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Author(s): Noël Carroll

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Can Government Funding of the Arts Be Justified Theoretically?

NOËL CARROLL

The question addressed in this article—Can government art support be justified theoretically?—might elicit an abrupt response: “Perhaps not, but so what, that is, why should it require a theoretical justification?” If, in a democracy, the citizens favor public arts funding, then public arts funding is what we should have. But the suspicion is abroad that the citizenry does not favor the use of public money for arts funding. The likelihood that Americans may not endorse arts funding indicates that some justification, in terms of the right and proper activity of the state (i.e., a theoretical justification), would be demanded if state funding were to continue in a context of public disapproval. Of course, we cannot claim to know that the majority does disapprove of government arts funding. Rather, that prospect merely recommends that justifications be prepared. Furthermore, charges, quite plausible ones, have been made that public arts funding primarily benefits the already advantaged. And this suggests yet another reason why a theoretical justification ought to be produced. The purpose of this article is to explore various avenues for justifying arts funding. Our results are mixed. Some grounds for government arts funding are found, but it is noted that in embracing these justifications untoward consequences may be incurred. Thus, it is urged that we refrain from government funding of the arts because the effects of such funding, when guided by the kinds of justifications available, would be deleterious to the art world. However, the conclusions of this article are provisional; there is no reason to believe that someone may not construct better justifications for government arts funding than those examined here.

The question, Are there theoretical grounds for government arts funding? is unwieldy and needs trimming. First, what does “funding” refer to?

Noël Carroll is an assistant professor in the Philosophy Department, Wesleyan University. His work has been published in *Daedalus*, the *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, and this journal.

Funding can be either direct or indirect. One might say that there was government arts funding in this country before 1965 but that it took indirect forms, including land grants, tax exemptions to educational and cultural institutions such as museums, and tax advantages for private donations of art to the public.¹ Concern here is not with indirect funding but with the justification of direct state funding of the arts.

But still the scope is too broad to be manageable, because there are so many different kinds of arts-related activities with which direct state funding may be involved. Much government funding is aimed at what might be thought of as the preservation of culture. It supports museums and repertory companies and is intent on keeping our culture intact. Other objectives of government funding target community art centers, regional theaters, and school programs. And funding may also be directed to professional artists for the purpose of enabling them to produce new works of art. This latter type of funding is the sort with which this article is concerned. Whereas funding of museums looks to the past of our culture, funding artists is prospective. It is not a matter of preserving culture, but of *creating* culture. The preservation of culture, of course, is involved with education, which appears to be a legitimate realm of state activity. And, furthermore, though even more vaguely, art preservation keeps us aware of who we have been, which knowledge is relevant to us in our practical decisions about who we shall become. But it is not so easy to see the way in which prospective funding—i.e., support for the production of contemporary art—can be defended as educational in terms of the state's responsibilities in this arena in the way the preservation might be. Bluntly, contemporary art is not our heritage yet; nor is it clear how much of it will be. So even if funding for the purpose of preservation falls within the state's educational responsibilities, prospective arts funding calls for some other kind of theoretical justification, that is, a justification in terms of the way in which prospective arts funding can be seen as implementing one or more of the proper functions of the state.

Clearly, commissioning artists to design stamps and government buildings is a legitimate government activity. So our question is whether state funding of the production of new art that is not connected to state projects is also legitimate. Admittedly, the great bulk of governmental funding of the arts is not directed to artists. But the question is how even this admittedly small expenditure is to be funded. (Hereafter, "arts funding" refers only to this issue.)

Before proceeding, a word or two about the use of 'state' in this discussion is appropriate. Though certain issues particular to the United States will be canvassed, in general our question concerns whether there are theoretical justifications for prospective arts funding in what we broadly think of as modern, pluralistic, democratic states. We should not have in

mind the sort of Marxian utopia where we all fish in the morning and write art criticism in the afternoon. That state of affairs would not be blighted by a scarcity of resources or by differences of opinion and, anyway, would not, one presumes, need arts funding (or a state, for that matter). Nor do we have totalitarian regimes in mind; they have no need for justifications. Rather, our question is addressed to pluralistic, democratic states which have fundamental commitments to protecting their citizens from harm—both foreign and domestic—and to securing the welfare of those within their boundaries, i.e., to providing some manner of generally economic assistance to individuals in need, where such needs are connected to the individuals' capacity to maintain a livelihood.² Such states are also committed to the protection of the civic institutions upon which democracy rests.

