
Critical Notice

JAMES O. YOUNG, *Art and Knowledge*. London: Routledge 2001.
Pp. 180.¹

In his *Art and Knowledge*, the distinguished Canadian philosopher of art, James O. Young, takes on the daunting task of defending his opening claim that 'every item properly classified as a work of art can contribute to human knowledge' (1). His assertion is a general one, intended to apply to any and every prospective artwork, not merely to sub-genres like the moral novel or the 'Shock-Headed Peter' school of didactic bedtime terror-fest. Thus, according to Young, works such as *The Well-Tempered Clavier* and Vermeer's *Officer and Laughing Girl* do not qualify as art unless they can provide knowledge about topics that are important to us as human beings. A work does not become art-worthy by inspiring us to meditate, ruminate, or reflect unless the work also leads us to true beliefs that are, in some sense, justified. Furthermore, it's not enough for a work to provide knowledge about, say, abstruse issues in eighteenth-century counterpoint or the cult of painterly flatness; to count as art, a work must, in some way, supply answers to questions that are important to us as human beings living in the world. Young also argues that artworks have their own method of conveying knowledge. Hence, he buttresses his cognitive definition of art with an epistemology of art.

If successful, Young's case would undermine the fundamental views that we, the authors of this critical notice, hold with regard to both the definition and the value of art, and we therefore take quite seriously his

1 The authors would like to thank Joyce Jenkins and James O. Young for their helpful discussion. Unless otherwise noted, all page references are from James O. Young's *Art and Knowledge*.

book-length defense of the claim that it is necessary and important that artworks produce knowledge in us. To begin with, we are strongly opposed to Young's proposal that every artwork can contribute to knowledge. That is not to say that we are anti-cognitivist in the wider sense of 'cognitivist'; we do believe that our encounters with art are often intellectually stimulating and cognitively complex in a way that greatly enhances the value of art for us. We affirm that in order to understand a work of art fully, one must also understand its art-historical context, and that this understanding requires a great deal of prior knowledge. We even believe that, in the end, art can help make us deeper and better thinkers.

However, we deny that individual artworks always (or even frequently) cause knowledge in us. We further deny that such an ability to cause knowledge in us would constitute an important part of the works' artistic value even if it existed. In short, while we agree that most (but perhaps not all) works of art require and reward a substantial intellectual engagement, we believe that it is a mistake to think that this intellectual engagement translates into the acquisition of knowledge. Hence, we are opposed to Young's brand of cognitivism, not merely because we think it is false in itself, but also because a narrow concentration on artworks as conveyors of knowledge represents a distraction from the wider cognitivist task of capturing what is important about our intellectual relationship to art.

Our critical notice is divided into four sections. In the first section, we examine Young's theory of artistic value. Our main goal is to show that Young's value-theoretic arguments for the claim that all artworks have cognitive value (or the claim that we should adopt a definition of art according to which all artworks have cognitive value) are ultimately unsupportable. Next we consider music. If, as we show in our first section, Young has given us little reason to adopt a cognitive theory of art across the board, we can still ask whether there are independent grounds for adopting a cognitive criterion for musical art. We argue that there aren't such grounds, and that Young's definition accords poorly with the attitudes that most of us have to musical experience, practice and value. Third, we look at Young's account of the way in which literature is cognitively valuable. We argue that his account of the knowledge to be derived from art fails: certain crucial terms, like 'perspective,' are not clearly defined; the account does not provide the sort of knowledge that Young wants it to; and his epistemology of art does not show how artworks provide justification for the perspectives they present and the propositions they convey. Finally, we consider Young's position that, according to his definition of art, many avant-garde works do not count as art. We argue that, despite his claims to the contrary, avant-garde works frequently pass his test for art, and that the sorts of

arguments he uses for denying arthood to them would also deny arthood to many older works that are universally taken to be works of art.

I Young's Theory of Artistic Value

Young recommends that the artworld adopt guidelines for arthood according to which *all* artworks must possess cognitive value, i.e., be capable of conveying knowledge. This position will seem overly restrictive both to those who believe that not all artworks possess cognitive value and to those who believe that cognitive value is only one among many types of artistic value. The central case for his universal prescription is presented in a very brief section entitled 'Why Art Ought to Have Cognitive Value' (17-22), where his argument proceeds by stages. He argues for three claims in turn: first, that artworks are valuable only because they produce valuable mental states; second, that knowledge and pleasure are the only valuable mental states; and third, that we have good reason to insist that all artworks produce knowledge. We shall consider the stages in turn.

Stage 1: Artworks are valuable only because they produce valuable mental states. Young's argument for this conclusion runs as follows:

- (i) 'I take it that any artworld will agree that the function of any artwork is to have an effect on an audience. (Perhaps the audience may be thought to be only the artist.)'
- (ii) 'Artworks act on audiences by causing in them mental states.'
- (iii) 'Artworks are valuable because they produce valuable mental states.' 'These mental states can be valuable for their own sake, valuable for the results they have, or both.'
- (iv, corollary of iii) 'Artworks do not have intrinsic value.' 'They are good ... because they have good effects.' (17-18)

Young offers no support for (i), although it contradicts several existing theories. One could plausibly claim, for instance, that the function of art is to produce beautiful objects, and that the 'function' of an artwork is just to be beautiful. Similarly, one might claim that the function of art is to portray the world in a true and accurate fashion. Of course, beautiful objects could give rise to beautiful thoughts, and accurate portrayals to true beliefs. However, one is not thereby constrained to say that the function of these artworks is to give rise to these thoughts and beliefs;

rather, one could accept these thoughts and beliefs merely as welcome side-effects.

However, suppose that (i) is true. Do (i) and (ii) entail (iii)? No. Grant for the moment that artworks directly act on audiences by causing mental states in them. It is still possible that the audiences thus affected are led to produce valuable *non*-mental objects or states. For example, suppose that a Brechtian play instills in its audience a desire for social justice, and suppose that the members of the audience act on these desires. We can then say that the Brechtian play, via the actions of its audience, causes a higher level of social justice. Here it seems that the artwork is valuable for producing justice, which is not a mental state. A belief about whether one is living in a just society is a mental state, but in this case what is valuable is the *existence* of a just society rather than one's belief that one is living in a just society. The belief may also be valuable, but it is far from all that is of value in the case. Hence, (i) and (ii) do not entail (iii).

