

## The Definition of Art

Torres & Kamhi, *What Art Is: The Esthetic Theory of Ayn Rand*, ch. 6 [typos corrected]

In the preceding chapters, we have examined Ayn Rand's esthetic theory in detail, explicating her analysis of the nature of art in relation to human cognition and emotion. The linchpin of Rand's theory, undoubtedly, is her definition of art, which now merits closer consideration. A full appreciation of that definition, however, requires some awareness of the philosophic climate in the second half of the twentieth century, as well as a consideration of why definitions are essential to meaningful human discourse, and what rules govern their formulation.

### Anti-Essentialism in Contemporary Philosophy

As we noted in Chapter 4, Rand concluded her final essay on the philosophy of art, "Art and Cognition" (1971), with a scathing indictment of contemporary philosophers for having abandoned the attempt to formulate an objective definition of art—that is, a definition in terms of *essential*, or fundamental, characteristics.<sup>1</sup> Her indictment was entirely justified. By the 1950s, many philosophers had been led to "despair of the possibility of defining 'art,'" as the esthetician George Dickie has noted.<sup>2</sup> In an influential article published in the *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* in 1956, Morris Weitz declared, for example, that "the very expansive, adventurous character of art, its ever-present changes and novel creations, makes it logically impossible to ensure any set of defining properties."<sup>3</sup> Two years later, W. E. Kennick further argued that "traditional aesthetics" rests on a mistake—the mistake of trying to define art. Since art has no definite function, he claimed, it cannot possibly be defined. In his view, "the search for essences in aesthetics"—that is, for "characteristics common to all works of art"—is a "fool's errand."<sup>4</sup> By 1975, the Polish scholar Wladyslaw Tatarkiewicz observed: "Our century has come to the conclusion that a comprehensive definition of 'art' is not only very difficult but impossible to achieve."<sup>5</sup>

The anti-essentialist bias in contemporary aesthetics<sup>6</sup> is traceable to several factors. First, all prior attempts at an essentialist, or "analytical,"<sup>7</sup> definition of art had failed, for they had focused on criteria that were neither common to all art works nor unique to art—criteria such as beauty, "esthetic quality," and expression.<sup>8</sup> Further, most philosophers after mid-century were influenced by the anti-essentialism of Ludwig Wittgenstein, who held that the referents of many familiar concepts do not actually share any common or universal feature but are united only by a series of "family resemblances" observable among them, and that they therefore cannot be defined in terms of an essential common denominator.<sup>9</sup> Although Wittgenstein did not apply this

argument to the concept of *art* (the specific example he used was *game*<sup>10</sup>), philosophers influenced by him—most notably, Weitz—did so.<sup>11</sup> Moreover, as the century wore on, increasingly diverse objects and events had been put forward, and accepted, as art—no doubt, in part, because no valid definition had been formulated. The ever-greater diversity of purported art works, to which Weitz unwittingly alluded, posed an insurmountable barrier to a meaningful definition, since the supposed referents shared no commensurable characteristics. Finally, the school of thought known as “linguistic analysis” had become the dominant approach in Anglo-American philosophy, with the result that most philosophers merely examined the way words are *used*, rather than attempting to formulate objectively valid definitions of important concepts. Indeed, they even denied that a definition can be either true or false.<sup>12</sup>

### The “Institutional” Definition of Art

Having despaired of identifying any essential attribute by which art might be defined, most contemporary aestheticians have embraced open-ended theories regarding its nature. Such theories have in turn generated a profusion of spurious definitions in terms of non-essentials. The most influential of these, the “*institutional*” definition, was first proposed by George Dickie in 1969,<sup>13</sup> and again, in somewhat revised form, in his 1974 book *Art and the Aesthetic*:

A work of art in the classificatory sense is (1) an artifact (2) a set of the aspects of which has had conferred upon it the status of candidate for appreciation by some person or persons acting on behalf of a certain social institution (the artworld).<sup>14</sup> [34]

Although Dickie regarded this as a formal definition, refuting Weitz’s claim that art cannot be defined, it violates virtually every principle governing the construction of a rigorous definition (see “The Rules of Definition” later in this chapter). Beginning with the not very informative stipulation that a work of art is an “artifact”—a very broad concept that is further broadened by his promiscuous definition of it<sup>15</sup>—Dickie’s formulation is essentially circular and therefore vacuous, in spite of subsequent attempts on his part to invest it with meaning.<sup>16</sup> Logically, the concept *artworld*—an idea he borrowed from Arthur Danto, who had introduced it in 1964<sup>17</sup>—must depend on the concept *art*, the term being defined. Thus Dickie’s attempt to define *art* in terms of the *artworld* is profoundly mistaken.

In response to criticisms of his original version, Dickie published in 1984 a substantially revised, “improved” version of the institutional theory, with the following definition:

A work of art is an artifact of a kind created to be presented to an artworld public.<sup>18</sup>

Though it has the virtue of brevity, and abandons the absurd idea that something becomes art by having that status “conferred” upon it, this later incarnation of the institutional definition of art is as fundamentally circular as the previous version. Dickie himself seemed to sense something

more was needed to buttress it, for he appended four additional definitions—two, of terms that appear in the main definition; the other two, of concepts that are implicit in it:

An *artist* is a person who participates with understanding in the making of a work of art. A *public* is a set of persons the members of which are prepared in some degree to understand an object which is presented to them. The *artworld* is the totality of all artworld systems. An *artworld system* is a framework for the presentation of a work of art by an artist to an artworld public. [92]

In his most recent book, Dickie maintains that the five definitions taken together “provide the leanest possible description of the institution of art and thus the leanest possible account of the institutional theory of art.”<sup>19</sup> To us, they provide the leanest possible evidence of the utter emptiness of his theory, owing to its blatant circularity. They fail to tell us anything about the actual nature of art works or how they differ from other human artifacts.

Dickie acknowledges that his definitions of art are circular, but claims that they are not “viciously” (or fundamentally) so, for they constitute, in his view, “a logically circular set of terms” which are *inflected*, “bend[ing] in on, presuppos[ing], and support[ing] one another,” thus reflecting the “inflected nature of art.” (92) “What the definitions reveal,” Dickie explains, “is that art-making involves an intricate, co-relative structure that cannot be described in the straightforward, linear way envisaged by the ideal of noncircular definition.” Furthermore, “the inflected nature of art is reflected in the way that we learn about art.” Thus the poor reader who is lost in the opacity of all this prose can be taught “how to be a member of an artworld public”—“how to look at pictures that are presented as the intentional products of artists.” (93)

In the nearly three decades since Dickie first promulgated the institutional theory, it has been repeatedly discussed and revised by other philosophers. Yet the resulting “definitions” of art have retained the same fundamentally circular thrust: all of them imply, in effect, that virtually *anything* is art if a reputed artist or other purported expert *says* it is. Moreover, the basic assumptions of the institutional theory have persisted, even in the thought of philosophers who claim to reject it in whole or in part. In *Art and Nonart* (1983), for example, Marcia Eaton pointed to “serious weaknesses” in Dickie’s definition (though she nonetheless considered it “the most careful and clearest working out of such a definition”). (82) She subsequently offered her own version of what art is:

[Something] is a work of art if and only if . . . [it] is an artifact and . . . [it] is discussed in such a way that information concerning the history of [its] production . . . directs the viewer’s attention to properties which are worth attending to.<sup>20</sup> [99]

Note that Eaton’s implied discussants, who direct our attention to properties of artifacts they deem “worth attending to,” bear an uncanny resemblance to the “person or persons acting on

behalf of . . . the artworld”—who anoint certain artifacts as “candidate[s] for appreciation”—in Dickie’s original definition. Moreover, the determinative role of the “artworld” becomes even more obvious in the revised definition proposed by Eaton in *Aesthetics and the Good Life* (1989).<sup>21</sup> Eaton strives to retain what she refers to as the “aesthetic value” of art. But her definition of this concept<sup>22</sup> sheds no light on the distinctive value of *art*, as compared with other “aesthetic” objects. In any case, Eaton accepts the institutional theory’s basic premises. As Ralph Smith has observed, the *discussion* emphasized by Eaton enables “a thing that otherwise would not be regarded as art [to be inducted] into the world of art”: thus such things as “[b]oulders, pieces of driftwood, or ditches” that “get talked about in relevant terms . . . in effect become works of art” according to Eaton’s theory.<sup>23</sup>

Another prominent philosopher, Richard Wollheim, promisingly begins a sometimes insightful critique of the institutional theory, in his book *Painting as an Art*, by noting the theory’s “fundamental implausibility,” and by further suggesting that revision does not reduce any of “the very serious difficulties that attach to it.” That the theory is popular in some circles, he astutely remarks, derives from the enhanced power and enlarged self-esteem it imparts to those “tempted to think of themselves as representatives of the art-world.” In their view, Wollheim observes, “[p]ainters make paintings, but it takes a representative of the art-world to make a work of art.” (13–14) Nonetheless, like Eaton, he ultimately embraces the fundamental assumptions of the institutional theory.

Though Wollheim does not offer a definition of art (notwithstanding his concern with painting “as an *art*”), one need only read between the lines of his work to see that his concept is little removed in essence from those of Dickie and Eaton. “The experience of art,” Wollheim explains, rather opaquely, “takes the form. . . of coming to see the work that causes the experience as in turn the effect of an intentional activity on the part of the artist.” Further, the artist’s intention involves, in part, his belief that

when a particular intention is fulfilled in his work, then an *adequately sensitive, adequately informed*, spectator will tend to have experiences in front of the painting that will disclose this intention. [8, emphasis ours]

What is one to make of Wollheim’s reference to “an adequately sensitive, adequately informed, spectator”? Imagine a poor, befuddled “spectator” standing before an abstract painting in a museum and confiding to Wollheim that he discerns only geometric forms, color, and texture which *represent* nothing. He therefore questions whether the work is, in fact, art. Wollheim would no doubt inform him that the work is actually “at once representational and abstract” (as he argues later in his book), and that it is indeed a work of art. When the hapless spectator, now “adequately informed,” nonetheless fails to discern the alleged artist’s “intention,” and continues to doubt that the work is art, he would then be judged “inadequately sensitive”—according to

Wollheim's version of the "experience of art." In effect, Wollheim is a representative of the artworld he purports to disparage.

In *Definitions of Art* (1991), Stephen Davies remarks that Dickie's original proposition "struck some people as preposterous" (78)—owing, no doubt, to its obvious circularity. Yet all the succeeding approaches which Davies examines can be seen, when stripped of the obfuscating jargon in which they are often cast, to be nothing more than variations on the institutional theory. Indeed, after describing and commenting in detail on the definition of art "as it has been discussed in Anglo-American philosophy over the past thirty years,"<sup>24</sup> Davies himself offers "not a new theory but rather a new perspective," culminating in the following conclusion:

Something's being a work of art is a matter of its having a particular status. This status is conferred by a member of the Artworld, usually an artist, who has the authority to confer the status in question by virtue of occupying a role within the Artworld to which that authority attaches.<sup>25</sup> [218]

How does Davies define the crucial concept "Artworld"? It is, he explains somewhat murkily, an "informal institution" arising from "(noninstitutional) social practices related to the function of art and . . . continu[ing] to develop through time," which is "structured in terms of its various roles—artist, **impresario**, public, performer, curator, critic, and so on—and the relationships among them." Of these many roles,<sup>26</sup> Davies defines only the first:

An artist is someone who has acquired (in some appropriate but informal fashion) the authority to confer art status. By "authority" I do not mean "a right to others' obedience"; I mean an "entitlement successfully to employ the conventions by which art status is conferred on objects/events." This authority is acquired through the artist's participation in the activities of the Artworld.<sup>27</sup> [87]

Thus Davies's "new perspective" merely combines and reshuffles the elements of the two versions of Dickie's proposition for a result that, in our view, is equally nonsensical.

Regarding the *purpose* of art, and the question of why art plays "so significant a role in the lives of so many people" (50), Davies notes only that its "primary function . . . is to provide enjoyment."<sup>28</sup> Unlike Rand, he offers no suggestion of what might be the *source* of the pleasure derived from art. He notes only that the "wider social functions" art serves—"providing employment, securing the value of [financial] investments, and so on"—tend to influence the Artworld "to operate in a way that often is at odds with the function of art." With no further comment on his part, however, the reader is left to guess at his precise meaning. (220)

Just how entrenched anti-essentialism and the assumptions of the institutional theory have become in scholarly and critical circles is evident from an article in the *New York Times*,<sup>29</sup> in

which nearly a score of prominent “art-world participants” answer the fundamental question of aesthetics, “What is art?”—as well as the frequently appended question “Who decides?” A typical response is that of Thomas McEvelley, professor of art history at Rice University and a contributing editor of *Artforum*. McEvelley prefaces his answer by recalling a visit to the Houston “Media Center,” where an assortment of laundry hanging from clotheslines attached to posts, “as in a back yard,” was immediately recognizable by him as a work of art “because of where it was.” He concludes:

It is art if it is called art, written about in an art magazine, exhibited in a museum or bought by a private collector.

It seems pretty clear by now that more or less anything can be designated as art. The question is, Has it been called art by the so-called “art system”? In our century, that’s all that makes it art.<sup>30</sup>

In so stating, McEvelley echoes the critical dictum of Roberta Smith, quoted in our Introduction. Similarly, *Time* magazine’s art critic Robert Hughes (known also through his televised surveys of art history and related books) avers: “As far as I am concerned, something is a work of art if it is made with the declared intention to be a work of art and placed in a context where it is seen as a work of art.” William Rubin, director emeritus of painting and sculpture at the Museum of Modern Art in New York City, sounds an equally familiar refrain when he claims that “no single definition of art [is] universally tenable.” And Arthur Danto, Johnsonian Professor of Philosophy emeritus at Columbia University and art critic for *The Nation*, even more bluntly declares: “You can’t say something’s art or not art anymore. That’s all finished.”