It is important to stress that the viewpoint of this essay is not based on opposition to the idea that states have responsibilities to the welfare of all persons within their borders. For example, the state has responsibilities to the victims of structural unemployment. When someone, through no fault of his or her own, loses the means to a livelihood, the state upholds a system of property distribution that restrains that person from walking onto a local farm and taking whatever she and her family need to live. Since the state thus contributes to the cause of that person's need, it has a responsibility to her.³ Full acceptance of the principle that the state, in our conception of it, has welfare obligations needs to be emphasized here just because in discussions of art funding it is often assumed that if one has any doubts about the propriety of arts funding, one must also be skeptical about welfare. Welfare is a legitimate arena of state activity, but it is not clear that *all* prospective arts funding is.

What does this talk of legitimate arenas of state activity come to? Maybe we can approach this by reviewing one of the more popular defenses of arts funding that recurs in contemporary debates. The point is stated succinctly by Sir William Rees-Mogg, Chairman of the Arts Council of Great Britain. He writes, "The Arts Council grant is equal to the interest on the interest on the capital cost of the Trident programme. That is the relative priority the state gives to the enhancement of the human spirit. I am a firm supporter of national defense policies, but just look at the state's priorities—the capital on defense but not even the interest on the interest on the arts."⁴

Many supporters of prospective arts funding will not be so temperate as Rees-Mogg. Appalled at our defense expenditures, many Americans will say it is a scandal that so much is spent on defense and so little on art or that art should not suffer so that defense spending may flourish. Perhaps they will urge that greater bounties for art should be carved out of the

gargantuan defense budget. But these remarks miss the point in assuming that defense spending and arts funding are somehow linked. They are not.

Defense is a legitimate function of any state. It is not clear that prospective arts funding is, nor if it is, that it is such a crucial function that it makes sense to tie its destiny in any way to that of so central a function as defense. Undoubtedly our defense spending is extravagant. But it is perfectly compatible to be opposed to the present level of defense spending while also wondering if prospective arts funding is appropriate. For *some* defense spending is recognized as legitimate by nearly everyone, save pacifists and certain types of anarchists, whereas it is not yet apparent that any prospective arts funding is legitimate. The defense spending argument may be politically persuasive, especially for those opposed to the current defense budgeting, but it is not a theoretical justification, for it does not show that prospective arts funding is a proper function of government, whereas defense is.

The discussion of proper state functions may suggest an avenue of justification for prospective arts funding, viz., welfare. If one agrees that the state has a responsibility to secure the welfare of its citizens, then one may be tempted to say that prospective arts funding is a means by which the state secures the welfare of those within its borders. But “welfare,” as it applies to state activity, refers to assistance to individuals in need of the basic goods that comprise a livelihood. Is it plausible to suppose that prospective arts funding provides some such goods?

A conclusive answer would require a full theory of needs, which, unfortunately, we lack. But perhaps we can at least determine whether the products of prospective arts funding sound like the things we ordinarily think of as needs. On one reading, to say that someone needs X is to say that if she lacks it, she will suffer injury, sickness, madness, hunger, or avoidable death.⁵ Does the production of contemporary artworks assist individuals in needful situations such as these? Would anyone be harmed, in any literal sense of the term, if prospective arts funding were discontinued? Am I harmed if painter X does not execute the series she would have created had she received a state grant?

Of course, defining basic needs in terms of harms has limitations. But suppose we define welfare needs in terms of the amount of goods and services sufficient to raise an individual from his present state to somewhere above the poverty line.⁶ If this is how we conceive of the welfare jurisdiction of the state, then it is difficult to see how prospective arts funding has anything to do with welfare.