Young could try to regain (iii) by re-construing (i) such that the function of an artwork rests in its *direct* effect on an audience, and by adding a supplementary premise that the value of an artwork is exhausted by its ability to perform this function. However, since both the supplementary premise and the re-construal of (i) are highly dubious, such a strategy is not promising.

Stage 2: knowledge and pleasure are the only two intrinsically valuable mental states. Young divides valuable mental states into two categories. There are those with intrinsic value: 'When a mental state is valuable for its own sake, it is pleasurable' (18); there are also those that possess extrinsic value through causing — indirectly or directly — mental states with intrinsic value. According to Young, knowledge has intrinsic value because '[humans] enjoy knowledge for its own sake' (18). Knowledge also has extrinsic value: it indirectly causes mental states with intrinsic value 'by giving a person a capacity to act in such a way that he attains intrinsically valuable mental states.... A person with knowledge is in a position to predict and control nature with a view to maximizing human well-being' (18). Having established that pleasure and knowledge are valuable, Young goes on to argue that other mental states can only be valuable to the extent that they produce knowledge and pleasure:

[We] need to ask why audiences find valuable the arousal of emotion. The answer must be either that the audience finds the arousal of emotion enjoyable for its own sake, or that the arousal of emotion has extrinsic value. In the first case, art functions to cause pleasure. If the arousal of emotion has extrinsic value, it has so in one of the two ways noted above. The first possibility is that arousal causes intrinsically valuable states, perhaps by a process of catharsis. The arousal of emotion could also have extrinsic value as a source of knowledge about emotion. Consequently, if art

functions to arouse emotion, it functions to provide either pleasure or knowledge.
(18-19)

Here, one may offer several objections.

First of all, knowledge is supposed to be intrinsically valuable because 'humans enjoy knowledge for its own sake.' Suppose for moment that the acquisition of knowledge always increases one's pleasure; that fact in itself would not entail that knowledge is an intrinsic virtue. If my coming to know something caused my pleasure, then my state of knowledge would merely be extrinsically valuable in virtue of what it caused. For knowledge to be intrinsically valuable, my state of knowing would have to be the *same* state as my state of pleasure. More might be required than co-extensionality; one might argue that knowledge is an intrinsic virtue only if a knowledge-state is pleasurable *qua* knowledge state. Settling these sorts of debate requires a secure tread in the byways of value theory and the ontology of mental states and/or events. Young offers us no roadmap here, so the reader is left more puzzled than enlightened.

Fortunately, his position does not require that knowledge possesses solely intrinsic value, but simply that knowledge adds to one's pleasure. However, there are many propositions (say, that one is soon to die of a painful terminal disease) for which one's general pleasure in discovering facts about the world is outweighed by the dismal nature of the specific proposition acquired. In such cases one may, all things considered, prefer not to know the truth, especially if one is concerned with maximizing one's pleasure. Once stripped of its arcane trappings, Young's faith in the general hedonic value of knowledge seems misplaced. Furthermore, when one thinks of the various ways in which our capacities to enjoy and cope with life are enhanced, knowledge does not seem to be an essential ingredient. For instance, one may find one's life upon one's religious beliefs. These beliefs enable one to deal with adversity, better love others and find a direction for one's life. Perhaps it is important for one's life that one believes that one knows that God exists. However, whether one actually knows that God exists or whether one's belief in God is even true seem to make little difference to one's ability to cope.

This objection leads to two serious criticisms of Young's basic program. First, Young's claim that knowledge is a mental state seems false. In addition to belief, which is a mental state, knowledge requires a contribution from the world. There are theories of truth and knowledge, say the combination of an ideal-justification theory of truth with a coherentist account of knowledge, according to which a 'fit' with the world could be construed as a very complicated mental state. However, for most theories of truth and knowledge this is not the case. Young is

required to relinquish either the claim that only mental states are a source of artistic value or the claim that knowledge is valuable.

The second criticism is that, by insisting on knowledge as the only cognitive state of artistic value, Young restricts himself to a theory that does little justice to accepted artistic practice. Why is the truth of a work's message aesthetically relevant, as opposed to its plausibility of presentation and other factors internal to the work in which it is presented? We will return to both of these criticisms later in this notice.

Another objection is that Young's entire argument to this point has presumed a theory of value according to which only pleasurable mental states are of intrinsic value. For instance, he claims that the arousal of emotion can be valuable only insofar as it leads to pleasure or (through increasing one's knowledge) to the capacity for enhanced pleasure. But competing theories exist, such as the theory that value consists in the satisfaction of desires. Armed with a theory of value based on desire, one could say that the arousal of emotion is intrinsically valuable in virtue of being desired for its own sake — and that, by satisfying our desires, art can be as wide-ranging in its value as the spectrum of our desires. Those who would object 'Why desire something for its own sake unless the attainment of one's desire leads to pleasure,' are merely overtly or covertly reverting to a pleasure-based theory of value. In the end, Young must offer substantive support for the controversial theory of value upon which his position crucially depends.

Stage 3: That the artworld should confer arthood only on those works that produce knowledge. For the moment, suppose that Young has successfully shown that the only possible functions for art are the production of pleasure and knowledge. One would naturally also suppose that the artworld should endorse any work that fulfills at least one of these functions. Yet Young wants it to admit works that produce pleasure only if they *also* produce knowledge. His first argument is that because '[an] artworld has an interest in encouraging the production of works which are as valuable as possible,' the artworld should present guidelines which encourage artists to produce 'works with all the aesthetic value that they can have' and they cannot do this unless 'the guidelines specify that artworks must have cognitive value' (20).

His conclusion here is puzzling. If the artworld has an interest in the production of works with maximal aesthetic value, then why shouldn't it just lay down guidelines that state this interest? Perhaps Young fears that the desires of the general populace will spur artists to neglect the intrinsic value of knowledge and its long-term hedonic value in favor of the easy rewards to be gleaned from immediate gratification. However, the art-world can guard against the exclusive pursuit of short-term strategies by merely stressing the importance of the maximization of

total aesthetic value. If he is right that '[people] take delight in knowledge for its own sake' (20), then it is likely that artists and their audiences would pursue knowledge even if given a choice not to.