Most disturbing is the opinion of Robert Rosenblum—professor of art history at New York University’s Institute of Fine Arts, and a curator at the Guggenheim Museum in New York City—who disdainfully presumes: “By now the idea of defining art is so remote I don’t think anyone would dare do it.”<sup>31</sup> Since Rosenblum surely knows of on-going attempts at an institutional “definition” by his peers in the artworld, he must mean that no one would dare to propose an *essentialist* definition, framed according to the rules of logic. As this book testifies, however, he is much mistaken. In any case, the pedagogical implications of Rosenblum’s remark are disconcerting, for it is all too easy to imagine the intimidating influence his attitude might have on students inclined to even raise the question of an objective definition of art in the classes he teaches.

### *The “Appeal to Authority”*

The institutional theory, in all its manifestations, resorts to the logical fallacy known as the “appeal to authority.”<sup>32</sup> But the rules of logical argument demand that adequate evidence be given in support of a claim or theory. As Kelley points out in *The Art of Reasoning*, it is entirely

appropriate to rely on expert testimony, provided that “the conditions of credibility are satisfied”: (1) the alleged authority must, in fact, be an expert in the field under discussion; and (2) he must be objective. Moreover:

The use of authorities . . . is appropriate only when the issue in question requires specialized knowledge or skill that the ordinary person does not possess. If the issue is *not* a technical one—if it is a matter of common sense, . . . then the ordinary person is capable of understanding the evidence for it, and . . . should simply be given the evidence, not asked to rely on someone else’s judgment. Why should [one] settle for secondhand knowledge, when [one] could have firsthand knowledge? [119–20]

Contrary to the artworld’s authoritarian “experts” cited above, we would insist that the general nature of art is decidedly *not* a technical issue requiring specialized knowledge beyond the grasp of the ordinary person.<sup>33</sup> As Jacques Barzun has admonished: “Talk and thought about art must conform to the canons of common sense, because art offers itself to the senses and the mind not as an idea or an abstraction, but as a piece of concrete experience. Nor does common sense here mean conventional opinion but thought free of jargon.”<sup>34</sup>

Since the institutional theory in all its forms depends on the “appeal to authority,” we refer to it as the “authoritarian theory of art,” a term that more accurately indicates its true nature, and to the various definitions subsumed under it as “authoritarian” definitions of art.

### **The Rules of Definition**

Given the overwhelming trend away from essentialist, or analytical, definitions in contemporary philosophy, Rand deserves credit, at the outset, for insisting on the need for such a definition with respect to art. In so doing, she continued an established practice of inestimable value. The virtues of precise definition, and the rules governing its construction, had been a commonplace of intellectual discourse in the first half of the twentieth century.

As late as 1948, for example, the *Encyclopedia Britannica* carried a succinct entry on “definition,” written from an essentialist perspective. Referring to *definition* as “a logical term used popularly for the process of explaining, or giving the meaning of, a word,” the entry went on to cite a set of rules “generally given as governing accurate definition.”<sup>35</sup> In his classic introductory text *Logic* (first published in 1950), Lionel Ruby observes that “when we speak of ‘definition,’ we usually refer to this type of definition” (99). He further notes that such a definition is valuable because it tells us that “something belongs to a general class of things and that it is distinguished from other members of its class by certain characteristics.” (100–101) Ruby aptly begins his discussion with a trenchant bit of dialogue from *Lady Windermere’s Fan*, by Oscar Wilde, in which the Duchess implores: “Do, as a concession to my poor wits, Lord Darlington, just explain to me what you really mean,” and Darlington candidly replies: “I think I

had better not, Duchess. Nowadays to be intelligible is to be found out.” As Ruby explains: “When we define our terms we explain ‘what we really mean,’ with all the risks attendant thereto. But if we desire to avoid obfuscation and discussions which move at cross-purposes, we must give definite and precise meanings to our terms.” (88)

Regarding the process of constructing a proper definition, Ruby acknowledges that it can be very difficult, “particularly when there is controversy over the ‘proper’ meaning of a word.” (119) As it happens, one of the controversial concepts with which he chooses to illustrate the process is *art*, for it is precisely such “vague or ambiguous terms” that most require an analytical definition, which helps to clarify the objective nature of the concept’s referents. (100) According to Ruby:

We should first stipulate that the word [‘art’] will denote certain referents: . . . [i.e.,] productions in the fields of painting, sculpture, architecture,<sup>36</sup> literature, and music. . . . Our next task is to analyze the nature of the referents . . . [and to] seek for the characteristics which are common and peculiar to paintings, poems, etc., so that our definition will have the virtue of equivalence. [119-20]

Kelley, too, discusses the definition of the concept *art*, emphasizing that “the more abstract a concept is, and the longer the chain of other concepts that link it to its referents, the more important a definition is.”<sup>37</sup> (35)

In her *Introduction to Objectivist Epistemology*, Rand argues that, though a definition is often said to state the meaning of a word or term, it really identifies “the nature of the [referents] subsumed under a concept.” She explains: “A word is merely a visual-auditory symbol used to represent a concept; a word has no meaning other than that of the concept it symbolizes, and the meaning of a concept consists of its [referents]. It is not words, but concepts that man defines—by specifying [the fundamental attributes of] their referents.” The purpose of a definition, she emphasizes, is “to distinguish a concept from all other concepts and thus to keep its [referents] differentiated from all other existents.”<sup>38</sup> (40) A useful definition can therefore be based only on a rational system of classification,<sup>39</sup> and one cannot merely “stipulate” (as Ruby might seem to suggest) the referents being defined. “When in doubt about the meaning or the definition of a concept,” Rand counsels, one should seek the referents that “gave rise to the concept.”<sup>40</sup> (51) In the case of art, this means pre-modernist works of painting, sculpture, literature, music, and dance. Since the process of concept-formation itself depends on a recognition of fundamental similarities and differences,<sup>41</sup> a re-examination of these original referents would yield more reliable information than a consideration of avant-garde work. Thus the approach taken by contemporary theorists, who focus on such phenomena as “dadaism, pop art, found art, and happenings,”<sup>42</sup> is completely mistaken.

