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## The Classificatory Sense of “Art”

The first question with which philosophers of art must deal is “What are the limits of *making*?” not “What are the limits of the use of ‘art’ and “work of art?”

George Dickie, *The Art Circle*

I

A student of the main debates of analytic philosophy of art throughout the latter half of the twentieth century might well be struck by what is no doubt a scandalous element in one of the most influential theories of the period, George Dickie’s brand of institutionalism. Dickie’s theory has long faced a pair of objections: Either the theory is circular or it is not sufficient to distinguish artworks from what are not artworks. The circularity is obvious; few critics comment on it, preferring to head straight to the problem of insufficiency. Noël Carroll, for example, remarks, “There is a real question whether the . . . institutional theory is really a theory of *art*. For the . . . set of definitions, though mentioning ‘art’ at crucial points, could be filled just as easily with the names of other . . . practices, like philosophy and wisecracking.” If Dickie’s claim is simply that art is some sort of practice, continues Carroll, “then he should give up talking about defining art. For he is no longer playing that game according to its original rules.”<sup>1</sup>

That Dickie’s account appears caught between circularity and insufficiency is not the scandal, of course. This pair of criticisms has been leveled against familiar strands of functionalism, historicism, expressivism, and intentionalism. The scandalous feature is that Dickie *flaunts* the circle.<sup>2</sup> Although he has refined the theory extensively since first introducing it some three

decades ago, and although he is highly responsive to criticism, he continues to argue that his set of definitions is both necessary *and* sufficient to characterize “art” in the “classificatory” sense, that neither the circularity nor the uninformative character of the theory is a defect, and anyway, he never promised to play the game of defining “art” according to its original rules.<sup>3</sup>

I will argue that the root of the scandalous element of Dickie’s institutionalism is that his own considerations cast serious doubt on an assumption so basic that it never occurs to him, or to his critics, to reject it. The assumption I am talking about is simply that the classificatory sense of “art” applies to some kinds of artifacts but not to others. I will urge that this assumption is false. Once we have a proper understanding of the relevant notion of an institution, and once we clarify what work the classificatory sense of “art” is to do, the real strength of institutionalism is that the classificatory sense of “art” is the ultra-abstract concept of an institutional kind.

In section II, I make some preliminary remarks about the parameters of my argument. In section III, after sketching Dickie’s theory, I distinguish the three possible noncircular versions of institutionalism. In sections IV–VIII, I argue that the most plausible version of institutionalism supports the view that all artificial kinds are art, in the classificatory sense.

## II

Before introducing the set of definitions that Dickie calls the institutional theory of art, I want to make three brief remarks about how I will proceed.

The first point to mention is that I will focus almost exclusively on Dickie's theory as it appears in *The Art Circle*, as Dickie has recently said this is the best version of his view.<sup>4</sup> Because I intend to read some of its arguments against one of its most basic assumptions, it is important to start with the most compelling expression of the view. Since that is a rather tall order, I hope it is enough that Dickie, in company with most of his critics, takes the arguments put forth in *The Art Circle* to be the most successful support of institutionalism.

The other two preliminary points concern the parameters of the discussion, rather than our source material. I want to stress that the question I am raising is about the *classificatory* sense of "art." Dickie is the philosopher who has made the most of the distinction between a "classificatory" sense of "art" and any other possible sense. His own remarks about the classificatory sense are problematic, however, and I will discuss the difficulties in depth. As a tentative gloss, we might say that the classificatory sense of "art" expresses the ordinary concept of an art form. If that is accurate, then I can illustrate my central thesis by saying that while I do not dispute that various forms of painting, sculpture, music, theater, and writing are all art forms, I take issue with the assumption that wisecracking and philosophy, for example, are *not* art forms.<sup>5</sup> The final preliminary point is that to give Dickie a fair hearing, I will not enter into the controversies surrounding the claim that institutionalism affords at least a necessary condition of art. Aside from explaining what an "institution" is for Dickie, I will limit my discussion to the question of whether institutionalism gives us *only* a necessary condition or yields a condition that is both necessary and sufficient to mark out all and only art, in the classificatory sense.

## III

As philosophical theories of art go, Dickie's institutionalism is very widely known. But it is

not *so* widely known that it is safe to assume that everyone is able to recite it by heart. Thus, before I attempt to reconstruct the theory, it will be useful to have it clearly before us.

The central tenet of an institutional theory of art is, according to Dickie, the claim "that a work of art is art because of the position it occupies within a cultural practice."<sup>6</sup> Notice the ambiguity in Dickie's choice of phrase. The central tenet could be that there is some cultural practice, a metapractice perhaps, in virtue of which some things are art. One is likely to think Dickie *must* be articulating some version of this claim. Indeed, Dickie says explicitly that he thinks there is some specific practice rightly called "the practice of art."<sup>7</sup> But, given the phrasing of the central tenet, the claim *could* be that "art," in the classificatory sense, is analyzable as: that which is what it is in virtue of the position it occupies within a cultural practice. I do not think that the ambiguity is due to carelessness.

Dickie's full theory does not resolve the ambiguity of his formulation of institutionalism's central tenet. For when it comes to describing *the* practice "in virtue of which a work of art is art," we get the famous (or infamous) circular account:

1. An artist is a person who participates with understanding in the making of a work of art.
2. A work of art is an artifact of a kind created to be presented to an artworld public.
3. An artworld system is a framework for the presentation of a work of art by an artist to an artworld public.
4. The artworld is the totality of all artworld systems.
5. A public is a set of persons the members of which are prepared to some degree to understand an object which is presented to them.<sup>8</sup>

Before taking up the circularity and my diagnosis of its source, it is important to see that the first three definitions bear the weight of the theory.<sup>9</sup> The first three definitions—those defining the notions of artist, work of art, and artworld system—form a sort of solid block. The fourth and fifth definitions are not part of the block. The fourth definition simply gives us a name for that set of actual systems, described by the first three definitions that "exist." Metaphorically

speaking, while the first three definitions concern the bricks, the fourth concerns the house (or wall or pile or heap) composed of the bricks. Thus, the usefulness of the notion of the artworld depends entirely on the cogency of the first three definitions of the theory. If all institutional kinds count as artworld systems, then all institutional kinds belong to the artworld. If the notion of an artworld system is empty, then so is the notion of the artworld.

In contrast to the definition of the artworld, the definition of a public is independent of the first three. Dickie's use of the complex expression, "*artworld* public," in the second and third definitions shows that, as he is using the word, there are different kinds of publics, but no such thing as a public *simpliciter*.<sup>10</sup> For example, there are mathematical proof publics and car publics and philosophical doctrine publics, as well as Impressionist painting publics and Gothic architecture publics. Following J. L. Austin, we might put the point by saying that the notion of a public, as it occurs in the institutional theory of art, is substantive-hungry.<sup>11</sup> The definition of a public *as such*, therefore, might be recast as:

For any kind of object, K, a K-public is a set of persons the members of which are prepared to some extent to understand a K that is presented to them. The virtue of reformulating the definition of a public in this way is that it reveals that the notion of an *artworld* public depends for its cogency on the first three definitions as much as the notion of the artworld does.

