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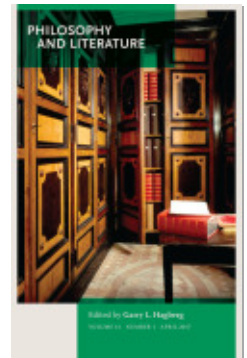
Art World: Grudger, Sucker, Cheat

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ART WORLD: GRUDGER, SUCKER, CHEAT

Abstract. In this essay, replete with compelling examples, I make a case for a game-theoretical approach to understanding better the art world. Like J. L. Mackie and Richard Dawkins, who argue that in order to understand an evolutionarily stable moral world, the same ideas that apply there—grudger (reciprocal altruist), sucker (naive altruist), and cheater (egotist)—need also to apply to the art world. Thus, there are artists and appreciators who are grudgers, suckers, or cheats. The result: the only evolutionary, stable strategy for the art world is a grudger strategy; all other art worlds are doomed to extinction.

A picture lives by companionship.
—James E. B. Breslin¹

IN *ART AS EXPERIENCE*, John Dewey is clear that art, like life, goes on in an environment—or, more emphatically, art, like life, goes on “not merely *in* it but because of it, through interaction with it. . . . The career and destiny of a living being (and an artwork) are bound up with its interchange with its environment, not externally but in the most intimate way.”² Later, Dewey says: “The word ‘esthetic’ refers, as we have already noted, to experience as appreciative, perceiving, and enjoying. It denotes the consumer’s rather than the producer’s standpoint. . . . As with cooking, overt skillful action is on the side of the cook who prepares, while taste is on the side of the consumer, as in gardening there is a distinction between the gardener who plants and tills and the householder who enjoys the finished product” (Dewey, p. 47). Obviously, of course, Dewey sees not only a profound biological basis to artworks and experience but also concomitantly a strong and intimate social

relationship between artist and appreciator—the artwork, as it were, being the offspring of that artist/appreciator intercourse.

George Dickie, too, views the art world, if not from a biological standpoint, surely from a social point of view. In his famous “What Is Art: An Institutional Analysis,” Dickie argues that the “institutional behavior (of the art world) occurs on both sides of the ‘footlights’: both the players and the audience are involved and go to make up the institution of the theater. The roles of the actors and the audience are defined by the traditions of the theater. What the author, management, and the players present is art, and it is art because it is presented within the theater-world framework.”³ Dickie goes on to argue that his institutional view of the theater can be generalized to include the painting world, the music world, the poetry world—indeed, the art world itself.

True, art occurs in an art world, and Dewey and Dickie are right in arguing that if we are going to understand fully the nature of art, we need to understand how art is made and appreciated in that world. No doubt Dewey and Dickie contribute much to our understanding of how the art world works. In this essay, I’d like to add to that understanding by looking at the art world through the lens of game theory, more specifically some fundamental game-theoretical ideas I have learned from J. L. Mackie and Richard Dawkins. By doing so, I will be suggesting some new ways of looking at some familiar facts and ideas about art.

Game theory is usually applied specifically to economic, military, moral, political, and social problems. It is even now applied to understand both human and nonhuman survival games, that is, the very biology of cooperation and competition.⁴ Here, I argue that game theory has a place in the realm of aesthetic problems as well. The reason I think game theory has such a place is suggested in my citations of Dewey and Dickie. Like them, I see continuity in our various relationships with others; there is no difference in kind (or as Dewey would say, there are no dualisms) between our military and political relationships, just as there is no difference in kind between aesthetic and moral relationships. Human relationships differ in degree—of intimacy, compassion, depth, intellect, etc. If putting moral or political relationships under the umbrella of game-theoretical ideas does not at all distort, corrupt, or do violence to those relationships, then it seems reasonable to argue the same goes for aesthetic relationships, i.e., the relationship between artist and appreciator.

Therefore, to examine the artist/appreciator relationship with respect to game-theoretical ideas should be another way of illuminating that

relationship. In other words, artists and appreciators act in essentially the same ways that moral, political, and social agents act. Although the context and details of these various acts differ, the principles of action remain the same: in any given niche there is greater or less defection and cooperation among “players”; hence, the principles of action are all derived from the human substrate—perhaps the animal substrate, as well.

J. L. Mackie wrote “The Law of the Jungle: Moral Alternatives and Principles of Evolution.” That essay provides an excellent example of how game-theoretical ideas help to illuminate moral problems. After briefly looking at that essay, I will plug those ideas into the artist/appreciator relationship and then draw out the implications.

As I read Mackie, he seems to be concerned with two big questions. Given that our bodies and behaviors are fundamentally products of evolution by natural selection:

1. What morality would be most consistent with our nature? Since Mackie thinks like a Darwinian, one might be mistakenly led to believe that he ignores the role of culture in our nature and relationships. This disregard is often an unfortunate and frivolous response to evolutionary thinkers. However, although he does not explicitly address this issue, I take it that—like other thoughtful evolutionarily inclined thinkers—Mackie would argue that, of course, culture is significant in determining our actions. However, underlying culture is biology. In other words, the various cultures that humans express and develop over time are expressions of and are grounded in our bodies and behaviors, which are products of evolution by natural selection. Certainly our cultural practices are not in any sense, magical or otherwise, suspended in midair.

