

THE AESTHETICS OF MEANING

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ABSTRACT: Following C. S. Peirce's claim that aesthetics precedes ethics and logic, I argue for reconceiving aesthetics as a normative science. The deteriorated relations between these links in the 'modern mythology' is associated with art's decline and apparent indistinguishability from the 'general aesthetic' (aided by 'aesthetics as theory'). 'Naturalizing' art, according to F. W. Schelling's system, is proposed to ameliorate this. Bringing together Peircian semiotics with Schelling's 'process metaphysics' suggests how to restore the historicized split between Art 'as principle' and the Person (two 'perfect signs') by attending to the 'ethical phenomenology' of artworks. An argument is then made for how modern ethics and 'morals' may be reconnected.

KEYWORDS: Art; Ethics; General Aesthetic; Historicization; Morals; Normative Science; Process Metaphysics; Theoretical Aesthetics.

INTRODUCTION

Uncertainty often surrounds the question of whether our aesthetic experiences of an artwork should be dependent on ethics. Is there such a thing as 'aestheticist ethics' or 'ethicist aesthetics'? My argument in this paper is that this would amount to a category error, since ethics are *wholly* governed by aesthetics. Therefore, genuine art cannot simply reduce life to either/or scenarios and 'moral' dilemmas such as 'psychological thrillers' like *Unthinkable* usually present in cinema. In other words, the real question for any community is not whether Jeff Koons' porcelain pornography or D. H. Lawrence's novels (for instance) are morally deficient, granted the differing values of their epochs; but whether they are good or bad art. Underlying this proposition is the suggestion that the *ethics*

of an artwork or artist can only be judged by their evident aesthetic orientation toward meaningfulness. This, I will argue, is because *Art* and *the Person* are ‘perfect signs’.¹ Moral judgements about *this* orientation in fact reflect the morality of the community making them. It is the relation of the aesthetics of meaning to ethics, then, which this paper is most concerned with.

The story of how aesthetics was severed from ethics (and, perforce, art from ‘morality’) has been largely lost in modernity, which we can put down to Kant’s aesthetic legacy and the re-definition of the meaning of aesthetics. This as I will show made aesthetics *in itself* a theory, rather than a science of cognition and consciousness.² The modern ‘crisis in art’ continues to obscure this severance and its origins. My central argument for how to reconnect aesthetics and ethics will reveal that theorizing aesthetics went hand in hand with the decline in art because it enabled the fragmentation of the principle of Art which was once aligned with a definition of aesthetics as a ‘normative science’.

According to Friedrich Schelling (1775-1854) art had already lost its way with the onset of the ‘modern mythology’, when Christianity overturned the ‘ancient mythology’ where art was a unified principle integrally linked to both Nature and History via *the Person* (Schelling 1989). This, he argues, is when both the artificial historicizing of humans and Art began. Subsequently, the essential link between aesthetics, ethics, and logic – which had already suffered some deterioration during the fall of Athens and decline of Rome – was set on an irreversible trajectory of separation. ‘Modernity’ is not a period but an ideology, and ours has reached an apotheosis of associated disjunctures – of art from nature, science, and society – through what Schelling argues as ‘symbolic idealism’ originating in the historicization and cultural overdetermination of humans since early times.³

Following Schelling, Charles Sanders Peirce (1839–1914) claimed both ethics and logic are *preceded* by aesthetics. Aristotle made the interrelationship between

¹ ‘The Person’ is ‘the human subject’ – both individual and collective – hence the unified ‘selfhood’ of humanity. As argued below, Art and the Person are ‘perfect signs’ of each other because they are unified embodiments of Nature and History (i.e., metaphorically, rather than merely *representatively*); thus, neither can be illegitimately historicized without devaluing them. This embodiment forms an ethical relation, explaining both why we invented art, and why aesthetics is ‘normative’ and integrally linked to ethics.

² Aesthetics is not a theory but a science (see Aristotle’s definition of science in §3). An artwork can be understood as ‘a theory’, relative to a principle of Art.

³ Numerous thinkers present similar argument to Schelling, including Polok (1973) and MacIntyre (2007).

these three 'normative sciences' clear in the *Ethics* which, read with the *Poetics* and *Politics*, shows why they are separate studies but must remain interlinked for life to be meaningful. They are called '*normative*' because *together* they study the relation of phenomena to ends, and it is *this* relationship which enables us to form a basis for making reasoned judgements (Potter 1967).

These constitute the three complementary methods of progressing human understanding and well-being in synchronicity - toward 'Reason'. But it is aesthetics that fundamentally directs *all* our deliberated or undeliberated intentionalities. In other words, all determinations of logic (true/false), ethics (good/bad) - in all circumstances - must be *originally* presupposed by our aesthetic (beautiful/ugly) 'habit-taking'.

Peirce, perhaps the most eminent logician of all time, produced an evolutionary theory binding the relation of these normative sciences to all meaning productivity in the cosmos, showing how this is manifest in nature. Thus, *all* meaning originates in aesthetics, including how plants or animals communicate it (ie., chemically, gesturally), via what we might call the 'general aesthetic' in the perfuse signs of nature. But *human* nature has evolved to refine 'general aesthetic' meaning. Unlike any other species, human beings are 'metaphorical creatures' (Johnson 1987: 279). And I will argue below this is what distinguishes our invention of art from the 'general aesthetic', binding art to a *normative* definition of aesthetics, making self-actualizing *higher meaning* its purpose.

In *The Tacit Dimension* Michael Polanyi takes up the problem of what human bodies – or 'body-minds' - can learn and know.⁴ Knowledge of lived experience is 'the not wholly self-present or self-conscious knowledge of a body in the company of a self-reflexive mind capable of nurturing it' (Wheeler 2006: 49). It is knowledge which we can draw upon consciously, but it 'hovers' between the experiential intuition of animals and the more self-disciplined attention humans are capable of in producing higher meaning. Thus, *values*, like meaning, exist in all of nature (ie., among animals and plants) as *essences quite apart from* their

⁴ 'Body-minds' was a term used by John Dewey to oppose the Cartesian-dualist misconception that the body and mind are separable (which persists in posthumanism). Modern neuroscience still struggles to shake off a fallacious mechanistic model of the brain to explain cognition, which emergent theories of mind offer far better explanations for.

comprehension or method of understanding.⁵ How *humans* consciously and unconsciously discern value then, unlike any other species, relies on the confluence of the normative sciences.

What I propose as the ‘aesthetics of higher meaning’ is thus the main subject of this paper, because of this relation between *valuing* and *meaning*. My main argument is that it is *art’s* association with *normative* aesthetics that has been disrupted in modernity, severing that most important relation between ethics and morals in every human endeavour, causing far more damage to humanity than meets the eye. As a way of valuing the world, art is the invention which rises above every other means - including science and philosophy. But it is only by realizing why and how genuine art is tied to the *normative sciences* that the intersection of aesthetics with ethics can be understood. Exactly how ethics intervenes in any assessments of art may then be explained.⁶

By the same token sometimes the meanings of ‘art’ and ‘aesthetics’ align (via ‘the ought’, as I will argue), and yet assigning a theoretical definition of ‘aesthetics’ to art is false. The question of ethics’ relation to aesthetics can only be answered by making such distinctions as I will therefore make between ‘aesthetics as normative science’ and ‘aesthetics as theory’. This requires firstly distinguishing art from the ‘general aesthetic’, revealing why ethics and meaning of *higher* value are only present in art. How any ‘*moral*’ judgements pertaining to art can be made, will then be shown to relate to this. Though not as we have become used to characterizing it.

‘Moral’ judgement of anything relating to the artwork, I will argue, has in modernity suffered from the poor state of moral philosophy, which obscures the fundamental difference between ethics and morals. Morals are concerned with right and wrong, but ethics are what make right *right* and wrong *wrong* (Scheler 1973). The former’s association with Art is *essentially* unrelated to what I suggest binds aesthetics to ethics in the *phenomenology* of the art object itself. Yet it *is* related to how we *use* art. But only in *this* context does the ‘ethical’ construction of an

⁵ Plants communicate values among each other and to animals via chemical interactions; animals display diverse behaviours expressing values ie., ‘agreeable’/‘disagreeable’ or ‘useful’ and ‘harmful’.

⁶ Key to this is understanding that in Aristotle’s *Ethics*, ‘external goods’ are, basically, ‘goods’ which anyone seeks as means to ends (eg., income, shelter, etc.) – and they are essential to seek, within moderation. But ‘internal goods’ are goods internal to themselves, pursued for their own sake, in aspiring to virtues. Art is such an ‘internal good’, which is why it is purposeless.

artwork, driven by a *normative* aesthetics, become helpful in making moral judgements to orient humanity toward ‘the good’.

Though it is not my aim here to examine morality in detail, my argument essentially follows Alasdair MacIntyre’s (2007) study of moral philosophy. That is, we must re-conceive modern emotivist ‘morality’ - casting art’s prevailing contemporary utilitarian purpose as ‘dispeller of moral taboos’ - by replacing this with morals governing art’s *optimal* usefulness for human ecological civilization. To illustrate why this proposition can be characterized as an *ethical* rather than *moralising* one, consider the differences in how to understand beauty (either ethically or morally) via the example of the famous Botticelli’s *Venus*.

This was painted for private viewing only to hang in a bedroom ostensibly for erotic purposes. Its beautiful portrayal of the young Simonetta (a celebrated beauty in Florence at the time), however, became a force that opened the floodgates in the mid-Renaissance to a completely new and revolutionary idea (since the birth of Christianity, at least): that art should be for human pleasure rather than the worship of God. Henceforth (though still contentiously) artists increasingly felt liberated to paint nudes – not as depicting humanity misshapen in a state of shame and sin (as Christian morality had previously only allowed it) – but as a portrayal of the reality of the human form, condition, and personality. Of humanity in all its potential beauty and contexts. The old-world Christian ‘morality’ dictating the terms of nude painting has long since disappeared, with art thereafter - in no small way thanks to Botticelli’s *Venus* (though the artist himself burned many of his ‘irreligious’ paintings afterwards in a purge of guilt) - becoming instead well known as the primary means in our modernity *for casting aside* ‘moral’ taboos. This tendency, being an *equally* utilitarian modification of Art’s purpose, which is *essentially* purposeless, led it to be bound to and justified by a *different* modern ‘morality’ of its times. One now completely disengaged from ethics (as it arguably also was then under Christian morality).

The above mentioned ‘revolutionary idea’, as it might appear today, has two aspects. One, a *moralizing* reasoning involving ‘the ought’: that art should be for human pleasure rather than some higher or divine purpose. And another *ethical* reasoning that art optimally serves humanity better if it can be allowed to seek truth and meaning via the *realistic* appreciation of Beauty (though *only*, importantly, *in relation to* Truth). Thus, ethics reflects that *intellectual intuitive*

understanding of what makes right *right* and wrong *wrong*. Morality, *how we choose to habituate such judgements* - rightly or wrongly. And this is how the two are linked.

I will show why it is ethics which dictates not only how to distinguish art from non-art, but why 'anti-art' produces fragmentation of the human *telos* and is hence morally questionable. Underscoring my whole argument, therefore, is the question of the failure of modern moral philosophy (as indeed modern 'aesthetics') to maintain a meaningful link between art and morality. This of course results from consequentialist ethics becoming dominant, via the triumph of Ockham's nominalism over the 'scholastic realism' of Duns Scotus, after the middle-ages (Prawat 2003). Exactly how art and *virtue ethics* could be reunited in modern traditions, institutions, and practices is beyond this paper's scope; but I will suggest why *this* is the only way to reunite ethics and morals in modernity, and restore meaningfulness to 'moral' judgements concerning art. How we attend to art is important to how we perceive it. And how we *cultivate* our aesthetic orientation governs how socio-cultural 'normativity' surfaces. Therefore, discerning art from the 'general aesthetic', and understanding why aesthetics 'as theory' came to replace 'normative' aesthetics, is key to answering all these questions.

Immanuel Kant established the first strong paradigm of aesthetics, but it was one that signalled the independence of art from cognition and morality (though clearly the latter was not intended). It also served to keep art and morality separated from nature, as earlier philosophers following Plato had done. To offer an alternative, we must first understand why and how what I will call 'ethical intentionality' is integrally *evident in the artwork itself*, rather than placed on top interpretatively (which yields a method for distinguishing art from non-art). But this depends on how we understand Art's *purpose*. Hence distinguishing 'aesthetics as normative science' from 'aesthetics as theory', realigning Art with the former (as pertaining to *ends* over *means*, and *values* over *facts*), is key.

Drawing on both Peirce and Schelling, primarily, I will begin by arguing that restoring aesthetics to 'normativity' requires 'naturalizing' Art.⁷ To explain this,

⁷ 'Art' capitalized throughout refers to 'art as principle'. Lower case denotes either 'art' categorically as a phenomenon, or the 'art object' (i.e., 'artwork'). 'Object' refers to 'Art'/'the Person'; 'object' to its related artwork (or intentional proposition). 'Person'/'person' = humanity/individual. In Schelling's terms, my capitalizations refer to 'the ideal' whereas lower case references indicate 'the real'.

I will highlight advances on Kant offered in Peircian semiotics and Schelling's 'process metaphysics' (§1). Then, to show why it is necessary, I will outline how the historicization of Art and 'the Person' severed the link between ethics and aesthetics (§2), causing the onset and ultimate demise of theoretical aesthetics (§3). Comparing these different 'paradigms' for defining art, then, returns us to my main proposition: that ethics is *driven* by aesthetics – but *only* through Art is this realized and habituated morally. And only by restoring the higher meaning-value of Art can we proceed to redirect our both ethical and moral 'habit-taking'.

Naturalizing art is, then, – by virtue of this re-conception's foundation in the normative sciences - argued to be our only means to restore the relation between ethics and morals severed in modernity.⁸ And the only way to restore any meaningful link between *art* and morality. Moreover, it is also our only way of reconnecting the normative sciences - which now more than ever remains the most pressing *political* concern for artists/aesthetes, critical to the future of both art and humanity (§4).

Before proceeding, how we *intellectually intuit* ethics and *habituate* morals requires some explanation. As Aristotle discovered, ethics are 'pre-felt' by what Johann Fichte called our 'intellectual intuition', which has a *primordial* dimension placing *the Person* in Time; but morals are *chosen* and *habituated* (Aristotle 2011). As anthropological philosophers like Max Scheler have subsequently shown, the former pertains to 'preferring' and the latter to 'choosing', which are two different acts. One develops our *thinking*, the other produces '*character*'. But both are *habituated in 'character'*.⁹ This is key to understanding why and how aesthetics *directs* ethics (and logic), while *only through Art* being implicated in morality (via 'the ought'). Thus, it is the *meaning-value* of what we are compelled to attend to in art that matters most.