Thus, the first three definitions carry the weight of the institutional theory of art. Together they comprise the theory Dickie claims to be a necessary and sufficient characterization of the classificatory sense of "art." The defect of the theory is obvious, for the three definitions run in a tight circle. The word "art" is brought in at each turn to indicate the relevant *kind* of work, *kind* of maker, *kind* of public, and *kind* of system. It is clear, then, that at least part of Carroll's objection hits the nail right on the head. It is absolutely true that the word "art" can be replaced by the names of any number of practices. But Dickie does not deny that one can replace the word "art" with the name of any practice one likes. He agrees that if one replaces the word "art" with the name of some (nonart) practice, the theory ceases to be a theory of *art*.

His point is rather that there is no noncircular formulation of what it is to be a practice of art—the circular account is the only account.<sup>12</sup> *This* is the scandal.

Dickie is not blind to the difficulty of taking his position seriously. He offers a number of arguments designed to show there is really no objection to circular definitions of practices.<sup>13</sup> While these arguments are interesting, I will not discuss them here. I am not asking whether the circle can, after all, be defended. Granting the traditional line that it cannot, the question remains: What does Dickie see, or think he sees, that makes it seem that a circular account is the *only* account that will do?

If one rejects circularity, three options remain to the institutionalist. Since the institutionalist about art holds that institutionalism affords at least a necessary condition of art—that is, that all art forms are practices—the first point of possible divergence concerns whether all practices are practices of art or not.—Let us call the thesis that all practices are practices of art "weak" institutionalism. This version holds that Dickie's three definitions comprise an adequate *implicit* definition of an art form. Such a theory need not be circular, but it will be uninformative in precisely the way in which a formal account of a practice *as such* is uninformative; it will of course tell us nothing about the goals or standards of any specific art form, nothing that would, say, allow us to appreciate or create objects of that form. This is the *weak* version because, according to it, painting and verse are art forms merely in virtue of being institutional kinds.<sup>14</sup> Unlike weak institutionalism, the other two versions of institutionalism cannot happily allow the theory of art to be uninformative. If not all practices are practices of art, then a theory of art needs to offer some account of the distinction between an art practice and a nonart practice. One way to account for this would be to hold that for a practice to be an art practice, it must be embedded in a further specific practice, *the* practice of art. Alternatively, one might hold that there is no such thing as *the* practice of art, in which case one must hold that the distinction between art practices and nonart practices relies on some other sort of consideration. Let us call the thesis that there is some specific practice in virtue of which all art forms are art forms "strong" institutionalism.

On this view, Dickie's three definitions refer to *this* institution. And, still supposing circularity is not an option, the strong institutionalist owes us some noncircular, informative account of this institution.<sup>15</sup> This leaves the thesis that the distinction between art practices and nonart practices must be explained in some way other than by appeal to *the* specific practice of art. Let us call this view "partial" institutionalism, because it holds that Dickie's three definitions are neither a sufficient implicit account nor a sufficient ostensive account. At best, talk of institutions gets us only part of the story about art. Of course, among partial institutionalists, the issue of *what* consideration or element is needed to draw the distinction between art practices and nonart practices is a matter of some disagreement.<sup>16</sup>

## IV

Now that we have isolated the three possible noncircular versions of institutionalism, I can state my central thesis more precisely. My contention is that weak institutionalism makes the best sense as a theory of art, in the classificatory sense, and that some of Dickie's own considerations show this.

I aim to loosen the grip of the assumption that weak institutionalism is obviously false. To do this, we need to start the argument for institutionalism more or less from scratch: Let us ask what recommends *any* version of institutionalism. The answer is that the "institutions" and "cultural practices" at work in Dickie's institutionalism are simply artificial kinds.

In *The Art Circle*, Dickie is careful to state that in arguing for institutionalism, it is the concept of an action-institution that he has in mind.<sup>17</sup> An action-institution is any type of act that is governed by rules, and is such that understanding the rules is a condition of performing an act of that type.<sup>18</sup> Promising is a clear case. The "rules" of promising are simply what defines the practice as such; among other things, there must be a special sign in a language that means givers of the sign have put a limitation on their future possibilities of acting well. We can see how promising is *governed* by these rules by imagining a word that is pronounced and spelled the same, but which has a different set of rules

associated with it. Suppose saying "I promise to such-and-such" is associated with the rule that the giver of the sign *wishes* that such-and-such would come true. If this were the rule, saying "I promise..." would not *be* making a promise. Furthermore, someone who does not understand the (real) rules of promising does not have the concept of a promise; hence they *cannot* make a promise, although they might easily and intentionally utter the words, "I promise" followed by a description of a future act that is in their power to do. In the absence of an understanding of what "I promise to..." means, saying the words is merely the appearance of making a promise, analogous to saying the words in one's sleep or while delirious.<sup>19</sup> Thus, the central tenet of institutionalism is unambiguously true of promises, that is, a particular promise is a promise because of the position it occupies within a cultural practice.

What has been said so far will probably meet with general approval, if only because promising is one of the poster children for philosophical work on practices. What may be harder to accept is that, if the account of an action-institution is to accommodate cases that do not include vows (i.e., not simply betting, promising, marrying, etc.), then pretty much the whole range of acts of making kinds of artifacts are action-institutions. Dickie does not actually draw this inference, although I do not think he would object to it. He explicitly mentions marriage, tool making, and storytelling as examples of action-institutions.<sup>20</sup> Let us consider how tool making turns out to be an action-institution.

It is probably misleading to say that tool making is *an* institution. The claim is more clearly put by saying that all kinds of tools are action-institutional kinds. That is to say, all tool making actions, for example, making a roofing hammer or a socket wrench, are governed by rules, some understanding of which is a condition of making a hammer or a wrench. To see this, imagine a culture rather different from ours, one in which people make objects that *look* (feel, etc.) exactly like some of our chairs and are made of the same materials from which chairs are made. Suppose, though, that these objects are understood to be targets in an elaborate game these people play. (The game involves throwing delicate glass objects onto

the surface from some distance away, say.) Now, these objects are *not* chairs; they are targets in some game. The acts involved in making them are not correctly described as "carving the seat," "forging the arms," and so forth. The acts *are* correctly described as, say, "carving the target," "forging the foul posts," and so forth. Moreover, we can speak of "rules" governing the acts of making chairs and making the targets. In both cases, certain things count as making the device poorly or improperly. Constructing the legs so that the device wobbles is contrary to one of the points of having *chairs*, hence, against the "rules," but wobbling may be quite appropriate, even required of the targets. Thus, it should at least be clear that whether the thing that looks like a chair *is* a chair brings in considerations of a wider reach than the physical or phenomenal properties of the object at issue; just as with particular promises, particular chairs are what they are in virtue of being embedded in a "rule" containing practical context.

But now we face a difficulty. While it holds for promises (and vows of all varieties) that some understanding of the rules of promising presupposes any individual agent's act being a promise, the same does *not* seem to hold for tool making and chair making and the rest. Imagine a factory in which individual workers participate in making some complex device, such as a rocket ship, none of whom understand in the least what sort of device it is. Each person's task is, say, to push a button at stated intervals. Cases such as these are possible; hence, it is possible for an individual person to make a tool without understanding the "rules" that describe the sort of object being made. This is not to allow that the factory workers understand nothing of what they are doing. They are following orders, and so must understand the orders they are following. The point is that they do not have an understanding of the wider practice in virtue of which, say, "pushing the red button" *amounts* to "attaching the door to the body."