Undoubtedly, the picture presented thus far involves thinking of the welfare of nonartists. Our rhetorical questions really ask, “What nonartists will be harmed, in a basic, literal sense, if they do not have the opportunity to see so-and-so’s planned series due to a lack of government fund-

ing?” Or, even more ridiculously, “What nonartist will fail to be raised above the poverty line should so-and-so’s proposed series not be funded?” It may be charged that the case has been rigged. Haven’t we forgotten about the welfare responsibilities of the state to artist so-and-so? Isn’t it possible that artist so-and-so will fail to rise above the poverty line without funding?

The problem with these new questions, however, is that if artist so-and-so has a legitimate welfare need, then the state will have the responsibility to assist her. That is, if a state is meeting its basic welfare responsibilities to everyone, then there is no reason to propose prospective arts funding as a further aspect of the state’s welfare function. Of course, this raises issues about the relation of welfare to the active promotion of employment by the state, and we will come back to that matter.

Some writers who attempt to connect state arts support to the state’s welfare function introduce a concept of “aesthetic welfare.” “Aesthetic welfare,” in turn, is defined as “all the aesthetic levels of the experience of members of the society at a given time.”⁷ It is then suggested that there is a *prima facie* government duty to preserve the aesthetic wealth of society where that wealth—pictures, plays, and so forth—is what gives rise to aesthetic welfare. It is not certain, however, that this particular notion of aesthetic welfare helps the case for prospective arts funding since it may be that, if there were such a *prima facie* duty, retrospective arts funding might suffice to discharge it.

Also, one must question whether the connection between “aesthetic welfare” and the concept of welfare relevant to government activity is really unequivocal. First, “aesthetic welfare” doesn’t correlate with definable needs, especially basic needs; nor does being below the poverty line imply being aesthetically disadvantaged. And clearly promoting individuals’ aesthetic welfare will not raise them over the poverty line. Moreover, the state’s welfare responsibility under this conception of aesthetic welfare doesn’t seem to be directly connected to individuals but is a matter of ensuring that there will be a large number of aesthetic objects around so that people can have aesthetic experiences if they want them. The state is to ensure the permanent possibility of high levels of what is called aesthetic welfare but might better be called aesthetic well-being. This well-being is to be secured for society at large, construed additively, whereas the state’s welfare responsibilities are discharged toward particular persons, *viz.*, anyone in need. Thus the notion of “aesthetic welfare” appears not to refer to welfare of the kind that defines the state’s proper domain of activity; it is merely a homonymous term that, though sounding like the concept employed in the discussion of the state’s welfare responsibilities, is actually quite separate. Of course, we have not adequately dealt with the notion of aesthetic needs, but will turn to it shortly.

In the discussion of welfare, it may be objected that our perspective is too narrow. By speaking of basic needs and poverty lines, we have restricted the compass of the welfare activities of the state to aid in desperate situations and to matters of life support. But must the state's welfare jurisdiction be so constrained? It might be argued that apart from assisting those in need, the state's welfare function also includes benefitting the populace, supplying human goods even to people above the poverty line, thus enabling people to flourish. Were this the case, the defender of prospective arts funding could argue that such a practice would be justified in virtue of the state's responsibilities to benefit the populace, to promote as much good as possible.

First, if the state does have a responsibility to promote human goods over and above the responsibility to prevent harms, it is not obvious that this is best conceived of as part of its welfare responsibility. Perhaps it is rather an obligation to beneficence. Whether the state has such an obligation is an important question which we cannot answer now. Some might argue that the state has such obligations, but only after it has discharged all of its welfare obligations—no money for paintings until all the needy are assisted. Personally, I find this viewpoint compelling in our present circumstances.