To illustrate this, consider for example Schelling's discernment of weaknesses in modern constructions of art, in narrating reality. This he shows by comparing the 'modern romantic epic' form (upon which, arguably, our

⁸ 'Naturalizing' art, in short, means returning it to a 'science of Ideals' wherein the indifferences between 'reals' and 'ideals' can be legitimately (ie., ethically) objectified.

⁹ 'Character' here refers not just to human character but the 'character' of Art as a principle and its related artwork (since one is a 'perfect sign' of the other). In modernity we have mistakenly assumed 'many principles' of art, fragmenting a unified conception of it, which produce a different (fragmented) 'character' when translated into their relative artwork constructions. This preference has become habituated.

mythology now constructs more cultural artefact than art) with the ‘ancient epic’.¹⁰ Catholicism, as Schelling points out, ‘recreated’ fate by ‘the invention of sins in order to prove the power of grace in their reconciliation’ (Schelling 1989: 269).¹¹ Shakespeare, a Protestant, could not use this kind of fate construction and replaced it with *nemesis* – the ‘dual nature’.¹² Thus, in his works ‘the element of character takes the place formerly occupied by fate’. Lacking ‘fate’ (ie., ‘final cause’), or at least being able to set it in motion, modern artists are bound by the expectation that they must present ‘great transgressions without thereby suspending the noble element of the morality involved’. This explains why, Schelling suggests, they must persist in ‘placing the necessity of the transgression into the power of an indomitable character, as Shakespeare has done so often’. As we will see, the question of ‘final cause’ is central to the meaningfulness of art and the reason it became disconnected from the normative sciences.

In western thought, the origins of the severed link between aesthetics and ethics can be found as far back as early as post-Homeric Greece.¹³ Not until Schelling’s revival of metaphysics was Aesthetics able to be understood again as normative. He argued ‘symbolic idealism’, via art, became the driving force of ‘modern mythology’. It bound our relation to nature and projections of destiny to seemingly limited determinable imaginary constructs, creating deep-seated assumptions about humanity. Others have since described this tendency as an

¹⁰ Modern Drama (emerging in the evolution of the romantic epic from the ancient epic) is predicated on a divided world that *juxtaposes* necessity and freedom. Thus, as Schelling identified well before Nietzsche, nihilism lurks beneath this kind of artistic intentionality because it leaves no possibility of ‘soul cleansing’. What often occurs in the rather nihilistic dramas unfortunately all too prevalent in contemporary modernity, is that the protagonist’s motivations are oriented toward an ‘*empirical-comprehensible necessity*’ in which the poet, as Schelling says, ‘tries to lower himself to the crude mental capacity of the spectators ...giving the protagonist merely a character of enormous breadth out of which nothing can emerge in an absolute fashion, and in which thus all possible motives can have free play... to make him appear to be the playground for external determining factors’ (Schelling, 1989: 256).

¹¹ ‘This provided in Catholicism the possibility of truly tragic fate, albeit one different from that of antiquity’. The difference between these ‘fates’ (as ‘final cause’) partly explains why modern and ancient Greek Tragedy differs.

¹² Nemesis is, in Greek mythology, the god of *vengeful* fate.

¹³ Aristotle’s *Poetics* outlines ways art becomes degraded; cf. McGilchrist (2010). By the early fourteenth century, Dante had reserved a place in his *Inferno* for ‘abusers of art’.

evolving 'pathological' one, neutralizing our most powerful means of expanding the imagination (McGilchrist 2010; Dalrymple 2005; Sass 1992). This, according to Fred Polok, has 'de-futurized' art.

Today, two dominant and complementary narratives are prominent in modern and postmodern attempts at art (in both eastern and western cultures). Apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic future visions on the one hand, and flagrantly excessive idealism, gay abandon and sensuous pleasure seeking on the other. Each predicated upon a supposedly 'natural' individual struggle for survival, above all. These are two sides of the same coin, arguably constituting 'necessity' and 'freedom' viewed purely idealistically. While not the only narratives driving the mythology of contemporary cinema, music, visual arts and other artforms, these are the most popular and prevalent. Our sense of both tragedy and comedy has been channelled into two extreme visions of idealistic action and reality; with fate entirely subjectivized and converted to nemesis, and the indomitability of character (self-deprecating or hubristic) permeating both.¹⁴

Schelling thought the modern mythology would eventually burn itself out; and our boredom with exploiting the above material 'standing reserve' seems palpably already well advanced.¹⁵ One indication is how often we are subjected to either entirely predictable or bewildering narratives lacking any meaningful *ends*, pieced together with unrelated fractals (even in 'ephemeral' artforms like music). Deliberate arbitrariness, pretending to be art, leaves us trying to decipher nonsense, pondering only the *means*: effects/affects, and 'technologies of action' (ie., techniques) producing them. The 'protest against the form of the poetic image' has been cast against 'its intrinsic meaning', which is now solely 'located in the one-dimensional present' (Polok 1973: 285).

With mass-production, the enormous proliferation of 'creativity', and so much diversity in what we produce to satisfy our appetites and aversions, we succumb easily to the illusion that our creative imagination has been stretched in

¹⁴ Note, for instance, how almost every 'psychological' or 'political' thriller in film history formulaically pits one indomitable 'character' (will to power) against another, as in *Unthinkable*. Rather than offering contemplation of 'ends' beyond 'efficient cause'.

¹⁵ As noted below (§2), the historicizing of art has '*materialized*' it. This accumulated historical material is exploited for its 'recycling' use-value (eg., Warhol's Campbell soup tins). The merger of art with the general aesthetic involves mass production from this 'standing reserve', modifying art's purpose, particularly now via techno-science: eg., gaming, monumentalizing cultural icons ('ABBA avatars'), and so on.

modernity rather than stunted. That is, *depth* of imagination and its expansion in consciousness; not merely the capacity to mechanically replicate or join many fabricated variations of similar ideas. Understanding what this means in *genuinely* artistic terms requires not yielding to the latter's illusory lower order meaningfulness, resulting from symbolic generative thinking which produces only cliché and repetition (McGilchrist 2010).

Combining Peircian semiotics with Schelling's ontological revival of Art's unified principle, is key to distinguishing it from the 'general aesthetic' and restoring the severed link between aesthetics and ethics. This is because art can only really be understood as 'process metaphysics'.

1. ART AS 'PROCESS METAPHYSICS'

As suggested, the modern disjuncture between art and morality coincides with the decline of moral philosophy – and both result from Art and 'the Person' being historically separated from Nature (and hence Nature *ontologically* from History). To 'naturalize' art means reconstituting this perfect sign relation to Nature *ahistorically*, ie., *ontologically*. Examining what this has to do with science gives us an insight into both how such manufactured separations occurred and how their impacts can be ameliorated. But also, why Art's 'materiality' and 'immateriality' is best understood as 'process metaphysics', rather than as aesthetic theories derived from a debased form of science.

'Metaphysics' in ancient Greece was 'cosmological', combining all the sciences with art and philosophy - charging the latter with the key role of balancing our ways of thinking. In modernity, science was fragmented by 'epistemological empiricism' into knowledge silos; philosophy downgraded to 'anti-philosophy'; and art professionalized and specialized into 'cultural and creative' activity, reducing it to little more than amusement or the accretion of symbolic capital (Gare 2018; Bowie 2003; Bourdieu 1972).¹⁶ All these transformations essentially occurred by abandoning attempts to understand

¹⁶ 'Symbolic capital' is Bourdieu's term for 'economic or political capital that is disavowed, misrecognized and thereby recognized, hence legitimate', which in the long run is guaranteed to produce economic profits. 'The arts business', he argues, is 'a trade in things that have no price' because it belongs to 'a class of practices in which the logic of the pre-capitalist economy lives on'. But these now 'lend themselves to two opposed readings, both equally false, which each undo their essential duality and duplicity by reducing them either to the disavowal or to what is disavowed – to disinterestedness or self-interest'.

anything beyond the ‘physical realm’ in mainstream science, relegating concepts like ‘spirit’ to theology.

Only more recently with a ripening revolution in biology producing Complexity Science has modern reductionist science come to grips with the idea that ‘consciousness or mind belongs to the basic fabric of the world’ (Dahlin 2021).¹⁷ Traditional Cartesian dualisms dividing the body and mind (eg., realism/idealism, rationality/irrationality) are now replaced by the Schellingian and Peircian leanings toward a neutral (‘naturalistic’) substance monism in recognition that this is probably the best alternative to ‘physicalism’ and neo-Darwinism. The importance of the *normative* sciences in ancient metaphysics was key to their revelations about consciousness.

Restoring metaphysics’ regulative status, Peirce named ‘esthetics’ the ‘science of ideals’ (or ‘admiring’) because it governs how we conceive and approach *ideal ends*. Unlike Kant, he took pursuit of ‘the good’ not as ‘duty’ but as ‘admirable end’, based on Reason. And it is *esthetics* which determines ‘the ends that are worthy of pursuit’. Logic is therefore grounded in how we intellectually intuit ‘the admirable’: ‘[W]e pursue logic because it leads to truth; truth because it is good; and goodness because it is an admirable end’ (Bernardo 2022: 4).

Peirce’s reconstruction of the relation of science to meaning productivity, reviving a central place for metaphysical explanations of reality based on reason, led to development of new fields such as biosemiotics, neuroaesthetics, neurophenomenology and a revision of ‘cognitive arms race’ brain evolutionary theories and neuroscience. According to Peirce’s ‘semiotic realism’, how we obtain knowledge rests on three philosophical foundations. *Phenomenology* studies the immediacy of our experience of phenomena (in themselves). The *Normative Sciences* govern the dyadic relations between phenomena and ends. And *Metaphysics* attends to ‘the regularity’ (or natural ‘laws’) which govern the interactions between different phenomena.

These divisions correspond to Peirce’s ‘triadic’ order of signs in natural semiosis (*firsts* - what is intuited; *seconds* - ‘objects’; and *thirds* - ‘interpretants’). All organism-environment interactions (or *Umwelts*) are governed and traced by this

¹⁷ Resistance persists however, as Dahlin argues, with *Spirit* being lately dressed up as ‘panpsychism... panprotopsychism (and even) ...panspiritism’.

order.¹⁸ But in humans (by virtue of the relation between the normative sciences) this puts all our intersubjective semiotic relations into a time-oriented dimension. In other words, this relation is *primordial*; and through it, only by constructing time-oriented collective narratives, can any community create and maintain a common project through shared values (ie., a mythology founded on normativity bound to the Nature-History nexus).

Human meaning production is thus *lived* in individual lives but simultaneously – by virtue of the natural intersubjectivity and interactivity of semiosis (the ‘general aesthetic’) - it is *distributed* meaning. Semiotic ‘freedom’ therefore requires each of us to respond to a totalising reality primordially inculcated in humans by Nature (Wheeler 2006). We thus *embody* the ‘part-whole’ phenomenon, which is fundamental to art. How we respond to the constraints of natural *freedom* in interaction with *necessity*, governs our higher meaning productivity. This, as we will see, is key to understanding the phenomenology of ‘ethical intentionality’ in any artwork. Because how we *all* intellectually intuit implicit or explicit meaning is via the same process, which Polanyi calls ‘indwelling’.

First, we understand the world as a whole and from an aesthetic responsiveness, then we focus on the parts of that world and reconstruct it in relation to the whole in terms of ethical and other logical responses. By paying attention to these processes of attendance, and the way meaning is produced through them, we can discern ‘intentionality’ even in the most obscure circumstances. The *ethical* phenomenology of any art object – in any artform, epoch, or culture (to the extent it is ‘intelligible’) – can thus be differentiated from what we observe as its ‘empirical contents’. The latter, as Schelling’s system of art shows, is less important in understanding an artwork’s *real* meaningfulness (because literal meaning is subordinate in ethical intuition).

Aesthetics can hence *only* be studied phenomenologically (not theoretically). But its inseparability from these other sciences is critical.¹⁹ Thus, any art object’s

¹⁸ Life, as Peirce says, is ‘perfused with signs’. All organism-environment interactions – all *Umwelts*, a term introduced by Baltic German biologist Jakob Johann von Uexküll – infuse meaning into the world. And that meaning is not entirely subjective; it is ‘read’ in the universe, exhibiting intrinsic freedoms which are nevertheless constrained by the laws of Nature (the laws of our ‘*Umwelt*’). See Wheeler (2006).

¹⁹ Together all these sciences study the relation between phenomena and ends *in secondness* (the object). Aesthetics studies the secondness of this relation in *its firstness* (immanent meaning), ethics in *its secondness*

real meaning is revealed aesthetically via its ethical-logical ‘transaction’ with the Object (ie., towards reason). I suggest this ‘normative’ relationship (object-Object = artwork-Art) *only* exists in genuine artworks; *not* in the ‘general aesthetic’ where the same relation exists, but *without* the ‘perfect sign’ double-unity with *the Person*. This explains why Art uniquely lays a *claim* on us.

Bernardo (2022: 9) argues evaluating art depends entirely on the consensus of a ‘community’ (Aristotle’s ‘political community’). But we must distinguish this ‘consensus’ from Kant’s doctrine of ‘the agreeable’, upon which valuation is determined by the *mode of discourse* and concepts like ‘adherent’/‘free’ beauty, rendering judgement entirely subjective. Aristotle, on the other hand, left ultimate judgement to the highest virtue of *Contemplation* which is above the authority of ‘political community’ and only cultivated in individuals. This requires cultivating habits of *thinking* and reasoning or ‘deliberating’ (ethical) which is different from ‘choosing’ (moral).

Peirce did not progress his aesthetic theory further, but others since have, revealing how his ‘triadic thinking’ can be applied to move us ‘beyond interpretation’ as James Bradley argues.²⁰ Though not possible to detail here, examining Art’s ‘ethical phenomenology’ offers a way to attend to what biosemioticians call ‘boundary conditions’ (the ‘is/is not’) inherent in any artwork’s ‘actantial structure.’²¹ This reveals Peirce’s defining aesthetic intentionality: inquiry concerning ‘human conduct’. Specifically, enquiries about ‘self-control’ (necessity/freedom) in ‘*future* action’ (a forward moving time-oriented dimension, present in all life). The metaphysical conditions of ‘life-giving’ are thus key to understanding art, as is the nature of Time.²²

Art’s ‘process metaphysics’ is revealed, moreover, in the fact humans are ‘metaphoric creatures’, which Paul Ricoeur shows by comparing ‘speculative’ and

(objective meaning), and logic in *its thirdness* (interpreted meaning). Further examination, beyond my scope here, shows that the secret to *semiotically* distinguishing art from artefact, and determining higher meaning-value, lies in Peirce’s ‘suspended second’.

²⁰ Notably Arnold (2011). See also Bradley (2009).

²¹ Algirdas J. Greimas’ term ‘actantial structure’ derives from his ‘actantial’ theory of narratives, which augments Peircian semiotics, further supporting my assertions about intentionality being subject to habitual meaning orientations.

