Creativity as an Artistic Merit

James Grant

Abstract

The aim of this paper is to explain why creativity is an artistic merit. Artworks and non-artworks can both be creative. But creativity does not help make many other creative things good of their kind. A creative explanation is not a better explanation in virtue of being creative. Why, then, is a creative artwork a better artwork in virtue of being creative? Understanding this will give us a better understanding of the nature of artistic merit. The approach adopted in this paper is as follows. First, I say what creativity is and what an artistic merit is. Second, I identify reasons to doubt that creativity is an artistic merit. A good explanation of the merit of creativity should address these doubts. Third, I develop a theory of artistic merit that appeals to the final value of acting excellently – for example, virtuously or skilfully. Finally, I argue that this enables us to explain why creativity is an artistic merit. This account also enables us to argue that artistic merits give some things final value, and not merely instrumental value. It also provides reason to believe that ethical qualities of artworks enhance their artistic merit for the same reason creativity does.

Forthcoming in *Creativity and Philosophy*, ed. Berys Gaut and Matthew Kieran (London: Routledge).

Creativity as an Artistic Merit

James Grant

Here is a puzzling contrast. Creativity helps make artworks good. Joyce's *Ulysses*, Gaudí's Sagrada Familia basilica, and Blake's *Ghost of a Flea* are good works of art partly because they are creative. But creativity does not help make many other creative things good of their kind. A creative explanation is not a better explanation in virtue of being creative. A creative design for an engine is not a good design for an engine because it is creative. The creativity of a diplomat's peace plan is no part of what makes it a good peace plan. The creativity of these things might be a good thing about them. But it does not help make them good of their kind.

Why is this? Why is creativity an artistic merit? The aim of this paper is to answer this question. Answering it promises to shed light on the nature of artistic value. One way of gaining a better reflective understanding of a kind of value is to consider what its criteria are and why they are its criteria. There is something distinctive about artistic value, in virtue of which creativity enhances it, but not many other kinds of value. Explaining why creativity is an artistic merit should therefore provide a better understanding of artistic value itself.

In the first section, I elucidate the claim that creativity is an artistic merit. I say what creativity is and what an artistic merit is. In the second, I discuss reasons to doubt this claim. A good explanation of the merit of creativity should address these doubts. In the third, I develop a theory of artistic merit that appeals to the final value of acting excellently – for example, virtuously or skilfully. I argue in the fourth section that this theory gives us a good explanation of why creativity is an artistic

merit. I conclude by identifying questions raised by this theory, as well as some of its important ramifications.

A note on terminology. I believe that creativity, in the sense (or one of the senses) in which it is an artistic merit, is the same property as imaginativeness. But I prefer the term "imaginativeness," for reasons I give in a note.[1] I also say "artistic merit," not "artistic value," and I set out my reasons in this note.[2] But I suspect that many who use "artistic value" just mean artistic merit, and so, from their perspective, this is also just a terminological preference.

1. The Explanandum

What is meant by saying that imaginativeness is an artistic merit? It will help to start with some distinctions.

First, having artistic merit is different from being a good artwork. An artwork can have artistic merit without being a good artwork. It can fail to be good, but not entirely lack merit.[3] Being a good artwork clearly involves having artistic merit. But exactly how having merit and being good are related is a delicate question. It is not clear, for instance, that being a good artwork is just being an artwork with substantial artistic merit. A work with substantial merit might also have major defects. It is not clear that such a work would necessarily be good. It is not even clear that such a work would necessarily be better than one with slightly less merit but minor defects. Goodness and betterness may be a more complex function of merit and demerit. However, in what follows I shall assume that one work is better than another at least when the first has more merit and no more demerit.

Second, there is a distinction between artistic merit and artistic merits. Works have artistic merit in virtue of the artistic merits they have. Artistic merits are

properties that give works artistic merit (though as I shall argue shortly, there is more to being an artistic merit than this). For example, gracefulness is an artistic merit, and some Gothic arches have artistic merit because they are graceful. Moreover, good works are good in virtue of their artistic merits. Some arches are good because they are graceful. So merits give works merit and make works good. In what follows, I shall treat "P gives it merit," "P enhances its merit," and "It has merit in virtue of (having) P" as synonymous. Each entails that it has merit because it has P.

Third, not every property that gives some artwork artistic merit is an artistic merit. Suppose a painting has merit because it is powerfully expressive, and it is powerfully expressive because it is garish. This painting has merit because it is garish. Garishness gives the painting merit by making it powerfully expressive. But this does not mean that garishness is an artistic merit. One might want to say that garishness is an artistic merit of this painting. This is fine if one means only that it gives this painting artistic merit. But then one should distinguish between being an artistic merit and being an artistic merit of some work.

How does being an artistic merit differ from simply being a property that gives some work artistic merit? The difference, I suggest, is that artistic merits are standards or criteria of artistic merit. Not all properties that give some work merit are criteria or standards of merit. The fact that some work's garishness gives it merit by making it powerfully expressive does not show that garishness is a standard of artistic merit.

Fourth, in describing a property as a merit, I mean to be neutral about whether it gives merit to every work that should have it. Holists about merits, who deny that any property has an invariable merit-giving valence, need have no objection to the claim that there are criteria of merit.

