The Bloomsbury Companion to Aesthetics

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3 Defining Art

Thomas Adajian

1. Introduction

Work on the definition of art in the past several decades has been dominated, it seems fair to say, by views that either defend some sort of broadly institutional definition, or are skeptical about the definitional project.[1] Not unrelatedly, perhaps, definitions of the individual art forms have proliferated recently.[2] Definitions of the individual art forms are compatible with a variety of different approaches to the definition of art, including non-skeptical and non-institutionalist ones. But most important recent work dealing with the *relationship* between art and the individual art forms approaches the matter from this dominant institutionalist or skeptical orientation, focusing on the individual art forms in a reductionistic spirit.[3]

This chapter focuses on the definition of art and its relationship to definitions of the individual art forms, with an eye to clarifying the issues separating dominant institutionalist and skeptical positions from non-skeptical, non-institutional ones. Section 2 indicates some of the key philosophical issues which intersect in discussions of the definition of art, and singles out some important areas of broad agreement and disagreement. Section 3 critically reviews some influential standard versions of institutionalism, and some more recent variations on them. Section 4 discusses some recent reductionistic approaches to definitional questions, which advocate a shift of philosophical focus from the macro- to the micro-level—from art to the individual art forms. Section 5 sketches, against this background, an alternative, non-institutionalist and non-reductionist approach to definitional questions.

2. Key Issues: Agreements and Disagreements

There is fairly wide agreement that most works of art are made to be appreciated; that a significant amount of art appreciation is aesthetic; that definitions of art that do not illuminate *why* art is valued, leave important philosophical work undone; that art has vague boundaries: some things are clearly artworks, some are clearly not, and some are on the borderline; that, if natural kinds are

timeless, sharply demarcated entities, individuated extensionally, then artworks do not constitute a natural kind; and that list-like definitions, lacking principles that explain why what is on the list is on the list, and how to project the list, are short on explanatory power.[4]

There is *lack* of agreement concerning the following: the nature of the aesthetic, and its precise relation to art; the need to capture the normative character of art and its forms in a *definition* rather than in a *theory* of art, and, relatedly, the nature and significance of the definition/theory distinction; the precise role (if any) of artworld institutions in determining art status; the degree and source of the unity (if any) of art and its functions, forms (theater, music, painting, etc.), and history; the *definiendum* (if any)—art? the word "art"? the concept ART?—that the definitional project does or should concern itself with.[5]

3. Some Varieties of Institutionalism

Institutionalist definitions of art hold that being a work of art consists in standing in the right relation to either art institutions or the history of art. They deny that anything substantive and more fundamental—say, a commitment to aesthetic or creative values—unifies the nature of the art-institution or the history of art. Characteristically, they either include some sort of analysis of the art-institution, where the terms in which the art-institution is analyzed are interdefined, or they define art in terms of its forms, or functions, or the kinds of attitudes that people should or have had, toward artworks. These forms, functions, or attitudes are merely listed: there are, on institutional definitions of art, no deeper facts or principles that explain what gets on the lists of art forms, or art functions, or art-attitudes—no informative explanations of what makes all artists *artists*, or different art forms all *art forms*, or the different art functions all *art* functions. So whether institutionalism's fundamental appeal to inexplicable lists is philosophically acceptable depends on whether the functions/forms/attitudes that typify art really are so disunified that they can only be enumerated.

On George Dickie's institutionalism, art has an essence, although it is not a natural kind. Artworks form a social kind; they are artifacts of a kind created to be presented by an artist to an artworld public.[6] Dickie defines artists in terms of artworlds. Artworlds are defined in terms of artworld systems, which are in turn defined as frameworks for the presentation of works of art by artists to artworld publics. One implausible consequence of Dickie's definition is that art produced outside the institution is impossible. Moreover, given its uninformative interdefinitions of artists, the artworld, and the artworld public, Dickie's definition has little to say about the nature of the parties who make up the art circle. For the same reason, it lacks the resources to distinguish art institutions

from other institutions that share the same abstract relational structure.[7] This is a lot to leave unilluminated.