There are, however, other arguments against state obligations to beneficence that also bear serious consideration. In pluralist societies—such as we envision modern democracies to be—that which constitutes human good over and above welfare goods is essentially contested. If the state, given conditions of scarce resources, promotes some goods rather than others, it is unjustifiably favoring the proponents of one good over the proponents of a rival good who may, in fact, deny that the good so favored is a good at all. Of course, the problem disappears if we think that the state's obligation to beneficence extends to promoting every human good, every kind of benefit that facilitates human flourishing or that is believed to contribute to human flourishing. But this seems implausible. Even if the state has legitimate obligations of beneficence, there remain questions of the extent of these obligations even where scarce resources are not at issue. Assuming an obligation of beneficence, we may still argue that the state is not obligated to administer every human benefit to its populace. Consider love and affection. These are things that contribute to the flourishing of human life. But we do not think that the state should intervene in human relations to redistribute affection within society so that each receives his fair share. We would not countenance the formation of a new state agency, the Department of Love, whose duty it would be to assist anyone who has fallen below some putative affection line, construed on the model of a poverty line.

The state, even supposing a legitimate function of beneficence, will not be expected to deliver every possible benefit to its citizenry. This observa-

tion, of course, is relevant to the question of prospective arts funding, because if the proponent of such funding invokes beneficence in defense of it, we shall still want some demonstration that art is the kind of benefit the state has a duty to supply. Is prospective arts funding more analogous to discharging a welfare obligation or to assisting the love-lorn? For a number of reasons, including the degree to which personal preference is involved with both art and love, one suspects that prospective arts funding is more analogous to the imagined administration of affection than it is to the administration of welfare. But that suggests that prospective arts funding cannot be grounded in a putative state responsibility of beneficence.⁸

Of course, the preceding discussion of benefit will dissatisfy those who feel that art is not merely a benefit to human life, but that it satisfies a human need, call it an aesthetic need. Often this belief is advanced through environmentalist metaphors. In the first annual report of the NEA, it was proclaimed that "we need to make our open spaces beautiful again. We must create an environment in which our youth will be encouraged to pursue the discipline and craft of the arts. We must not only support our artistic institutions, both national and local, but we must also make the arts part of our daily life so that they become an essential part of our existence."⁹

The underlying spirit of this plan seems to suggest that just as the government has an obligation to forestall the deterioration of the ecosystem, so there is an obligation to reverse the deterioration of the aesthetic environment. Human animals have aesthetic needs; environments replete with aesthetic and expressive qualities satisfy them. Perhaps it will be argued that environments bereft of such qualities, or possessing them in minuscule degrees, result in some sort of psychic tension, ranging from irritation to alienation. Miles of gas stations, fast-food restaurants, used-car lots, body shops—the strip phenomenon—present an impoverished aesthetic habitat that has unsettling psychic consequences. Similarly, the private sphere, flooded with tawdry, mass-produced consumer goods, is aesthetically deprived in a way that is psychically unnerving. Vigorous arts funding is urged as a countermeasure, including prospective arts funding, which presumably will provide some of the objects we need to restore or perhaps to create the kind of aesthetic environment that promotes our psychic health. Thus, prospective arts funding would be warranted on the grounds that it implements the state's obligations in regard to the health of its citizens.

This argument is not implausible. Of course, it requires "fleshing out." Before it can be accepted, research would have to be undertaken to show that we do indeed have aesthetic needs whose frustration results in some form of psychic discomfort. And if this could not be demonstrated, this particular argument would falter.

But suppose it is the case that there are such aesthetic needs. What would that suggest about prospective arts funding? It would imply that we should do further research in order to determine the kinds of art that satisfy whatever aesthetic needs the earlier research identified. We might then go on to fund the kind of programs and the kind of art that satisfies those needs. But note that this will not imply support for any kind of art whatsoever. It only grounds support for those projects which function to alleviate aesthetic needs or which we predict are probable to alleviate aesthetic needs. Not all art will have this causal capacity. For example, Duchamp's *In Advance of a Broken Arm* as well as much Punk Art will not have this capacity, nor will films like Buñuel's *The Andalusian Dog*. Thus, prospective arts funding of works such as these will not be justified by an aesthetic need argument.