²² As Polok (1973) argues, art has been ‘de-futurized’ by being ‘submerged in the present’ such that it now exerts influence mostly ‘through the transmission of images, in a nihilistic way’ (p.280). But Time (or ‘spacetime’) is also a fundamental feature of every genuine art object.

‘poetic’ discourses. Art is a form of ‘speculation’, but a very different one to both science and philosophy (each different again from the other). Unfortunately, misconstruing this, and being unable to distinguish these different modes of inquiry, some scholars over time committed both art and philosophy to the same fate – as subordinate to science. Explaining how philosophical discourse was degraded will help us later understand how similarly our use of metaphor in art became corrupted (essentially to symbol).

The speculative discourse of Enlightenment science grew to convert the philosophical speculation of ancient philosophy into a tendency to displace proportional analogy to an ‘analogy of attribution’ (Ricoeur 2003: 320). This historicization of our key meaning-making modalities (that had once maintained a clear distinction between the symbolic, allegoric, and metaphoric) weakened philosophical speculation – essentially comparing it unfavourably with mathematical, biological, and other models of logical thinking. Medieval philosophers were less sensitive to these effects, but modern logicians eventually used this deterioration as an argument against (what was by now a degraded form of) ‘analogy’. Thus, Aristotle’s great text of *Metaphysics* ‘is turned against the philosopher and becomes the ultimate evidence of the unscientific character of metaphysics’ (Ricoeur 2003: 321).

Schelling’s radical post-Kantian revival of metaphysics was, unfortunately, ignored by aestheticians. Subsequent increasing denial of philosophy’s ability to make sense of art is symptomatic of the modern mythology’s gradual, almost complete immersion in the allegorical. His development of a ‘*process metaphysics*’ opened the road for the first re-conception of aesthetics as ‘normative’, and Art’s reconstruction according to such a paradigm. Art itself is *not* knowledge, he argues, it is the *merging* of knowledge with action. But as such nevertheless a way of *knowing* rather than simply *perceiving*. And we access this ‘knowing’ by indwelling *both* formal *and* non-formal ethical values.

Positivism deals with the relationship between knowledge, perception, and reality in several ways, which can tend to fragment art.²³ Kant’s aesthetic legacy

²³ Specifically three: Firstly, as merely the witnessing of ‘phenomena’ in consciousness, rejecting the notion that any world or thing exists outside of perception. Secondly, as being the conduit for representing the world. Or thirdly, as a means of experiencing the world as it really is ‘in itself’. Knowledge then may be seen as simply the means to verify these by which predictions or representations between one perception

thus produced ‘many principles’ typically described in modern aesthetics in terms of such features as balance, proportion, emphasis, variety, movement, rhythm, harmony and so on. But these relate to ‘external goods’ (in Scheler’s terms, ‘technologies of action’) and are only *parts* of the unified principle expressed as *qualities*. Taken separately or focused on exclusively they invite a narrow and questionable hermeneutics. The key features of dynamism and tension fundamental to Schelling and Peirce’s dialectical metaphysics (and Ricoeur’s ‘metaphoric utterance’) – which connect all these features, though are not necessarily observable (ie., they are intuited) – on the other hand remain fundamental ontologies of a singular principle of art because of the very nature of metamorphosis and predication in natural semiosis.

The *dialogical* nature of the latter is grounded in the dialectics of action/movement, ethics/logic, constraints/freedoms, and temporality/space. All matters for the attendance > perception > judgement paradigm based largely on reasoned ‘indwelling’. Schelling’s system of art, combined with Peirce’s ‘semiotic realism’, is thus capable of determining progress toward Reason, unlike Kant’s. Why the former’s is *aesthetically* ‘normative’, while the latter’s embraces arbitrariness, is due to the difference between reflexivity and reflection.

Schelling and Peirce define ‘normativity’ as *both* psychological and physical. Thought and Mind are not contained in the body; thought is ‘synthetic’ – it is ‘out there’ in the world, emerging in natural semiosis, but *synthesized* by *active subjects*. The processual, dialogical, nature of art makes it ‘reflexive’ (ie., *active*), rather than simply reflective of emerging consciousness.²⁴ Aesthetics ‘becomes objective’ because, as Peirce says, the normative sciences collectively determine how Feeling, Conduct, and Thought ought to be controlled. And art remains

and another may be reconciled. Theories of knowledge (epistemologies) battle for dominance over the validation of reality in all human cultures. Essentially, all perception is categorizable as some form of ‘monism’. ‘Positive counting’ is one, which has become dominant. August Comte’s term for ‘a positive philosophy’ (underscoring his invention of ‘social science’) in opposition to the negative or ‘critical philosophy’ that had led to the French Revolution, was later appropriated by nineteenth and twentieth century logical positivists and logical empiricists to embody the Hobbesian inspired scientism which came to dominate some of the more *genuinely* positive aspects of Comtean and later neo-Kantian empiricism.

²⁴ This is revealed in Schelling’s ‘empirical object’ and is best understood as, essentially, the essence of the ‘double-unity’ of the Person and Art in metaphoric metamorphosis through the artwork. The ‘materialization’ of the artwork does not necessarily entail a *physical* materialisation (as divine creation implies); the empirical object *becoming metaphor* is itself a stage of ‘materialisation’ of thought.

our best way to make it so, by exerting a measure of ‘self-control, exercised by means of self-criticism, and the purposive formation of habit’ (Colapietro 1988).

Normativity thus surfaces in the ‘ethical intentionality’ of any genuine art object; in the higher meaning produced by the ‘in-forming’ of non-formal ethical values (qualities) dialogically via metamorphosis. And this – because it manifests as ‘being’ *only as a limit case of becoming* - is discoverable *only* in its phenomenological ‘actantial structure’; and what Mikhail Bakhtin called its ‘ethical answerability’ (Arnold 2011; Miroslov 2002). I have referred to this earlier as a ‘responsibility to respond’, predicated upon the *claim* an artwork makes on us. But it is important to emphasize this is *not* to be confused with the ‘*empirical-comprehensible necessity*’ present in the contents of any artwork (ie., offering *literal* comprehension). This difference allows us to see art as a way of *valuing* the world.

In nature, evolution constantly transforms ‘lower values’ into ‘higher values’ (eg., a seed turning into a stem); hence meaning is *autopoietically* emergent.²⁵ Lower values are thus *equally* necessary to higher ones for higher meaning to emerge (it is not an either/or scenario) (Findlay 1970 :64).²⁶ But humans making art actively provide the conditions for the *inversion* of lower values. Therefore, what defines art, and distinguishes it from a rainbow, is *intention* - or – *purpose* (but not just any purpose).

Because it intersubjectively involves ‘*the Person*’ (as both subject *and* object), genuine art is discernible from the general aesthetic by its intentional ethical ‘objectivity’ *relative to human conduct* (conveyed in signs). Objectivity does not rest in form alone; in fact, all *higher* meaning arises from *non-formal* values (or ‘qualities’) (Scheler 1973). But it is ‘formalism’, in various guises that Kant’s aesthetic legacy has underwritten; and, like other *sensual* qualities, our

²⁵ Autopoiesis is a term often used in biosemiotics, and by ‘emergent theory of Mind’ proponents, but physicists too now use this Peircian logic to explain how ‘matter’ emerges. See Kauffman and Gare (2015).

²⁶ Reason itself is produced in the process of transforming lower meaning values into higher ones only when, as J. N. Findlay (1970) says, the Spirit ‘sets the project’. Elevating art above the general aesthetic requires paying some attention to the proliferation of lower order values that clutter our habitus. Scheler’s view was that, in the first place, lower order values are the most powerful and higher order values are most impotent – which accounts for our natural attraction to the former. But humans have the capacity, ‘through Spirit’, to suppress and repress vital drives, denying them of ‘the nourishment of perceptual images and representations’. Thus, an artist must ‘dis-attend’ to these selectively.

capacity to discern meaning from non-formal *ethical* values has been relegated entirely to subjectivized assessments.

Reconceiving art as process metaphysics is the only way to reverse this illusory merger because it offers objective discernment of art from anything else. And here is why.

‘Ethical phenomenology’ is *not* present in the general aesthetic. *All* meaning arises in Nature. But even though here ‘objects’ are continually being ‘in-formed’ - ie., *gestalts* are always operative, reflecting the part-whole, becoming-being, order out of chaos patterning behaviours evident in natural semiosis - all this self-structuring emergence is essentially ‘accidental’ (autopoietic).²⁷ Ideal form emerges naturally (in ‘conflict’ with non-form), but such ‘ideals’ are *undeliberated*. This (‘semiotic freedom’) is what produces such abundant variation in the ‘general aesthetic’.

But neither is such ethical phenomenology (and ‘answerability’) evident in cultural artefacts. This, as examination of Aristotle shows, is due to their *ends* being dependent upon *means*. Here ‘the ideal’ is therefore usually mediated by symbol, *not* what Ricoeur calls ‘proper metaphor’.²⁸ Being able to distinguish these, and the most productive ways the latter is employed, is essential in discriminating between speculative and poetic discourses. And this is what should be included in the ‘skill-set’ of any artist.

But that’s not all. Understanding Art’s double-unity with the Person – and why it is thus the ‘*science* of ideals’ (*synthesising* meaning) - is key to aesthetically producing ethical intentionality. For Aristotle, Schelling, Peirce, and later phenomenologists such as Scheler, Ricoeur, and Maurice Merleau-Ponty following in the tradition of the Radical Enlightenment, great art uniquely produces a kind of synthesis of Mind in which the human ‘Spirit’ emerges.

The artist, when unsatisfied with the boundary conditions of surrounding

²⁷ Note ‘gestalt’ simply means the forming of a ‘whole’. Gestalt psychology, though rightly for a time regarded as ‘unscientific’, has long established (supported by more recent phenomenologists) that this process is fundamental to all meaning formation. The problem is, *gestalts alone* do not produce *higher meaning* – thus while any chart-hitting pop song or sensational readymade ‘artwork’ will *necessarily* employ familiar *gestalts*, thinking this sensual characteristic alone renders them art is delusional. See Rudolph Arnheim’s *To the Rescue of Art*.

²⁸ Proper metaphor is phenomenologically distinguishable from ‘lexicalized’ or ‘improper’ metaphor; and required to produce the morphogenic ‘perfect sign’ double-unity which symbol cannot (Ricoeur 2003).

reality, ‘attempts to partially lift the veil of the future and show man in his ideal. He begins to view today’s reality through the prism of an ideal “tomorrow”’ (Voronsky 1998: 100). But importantly, this is not a ‘naked, abstract dream’ if this ideal ‘matures within the depths of the current reality’. Therefore, to *synthesize* this reality the artist must also ‘omit, not notice, whatever has no cognitive value, whatever is accidental, uninteresting, well known’.

Though Art (the *Object*) must be ‘purposeless’ to enable autopoiesis, an artist/aesthete *purposefully* selects out that which must be attended to in the artwork (its related *object*). It is *this* search for morphogenic meaning – this specific intentionality - which primarily distinguishes a poetic from speculative discourse, and Art from artefact or the ‘general aesthetic’. The beauty of a sunset is thus different from the beauty of the young Simonetta depicted in Botticelli’s *Venus*. The difference involves what Aristotle calls ‘deliberation’. That is, in the artist/aesthete’s judgement of the merger of Truth and Beauty (‘real’ and ‘ideal’), governed by the indifference between freedom and necessity as it relates to ‘human conduct’ – in morphogenesis.

Considering Art as ‘process metaphysics’ thus clears up a fundamental confusion. Which essentially rests in *the kind* of ‘truth’ we attribute to the ‘general aesthetic’ (generated *autopoietically*); compared with how we purposefully value and relate it to Art as a *principle* governing the ‘construction’ of any genuine artwork. Both relate to ‘the Person’; but in the former *only* generally, and in the latter *only* by linking Nature with History (since only humans possess history). The main reason for the confusion is that producing art involves both *poiesis* (making) and *autopoiesis* (see §3). Key to how genuine art relates to ‘the person’, then, are two longstanding phenomenological questions: the ‘part-whole’ and ‘becoming-being’ problems - making ‘process metaphysics’ the most helpful ‘paradigm’ for understanding art. The nature of the subject-object interaction emerges from boundary conditions (ie., between necessity/freedom). Art ‘becomes objective’ in *approaching* absolute ‘being’, which is never fully achieved; because ‘being’ is always only a disclosure of imposed finitude on infinity (Schelling, 1989; Voronsky, 1998). Our *processual* attendance to the ‘reals’ and ‘ideals’, in all that is life-giving and *human* then, is critical to producing ethical intentionality.

Schelling’s system, reconnecting art with nature via this ‘absolute’ ideality,

describes this disclosing feature of art as the ‘empirical object’. Aesthetics is restored to normativity by employing ancient mythological archetypes, and setting out how progress to higher meaning is tracked in the mergers between his ‘mythological categories’ (schematic to allegoric to metaphoric meaning).²⁹ Combining this systemic ‘meaning-orientation’ with Peirce’s triadic thinking and Scheler’s value hierarchy, we can discern why one still life painting of vegetables on a table can be more meaningful (and hence artful) than another.³⁰ As Schelling realized, not just *anything* can be *the subject* of genuine art. Only subjects related in a certain way to ‘the Person’ - since only humans possess history (*historia*); and the spacetime dimensionality of art depicts this perfect-sign relation (metaphorically).

Art hence *must* involve ‘ethical intentionality’. Nothing in the general aesthetic can. Because a sunset cannot make a proposition; only humans make propositions - which we can certainly then *project* onto anything in our world. But humans also possess ‘nature’. Thus, our organic nature, reflected in art, provides the illusion art is simply an imitation of Nature.

Schelling’s significant advance on Kant’s essentially ‘reflective’ aesthetics, is that his is *pre*-reflective. In Kant, the symbolic function of beauty is interpreted as a *formal displacement* of ‘the Person’ (the audience’s ‘self’), because it prompts *reflection* on the human condition (as indeed a waterfall, flower, or suspension bridge can). As with Heidegger’s concept of ‘worlding’, however, such an aesthetic is attenuated to a subjective thesis where the ‘other’ is always an object of a *manufactured* reality (Torsen 2016).

But in Schelling, the ‘*reproductive* imagination’ (contrary to Hegel’s ‘*productive* imagination’), via this same worlding process *releases the subject*, expanding our consciousness as art approaches an ‘absolute’ *objective* Ideality.³¹ It is important

²⁹These are the stages of meaning productivity, from lower to higher order meaning potentiality, identifiable in the phenomenology of any artwork.

³⁰ This is, essentially, due to the confluence of these and other meaning-markers in the work and their combined morphogenic orientation to *the Person*. Even so, the best such still life paintings inevitably present *lower* meaning-value possibilities than say a human portrait. Why this is so, is revealed in Schelling’s system, which also shows for instance why some examples of architecture can be art and others not.