Jerrold Levinson defends a purely historical definition of art.[8] Artworks, on his historical institutionalism, are all and only those things that are either (1) intended for regard or treatment in some way that past artworks were correctly regarded or treated or (2) are the earliest artworks. So his definition requires some account of the nature of the first artworks, as well as an account of the ways artworks are and will be correctly regarded or treated. Levinson holds that what makes the first artworks *art*works is the fact that they are the ultimate cause of, and share aims with, the artworks we take to be paradigms. For something to be art, then, is, for Levinson, for it to stand in the right historical relation to, and to share the same goals as, predecessor artworks. Predecessor artworks are in turn characterized as the artworks that stand in the right historical relation to, and share goals with, artworks we take to be paradigmatic. Hence, for something to be art is for it to stand in the right historical relation to, and share the same goals with, artworks we take to be paradigmatic. But the only account of what it takes for an historical relation to be of the proper sort comes down to an enumeration of ways in which art has been regarded. And the definition's exclusively historical focus leaves it unable to explain, in particular, why radically new ways of looking at things, which seem to differ in kind from traditional ones, should make it on the list of art regards—as "revolutionary avant-garde" ways of regarding art. Nor is it clear that Levinson's view can exclude from the list of "correct ways of regarding art" purely pecuniary- or status-focused perspectives, which, though in a straightforward sense *correct* ways of regarding art, cannot plausibly be regarded as essential. Moreover, the purely historical nature of Levinson's view leaves it unable to explain what makes either our art tradition or—something that is clearly possible—an historically disconnected alien art tradition, *art* traditions.[9] So it leaves a fair amount unaccounted for.

On Robert Stecker's historical functional definition, something is an artwork at a time just in case (1) it is either in one of the central art forms at that time or in something recognizable as an art form because of its derivation from one of the central art forms, or (2) it is made with the intention of fulfilling a function art has at that time, or else (3) it is an artifact that achieves excellence in fulfilling a function art has at that time.[10] His view, then, requires an account of the various art forms and art functions. Do the art forms and art functions constitute a mere arbitrary collection, or do they have a degree of unity?[11] Well, being in a central art form at a given time consists in being derived from earlier art forms, for Stecker, so for a form or function to be an *art form* or an *art* function, it must be historically connected to, or share properties with, logically prior art forms and functions. But this does not explain what makes the central art forms central *art*forms, or what makes the various art functions all *art*functions.

Moreover, although art has a variety of functions at any given time—including, for example, various economic and sociological functions—it is unclear how Stecker's view distinguishes the essential functions of art from the accidental ones. So, as Dickie's definition consists of a list of uninformatively interdefined art institutions, and Levinson's definition rests on a bedrock of ungrounded lists of correct art regards and paradigmatic artworks, Stecker's definition rests on bedrock of unexplained lists of art functions and art forms.

On Kathleen Stock's recent extension of Noel Carroll's historical narrativism, something is an artwork if and only if (1) there are *internal historical relations* between it and already established artworks; and (2) these relations are correctly identified in a narrative; and (3) that narrative is accepted by the relevant experts.[12] For Stock, the unity of art is secured only by the fact that users of the concept inherit their concept from earlier users. Experts, she holds, do not recognize new objects as artworks on the basis of prior apprehension of rules citing certain properties as necessary and sufficient conditions of art. Rather, the experts' assertion that certain properties are significant in particular cases is constitutive of art, on Stock's definition.

Stock's nominalistic definition raises three worries, parallel to those raised by the institutionalisms of Dickie, Levinson, and Stecker.[13] First, because Stock's definition, like Levinson's, offers no informative way of specifying which of the historical relations that hold between later and earlier artworks are the crucial ones, it may overgeneralize. Works of art criticism, works in art history, and works in the philosophy of art stand in internal historical relations to already established artworks, and they are described in accurate narratives, accepted among experts—art critics, art historians, philosophers of art, and sometimes even artists. If so, they qualify as works of art.

Second, there could be objects that for adventitious reasons are *not* correctly identified in narratives, even though they stand in relations to established artworks that make them correctly describable in narratives of the appropriate sort. And there could also be objects that were correctly described in narratives which, for purely adventitious reasons the experts don't accept. It is not clear that it is as plausible to deny such works art status, as Stock forthrightly does, as it is to assert that they are artworks whose status as such is outside the experts' ken.

Third, suppose that the application of the concept of art is not governed by prior apprehension of rules stating necessary and sufficient conditions, as Stock holds. It does not follow that the unity of the concept of art is guaranteed only by the judgments of experts. Perhaps, although no rules determine their content, experts' judgments have a strong normative force: they are subjectively universal singular judgments that make a claim to be valid for everyone, while lacking a universality based on concepts. Perhaps some other substantive account of what it takes to be an expert, where that requires more than being *said* to be an

expert, is correct. Or, perhaps, as Stock seems committed to holding, it is just an inexplicable fact that the list of experts includes certain people but not others. But if nothing whatsoever can be said by way of grounding either the dicta of the experts, or their status as experts, then Stock's account seems to imply that what makes things artworks is inexplicable.[14]

