korsgaard [1989], O’Neill [1992], Allison [1993], and Wood [2008: ch. 4-6]. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
6. Kant [1797: 6: 448-50, 462-8]: for discussion and defence, see Hill [2000]. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
7. Respecting this authority is compatible with trying our best to give reasons but failing: for further discussion, see Cullity [2018b]. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
8. Examples include Mill [1859: ch. 4]; Frankena [1970]; Nagel [1986: ch. 10]; Scheffler [1992: ch. 7]; Scanlon [1998: 6-7] – and Nietzsche [1887]. For a survey of other alternatives, see Wallace and Walker [1970: 1-20]. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
9. See Brentano [1889: 23]; and Chisholm [1986: ch. 6]. Prominent recent proposals for sharpening Brentano’s dictum include Hurka [2001: 13-16]; Lemos [1994: 74-6]; and Zimmerman [2001: 199, 202]. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
10. I argue this more fully in Cullity [2018a: ch. 8.] [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
11. I am grateful to Jenny McMahon for detailed editorial comments and advice. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)