³¹ Schelling’s ‘absolute’ is simply a means of dealing with the difficult concept of infinity. His conception of the imagination as ‘reproductive’ fundamentally counters Kant’s view that the imagination can never lead to understanding (and is governed by a supervening ego). Hegel’s ‘standpoint of reflection’, derived from

to be able to understand our natural ‘worlding’ capabilities as contextualized in relation to an *Other* which Polok characterizes as the ‘split mind’. Wherein lies the integral link between aesthetics and ethics – *only* revealed in genuine Art. Schelling is one of the few thinkers to take this strongly ontological view of Art’s superior value and purpose for ‘Mind-productivity’, predicated on ‘unprethinkable’ active subjectivity. His major contribution to understanding consciousness underscores this.

Self-consciousness develops in three stages. Firstly, in ‘*naïve consciousness*’ sensation objects are first thought of as separate from the self and hence a ‘thing in itself’. Consciousness is unaware it is its own productive intuition positing the object. It mistakes the object as independent. This is followed by ‘*reflection*’ when the conscious self distances itself from the object by means of thought and linguistic operations which create interdependent concepts with the object and – importantly – *recognition of their interdependence*. Finally, in the state of ‘*praxis*’ the self engages with the world and other individuals as they begin to make demands on it. Intersubjective reality now becomes ‘*the reality*’.³² (And it is then that *morals* are chosen and habituated).

Art’s fundamentally *purposeless* purpose is thus one of ‘*self-actualization*’ (ie., ‘becoming’). Not *self-legislation*, or *self-realization*, as it appears in modernity.³³ These favour concrete ‘being’ over the *dynamic tensions* embodied in the ‘process metaphysics’ of Art (one via laws, the other via psychologism). And in so doing such intentionalities *materialize* our valuing of art. Whereas it is this dialogical dynamism which makes possible what Scheler calls a ‘phenomenological experience’ – the *precondition* for transforming lower order values into higher meaning. However, the modern mythology’s historical disjuncture of art from nature and society through the deterioration of the public sphere, via various modifications (including the meaning of aesthetics itself), has disrupted how we perceive this Art-Person ‘double-unity’. And it is necessary to now examine this

Kant, is thus countered by Schelling’s ‘standpoint of production’ – but it is Hegel’s which has prevailed in modern aesthetics. For more on Schelling’s ‘absolute’ see Dalia Nassar (2014).

³² These three stages are, incidentally, comparable descriptions of our active engagement with the art object, reflected in Peirce’s triadic system.

³³ My argument reverses what Kant believed was art’s *purposeful* purposelessness. This is a logical inference from Schelling’s post-Kantian advances, revealed by comparing their respective aesthetic dialectics. ‘Self-actualization’ is intuited ethically, ‘self-legislation/realization’ are moral interpretations.

before understanding why modern aesthetic theories are incapable of making ethical assessments of art.

To summarize, since ancient times the complete reorientation of our active subjectivity has, put simply, increasingly favoured ‘idealizing’ or reifying the symbol above morphogenic meaning productivity. This has disabled our potential to approach the *Ideal* of art as the ancients did: as ‘more real than reality itself’ (Schelling 1989). Together, Peirce and Schelling’s combined metaphysical revivals offer a way to reverse this attentional polarity.

Their ‘process metaphysics’ transcends the Cartesian-dualist oppositions which have dogged both philosophy and art before and since Kant, revealing how to understand the Aesthetics of higher meaning according to what McGilchrist calls ‘coinciding opposites’. I will now examine how the severing of the link between ethics and aesthetics was engineered in the modern conception of art, by favouring mechanism over this.

2. THE HISTORICIZATION OF ART AND THE PERSON

In this section I will firstly argue how Art (‘as principle’) was fragmented and degraded historically, similarly to notions of *the Self*. In §3, why an artwork may be legitimately (normatively) or illegitimately (theoretically) historicized will then become apparent.³⁴

Schelling claims Christianity’s reversal of the ‘ancient mythology’ began the rendering of both humans and Art as ‘historical objects’. Though art had suffered periodic decline previously, art and ‘*the Self*’s’ continued fragmenting deterioration due to this in modernity, via the ‘privatisation’ of public life and our descent into fantasy, has been well chronicled (Polok 1973; Bowie 2003; MacIntyre 2007). Art was eventually forced to undermine its own aesthetic value, becoming just another ‘cultural practice’ (or ‘anti-art’), as stagnation in both artistic productivity and debate on how art relates to aesthetics, set in. Thus, ‘[t]he dilemmas which emerged in the period from Kant to Nietzsche’, says

³⁴ ‘Historicization’ here denotes the process of either legitimate (ie., via natural processes or ‘aging’) or illegitimate (ie., fabricated) changes. For instance, the artwork, like a human, is *legitimately* historicized in the process of ‘becoming’. However, art as principle and the Person are constants. These, and artworks, are *illegitimately* historicized by a process of fragmentation and meaning manipulation (eg., via aesthetic theorization and cultural overdetermination).

Andrew Bowie (2003: 319), ‘still tend to define the agenda of contemporary discussion on aesthetics’.

The theory of Artistic Formalism has, since Duchamp’s upturned urinal, become silenced in the face of art that purports to be ‘anti-aesthetic’ yet still wants to be considered ‘art’. But this simply reconfirmed that an artist’s practice was ‘freed up’ from any kind of guiding principles, and art’s autonomy could be construed as ‘absolute freedom of expression’ (devoid of *any* ‘responsibility’). Postmodernism’s most celebrated Pyrrhic victory was the liberation of the artist from any ‘rules of art’, only to be shackled to a self-defeating and ultimately neo-Kantian eudaemonist pursuit of deluded individualism, decadent heroism, hedonism, and celebrity.

The twentieth century heralded various permutations of structuralist and poststructuralist ventures to defend this ‘freedom’, while still appearing interested in judgement. From adamant formalists starting with Clive Bell’s much disputed book *Art* (1913); to ‘aesthetic empiricists’ like Gregory Currie and David Davies or the more moderate contemporary neo-Kantian formalists like Nick Zangwill (*The Metaphysics of Beauty*, 2001); to anti-formalists like Kendall Walton and Allen Carlson – we appear to move forward but encounter no theoretical solution to what has now become the unresolvable ‘problem of art’. And we are left confounded by the relation of art to morality. Anthony Cascardi (2010: 16) suggests perhaps that after Adorno, aesthetics ‘needs to return to Aristotle or at least to Merleau-Ponty’. What he says is at issue, however, is ‘art’s desire to serve as a form of sensuous cognition... (which) ...aesthetic theory ought to be able to explain’; apparently ignoring the fact it is its historical perpetuation of this misconception which has been the problem (see §3).

In their influential essay, *Literary History as a Challenge to Literary Theory*, Hans Robert Jauss and Elizabeth Benzinger (1970) present a strong case for why aesthetics as theory diminishes an understanding of art from an historical point of view on several levels. The coinciding historicization of *Art* which reductive formalisms produced (in artificially historicizing the *artwork* too), eventually contributed to the demise of theoretical aesthetics in the late twentieth century. Modern art is thus attenuated by unreliable laws, which we have also become ‘morally’ habituated to, serving a canon derived from what Pierre Bourdieu calls a ‘bad-faith economy’ originating earlier in history. One in which its characters

must trade in 'the sacred' while at the same time disavowing any truth-claim to values; and trading what is *truly* sacred, for a symbolic ideal. What eludes us is that this is symptomatic of 'modern mythology'; and it is our way of *mythologizing* that needs to be corrected.

Consider the disjuncture between aesthetic and ethical *valuing* arising in contemporary aesthetic theories. For example, in a supposedly '*ethical*' evaluation of art according to the precepts of 'moderate autonomism' it has been argued that 'an artwork will never be aesthetically better in virtue of its moral strengths... [or] ...worse because of its moral defects' (Carroll 2001: 301).³⁵ A strict reading of this theory requires one to accept the assertion, common in postmodern art, that defective moral understanding never counts against the aesthetic merit of a work. Which is different from suggesting 'an artwork may invite an audience to entertain a defective moral perspective' without detracting from its aesthetic value. The likely confusion this creates, produces the kind of myth making which merely assumes aesthetic value and ethical intuition are unconnected, while overlaying a chosen morality.³⁶

Very often there is a subtle illusion created in some artworks, which transforms 'technologies of action' into a 'general welfare' that in turn establishes a dogma of 'basic value' (Scheler 1973).³⁷ This brings with it a false sense of value normativity. For instance, elevating 'soundscapes' to 'music', on the basis of spatial depth alone (ie., without counterpoint, rhythm, or melody). Yet this *aesthetic* miscalculation can easily translate into an equally misguided *ethical* one, becoming adopted *morally*.

Ideological moralising, creating a habituated disjuncture between aesthetic and

³⁵ Carroll roundly disputes this and the subsequent suggestion (citing among other sources Aristotle's *Poetics*).

³⁶ As MacIntyre argues, these are not merely harmless opinions. The incorporated moral and metaphysical theories and claims of such 'characters' (both artists/aesthetes, *and* artworks) - externally bestowed upon them rightly or wrongly by a significant segment of the community, in *any* culture - furnishes them with 'a cultural and moral ideal', driven by a philosophical 'emotivism' influencing those who engage with art under the same precepts.

³⁷ This of course is evident in many 'styles' made famous in modernism, and more generally in the fetishized, fashion and design industries masquerading as art in popular culture. The fixation on paradox in both modernism and postmodernism is but one prominent example of such basic 'value dogma' which has underwritten entire so-called 'art movements'. Contemporary heroes of postmodern visual art, particularly the likes of Damien Hirst, Jeff Koons, and others regularly featured in MoCAs around the world, provide numerous examples.

ethical intuition, is then underwritten by our highest cultural institutions *promoting* the modern mythology's widespread acquiescence to false bearers of value. Ethically, we are confronted with warrantless notions of individual freedom relative to the collective good being nurtured, instead of an artist's *vocational* 'responsibility to respond' to what we collectively *ought* to admire in the merger of beauty *and* truth (ie., *reasonable* judgement regarding freedom vs necessity). With aesthetic judgement habitually separated from any *real* notion of individual *or* collective autonomy, either 'morality' and art are presented as paradoxical antinomies, or art as moral 'will to power'.

This ultimately underscores a dual privation in the public sphere: the absence of *genuine* connectivity between individuals and the *principle* of art, and between individuals and the collective. All bound by the ontological connection between Nature and History. Psychiatrists like Theodor Dalrymple, Louis Sass, and Iain McGilchrist have more recently made a connection between aesthetic and ethical disorientations and nihilistic social patterns of behaviour among both groups and individuals.³⁸ (McGilchrist's brain evolutionary thesis very much matches Schelling's mythological one, tracking the decline of art over centuries and correlating this with major historical events characteristic of civilization decline).

The question of the *autonomy* of art and its expression, as Scheler shows, is really one of *ethics*. But specifically in terms of how normative aesthetics *undergirds* ethics in a *genuine mythology*. Moral judgement *follows* what we choose to mythologize, from what we ethically intuit as good or bad. (The ethical intentionality of an artwork determines the *truth* of the latter, manifest mythologically). But modern mythology is based only on notions of historical 'truth'. Schelling offers an alternative *ahistorical* choice in constructing mythology. And why only this can support a normative aesthetics becomes clear upon examination.

Until art becomes 'the affair of the collective' and thus elevated in importance to a whole people, it can only be viewed as 'factual' or fixed, hence 'historical'

³⁸ Such behaviours are well described by psychiatrist, Theodore Dalrymple's in *Our Culture, What's Left of It: The Mandarins and the Masses* (2005), drawing parallels between the decline of art and numerous social problems in society at large.

(ie., *scientifically*), or in ‘reference to the world’ (Schelling 1989: 282).³⁹ The latter, referring to ‘religion’, elevates it in importance. But ‘religion’ can be either viewed in reference to morality (insofar as this is ‘an objective expression of speculative ideas within action’), or as a mode of speculation about the world of ‘things’ as ‘unchangeable’ and ‘objective’. In other words, a community can choose to view art as ‘factual’ in a purely observational or experimental ‘scientific’ sense, or as a way of valuing the world. And in the latter *either* as a means of ‘moralising’ or seeking normative objectivity. This differentiates what he understood as the purpose of art in the ‘*real* religion’ of ancient mythology (understood as ‘civic humanism’) compared to the ‘revealed religions’ of modernity (eg., Christianity, Islam, etc.).⁴⁰

Thus, viewing art as objectively *a way of valuing the world*, as the ancients did, as *ahistorically sacred* to humanity; is preferable to succumbing to the historicising ‘symbolic idealism’ associated with scientism and modern religiosity (or ‘moralising’).⁴¹ *Great* art makes the key interrelationships between the Person, Nature, and History *implicit*, yet more transparent and seamless, as any *explicit* ‘ethical intentionality’ an artist might suggest withdraws behind the curtains. This affords it the power to *claim* us.

Mythology, as many have argued, is at the heart of everything. But Christianity is not ‘mythological’ in the same sense as *ancient* mythology. It represents ‘the beginning’ of history and modernity because it completely

³⁹ In other words, as Aristotle argued, until it becomes morally habituated to the extent that judgement is ‘common sense’ - as in the ideal political community.

⁴⁰ This refers to the fact that they obscure ‘the mystery’ inwardly in the individual, only to be able to reveal it publicly through symbolism. In fact, the ancient Greeks did not think of ‘gods’ in the same way at all (rather as ‘ideas’). See Segovia (2021).

⁴¹ I am suggesting the superimposition of another kind of modern secular religiosity (symbolic idealism), particularly in the virulent forms of commercialized popular culture now driven by techno-science. Consider Kai Hammermeister’s (2002) argument that, Hegel’s thesis of ‘the end of art’ highlights the fact that ‘Sociologically ...in a secularized age, art has regained a semireligious status as the only expression of something that transcends man’s individual life’. A view consistent with Schelling’s though for different reasons. Though Hegel agrees with Schelling that Christianity’s ‘inward turn’ caused similar deterioration to art, his position then limits *the truth of art* – in principle - to one historical period, the ‘classical period’ in his triadic apotheosis. (See Hammermeister, p.102). Also, Hegel’s view of Christ’s suffering on the cross, whose ‘ugliness’ could not be depicted in his classical Greek ideal apotheosis of art, thus renders ugliness in modernity not only permissible, but *necessary*, encouraging false postmodern aesthetic theories of ugliness as *separate* from theories of beauty (whereas Aristotle, Schelling, and others combine them. See Hammermeister 2002: 98-99).

reverses how the Greek mythology perceived reality. (Thus, as Schiller argued, we moderns are in fact *bereft* of real mythology). Schelling's clarification is important for understanding what limits the 'material' upon which art can draw in modernity (Schelling 1989: 59).⁴²

The material content of Greek mythology was nature, the universal intuition of the universe as nature. The material of Christian mythology was the universal intuition of the universe as history, as a world of providence. This is the actual turning point of ancient and modern religion and poesy. The modern world begins when man wrests himself loose from nature.