4. From Art to Art Forms: Reductionism and Skepticism about Definitions

The varieties of institutionalism discussed above are neutral on the question of which is more fundamental or deserving of theoretical attention—art or the individual art forms. By contrast, the two reductionistic approaches to the definition of art to be discussed next agree in taking the individual art forms to be theoretically more important than art, and agree that seeking a definition of art even as thin as institutionalism is a mistake. One of the approaches defends a deflationary approach to the definition of art, allowing that art can be defined, albeit minimally and platitudinously. The other takes an eliminativist, or perhaps pluralist, approach to the definition of art and the individual art forms, holding that neither art nor the individual art forms can or should be defined. These views push institutionalism and skepticism in new directions.

4.1 Deflationism

A novel deflationist proposal about the definition of art has been defended by Dominic McIver Lopes.[15] It has two parts. One is an explanation of the error of those who, failing to grasp the philosophical significance the individual art forms, seek a non-minimal definition of art: they commit a Rylean category mistake. The idea is that wanting a substantive definition of art, provided that one knew all about the individual art forms, would be like wanting to know where the real university is, after one has seen all of the university buildings. The second, positive, part of the proposal is the claim that the problem of analyzing the macro-category of art may be reduced, in the spirit of methodological individualism, to two problems: the problem of analyzing art's constituent micro-categories, the art forms, and the problem of analyzing what it is to be an art form.[16] If those two problems were solved, Lopes holds, then a very thin definition of art—call it the *Deflationistic Definition* (DD)—would be adequate:

> **(DD)** Item x is a work of art if and only if x is a work in activity P, and P is one of the art forms.[17]

Call the thesis about DD the *Adequacy of the Deflationist Definition* thesis (ADD):

> **(ADD)** If we had accounts of the individual art forms, and of what it is to be an art form, then DD would be an adequate definition of art.[18]

Deflationism has some attractive features. Undeniably, accounts of the individual art forms, and an account of what it is to be an art form, would be great to have. Deflationism encourages such theorizing, and Lopes's influential work on pictures is exemplary in this regard.[19] But why accept **ADD**? Why think that, given theories of the individual art forms and an account of what it is to be an art form, **DD** would be adequate? Well, according to Lopes, the deflationist approach can explain revolutionary works like Marcel Duchamp's ready-mades, which at the time of their creation appear not to be artworks. Here is how: any reason to say that a work belonging to no existing art form is nevertheless an artwork is a reason to say that it pioneers a new art form. Hence, Lopes holds, every artwork belongs to some art form. Hence, if we had an account of what it is to be an art form, together with theories of all the individual art forms, no definition of art more substantive than DD would be needed.

But why accept the crucial claim that any reason to say that a (avant-garde) work belonging to no extant art form is an artwork is a reason to say that it pioneers a new art form? On the face of it, an activity might be ruled out as an art form on the grounds that no artworks belong to it. If so, determining whether a new practice is an art form requires determining, first, that its products are artworks. Art, therefore, seems conceptually prior to art forms. So focusing on the individual art forms does not get around the need for an account of art. Alternatively, the philosophical buck can be passed from an account of the macro-category of art to micro-level accounts of the individual art forms, plus an account of what it is to be an art form, only if an account of what it is for an activity to be an *art form* doesn't require getting clear both on what it is to be *art*, and on what it is that makes an activity a *form*. But that does seem to be required.

A second argument offered by Lopes in support of ADD runs as follows: A substantive, non-deflationist definition of art would serve a significant theoretical purpose only if there are serious psychological, anthropological, sociological, or historical hypotheses about the macro-category of art (as opposed to the individual art forms). But no such hypotheses exist. So a definition of art more robust than DD would serve no significant theoretical purpose.[20]

Consider the principle that drives this argument: a necessary condition for an account of Φ serving a significant theoretical purpose is that there be serious psychological, anthropological, sociological, or historical hypotheses about Φ (as opposed to serious hypotheses about Φ's micro-categories). Parallel arguments appealing to this principle would show that substantive philosophical theories

about the nature of science, mathematics, logic, truth, properties, reductionism, laws, value, and so on, would serve no significant theoretical purpose.[21] It may be wondered whether this is rather quick. The principle reminds us, moreover, of an important fact, rightly recognized by Lopes, that is pertinent here: works of art are made to be appreciated.[22] Deflationism needs an explanation of that fact, which on its face is a fact about the macro-category of art, and not only a fact about art's micro-categories. Likewise, reasons are needed for thinking that inquiry into generic principles of art criticism is replaceable, without theoretical remainder, by inquiry into art form-specific principles of criticism. Finally, and relatedly, deflationism seems to bar the road to inquiry into the nature of the connections between the normativity distinctive of art and the aesthetic, and the nature of various other kinds of normativity—the moral, the logical, the legal, and the prudential.[23]