Young also argues that '[if] everyone acted in his best interests, only one artworld would exist and all artworks would have cognitive value.' His reason for this immediately follows in brackets: '(I take it that the decadent pursuit of sensory pleasure is in no one's best interests.)' (21). His argument here presupposes that the only sort of pleasure to be derived from art is sensory. Not only is this false as a claim about artistic pleasure, but he explicitly denies it two pages earlier when he says that '[pleasures] can be intellectual as well as sensory' (19) and adds that music can be a source of intellectual pleasure. His argument, then, is against a straw man that he has just dismissed. We wonder whether he also thinks that the pursuit of *intellectual* pleasure is in no one's best interest. Not only is a theory of artistic value based on both sensory and (chiefly) intellectual pleasure more in keeping with the way in which we apparently experience art, but it also opens the doors for cognitive theories of art which locate artistic value in cognitive activities like contemplation and the posing of questions and alternative hypotheses, rather than simply in the production and acquisition of knowledge.

In a later chapter, Young expands on his background concern that 'if art is only a source of pleasure, we are condemned to a debilitating relativism about aesthetic value' (114). He asserts that, in cases of disagreement between audiences about the hedonic value of given artworks, there is nothing that could even potentially be offered as a reason why one of the conflicting judgments is better, since each disputant is merely testifying to the subjective level of pleasure created in them by the work. On the other hand, he argues, the 'aesthetic realist' can resolve such disputes by holding that 'some audience members are more qualified than others,' and Young believes that such realism can only be achieved by holding his theory of cognitive content.

Young's assumption that deep relativism would be an unwelcome consequence of an aesthetic theory seems quite justifiable. Most of us have significant non-relativistic intuitions about art: for example, we tend to believe that artworks genuinely differ in quality and value, and whatever we think about the nature of aesthetic disputes, we usually hesitate to conclude that they are entirely without content. Deep aesthetic relativism would also collide with empirical observations such as the clumping of independent audience preferences for specific works, or the degree to which critical rankings are stable over time — this agreement may be far from universal, but a deep relativist would have trouble explaining even the degree of convergence that clearly exists. Hence, any account licensing an overwhelming relativism should indeed be viewed as implausible.

However, there are many domains in which subjects are evaluated on non-cognitively hedonic grounds without seeming to entail a 'debilitating relativism.' Wine-tasting is one such example: surely the craft of making and consuming wine has no cognitive content in Young's sense (he notes in passing that 'the products of vintners ... [are] simply valuable as sources of pleasure' [166]), but we do not generally take this to entail nihilism about wine expertise, or as grounds for the conclusion that all disputes about wine are vacuous. Wine experts may of course disagree among themselves to some degree, but this is consistent with the finite level of relativism that Young expects even his own account to produce, due to the inevitable range of differences in human interests (117, 122), and is very far from 'radical' relativism. But if typical non-cognitive pleasures like wine-tasting do not entail extreme relativism, then it is unclear why a pleasure-based account of art would have such consequences.

Young comes closest to addressing this objection when he considers the proposal that 'admirers of Jane Austen have a fineness of discernment greater than that possessed by Barbara Cartland's fans' (118) and hence that, even if literary works are of solely hedonic value, there are at least some grounds for denying extreme relativism and declaring that the Cartland fans' disdain for Austen is mistaken. But he argues that even after being introduced to Austen, some of the Cartland acolytes will undoubtedly continue to experience greater pleasure from Cartland than from Austen, and he concludes that we are back where we started: hedonic accounts entail 'radical relativism' even if the possibility of critical discernment is granted (119).

However, Young assumes that hedonic accounts may assess works only along the single, quantitative axis of the total amount of pleasure they create, where the particular type of pleasure is irrelevant. But this is already empirically dubious in the example at hand, which presupposes that there is a way in which Austen's work genuinely differs in kind from Cartland's. Also, it is hard to see why we should dismiss the possibility that the ex-Cartland fans in this scenario wouldn't largely *replace* their Cartland-affinity with Austen-affinity: a fairly common assumption about sophisticated aesthetic preferences is that, at least to some extent, they render less available the pleasures of hackneyed or clichéd works, because the audience has come to 'know better.' So the single-axis assumption seems doubly unwarranted: not only may different pleasures fail to fall along a common quantitative axis, they may actually be mutually exclusive.

Furthermore, it is irrelevant to a pleasure-based account how many Cartland disciples in any specific set would convert to Austen fandom. Young argues, quite reasonably, that 'failure to perceive that Jane Austen's masterpiece has cognitive value does not entail that the work

has no cognitive value' (120). But if cognitivists can evaluate works not only by the cognitive content perceived by particular audiences, but also by their *potentially* available cognitive content, then hedonists must be allowed the same latitude. In other words, accounts that found aesthetic value on pleasure, and that avoid deep relativism by citing 'fineness of discernment' and a hierarchy of types of pleasure, are in no greater danger from philistines than are cognitivist accounts — artworks can be ranked according to their *potential* pleasures, rather than according to whatever pleasures they happen to produce in a given audience.

Thus a theory of artistic value based on intellectual (and sensory) pleasure provides Young with a better philosophical opponent in all respects, and he should have considered it. A noteworthy feature of Young's dismissal of sensory pleasure above is the presence of the word 'decadent' (21). Are we to think that the non-decadent pursuit of sensory pleasure may be in our self-interest (in which case we wonder why Young doesn't consider it), or are we to think that the pursuit of sensory pleasure is decadent in itself? If so, why? More importantly, given that Young has already endorsed a theory of value holding that '[w]hen a mental state is valuable for its own sake, it is pleasurable' (18), there seems to be a deep dissonance between the claim that only the pleasurable can be valuable and the claim that the pursuit of sensory pleasure is decadent. Young could circumvent this ambivalence by adopting a value theory according to which knowledge is valuable in that we desire it for its own sake (and not because it gives us pleasure). However, were he to do this, he would also be forced to admit as valuable other activities and mental states that we may desire for their own sakes, such as the expression of emotion. No matter which theory of value he chooses, Young will be unable to provide arguments for his privileging of the acquisition of knowledge.