Thus, from this point onwards art adopts an 'historical' reasoning. Art and nature; Nature and *human* nature, are separated. The Greek's was the world of '*the real*', whereas Christianity forced humanity into pursuing the world of '*ideals*'. While Greek mythology represented the infinite in the finite (ie., 'drawing the universal into the particular') thus demanding a *metaphoric* treatment of ideas; 'the fundamental demand raised by Christianity was just the opposite, namely, to take up the finite into the infinite, that is, to make it into an *allegory* of the infinite' (Schelling 1989: 61).⁴³

Consequently, as a world of ideas expressed in acts, Christianity's archetypes developed into hierarchies which demanded that *human beings themselves* (rather than nature) become the 'symbol' of the realm of ideas. In the process, the meanings of 'symbolic', 'metaphor' and 'allegory' became in various ways degraded.⁴⁴ As Schelling points out (Schelling 1989: 67):

The most important thing here is to see how the universal character of subjectivity and ideality within Christianity caused the element of the symbolic to flee completely into the act (actions).

Christianity's mythological 'history of the world' then developed much aided by art, which it employed in this archetypal way, redefining Art's fundamental *purpose*. These 'historical' archetypes still provide the 'material' of modern artmaking (being as evident in Milton or Shakespeare, Picasso or Da Vinci, opera, or rap music). Dante nevertheless showed it was possible to overcome the

⁴² For Schiller's comment: p. 300n46.

⁴³ Emphasis added. Note drawing the infinite into the finite is how *metaphor* is defined. Schelling's use of 'symbolic' in the original is archaic, which I have replaced with 'metaphoric'.

⁴⁴ Space prevents full examination here, see Ricoeur (2003).

problems of an 'historical mythology', as Polok puts it by giving shape to the shapeless and being able to make 'the crudest material immaterial'.⁴⁵

Modern aesthetics was thus both a function of and instigator in this historicized mythology. It was born out of a conflict largely created by Cartesian dualism emerging after the Middle Ages in the Hobbesian tradition, during the 'Enlightenment project'.⁴⁶ But there were two 'enlightenments', the Moderate Enlightenment of Hobbes, Hume, Locke and their followers; and the Radical Enlightenment led by Johann Herder and those who, like Schelling, Goethe, Coleridge and others opposed the 'mechanisation' of humanity and the extraction of art and 'human nature' from Nature (Gare 2007/2008).

The prevailing Moderate Enlightenment produced 'positivistic materialism' which, via scientism, became the predominantly corrosive force fragmenting art and, as MacIntyre (2007) argues, casting *the Self* adrift in modernity.⁴⁷ The

⁴⁵ Polok, *The Image of the Future*, p.280. Though it can't be examined here, James Joyce's 'theory of epiphany', Virginia Wolfe's 'moment of being', or Marcel Proust's '*moment privilégié*' all evidence modern mythological *fragmentations* of Schelling's 'empirical object', by separating out 'being' in succession (ie., succumbing to the 'becoming-being' problem). In antiquity the art object could *not* be historicized like this. On the other hand, Dante was, despite being 'historical' still able to render the 'ultimate indifference between intention and necessity' which distinguishes great art. Dante, says Schelling, 'is allegory in the highest style', compared with Voltaire's *Henriade* where 'the allegorical is quite visible and crass'. My argument is thus, like Schelling's, *not* 'classicist' (as Hammermeister argues). Rather it is that constructing a 'new mythology' requires rediscovering *natural* archetypes *relevant to our own ethos* (in any epoch).

⁴⁶ This is because Christianity first separated the Art/Person double-unity. Note there was no prior perceived need for philosophising about art (since what it was, and its worth, had been well understood widely in antiquity) until theorization about it centring on disputes around beauty really came to a head in the eighteenth century. The 'philosophy of art' then developed to *retrospectively* apply a periodized view of art that gave it apparent unity for the first time. But this was an artificially unified view of 'the arts' forming the basis for the study of art history, whose categorisations generally followed enlightenment science's burgeoning atomistic nomenclature – thus setting the fragmenting of the *principle of Art* on an irrevocable course. See Winckelmann's *History of Ancient Art* (1764).

⁴⁷ Positivistic materialism is that form of atomistic substance monism undergirding scientism (or scientific materialism), and the dominant modern thinking paradigm today, evident too in analytical philosophy. 'Logical positivism' (promoted by philosophers like Bertrand Russell and A. J. Ayer) developed out of the growing consolidation of global capitalism in nineteenth century Europe, accompanied by rampant industrialisation for which a stringent form of positivistic science was needed to provide inventions. This took hold in the USA at the turn of the twentieth century, making it very difficult to challenge the deep assumptions of mainstream science that has continued to privilege reductionist thinking in the west, with an implicit assumption that ultimately everything must be explained through the most basic particles.

triumph of Hobbes' materialist, *epistemological* empiricism - opposed by the radical empiricism of Schelling, Peirce, Whitehead, and others since - cannot be overstated for its devastating impact on art, human polity, and eventually the ecosystem. This has ultimately caused humanism to be overwhelmed by anti-humanist and posthumanist philosophies (Gare 2013).

The subsequent decline of art and corruption of the normative sciences arises in the degradation of meanings critical to understanding 'Art as principle'. Most importantly, the historicization of the meanings of 'symbolic' and 'metaphoric', creating confusion between allegory (or analogy) and metaphor (further degrading both); and other meaning changes helpful in distinguishing how these modes of 'worlding' function to separate 'value' from 'fact' (Ricoeur 2003). Associated transformations in the human *habitus* aroused a 'worldlessness' that changed how we mythologize the human *telos*.⁴⁸ The eighteenth-century redefinition of aesthetics then permanently split the 'perfect sign' relation between *the Self* and *Art*.

With Lutheran Protestantism had come the recognition that only subjective religious experience was valid. Any objective link between God and man or eternity and time – any connection between any 'other world' and this world, or between spirit and flesh – was quashed (Gare 1981: 86). Relational ontologies gave way to the machine metaphor of life. The poet John Donne eloquently expressed the estrangement and social struggle for a coherent world view that was to follow like this:⁴⁹

'Tis all in Peeeces, all coherence gone
All just supply, and all Relation...
For every man alone thinks he hath got
To be a Phoenix, and that then can bee
None of that kinde, of which he is, but hee
This is the world's condition now

'Logical empiricism' claims to have provided a rigorous characterisation of all valid claims to knowledge. However, it evidently shapes reality hand in glove with 'symbolic idealism'.

⁴⁸ 'Worldlessness' has been heralded by contemporary posthumanists like Roland Végéső and Timothy Morton who find in it 'opportunities' to re-envision a 'common world' as a virtual treasure trove. In *Worldlessness After Heidegger*, Végéső describes the 'loss of world' that now defines our modernity as a 'widely accepted historical narrative' which presents an 'opportunity'. But, as Segovia (2021) argues, this is a 'dystopian acceptance of our worldlessness' also evident among 'new materialists' like Dianne Coole.

⁴⁹ Cited in Gare (1981) p.88

Though in religious terms art exalted one towards the eternal and the divine, it had always been associated with ‘the sensuous world’ and as such was then ultimately not to be trusted by people of religion. For them this world of sensible feelings could have little spiritual importance and was considered a threat to beliefs. ‘Senses’ related then to ‘*objective* experience’, and in those times if people began to trust ‘objective reality’ they would arguably lose the only valuable inner experience they believed to have in communion with their God. When neo-Platonic thought was incorporated into the Christian gospels to reconcile a ‘scientific’ merging of ‘objective reality’ with religious ideals, art was completely banished from the public sphere except as a tool of the Church (the only place where collective ‘public life’ remained). Its *objectivity* was considered dangerous. Art and *the Self* were separated, except for reasons of subjective worship.

The Person, once simultaneously the individual *and* collective, was subsequently transformed into the ‘emotivist self’ (MacIntyre 2007: 31). ‘Emotivism’ is what MacIntyre describes as that modern dominant ‘moral philosophy’ degrading our conception of ethics and blurring the distinction between manipulative and non-manipulative social relationships. Art has, following its ‘perfect sign’ double, also assumed this role (both consciously and non-consciously). Together this essentially created the myth of the ‘private world’. Cults of personality, celebrity, and ultimately ‘morality’, which religious authority could no longer control (but neo-Darwinist social ‘sciences’ could explain via psychologism) emerged as a result. Art became *idealistically* subjectivized in the service of ‘the individual’, through industrialization and markets.

Just as, during the Enlightenment, art was released from any *objective* role to avoid uncontrollable potential exaltation to ideal, eternal, and divine rapture; modernity eventually relegated it to ‘symbolic capital’ by reducing its original realistic, objective, *self-actualizing* value to purely *subjective* ideality. This so-called ‘democratization’ of both art and ‘the self’ departed from the Aristotelian concept of democracy advanced by Cicero and Herder (ie., civic humanism). The dialectic of ‘freedom’ and ‘necessity’ was no longer grounded in ‘normativity’ bound to Nature. Rather, a materialist historical representative (reflective) definition of ‘democracy’. Markets, entirely driven by the global movement of capital are completely ineffectual in resolving dialectical contradictions. Thus, whether art exists in the public or private realm, it can only ever be an ‘external

good', or in Bourdieu's terms 'symbolic' capital.

The dialogical social relations which the normative sciences were once capable of maintaining in all kinds of human activity, have given way to logical positivism driven by a 'morality' founded on emotivism. And this has both been driven by, and shaped, the art of modernity.

The 'metaphysical' problems of observation, interpretation, and causality would deteriorate into a new kind of religiosity subsuming art into the *secular* 'miraculous' and 'mystical'.⁵⁰ Today this commodified mythologizing is not peripheral, but active in all spheres of 'human progress'. Modern art thus helped propel civilization toward a positivistic materialist approach to explaining all experience. And this contributed to legitimizing the *artificial* historicizing of the artwork itself, in turn helping to normalize the unified principle's deterioration and generalization.⁵¹ Art's eventual marriage with techno-science has culminated in a *posthumanist* idealism, now a strong undercurrent in contemporary 'arts' movements and the Humanities. Its *real* relation to science, despite Aristotle making this clear, has often been confused.

At various times in history art has been notionally separated from 'science' (eg., during the *Querelle des Anciens et Moderns*) while at others 'merged'. But *au fond* these can be characterized by two opposing conceptions of humanity's relation to Nature and Freedom (each subject to different orientations toward logic, reason, and the 'productive' imagination). One 'mechanistic' and anti-humanist, deterministically epistemological; and the other humanist, giving a place to ontology and teleology.

The mid-twentieth century 'apothecic' milestone for the artificial merger of art with 'science' is marked by Theodor Adorno as the socialist theatre of Bertolt Brecht. But while cultural theorists like David Roberts (1991: 193) celebrate this for defining 'the status of postmodern art', it might as well be marked as the apothecic normalization of the artificial historicization of the art *object*. Brecht attempted to socialize art as a force for 'truth-telling', but ultimately encouraged the *stylistic* theorization of false dualisms (eg., 'naturalism' vs 'realism'). His poetic

⁵⁰ These tend to be secularized as 'empathy', as a psychological reductionism of our natural connectivity via attraction to 'the general aesthetic'.

⁵¹ Space prevents presenting evidence for this in every artform; see Jauss and Bensinger (1970-71) for detailed and representative examination of this phenomenon in literature. Also: Polok (1973), McGilchrist (2010).

form of ‘epic narrative’ is necessarily associated with certain inevitable reductionisms, revealing his ‘method’ was captive of Hegel’s ‘standpoint of reflection’. For example, Brecht’s theatrical ‘principle of historicisation’ (*grundgestus*) – based on observation – was the instrumental ‘aesthetic’ required of an actor. But this, and associated ‘alienation’ devices, lent little to any realistic merger of Truth and Beauty because this ‘principle’ (originating in Kant’s ‘distanziation’) is founded on scientific fallacy.

The fundamental confusion between observation and interpretation in Brecht’s method unsurprisingly went unnoticed. Our inherited modern epistemology and hermeneutics of art had by now become one of ‘effect and affect’ rather than meaning. Originating in logical empiricism and the language of ‘observation’ which became dominant in both science and art, this reduced art to an ‘experientialist’ account of truth. But the nature of experience is that it cannot be reduced to observation; observations are not simply experiences, because an observation is not something that we do but something which is made (Gare 1981: 194). It always involves an active subject. And, unless accumulated and reasoned through, can hardly be called science.

As noted, problems of perception arise when, in attempting to separate being from becoming, feeling and thinking too are separated, and ‘positive counting’ surfaces in how we interpret our experienced or reasoned reality of any Whole (Hobbes 1999: 26).⁵² Brecht’s theatre was therefore no progress-defining ‘break with tradition’, as Adorno claims. Myths about art’s ‘truthless’, ‘dissembling’ character, and complete unrelatedness to science, by such associations, only grew stronger. And, contrary to Roberts’ characterization of postmodern ‘art’ as a ‘radical path to enlightenment’, what we witness instead is the residue of the *Moderate Enlightenment*. The *New Historicism* of cultural materialists plundering a bottomless quarry of extractable ‘external goods’; renewably canonized in a circular self-justifying illusion of artistic progress.

Art’s identity by the late twentieth century, reduced to a generalized idea without any ontological value, was left to the dissections of ‘critical theorists’. In this state it became observed as conforming to conceptual explanations. Only by

⁵² ‘When man reasoneth, he does nothing else but conceive a sum total... These operations are not incident to numbers only, but to all manner of things that can be added together, and taken one out of another.’

being conceptualized could art then be seen as ‘really’ art – as something concrete. But this traces back to Hobbes’ (1999: 15) belief that human beings and their minds were entirely material and hence art could only be seen in material terms.⁵³

Art’s ultimate transformation into a ‘non-fungable’ virtual asset in our contemporary mythology was sealed by the neoliberal embrace of market ideology. The core assumptions of classical economics, says Gare (2006: 21) ‘...that humans are nothing but complex machines moved by appetites and aversions, that life is nothing but a struggle for survival and sensuous gratification, and that progress occurs through the struggle for survival, is part of the dominant world-view which has been inculcated into generations’. The only way humanity can avoid the all-consuming effects of this mechanical view of life, and the ‘symbolic idealism’ it encourages, is to favour the more meaningful value of ‘truth coherence’ in the actualizing metamorphosis of reality offered by metaphor over the *unreal* value of symbolism.