Finally, a more general worry about the scope of the reductionism should be noted. Suppose that facts about the macro-category of art do actually reduce to facts about art's micro-categories, the art forms. Do facts about individual art forms reduce, in turn, to facts about their lower-level realizers, so that every fact about literature, for example, is reducible to facts about the novel, the poem, the short story, plus a theory of what it is to be a literary genre? Do genre-level facts about the novel reduce to facts about the novel's lower-level realizers—the epistolary novel, the historical novel, the novel of ideas, and so on? Lopes's reductionism may not have these implications, but it is fair to ask why not.

4.2 Eliminativism

Call the view that no definition of art or the art forms is possible or desirable *eliminativism*. Several eliminativist arguments, inspired by Morris Weitz, have been put forward by Aaron Meskin. One, driven by enthusiasm for empirical psychology rather than Wittgenstein, runs as follows: The search for definitions involves submitting proposed sets of individually necessary and jointly sufficient conditions to the dubious tribunal of philosophers' intuitions. But empirical psychological theories of categorization suggest that humans categorize things on the basis of their similarity to prototypes, not on the basis of internalized sets of necessary and sufficient conditions. If that is true, efforts aimed at discovering an adequate set of necessary and sufficient conditions by appealing to philosophers' prototype-driven intuitions will probably fail. So, Meskin thinks, only logical, mathematical, and technical concepts admit of non-arbitrary definition. So ART and many of its subconcepts do not admit of non-arbitrary definition.[24]

This interesting argument raises at least three issues. First, the technical/non-technical distinction bears a lot of weight. So the force of the argument will

be somewhat reduced if there are reasons for thinking that technical and non-technical concepts form a continuum. This will be pursued in Section 5. Second, most metaphysicians take themselves to be trying to discover what fundamental kinds of things there are. It is certainly possible that they are wrong about that, and are actually, unwittingly, studying the mind. But this "idealism about the subject matter of philosophy," to use Timothy Williamson's phrase, is, at least, quite controversial.[25] Third, it is not obvious that something's being vague precludes its definability. Being black and being a cat are necessary and sufficient for being a black cat, even if *black* and *cat* are vague.[26] So, arguably, the vagueness of the class of artworks can be accommodated by definitions that employ vague predicates just as well as by a psychological theory of concept-formation like the prototype theory, which construes membership in a concept's extension as graded, determined by similarity to its best exemplar.[27] Still, Meskin's argument would be more satisfactorily answered if there were independent theoretical reasons to blur the technical/non-technical distinction, and recognizing vague definitions; this is pursued in Section 5.

4.3 Should we define art?

There is no philosophical consensus about the definition of art. This, Meskin has suggested, provides some reason to draw an eliminativist, or perhaps eliminativistic pluralist, conclusion: there is no unitary concept of art. Instead, there are several interlocking concepts of art: institutional, historical, aesthetic, neo-representational, craft/skill, evaluative. These interlocking concepts, Meskin says, are used for different purposes: creative, appreciative, and critical. Not all of those concepts serve all of those purposes equally well. Concepts should be used for the purposes they serve best. So, different art concepts should be used for different purposes. Art *should* be defined only if there is a unitary concept of art that serves all of the purposes of art. Hence, we should not define art.[28]

A response to this argument should begin by pointing out that the relations between the functions of art bear further examination, since, from the fact that art has multiple functions, a number of things might be inferred. Consider the case of numbers. In parallel fashion, one might infer from the fact that numerals have ordinal, cardinal, and symbolic functions that there is no single unitary concept of number. Rather, one might think, there are three different number concepts, to be used for different purposes. A second possibility would be to argue that one of the functions is fundamental. So, following Gottlob Frege and Betrand Russell, one might take cardinal numbers to be basic and hope, by elucidating them, to elucidate the nature of all other numbers as well. Or, following Richard Dedekind and Georg Cantor, one might take ordinal numbers as basic. A third possibility would be to argue that there are three facets to our

concept of natural number, which cannot be subsumed under any one head. In brief, from the fact that numbers have an ordinal and a cardinal function and an abstract symbolic function, additional argument is needed, before concluding that there are three unordered concepts of number.[29]

There are parallels elsewhere. Pluralism about biological species does not entail eliminativism about species.[30] Deflationism about truth does not follow from the fact that truth can be realized in many domains: a substantive view of truth on which truth is a single, higher-order property—multiply realized in many domains, so that the plurality of truth lies within the bounds of a single type—is a live possibility.[31] So the fact that the concept of art is used for a number of purposes does not settle the concept individuation issues.