Lastly, non-artworks can have artistic merit. The least controversial examples are parts of artworks. A line of a multi-line poem can have poetic merit. But it is not an artwork. Some accounts of artistic value require the bearers of artistic value to be artworks (e.g., Budd 1995: 2; Hanson 2013: 499-500). These accounts are either mistaken or talking about a different property than artistic merit.

The next question is what imaginativeness is. The first thing to note is that artworks are imaginative as members of kinds. An artwork might be an imaginative gift but not an imaginative artwork. Clearly, imaginativeness as a gift is not an artistic merit. Imaginativeness as an artwork is. So what is it to be imaginative as an artwork?

I have defended the following view (Grant 2013: ch. 3.5-6). All cases of imaginativeness involve thinking of something that was not an obvious thing to think of, and which it was plausible to believe would have a reasonable chance of success. The kind of success in question determines the kind of imaginativeness. Commonly, success means having substantial value as a member of some kind. For example, an unobvious gift to think of, which it was plausible to believe would be a good gift, is an imaginative gift.[4]

In the case of imaginative artworks, the artist thinks of a way a work might be. This is not an obvious way for a work to be to think of. And it is plausible for her to believe that being this way has a reasonable chance of giving the work substantial artistic merit. A dancer might think of an unobvious way of moving gracefully; a sculptor might decide to leave the stone rough-hewn to make it more expressive, when polish would be the obvious choice; a playwright might think of a surprising and satisfying denouement for the plot. Non-artworks whose imaginativeness is an artistic merit are similar. Their maker or performer thought of an unobvious way for

them to be which it was plausible to believe would give them substantial artistic merit. Let us call this artistic imaginativeness.

In my account, imaginative thinking is fundamental. Acts, omissions, and their products can all be imaginative. But imaginative things other than thinking are imaginative because of the imaginative thinking that went into them. Two points deserve emphasis. First, I mean thinking of something in the sense of thinking up or coming up with something - the sense in which you think of a solution. I do not mean thinking of something in the sense of merely bringing something to mind or thinking about it - the sense in which you think of what you did last summer. Second, thinking of something does not necessarily precede doing. A comedian replying to a heckler thinks of a reply, even if she did not first think of it and then deliver it. She thinks aloud. A hockey player who makes an imaginative pass thought of a way of getting the puck to her teammate, even if she didn't think before passing.

My account also allows for imaginative failures. It must be plausible to believe that what you thought of had reasonable prospects of success. But to be imaginative, it need not actually succeed. Leonardo's designs for flying machines were failures as designs, because the machines would not have flown. But they were imaginative designs.[5]

Is artistic imaginativeness an artistic merit even when it fails? That is, even when the features thought of for the work do not actually give it merit, though it was plausible for the artist to believe they would? I find it difficult to think of cases in which failed artistic imaginativeness gives something very much merit. But it seems to me that it still confers some merit. A plot that does not cohere is not greatly redeemed by being imaginative, nor is a comedy that is not amusing. But imaginative failure is still better than unimaginative failure. However this may be, in what follows

I shall focus on explaining why successful artistic imaginativeness is an artistic merit. After giving this explanation, I shall return to the topic of imaginative failures.

It is interesting if imaginativeness is an artistic merit. I have already given one reason: imaginativeness does not confer various other kinds of merit or goodness, such as goodness as an explanation. Even when it does, it is not necessarily a criterion of that kind of goodness. A chess move might unnerve your opponent because it is imaginative. So its imaginativeness makes it a good move to make. But this does not mean imaginativeness is a criterion of being a good chess move to make.

A second reason is that imaginativeness is a merit that things have in virtue of properties that it was plausible to believe would give the work a different merit. Similes can be imaginative in virtue of properties that were plausibly expected to make them apt; jokes in virtue of properties expected to make them funny; dancing in virtue of grace-making properties. So, at least in cases of imaginative success, the properties that make the work imaginative confer artistic merit by two routes: by giving it the first-order merit and by making it imaginative. The first-order merit gives it merit, and the imaginativeness gives it additional merit. There seem to be several features that are like imaginativeness in this respect. Virtuosity, skilfulness, intelligence, craftsmanship, and artistry are others. In each case, it is an artistic merit that a different artistic merit was realized, or at least aimed at, in a certain way - skilfully, intelligently, and so forth. We might call these higher-order artistic merits.

2. Deflationism

These points may make it interesting to claim that imaginativeness is an artistic merit. But they also raise suspicions about this claim. Similar suspicions have been expressed about originality.

First, if imaginativeness does not enhance other kinds of merit, one might doubt that it enhances artistic merit. Jack Meiland (1983: 121-2) argues against the aesthetic value of originality on these grounds. Originality does not enhance other things' value of their kind (e.g., the original telephone). But one would expect it to, he says, if it enhanced the aesthetic value of artworks.

Second, the fact that imaginativeness depends on properties expected to give the work another merit raises the suspicion that the other merit is conferring all the merit. The suspicion will be strengthened if one doubts that imaginativeness is a merit in cases of failure to realize the other merit. That suggests that it is the first-order merit, not the imaginativeness, that is conferring all the merit in cases of success. As Bruce Vermazen (1991: 276-7) has argued about originality, the reason why we think imaginativeness gives works merit is that many works do have merit in virtue of properties that also help make them imaginative. This makes us think, wrongly, that they have merit in virtue of their imaginativeness.