Ricoeur’s prescription for ‘proper metaphor’, however, is all but absent in most contemporary artistic inquiry. Genuine ‘worlding’ has been replaced by sensationalism and experientialism, via narrowed focus on the effects/affects of sensuous gestalts.⁵⁴ As we will see in the next section, the failure of ‘aesthetics as theory’, abetted by the fragmenting historicizations it thrived on, has only led to further elevating ‘worldlessness’ as the conceptual posthumanist ideal. Neo-Darwinism, lacking the benefit of Peirce’s evolutionary semiosis, converts ‘semiotic freedom’ in Nature to ‘everything is permissible’ in human nature. This, however, is the Nietzschean definition of nihilism.

A unified, naturalized, conception of art is humanity’s manifest proclamation of the fact that ethics is *driven* by aesthetics. Reviving this follows in the tradition of the Radical Enlightenment, and it remains our only possible way of restoring a meaningful Aesthetics capable of *realizing* this relation in society; enabling it to influence the human *telos* for our optimum benefit. Why *only* through Art can this relation be manifest, and habituated *morally*, will be argued further in §4.

⁵³ ‘All fancies are motions within us...’.

⁵⁴ See McGilchrist (2010); Dalrymple (2005). Even experts like Lakoff and Johnson (eg., in their famous *Metaphors We Live By*, 1980) occasionally mistake metaphor for symbol or allegory.

Having proposed an alternative paradigm for understanding art, and above discussed why the historicization of Art and 'the Person' severed the link between ethics and aesthetics, it is now necessary to show why aesthetics as theory is counterfeit, and why realigning art's fundamental purpose with 'aesthetics as normative science' is necessary.

3. THE END OF AESTHETICS AS THEORY

Many theorists have, since Hegel, tried to construct justifications for the anti-humanist and ultimately post-humanist direction of art's 'inevitable' trajectory in modernism. Roberts (1991), for instance, liberally misinterprets Hegel's supposedly unlamenting death knell on art as heroic prediction, while (in the mode of the logical positivists) associating it with the 'liberation' of subjectivity. However, *Art as principle* and the objectivity afforded by it, did not die. Hegel merely recognized the decay of an ancient conception that cannot be artificially tied to history, being overtaken by one that can.

Depicting contemporary modernity as a period of 'reintegration of art and life, the aestheticization of mass culture, and the self-negation of authentic art', as does Roberts, reflects the kind of historicist 'rationalism' symbolic idealism emboldens. What was born out of the *principle* of art's supposed ashes was a phoenix: permanent revolution of the familiar subjective world consecrated as 'the aesthetic'. Theoretical aesthetics is a paradigm for accommodating all forms, styles, and arbitrary judgements of value, without Reason. An apt metaphor for postmodern 'art', which deconstructive postmodernists and posthumanists would have us believe is just another stage in our heroic evolution out of the ashes of past theories into a new era of 'enlightenment'.

Art 'after philosophy' is a familiar refrain from constructivists searching desperately for anything at all to pin artistic values on.⁵⁵ But where has this led? Only to consolidating the 'artist as hero' and associated myths (which began in the Renaissance). Arthur Danto's suggestion, for instance, in the early nineteen-

⁵⁵ See Gerald Bruns, University of Notre Dame (<http://ndpr.nd.edu/news/24646-art-and-aesthetics-after-adorno/>) Review of: Jay M. Bernstein et al. *Art and Aesthetics After Adorno*, Jay M. Bernstein, Claudia Brodsky, Anthony J. Cascardi, Thierry de Duve, Aleš Erjavec, Robert Kaufman, and Fred Rush, University of California Press, 2010, 299pp., ISBN 9780982329429. Bruns' describes this compilation as a selection of writers 'fed up with Adorno', noting its title recalls conceptual artist Joseph Kosuth's essay *Art After Philosophy* celebrating 'the end of philosophy and the beginning of art'.

sixties that to argue Andy Warhol's *Brillo Box* is art 'one must have mastered a good deal of artistic theory as well as a considerable amount of the history of recent New York painting', reflects the degeneration of art criticism which Gerald Bruns more recently tries to grapple with.⁵⁶ 'Perhaps,' says Bruns sanguinely, 'what we need, after Adorno, is a theory of nomad aesthetics, or a variable way of thinking about art that (like art itself) can pull up stakes as the ground shifts or the weather changes.'⁵⁷

Australian critic Robert Hughes' documentary, *The Mona Lisa Curse*, also traces the sharp decline in twentieth-century art back to this period when as he says '[f]or the first time, people queued round the block "not to look at (the Mona Lisa), but to say that they'd seen it." Meaning within the artwork became secondary to it as spectacle.'⁵⁸ Hughes lambasts some of the highest earning artists in history (eg., Damien Hirst) sacrificing their integrity for purely commercial ends, but he was condemned by some for challenging embedded assumptions. Germaine Greer attacked his view 'that art should have some substance and meaning ("Hughes still believes that great art can be guaranteed to survive the ravages of time, because of its intrinsic merit. Hirst knows better")', exemplifying the widespread deep level of cynicism now prevailing in the modern mythology of art, particularly among neoliberals. As Greer adds glibly, 'Bob dear, the Sotheby's auction was the work', little wonder many have given up trying to fathom whether it is the critic, the artwork, or the artist lacking a moral compass.

What is really in question here is the nature of 'virtues', and how these relate to the life of a 'serious person' (as Aristotle defined them). Two things should be apparent by now. Firstly, the decline in art began much further back than the nineteen-sixties, due to such disorientation – though clearly accelerated during its 'cultural and creative' industrialization since. And secondly, decay in valuing results from being unable to distinguish means and ends. Besides reducing the judgement of art to a game of monopoly, it is moreover when the work of 'a

⁵⁶ Bruns depicts the degeneration of art criticism, citing Arthur Danto's essay *The Artworld* (1964) in the above compilation.

⁵⁷ Bruns, G. *Review of Art and Aesthetics After Adorno*, p. 3-4

⁵⁸ See "Robert Hughes: A refreshingly frank comment on the art market" by Paul Bond (14/10/2008): <https://www.wsws.org/en/articles/2008/10/hugh-014.html>, and also <https://www.marxist.com/the-mona-lisa-curse.htm> (accessed 8/10/2021).

serious person' (examined below) is reduced to 'play' that should alert us to the confusion between ethics and morals.⁵⁹ Neither play nor relaxation are 'ends'. And even though these activities may be both useful and pleasurable, it is delusional to think their end is Happiness - which itself *is* an end but one that can only be fully achieved through 'activities in accord with virtue'.

Take just one example. While relentlessly driven by indomitable characters, today's 'megabuck' video-gaming industry - which notoriously merges the general aesthetic with obsessive play, claiming often to be art (instead of, *at best*, cultural artefact), while clearly mainly in pursuit of 'the money-making life' - is not an example of a 'serious life'. There are countless others in modernity falsely awarded the status of genuinely serious pursuits of 'the good'. Where does failure to challenge the ethics or morals of our acquiescence to this originate, if not in aesthetic judgement?

Theoretical aesthetics, consecrating purely subjectivist imaginaries while at the same time avoiding the impossible task of executing science's goal of accurate prediction, encourages an illusion that all creativity has equivalent value. By simply changing the meaning of the terms of description, modifying these and their associations, inventing new categories to describe material objects and technological change, our attention is diverted from any deterioration in artistic inquiry. And hence confusion arises between priorities of attendance to the artwork's 'vehicle of appearances' (ideal 'materiality') compared with its real '*immaterial*' Object (*Art as principle / the Person*).

When collective reason consecrates, via our modern aesthetic habitus, the predictable, self-energizing, repetitive renewal of what we observe in the 'general aesthetic' as art, then any object can become 'art'.⁶⁰ Couple this with neo-Darwinian evolutionary theory, incapable of revealing its perfect-sign relation to the Person, and the tendency for our consent to be continually re-manufactured by a readily subjectivized, ever-fragmenting 'developmental' paradigm becomes irresistible. Art's apparent but *false* autonomy then reinforces an already

⁵⁹ For precedent, we need look no further than Rome's or Athens' decline, and the reduction of comedic and tragic drama to mass spectacle and games of cruelty.

⁶⁰ For instance, a banana duct taped to gallery wall: <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/12/08/arts/design/banana-removed-art-basel.html> (accessed: February 12, 2022). This banana sold as art three times, with certification, for a total of \$390,000.

dominant preoccupation with ‘the familiar’ at the expense of the real unified principle of Art. And the idea that ‘everything is art’ becomes ‘reality’.

Consequently, lower values in Scheler’s hierarchy – like ‘human values’ (also called ‘biological’ or ‘vital’ values), descending toward basic use-values – become more prominent in the subject-object interface. Thus, appetites and aversions become the dominant motivating habitual intentionalities driving artistic inquiry. Not the highest values related to ‘the Person’: the ‘Spiritual’ and ‘Holy.’⁶¹ This reduces any *end* of such enquiries to the realm of ‘product’ and utility. The ‘sensible realm’ of fixity, fact, predictability, materiality – in a word: *artefact*. This, of course, reinforces the cultural overdetermination of *the Self*, whose reflection in such mythologizing runs parallel.

Practices, traditions, and institutions begin to reflect this new ‘perfect sign’ relation, and this is translated into the key Hegelian dialectics governing social cohesion: recognition, representation, and labour. The changed relation between artist and patron during the Renaissance morphed into a ‘commodification’ of artistic practice during the Enlightenment. Art was, as MacIntyre (2007: 227) says, ‘expelled from the realm of practices with goods internal to themselves’. And today the complete merger of art appreciation with consumption in the West, and propaganda in the East, (though barely distinguishable), coincides with the disappearance of the public sphere, internalized as it now is in the individual.

The transference of political power from a solidarity of collective interests to power elites in a market driven, industrially manufactured ‘reality’, has hence caused intellectual intuition of ethics to become sublated habitually. But our language of morality remains tied to the misleading character of past morality, according to MacIntyre (2007), producing stock characters that still populate our social narratives – creating ‘disagreement’.⁶² This reinforces beliefs that any ‘common purpose’ appears both morally unintelligible and impossible to achieve. It is unsurprising, therefore, to find in any contemporary literature, cinema, or other form of artistic expression, the modern epic central figure of the Nietzschean *Übermensch* as the only kind of heroic image of man. The man ‘who transcends, finds his own good nowhere in the social world to date, but only in

⁶¹ These are not just theological terms; the etymology of ‘holy’ is Whole.

⁶² As MacIntyre points out ‘it is partly because (these characters and their work) provide focal points for disagreement that they are able to perform their defining task’ providing emotivist ‘*moral definitions*’.

that in himself which dictates his own new law and his own new table of the virtues' (MacIntyre 2007: 257). With much of the content of art since the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries shaped in the service of the psychology of 'that newly invented social instrument, the individual', art became either an expression of our natural passions or of the disposition to curb their destructive effects (MacIntyre 2007: 228).

As this new nexus of the individual-collective will was now irrevocably bound by the ego, Kant's doctrine of 'the agreeable' - adopted by the 'social sciences', underwritten by theoretical aesthetics – transformed art into a modern pursuit of its emotivist double. But the fundamental conceit MacIntyre finds in 'social sciences' is not just, as Rudolph Arnheim too suggests, that through them 'personality' triumphs over any genuine inquiry into 'the person'. It is also that they underwrite a false conception of prediction applicable to the human condition. Then, via subsequently derived law-like generalisations, these provide the overwhelming *material* for artistic expression of 'scientific' or 'moral' falsehoods. They eventually undergird the *consecrated* 'material' of art, for generations shaping what kinds of propositions or 'characters' populate the arts field and entire cultural habitus.⁶³

Kant's modification of aesthetics, which it is now necessary to examine, was a milestone in the above outlined transformation of Art's purpose in the modern mythology. The demise of 'aesthetics as theory' is sourced here too, in its own origins. Importantly, Kant does not regard aesthetic judgement, which he places on a par with cognitive and moral judgements, as exclusively *about art*. It is, rather, most emphatically about nature - 'about beauty in natural objects, as well as ...our experience of the sublime' (Hammermeister 2002: 21).⁶⁴ Thus seminally beholden to Plato's ideal of perfection, elevating the

⁶³ Clearly it is not beliefs held by most people – eg., those unfamiliar with aesthetic theory - becoming authoritative, which produces widespread dominance. Rather it is those beliefs held by people socially recognized as 'the ultimate arbiters in disputes about beliefs' whose views consequently permeate the society's most powerful institutions (Gare 1981: 81). Thus, if most opinion leaders on art aren't suggesting it has lost its way, is there any reason to think it has? Richard Dawkins' invention of 'memes' offers a 'genetic' model for the cultural proliferation and consolidation of ideas in society, but this is widely discredited due to the limitation of genetics to alone explain evolutionary activity. In fact, 'swarming', which occurs in nature, explains this phenomenon far better.

⁶⁴ As Hammermeister characterizes him, in marked contrast to Schelling, 'Kant is probably the one thinker who attributes the least significance to the work of art'.

general aesthetic to the detriment of art. Its subsequent manipulation in what MacIntyre calls the fragmenting narrative of ‘a whole life’ of the self becomes more apparent with this hindsight.

Firstly, though dismissed by Kant’s subsequent complete separation of art from cognition, Baumgarten’s establishment of aesthetics as a theory of ‘sensual cognition’ withstood scholastic resistance.⁶⁵ This resulted with the end of ‘rationalist’ metaphysics, leaving ‘aesthetic philosophy’ as by-product (Hammermeister 2002: xii). The original Greek *aisthetikos*, meaning ‘of or for perception by the senses’, became popularized in English translations of Kant. And ‘aesthetics’ today remains defined as ‘science which treats of the conditions of sensuous perception’. Which stands in sharp contrast to Peirce’s ‘science of admiring’, *not* subject to perception at all, but *knowing*.

It is worth noting some important differences with Schelling’s dialectical ontology, which were subsequently overshadowed as this definition became dominant through Hegelianism. Kant and Hegel separate Beauty and Truth; Schelling merges them. Kant’s ‘sublime’ is set in the supranatural and suprasensuous, de-ontologizing and de-naturing the concept of ‘genius’; Schelling’s dialectics places ‘sublimity’ *within* Nature (and hence *human* nature). Following Kant, Hegel’s ‘Spirit’ is grounded in ‘the historical’, Schelling’s in natural semiosis.