The problem here, of course, involves what is meant by "aesthetic." It is not synonymous with "art." Generally, it is associated with the beautiful and the sublime, or it is associated with the qualitative appearance of things. An aesthetic need, under this reading, would be a need for experiences of the beautiful, the sublime, or for the experience of objects and environments with marked expressive qualities such as warmth, friendliness, or joyfulness. Much art, including, significantly, much contemporary art, is not dedicated to producing aesthetic experience. Indeed, much contemporary art is even avowedly anti-aesthetic. If an artist makes a junkyard piece to portray modern life, it seems curious that he should expect funding on the basis of alleviating aesthetic privations. Nor is it obvious that every expressive quality projectible by a work of art will have the equilibrating effect presumed by the aesthetic need argument. Works marked by turmoil, horror, anguish, and so on are not *prima facie* defensible under the aesthetic need argument. The point is that even if the aesthetic need argument is acceptable, it will not support prospective arts funding as we know it. It will only support funding of those prospective artworks with high probability of bringing about equilibrating aesthetic experiences. Nonaesthetic, anti-aesthetic, reflexive, and certain darkly expressive artworks will not be defensible in the name of aesthetic experience.

If the aesthetic need argument gives us the means for justifying prospective arts funding, it also seems to have the unfortunate consequence that it only warrants the funding of certain kinds of art—the art of the beautiful, the sublime, and that expressive of psychically equilibrating qualities. If no further justification can be found, the consequence of this is that the state can only fund a certain type of art. Artists pursuing certain nonaesthetic aims cannot be funded by the state. But proponents of art funding, lovers of art, and artists with nonaesthetic projects should be disturbed by this. For if the government places large investments behind one type of art, the evolution of the art world will undoubtedly be affect-

ed. Whole avenues of artistic development will appear less viable than the production of aesthetic art. And from the contemporary art world's point of view, this kind of prospective arts funding might be regarded as having a regressive effect overall.

At this point, it may be claimed that the relevant need to consider is not an aesthetic need but a need for art. All societies, it might be said, have artlike practices—i.e., symbolizing practices of some sort—which suggests that art of some type answers a human need. Next, the idea will be advanced that in modern industrial societies, art will disappear if the government does not support it. Thus, without government support the conditions necessary for satisfying our need for art cannot be sustained. Perhaps prospective arts funding can be endorsed as a corollary to this via the claim that the need for art includes a need for new art. And if the state does not fund new art, no one else will.

Of course, this is an empirical claim, and a dubious one at that. The arts flourished in democratic societies before the advent of direct public funding; there is no reason to suppose that they will disappear without the direct government funding of new artworks. Where people are interested in art, there will still be an audience to support new work. Were there no audience whatsoever, it would be difficult to determine on what basis the government would justify funding new art. Moreover, in advanced capitalist societies at least, big businesses are attracted to arts patronage because projecting the kind of upwardly mobile profile associated with interest in the arts attracts upwardly mobile investors. One could go on elaborating considerations that count against the disappearance-of-art thesis. But perhaps what is most important to say about it is that, at best, it is worried not about the disappearance of art per se, but only of certain types of art, viz., what for want of a better label we call high art. Popular art—movies, TV, pop music—will not disappear if prospective arts funding is discontinued. So it is not the case that our society will be deprived of art, including new art, without prospective arts funding. Hence if there is a need for art, it will not be frustrated. On the other hand, it is unlikely that there is a human need for our kind of high art. But, in any event, it is also unlikely that our kind of high art is about to disappear if prospective arts funding is halted, though the assumption that it will seems implicit in too many of the arguments of proponents of such funding. Of course, sans funding, high art might be produced at a diminished rate. But here the burden of proof rests with the proponent of funding to show what social evil results from a diminished rate of high art production.

One practical justification for arts funding is that it may function as an economic stimulant, promoting prosperity by, for example, attracting tourists. Insofar as prospective arts funding can be pegged to the state of the economy, it would appear to be a legitimate state operation, since the

maintenance of a functioning economy is related to the state's welfare responsibilities. Needless to say, it is often difficult to imagine the way in which grants to individual artists for new works—as opposed to city art centers—can engineer economic well-being; but there is no reason to think that such a connection could not be made in principle. Of course, an economic stimulation argument identifies the value of arts funding not with aesthetic or artistic value, but with economic instrumentality.¹⁰ But despite this, the economic stimulation argument seems acceptable, although it can only be mobilized where certain constraints are respected. Where prospective arts funding is employed to stimulate tourism or some other form of economic activity in a given area, the state must be convinced that no alternative form of intervention of comparable cost would yield greater prosperity in that area. Furthermore, where national rather than local stimulation is at issue, the nation state must supply some rationale why it is undertaking to stimulate tourism in one geographical region rather than another. But when these conditions can be met, no obvious barrier to prospective arts funding appears to remain, though it is uncertain how often these criteria can be satisfied.