As outlined by both Ruby and Kelley, as well as by the brief *Encyclopedia Britannica*



article cited above, a proper definition is constructed according to a prescribed set of principles, or rules, the most important of which are the following: (1) it includes a *genus* (the general class of things to which the referents of the concept being defined belong) and a *differentia* (the principal characteristic[s] distinguishing the concept's referents from other things in that class); (2) it is neither too broad nor too narrow; (3) it identifies the essential attributes or characteristics of the concept's referents; (4) it avoids circularity (it must not employ a synonym or cognate of the concept being defined); and (5) it is clear—avoiding, in Kelley's words, “vague, obscure, or metaphorical language.”<sup>43</sup>

### **Rand's Definition of Art**

How well does Rand's definition of art as “*a selective re-creation of reality according to an artist's metaphysical value-judgments*” satisfy the criteria enumerated above? Let us examine each point, in turn:

(1) Rand's definition does include a *genus* (“a selective re-creation of reality”) and a *differentia* (“according to an artist's metaphysical value-judgments”). Further, the genus conveys, as it should, important information about the larger class of things to which art works belong.<sup>44</sup> As we suggested in Chapter 1, Rand's genus broadly corresponds to the concept of *mimesis*<sup>45</sup> (imitation) in ancient Greek thought. In our present-day context, Rand's concept of “selective re-creation” subsumes a wide variety of man-made objects and activities, many of which are not works of art. Among the non-art examples are dolls, toy cars, model ships, billboard advertisements, magazine illustrations, children's play-acting,<sup>46</sup> and celebrity impersonations. In each instance of mimesis, the principal criterion for the selective re-creation of reality is suitability for the intended purpose, or function, of the object or activity. The designer of toy cars or dolls, for example, seeks to delight and instruct children. The billboard designer aims to catch the eye of people traveling at some speed on a highway and motivate them to purchase commercial goods or services, for example, or to support some cause. The celebrity impersonator's goal is to entertain an audience by mimicking the vocal and physical mannerisms of well-known personalities, often by exaggerating them as in a caricature.

The criterion of selectivity on the part of the artist is also dependent upon the ultimate function of the work—which is to objectify fundamental values and a view of life. In contrast with the individuals cited above, however, the artist need not be aware of that ultimate function at all, and surely not to the degree explicated by Rand.<sup>47</sup> Though it governs his choices, it does not necessarily form part of his conscious intention. Nor does the artist focus, during the creative process, on the work's relation to other people. His intentional focus is on the work itself, on its intrinsic importance for him, as we emphasized in our discussion of “communication” and art in Chapter 3. He is guided primarily by the standard of what he holds—on the deepest, emotionally integrated, subconscious level—to be *important* in life.<sup>48</sup> This is what Rand's

*differentia* of “metaphysical value-judgments” is meant to convey, but the full meaning of that term and its relationship to art are far from transparent. On that issue, see (5) below.

(2) To test whether Rand’s definition is too broad or too narrow, one must seek possible counterexamples: would it include some things that are clearly *not* art? might it exclude anything that one would reasonably classify as art? To our knowledge, her definition subsumes all, and only, those works that commonly fall under the traditional category of (“fine”) art—with the exception of architecture, the exclusion of which is justified, as we argue in Chapter 10. We can think of nothing whose status as art is undisputed that would be excluded by it.<sup>49</sup> The only works excluded are precisely those that have been regarded as “controversial” or “avant-garde” in the twentieth century—that is, those which have been arbitrarily granted art status by the “artworld.” In our view, their exclusion is a major virtue of Rand’s definition.

(3) Does the definition identify the *essential* attribute(s) or characteristic(s) of all works in the major art forms? As we have indicated in (1) and (2), we think that Rand’s concept of a “selective re-creation of reality” does indeed identify a fundamental attribute of all authentic instances of art. Moreover, her criterion of selection “according to an artist’s metaphysical value-judgments” (at least as it is elaborated by her in terms of her concept of sense of life) is valid, in our view, although we have reservations about the term as such—on which, again, see (5) below. Taken as a whole, Rand’s definition accounts for the salient features of the rich diversity of art works in various cultures from prehistory onward, while also allowing ample possibility for future creativity—even as technology advances—within the limits set by the requirements of human nature.<sup>50</sup> It not only points to the distinctive attributes of art works but also suggests why art can be of profound personal significance for both creator and responder, as well as being culturally significant. In sum, it answers three of the principal objections commonly raised against an essentialist definition: first, that such a definition would foreclose creativity; second, that works of art share no perceptible common features; and third, that such a definition could not be a guide to distinguishing art from non-art.<sup>51</sup>

Nonetheless, the objection has been raised that Rand’s definition is inadequate, because it fails to specify the function of art.<sup>52</sup> On the face of it, this may seem to be a legitimate objection, since human artifacts are usually defined in terms of their function, which determines their characteristics.<sup>53</sup> Rand herself emphasizes that a distinctive characteristic of art is that it serves a unique psychological function—that of concretizing or objectifying what one deems to be important in life. A persistent problem with attempting to define art in terms of its purpose, however, is that an art work often serves multiple purposes. While the cognitive function identified by Rand constitutes the ultimate purpose for which art exists, secondary functions may readily coexist with it. And, as we have stressed, the cognitive function of art does not ordinarily form part of an artist’s conscious intention.<sup>54</sup>

According to Rand's definition, it matters little whether the conscious purpose or intention of a Renaissance painter depicting a Madonna and Child, for instance, was to pay homage to the Virgin, while satisfying his patron's wish to do the same, perhaps hoping thereby to insure intercession with God. As evidenced by the widely varying treatments of such religious subjects, a different artistic temperament shapes each one, and each work projects a distinctive sense of life. Nor do we need to know whether Dante's motivation for writing *The Divine Comedy*, for example, was to save the souls of his fellow Christians. What counts is that, in every case, the individual sensibility of the artist is embodied in the work itself. Because Rand's definition identifies the essence of art works as such, without stipulating their function, it need not exclude those works intended or employed for ritual or religious purposes.<sup>55</sup> Regardless of the purposes for which such works may have been intended or enjoyed, they presented a selective re-creation of reality which held deep personal significance for the artist and for countless others as well, down to the present day.<sup>56</sup>

In any case, it is important to remember that a definition need not specify *all* the important characteristics of the concept's referents, but should focus instead on those that have the greatest explanatory power. In our view, Rand's definition of art does this, notwithstanding any reservations we express below about the key term of the differentia.

(4) At first glance, the objection could be raised that Rand's differentia violates the rule of non-circularity, since it employs the term "artist," a cognate of the term or concept being defined. On closer examination, however, this objection evaporates. Rand's definition is not fundamentally circular, since one might easily substitute the term "maker" or "creator" without altering the essential meaning of the statement (though we much prefer the term "artist").<sup>57</sup> In other words, one does not need to know what an "artist" is in order to understand what "art" is, according to Rand's definition. Authoritarian definitions of art, by contrast, are fundamentally circular. Their meaning ultimately depends on one's knowledge of what an "artist" or the "artworld" is, which in turn requires that one know what "art" is.

(5) Finally, we must consider whether Rand's definition is sufficiently clear, whether it avoids vagueness and obscurity. The key term of her differentia, "metaphysical value-judgments," might well be obscure to persons not steeped in philosophy.<sup>58</sup> As we noted in Chapter 1, her own discussion of the concept is cursory, and the examples she cites seem to have little relevance to art forms other than literature. Her fullest explication of *metaphysical value-judgments* as they pertain to the arts is in terms of *sense of life*, as we indicated in Chapters 2 and 3. Why, then, did she not use that concept in her definition?