Third, one might adapt another argument from Vermazen (1991: 271-2) against the aesthetic value of originality.[6] Take Frans Hals's portraits painted in his mature manner. These differ significantly from each other only in that different faces were painted. So the later portraits, at least, are not imaginative. But all are wonderful. And the later ones are no worse for not being imaginative: I might prefer to have the first portrait rather than the eleventh, but my preference would clearly not be for reasons of artistic merit if the eleventh were, imaginativeness aside, just as good.

Let us call "deflationism" the view that artistic imaginativeness is not an artistic merit. The deflationist could accept other theses about the value of imaginativeness. She might allow that imaginativeness can give things artistic merit, but is not a criterion of it. She might hold that imaginativeness gives works final

value, but not artistic merit. She might even hold that imaginativeness can help make works great, but not good. Anthony Savile (1982: ch. 9) argues that artistic greatness is not extreme artistic goodness, but constitutes a different dimension of evaluation. Allowing that imaginativeness makes these kinds of difference to a work's value might make deflationism more palatable to those who find it unintuitive.

The best answer to deflationism, I suggest, is to make it intelligible why imaginativeness, and not only first-order merits, would be a criterion of artistic merit. We will have little incentive to be deflationists if this can be explained. My preferred explanation will also enable us to respond to the specific deflationist doubts voiced above.

3. The Excellence Theory

A common way of explaining the value of an aesthetic or artistic merit is to relate it to a quality that has non-artistic or non-aesthetic value. Frank Sibley (1959b: 31-2) suggests that qualities in artworks like warmth, clarity, regularity, and softness can be aesthetically admired for themselves because we have deep and abiding non-aesthetic interests in warmth, clarity, regularity, softness, and the like outside art.[7] Similarly, Monroe Beardsley (1973: 109-10) holds that ascriptions of elegance, dignity, or stateliness to music can support judgements of aesthetic value because these qualities resemble qualities that interest us in persons. And many philosophers have explained the value of beauty by arguing that it symbolizes, expresses, or manifests valuable non-aesthetic qualities, such as moral goodness or freedom (e.g., Kant 1790: s.59; Schiller 1793; Alison 1811).

A simple version of this approach is to argue that the imaginativeness of the artwork is an artistic merit because it manifests the imaginativeness of a person (the

artist). Many claim that the imaginativeness of a person is a virtue or skill, and many hold that virtues or skills have final value.[8] One might not agree that imaginativeness is a virtue or skill. But one might still agree that the imaginativeness of a person normally has final value, whether that person is an artist or not. The imaginativeness of an artwork manifests this finally valuable quality of persons, and that is why it is an artistic merit.

One problem with this explanation is that the imaginativeness of a work doesn't necessarily manifest the imaginativeness of a person. One needn't be an imaginative person to produce an imaginative artwork. One must certainly think imaginatively to do so. But one needn't be an imaginative person to think imaginatively on isolated occasions. The imaginativeness of persons is a propensity to think imaginatively (see Grant 2013: 80-1), and one needn't have a propensity to think imaginatively in order to do so. Yet the imaginativeness of an artwork gives it merit even if the artist was not an imaginative person.

As these remarks suggest, however, the imaginativeness of a work does always manifest the imaginativeness of a person's thinking. Every artistically imaginative work is the realization of an imaginative thought of a way of giving something artistic merit. One might hold that the imaginativeness of thinking has final value, just as the imaginativeness of persons is said to have. For one might think that the virtuousness or skilfulness or, in general, the excellence of an act has final value. It makes that act an end in itself.[9] The imaginativeness of thinking is an excellence of the mental act of thinking.[10] So it too has final value.

Perhaps, then, the imaginativeness of a work is an artistic merit because it manifests the imaginativeness of the artist's thinking. It is the relation between artistic

imaginativeness and a finally valuable quality of thought that explains why the former is an artistic merit.

This explanation has much to recommend it. In the first place, there is good reason to believe that manifesting an excellence of thought, perception, or action, in the realization of another artistic merit, can make a property an artistic merit. Many higher-order merits are like this. The intelligence of a work, which manifests the intelligence of the artist's acts of realizing first-order merits, can be a merit of that work. That a work has artistic merit realized skilfully, dexterously, or deftly is a further merit of it. Excellences of perception also seem relevant. It is a merit if a comedian's humour is well-observed, and a painter's eye is discriminating. Skilfulness in arousing certain feelings, such as suspense, seems to count too. We also praise works for manifesting ethical excellences. E.H. Gombrich observes that for centuries critics "have branded colour combinations as 'vulgar' or exalted forms as 'dignified,' have praised the 'honesty' of one artist's palette and rejected the 'meretricious' effects of others" (1963: 15). Others have made similar observations about ethical excellences.[11] It can be an artistic merit that a work is bold, sincere, authentic, poised, restrained, or sensitive, and a flaw that it is pretentious, emotionally manipulative, timid, dishonest, flashy, clumsy, or coarse.