Connecting prospective arts funding to economic policy suggests another means for justifying state support, *viz.*, employment. If state funding is not forthcoming, then many artists will be unemployed. Unemployment is clearly a matter of concern for the state. The massive unemployment of black inner-city youths is one of the great tragedies of our society, and we must demand that the state do something about it. Many would be in favor of New-Deal-type programs to alleviate the problem. Can we mount a similar argument in order to show that prospective arts funding can be seen as a way of averting massive unemployment among artists? My inclination is to think not. Artists do not seem to constitute a group that is comparable to black inner-city youths. Questions of justice and equal opportunity do not seem to bear on the issue of artistic unemployment. Moreover, the artistic unemployment we might envision involves artists' unemployment as artists rather than their unemployment simpliciter. That is, I may not be able to support my family as an unemployed poet; but that does not mean that I can't do it in another way, say, as a journalist or a copywriter. It does not seem to me that the state's responsibilities in regard to the unemployed extend to guaranteeing that everyone have the job he or she most desires. The case of artistic unemployment involves people not able to pursue the line of work they most covet, while inner-city unemployment involves people excluded from the work force altogether. Our belief that the state has clear responsibilities in the case of inner-city unemployment cannot ground claims to similar duties in regard to artistic unemployment. If artists are unemployed, the state will have certain duties to them, though it is not clear that those duties include finding them employment as artists.

It may be suggested that a certain conception of fairness can be used to ground government art support. If a given government subsidizes the building of sports arenas, then, in all fairness, arts production should also be supported. If the government facilitates the pursuits of sports fans, then it should, as a matter of treating people equally, also facilitate the pursuits of arts fans, perhaps by means of supporting the creation of new art. Of course, this argument presupposes a context in which some leisure activity, such as sports, is being subsidized. But what, in such a context, justifies the subsidizing of sports? If nothing does, then perhaps what is required is that neither sports nor the arts be subsidized.

Insofar as one objects to sports subsidies, one must forgo art subsidies. Of course, a subsidy for a sport might be defended on the grounds that it stimulates the economy of an area; but then arts funding can, in principle, be similarly defended. Again, it does seem correct to say that if a majority, call them sports fans, demand sports funding in the face of opposition by a minority, call them arts lovers, then fairness urges that the leisure activity of the latter group also be supported, though perhaps not to the same extent. The deeper question, however, is whether any leisure activity should be supported. For if any is supported, then all should be in proportion to the allegiance to that leisure activity in the society. And yet this appears extreme. Suppose skateboard racers wanted a national stadium. Does that seem to be something for which the state should pay by levying taxes on the rest of us? Obviously, even wilder examples could be concocted—hopscotch stadia, a coliseum for Bocci Ball, a national gallery of toothpick sculpture. The advancement of the leisure professions may just not be an area the state should enter at all.

One of the earliest arguments in favor of government support of the arts is that the arts perform a moralizing function. During the period of the Second Empire, in nineteenth-century France, the Orpheon, a working-class choral society, was sponsored by Napoleon III's government on the grounds that it would introduce the proletariat to "moral amusements," which would not only cultivate their tastes but "moralize" them.¹¹ Similarly in this country in the nineteenth century the belief was widespread that through art the populace could be morally improved. These beliefs influenced both school reform and the founding of the great American museums.¹² In the era of state funding of the arts, faith in their potential to make people more moral—faith in the civilizing power of the arts—suggests a line of justification for the prospective funding of art. For surely the maintenance of the moral order in society is a legitimate state concern. Thus, if art can function as a means of improving morality, then the state is justified in supporting it. If art provides moral exemplars or deepens conscience, the state, it would seem, can avail itself of the devices of art to instill moral behavior in its populace.