Schelling’s ‘*cosmological*’ linking of Art to Nature and History (*productively* rather than *reflectively*) did not take hold given the forces subsequently shaping modern aesthetics. Kant’s aesthetic legacy, through Hegel, prevailed via even those philosophers like Heidegger who, though sympathetic to Schelling, cast aside

⁶⁵ Baumgarten’s initiative was a reaction to Leibniz granting a place to rationality in both ‘obscure’ and ‘clear’ cognitions. Leibniz was reacting against the Platonic devaluation of the objects of the senses cast as ‘impoverishing reality’. Baumgarten’s best intentions to elevate art, albeit to a science of sensibility, drove him instead to divide up cognitions such that art was assigned as ‘confused cognition’. This was a poor description of what he was really attempting to explain as ‘obscure’ prehension. ‘Aesthetic truth’ was subsequently to continue to duel with truth as correspondence of mind and reality, right up to contemporary modernity when the quest for truth through art has been outsourced to cultural theory. While some of Baumgarten’s ideas taken on their own merit are valid, insightful, and revivable, his original major mistake as Hammermeister says was trying to resolve them in a philosophical framework which assumed art to be reducible to theory – especially a theory of divided cognitions. And this has since reverberated through the ages. Mendelssohn, who followed shortly after, made the same mistake, only this time attributing to pleasure what Baumgarten attributed to cognition.

metaphysics and any hope for philosophy to understand art.⁶⁶ The gaping wounds left in the *normative* science of aesthetics festered for centuries as the new meaning became consecrated in practice. By briefly comparing Kant and Schelling's aesthetics and returning to Aristotle, we can see why theoretical aesthetics *had* to fail. This is because, somewhat ironically, it is fundamentally *unscientific*, relying on deception. And completely divorced from ethics.

While attempting to accurately describe the character of aesthetics in our *perception*, Kant completely ignores the more fundamental question of *judgement* behind Aristotle's insistence that Prudence connects *all* the virtues. Kant never answers the '*ontological question*', which Schelling's whole system is founded on (i.e., 'art as principle'). Schelling's dialectics are by contrast firmly grounded in the self-actualising aesthetic normativity of Aristotelian teleology and *virtue ethics*, inuring art with 'final cause'. Merging Beauty and Truth for instance, contrary to Kant and Hegel's insistence they remain unconnected, binds Art's purpose, judgement, and orientation toward Reason. How?

Finding the meaningful relation between beauty and truth requires judgement. For Aristotle, judgement requires prudence, which is cultivated; and therefore, *how* we make such deliberations is key (because this becomes *morally* habituated). Beauty is certainly the fundamental *Object* of Art, but *only* beauty *integrally related to truth* (i.e., dialectically). Pleasure likewise is the fundamental *Purpose* of Art (as of life), but again only *ultimate* Pleasure in pursuit of the *virtues* (the highest being *Contemplation*). A serious life - not play (or 'eudaimonia' as it was recast post Kant, pursuing *sensuous* pleasures) - is therefore at the heart of the Aristotelian definition and purpose of Art.⁶⁷

Understanding how Reason is obtained relative to artistic *meaning* productivity, and the centrality of Prudence to this, requires detailed analysis of Aristotle's *Ethics* - which must be summarized here to arrive at my argument for the scientific and ethical failure of aesthetics as theory. A more robust comparison reveals the fundamental question is one of means and ends relative

⁶⁶ Note, for instance, Heidegger's questionable defence of abstract art described by Robert Pippin (cited in Torsen 2014: 301-302). This indeed echoes common poststructuralist defences of the failures of modernism as merely 'evasions' and temporary regressions, rather than a neo-Kantian capitulation or a regression of culture (301n32).

⁶⁷ Though Peirce regards 'play' as essential to normative aesthetics, close examination confirms his view aligns with Aristotle's precise definition of it.

to virtues. Aristotle's normative aesthetics defines Art as having a purpose *other* than the means of its own making (ie., ontological); while Kant's modification left open inconsistencies which inevitably eventually led to the complete opposite (ie., utilitarian). The former 'paradigm' generates meaning-value, the latter theoretical abstraction.

To begin with, Reason is obtained from *both* Aristotle's divisions of the 'rational' *and* 'nonrational' soul. The 'rational' part's excellence or merit comes 'of thinking' or contemplative virtue (ethics), and the 'nonrational' part's lies in the virtue of 'character' (morals) (Aristotle 2011: 282). Secondly, in an epoch when culturally determined objects (artefacts) were easily distinguished from the self-actualizing purpose of Art, the same word was used for both: *tékhnē*. Anyone not paying attention to how Aristotle distributes Prudence in applying the words *poiēsis* (making) and *praxis* (action) in relation to *tékhnē*, may thus easily confuse the two.⁶⁸

Essentially, Art produces that kind of contemplation *more* associated with the 'making' (*poiēsis*) of things than with action (*praxis*). That is, 'Mind-productivity' (both rational *and* irrational) that a unified principle of Art *alone* admits in contemplation of the indifferences between necessities *and* freedoms. (Note 'freedoms' = *possibilities* - since Art 'admits of things being otherwise'). Therefore *this* 'Art', says Aristotle, 'is bound up with making that is accompanied by *true reason*' (emphasis added). It belongs to the realm of productivity that *does not* admit of 'artefact', because it has an end *other than its own activity* (ie., the self-actualizing merger of Truth and Beauty in search of higher meaning).

On the other hand, artefact - associated *only* with action (*praxis*) - requires that Prudence *not* involved in making (*poiēsis*). Therefore, *tékhnē* ('the arts' as a generality, or 'technologies of action') only constructs *artefacts*, whose 'ends' *are bound to means*. While Art proper has a purpose whose end is *not* the means (actions) of its making.

This distinguishes Art from artefact, and what different prudence is required in each. Artists are thus discernible from artisans, and Design or Craft from Art

⁶⁸ For Aristotle's logic throughout the following summary, see Book 6, Chapter 4.

proper.⁶⁹ The ‘performative’ aspect of prudence, or the ‘action’ part of artistic productivity, is not in conflict with the ‘making’ part – that which both art and craft *share* in. What separates them is *purpose*.

What then distinguishes Art as a science? Since Art *also* is *partly* to do with action (though distinguished *as poiesis*), it must *also* be understood as inquiry about things that ‘do *not* admit of being otherwise’. That is, ‘*necessity*’. Hence – since science is to do with ‘precision and self-sufficiency’ (of determination) – then Art too must be a science. But, specifically now, a *normative* science; due to *also* possessing that higher *binding* virtue, Prudence, as arbiter of *merit*.⁷⁰ This both distinguishes Art *as* science, and *from* the empirical determinism of any *experimental* science (derived from theoretical physics, chemistry, or biology).

Aesthetics, understood as *science*, therefore possesses *both* those ‘rational’ and ‘irrational’ qualities with respect to meaning and valuing which can produce ‘ethical *intentionality*’. These qualities are capable of moderating Reason, between *necessities* and *freedoms* (eg., form/non-form, or *any* apparent dualisms or paradoxes) – but importantly – ‘*without resort to symbolic mediation*’ (Schelling 1989). *That* resort, in aesthetics according to Schelling or in ethics according to Scheler, rests in the realm of the ‘artefact’ and ‘moralizing’ respectively, because *such* mediation *serves a lower order utility*.⁷¹

Neither is Art, however, the same sort of science as *theoretical* science, because it deals in *possibility* not probability. It demands greater deliberation from an *active* subject (the artist/aesthete). In its ‘productivity’, how something will turn out (in the making) and what exactly that something is (in its admiring) remains indeterminate for the most part – more so the greater the artwork. It requires an active subject to *complete* it – hence the key relation to the Person and prudence.

This uncertainty, however, inherent in Art’s *defining propositional* role, is what

⁶⁹ It is important to note these distinctions, in Aristotle’s time, were habituated – that is, everyone tacitly understood them; they did not need to be explained. This suggests why in the *Ethics* they appear as merely cursory accounts in support of the main argument and are easily overlooked.

⁷⁰ ‘For both carpenter and geometer seek out the right angle but in different ways: the former seeks it insofar as is appropriate to his work; the latter seeks out what it is or what sort of a thing it is, for he is one who contemplates the truth.’ (Aristotle’s *Ethics*, 8:29-32)

⁷¹ In other words, as noted, morality is chosen, and if habituated from ethical deliberation upon ‘*the real*’, becomes a characteristic mode of *preferring*. But ‘moralizing’ is an *act of choosing* which, if it involves the symbolic (and hence utility), is a means of *idealising* prone to deception.

in modernity – in the absence of Prudence - gave rise to an array of ‘experts’ to provide ‘authoritative’ deliberation over matters of ‘taste’, often but not always governed by ‘the many’. And this quickly replaced any real concern for *meaning-value*. Unable to distinguish art from artefact, as Aristotle did, ‘aesthetics as theory’ rose to fill the role of augmenting our *natural* subjectivity with theoretical authority. Since such ‘authority’ relies entirely upon Kant’s ‘agreeableness’ (ie., false ‘lawmaking’ based on *tastes*), any deliberation about ‘ends’ is naturally left to the subjectivity of ‘the many’. The artist is also, by and large, excused from deliberating much about ends; instead encouraged to shape accidentals and fragments, guided by ‘forms’ in the character of ‘genres’, ‘styles’, and technologies of action known to produce familiar gestalts; cumulatively influenced by tastes and fashions – of ‘the many’.

The illusion of an artist’s *real* autonomy evaporates. Likewise, an aesthete’s prudence and judgements too become governed by these factors. Both become knowingly or unknowingly enslaved to a field of production bound by constructs governed by a market ideology locked in the present. Each is compelled to the act of *choosing*, mostly between means, rather than *deliberating* upon ends, as Aristotle claims a ‘serious person’ does. To add insult to injury, moreover, the object categories of *choice* on the one hand and *deliberation* on the other have been falsely assimilated in the modern mythology of art. (Their complete merger “authoritatively” underwritten by theoretical aesthetic). This is due to the severance of the essential link between aesthetics, ethics, and logic in judgement.

To explain, theorizing always favours *choice* in judgement, even though it is ruled by *prefelt* deliberation (Scheler 1973). Choosing is an act of *willing*, a pre-conditioned intention. Preferring on the other hand is *a priori* an intuitive act *if* it is directed *between* values themselves (not between ‘goods’). Ethics are thus *preferred*, via intellectual intuition. Morals are *chosen*. If someone ‘prefers’ an experience in the ‘world of goods’ they are willfully ‘choosing’, and not ‘preferring’ (preferring being of higher value than choosing).

This, as Scheler (1973: 88) explains, following Aristotle, is how deception arises. Any modern predilection for ‘anti-art’ (or, more generally, the general aesthetic mistaken for art) essentially constitutes a ‘deception of preferring’. Because this is based on the ‘world of goods’, not values. But this has been variously consecrated by structuralist and poststructuralist aesthetic theorists as

‘tastes’ (ie., value deceptions). Furthermore, this deception is exacerbated when we choose morals predicated on these, because both judgements become habituated together (ie., by virtue of choice and deliberation being assimilated).

The excellence or merit which comes ‘*of thinking*’ or contemplative virtue (ethics), has here been displaced by the tendency to moralize a character deceptively chosen from what Aristotle deemed ‘external goods’.

The aesthetic language Kant constructed (‘the agreeable’, ‘adherent’ and ‘free’ beauty, etc.) could only attend to the ‘material’, since the ‘immaterial’ was not seen as accessible. Thereafter, art could only be made sense of as an object in the world of *external* goods (and of ‘positive counting’ – that is, valued *positivistically*). Therefore, subjectivity *had* to become dominant, the individual’s private world exalted, and reputations founded on ‘agreement/disagreement’ surrounding ‘the familiar’ (ie., ‘tastes’) the only character that could be developed/marketed. There was no way of ‘scientifically’ dealing with the alternative afforded by a *normative* aesthetics.

In the absence of any well-reasoned, *normative*, assessment of ethics, moralizing becomes the only means to address *disagreement*. Which is now enhanced by the *very* modern character of artists/artworks, whose role and value is increasingly seen as providing *emotivist* ‘moral definitions’ rather than pursuing Reason and genuine Virtues. A false set of virtues was needed.

Thus, founded on logical positivism, modern aesthetics underwrites an arts business which Bourdieu (1993: 78) claims is simply ‘the site of the struggles for the monopoly of the power to consecrate, in which the value of works of art and belief in that value are continuously generated’. In the *materialist* value vacuity of the market, our acceptance of this vagrant status of art has become normalized. An ‘artist’ can sell his ‘artwork’ for a very high price at Sotheby’s, have it shredded in front of the buyers, and watch its price almost double.⁷² Art, now degraded to a concept or slogan, mocks questions of artistic judgement and merit; in turn devaluing arts institutions, traditions, and practices. And therefore, the whole cultural habitus. The ‘ethics’ of art becomes meaningless, and moralizing about it more so.

⁷² See: <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/smart-news/watch-14-million-banksy-painting-shred-itself-soon-it-sold-180970486/> (accessed February 6, 2022).

In summary, aesthetics as theory fails because it is unscientific; but more fundamentally because it cannot assess meaning-value. It relies entirely on assessments of values of experience. Such theories have always had to engage in the erroneous process of reducing *value*-experiences to values *of* experience and then trace them back to measures, norms, and principles. These are then codified as rules that could be logically inferred as ‘aesthetic values’. This consists of ‘the erroneous presuppositions that lead to the positions of those scholars who would find the origin of ethical values in ...a law of assessment according to certain “ideas” or “norms”’ (Scheler 1973: 197). That is, fabricated norms: ‘*formalisms*’ (for Art); and ‘*morals*’ (for the Self).

Neither the self nor art are afforded any genuine autonomy here. Though the illusion of the complete opposite is produced. The *arbitrary* in the ‘art’ of modernity thus easily becomes consecrated social ‘fact’, then ‘value’. As easily as any emotivist proposition leads to a deceptively false ‘morality’.

4. CONCLUSION: TOWARDS AN AESTHETICS OF MEANING

The opposite of arbitrariness is not predictability, but purpose. The ‘human sciences’, to gain scientific status, were forced to treat intentions, purposes, and reasons for action as detached from notions of good or virtue. Reviving Aristotelian virtue ethics, arguably our only way of avoiding further descent into nihilism, requires changing our collective interpretative orientation from *fact* to *value* (MacIntyre 1973). From an *exclusive* focus on ‘external goods’ to one more oriented toward ‘internal goods’. And because only a *normative* aesthetics governs ethics, according to *genuine* virtues, returning to this definition is the only option. Therefore, only reconceiving Art as a ‘research program’ in Complexity Science (as *Wissenschaft*), and placing it at the centre of the Humanities, can hope to stem both its eventual disappearance (except in museums/private collections) and the continuing dehumanizing fragmentation of *the Self* in modernity.

The most daunting challenge, however, is facing the reality that this is the only possible route to repairing the modern disjuncture between ethics and morals, to restore meaning.