This difference between promising and tool making is important, but it is not enough to show that Dickie is wrong to begin with the thought that action-institutions are central to a theory of art. What the case just considered *does* show is that the second criterion of an

action-institution—performing an act of the relevant type presupposes some understanding of the rules of the practice—is not a thoroughly individualistic condition. The essential point is that the *source* of the chain of orders, if there is any chain, is someone who understands the practice at issue. Dickie's formulation is a bit misleading, but the claim that tool making is action-institutional is not misguided.

To see that an agent's understanding cannot be omitted entirely, consider a case in which the maker has no understanding of the kind of device being made and is not following somebody else's instructions. By hypothesis, this person has *no* idea about, say, chairs, and makes an object that looks just like a chair and is chemically or molecularly identical to some chair (or as identical as any two chairs can be). *Has* this person made a chair? The answer would be obvious if we build into the thought-experiment that this person means to make some other specific sort of thing. If they mean to make one of those targets or if what looks like the seat is really the base of a podium or really the beginnings of a roof, then, clearly, they are not making a chair. But to build in some alternative understanding on the part of the maker misses the point of the objection; it grants institutionalists their claim that some understanding of the wider practical context must be in place.

A good way to address the objection head-on is to suppose for the sake of argument that a person *can* be making a chair without the least understanding of what a chair is. If they are making a chair, then *what* they are making cannot depend on their intention or understanding in any way. But if what they are making does not depend on their intention or understanding in any way, why not just as easily suppose that they are, unwittingly, making *anything* of which they have no concept? Why choose chairs specifically? Why not a rocket ship, or a thermonuclear reactor, or a perpetual motion machine? The only reason seems to be that the object is hypothesized to look just like a chair. But that cannot really matter—a fertile imagination can supply any number of devices, some instances of which could look just like a chair. Thus, the objection to holding that somebody is making a chair, while the context contains no one who grasps the concept of a

chair, is that there is no ground to fix on “chair” as the relevant description of what they are making. To put the point another way, there is *equal* ground to fix on any one of any number of different specific kinds of thing as the type of thing made. *This* is the sense in which tool making presupposes an understanding of the practices that inform tools. To say that tool making is an action-institution is, therefore, to say that tools are kinds of things such that some understanding of what belongs to tools is logically prior to the existence of any particular tools. Of course, there is nothing special about *tools* in this regard; the same is true of pretty much any kind of artifact. Therefore, the notion of institution at work in the institutional theory of art is basically the notion of an artificial, or invented, kind.<sup>21</sup>

Before moving on, I want to point out that this analysis of the sort of institutions at work in institutionalism throws an interesting light on one of Dickie’s central arguments for institutionalism, the celebrated “visually indistinguishable objects” argument, which Dickie takes over from Arthur Danto.<sup>22</sup> The argument, recall, supposes a pair of visually indistinguishable objects, one of which is a minimalist painting and the other of which is a primed canvas, or one of which is a sculpture and the other of which is a package of scouring pads.<sup>23</sup> The argument concludes that being a minimalist painting or piece of sculpture is not a visually discernible property of an object. This is correct. And the same point holds for hammers, wrenches, shirts, chairs, games, houses, menu items, forms of entertainment, and so on. In all of these cases, we can imagine two objects that look the same, are chemically or molecularly the same, but are not the same sort of thing because they are not bound up in and informed by the same practice. Thus, the “visually indistinguishable objects” argument does not show there is anything special or peculiar about paintings and sculptures or the practices informing them that distinguishes them from all other artificial forms. At most it shows that the various kinds of painting, sculpture, prose, poem, and so on are some among the huge range of kinds that presuppose human understanding, that is, the range of things that are what they are in virtue of being embedded in a cultural practice. The visually indiscernible

object argument simply trades on a conceptual truth about the *whole class* of artificial kinds.

v

Clarity about what work the notion of an institution does in institutionalism goes a long way to support *some* form of institutionalism. To deny even partial institutionalism would be to deny that only artificial kinds can be art forms. Clarity about the notion of an institution also shows that neither the concept of an institution nor the visually indistinguishable object argument provides grounds to hold a strong or partial institutionalist account of art as opposed to the weak institutionalist account of art. Of course, nothing said so far obviously favors a weak account either. To make some progress on the question of which form of institutionalism provides the most promising theory of art, it is necessary to insist on being precise about some thoroughly foundational issues: Institutionalism is meant to be a theory of art, in the classificatory sense. So, before we ask which theory best describes what art, in this sense, is, we would do well to make sure there is no confusion in granting that there *is* such a sense of “art.”

Some philosophers have thought that we ought to reject any theory of the classificatory sense of “art” because the very idea of a classificatory sense of “art” is problematic. There is some ground for this charge, for Dickie’s only explicit argument that there *is* a “classificatory” sense of “art” about which there is a philosophical puzzle is obscure. His argument turns on the claim that “we” say important things with the phrases “good art” and “bad art.”<sup>24</sup> This claim raises a number of questions, quite apart from whether anybody *other* than philosophers uses these phrases in any serious way.<sup>25</sup> Suppose it is true that these phrases are commonly used to say important things. Even so, it does not follow that “good art” shows us *what* they are used to say. As Peter Geach pointed out long ago, not every phrase with “good” in it expresses a determinate sense.<sup>26</sup> If someone says, in the normal course of life, “What a good thing it’s raining!” they could be making any number of different statements. Perhaps the thought is that it is a fortunate change in the weather for a

person who does not want to go to the college picnic but who also does not want to make excuses about not going. Alternatively, the idea might be that one's friend now stands a good chance of winning some money at the racetrack, since they have bet on a mudder. Whatever might be meant, it is not that rain is here is a good feature for *things* to have, in the way that a sharp blade is a good feature for chef's knives to have.

What I think Dickie has in mind by invoking the phrases "good art" and "bad art" as being used to say very important things (which it is open to him to have in mind, anyway) is the obvious fact that the phrases "good sonnet," "bad portrait," and "mediocre horror movie" are used to say things that any theory of art had better take seriously. But, of course, these facts do not show there is any special classificatory sense of "work of art."

It is very important that Dickie's most common way of setting out the classificatory sense is *not* by deploying the idea that we say important things with the phrases "good art" and "bad art." Mostly, he simply gives a list: The classificatory sense of "art" expresses a concept that ranges over "all paintings, statues, vases, buildings, and such," or, all "paintings, poems, plays, and the like," or again, "the old familiar class of paintings, poems, musical pieces, and the like."<sup>27</sup> If we take remarks such as these as definitive, it follows immediately that we are not working with any sense of "art" according to which a particular object has to be a *good* something or other in order to be a work of art. Thus, if there is a sense of "art" that ranges over only *good* paintings, *good* statues, *good* buildings, vases, poems, plays, "and the like," this sense is *not* the classificatory sense.

We do not have everything we need to justify talking about the classificatory sense of "art" yet, but we do have enough to show that the claim that there is a classificatory sense of "art" does not rest on any very bold, contentious, or especially fishy distinction between classification and evaluation. Thus, a certain group of objections are simply irrelevant. For example, it has been argued against Dickie that sometimes evaluation is part and parcel of classification.<sup>28</sup> Perhaps it is true that a piece of pocket lint cannot be classified as a can-opener, not even a very, very, very defective can-opener, because

the pocket lint does not meet even the most minimal standard of success at opening cans. If the same point holds for the range of kinds at issue, it follows that some evaluation is required to classify something as a painting, vase, building, and the like. If so, Dickie is wrong when he says that being a work of art in the classificatory sense does not guarantee *any value at all*.<sup>29</sup> But as long as it is possible for a portrait to be a pretty miserable, pathetic excuse for a portrait, there is no serious problem.