In fact, something more constructive can be said. Virtually everyone, reductionist or not, agrees that artworks are typically made to be appreciated. If appreciation typically involves critical considerations, and conversely, and if artists engaged in the creative process imaginatively adopt critical/appreciative perspectives on that process and its products, and if the experience of art involves a creative contribution on the part of the appreciator, then there is reason to hold that the concept of art has three interrelated normative facets.[32] This is, evidently, an extremely quick sketch of an argument. But it is a very familiar *sort* of argument. If, as Meskin rightly notes, the different concepts (subconcepts? concept facets?) of art "interlock," there is no pressing theoretical reason to draw an eliminativist conclusion without more attention to the *ways* in which the concepts—or the concept's facets—interlock.

This emphasis on the normative nature of the concept of art connects with another Weitzian argument offered by Meskin, this one for the conclusion that "thinking normatively rather than descriptively about the issue of definition" may be *fruitful* when it comes to the individual art forms, and especially when it comes to one particular art form, the comic.[33] Meskin, operating on the assumption that works of art are appreciated, evaluated, and interpreted with reference to the art categories in which they are judged to fall, suggests that for art-critical and art-appreciative reasons, certain concepts of comics—and the case generalizes to other art forms—are more "useful" than others. For example, *sequential pictorial narrative* and *narrative with speech balloons* are not useful concepts of comics, because they treat aesthetically relevant features of comics as if they were necessary.

Meskin's argument goes as follows: The aesthetic use of atypicality and typicality effects is central in contemporary art, and non-classical concepts of comics allow for maximal typicality and atypicality effects. Non-classical concepts of comics, therefore, allow something whose aesthetic use is central in contemporary art. Moreover, whatever allows something whose aesthetic use is central in contemporary art is critically and appreciatively fruitful because criticism and appreciation have to do with the aesthetic. Only concepts that are

critically and appreciatively fruitful should be used. But classical necessary and sufficient concepts of comics do not allow for typicality and atypicality effects. So, classical necessary and sufficient concepts of comics are not critically and appreciatively fruitful. We should, therefore, use non-classical concepts of comics, rather than classical ones (and this holds for the concept of art, and of the other art forms, as well). Consequently, given the intimate connection between classical necessary and sufficient concepts and definition, we *should not* define comics, or any of the individual art forms or art, in terms of necessary and sufficient conditions. That would not be fruitful.[34]

The argument rightly calls attention to the preeminence of aesthetic considerations in our thinking about art. That said, it is natural to wonder whether, in so doing, it concedes something that can be as well accounted for by definitions of art as by psychologistic approaches that eschew them. It was remarked above that atypicality might be as well explained by a definition that employs vague predicates/properties as by a psychological theory of concepts like the prototype theory.[35] But this raises a question: How much difference there is between saying that we *should* use a certain concept of art because it best serves certain normative/critical/appreciative purposes—which seem fundamentally aesthetic—and defending an aesthetic definition of art? The priority accorded to this sort of "should" seems to suggest that the aesthetic dimension of art is fundamental. If so, then it is natural to wonder whether the aesthetic concept of art is more fundamental than the other concepts of art, with which, according to Meskin, it interlocks. That points away from eliminativism and toward an aesthetic definition of art.

5. New Directions: Art, Natural Kinds, Clusters, and Definitions

As noted earlier, there is fairly wide agreement that, on a common conception of natural kinds, art cannot be a natural kind. Meskin puts the challenge clearly: If the orthodox Putnam/Kripke view of natural kinds is correct, then natural kinds have hidden essences and are the subject of scientific investigation by experts, to whose opinions about certain extensional issues the non-experts defer. Therefore, since art lacks a hidden essence, and is not the subject of scientific investigation by experts, art is not a natural kind. Real definitions of Φ require that Φ be a natural kind. Hence, if the orthodox Kripke/Putnam view of natural kinds is correct, then a real definition of art is impossible.[36]