II The Case of Music

Pure instrumental music provides the sternest challenge for cognitive theories of art. Given that *The Well Tempered Clavier* isn't about anything, what can it possibly teach or show us? To meet this challenge, the cognitivist can argue either that *Clavier* is about something, at least in some sense of 'about,' or that it can teach/show us things even if it isn't about anything. Young takes the first strategy: upon reflection, pure instrumental music is about something and, therefore, there is a subject-matter about which it can teach us or at least illustrate important truths. For Young our '[e]xperience of music can be like the experience of emotions' in the way it inspires us to move or makes us aware of how we would move to it: for instance, the 'Dead March' from *Saul* inspires

us to move in a way consistent with solemn mourning, while the Funeral March from Beethoven's *Eroica* symphony inspires us to move in a way consistent with the experience of bitter grief. Our experience of music can also resemble our experience of emotions in that its formal structure can provoke reactions in us: the cadential incompleteness at the end of Hindemith's *Trauermusik* makes the experience of the piece 'like a feeling of sorrow' (62) in that one is made to feel that something is missing.

Let us suppose that music can be about emotions, and even that it can represent emotions rather than merely express them, so that the 'Dead March' from Saul represents stately mourning and the second movement of the *Eroica* represents bitter grief. Since Young's cognitive theory of art requires not just that these pieces represent emotions, but also that we can learn about emotions from them, we are naturally led to ask what precisely these works can teach us. Young suggests two answers to our question: a piece of music can teach us what the composer of a piece felt when writing the piece (or perhaps at some other time), and it can enable us to acquire a more finely-grained personal taxonomy of emotion as we learn more about the experiential differences between, say, the various types of grief.

One could quibble with these proposals. How can a work of music teach us what the composer was feeling without some text or external evidence to inform us that the work in question was supposed to represent the composer's feelings? How can music provide us with a perspective that gives us new knowledge of the varieties of our emotions? At best, what we learn from music seems only to illustrate what we already know — although here the cognitive theorist can respond that a work's ability to reinforce previously acquired knowledge via a new perspective should still count towards its cognitive value.

Rather than following through on these quibbles, for the sake of argument let us grant Young all of his presuppositions. The important point is that, even if he gets all that he wants, Young still doesn't obtain very much. Why would a prospective composer devote her life to the production of music once she realized that her work was valuable only insofar as it communicated her emotions or provided a more detailed map of the emotional landscape? Why would a prospective audience bother to listen? These goals for music, although not totally without value, are certainly not a sufficient basis for what many people take to be the most fundamentally valuable and enduring of all the arts. Our objection is not that composers and listeners could not possibly value music in the way that Young suggests. Rather, it is that very few composers and listeners actually seem to share Young's account of musical value, and that he provides neither a reason why they should adopt his evaluative scheme or any argument showing that it is already widely employed.

For instance, some critics believe that the most important goal for music is to express the emotions of the composer or to cause emotions in the listener. On this account, the value of music is in the act of expression or the instance of being affected, rather than in the act of communication, and such expressive or affective values are not cognitive in Young's narrow sense of 'cognitive.' Others, following Kivy's² doctrine of *cherchez la theme*, might locate the value of music in the pleasures of thematic recognition and formal analysis, or, following Levinson's³ concatenationism, might center our musical experience and what we value about it on the audible organic development of a piece of music. Although intellectually rich and challenging, these sorts of encounters are not cognitively valuable in Young's sense, because they do not provide us with knowledge concerning important topics. According to yet another camp, the value of music is cognitive, but the knowledge transmitted by music concerns the fundamental nature of being, nature, or reality. This camp would reject Young, not because he says that music is a source of knowledge, but because he trivializes the sort of knowledge that music can give us. We offer the purely empirical hypothesis that the adherents of the three positions just outlined far outnumber those who would endorse Young on the value of music.

If Young's value-theoretic reasons for adopting a cognitive definition of art were successful, then these three camps would be obliged to relinquish their schemes of musical value for his. But, as we saw in the previous section of this notice, he has not provided persuasive reasons for his theory. As a result, the success of this theory chiefly depends on the extent to which it descriptively maps the actual practices of real people. If our empirical hypothesis is even approximately correct, then Young's theory is not descriptively accurate as it pertains to music. In the absence of both normative support and descriptive adequacy, his theory remains merely a position on musical value that one may adopt if one so wishes, on the understanding that there is no compelling reason to do so, and under the realization that one would be in a small minority were one to adopt it.

The argument we have just given constitutes our main objection to Young's position on music. However, we would like to add two further comments. First, choose a piece of instrumental music such as *The Goldberg Variations*. That this is a work of art is beyond dispute, and its formal virtues and emotional depth are universally acknowledged.

2 See Peter Kivy, *Music Alone* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press 1990).

3 Jerrold Levinson, *Music in the Moment* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press 1997)

However, we can't see how *The Goldberg Variations* could be a source of knowledge of the sort that Young requires. Unlike C.P.E. Bach, who, as Young notes (92), annotated his *Fantasia in F# Minor* with the words 'C.P.E. Bach's feelings,' Johann Sebastian Bach did not make any such claim about *The Goldberg Variations*. As such, it's difficult to say that the work provides us with knowledge about J.S. Bach's feelings. Furthermore, although the work affects us deeply, we cannot say that we *learn* anything more about our emotions (or about the world) from listening to it. For us, *The Goldberg Variations* straightforwardly fails Young's cognitive criterion, as do most pieces of pure instrumental music. However, we have not provided a compelling argument that *The Goldberg Variations* cannot possibly teach us anything. Were Young to show us what this and other canonical pieces of pure instrumental music might teach us, and how they might cause knowledge in us, he would greatly improve his case.

Second, Young's failure to capture the value of music reveals an important way in which his construal of 'cognitive value' has forced him astray. In equating cognitive value with the transmission of important truths, Young commits himself to a theory of cognitive value according to which the process of listening to music is cognitively valuable chiefly for its ability to generate a *product* (i.e., knowledge). In doing so, he ignores the important possibility that the *process* (or aspects of the process) of listening to music is the locus of cognitive value. For instance, one may believe, with Kivy, that music affords us a special type of cognitive pleasure. Alternatively, one might think that the cognitive value of music is instrumental, in that the cognitive processes we undergo as we listen to music somehow improve us by making us more resilient, more reflective, or more capable of happiness in some other way.