In the second place, this account makes it intelligible why manifesting an excellence can make a property an artistic merit. According to this account, excellences have final value. Acting excellently is an end in itself. It is not just the ends that excellent behaviour can be directed toward that are ends in themselves. It is worth acting excellently for its own sake. Therefore, it is unsurprising that there exists a practice in which we count properties that manifest excellences as criteria of merit.

Indeed, there appear to be other practices like this. Games (that is, matches) are another example. It is a merit in a game if the aim of the game is skilfully pursued. That is one criterion of being a good game.

The position, then, is this. One reason why a property can be an artistic merit is that the property manifests an excellence of thought, action, or perception in the realization of some other artistic merit.[12] Manifesting such an excellence makes a property an artistic merit because such excellences have final value. Let us call these two claims the excellence theory of artistic merit.[13] On this theory, artistic imaginativeness is an artistic merit because it manifests such an excellence of thought – namely, the imaginativeness of the artist's thinking.

This theory faces the following objection. The theory speaks of properties manifesting excellences of acts. But some bearers of artistic merit, such as a musician's performance, are themselves acts. They possess excellences, such as skilfulness. They do not merely have properties that manifest them. And at least some of these excellences, such as skilfulness, are artistic merits of those acts. Surely being an excellence, not just manifesting one, can make a property of an act an artistic merit.

The excellence theorist should accept this. She should say that manifesting an excellence of thought, perception, or action in the realization of some other artistic merit, or being an excellence of an act in the realization of artistic merit, can make a property an artistic merit. Being such an excellence makes a property an artistic merit because excellences have final value. The considerations raised above in favour of the original excellence theory – that it explains why many merits are merits, and that excellences have final value – favour this conclusion, too.

The modified excellence theory suggests a modified explanation of why artistic imaginativeness is an artistic merit. Imaginativeness, too, can be an artistic merit of performances, such as an actor's portrayal of a character. Plausibly, then, artistic imaginativeness is an artistic merit because it manifests an excellence of thought, and sometimes also because it is an excellence of acts.

There are several points worth clarifying about the excellence theory. For one, it is not a comprehensive theory of artistic merit. It says nothing about why any first-order merits are merits. It is only about a class of higher-order merits, because its claim is that manifesting excellence in the realization of some other artistic merit can make a property an artistic merit. It is also neutral about the relative weights of different merits. Accomplishing some things excellently might confer more merit than accomplishing other things just as excellently, and manifesting some excellences might count for more than manifesting others does, for all the excellence theory says.

Second, the excellence theory does not imply that excellences have final value under all conditions.[14] Perhaps the coolness of a villain, to use Kant's example (1785: 4:394), lacks final value. The final value of an excellence might be conditional on the act not being evil, and perhaps on other factors as well. That excellences normally have final value suffices to explain why we count them and properties that manifest them as criteria of merit.

Third, for an act to have final value is for that act to be worth performing for its own sake. Final value is what many philosophers call "intrinsic value" (e.g., Kagan 1998; Zimmerman 2001). But many prefer the expression "final value" (e.g., Rabinowicz and Rønnow-Rasmussen 2000) because some philosophers, notably Moore, reserve "intrinsic value" for the value something has in virtue of its intrinsic properties alone. I do not assume that an act's intrinsic properties are all that make it

worth performing for its own sake, so I also prefer "final value." Further, an act with final value is not necessarily the act that there is most reason for you to perform. One thing can be more worth doing, for its own sake, than another, even though both are worth doing for their own sakes. And I assume that, as the word "final" suggests, an act is an end in itself iff it is worth performing for its own sake. But this claim is not essential. If more is needed for an act to be an end in itself (e.g., if the act must be *especially* worth performing for its own sake), then the account of acts with final value as the ones worth performing for their own sakes still stands.

Fourth, manifesting excellence per se is not what the excellence theory says can make a property a merit. It is manifesting excellence in the realization of artistic merit. A work might be courageous simply for expressing banned political views. The excellence theory does not suggest that this is an artistic merit. It suggests that courageousness in the realization of another artistic merit is an artistic merit. Expressing a certain political view is not an artistic merit. What is relevant to the excellence theory are cases in which it was courageous to realize a certain artistic merit, or to realize one in a certain way.

Fifth, the excellence theory's claim is that manifesting or being an excellence in the realization of another merit *can* make a property an artistic merit. The theory does not assert (or deny) that this always does make a property an artistic merit. So if there are cases in which it does not, this by itself would not undermine the theory. Nor would it undermine its account of imaginativeness. There are good moral explanations (e.g., of an act's rightness) that appeal to generalizations with exceptions. We might expect our explanation of the merit of imaginativeness to do so. A full account of any enabling and defeating conditions there may be is not necessary for a successful explanation.

Finally, for the work's properties to manifest excellences, the artist's behaviour, thinking, or perception must really have possessed these excellences. The work is not intelligent or imaginative if the artist's acts were not. Manifesting excellence is therefore different from being expressive of emotion. A work can be sad without the artist having been sad. By contrast, it matters what excellences actually characterized the thinking, acting, and perceiving that went into the work's creation. The excellence theory therefore takes sides in one of the debates in the philosophy of art over the relevance of the actual artist to criticism. Romantic theories of artistic expression as the overflow of powerful feelings may have been discredited, and Romantic theories of artistic meaning as artist's meaning may need to be heavily qualified or rejected outright. But if the excellence theory is correct, a robustly Romantic theory of artistic merit is true.