Symbolic idealism, though manifest differently in various societies, has caused the collapse of every human civilization – by replacing reality with some form of ‘hyper-coherence’ (hubristic worship/ reification/ worldlessness) causing over-

extension (Tainter 1988: 152-178).⁷³ This way of mythologizing, which has accompanied the decline in art and moral philosophy, adheres to an essentially utilitarian, mechanistic, misconception of life, which is ultimately anti-humanist. And it contributes significantly to the modern ‘crisis in thinking’ (Gare 2018). As Coffman and Mikulecky write, ‘civilized humanity, by way of its scientifically informed industrial economy cum existential nihilism cum retreat into fantasy, is destroying the biosphere – and hence itself.’⁷⁴

The Western world model of representative democracy discourages genuine political community, just like totalitarian states. Modern populism can only be understood as a *political* phenomenon ultimately manipulated to serve elites (MacIntyre 2007: 156). *Anti-art* elites included. In each system, individualism is pitted against collectivism; producing illusory progress and freedom of the whole, and satisfaction and autonomy of the individual, as if they were identical constructs. Similarly, art and culture are generalized as one, by creating a proxy location for expressing their common economic interests via unconstrained growth.⁷⁵

To put this phenomenologically in Schelling’s terms: in western ‘modern epic’ narratives freedom mostly rules over necessity; while in totalitarian countries, propagandist ‘art’ produces the same narrative symbolic idealism, but with necessity ruling over freedom.⁷⁶ Today’s *globalized* mythology thus marks Art (or rather *anti-art*) as a key driver for securing the self-destruction of humanity. Having lost its original purpose and power to influence this course, art has been reduced to an ‘external good’ manifesting variously as a ‘luxury’ item *or* ‘subversive’ means to serve *either* neoconservative *or* neoliberal will-to-power

⁷³ Not solely western civilizations, note Mayan collapse.

⁷⁴ Cited in Gare (2018: 142).

⁷⁵ See <https://www.google.com/amp/s/amp.abc.net.au/article/13220228>, accessed March 10, 2021. Any ‘merchandise’ at all is now billed by producers in these ‘digital art’ industries as art. Stagnation of imagination in ‘Cultural and Creative Industries’ is arguably causing a crisis of *over*-production. The imperative for ‘permanent revolution’ is now an economic as well as boredom-induced one.

⁷⁶ ‘Totalising’ humanity remains a posthumanist techno-scientific fantasy because we have not developed effective political systems. One system uses enforced heightened chaos, the other enforced order, to achieve mythological normalization. Both politicize and instrumentalize art, for propagandist purposes too. Neither holds the totality as an ideal (only a resource) because a whole only gains *integrity* from its relation to the parts *in whose value* the integral value of the whole resides. Thus, globally, art is rendered impotent to self-actualize any *genuine* totality, only a purely symbolic idealist one.

ideals. Its industrialization fuels economic growth irrespectively, hence its meaning-value has become irrelevant except for efficiently reinforcing ‘the familiar’ positivistic ideals. Its fundamental ‘coinciding opposites’ – the real/ideal of necessity/freedom – that once served to mediate a meaningful future, are now replaced by material, utilitarian, counterutopian images of ‘reality’ and ‘progress’. Any claim art once had to guide our normativity or objectivity has been completely undermined.

One might well ask: Are there vested interests in not elevating art to the status of an ‘*internal* good’, for humanity’s *real* benefit? Its original conception, were it realizable, might present a threat to ‘progress’ defined in terms described above (not unlike the threat it posed to Christianity long ago). Merely suggesting art could be reconceived in modernity according to ‘moral virtues’ simply draws ridicule, having been written off long ago as antithetical. But could it be that (both neoliberal and neoconservative) moralizing of art is tacitly encouraged to assuage buried doubts about our/art’s *real* autonomy?

In any case, the human cost of *de-futurizing* art goes unheeded. Continuing decline of art’s status in the Humanities and narrowing depth in artistic inquiry, focused almost entirely on markets of one form or another, serves only ‘a trade in reputations’ rather than serious traditions of thought (Bourdieu 1993). The illusory antidote for this privation, and poor substitute for an expanding individual/collective imagination which art had been better employed to develop in some past epochs, comes in the form of mass-produced material diversity of, predominantly, cultural artefact and novelty. Meanwhile, stagnation in the dialectical relations between our social, political, and philosophical imaginaries pushes us further toward a techno-science driven, posthuman “utopia” (in reality, worldlessness). The ‘modern epic’ narrative refurbishes our subjectivities reflectively in novel re-creations; whereas ‘ancient epic’ narratives sought Reason reflexively, driven by final causes. The former is self-legitimizing, the latter was self-actualizing. What kind of ‘idealism’ reduces ‘the Person’ to a self-interested, emotivist self; and makes arbitrariness a ‘reasonable ideal’ to pursue? Ultimately, only one capable of producing counter-utopian propositions. Because a genuinely utopian proposition and ideal is one that makes *purpose* - ends, not means - the object.

Modern aesthetics has proven useless because it must adhere to the precepts

of deficient ideals and propositions. As Matthew Segall (2012: 9) argues, when sense-bound conceptuality becomes an end in itself, it becomes an ‘intellectual sickness’ in which imagination can only contemplate the lifeless, ‘merely ideal concepts of the reflective understanding’. Only an *aesthetics of meaning*, that can determine at least the *directionality* of meaning-value is now of any real use. The former paradigm is steeped in Kant’s *transcendental* conception of imagination which turned propositions into ‘discontinuous antinomies – paradoxes’ incapable of producing understanding. Unless we want disagreements and paradoxes to continue to rule our world, we need to adopt a *cosmological* mythology which ‘identifies the speculative mode of imagination with reason’. The intersection between ethics and aesthetics will appear paradoxical until we do.

Scheler, Peirce, and Schelling together offer a way out of this *cul de sac*. The deceptions regarding *Freedom* and *Necessity* which modern aesthetics’ is fuelled by, are corrected in Schelling’s system of meaning productivity, Peirce’s semiotic realism, and Scheler’s hierarchy of values. With the former manufactured orientation prevailing today over the latter ontological one, Reason has been separated completely from the emotions. Any hope of restoring balance lies in naturalizing art. But how can this be done? I suggest as follows:

- I. First, by restoring a unified principle of art (returning to a normative aesthetics).

This begins with being able to recognise ethical intentionality in the artwork. As Scheler argues, ‘the person’ (and ‘act-being’) are bearers of ethical value and in any artwork where ethical values occur, these must be ‘given’ as real even though they are contained within a ‘vehicle of appearances’. If not, there is no value-meaning as such. But bearers of *ethical* values can never be thought of as ‘objects’ because ‘as soon as we tend to “objectify” a human being in any way, the bearer of moral values disappears *of necessity*’ (Scheler 1973: 86). The *purpose* of Art (‘as principle’), therefore, is to offer us a way to ‘objectify’ these bearers via the subject-object interface in artworks. But we can only distinguish their *ethical* value by how this occurs as ‘real’. That is, as *given*, phenomenologically.

Ethics are thus identified in the artwork’s *meaning*-value according to its *posited* reality, *irrespective of appearance*. (We need not ask the artist). Any ethical values attached to bearers intuited in *thought* (not necessarily pictorially) indicate

meaning-value by way of *directionality toward the real*. Thus, to have any *real* meaning or ethical value, the link between ‘the person’ and the artwork must be ‘in-formed’ by a *unifying* principle of Art.⁷⁷

2. Second, by reconceiving Art as a research program in Complexity Science (as *Wissenschaft*) and placing it at the centre of the Humanities.

Peirce defined the person as a species of sign, a form of semiosis in its innermost being. This exposed the myth of the ‘private world’, by avoiding subjectivism while constructing a common-sense ‘social and semiotic theory of the self consistent with science’ (Colapietro 1988: 37). The very ‘fabric’ in which we collectively generate meaning lies in the ‘ontology of the flesh’ originating in a primordial realm, which is the fundamental historical condition for the subject-object opposition contained within it (Kauffman & Gare 2015: 223). Aesthetics, ethics, and logic are thus meant to produce sustainable individual and collective self-actualizing narratives of life. And the most powerful way of mythologizing these, and expanding both our individual and collective imagination, is via the metaphoric morphogenesis afforded by *genuine* Art. Art as a science of Mind.

Fake art, or anti-art – incapable of elevating meaning-values - has no *ethical* value. Any moral argument posited on the pretext of its cultural ‘sacredness’ therefore consists in self-deception; and diversion from what *is* really sacred to humanity: a *human* ecology harmonized with Nature. The primordial realm upon which our reproductive imagination draws ‘partially occluded and “disattended” to’ ontologically prior tacit knowledges ‘as ancient as life itself’ is the real source of ‘material’ for genuine Art’s propositions (Wheeler 2006: 137).

Aesthetics, through Art, offers access to *this* ontological History (via the ‘history of ideas’); as a way of admiring, of understanding beauty and truth, both integrally linked to ethics (valuing) and semiotic productivity (meaning). We already have the means to produce such admiring. Schelling’s system models the ‘indifference between the ideal and the real’ at its highest value (‘absolute’). This correlates artworks with an intentionality directed toward *reality* – i.e., ‘naturalism’ (which must be redefined not as some theoretical form of ‘realism’, as in

⁷⁷ The criteria for which space here does not permit detailed examination.

‘photorealism’, but as what he calls the *Ideal*: ‘more real than reality itself’). As such it underscores the integral link between ethical and aesthetic *value-ception*.

3. Third, by recognising there is a moral dimension to Art characterizable as ‘religious’ *in the ancient sense*.

As Schelling (1989: 21) says, ‘only a harmonious disposition ...is genuinely receptive to poesy and art’ because ‘true morality’ equates to harmony. The propositions that both artists and aesthetes need to engage with, then, relate to restoring the harmonic ‘double-unity’ of human nature and Nature, since this in fact lies at the foundation of morality. This is the genuinely real source of meaning for transforming ethics into morals. A *human ecology* – founded on civic humanism - not any idealistic escapist fantasy of *Übermensch* posthumanism – is the real subject of Art (in Peirce’s terms: human conduct and self-control in future action).

Considering the ‘moral’ value of any artist from D. H. Lawrence to Jeff Koons – before even attending to the phenomenology of their work - one can prepare a list of questions to ask themselves.⁷⁸ Does their work *really* produce such propositions? Is its ‘semantic aim’ directed at higher values? Or are we merely being drawn by technologies of action into a ‘general welfare’ producing a dogma of basic values lacking the dialectical qualities capable of raising our collective consciousness? In short, in this merger of ‘truth’ and ‘beauty’ presented before me, am I simply being drawn into a false sense of value normativity? For instance, we might ask, what meaning is ‘*given*’ phenomenologically in Jeff Koons’ *Balloon Dog* (one of the world’s most highly prized ‘artworks’)? If the answer points to the category of ‘symbolic idealism’, as some jokey disclosure of ‘purity’, are we not compelled to ask: “Is this the work of a ‘serious person’”?

Finally, any such research program clearly needs to combine studies in biosemiotics and phenomenology with ethics, moral and political philosophy, and so on.⁷⁹

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⁷⁸ Always, of course, being careful to try to make any cross-epochal or cultural understandings intelligible.

⁷⁹ As *Wissenschaft* implies, this would be wide enough to include new fields like neurophenomenology and other such studies; including McGilchrist’s brain evolutionary theory, and related approaches to psychology.

In summary, adopting a normative aesthetic conception alleviates us of the need for moralizing about ‘ethically’ corrupt ‘art’, or its producers; because the former is self-evident in the work, and the latter is a separate concern of the ‘political community’. But we need to recognize that our admiring is habituated from ethics, drawn from intellect which is part of a consciousness stretching beyond our individual selves. It extends toward human totality in a primordial, temporal dimension. And ultimately ‘contemplative virtue’, only cultivated by individuals, arbitrates here. Hence our *individual* responsibility to respond to the meaning-value of art is paramount.

This explains why Art is, *essentially*, an immaterial asset (of the highest order) which no one can materially ‘possess’ as such; only *be claimed by* and share. Therefore, producing a mature political community to facilitate this attitude is the immediate ‘end’. Modern ‘moralizing’ – tacitly endorsing anti-art and its practices, institutions, and traditions - merely obscures our main obstacle to such progress. We need to face the fact that not only is anti-art manifest by corrupted ethics and logic, but much of our world is constructed on our aesthetic orientation toward it. Our most immediate concern then must be distinguishing between the *unifying* benefits of taking an ontological and teleological view of aesthetics, in favour of a socio-culturally fragmenting theoretical one. And *this* is a political problem.

As argued above, the main difficulty for the art of modernity, then, is that the *emotivist Self* is a perfect sign of the pervasive meaninglessness dominating ‘the arts business’. When we consecrate categories like ‘experimental art’, tasked to inquire about fascination with ‘means’ over any real concern for ‘ends’, what do we expect can be produced besides novel affects and effects in our mythology, and detachment from reality in personhood? This may be the easiest way to create more categories of ‘the new’, requiring little intellectual and imaginative application, but we should ask ourselves: how can this elevate anyone’s attention beyond lower order values?

Experientialism comes to the fore as the psychological ‘material’ of experimental choice in such an undisciplined approach. The Newtonian-Cartesian paradigm encourages us to think of meaning as in a ‘state of motion’. This has predisposed people to believe that meaning is a fluid *substance* subject to inertia and entropy and impossible to be described unless deconstructed into

parts. And *emotions* are subsequently inclined to be understood under the same paradigm (in which ‘empirical psychology’ became the experimental means to validate causation, and manipulation). So too *all* human experience, the nature of the individual, its relation to humanity as a totality, and - since via this means art’s domain became stuck in the ‘realm of the senses’ - how to understand meaning and valuing through art.

Ultimately, no ‘final cause’ for humanity – our purpose and place in the cosmos – can be discovered by the ‘emotivist Self’ responsible for our current predominant modern philosophical orientation and the collapse in morality. Therefore, we need to re-populate the field of art with aesthetic ‘characters’ capable of understanding the distinction between what can and cannot be legitimately manipulated; and must not be so easily blurred in theory or practice. It is clear the crisis of Art is a crisis of meaning. That anti-art, suffering from degradation of our conception of ethics to ‘morals’, and deterioration of our understanding of values and virtues in the double-unity perfect sign relation, has been particularly instrumental in further encumbering arguments about both morality and individualism versus collectivism (polity). Further fragmenting our world. The ‘thinking’ artist and aesthete of the future needs the skills to be able to not only avoid this; but lead a way out by example.

To conclude, Art’s ‘ethical intentionality’ is not found in empirical contents; it does not consist in a ‘morality tale’ manifest in artworks or what we project upon them. It lies in a work’s *essences*, which may or may not respond effectively to the demands of a unified principle of art – and thus be *capable* of ‘narrating’ the wholeness of the life of *the Person* – upon which such judgements are better founded. Art’s ethics lie in its orientation toward yielding either ‘ideals’ or ‘reverse ideals’ of beauty and truth, offering higher meaning or not. It is how we *value* this meaning that matters. Therefore, the main *moral* question for any ‘aesthete’ today, since this lies at the heart of all humanity’s greatest challenges, is why we do not naturalize art and return aesthetics to normativity.

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