We are also in a position to sidestep a different worry about any purported classificatory sense of "art." It has recently been pointed out that it does not follow from the fact that we can make sense of "good F" and "bad F," that "F" must be something other than an evaluative term.<sup>30</sup> For example, it does not follow from the fact that we understand "the cat is in good health" and "the cat is in bad health," that "health" is not an evaluative term, for "health" means "the sound working state of an organism." This insight about "health" would pose a problem for those of us interested in the classificatory sense of "art" *if* we depended on an exclusive distinction between classificatory expressions and evaluative expressions to mark out the special sense of "art." However, on the account we have before us, the claim is not that "art" must be something other than an evaluative term *because* we can talk about good and bad art. The claim is that there is a sense of "work of art" such that if *any* sonnets, portraits, or vases are works of art, then *all* sonnets, portraits, and vases are works of art, the brilliant, the sublime, the mediocre, the stupid, and the incompetent ones equally.

So far, then, there is no reason to hold that the classificatory sense of "art" is based in confusion from the very beginning. It has so far been explained as a sense of the word "art" that swallows kinds whole, and is restricted in its range to kinds that provide criteria for judgments about the goodness or defect of particular instances. This leaves us free to say that in whatever way evaluation and classification are involved in grasping the concepts of the kinds, *that* will be how evaluation and classification are presupposed by the classificatory sense of "art." At this point, we may as well stipulate to a third thesis about the classificatory sense of "art"—the undisputed shared doctrine of all

three versions of institutionalism: the range of kinds that the classificatory sense of “art” swallows whole is further restricted to kinds for which some understanding of what belongs to the kind is conceptually prior to any instance of the kind.<sup>31</sup> For example, species of animal or plant, although arguably kinds that provide criteria for judgments of goodness and defect of particular organisms, do not belong to the extension of the classificatory sense of “art,” because they are not action-institutional kinds.

## VI

If the considerations of the previous section are sound, the idea of a classificatory sense of “art” is not based on any obvious confusion. We have a sense of the word “art” that ranges over institutional kinds, includes all instances of any of the kinds within its extension, and that so far has been indicated only by an open-ended list. It is possible, therefore, that there is some genuine and interesting question at issue for those who work on the classificatory sense of “art.” And here we come to the central difficulty. Confusion about the question stands firmly in the way of seeing that two very different understandings of what is to be explained are colliding in Dickie’s institutionalism.

Let us start again from Dickie’s list of kinds that the classificatory sense of “art” swallows whole. These are: all forms of painting, poetry, vase, building, and *the like*. Now, what exactly is the puzzle? It is no good to say that these are all art forms and we want to know what an art form is. This answer forgets that we are trying to come up with a way to characterize the question of what an art form is that does not leave out the articulation of the problem. We do not get much further by saying that the puzzle is to set out some sort of principle governing what belongs on this list and what does not. Just faced with the list, and the question, “What else goes on it?” there are any number of possible answers. Paintings, poems, vases, and buildings are all things that some people like to spend their time looking at and thinking about, particularly people with a lot of leisure time. They are all things that some people make for a living. They are all things that some people make for pleasure. They are all things that have

been made, in one form or another, for a very long time. They are all things that have served many different purposes—some important, such as protection from the weather and telling the story of a peoples’ history, some not very important, such as filling up an empty space in the living room. They are all things that can star in a “visually indistinguishable object” argument. They are all things that have been examples in a great long argument about the nature of art. Any of these answers would do if the question were simply, “What do all these things have in common?”

So again, *what* is the puzzle? It is difficult to answer this question on Dickie’s behalf precisely because he runs two rather different puzzles together.

The familiar puzzle about the classificatory sense of “art” comes out when Dickie is explicitly distinguishing the classificatory sense of “art” from a “derivative” sense. The contrast he draws between the two makes it clear that he has some sort of fairly traditional distinction in mind between arts and crafts. The “derivative” sense is supposed to apply to, say, cars and pieces of furniture.<sup>32</sup> Elsewhere, Dickie mentions other examples of artificial kinds that do not make it into the extension of the classificatory sense of “art”: religious activities and the objects belonging to them, athletic activities, fashion shows, stage props, stage sets, and playbills.<sup>33</sup> What is crucial in all of this is that Dickie gives no argument at all that these kinds do not belong to the class of art forms. No argument is needed; these examples are all offered as *definitive* of the very sense of “art” at issue. Now, suppose we accept the examples as setting out the very sense of “art” at issue. The puzzle about the classificatory sense of “art” becomes a puzzle about what all the various forms of painting, verse, theatre, music, building, statue, and vase necessarily have in common *that they do not share* with any kind of clothing or furniture, or with sports, stage sets, cars, altars, sermons, or hymns. There is certainly a question here. And it certainly does follow immediately, and from the very sense of “art” at issue, that only strong and partial institutionalisms are possible answers. Weak institutionalism—the view that kinds of art are kinds of art in virtue of being action-institutional kinds—is clearly ruled out by the fact that kinds of

clothing and furniture are also action-institutional kinds. However, before we conclude that we have elucidated the puzzle at the heart of institutionalism, notice two points. First, it is not at all clear why this puzzle should be especially engaging to a philosopher. And this is so, in part, because of the second point; the fact that strong and partial institutionalism are the only two possible institutional theories of this sense of "art" does not imply that one of these two theories is the *truth* about the favored list of kinds. For the truth may be that there is *nothing* that the kinds on the "art"-list necessarily have in common that distinguishes them from the group of kinds on the "nonart" list. If the question plays out in the latter way, we would not necessarily end up with a circular account. The classificatory sense of "art" would simply be a name for a stipulated list of artificial kinds—and there would be nothing left about which to argue.

I do not believe that the puzzle outlined above is the one that is really motivating Dickie. I will state my grounds for this claim in the next section. For now, I want only to show that a different puzzle does in fact appear in Dickie's work. It comes out most clearly in the course of a discussion about when it becomes intelligible to speak of a culture as having some art or other:

Art may have emerged (and no doubt did emerge) in an evolutionary way out of the techniques originally associated with religious, magical, or other activities. In the beginning these techniques would have been no doubt minimal and their products (diagrams, chants, and the like) crude and in themselves uninteresting. With the passage of time the techniques would have become more polished and specialists [would] have come to exist and their products would have come to have characteristics of some interest (to their creators and others) *over and above* the interest they had as elements in the religious or whatever other kind of activity in which they were embedded. At about this point it becomes meaningful to say that primitive art had begun to exist, although the people who had the art might not yet have had a word for its art.<sup>34</sup>

While this passage contains a number of intriguing suggestions that we cannot pursue here, it also contains one of the most useful sketches