4. Deflationism Deflated

This account gives us a reply to deflationism. First, it makes it intelligible why artistic imaginativeness, and not only first-order merits, would be a criterion of artistic merit. The reason is that the imaginativeness of acts has final value, as other excellences of acts do. It is not only the ends achieved by imaginative acts (in this case, realization of first-order merits) that can have final value. So it is understandable that artistic imaginativeness would be a criterion of merit over and above the first-order merits.

Second, the account enables us to see why imaginativeness is a criterion of artistic merit, but not of various other kinds of merit. The reason is that manifesting excellence of thought is irrelevant to many other kinds of merit. This is so even when the object manifests excellence of thought in the realization of first-order merits for that kind of merit. A mouse-trap might manifest excellent thinking about how to build

a better mouse-trap. But that is no part of what makes it a better mouse-trap. It does not catch mice any better in virtue of manifesting excellent thinking about how to catch mice better. It catches mice better in virtue of the features thought of.

Third, the deflationist is nevertheless wrong that artistic merit is unique in having imaginativeness as a criterion. Imaginativeness is a criterion of merit in games, just as other excellences are. A game is better for involving imaginative play.[15]

Fourth, the excellence theory suggests an account of imaginative failures. Many such failures manifest deficiencies of excellence. For example, it might be plausible to believe, in advance of making the work, that the work would have artistic merit in virtue of being a certain way. But it might not be plausible to believe this once you have made it that way and seen the results. It might show poor judgement to leave the work that way, even if the initial thought to make it that way was imaginative. The imaginativeness of that aspect of the work gives the work little or no merit because the same aspect of the work manifests poor judgement. We can thus explain why imaginative failure contributes less to merit than imaginative success, without endorsing the deflationist view that it is only first-order merits that ever contribute.[16]

Lastly, we can reply to the Vermazen-inspired objection that Frans Hals's later paintings in his mature style are not imaginative, but are no worse than his first painting in that style. The reason the later paintings are no worse is that they also manifest the imaginativeness of Hals's thinking. He thought of an imaginative style in which to paint portraits, and the later portraits manifest this thought. There is nothing about the first portrait in virtue of which it alone counts as a manifestation of this thought. Indeed, he might have thought of an imaginative style without thinking of it

for some portrait in particular, or he might have thought of it and formed the intention to employ it in several portraits. Especially in these cases, it would be clear that the first portrait is not the only manifestation of his imaginative thinking. The later portraits are imaginative too.

Still, one might reply that there would surely come a point when adopting the same style yet again would result in a work that is not imaginative. This does not salvage deflationism, because it is not clear that this wouldn't also be the point where the resulting work would be inferior to those that went before. But one might think it poses a problem for the excellence theorist. After all, the work would still realize the initial, imaginative thought the artist had long ago. How, then, can the excellence theorist explain why it would be inferior?

The explanation, I suggest, is that it would no longer be plausible for the artist to believe that making the work in that style would give it substantial merit. And it would no longer be plausible to believe this because, by that point, making it in that style would clearly be lazy, perfunctory, or mechanical. Manifesting these qualities is an artistic defect, as the excellence theory itself suggests. So one condition of imaginativeness, the plausibility condition, would not be satisfied by the later work. The thinking manifested by the work is not imaginative, all things considered, even if an imaginative thought in the past played a role in its production.

Vermazen asks us which painting we would rather own (for the right reasons) as a test of which work is better. The underlying assumption, that the better artwork provides the greater benefit, of the right kind, to its audience, is widespread (e.g., Currie 1989: 97-103; Levinson 2002: 233-6; Goldman 2006: 341). Others besides Vermazen use it to argue that features like originality and imaginativeness are not artistic merits (e.g., Meiland 1983: 121). Imaginative or original works, they say, give

audiences no greater benefit, of a relevant kind, than very similar works that are not imaginative or original, such as extremely accurate copies, or later works in the same style. Even if it is beneficial to appreciate the imaginativeness of an original or that of an artist, others say we could appreciate such imaginativeness just as well by appreciating a perfect though unimaginative copy. So at minimum, enabling us to perfectly appreciate imaginativeness is just as great an artistic merit as actually being imaginative (Stang 2012: 275, 277; cf Currie 1989: 98).

But the assumption that the better work necessarily provides the greater benefit (of some kind) is not a trivial one. Those who make it presuppose a conception of artistic merit – often a form of experientialism – that is sometimes the very one in dispute. One might find it strange that an original that manifests excellence would be better than a copy that does not if the original provides no greater benefit. But if the excellence theory is right, this is not strange. Other things being equal, making the original was more worth doing, for its own sake, than making the copy was. Greater final value underlies its greater artistic merit. We should consider the value of what went into the work, not merely the value of what we get out of it, when explaining its artistic merit.

5. The Excellence Theory Extended

For these reasons, I think the appeal to excellence is a good explanation of why imaginativeness is an artistic merit. As a theory of artistic merit, the excellence theory requires further development. It would be good to have an account of what an excellence is. I have mentioned virtuousness and skilfulness as two forms of excellence. But I have not provided a definition of an excellence. Another question is why we should believe that excellences of acts have final value. It would be good to

have an argument for this, and an explanation of why it is the case. Lastly, the relation of excellence to greatness, if greatness is not simply extreme goodness, remains to be explored.