The likely answer is that, while less obscure, the term "sense of life" would be far more vague, in the absence of Rand's explication and analysis. Though the phrase is often used in everyday discourse, no one unfamiliar with Rand's thought could be expected to be aware of the complex

layers of meaning she ascribes to it, as “a pre-conceptual equivalent of metaphysics”—“an emotional, subconsciously integrated appraisal of man and of existence.” In light of her analysis of sense of life and its role in art, however, it is clear that the term “metaphysical value-judgments,” without further modification, may be somewhat misleading as the criterion of artistic selectivity, since it can be taken as referring to conscious value-judgments, whereas “sense of life” refers to the subconsciously held value-judgments that are crucial to emotional response.

In our previously published introduction to Rand’s philosophy of art, we proposed the following reformulation of her definition: *Art is a selective re-creation of reality according to an artist’s fundamental values.* Such a formulation gains some support from Rand’s own comments in “Philosophy and Sense of Life.” For example, she observes that “it is only those values which he regards or grows to regard as ‘important,’ those which represent his implicit view of reality, that remain in a man’s subconscious and form his sense of life.” (28) And: “The integrated sum of a man’s *basic values* is his sense of life.” (29, emphasis ours) Further, she maintains that an individual’s sense of life reflects his “deepest values.” (31)

When we proposed our revision of Rand’s definition, we were unaware that she had originally employed the term “values”—though not “fundamental” or “basic” values—in her definition and had then replaced it with “metaphysical value-judgments.”<sup>56</sup> In re-considering this point, one of us (M.M.K.) has had a change of mind. The other (L.T.) has not. We offer both our views below for our readers’ consideration.

[M.M.K.] Certainly, the concepts of “values” and “metaphysical value-judgments,” while related, are by no means equivalent for Rand. She defines a *value* as “that which one acts to gain and/or to keep,” and implicit in that definition is the standard sense of that which one esteems as a good. In contrast, a *metaphysical value-judgment* might be defined (based on her analysis) as “an assessment of a fundamental aspect of reality in relation to its import for one’s life.” Whereas *values* pertain to everything that a man regards as a good (and therefore seeks to gain and to keep),<sup>57</sup> *metaphysical value-judgments* comprise both negative and positive assessments, since they pertain to fundamental aspects of existence—that which is deemed *important*, for better or for worse.

With respect to art, in particular, the concept of metaphysical value-judgments has broader relevance than that of values alone. An artist who chooses to depict human suffering and misery, for example, cannot reasonably be supposed to be guided in the creative process by his fundamental *values*, if by “values” one means “that which he deems as a good.” Rather, he is guided by what he considers to be metaphysically *important*. Because he regards suffering as a salient and inescapable aspect of human existence, he makes it the subject of his art. The medieval painters who depicted the horrors of the plague in fourteenth-century Italy (or the

patrons who commissioned such scenes), for instance, did not “value” the Black Death. But they deemed it to be an event of shattering importance, of which one must remain mindful, and therefore sought to give it concrete expression. Indeed, Rand herself stresses this criterion of importance in her analysis of the role of sense of life in art, as we have previously noted. In replacing “values” with “metaphysical value-judgments” in her definition of art, Rand may have recognized that the former term would exclude such works. To translate her definition into simpler language that accurately reflects her concept of sense of life, I therefore now propose: *Art is a selective re-creation of reality according to an artist’s fundamental view of life, which includes his deepest values.*

[L.T.] In substituting “metaphysical value-judgments” for “values” in her definition of art, Rand may have realized that the term is, by her own account, far too inclusive, since it encompasses literally *anything* one acquires (or seeks to acquire), or stores or preserves in some manner—from seashells and ice cream to picture postcards and freedom. But the term *value* occurs repeatedly in Rand’s thought on art, most often preceded by such qualifiers as “metaphysical,” “deepest,” “basic, or “fundamental,” so it is worth examining further, especially in relation to the above-mentioned notion of its “being esteemed as a good.”

As defined by Peter A. Angeles (*Dictionary of Philosophy*), “value” is, indeed, “that which is . . . regarded highly, or a good”—but, as he adds: “the opposite of a positive value is . . . ‘negative value.’” More germane, in *The Philosophic Thought of Ayn Rand* (64), Douglas Den Uyl and Douglas Rasmussen note that, for Rand, “Value is a morally neutral term.” Finally, as Nathaniel Branden has observed: “If a man regards a thing (a person, an object, an event, a mental state, etc.) as good for him, as beneficial in some way, he values it—and, when possible and appropriate, seeks to acquire, retain and use or enjoy it. . . . As a being of volitional consciousness, [however, man] is not biologically ‘programmed’ to to make the right value-choices automatically. He may select values that lead him to suffering and destruction. But whether his values are life-serving or life-negating, it is a man’s values that direct his actions.” (“Emotions and Values,” *The Objectivist*, May 1966).

Most importantly, in the first of her *Fiction-Writing* lectures, Rand elaborated on her concept of art. “The mere fact of what you select to present and how you present it, will express your fundamental values,” she remarked, adding: “When I say ‘fundamental,’ I mean ‘metaphysical.’ I mean your view of the nature of reality, or man’s relation to it.”

In light of the above, I offer again the revised definition we proposed in 1991 (since the alternative suggested above strikes me as insufficiently clear and overly broad): “*Art is a selective re-creation of reality according to an artist’s fundamental values.*”

[M.M.K. and L.T.] We hasten to stress that, our differences on this point notwithstanding, we

consider Rand's original definition of art (and either of our reformulations of it) preferable to any other definition we know of in the critical literature.

## Endnotes

1. Though Rand gives little direct evidence of having read the contemporary philosophic literature, much less that pertaining specifically to the definition of art, she was certainly broadly aware of philosophic trends. Moreover, in the early 1960s, around the time she began articulating her theory of art, she had lengthy conversations on the subject with the philosopher John Hospers, who arranged for her to deliver a paper on "sense of life" at the annual meeting of the American Society for Aesthetics in 1962. See Kamhi & Torres, "Critical Neglect of Ayn Rand's Theory of Art."
2. George Dickie, "Definition of 'art,'" in Cooper, *Companion*, 111.
3. Morris Weitz, "The Role of Theory in Aesthetics," *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 15 (1956); reprinted in Coleman, *Aesthetics*, 90.
4. William E. Kennick, "Does Traditional Aesthetics Rest on a Mistake?" (1958), reprinted in Coleman, 411-27.
5. Wladyslaw Tatarkiewicz, *History of Six Ideas*, 33. On skepticism among contemporary aestheticians regarding a definition of art, see also Eaton, *Art and Nonart*, 15.
6. For other seminal statements of the "anti-essentialist" view, see Paul Ziff, "The Task of Defining a Work of Art" (1953), reprinted in Coleman, 94-111; and John Passmore, "The Dreariness of Aesthetics" (1951), reprinted in Coleman, 427-43. According to Stephen Davies (*Definitions of Art*, 22), it was Weitz who "persuaded many that artworks could not be defined in terms of their perceptible, intrinsic properties."
7. There is no relationship between "analytical," or essentialist, definitions and the "analytic" school of contemporary philosophy. Indeed, as noted below (n. 12), that school eschews the analytic approach to definition.
8. Regarding essentialist approaches to defining art based on "expression," see our discussion of "Emotion and 'Expression' in Art" in Chapter 3. As Davies notes (*Definitions*, 22), it was, in particular, the effort to define art in terms of "certain aesthetic properties, such as beauty," that anti-essentialists rejected. Since beauty is neither a necessary nor a sufficient attribute of art works, it should never have been the focus of a definition. As Davies explains, rather than continue the search for a valid essentialist criterion, philosophers adopted a "contextualist" approach, attempting to define art in relation either to its social function or to the "procedures" by which art works are brought into being. The "procedural" definitions to which Davies refers, however, bear no similarity to the creative process implied in Rand's definition; his prime example of a procedural definition pertains to the "institutional theory" of art, which we discuss later in this chapter.