I have found of one of the most difficult problems of the philosophy of art. To see it, let us put aside the issue of whether evolution is a fruitful way to think about the emergence of art. Let us also pass by the stress on "primitive," except to notice that one should not connect it too tightly to the fact that Dickie mentions only religious and magical activities as examples of practical sources of art, as if he is claiming that the practical sources of art have always to do with something mystical or unearthly. That Dickie is not making such a claim is clear from the fact that he adds, "or other activities"—the practical sources of art *might* have to do with such mundane matters as the various preparations of food and shelter, the making of tools, or the forms of social interaction. Putting all these matters aside, the central claim in the passage is basically that to speak meaningfully of a culture as having some art or other, it is both necessary and sufficient that the people have some techniques for making some sorts of things, such that some of the products of the techniques—for example, some individual shelters, rites, or tools—have "characteristics of interest *over and above* the interest" the products have qua shelter, rite, or type of tool.<sup>35</sup>

While the description of a particular object as having some characteristics of interest *over and above* the interest it has as an element in the practice in which it is embedded is clearly of critical importance, it is also somewhat obscure. To make a start on clarifying it, notice that to say of a particular object that it has characteristics of interest as an element in the kind of activity in which it is embedded is another way to say that the object meets the standards or norms of its (action-institutional) kind. For example, to say that a particular bottle opener "has characteristics of interest as an element in the activity of opening bottles" amounts to saying that it has the characteristics of a good, or decent, bottle opener. When we turn to the more complex description of a particular artifact as having characteristics of interest "over and above" the interest it has as an object of a specific artificial kind, we would do well to follow the same pattern, and replace talk of "characteristics of some interest (to their creators or others)" with talk about goodness. For we do not mean to include all cases in which an artifact happens to have some

characteristic that happens to be of interest to someone. If that were the whole point, we would have a very contentious account of art indeed.

That the whole range of cases in which some artifact has some characteristic of interest includes too much becomes clear if we consider a few examples: On the one hand, we have a bottle opener, say, the one designed in 1997 by Erik Magnussen and manufactured by Stelton. This opener is an elliptical piece of heavy gauge stainless steel, folded in half long-ways; the fold is rounded so that one's thumb rests along the interior of the fold while one's fingers rest along the exterior. The mouth is cut out of the fold and positioned far enough toward the top so that one can open a bottle with a very small amount of effort. The steel is polished to a high shine and has no ornamentation, allowing the steel itself and the opener's utterly simple and elegant shape to be the focus of attention. This is a clear example of at least one type of case in which it would be natural to say that this bottle opener has "characteristics of interest over and above the interest" a bottle opener has as a bottle opener; I hope it is also a clear example of what seems right about the thought that works of art are those objects that have characteristics of interest over and above the interest they have as instances of some artificial kind.

In contrast to the Magnussen opener, which illustrates what is right about invoking "characteristics of interest over and above" the characteristics required of a good opener, the next two cases illustrate what is problematic. First, imagine an ordinary bottle opener of the sort that one finds in thousands of kitchen drawers, only this one has a blue plastic handle. Imagine also somebody who just really likes the color blue. Given a choice, this person will prefer a blue house, a blue car, blue clothing, blue paintings in the living room, and a blue bottle opener. It is clear that it would be very strange to take such a person's fondness for the color blue as evidence that being blue is a characteristic that makes a bottle opener a good or decent *bottle opener*. All the same, this person is interested in blue things, and the bottle opener is blue, so the bottle opener has a characteristic of interest to this person. May we not say that it is a characteristic that interests that person over and above the opener being a good

or decent opener? While there would seem to be nothing wrong with describing this person's taste for blue things in this way, it is clear that *this* sort of case is very far from providing grounds to say that the bottle opener with the blue handle is a work of art. The reason is that the example gives us no way to see this person's interest as having any nonaccidental connection to the goodness of any of the objects in which she or he has an interest. That is, we lack even the beginnings of a way to understand how the color of the handle is somehow apt, or groundbreaking, or thoughtful, or traditional, or harmonious, or funny, etc.

The fact that people's tastes can be idiosyncratic is one problem for a plain "characteristic of interest" theory. But it is not the only problem. Imagine someone who collects bottle openers, and so has an interest in some bottle openers because they are rare, old, expensive, strange, or simply not already in the collection. The collector may also have an interest in characteristics of bottle openers that have nothing to do with whether or not the bottle openers are in any way good openers, may even prize some especially awkward or dangerous openers for the characteristics that make them awkward or dangerous. Unlike the first type of case, the characteristics of interest to the collector need not be entirely a matter of taste. Indeed, there may be rather definite standards of goodness in place for collecting; collecting, after all, is not merely accumulating. It is a cultural practice formally on a par with promising and tool making. Here again, while it would seem unobjectionable to say that the bottle openers that interest the collector have characteristics of interest to someone over and above the interest the openers have as openers, it would be contentious, to say the least, to hold that a bottle opener that has characteristics of interest to the collector is thereby a work of art. The problem this time is *not* that there are no standards of goodness in place. Rather, it would seem to be that the standards of goodness the collector is using are themselves only accidentally connected to the standards of goodness that belong to bottle openers. It is because we have again lost the sense of a nonaccidental link between the characteristics that are of interest to the person and the goodness of the object in which the person is interested, that the example fails to

be anything but a contentious example of a work of art.

If the analysis of the examples is correct, talk of an object as having characteristics of interest over and above the characteristics that make it a good one of its kind covers too much. It includes merely idiosyncratic matters of taste, as well as cases in which the characteristics that are of interest are informed by standards of goodness, but are accidentally related to the object being a good one of its kind. What we need to make Dickie's point clearer is something along the lines of a description of an object as *good* over and above meeting the standards of goodness of its kind (without this amounting to its meeting the standards of some other kind that is only accidentally related to it).

The concept of a particular object as good over and above the standard of goodness set by its kind is enormously problematic, of course. But Dickie is not working on the question of how to make sense of *that* concept. His question is about the classificatory sense of "art," which is defined in part as swallowing kinds whole, that is, as including whole kinds, irrespective of the goodness or badness of the individual objects of those kinds. So, the classificatory sense of "art" applies to a certain range of kinds that stand in some special relation to the particular extra-good objects. One's first thought may be that Dickie's question is, "What kinds have traditionally, or up to now, been widely recognized as kinds capable of producing instances that are good over and above the standards set by their kind?" This question has the virtue of fitting well with the first, list-given picture of the classificatory sense of "art." However, if our question were really about what has happened up until now, our inquiry would be an empirical investigation. It would certainly be odd to try to answer the question through conceptual analysis and thought experiments, as Dickie tries to do. We would just look and see which institutions have been recognized as productive of objects of the relevant sort, and be done with it. Suppose, on the other hand, that the question is not about what has or has not happened so far. Suppose the question is, "*What kind of kind must be in place if it is so much as intelligible for instances of that kind to be good over and above whatever the standards are for things of that kind?*" If this is the question, then at least

the classificatory sense of "art" is a proper quarry for a philosopher. But it would also follow that we are working with a *different* picture of the classificatory sense of "art" than the one determined strictly by Dickie's list; this classificatory sense of "art" is not set out by giving two lists of artificial kinds, one of which stipulates the art forms, whereas the other stipulates the nonart forms. Rather, this latter conception of the classificatory sense of "art" is motivated by the intelligibility of a certain sort of judgment, the judgment that some particular object is good over and above the norms or standards determined by the kind of thing it is.