If the excellence theory is true, it has noteworthy implications. First, it implies that some things have final value in virtue of their artistic merits. As we have seen, some bearers of artistic merit are acts. Some of these acts have final value in virtue of their excellences. Some of these excellences are artistic merits. So some things have final value in virtue of their artistic merits.

Second, the excellence theory gives us reason to believe that some ethical qualities of artworks affect their artistic merit. Some of a work's ethical qualities manifest ethical excellences and deficiencies of the artist's acts, in the realization of artistic merit. That a work boldly realizes some artistic merit is an artistic merit. That it is an emotionally manipulative attempt to achieve dramatic intensity is an artistic flaw. Some ethical qualities are artistic merits for the same reason imaginativeness is.

With this account, I have not ruled out the possibility that imaginativeness is an artistic merit for other reasons. In particular, explanations of why the imaginativeness of persons has final value suggest other possible explanations of why artistic imaginativeness is an artistic merit. The imaginativeness of persons has been linked with courage, individuality, power, spontaneity, autonomy, and freedom.[17] One might think artistic imaginativeness is an artistic merit because it expresses or manifests such qualities.[18] Vindicating such a claim would require establishing that artistic imaginativeness is indeed linked to these qualities, and that this link makes it a merit. Here I hope to have established the truth of one explanation of why imaginativeness is an artistic merit.[19]

References

Alison, A. (1811) *Essays on the Nature and Principles of Taste*, 2nd ed., 2 vols, Edinburgh: Bell and Bradfute et al.

Alperson, P. (2003) "Creativity in Art," in J. Levinson (ed.) *The Oxford Handbook of Aesthetics*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Anglin, W.S. (1990) *Free Will and the Christian Faith*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Aristotle (1999) *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. T. Irwin, 2nd ed., Indianapolis: Hackett.

Audi, R. (2014) "Normativity and Generality in Ethics and Aesthetics," *Journal of Ethics* 18: 373-90.

Barnes, E. (2015) "Freedom, Creativity, and Manipulation," *Nous* 49: 560-88.

Barrett, W. (1961) "Determinism and Novelty," in S. Hook (ed.) *Determinism and Freedom in the Age of Modern Science*, New York: Collier Books.

Beardsley, M.C. (1965) "On the Creation of Art," *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 23: 291-304.

---- (1973) "What Is an Aesthetic Quality?" in *The Aesthetic Point of View: Selected Essays*, ed. M.J. Wreen and D.M. Callen, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1982.

Boden, M.A. (2004) *The Creative Mind: Myths and Mechanisms*, 2nd ed., London: Routledge.

---- (2011) *Creativity and Art: Three Roads to Surprise*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Bradford, G. (2015) *Achievement*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Budd, M. (1995) *Values of Art: Pictures, Poetry and Music*, London: Penguin.

Crowther, P. (2001) *Art and Embodiment: From Aesthetics to Self-Consciousness,* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Currie, G. (1989) *An Ontology of Art*, Basingstoke: Macmillan.

Davies, D. (2009) "The Artistic Relevance of Creativity," in M. Krausz, D. Dutton, and K. Bardsley (eds.) *The Idea of Creativity*, Leiden: Brill.

Davies, S. (2012) *The Artful Species: Aesthetics, Art, and Evolution*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

---- (2015) "Defining Art and Artworlds," *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 73: 375-84.

Dutton, D. (2009) *The Art Instinct: Beauty, Pleasure, and Human Evolution,* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Gaut, B. (2000) "'Art' as a Cluster Concept," in N. Carroll (ed.) *Theories of Art Today*, Madison: University of Wisconsin Press.

---- (2007) *Art, Emotion and Ethics*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

---- (2009) "Creativity and Skill," in M. Krausz, D. Dutton, and K. Bardsley (eds.) *The Idea of Creativity*, Leiden: Brill.

---- (2014) "Mixed Motivations: Creativity as a Virtue," *Royal Institute of Philosophy Supplement* 75: 183-202.

Goldie, P. (2007) "Towards a Virtue Theory of Art," *British Journal of Aesthetics* 47: 372-87.

---- (2008) "Virtues of Art and Human Well-Being," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society Supplementary Volume* 82: 179-95.

---- (2010) "Virtues of Art," *Philosophy Compass* 5: 830-9.

Goldman, A.H. (2006) "The Experiential Account of Aesthetic Value," *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 64: 333-42.

Gombrich, E.H. (1963) "Visual Metaphors of Value in Art," in *Meditations on a Hobby Horse and Other Essays on the Theory of Art*, London: Phaidon.

Grant, J. (2012) "The Value of Imaginativeness," *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 90: 275-89.

---- (2013) *The Critical Imagination*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Hanson, L. (2013) "The Reality of (Non-Aesthetic) Artistic Value," *The Philosophical Quarterly* 63: 492-508.

Hausman, C.R. (1984) *A Discourse on Novelty and Creation,* Albany: SUNY Press.