Young grants that the value of music may partially lie in the pleasure it causes, but he ranks the value of this pleasure below that of knowledge. Young also grants that a mental state can be extrinsically valuable in virtue of its ability to cause pleasure, but he claims that only states of knowledge qualify. However, as we saw in the previous section of this notice, since he offers no argument for his presupposition that only states of knowledge are extrinsically valuable, he gives us no reason to reject the current suggestion that the experience of listening to music may itself be extrinsically valuable, even though it is not a state of knowledge. Furthermore, his argument for the superiority of knowledge over pleasure explicitly mentions only the superiority of knowledge to physical pleasure; as such, it is inapplicable to the question of whether knowledge is superior to the intellectual and cognitively complex pleasures involved in the experience of music. Young has conceptually hamstrung himself. As a result, he is left with an account of musical value that will

strike many people as too thin and without any adequate reason for rejecting what many believe to be more promising accounts.

At this point, we could be accused of seriously misconstruing the purpose of Young's theory, which is to offer a cognitive criterion for arthood but not a completely cognitive account of artistic value. Young could argue that music provides no problem whatsoever, because the pieces of music that we regard as art do pass Young's test for cognitive value, at least minimally, even if most of their value is not cognitive in Young's sense. That a musical work illustratively represents the emotions of the composer (or performs some other cognitive function) qualifies it as art; once we have counted it as art, we can further evaluate it for the intellectual pleasure it causes. Furthermore, a separation of definitional and evaluative questions has previously been maintained by respectable definitional theories, such as the institutional theory of art — a theory to which Young subscribes.

Unfortunately for Young, his reasons for adopting a cognitive theory do not allow him to maintain a strong separation between the definitional and the evaluative. Recall that his reasons for adopting a cognitive definition of art were value-theoretic: it is by adhering to such a definition that we can produce and experience works of art in a way that maximizes the value we derive from art. We assume that if Young were to find that our adherence to his definition of art would not help us to maximize the value of musical works, he would be inclined to change it. Therefore, the fact that Young's definition is largely irrelevant to the value of music must count as a serious problem for it, even by its own lights.

III The Case of Literature

Unlike music, literature is commonly believed to convey knowledge. For instance, Martha Nussbaum⁴ claims that novels possess certain properties that make them ideal for the formation of our moral perceptions, such as the length with which to present characters and their situations in sufficient detail and the ability to connect with readers both affectively and cognitively. On the other hand, writers like Lamarque and Olsen⁵

4 Martha Nussbaum, *Love's Knowledge: Essays on Philosophy and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 1990)

5 Peter Lamarque and Stein Haugom Olsen, *Truth, Fiction, and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 1994)

reject the idea that literature commonly produces moral or any other sort of knowledge (even under a wide construal of 'knowledge'). Instead, they offer a 'no-truth account' of literary value according to which the literary status and value of a work are independent of the work's ability to tell us truths about the world. But given that even those who reject the position that literature can and should teach us about the world regard it as worthy of consideration, Young's cognitive definition will find its friendliest reception among philosophers of literature.

However, before we consider Young's position in detail, we should point out that the thesis that literature can produce knowledge does not entail the thesis that only those works of literature that produce knowledge are to be counted as art. Nussbaum, for example, concentrates on authors like Henry James and George Eliot, whose works are especially well-suited for the cultivation of our moral perceptions. She has relatively little to say, nor need she, about Poe or Calvino. On the other hand, since Young believes that any work that fails to meet his cognitive criterion also fails to be art, he bears the responsibility of showing that his criterion satisfactorily demarcates the boundary of literary art even outside the friendly confines of the psychologically realistic moral novel. And, to add a small wrinkle, barely worth mentioning: Young's account is to apply to all of poetry as well.

Young begins by rejecting the notion that literature (or any sort of art) can teach us in the way that science commonly does. Literary works cannot assert theories or provide arguments; instead, they provide illustrative demonstrations of the rightness of perspectives on objects. This characterization introduces the technical terms 'perspective' and 'illustrative demonstration.' For Young, 'a perspective is a way of conceiving of an object that can enhance the understanding of the object' (67). A perspective itself cannot be true or false; it 'is right when it aids people who adopt it in the acquisition of knowledge' (69). An illustrative demonstration 'places one in a position where one can recognize something' (68). Young provides the following example of an illustrative demonstration:

Suppose that Colin wants me to demonstrate to him the colour of the pencil on my desk. I provide him with an illustrative demonstration if I lead him into my office and point to the pencil. I have not given Colin an argument. Instead, I have put him in the position to recognize that the pencil is orange. In short, I have shown him the colour of the pencil. (68)

Here the illustrative demonstration consists in a showing, an act of ostension, and that is why Young believes that the demonstration has neither stated nor argued for a conclusion. Now, what is it to provide an illustrative demonstration of a perspective?

Imagine that two women, Karen and Lana, are out shopping. A hat catches the fancy of Karen and she tries it on. Although she finds the hat appealing, she is not quite certain about it.... As Karen hesitates, Lana says to her, "It's the Taj Mahal." Karen immediately recognizes what had made her hesitate about the hat, and she sees clearly that it will not do. In comparing the hat to the Taj Mahal, Lana does not state or argue for the conclusion that the hat bears an uncanny resemblance to the great Mogul Mausoleum. Rather, her utterance puts Karen in a position to notice this resemblance and to see that the hat is unsuitable. In this way, she demonstrates the rightness of the perspective that the hat is unsuitable (86).

This is somewhat puzzling. First of all, many of us would think that Lana has stated (or at least conversationally implied) that the hat does bear a resemblance to the Taj Mahal. It is true that with the same words she could be elliptically making another claim: say, that the hat is a wondrous thing, the *summum bonum* of hats. The content of her brief comment is fixed by context, where the context includes, among other things, Karen and Lana's overtly held beliefs concerning the aesthetics of things millinery. In order to understand Lana correctly, whether Lana is elliptically stating an argument or not, Karen must be properly aware of these beliefs.

Supposing that she is properly aware, she can take Lana to be implying that the hat is as ornate as the Taj Mahal, that hats of such ornateness are unsuitable, and finally that, therefore, the hat is unsuitable. Karen does not explicitly state the argument because, if she were to do so, she would commit the boorish sin of failing to discharge her conversational responsibilities with optimal economy of expression. But an elliptically stated argument containing suppressed premises and an implied conclusion can still be an argument, and in this case, we think that it is clear that Lana has presented such an argument. At the very least, Young needs to show why she can't be taken to have presented one.