One aspect of art that is related to its capacity to engender moral improvement is the tendency of certain kinds of art to develop our sympathies for others. Some art enables us to see the world from different points of view, thus promoting not only the acquisition of a formal requirement of morality, but also enabling us to grasp vicariously the situations of different classes, races, creeds, and genders. Art, then, can foster greater tolerance within society and thereby bolster the moral order. A strengthened moral order is a goal that the state legitimately pursues, given, among other things, its responsibility to prevent harm from befalling its populace. That is, one way to prevent harm is to prevent people from harming each other by making them more moral. If art can serve the accomplishment of this goal, then the prospective funding of such art seems justified.

But this argument for prospective arts funding does have certain unhappy consequences. The argument assumes that art increases moral sympathies. We have no reason to dispute the contention that *some* art has this capacity. But it seems unlikely that all art functions this way. If the state is to justify its funding of art on moralizing grounds, then only that art which we can reasonably predict will increase moral sympathies can be funded. This will probably require some empirical research into the moral efficacy of different kinds of art. Art, indeed whole categories of art, that afford no moral uplift cannot be funded on the basis of this argument. Art that works against any increase in moral sympathy will also be problematic. Art devoted, for instance, to outraging the bourgeoisie or politically partisan art is likely to be debarred from funding insofar as it instills divisiveness rather than tolerance. That is, in mobilizing this functionalist justification for arts funding, only grounds for certain types of arts funding have been secured. This raises problems like those encountered in our earlier discussion of the aesthetic environment argument. If the state is justified in funding only certain kinds of art and it enters the art world, putting its immense resources behind only moralizing kinds of art, then there is a great danger that the development of the art world will be skewed in certain directions. This violates our intuitions that the realm of art should be pluralist and relatively independent of considerations of social utility. Thus, though the state may be justified in funding certain types of art, we may be loath to have it exercise this prerogative because of the damage it would wreak upon art as we know it. Nor does it seem practicable to meet this objection by saying that the state should fund every type of art in order to fund the kinds of art it is justified to fund. For this will result in a kind of self-defeating schizophrenia: supporting anti-aesthetic art in order to support aesthetic art; supporting divisive art in order to support art that expands moral sympathies.

A recent argument in favor of public art support has been advanced by

Ronald Dworkin. He draws a distinction between two dimensions of culture. Culture “provides the particular paintings, performances, and novels, designs, sports and thrillers that we value and take delight in; but it also provides the structural frame that makes aesthetic values of that sort possible and makes them values for us.”¹³ This structural frame includes a wealth of associations, references, images, and contrasts, which, like language, supply us with the tools with which we forge and map our common life. Dworkin insists that it is better for people to have a complex and multifarious cultural framework and that we owe future generations at least as rich a cultural framework as the one we inherited. Both these values can be achieved by promoting the creation of innovative art. Government support in this area is necessary because it “helps protect the fragile structure of our culture.”¹⁴ Admittedly, Dworkin uses this argument to endorse indirect rather than direct arts support by the government. But he does countenance situations in which government support could be direct. And someone other than Dworkin might attempt to use this argument in favor of direct support.

At least two problems, however, beset this approach. First, there is the assumption that the structure of culture is fragile. We have encountered this before. But as an empirical supposition we have argued that its truth is far from obvious. Moreover, when we look at the structure of culture, we note that it comprises many ingredients beside art—social dances, children’s games, fashion, sports, religion, indeed the whole gamut of our symbolizing activities. When we think of the twenties, we recall the flapper and the Charleston; perhaps in the future people will think of the eighties in terms of punk haircuts and break-dancing. These images become part and parcel of our ways of thinking; they are the very weave of our common culture. But it seems dubious to consider them to be fit beneficiaries of public funding. Yet if art deserves public funding because of its contribution to our cultural framework, so does anything else that similarly contributes, including, potentially, every sort of symbolizing activity, and notably some outlandish ones: hoola-hoops, comic books, Billy Graham, the Watergate break-in, and so on.¹⁵

One criticism that is apt to be directed at this essay is that we have repeatedly discussed prospective arts funding in terms of things other than art, i.e., in terms of some good consequences which would justify such funding. One may feel that this completely misses the point. Art is good in itself and does not require further validation in virtue of the further consequences it abets.¹⁶ It may be true, though one has one’s doubts, that art is intrinsically good. But even if the production of art is intrinsically good, that, in and of itself, would not warrant state funding of the arts. For the state does not and, in some cases, should not be taken to have a role in the production of whatever we conceive to be an intrinsic good or

even of whatever is an intrinsic good (if there are such things). State intervention in these matters calls for justification.