Isenberg, A. (1973) "'Pretentious' as an Aesthetic Predicate," in W. Callaghan et al. (eds.) *Aesthetics and the Theory of Criticism*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Kagan, S. (1998) "Rethinking Intrinsic Value," *The Journal of Ethics* 2: 277-97.

Kane, R. (1996) *The Significance of Free Will*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Kant, I. (1785) *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, trans. M.J. Gregor and J. Timmermann, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012.

---- (1790) *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, ed. P. Guyer, trans. P. Guyer and E. Matthews, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000.

Kieran, M. (2014a) "Creativity as a Virtue of Character," in E.S. Paul and S.B. Kaufman (eds.) *The Philosophy of Creativity: New Essays*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

---- (2014b) "Creativity, Virtue and the Challenges from Natural Talent, Ill-Being and Immorality," *Royal Institute of Philosophy Supplement* 75: 203-30.

Kronfeldner, M.E. (2009) "Creativity Naturalized," *Philosophical Quarterly* 59: 577-92.

Levinson, J. (2002) "Hume's Standard of Taste: The Real Problem," *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 60: 227-38.

Lopes, D.M. (2008) "Virtues of Art: Good Taste," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society Supplementary Volume* 82: 197-211.

Lyas, C. (1983) “The Relevance of the Author’s Sincerity,” in P. Lamarque (ed.) *Philosophy and Fiction: Essays in Literary Aesthetics*, Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press.

Maitland, J. (1976) “Creativity,” *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 34 (1976): 397-409.

Meiland, J.W. (1983) “Originals, Copies, and Aesthetic Value,” in D. Dutton (ed.) *The Forger’s Art: Forgery and the Philosophy of Art*, Berkeley: University of California Press.

Meyer, L.B. (1967) “Forgery and the Anthropology of Art,” in D. Dutton (ed.) *The Forger’s Art: Forgery and the Philosophy of Art*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983.

Murdoch, I. (1970) *The Sovereignty of Good*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.

Popper, K.R. (1979) “Of Clouds and Clocks,” in *Objective Knowledge: An Evolutionary Approach*, rev. ed., Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Rabinowicz, W., and T. Rønnow-Rasmussen (2000) “A Distinction in Value: Intrinsic and for Its Own Sake,” *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 100: 33–51.

Savile, A. (1982) *The Test of Time: An Essay in Philosophical Aesthetics*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Schiller, F. (1793) “Kallias or Concerning Beauty: Letters to Gottfried Körner,” in J.M. Bernstein (ed.) *Classical and Romantic German Aesthetics*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003.

Sibley, F. (1959a) “Aesthetic Concepts,” in Sibley 2001a.

---- (1959b) “Aesthetics and the Looks of Things,” in Sibley 2001a.

---- (1993) “Making Music Our Own,” in Sibley 2001a.

---- (2001a) *Approach to Aesthetics: Collected Papers on Philosophical Aesthetics*, ed. J. Benson, B. Redfern and J.R. Cox, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

---- (2001b) "Some Notes on Ugliness," in Sibley 2001a.

Stang, N.F. (2012) "Artworks Are Not Valuable for Their Own Sake," *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 70: 271-80.

Tatarkiewicz, W. (1980) *A History of Six Ideas: An Essay in Aesthetics*, trans. C. Kasparek, The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff.

Vermazen, B. (1991) "The Aesthetic Value of Originality," *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* 16: 266-79.

Woodruff, D.M. (2001) "A Virtue Theory of Aesthetics," *Journal of Aesthetic Education* 35: 23-36.

Zagzebski, L.T. (1996) *Virtues of the Mind: An Inquiry into the Nature of Virtue and the Ethical Foundations of Knowledge*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Zimmerman, M.J. (2001) *The Nature of Intrinsic Value*, Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield.

---

[1] "Creativity" tends to invite questions about creation. Can types (like novels) really be created? Is an act really creative when it does not aim at creating something distinct from itself (e.g., in dance)? What about destructive acts? These questions are distractions from the question of why creativity, in the sense I am concerned with, is an artistic merit, and "imaginativeness" does not tend to invite them. They arise because there are causative senses of "creative" in which the word applies only to something that creates. In these senses, it applies to persons and to some acts, but not to paintings or to some performances.

[2] "Artistic value" is used to cover both artistic goodness and artistic greatness. As we'll see, some argue that artistic greatness is not simply extreme artistic goodness,

but constitutes a different dimension of evaluation altogether. I wish to remain neutral about this. But I want an expression that relates only to artistic goodness if greatness is not just extreme goodness. So I prefer "artistic merit." I also suspect that "artistic value" encourages a widespread tendency to assume that the better work is the one that, in some respect, benefits the audience more, a tendency I criticize at the end of this paper. "Artistic value" makes us more likely to take for granted that the work with more artistic value is of more value to us. "Artistic merit" is less liable to have this effect.

[3] Having artistic merit is, I take it, what some philosophers would call being artistically good "to some extent."

[4] Strictly, it *might* be an imaginative gift. I claim that the plausibility and unobviousness conditions are necessary conditions of imaginativeness, not that they are jointly sufficient.