Stephen Davies has entertained the idea that art is a natural kind in something other than the orthodox sense, suggesting that, although art lacks a real essence, as traditionally construed, it has an essence that is not purely nominal, either; rather, it depends in part on widely shared, biologically conditioned capacities of human beings.[37] Of relevance here are cluster definitions of art,

which provide an open-ended list of properties, every subset of which is individually sufficient, and none of which is necessary, to make something a work of art. For, while some cluster theorists, like Berys Gaut, are Wittgensteinians, and deny that their views are definitions, other cluster theorists, are attracted to the idea that art is a natural kind.[38] One cluster theorist, Julius Moravcsik, has remarked that "consistency in pretheoretical intuitions, widespread dispersal, and similarity of structure allows us to treat art as a natural kind."[39] Another, Denis Dutton, has recently defended what he calls a "naturalistic" cluster definition of art, on which direct pleasure, skill or virtuosity, style, novelty or creativity, criticism, representation, special focus, expressive individuality, emotional saturation, intellectual challenge, connection with art traditions and institutions, and imaginative experience are jointly sufficient for something's being a work of art. (Dutton claims that it is a virtue of his definition that it recognizes that art has fuzzy boundaries.)[40]

Unfortunately, all of these cluster accounts seem somewhat explanatorily shallow. Gaut's Wittgensteinian version does not explain how to go on extending the open-ended list of properties, and provides no rationale for why the list contains what it does. Neither Gaut's Wittgensteinian cluster definition nor Dutton's naturalistic cluster definition sheds any light on *why* art's definition has a cluster structure. And neither Dutton nor Moravcsik provide an alternative conception of natural kinds that might allow a deeper theoretical explanation of art's loose clustering structure and its vagueness.

Nevertheless, cluster views, taken together with Davies' suggestive remarks about natural kinds, raise a question that may point in a promising direction. Is there an alternative theory of natural kinds, one with some promise of illuminating features of art that need illumination?

5.1 Homeostatic property-cluster kinds

Such a view, a principled liberalization of more traditional ideas of natural kinds, does exist: Richard Boyd's influential account of natural kinds as homeostatic property clusters.[41] Homeostatic property clusters are families of properties that co-occur, where that co-occurrence is literally or metaphorically a sort of homeostasis: either the presence of some of the properties in the family tends to favor the presence of others, or there are underlying mechanisms or processes that tend to maintain the presence of the properties in the families, or both.[42] The view finds its natural home in philosophy of biology, where it has long been applied to something that, like art, has a crucial historical dimension—biological species. But it has also been applied in fruitful ways to a variety of topics in political philosophy—race, gender, and social roles generally—epistemology, and ethics.[43]

Here is the homeostatic property-cluster view in more detail. First, homeostasis admits of degrees. Things may possess some but not all of the properties in the cluster; some but not all of the underlying homeostatic mechanisms may be present. So, second, the property-cluster view allows cases of in principle unresolvable extensional indeterminacy. Third, the homeostatic property clusters that define natural kind terms are not individuated extensionally, but, instead, in the way that historical objects or processes are: the properties that determine the conditions for falling under natural kind terms may vary over time (or space) while the term continues to have the same definition. Explanatory or property-cluster kinds need not be ahistorical and unchanging. Thus, fourth, not just biological entities like species, but also things like *feudal economy*, *behaviorism*, *money*, and some kinds of tools and ceremonies may be natural kinds. Fifth, a property-cluster kind may be natural from the perspective of some disciplines but not others: to take Boyd's example, jade may be a natural kind in art history, but not geology. Sixth, inasmuch as the mechanisms that underlie homeostatic property clusters need not be micro-structural, and inasmuch as the properties may be intrinsic or relational, the distinction between natural kinds and kinds generated by human agency is not sharp. Hence, the distinction between technical and non-technical kinds is not sharp.[44] Seventh, naturalness itself comes in degrees, because the strength of the homeostatic mechanisms is a matter of degree. (A kind is minimally natural if it is possible to make better than chance predictions about the properties of its instances. At one end of the continuum are arbitrary schemes of classification about which the nominalist claim that the members of a kind share only a name is true. At the other end of the continuum of property-cluster kinds are the kinds of the natural hard sciences. Biological kinds are in between.)[45]

Definitions have, since Aristotle, been connected with explanations, which are closely connected with essences.[46] And homeostatic property clusters correspond, functionally, to the traditional essences of natural kinds, while freeing essences from traditional commitments. As Paul Griffiths puts it, any state of affairs that licenses induction and explanation within a theoretical category is functioning as the essence of that category.[47] So Boyd speaks of "explanatory definitions": in the case of a homeostatic property-cluster kind, an explanatory definition is provided by a (perhaps historically individuated) process of homeostatic property clustering. Hence, as Boyd suggests, the property-cluster view may be applicable not just to the subjects of the natural and social sciences, and not just to "folk" kinds, but also to things like scientific rationality, reference, justification, and others that philosophers have long sought to understand.[48]