Secondly, Young's use of 'perspective' in this example is troubling, given his previous definition of the term. Young concludes that Lana has demonstrated the rightness of the perspective that the hat is unsuitable, where perspectives are supposedly capable of neither truth or falsity but only of rightness or wrongness. But hasn't Lana argued for the *truth* of the claim that the hat is unsuitable? Doesn't Karen come away from the conversational exchange with the *belief* that the hat is unsuitable? In this case, it is difficult to determine the work performed by Young's use of the term 'perspective.'

The difficulty is compounded by the previously quoted claim that 'a perspective is a way of conceiving of an object that can enhance the understanding of the object.' We are led to believe that a perspective provides us with a new way of looking at an object or situation, such that if we look at the object in this new way, we will acquire additional beliefs or feelings about the object. What are the additional beliefs and feelings

in this case over and above the belief that the hat is unsuitable? Lana's pointing out that the hat is like the Taj Mahal seems to enhance Karen's understanding of the suitability or unsuitability of the hat. Therefore, if a perspective is supposed to be a new way of looking at things that enhances knowledge, the best candidate for a perspective in this example is the perspective that the hat looks like the Taj Mahal. Young seems to be conflating the perspective that produces knowledge with the knowledge that it produces.

The same sorts of puzzles arise as one moves from Young's discussion of the hat-case to his comments about literature. For instance, the representation of the Court of Chancery in Dickens's *Bleak House* 'presents readers with the perspective that Chancery is an institution about which one ought to be angry' (80). As in the hat-case, it seems that *the Court of Chancery is an institution about which one ought to be angry* is a propositional claim, and hence capable of truth and falsity. Also, it seems that this claim is something that the reader would conclude from her reading of *Bleak House*. It is not a way of looking at things that leads to further knowledge; it is the knowledge to which the book leads the reader.

Similar confusions arise when Young tries to mount his cases for substantive positions in the philosophy of literature, such as his conclusion that '[t]he moral matters that can be illuminated by means of art are, however, specific moral problems and not general moral theories' (98). Young's argument for this is as follows:

- (i) Works of literature can only illustratively demonstrate the rightness of a perspective. They cannot offer arguments.
- (ii) 'An illustrative demonstration is possible [only] when an object can be shown directly or via a representation to an audience' (99).
- (iii) 'A law is not an object; rather it is a generalisation about objects' (99).
- (iv) 'Since laws are not objects, they cannot be shown to an audience' (99).
- (v) 'Any general principle or law can only be demonstrated by means of an argument' (99).
- (vi) Works of literature cannot demonstrate general principles or laws.

For the moment, let us ignore the still-contentious claim that works of literature cannot offer arguments; let us grant Young that works of literature function only via illustrative demonstration. Even then,

Young's argument is dubious. Suppose that the examples presented in works of literature are (and must be) specific to a given set of characters in a given situation. These are the objects that, in the words of premise (ii), are shown to the audience. However, the specificity inherent in each of the illustrations within a work does not prevent the perspective that the work demonstrates from being a general one. Consider an analogy with science. The specificity of scientific data does not forbid us from inferring general laws from such data. That's what induction and abduction are for — to justify general claims as inferences from specific data. To pursue the analogy, Young needs an extra premise to get from (i) to (iv), a premise which states that there is no demonstrative analogue for induction and abduction — that is, no way to demonstrate a general perspective on the basis of a (small) finite number of illustrations. Because Young does not argue for the non-existence of such a device, his argument contains a hole.

Still worse for Young, if he were able to fill that hole, he would have to deny that literature could teach us anything useful at all. Recall that Young's stated position is that literature can shed light on specific moral problems, but cannot demonstrate any general moral theory. But according to Young's view of *Middlemarch*, '[the] example of Fred Vincy presents a perspective on the moral value of being self-supporting' (101). Kaspar David Friedrich's *Monk by the Sea*, a painting of a 'small, solitary figure' standing on a beach, presents 'a perspective on the human condition' (89). These perspectives go beyond what is explicitly illustrated through Vincy and the monk; each of them is a general perspective. If the argument presented by Young were successful, literature (and all other forms of art) would be unable to present or demonstrate such perspectives as these. We would come away from our reading and viewing having learned only about Fred Vincy and the monk, not about how self-reliance and the human condition may pertain to our lives. Young needs the cut between what art can and cannot demonstrate to somehow fall between claims concerning specific moral issues, e.g., justice and hypocrisy, and claims about the basic nature of goodness and rightness. However, both sorts of claims are general claims; as such, the argument presented above would rule both of them to be outside of the purview of art.

Young tries to reclaim the possibility of the demonstration of at least general claims by saying: 'Here [i.e., for the purposes of premises (ii), (iii), and (iv) as we have presented them] the word "object" is used in a broad sense and applies to sets of objects and properties, including relational properties and types of objects' (99). On this construal of 'object,' the properties of justice and self-reliance count as objects, and hence can be illustrated. But if the properties of justice and self-reliance can be illustrated in this manner, then why not the properties of good-

ness and rightness? Perhaps justice is a property but not goodness. Perhaps only certain sorts of properties can be illustrated but not others. Whatever the case, Young needs an argument to permit the one and not the other, and he gives us none.

In the end, he seems to be caught in a trilemma. He can reject his argument entirely, in which case he has no reason for denying that literature can demonstrate perspectives on general moral theories. He can revise it so that his conclusion follows, in which case he must deny that art can teach us any moral lessons whatever. Finally, he can try to maintain that art can tell us about specific moral problems but not about moral theory, at the cost of admitting that his claim is based on an apparently arbitrary distinction between properties like justice and properties like goodness. None of these choices is appealing.