#### VII

We have uncovered two puzzles standing behind the question, "What is art, in the classificatory sense?" We arrived at one puzzle by taking it to be constitutive of the classificatory sense of "art" that one list of kinds belongs to its extension and another list of kinds does not; the question is what, if anything, do the art-kinds have in common that distinguishes them from nonart-kinds? We arrived at the other puzzle by focusing on a very special sort of judgment concerning the goodness of some particular objects; the question here is about the category of kind that is presupposed by judgments of this sort. The first puzzle is explicit in Dickie's introductory remarks and referred to throughout his work. The second puzzle appears almost as an aside in some remarks that, as a whole, address a quite different point.<sup>36</sup> If we were to consider only these facts, it would seem that, whatever we are to say about the relation between the two puzzles, it must be the first one that interests Dickie. However, it would be a disservice to institutionalism and to Dickie's work to consider only his official statements of the question. For on the hypothesis that it is really the second puzzle that is of central concern, Dickie's own claims about the importance of the classificatory sense of "art" snap into focus.

Suppose it is the second picture of the classificatory sense of "art" that is at issue. If so, first, Dickie's repeated claim that he is doing metaphysics rather than ordinary language philosophy is clearly true.<sup>37</sup> On the proposed

understanding, the question, “What is art, in the classificatory sense?” need not be a question about how the word “art” is used in English, now or ever. Possibly, some people sometimes use “art” to mean “instance of such a kind that it is intelligible that some instance of that kind could be good over and above being a good one of that kind,” but it is entirely consistent with there being this question that no one ever uses the phrase in this way.<sup>38</sup> On the other hand, if our question was, “What do all forms of painting, music, theatre, vase, and sculpture share that is not also shared by furniture, sports, hymns, forms of clothing, and cars?” it is more difficult to see how the question necessarily belongs to metaphysics. The question that invokes the two lists is, after all, just an instance of a question that can be described schematically as, “What is true of A’s, B’s, and C’s that is not also true of D’s, E’s, and F’s?” The fact that we can raise such a question about some pair of lists is no reason to suppose we are doing metaphysics; we might be simply listing out those kinds that tend to be called “art” in our time and in our culture.

Second, Dickie’s often repeated insistence that the classificatory sense of “art” marks out “the basic domain of the philosophy of art,” by capturing or expressing something that is presupposed by the excellence-guaranteeing sense of “art,” is also true, and necessarily so.<sup>39</sup> Moreover, and along similar lines, it becomes clear that Dickie is in pursuit of an issue that is fundamental to any analysis of the excellence-guaranteeing sense. For in the absence of a good account of the *kinds* that can stand in this special relation to some of their instances, we are apt to mistake merely prominent or striking elements of some of these kinds for necessary or sufficient conditions of being of the appropriate category of kind. This is a mistake Dickie explicitly warns us against, and surely he is correct to do so.<sup>40</sup>

Third, what is so often said about Dickie’s theory, that it completely ignores the evaluative aspects of art theory, comes out as simply false. *This* classificatory sense of “art” depends for its very existence on the connections between art and value, which is not to say that the connections are simple or easy to describe; the classificatory sense ranges over kinds of objects that are both valuable as useful and valued, at least

potentially, not simply as useful. Some instances of the relevant range of kinds are valuable over and above the value of the kinds. Thus, when Ted Cohen dismisses the classificatory sense of “art” as the sort of topic of interest only to “cataloguers, book-keepers and certain other philosophers,” and invites us instead to think about the sense of “work of art” that implies excellence—not excellence qua bottle opener or excellence qua portrait, but excellence that does justice to the thought that this particular object demands to be taken seriously regardless of one’s antecedent interest in portraits or bottle openers, it makes sense that Dickie waves away the objection.<sup>41</sup> The question Cohen wants to dismiss is the question about the two lists, and perhaps Cohen is correct to dismiss it. On our hypothesis, however, the two lists are not the crucial issue. If the correct analysis of *what it is* for an object to merit a person’s attention regardless of that person’s antecedent interests is that the object is good over and above meeting the standards of its kind, then there is an important connection between Cohen’s and Dickie’s topics. Far from forgetting about the excellence-guaranteeing sense of “art,” Dickie is *relying* on an interpretation of this sense to define the classificatory sense.

Finally, we are in a position to see what is correct in the idea that we say important things with the phrases “good art” and “bad art,” although there is no one important thing that we say. If the classificatory sense of “art” ranges over all and only those kinds, some instances of which can be good over and above meeting the standards of their kind, then the judgments concerning the goodness and defect of the instances, qua instances of their kind, would be among the conditions of intelligibility of the classificatory sense of “art.” Moreover, since the classificatory sense of “art” includes many different kinds within its extension, there would be no one set of standards to provide the content of the phrases “good art” and “bad art.” However, since the classificatory sense of “art” is now being defined partly in terms of the excellence guaranteeing sense of “art,” it is probably wise to stop using the phrases “good art” and “bad art” entirely. There are hazards on all sides, and the phrases do not do any essential work. To see this, accept for the moment that

the Magnussen bottle opener really is an opener that is good over and above meeting the standards of a good bottle opener. If so, the Magnussen opener is a work of art, in the special excellence-guaranteeing sense. So, does it not follow that ordinary, perfectly adequate but otherwise unremarkable bottle openers are *good* bottle openers and *bad* works of art? Such a view is not tempting; luckily, nothing in our premises implies it. In maintaining that the Magnussen bottle opener is a work of art, in the special excellence-guaranteeing sense, *all* we are committed to is that "bottle opener" names one of the kinds belonging to the classificatory sense of "art." That is, we are committed to holding that a bottle opener is a kind of thing, such that some particular one can be understood as good over and above the norms for its kind. It follows that a good or bad bottle opener is a good or bad work of art, in the classificatory sense—but it is "bottle opener," not "work of art," that is providing the criteria of goodness and defect here. It does *not* follow that ordinary run-of-the-mill bottle openers, be they good or bad ones, are works of art *at all*, in the special excellence-guaranteeing sense. The excellence-guaranteeing sense just does not come into it.<sup>42</sup>

## VIII

I have argued that the question at the heart of Dickie's brand of institutionalism is: What category of kind is presupposed in the judgment that some particular thing is good over and above its kind? The answer I have been pushing is that the relevant category of kinds is the category of artificial kinds, the category, that is, of individual things that are what they are in virtue of being embedded in a cultural practice. My hope is that this line will no longer seem thoroughly implausible. One might still suggest, however, that there is in the end only one question at issue, because the list-determined question is just another way of raising the question about the category of kinds. The suggestion amounts to the claim that particular paintings, sculptures, pieces of music, poems, and vases, but *no* particular sporting events, cars, pieces of furniture, jokes, or works of philosophy, can be good over and above meeting the standards of their kind, and so, strong or partial institutional-

ism are still the only possible theories of art, in the classificatory sense.

My final argument against this view is simply an argument by elimination. Consider strong institutionalism, the thesis that an institutional kind is a kind of art only if it is embedded in the institution of art. It is not just that we have failed to uncover any clear arguments *for* this view; the theory now looks muddled. For if the "institution of art" is an institution, then it sets the standards of goodness and defect for the objects informed by it. But, first, we have not made use of any distinct set of standards common to all art forms. Indeed, one of the draws of institutionalism is that it accommodates not only the fact that different standards are in place for different art forms, but that different works of art, in the excellence-guaranteeing sense, may be excellent in many different ways. And, second, even if there are some set of standards that are common to all kinds of art, *and* which are relevant to them in virtue of their place within the institution of art, the question would still be whether individual objects embedded in that institution can be good over and above meeting the standards of the institution of art. Whether the answer to this question is *yes* or *no* clearly cannot involve appealing to yet another institution. Strong institutionalism, therefore, is not a possible answer to the question about that category of kinds presupposed by the excellence-guaranteeing sense of "art."