9. As noted by Dickie (in Cooper, *Companion*, 111), many philosophers have even gone so far as to argue that works of art need not be artifacts.
10. For a persuasive refutation of Wittgenstein's claim that an essentialist definition of *game* is impossible, see Kelley, *Art of Reasoning*, 47–51.
11. On Wittgenstein's pervasive influence, see Dickie, in Cooper, *Companion*, s.v. "definition of 'art'"; and Hanfling, "Definition" (see below, n. 55), 14–16.
12. The emphasis on linguistic analysis in contemporary American and British philosophy was an outgrowth of *nominalism*, the view that concepts are merely mental constructs bearing no objective relation to reality. According to nominalists, a definition is simply an arbitrary stipulation as to how a word will be used, and is therefore neither true nor false. For a succinct analysis and refutation of this position, see Ruby, *Logic*, 114–18. See also Rand's rebuttal of various nominalist claims in her *Introduction to Objectivist Epistemology*, 36–38, 47–48, 50, and 77–78.
13. Dickie's earliest formulation of an "institutional" definition of art was the following: "A work of art in the descriptive sense is (1) an artifact (2) upon which some society or some subgroup of a society has conferred the status of candidate for appreciation." "Defining Art," *American Philosophical Quarterly*, 6 (1969): 254.
14. Dickie's 1974 definition, quoted by him in *Introduction to Aesthetics*, 83. Dickie's phrase "status of candidate for appreciation" seems an unnecessarily convoluted way of saying "status of art," which is, presumably, what he meant. The latter phrase would, of course, have rendered his definition even more evidently circular. On the concept "artworld," see below, n. 17.
15. After noting the "dictionary definition" of *artifact*—"An object made by man, especially with a view to subsequent use"—Dickie argues that a piece of driftwood "picked up and displayed in the way that a painting or a sculpture is displayed" would be "an artifact of an art-world system." He further maintains that the urinal Marcel Duchamp presented as an art work entitled *Fountain* "can be understood along the same lines." *Introduction to Aesthetics*, 87. Regarding Duchamp's work and its influence, see our Chapter 14. Randall Dipert observes that, though *artifact* is a key concept in Dickie's definition, it is inadequately developed and explained by him. *Artifacts, Art Works, and Agency*, 8n6 and 110. For an analysis of the concept, see esp. 29–33. Contrary to Dickie's claim regarding the piece of driftwood treated as art and the urinal appropriated by Duchamp, Dipert argues, in part, that *any* artifact (not least a work of art) should be recognizable as intended for the purpose it serves. He then constructs a definition by refining Dickie's concept of artifactuality so as to specify the distinctive nature of artistic intentionality. Though the approach seeks to identify an essential aspect of art, the resulting definition ("An art work is an artifact that is not conceived to have been made with an unsubordinated intention other than one that is such that its recognition implies its fulfillment" [112]) is unclear, owing to its dependence on a complex series of clauses and a double negative.
16. For comments by Dickie on his original definition, see, for example, his recent book, *Introduction to Aesthetics*, 83.

17. Regarding the concept *Artworld*, Dickie (“Defining Art,” 254) quoted Danto’s 1964 article in the *Journal of Philosophy*, which argued: “To see something as art requires something the eye cannot decry [*sic*]—an atmosphere of artistic theory, a knowledge of [the] history of art: an artworld.” As Davies observes, Danto’s discussion “shifted attention from the artistically relevant properties of artworks to the social context without which they could not take on and present such properties. That shift of attention prepared the ground for an institutional account of the definition of art.” *Definitions*, 81.

18. Dickie, *The Art Circle* (1984), 80–82; cited in his *Introduction to Aesthetics*, 92. As implied in n. 17, above, the term “artworld public” does not refer to the public at large, but to a relatively small segment of it whose members are knowledgeable about, and receptive to, “avant-garde” contemporary work and the theories supporting it.

19. A review of Dickie’s *Introduction to Aesthetics*, in the Newsletter of the American Society for Aesthetics (Spring 1998), makes the mistake of quoting the later version of his definition without comment, while omitting the four supporting definitions he himself treats as, in effect, integral to it. The reviewer, Sarah Worth (co-editor of the ASA Newsletter), recommends the book, reporting that she has used it in an introductory esthetics course.

20. We will not attempt to analyze here Eaton’s broader theory of art, which includes her definition, for to do so would take us too far afield.

21. In Eaton’s 1989 version, the work must be “discussed in such a way that information about [it] directs the viewer’s attention to features that are considered worthy of attending to in aesthetic traditions (history, criticism, theory).” Quoted in Ralph A. Smith, *Excellence II*, 69. More recently, Eaton has replaced “discussed” with “treated” because, as she explains, colleagues pointed out that her emphasis on *discussion* was appropriate only to “Eurocentric art.” “Reply to Symposiasts,” *Journal of Aesthetic Education*, Summer 1995, 29. We would offer a different criticism, however, arguing that Eaton’s definition, like all versions of the institutional theory, is mistakenly predicated upon the spurious art of the twentieth-century avant-garde.

22. According to Eaton, “aesthetic value is the value a thing or event has [owing] to its capacity to evoke pleasure that is recognized as arising from features in the object traditionally considered worthy of attention and reflection.” Quoted by Smith, in *Excellence II*, 69. Eaton’s phrase “traditionally considered” alludes, as Smith suggests, to the sort of critical and theoretical discussions of art that lie at the center of the institutional theory.

23. Smith, *Excellence II*, 70.

24. Davies views the debate over the definition of art as a conflict between “functional” and “procedural” accounts of the nature of art. On “procedural” approaches, see above, n. 6. Davies leans toward a procedural approach, which is characteristic of the institutional theory. *Definitions*, 22.