This sketch suggests that Boyd's view of kinds might illuminate a number of features of art widely acknowledged to need explanation. First, it is commonplace among biologists and philosophers of biology to hold that there are genuine indeterminacies with respect to both the species category and membership,

in particular, species taxa. So Boyd's view is intended, at least, to accommodate kinds that are both vague and historical, and may, therefore, allow a theoretical explanation of the fact that art and the individual art forms have borderline cases, and develop. Second, because the homeostatic property-cluster conception of kinds makes typicality central, it may address worries (discussed in Section 4) about the role of atypicality judgments in appreciation and criticism, and in the search for definitions.[49] Third, the homeostatic property-cluster view may provide a theoretical grounding for something that cluster accounts like Gaut's and Dutton's leave unexplained: *why* art has a cluster structure. Fourth, because Boyd's view is neutral with respect to the nature of the homeostatic mechanisms, it permits recognition both of art's biological roots and art's institutional features. Fifth, and finally, the homeostatic property-cluster view of kinds promises to make principled theoretical sense of the fact that while art is made for various purposes (primarily appreciation, as even institutionalists, deflationists, and eliminativists acknowledge), not every artwork need be made for every one of them.

6. Conclusion

If the class of artworks is totally fragmented, then the institutionalists' and deflationists' ultimate appeals to mere lists—Levinson's "art regards," Stecker's functions of art, Lopes' art forms—are acceptable. If not, not. Institutionalism and deflationism seem, to the present writer, to overplay art's disunity. But purely functional definitions of art underplay it. Art and the individual art forms are neither totally unified, nor totally fragmented. Making principled, theoretical sense of this fact is a necessary condition for an adequate approach to definitions of art and the arts.

If art and the individual arts are homeostatic property-cluster kinds, then something everyone agrees is desirable would be possible—non-enumerative definitions that account for the vagueness, heterogeneity, and unity of art and the individual art forms. The explanatory virtues of the homeostatic property-cluster view, and the fact that it has fruitful applications elsewhere in philosophy, strongly suggest, at minimum, that it merits further attention from aestheticians interested in alternatives to institutional and skeptical approaches.

Notes

1. The main inspiration for skeptical views is Weitz (1956), and, through Weitz, Wittgenstein.
2. See, for example, Hamilton (2007), Ribeiro (2007), Kulvicki (2006).

3. Matravers' characterization of institutionalism is adopted here: a view is institutionalist if it holds that standing in the right relation to some social entity—either the institutions of art, or a particular history—is necessary and sufficient for being a work of art. See Matravers (2007, p. 251).
4. On natural kinds: Stephen Davies has long suggested that art is some sort of natural kind (see Davies, 1991, ch. 1). Stock, who refers to art as a "nonnatural kind," thinks that Davies' suggestion requires further elaboration (Stock, 2003, p. 169); Section 5 provides some of that elaboration. On list-like definitions: to give a prominent example, the enumerative character of Alfred Tarski's definition of truth, with its list-like specification of truth-conditions for atomic sentences, notoriously makes it unable to capture our translinguistic notion of truth, since it cannot be projected to new notions of truth that might be at work in new sentences or languages. As Simon Blackburn remarks, Tarski's definition reveals the nature of truth in about the same sense that defining "proper-legal-verdict-on-Wednesday, proper-legal-verdict-on-Thursday, etc." reveals the nature of a proper legal verdict (Blackburn, 1984, pp. 266–7).
5. For the view that being called "art" doesn't guarantee that something is art, see, for example, Stecker (2005, p. 61) and Walton (1997, p. 98). Contrast Stock (2003) and, perhaps, Meskin (2008). On art's vagueness, see Davies (1991, 2006), Stecker (2005), Dutton (2009). On the proper *definiendum*: Meskin (2008) suggests, against Adajian (2005), that most contemporary philosopher of art are interested in defining the concept of art, understood psychologistically, rather than metaphysically. Both of these views may be overstated. There is substantial disagreement—as well, probably, as confusion—among philosophers over whether we should focus on artworks, words, or psychological entities.
6. See Dickie (1984 and 2001).
7. David Davies (2004, p. 249) points out that Dickie's definition of the artworld is so abstract that it applies equally to financial institutions (the "commerce world").
8. See Levinson (1991a and 1991b).
9. Stecker (1996) develops this criticism of Levinson.
10. Stecker (1997).
11. Although, like Levinson, Stecker holds that very early art had aesthetic functions, his definition isn't an aesthetic one. See, for example, Stecker (2005, p. 102).
12. Stock (2003, p. 175). Carroll's historical narrativism, an historicized descendant of Dickie's institutionalism, is defended in a number of places, including Carroll (1999).
13. Stephen Davies calls Stock's view "radical stipulativism" (Davies, 2006, p. 34).
14. Cf. Kenneth Warmbrod, on the implications of nominalistic definitions of the logical constants: "[A]bsent some conscious rationale for the choice of logical terms, a stipulated list is also troubling. If there is no rationale for the choice of logical constants, then there will be no rationale for designating some truths as logical and others as ordinary truths. Ultimately, such arbitrariness calls into question the basis for distinguishing logic from the rest of science" (Warmbrod, 1999, p. 504). Compare the standard objection to the divine command theory: that it implies that morality is arbitrary, since it makes morality depend ultimately on God's commands, and God lacks reasons for his commands.
15. See Lopes (2008).
16. See, for the characterization of individualism, Sober et al. (2003).
17. Lopes, 2008, p. 109.
18. Lopes, 2008, p. 127.
19. Especially Lopes (1996 and 2005).