In conclusion, there do appear to be theoretical justifications for prospective government funding of art. The two strongest justifications seem to be those concerning the aesthetic environment and the moralizing effects of the arts. However, though these arguments are available, it is not clear that they should be acted upon. For they endorse the funding of only certain types of art. Government support for the arts guided strictly by these arguments may indeed disturb the structure of artistic production and perhaps destroy the art world as we know it.

NOTES

1. Edward Banfield, *The Democratic Muse* (New York: Basic Books, 1984), p. 4.
2. Carl Wellman, *Welfare Rights* (Totowa, N.J.: Rowman and Littlefield, 1984), p. 30.
3. Suggested in *ibid.*, pp. 133-34, and by T. Benditt, *Rights* (Totowa, N.J.: Rowman and Littlefield, 1982), pp. 112-16.
4. William Rees-Mogg, "Paying for the Arts: The Political Economy of Art in 1985," *The Economist* 294, no. 7385 (9 March 1985): 94. It should be noted that Rees-Mogg uses this argument only to endorse indirect funding as a way of replacing declines in direct funding. However, I have heard arguments like this in discussions with proponents of direct funding.
5. Joel Feinberg, *Social Philosophy* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1973), p. 111.
6. Derived from Wellman, *Welfare Rights*, p. 136.
7. Monroe C. Beardsley, "Aesthetic Welfare, Aesthetic Justice, and Educational Policy," in *The Aesthetic Point of View*, ed. M. Wreen and D. Callen (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1982), pp. 113-14. Originally published in the *Journal of Aesthetic Education* 7, no. 4 (October 1973): 49-61.
8. My disposition is to see state activity connected to state responsibilities or duties. My inclination is to think that state power is so awesome that, in contested contexts, only things as serious as duties should mobilize it. But others may not share my squeamishness. They will think that in stating the issue above in terms of state obligations to beneficence, I am asking too much. They might suggest that what is really at issue are not state obligations to beneficence but rather a *prima facie* license to the state to proceed in any area where it can do good or bestow benefit. This construal of the state's relation to beneficence, however, raises the same sorts of problems discussed above in terms of an obligation to beneficence. Surely beneficent activity such as arts funding cannot be undertaken until the state has acquitted its welfare obligations. And, furthermore, where the benefits in question are contested, it is not clear that the state can implement them over the protests of significant numbers of its skeptical citizens.
9. Quoted in Banfield, *The Democratic Muse*, pp. 68-69.
10. A similar point is emphasized by William J. Baumol in his remarks in "IV. Panel Discussion: Public Support of the Arts," *Art and Law* 9, no. 2 (1985): 214-28. One kind of economic argument in favor of arts funding concerns the technical notion of a public good. I have not broached this issue directly in the article. Ronald Dworkin has dealt with the epistemological problems involved in considering art in this light in "Can a Liberal State Support Art?" in his *A Matter of Principle* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1985), pp. 221-33.

(This article is reprinted in *Art and Law* 9, no. 2 [1985]). I agree with Dworkin on this matter; for a differing view, see Baumol, "Public Support of the Arts."

11. Howard Becker, *Art Worlds* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), pp. 181-82.
12. Banfield, *The Democratic Muse*, chaps. 4 and 5.
13. Dworkin, "Can a Liberal State Support Art?" p. 229.
14. *Ibid.*, p. 233.
15. R. Nozick makes a related point in *Art and Law* 9, no. 2 (1985): 162-67.
16. T. Nagel seems to follow this line in *ibid.*, pp. 236-39.