25. Incredibly, Davies concludes: “Had the Artworld never arisen, there never would have been any artworks.” *Definitions*, 219. Contrast that view, all too commonly held, with Tatarkiewicz’s



observation: “Art exists not only where its name is to be found, where its concept has been developed and where there is a ready theory. These were not present in the caves at Lascaux, yet works of art were created there. Even were the concept and the institution of art to perish in obedience to certain avant-garde precepts, we may still suppose that people would go on singing and wittling [*sic*] figures in wood, imitating what they see, constructing forms and giving symbolic expression to their feelings.” *Six Ideas*, 49.

26. Other groups subsumed by the term “artworld” include philosophers of art, administrators, dealers, collectors, and art historians. See, for example, Wollheim, *Painting as an Art*, 13; and below, n. 31. Only those individuals within these groups who are receptive to avant-garde work and theories would be bona fide “artworld” members, however. The absurd pretentiousness of this term is apparent when one considers that nothing comparable exists in any other sphere of human activity. On this point, see Dipert, *Artifacts*, 110.

27. As just one example of the countless individuals, worldwide, who today hold, and act on, the belief that they have the “authority” to “confer art status” on virtually anything—consider Christine Hill, who declares that the *used clothing store* she created on a side street in an old neighborhood in the former East Berlin “is being perceived as art, *because [she has] chosen to call it that.*” She further explains: “I want to illustrate to people . . . that *art becomes art in the way it is perceived and considered.*” Interview with Janet A. Kaplan, Executive Editor, *Art Journal*, Summer 1998, 43–44, emphasis ours.

28. Enjoyment is an important aspect of experiencing art; but, as we shall argue in Chapter 7, it is a *byproduct*, not a metaphysical *primary*. An analogy may be drawn with the experience of eating food, the primary function of which is nourishment, not pleasure.

29. Amei Wallach, “Is It Art? Is It Good? And Who Says So?” *New York Times*, 12 October 1997.

30. More astonishingly, McEvilley argued “that issues of art are just as difficult as issues of molecular biology,” and are therefore beyond the understanding of ordinary people.

31. Rosenblum further claims that the only criterion for a work’s status as art, as well as for the determination of its quality, is “consensus . . . among *informed people*—[that is,] artists, dealers, curators, collectors” (emphasis ours)—in other words, among members of the artworld. That basic assumption of the “artworld” in this era of impoverishment in the visual arts is, ironically, at odds with the view widely held in Renaissance Italy, that an educated layman was fully qualified to judge works of art. See Sir Anthony Blunt, *Artistic Theory in Italy*, 56.

32. On the fallacy of the “appeal to authority,” see Ruby, *Logic*, 132–34; and Kelley, *Art of Reasoning*, 118–20. Kelley (109) characterizes fallacies as “a class of arguments . . . so weak that the premises do not support the conclusion at all.”

33. On this point, see the absurd claim of one artworld authority in n. 30, above.

34. Barzun, “Philosophy and the Arts,” in *Critical Questions*, 258. On the importance of intelligibility in discourse about art, see also Barzun’s “A Little Matter of Sense: Thoughts on the

Language of Criticism,” *Aristos*, March 1988; reprinted from *New York Times Book Review*, 21 June 1987.

35. The 1948 edition of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* lists the following rules, s.v. “definition.” (1) *The definition must be equivalent or commensurate with that which is defined; . . .* (2) *[It must state the essential attributes; . . .* (3) *[It must be [in terms of] genus [and] differentia. . .*.” Three “minor rules” include the admonition that “[o]bscure and figurative language must be avoided.” The most recent edition of the *Britannica* (1997), reflecting the contemporary eschewal of analytic definition, contains no entry on *definition* as such. The index does include a reference to “definition by genus and differentia,” but it is keyed to a cursory mention of *genus* and *differentia*—buried deep in the article on “Aristotelianism,” in a section entitled “Relationship to Neoplatonism”—which merely lists them as two of five concepts “that had been much used by Aristotle” (the other three being *species*, *property*, and *accident*). No hint is given of the emphasis placed on definition by genus and differentia in the long tradition of classical logic originated by Aristotle.

36. Ruby’s inclusion of architecture is inappropriate, in our view; see Ch. 10.

37. Whereas Ruby implies that a definition of art is possible, though he does not himself offer one, Kelley is less sanguine. He begins inauspiciously with the following speculation: “Suppose that an artist puts an egg on top of a brick, and exhibits the arrangement as his latest sculpture. Would this be a case of art? Some people would doubtless argue that it is; others would argue with equal vehemence that it is not. . . . The only way to settle the issue would be to find a definition of *art* that both sides could agree to.” (34–35) In so stating, he makes the fundamental mistake of assuming that an individual who would exhibit an egg on top of a brick as his latest “sculpture” might agree to an objective definition. Such an “artist” would *ipso facto* subscribe to the authoritarian theory of art, and would therefore reject out of hand what Kelley means by “definition.” More troubling with regard to Rand’s definition, however, is Kelley’s subsequent remark: “It won’t always be easy to find a definition—in the case of *art*, people have been trying for a long time—but even the effort to find one can clarify our understanding of a concept.” (35) Notwithstanding any misgivings he may have about Rand’s definition, it is regrettable that, as a leading interpreter of her work, he did not at least cite and critique her attempt, so rare in the twentieth century, at the sort of definition he extolls in his text. See Kamhi and Torres, “Critical Neglect.”

38. As Sciabarra explains: “The definition implies *all* of the concepts’ differentiated units. But a definition is only an identification that satisfies the cognitive need for ‘unit-economy’; it is not a description. Since people cannot grasp every characteristic of every existent in a single act of consciousness, they must utilize definitions that focus on essence within a specific context or level of generality.” *Ayn Rand*, 175. Kelley points out that a definition serves to clarify the *boundaries* of a concept, to clarify the relationships between concepts, and to provide a summary statement about the referents of a concept. *Art of Reasoning*, 32–35.

39. Although Rand does not discuss the process of classification as such, she clearly implies that a meaningful definition presupposes that the referents of the concept being defined are similar in some fundamental respect—i.e., that they have been rationally grouped or classified. In her

*Objectivist Epistemology*, she notes, for example, that “concepts represent classifications of observed existents according to their relationships to other observed existents” (47); “concepts represent a system of cognitive classification” (66); and “conceptual classification of newly discovered existents depends on the nature and extent of their differences from and similarities to the previously known existents” (73). See also her comments on the *genus* and *species* of the category “art works,” in “Art and Cognition,” 78. It is also significant that, in *The Art of Reasoning*, Kelley precedes his discussion of definitions (Ch. 3) with a discussion of classification (Ch. 2)—whereas Ruby’s discussion of classification is relegated to the context of “scientific methodology,” in his penultimate chapter. Moreover, Kelley emphasizes that things should be *classified* according to their “essential [i.e., fundamental] attributes” (19)—an explicit statement of a principle clearly implicit in Rand’s epistemology.