This leaves us with partial institutionalism, which holds that not all institutional kinds are kinds of art while rejecting any appeal to a specific institution of art. It is difficult to see what the partial institutionalist's grounds are for insisting that this category *must* be a proper subset of artificial kinds. The partial institutionalist might argue positively that it is in fact inconceivable that instances of some artificial kinds can surpass the standards of their kind; I would like to see this argument. For the fact is, we know about the thought and effort put into packaging, flower arranging, and food preparation in Japan.<sup>43</sup> We know how seriously the French have taken food, wine, perfume, and clothing. We know about Noguchi's coffee tables, lamps, and playgrounds; about the Eames's heat-molded plywood chairs; about Issey Miyaki's dresses; as well as Enever and Palmer's success in designing the engine and

body of the MG-A. These are all pretty clearly playgrounds, pieces of furniture, dresses, and sports cars, the excellences of which transcend the standards of goodness determined by the kinds: playground, chair, lamp, and so on. And who knows what is lost to us through history or what will happen next? It seems much more plausible to hold that there is no principled way to rule out any artificial kind as possibly being the focus of the thought and work involved in creating something good over and above meeting the standards of its kind.

One might always suggest that partial institutionalism and strong institutionalism are theories designed to answer questions other than the one about the category of kinds presupposed by the excellence-guaranteeing sense of "art." Far from having any objection to such a suggestion, I suspect that partial institutionalism at least provides the basic framework for both a theory of the excellence-guaranteeing sense of "art" itself and the ordinary sense of "art form." Indeed, some of the considerations offered in previous sections of this essay incline me to think that a properly developed partial institutionalism is the only plausible account of the sense of "art" I have called the excellence-guaranteeing sense. As an account of the ordinary sense of "art form," partial institutionalism is also plausible. As the phrase is ordinarily used, an artificial kind counts as an art form only *after* someone has made a work of art, in the excellence-guaranteeing sense, of that kind. Perhaps even this is not enough, and art forms, in the ordinary sense of the phrase, are strictly speaking only those artificial kinds that are commonly or generally thought of as kinds, some instances of which are works of art, in the excellence-guaranteeing sense.<sup>44</sup> Nothing I have argued requires that I deny the theory; I would only point out that, so understood, the ordinary concept of an art form presupposes both the category of kind treated under the heading of the classificatory sense of "art," and the concept expressed by the excellence-guaranteeing sense of "art."

I would press that we draw two conclusions: First, the scandal of Dickie's doctrine regarding the theory of art is the result of being torn between a bad picture and some good arguments. He sees that the traditional list of art forms have nothing in common other than being

institutional kinds. He sees that part of the philosophical importance of the concept of an art form has to do with the framework necessary to make sense of the judgment that some particular object is good over and above fulfilling the standards set by its kind. He even acknowledges that there are some coffee tables and lamps and chairs and sports cars that are good over and above *their* kinds. Were it not for the deeply but uncritically held assumption that cars and chairs are simply *not kinds of art*, there would be no scandalous flaunting of a circular account. The second conclusion I hope to have supported is that we should reject the assumption that some kinds of artifacts are not art, in the classificatory sense. If I have failed in compellingly demonstrating that this assumption is false, I hope at least to have shown that its truth is not obvious.<sup>45</sup>

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1. Noël Carroll, "Identifying Art," in *Institutions of Art: Reconsiderations of George Dickie's Philosophy*, ed. Robert J. Yanal (Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994), pp. 12–13. The earliest essay I have found that raises the insufficiency objection is Kendall Walton's review of Dickie's *Art and the Aesthetic: An Institutional Analysis* (Cornell University Press, 1974). See Kendall Walton, *The Philosophical Review* 86 (1977): 97–101.

2. *The Art Circle: A Theory of Art* (New York: Haven, 1984). Reprinted (Evanston, IL: Chicago Spectrum Press, 1997), p. 12.

3. The germ of institutionalism is introduced in "Defining Art," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 5 (1969): 252–258. For the remark about never having promised to play according to the original rules, see Dickie, "The Institutional Theory of Art" in *Theories of Art Today*, ed. Noël Carroll (University of Wisconsin Press, 2000), pp. 103–104.

4. Dickie, "The Institutional Theory of Art," p. 96, n. 14.

5. Some familiarity with Wittgenstein's *Tractatus* and Marcel Duchamp's *In Advance of a Broken Arm* might at least give one pause before accepting that philosophy and wisecracking in particular are obvious examples of institutional kinds that are not kinds of art.

6. Dickie, *The Art Circle*, p. 52.

7. For example, *ibid.*, pp. 8 and 10.

8. *Ibid.*, pp. 80–82.

9. I have altered the order. Dickie's list runs: artist, work of art, public, artworld system, and the artworld. I am indebted to Barbara Scholz's essay, "Rescuing the

Institutional Theory of Art: Implicit Definitions and Folk Aesthetics," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 52 (1994): 309–325, for the idea of rearranging the definitions. For Dickie's explanation of why he organizes the list as he does, see "The Institutional Theory of Art," pp. 100–101.

10. This point is made explicitly on pp. 65–66 of *The Art Circle*.

11. See J. L. Austin, *Sense and Sensibilia* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1962), sec. 7.

12. Dickie is explicit on this point. He says, for example, "If art is the sort of thing I think it is, the only correct account of it would have to be a circular account." *The Art Circle*, p. 78.

13. Dickie defends circularity, unformativeness, and arbitrariness in *The Art Circle*, pp. 75–79. The considerations he offers seem to support the plausible view that answers to philosophical questions will be uninformative in a certain sort of way. It is interesting that many of Dickie's arguments in support of a circular account are compelling arguments against more descriptively rich accounts.

14. I have not been able to find a contemporary philosopher who holds this view. Barbara Scholz's essay, "Rescuing the Institutional Theory of Art: Implicit Definitions and Folk Aesthetics," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 52 (1994): 309–325, looks like an example until one notices that on Scholz's understanding of implicit definition, implicit definitions are *not* sufficient to mark out what is being defined. In different circumstances, I would argue that R. J. Collingwood is a weak institutionalist in *The Principles of Art* (1938).

15. If the distinguishing feature of the relevant practice is something on the order of making pleasure (or a special kind of pleasure), then we would have a functionalist version of strong institutionalism. A nonfunctionalist example is Stephen Davies's attempt to define a special sort of entitlement that belongs to the practice of art. See *Definitions of Art* (Cornell University Press, 1991), chap. 4.

16. Noël Carroll's remark that I quoted in the opening paragraph, that Dickie would be clearer if he gave up talking about defining "art," suggests that Carroll inclines to partial institutionalism. Robert Stecker also seems to endorse partial institutionalism in his essay, "Is It Reasonable to Attempt to Define Art?" in *Theories of Art Today*, ed. Noël Carroll (University of Wisconsin Press, 2000), pp. 45–64.