20. Lopes, 2008 p. 127.
21. In a similar spirit, Meskin suggests that a *definition* of art or the art forms is unnecessary (though we may need *theories* of the art forms), on the grounds that "warranted evaluation, interpretation, and appreciation have never waited on philosophical definitions of the various arts" (2008, p. 143). But, equally, warranted evaluation, interpretation, and appreciation have never waited on philosophical *theories* of the various arts either. More generally, in a straightforward sense of "warrant," and of "doing fine," virtually *everything* philosophy deals with (including induction, political authority, mathematics, persons, moral responsibility, time, change, universals, explanation, laws, events, truth, species, logic, causation, the individual art forms, artistic evaluation, interpretation, appreciation, etc.) is such that we have been "doing just fine" without a philosophical account of it.
22. Lopes, 2008 p. 121.
23. Not to mention investigation of the nature of the normativity of the sublime. Besides Kant, it seems to rule out the inquiries into the nature of norms by philosophers as different as Peter Railton and Max Scheler. See, for example, Railton (2003) and Scheler (1973).
24. Meskin, 2008. The subargument about intuitions is inspired by Ramsey (1998).
25. See Williamson (2005).
26. Cf. Earl (2006).
27. Stephen Davies has long noted that vagueness is no bar to definition; see Davies (1991, 2006). Stecker (2005) defends a definition of art, while also recognizing that the concept of art is vague.
28. Meskin, 2008, pp. 138–9.
29. Cf. Lucas, 2000, pp. 90–156, and especially pp. 154–5. I follow Lucas very closely.
30. See Brigandt (2003).
31. For example, Sher (2004, 2005); Lynch, (2000).
32. The last point is argued in Elliot (1967).
33. Meskin, 2008, p. 140.
34. Ibid., pp. 140–2.
35. It is not unusual to oppose the classical view of concepts to the prototype view, as Meskin does. But it is unclear that prototype and classical views of concepts are incompatible. See, for this, and for extensive discussion of both psychological and philosophical views of concepts, Davis (2003, pp. 407–518), on prototype views, and on compatibility, see pp. 513–7.
36. Meskin, 2008, p. 134.
37. Davies (1991 and 2003).
38. See Gaut (2000).
39. Moravcsik, 1993, p. 432.
40. Cluster definitions may date back to the Stoics. See Tatarkiewicz (2005): "In defining art the Stoics also employed the term 'system' (*systema*), meaning a closely knit cluster." Moravcsik's remark is from Moravcsik (1993, p. 432); it is quoted in Dutton (2003). Dutton's most recent defense of his cluster definition is Dutton (2009).
41. The description of Boyd's view as a principled liberalization of more traditional ideas of natural kinds is from Mallon (2003).
42. The view is defended in a number of papers going back at least as far as Boyd (1988). See also Boyd (1991, 1999a and 1999b). I follow the last-named paper very closely. See also Brigandt (2009), and Wilson et al. (forthcoming).
43. In philosophy of social science, see Mallon (2003 and 2007). In ethics, see, besides the Boyd papers cited earlier, Sturgeon (1985 and 2003), and for a dissenting view, Rubin (2008). In epistemology, see Michaelian (2008).

44. See Boyd, 1999a, p. 161.
45. Griffiths, 1999, p. 219.
46. "A definition is an account (*logos*) that signifies the essence" (*Topics* I.5, 101b38).
47. Griffiths, 1999, p. 215.
48. Boyd, 1997, p. 71. In fact, it seems natural to wonder whether definition is itself a homeostatic property-cluster kind.
49. Wilson, 1999, p. 201.