Now we turn to the most important challenge for cognitive theories of literature. For a work of literature to provide us with knowledge, it must do more than merely produce true beliefs. The work must also, in some sense, provide us with a justification of those beliefs. For Young, the knowledge that we acquire from an artwork is derived from the perspective with which the artwork presents us. Perspectives on an object are demonstrated via techniques such as selection, amplification, simplification, correlation, juxtaposition and connection (82-5), according to which certain properties of the object are highlighted, exaggerated, or compared with properties of another object. For instance, Thomas Jones's paintings of Venice, unlike those of Canaletto, 'draw attention to signs of decay, shoddy construction, and laundry hanging from porches,' rather than on public monuments and gala processions, and so 'Jones's very selection of objects for representation contributes to a perspective on these objects' (83). Jane Austen frequently juxtaposes a superficially engaging but morally flawed character with a type who, though lacking certain social graces, has true worth' (84). Right perspectives are those which produce knowledge. Since artworks can also present wrong perspectives, it is important for us as readers to know whether we should trust an artwork's perspective (and the propositions it generates). Young often seems to hint that we can simply 'see' or 'recognize' the rightness of a perspective, but if this were his answer, we would have to question its apparent dependence on a quasi-perceptual faculty of literary intuition. Fortunately, he directly confronts what he calls 'the reliability problem':

We can imagine, for example, a novel by a virulent Nazi. The author of such a novel would employ many of the techniques of affective and interpretive illustration to present an anti-semitic perspective.... Such a perspective is obviously mistaken, but a clever writer may be able to make such a perspective appealing to gullible audience members. (105)

As Young notes, it could be argued that perhaps 'we are no better off than those people who are misled by the imaginary Nazi' (105) and, therefore, that literature cannot be a source of knowledge. To this objection, Young responds that scientific works can also be misleading, but the fact that scientific works can be misleading does not rule science out as a source of knowledge. Both literature and science count as sources of knowledge because literary perspectives and scientific theories are testable. In the case of a scientific theory, I should consult experts or check on my own to see whether the predictions it makes are true. On the other hand, '[a] work of art gives us a way of looking at the world. In order to test the work, we need to look at the world in this way' (105). We should ask whether the work 'accords with [our] experience and whether it helps [us] to make better sense of the phenomena than alternative perspectives' (106).

In this context, we could take 'accord with' to mean *coheres with*, or perhaps *explains*, both of which are relationships between (truth-valued) propositions. Given that Young's type of perspectives lack truth value, the very idea of our experiences according with a perspective is puzzling. Perhaps we could say that a perspective accords with our experiences if it generates propositional beliefs which, in turn, cohere with or explain our experiences. Young doesn't provide us with a detailed model of how non-propositional perspectives are converted into propositional beliefs, and in the absence of such a model, he cannot be credited with having an epistemology for art. For the moment, however, suppose that we can fill in the gap between perspective and belief and move on to a consideration of Young's claims about the testability of the propositions/perspectives derived from literature.

To be sure, scientific theories are as fallible as the beliefs that we derive from literature. Both could be based on corrupt data; and even if not, both could be overturned by future data. However, the fact that theories and literary beliefs could both be wrong does not entail their epistemic equivalence. To see this, compare scientific *works* with literary *works*. A scientific work consists of a justification for the hypothesis that it offers: its central theory is presented along with the data used to support the theory and an explicit outline of the way in which the data support the theory. We can say that scientific works and the practice of science are intrinsically justificatory. On Young's model, works of literature are not intrinsically justificatory. Instead, they offer perspectives that the reader accepts or rejects based on her own experiences. As such, literary works are not sources of knowledge so much as generators of beliefs.

But, a proponent of Young's position may ask, what about the illustrative demonstrations within a work? Don't they, in some sense, justify the perspectives presented by those works? No. On Young's account, these demonstrations have a rhetorical and not a justificatory function.

Their purpose is to cause the reader to adopt the perspective presented by the work, but it seems that the reader is entirely responsible for testing the perspective by comparing it with her experiences. Perhaps we can say that the entire act of reading *and* reflecting upon a work, which includes the reader's evaluation of the perspective presented within the work, has probative value. If so, then there seems to be nothing special about literature. There are many ways of simply presenting perspectives to readers, and literature is on a par with all of them if literary works do not contain a justification of their perspectives.

We can conclude, then, that it is not clear that Young has presented an epistemology of art. His central concepts, most notably the concept of the perspective presented by a work, are not laid out in sufficient detail to constitute a worked-out theory. His claims concerning the limits on the sorts of perspectives provided by art do not seem to follow from his theory. Most importantly, his account of art does not show the way in which works of art justify the perspectives they present; as such, one wonders how the term 'epistemology' figures in Young's epistemology of art. Admittedly, our criticisms here are largely speculative. Were Young to tell us more about the nature of perspectives, the criteria for their individuation, the way in which they generate belief and knowledge, what makes them right or wrong, and the ways in which literature can in some sense play a justificatory role, his epistemology of art could be more definitively evaluated.

Finally, suppose for the moment that Young can show that his epistemology of art meets the objections that we have raised. Since the knowledge offered to us by literature ('First appearances can be deceptive'; 'Hypocrisy is, on the whole, a bad thing') is apparently knowledge that we already have by the time we are ten, works that offer such nuggets will be of little cognitive value to us. Furthermore, according to Young's criterion for arthood, imagist poems and other works that do not offer any knowledge at all (at least about 'important' topics) would fail to be artworks. To locate the value of such works in the 'knowledge' that they provide would minimize or deny their worth. On the other hand, Lamarque and Olsen's suggestion that literature is valuable merely in the possibilities for thematic analysis it offers seems too thin.⁶ As in the case of music, we would suggest that the cognitive value of literature might lie in the cognitive activities that it facilitates, such as reflection and contemplation. Young rightly notes that such activities might indirectly cause knowledge; if so, his program can easily accommodate them.

6 See Lamarque and Olsen, 449-56.

However, if we value these activities for their own sake even when they are not conducive to the acquisition of knowledge, then Young would again have to broaden his notion of cognitive value.

IV The Problem of the Avant-Garde

Young argues that it is a major virtue of his account that most avant-garde artworks fail to count as 'art.' We feel that, on any good-faith reading of the works in question, his own account does not entail this conclusion, and furthermore that the virtues of such an entailment are overstated.

His main objections to avant-garde works can be summarized as follows: either the authors of such works do not intend any particular cognitive content to be present (as in the case of John Cage's randomly generated compositions), or when they do, the intended content cannot be successfully communicated to audiences, due to the works' rejection of existing representational conventions. At best, audiences can only decipher the intended content with the aid of written statements by artists or critics, making the works 'discourse-dependent' — in such cases, the artworks are largely superfluous next to the statements themselves, and even the statements tend to provide little valuable content. In short, the works fail either his 'intentionality condition,' his 'recognition condition,' or both (145-52).