17. The terminology belongs to Jeffery Weiland. See "Can There Be an Institutional Theory of Art?" *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 39 (1981): 409–417. Action-institutions contrast with person-institutions. A person-institution is an abstract agent of some sort, defined in part by its having certain specific powers and determining certain roles for its members. Churches, museums, foundations, and states are all examples of person-institutions. Waging war, declaring sainthood, and electing leaders are examples of the powers of person-institutions. Dickie grants that he confused the two sorts of institutions in earlier formulations of institutionalism. See *The Art Circle*, pp. 7–14 and 49–53.

18. *Ibid.*, p. 52. A developed account of action-institutions would require treatment of a number of questions concerning the levels and types of understanding presupposed by action-institutions. The difficulties involved in developing such an account, however, do not affect the points at issue in this essay.

19. Promising is a terrific example of an action-institution, but is a pretty difficult concept in its own right. For a discussion of some of the puzzling aspects of a sign that *means* that the sign-giver's future possibilities of acting well are limited by giving the sign, see G. E. M. Anscombe, "On Promising and Its Justice and Whether It Need Be Respected in *Foro Interno*," *The Collected Papers Of G. E. M. Anscombe*, vol. 3 (University of Minnesota Press, 1980), pp. 10–21.

20. *The Art Circle*, p. 51.

21. A defense of the claim that institutionalism affords at least a necessary condition of art would require pursuing this conceptual point.

22. Dickie is thinking of two of Danto's essays in particular. "Artworks and Real Things," *Theoria* 39 (1973): 1–17. Reprinted in *Aesthetics: A Critical Anthology*, ed. George Dickie and Richard J. Sclafani (New York: St. Martins, 1989), pp. 551–562. Arthur Danto, "The Transfiguration of the Commonplace," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 33 (1974): 139–148.

23. Dickie often couches the argument in terms of only one of the objects being a *work of art*, rather than only one being a painting or a piece of sculpture. For the reasons I have already laid out, I regard it as begging the question to stipulate that packages of scouring pads are not art, in the classificatory sense. See *The Art Circle*, pp. 12–13 and 64–65.

24. *Ibid.*, p. 13. But see also "Art and Value," *The British Journal of Aesthetics* 40 (2000): 228–241, where Dickie concedes the point that this consideration is less than entirely compelling.

25. There is an interesting passage near the end of "Art and Value," in which Dickie acknowledges that in regular critical discourse about paintings, pieces of theater, and so on, *nobody* calls these items "art" except as extremely high praise. What is interesting is that he seems to see this as *evidence* for a classificatory sense of "art." See p. 236.

26. Peter Geach, "Good and Evil," *Analysis* 17 (1956): 103–112. Reprinted in *Theories of Ethics*, ed. Philippa Foot (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967), pp. 64–73.

27. The first list is from Dickie's *Introduction to Aesthetics: An Analytic Approach* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), p. 57; the second and third are from *The Art Circle*, pp. 31 and 35 respectively.

28. For example, by M. W. Rowe, "Why 'Art' Doesn't Have Two Senses," *The British Journal of Aesthetics* 31 (1991): 214–221. See also, Graham Oppy, "On Functional Definitions of Art: A Response to Rowe," *The British Journal of Aesthetics* 33 (1993): 67–71, for criticism of Rowe's tripartite division of nouns and subsequent argument by elimination.

29. *The Art Circle*, p. 13. But see "Art and Value," p. 229, where Dickie claims that "even the worst art will have a tiny bit of value."

30. Berys Gaut, "'Art' as a Cluster Concept," in *Theories of Art Today*, ed. Noël Carroll (University of Wisconsin Press, 2000), pp. 38–39.

31. We may build in this further restriction without argument because we have limited the discussion to whether institutionalism provides only a necessary condition, or a necessary and sufficient characterization of art, in the classificatory sense.

32. See *The Art Circle*, pp. 13–14 and 37–43. Dickie wonders whether the derivative “sense” is a genuine sense of “art” or is in fact metaphorical. Either way, the possibility that the classificatory sense straightforwardly and literally applies to cars and pieces of furniture is never considered. I am ignoring Dickie’s remarks concerning an “evaluative” sense of “art” that is some sort of generic praise word applying as centrally to the Grand Canyon and sunsets as to *The Polish Rider* and *Hamlet*. As others have noticed, nothing in institutionalism implies that there must be any such sense of “art.” See Robert Stecker, “The End of An Institutional Theory of Art,” *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 26 (1986): 124–132.

33. See *The Art Circle*, p. 75, 80, and 81 respectively.

34. *Ibid.*, p. 56.

35. It is clear that Dickie means to be making an historical claim in the quoted passage. One might be skeptical whether he is *also* making a conceptual claim about art. If the point were simply historical, however, the most Dickie would be in a position to claim is that it is *false* to hold that people were making art before they were making objects that have characteristics of interest over and above the interest they have as elements in the institution in which they are embedded. But Dickie does not say that such a doctrine is false; he says it is *meaningless*.

36. Dickie is arguing that institutionality does not entail that practices must be invented in one fell swoop. See *ibid.*, pp. 53–56

37. For example, *ibid.*, pp. 13 and 37.

38. Thus, I would object to Robert Stecker’s assumption that a definition of “art” is always aimed to explain how people actually use the term. For Stecker’s view, see “Is It Reasonable to Attempt to Define Art?” in *Theories of Art Today*, ed. Noël Carroll (University of Wisconsin Press, 2000), pp. 45–64, and the very similar set of suggestions in Richard Kamber, “A Modest Proposal for Defining a Work of Art,” *The British Journal of Aesthetics* 33 (1993): 313–320.

39. Dickie, *The Art Circle*, p. 13.

40. *Ibid.*, p. 5.

41. Ted Cohen, “The Very Idea of Art,” *NCECA Journal* 9 (1988): 7–14. The remark about bookkeepers is on p. 8. See also “Reflections on One Idea of Collingwood’s Aesthetics,” *Monist* 72 (1982): 581–583. David Novitz makes some similar suggestions in “Disputes about Art,” *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 54 (1996): 153–164.

42. This is one of the logical features of the excellence-guaranteeing sense that makes it interesting and difficult to explain.

43. On packaging, see Yuriko Saito, “Japanese Aesthetics of Packaging,” *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 57 (1999): 257–266.

44. It might be suggested that the definition of the ordinary sense of “art form” proposed in the text puts the generality in the wrong place. Art forms, the suggestion might go, are the practices of making that commonly or regularly or reliably produce works of art, in the excellence-guaranteeing sense. Thus, painting and poetry are art forms, but bottle opener making is not, since it is rare indeed that a bottle opener is good over and above the standards of bottle openers. I can see no logical or conceptual difficulty with a concept that works along the suggested lines, although it is implausible as an account of the *ordinary* sense of “art form.” Painting and poetry are paradigmatic cases of art forms, in the ordinary sense; on the proposed definition of “art form,” however, it is probably false that painting and poetry are art forms. Lots and lots of people make paintings and poems; for example, in high school and college classes, at community centers, at summer camps, and on vacations. And, although I do not know what the actual statistics are, I suspect most of the products of these efforts do not even meet the standards of the kinds of painting or poem at issue, much less surpass those standards.

45. I would like to thank George Dickie, Lance Factor, Miles Rind, Candace Vogler, Stephen Wesley, Bill Young, and an anonymous referee for *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* for their discussions, suggestions, and criticisms of previous drafts of this article.

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