[5] My account thus differs from many other accounts of creativity in three respects. Other accounts standardly hold that something creative must be novel and have value, and some hold that creativity requires imagining. For example, in this volume, novelty and value conditions are accepted by Gaut, "The Value of Creativity," and by Paul and Stokes, "Attributing Creativity," and novelty and imagining conditions are accepted by Bird and Hills, "Against Creativity." By contrast, I appeal to unobviousness and plausibly expected success, and I hold that creativity requires thinking-of. I explain why I prefer this account in Grant 2013: ch3.5-6. Here I will mention another reason why I reject the novelty condition. It is widely agreed that a creative idea need not be unprecedented in history. A person might independently have an idea that was previously had by someone else, and the later person's idea might still be creative. But many follow Boden (2004: 2) in holding that a creative

idea must at least be "new *to the person who comes up with it.*" Boden and others, including those I mention above, mean that the person must never have had the idea before. But there are counterexamples even to this claim. Suppose a person has an idea again after irretrievably forgetting it. Assume that the fact she had the idea before does not explain why she has the idea now. If what she now thinks of is not an obvious thing to think of, her idea could still be creative. But it is not new to her. She has it independently of her past self, just as one might have a creative idea independently of some other past person who had it.

[6] Davies 2009 suggests this argument might be applied to creativity.

[7] See also Sibley 1959a: 17, 22-3, 1993: 143-7, 2001b: 235-9, and Lyas 1983: 33-5.

[8] Imaginativeness as a virtue: Zagzebski 1996: 123-5, 182-3; Woodruff 2001: 28; Goldie 2010: 835; Audi 2014: 387; Kieran 2014a and 2014b argues that exemplary creativity is a virtue; Gaut 2014 argues that creativity is a virtue in some senses of "virtue." Imaginativeness as a skill: Goldie 2007: 382; Gaut 2009 argues that creativity involves skill. Virtues have non-instrumental value and are valued as ends: Lopes 2008: 197, 199. We value skills for their own sake: Gaut 2009: 100. Skills have only instrumental value: Lopes 2008: 197.

[9] The idea that virtuous action is chosen for its own sake is ancient (e.g., Aristotle 1999: 1105a). Goldie 2008: 180 and 2010: 833 claims that exercising virtues is intrinsically or non-instrumentally valuable; Bradford 2015: 110-2 discusses such a view.

[10] I am assuming that imaginativeness is an excellence. But I wish to remain neutral about whether it is a form of virtuousness, of skilfulness, or of some other kind of excellence.

[11] Murdoch 1970: 59, 64-6, 86-7; Isenberg 1973; Lyas 1983; Gaut 2007: 96; Goldie 2008: 189-90.

[12] Or in the attempted realization of some other artistic merit, if excellence-manifesting properties are merits even in cases of failure.

[13] This theory might be welcomed by theorists of art who see manifesting skill or excellence as a condition of being art, or as something that counts toward a thing being art. See, for instance, Gaut 2000: 28; Dutton 2009: 53-4; Davies 2012: 29 and 2015: 377-8.

[14] Compare Berys Gaut's remarks on the conditional value of creativity in section 4 of his "The Value of Creativity," this volume.

[15] Berys Gaut and Matthew Kieran suggested to me that, when admiring objects of use (such as mousetraps) in design museums, we also treat imaginativeness as a merit in a design. This, they suggest, is another context in which imaginativeness is a non-artistic merit.

[16] Another possibility is that, in some of these cases, the work itself is not imaginative, but the thought to make it that way was. The plausibility condition of imaginativeness may apply to artworks in a different way than it does to thoughts. It may be that, when judging the work's imaginativeness, we do not only consider whether it was plausible for you to believe, when you had your idea, that your idea would work. Perhaps we also consider whether it was plausible to believe this after you implemented your idea.

[17] Courage: Meyer 1967: 84; Gaut 2009: 102-3; Kieran 2014a: 132-3; Kieran 2014b: 205, 207, 215. Individuality: Tatarkiewicz 1980: 259; Dutton 2009: 54, 232-5. Power: Beardsley 1965: 303; Tatarkiewicz 1980: 259. Spontaneity: Gaut, "The Value of Creativity," this volume. Freedom or autonomy: Barrett 1961; Meyer 1967: 83-4;

Maitland 1976: 401, 404; Popper 1979: 222-3; Tatarkiewicz 1980: 259; Hausman 1984: ch. 2; Anglin 1990: 14-5; Kane 1996: ch. 6; Alperson 2003: 254; Boden 2004: 270; Gaut 2009: 100-3; Kronfeldner 2009; Boden 2011: 2; Grant 2012: 289; Barnes 2015.

[18] Crowther 2001: ch. 10 argues this about individuality.

[19] I am grateful to Malcolm Budd, Noël Carroll, Jason Carter, Dan Cavedon-Taylor, Víctor Durà-Vilà, Stacie Friend, Jason Gaiger, Berys Gaut, Anil Gomes, Alison Hills, John Hyman, Matthew Kieran, Peter Shiu-Hwa Tsu, and audiences at the National Chung Cheng University, Taiwan, the Nordic Society of Aesthetics 2016 Annual Conference in Uppsala, and Exeter College, Oxford for their helpful comments. I thank the Oxford Philosophy Faculty Board and the Governing Body of Exeter College, Oxford for granting me research leave.