It might initially be suspected that Young's quarrel is also with the particular subjects chosen by the producers of the avant-garde — say, their fixation on identity politics or on the self-referential examination of the nature of art itself — since traditionalists might view these issues as less fundamental than the more grandiose moral or existential questions handled by the art of the past. But this is evidently not what he believes:

A true statement has cognitive value only when its audience has some reason to believe that it is true.... Discourse-dependent artworks generally do not lack cognitive value because they are about trivial or commonplace matters. On the contrary, they are generally statements about important matters such as the nature of art, the role of images in the modern world, mysticism, class struggle, relations between the sexes and so on.... [But since] discourse-dependent artworks are simply statements about these matters, they have little cognitive value. (149)

This last objection seems unwarranted, however, since many of the cognitively valuable works previously discussed in his book (e.g., illustrative paintings, musical compositions) cannot possibly provide 'justification' in the sense of explicit arguments to support a conclusion. As we noted above, on Young's own account the techniques of art transmit content by offering 'perspectives,' where establishing the correctness of

a perspective typically requires the viewer or listener to employ resources beyond the content of the work itself.

In addition, Young's readings of many avant-garde works seem willfully tone-deaf in their refusal to acknowledge non-propositional contextual information. For example, he suggests that Jenny Holzer's *Truisms* are as 'artworks which are nothing but statements' (151), works whose content is exhausted by the literal meanings of the English sentences in the signs that comprise her installations. This neglects a number of fairly obvious alternative interpretations: the statements are ironic; the statements are jokes; the statements are provocatively false; the statements are parodies of commercial speech; the works rely on the tension between the flippant statements and the monumental mode of their presentation; the works highlight (and thereby question) the objectivity we reflexively grant to institutional modes of messaging such as electronic signage, bronze plaques, and carved marble; or perhaps the works (by presenting the same statements in a variety of forms) suggest that medium and message are not as separable as one might think. These interpretations depend partly on contextual facts, such as the materials used to construct the works and the circumstances of their exhibition, but they can be arrived at without assistance from any propositional discourse surrounding the works.

Similarly, Young claims that Andy Warhol's paintings of soup cans are works 'about the homogeneity of everyday life in the modern world and about mass-produced images' (148), but asserts that since a Warhol soup-can painting is indistinguishable from an advertiser's illustration of the same can, the painting is 'unable to represent these facts by itself. It can do so only in conjunction with a body of discourse' (139). And indeed, had Warhol added the text 'M'm! M'm! Good!' to his 200 *Campbell's Soup Cans* and mounted it on an East Village billboard in the dead of night, without informing anyone of his role, then Young would have a point. But instead, Warhol exhibited his work as art, and proclaimed his own authorship of it. If this context is considered, then the cognitive content cited by Young is fairly easy to infer. In fact, insofar as one is inclined to place a low artistic value on Warhol's Pop Art paintings and sculptures, the most likely reason lies not in the obscurity of their cognitive content, but in that content's overwhelming obviousness.

Even fairly tenuous examples of art, such as Claes Oldenburg's performance piece *Placid City Monument*, which consisted of a hole dug and then refilled by hired workers, are more plausible vehicles of artistic intention than Young makes them out to be. He says of such performances that 'nothing about their contexts ... indicates that they are artworks' (146), but the context of the Oldenburg piece includes the fact that Oldenburg publicly declared it to be an artwork (complete with an assigned title). The intended cognitive content of *Monument*, such as it

is, presumably rests on that conjunction of facts, not merely in the act of hole-digging itself.

Worse yet, the line between works that rely on either context or associated text to disseminate their content and those that do not is much harder to discern than Young suggests. Many paradigm visual artworks of previous centuries presuppose knowledge of external texts: mythological or Biblical narratives, historical events, or religious iconography. These works must now be footnoted for modern audiences, bereft of classical educations, who have not already internalized the necessary texts. Conversely, even avant-garde works designed to confound mass audiences are thought to have fairly specific implications for properly-qualified viewers. It is true that the latter may, in some cases, be a small, incestuous circle of critics and fellow artists — for example, it is quite likely that (as Young asserts) untutored audiences cannot extract anything like the intended content from the paintings of Mark Rothko and Barnett Newman. It could be argued that knowledge is of low value when the audience qualified to comprehend it is overly small, but Young does not argue this — perhaps because, with respect to empirical knowledge in general, the fact that a theory is accessible only to a small number of specialists is not usually taken as evidence that the theory is valueless.

Finally, even if reliance upon external texts could somehow be ruled out of bounds only for art dated after the beginning of the twentieth century, Young's motivation for such a move would remain puzzling. Given his overall thesis that artistic value lies primarily in the successful communication of cognitive content from artists to audiences, there seems to be little reason for him to further stipulate that the vehicle of such communication should consist solely of naked artifacts or isolated performances.

V Conclusion

Although we have commented on many aspects of Young's project, we feel that there are two especially important areas of concern. The viability of Young's program depends on the extent to which he can reinforce his position in these areas.

First, according to Young, the artworld should adopt a criterion for arthood according to which every artwork must have cognitive value because: (a) in doing so, the artworld would maximize the artistic value of the works it produces, and (b) there is no other way for the artworld to avoid deep relativism concerning artistic value. Since Young's arguments for these claims fail in their present form, those who believe, say, that artworks can produce substantial intellectual pleasure without conveying knowledge should not feel pressured to relinquish their

position. We wonder, then, whether Young can amend or supplement his arguments for the thesis that all artworks should be cognitively valuable.

Second, Young's epistemology of art, although intriguing, needs to be developed. What, exactly, are 'perspectives,' and what is their causal and/or conceptual relationship to beliefs? How are perspectives justified (or shown to be correct)? What role does the artwork play in the process of the justification or certification of the correctness of the perspective it presents? Why, despite evidence to the contrary (e.g., that a character in a novel can offer an argument within the fiction) can't novels and films offer arguments, including implicit arguments, even if they don't make assertions in the everyday garden-variety sense of 'assertion?' Without answers to these questions, it is difficult and perhaps impossible for us to assess the prospects of Young's program.

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