40. With respect to the original referents of the term *art*, it is important to recognize that the idea of *skill* is fundamental to the root concept of *art*, in its widest sense, which derives from the Latin *ars*, the equivalent of the Greek term *technê*, meaning “craft, technique.” For Aristotle and other Greek writers, the “mimetic arts” (corresponding to the modern “fine arts”) are among the diverse products of human *technê*—that is, of practical, productive skill requiring the application of systematic knowledge. According to Aristotle’s conception, the mimetic arts inevitably involve *technê*. This root meaning persists in the background of modern-day discussions of art, though the “artworld” often ignores it in the indiscriminate granting of art status to works involving little or no skill. When someone objects that something isn’t art, because “anyone could do it,” the notion of skill is clearly implicit. As novelist and critic Anthony Burgess observed: “Art begins with craft, and there is no art until craft has been mastered.” “A Deadly Sin—Creativity for All,” in *But Do Blondes Prefer Gentlemen?* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1986); quoted in editorial, *Aristos*, March 1987.

41. See Rand, *Introduction to Objectivist Epistemology*, 13–14.

42. Dickie, *Introduction to Aesthetics*, 84, cites the twentieth-century examples we quote, and affirms that “both versions of the institutional theory have quite consciously been worked out *with the practices of the artworld in mind*—especially developments of the last hundred years or so” (emphasis ours). Thus his focus is on the avant-garde, rather than on traditional work. Davies devotes considerable attention to “hard cases” with respect to the definition of art. See *Definitions*, 39ff.

43. For the rules of definition, see Ruby, *Logic*, 102–108; and Kelley, *Art of Reasoning*, 36–43.

44. Note that while Rand’s definition refers to “art” in the sense of *art works*—that is, the artistic *products*, not the process or activity—it also implies the essential nature of the creative process.

45. On the concept of *mimesis* in Greek thought, see the highly illuminating analysis in Halliwell, *Aristotle’s Poetics*, 109–137; and his subsequent article, cited below, n. 46. Rand’s *genus* is far more informative than that Dickie’s institutional definition—“an artifact.” In specifying art works as a particular kind of *mimesis*, moreover, Rand’s definition answers a major objection raised by Dickie (“Definition of ‘art,’” 109–10): he notes that the idea of art as

imitation (*mimesis*), which persisted for 2,000 years after Plato, “flouts the traditional approach [to definition] by specifying only *one* condition rather than *two*,” and thus implies that all imitations are works of art. Rand supplied the missing differentia.

46. As Halliwell notes, Aristotle *Poetics* 1448b4–9 (on “the instinct of imitation . . . implanted in man from childhood”) seems to view the play-acting of children as an example of non-artistic mimesis. “Aristotelian Mimesis Reevaluated,” *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 28 (1990): 490n5.

47. Dipert, too, argues that the ultimate function of art is less apt to be held in conscious awareness than is the function of other artifacts, especially practical ones. *Artifacts*, 111.

48. As we noted in Chapter 3, the precise manner in which a given artist concretizes what he deems important may be influenced to a large degree by the expressive and stylistic conventions of his time and place; but this does not alter the fact that it is *his* view which he projects in his work.

49. Note that Rand’s term “re-creation” is general enough to encompass the diverse arts, whereas a term such as “embodiment,” say, could not apply to all art forms, since its implication of physicality would exclude literature and music. Dickie, however, argues that some works of art “are not imitations in any way,” citing as examples “many pieces of instrumental music and non-objective paintings.” Contrary to his view, we have argued (Chapter 5) that all music is fundamentally mimetic. For our arguments against regarding nonobjective (wholly abstract) paintings as art, see Chapter 8.

50. In contrast with contemporary theorists such as Weitz and Dickie, Rand clearly holds that artistic “creativity” is delimited by the perceptual, cognitive, and emotional requirements of human nature. We explore some of those requirements in Chapter 7. Responding to Weitz’s argument that an essentialist definition would foreclose creativity, Dickie sanguinely considers that “this danger is now a thing of the past.” *Introduction to Aesthetics*, 85–86. For an instance of the sort of “creativity” Dickie’s theory helps to legitimize, see above n. 27; for other examples, see our Introduction and Part II.

51. On the basic objections to essentialist definitions, see Davies, *Definitions*, 6, 8, 15, 20, and 21. One obvious problem was the assumption that the diverse forms of art could share directly perceptible properties. Rand’s definition is framed at a sufficiently abstract level to avoid this problem.

52. See Merrill, *Ideas of Ayn Rand*, 125; and our discussion in Kamhi and Torres, “Critical Neglect.”

53. As David Kelley observes, “the essential attribute of a man-made object is usually its function. Such objects are created to serve a purpose, and the purpose explains why they are designed the way they are.” *Art of Reasoning*, 21. Unfortunately, he comments no further, and cites no particular exceptions to the general rule.

54. Historically, functional definitions of art have been flawed, because they have incorrectly identified the ultimate purpose of art. Lacking the understanding of art's cognitive function that Rand provides, theorists have proposed definitions based on various misconceptions. Perhaps the most common of these (at least since the eighteenth century) is the idea that art is created solely for the "pleasure of contemplation"—in other words, that the primary function of art is to give pleasure. In contrast with Rand's theory, such accounts offer no adequate explanation regarding the source of that pleasure.

55. As Hanfling notes ("The Problem of Definition," in *Philosophical Aesthetics*, 27), for example, Kennick (see above, n. 4) cites ancient Egyptian funerary art, intended to provide magical benefits for the deceased, as evidence that the attempt to define art in terms of function is "doomed."

56. The enduring appeal of work from past centuries and distant cultures is potent testimony that true art often transcends the specific circumstances of its origins.

57. Neither "maker" nor "creator" is appropriate for every kind of art work. One does not speak of "making" a novel, for example, though choreographers often refer to "making" a dance. Regarding the problematic implications of the term "creation" (and its cognates), see above, Chapter 3, n. 28.

58. The term *value-judgments* is familiar enough in contemporary discourse, in the sense of "an assessment of someone or something in terms of personal values, such as whether it is good or bad, worthwhile or troublesome; a subjective judgment or appraisal"—as defined in the *World Book Dictionary* (1981), for example, or "a judgment attributing a value (as good, evil, beautiful, desirable) to a thing, action or entity" (*Webster's Third New International Dictionary*, 1967). While the primary meaning of *metaphysical* corresponds to Rand's sense of "pertaining to the fundamental nature of reality," however, the term is often differently construed in common usage—as pertaining to the spiritual, the occult, or the supernatural, to that which cannot be accounted for by physical science; or to that which is "highly abstract, hard to understand."

56. "Art is a re-creation of reality according to one's values." Rand, *Fiction-Writing*, Lecture 1. Similarly, in a lecture at the 1961 Creative Arts Festival at the University of Michigan, she defined art as follows: "Art is a re-creation of reality according to the artist's values. It is not a creation out of a void, but a *re-creation*, a selective rearrangement of the elements of reality, guided by the artist's view of existence." Quoted by N. Branden, *Who Is Ayn Rand?*, 90.

57. Rand, "Objectivist Ethics," in *Virtue of Selfishness*, 5.