2. What morality would be most successful, i.e., would withstand the test of time? As Aristotle says in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, we endeavor to articulate a moral theory for the sake of its practice: it should be “practicable and attainable by man,” a “good within human reach” (*NE*, 1.6.14).⁵ Again, as Aristotle suggests, inventing an ideal morality may be an invigorating intellectual challenge. However, for all practical purposes, a morality without staying power is not worth developing. Such exercises are intellectual luxuries that belong to other branches of philosophy, such as metaphysics (see *NE*, 1.6.14). I believe Mackie would agree.

“The Law of the Jungle” is an attempt to challenge Richard Dawkins’s argument against group selection. For my purposes, I am not interested in whether or not Mackie’s challenge succeeds. What I am interested in, and what Mackie, Dawkins, et al. accept as true, is the model they use in trying to understand the nature of selfishness and altruism in animal,

including human, relationships. As Mackie says: "This [selfishness and altruism] is a question of some interest to moral philosophers, particularly those who have been inclined to see human morality itself as the product of some kind of natural evolution."⁶ Mackie is not interested in examining whether or not someone will sometimes act altruistically for a group. What Mackie wants to know "is whether the good of the group or the species would ever figure in a correct evolutionary account," and he adds, "In other words, the issue is this: is there natural selection by and for group survival or species survival as opposed to selection by or for individual survival (or, as we shall see, gene survival)? Is behaviour that helps the group or the species, rather than the individual animal, rewarded by the natural selection which determines the course of evolution?" (Mackie, p. 456). Another way of posing the question is: would natural selection select for traits such that an individual would act to benefit the group at the expense of the individual who possesses that trait?

In order to deal with these questions, Mackie adopts the game-theoretical model derived from Dawkins's book *The Selfish Gene*.⁷ The purpose in adopting this model is to see: a) at what level (species, group, individual, or gene) selection occurs; b) what strategy/relationship between species, groups, individuals, or genes would be an evolutionarily stable strategy; in other words, the strategy with the greatest longevity.

So here's the model, a compressed and paraphrased version from Mackie's essay:

A species of birds is parasitized by lethal ticks. A bird can remove the ticks from most parts of its body but cannot remove them from the top of its own head. However, mutual grooming can take place. If each bird had an inherited tendency to take the ticks out of any other bird's head, this would help the group to survive. Someone who believed in group selection would expect this tendency to be favored and to evolve and spread for this reason. Consider two strategies, that is, inheritable behavioral tendencies: suckers and cheaters. Suckers groom any other bird who needs it. Cheaters accept grooming from anyone but never groom anyone else. In a population of both suckers and cheaters, it is easy to see that cheaters will always do better than suckers. As a matter of fact, in such a mixed population, suckers soon go extinct. To quote Mackie: "The fact that the group is open to evolutionary change from within, because of the way the internal competition between Cheat and Sucker genes works out, prevents the group from developing or even retaining a feature which would have helped the group as a whole"

(Mackie, p. 458). In other words, a sucker strategy is not an evolutionarily stable strategy, i.e., a sucker strategy has a very short life span.

There is, however, a third strategy to consider: the grudger.

A grudger is rather like you and me. A grudger grooms anyone who has previously groomed him, and any stranger, but he remembers and bears a grudge against anyone who cheats him—who refuses to groom him in return for having been groomed—and the grudger refuses to groom the cheat ever again. Now when all three strategies are in play, both Cheat and Grudger are evolutionarily stable. In a population consisting largely of cheats, the cheats will do better than the others, and both suckers and grudgers will die out. But in a population that starts off with more than a certain critical proportion of grudgers, the cheats will first wipe out the suckers, but will then themselves become rare and eventually extinct; cheats can flourish only while they have suckers to take advantage of, and yet by doing so they tend to eliminate those suckers. (Mackie, p. 460)

I should mention that another phrase for “grudger” is “reciprocal altruist.”

So, let’s sum up:

1. In a mixed population of suckers and cheats, the sucker strategy is the more unstable strategy. In a population of suckers, cheats, and grudgers, the sucker strategy is the least stable strategy. By implication, the presence of suckers is what makes populations vulnerable to cheats.

2. The cheater strategy is stable only in a population of largely cheats. However, once the population is composed *thoroughly* of cheats, it is doomed, given that the cheater accepts grooming but never grooms another. It is important to note that in a population of only cheaters and suckers, cheaters need suckers to survive. Once the suckers are gone, the cheaters soon follow.

3. The grudger strategy is most stable if it starts off with “a certain critical proportion of grudgers.” I would add that it will remain stable unless it is invaded by an overwhelming number of cheats.

4. A population of grudgers, suckers, and no cheats is also stable. That is, unless the suckers increase to such an extent that it is invaded by a large number of cheats.

5. Numbers 3 and 4 are the most stable strategies, i.e., they are most difficult to invade or to change from within.

6. On a final note: a) cheater and sucker strategies fail and go extinct as a result of merciless game-theoretical logic; b) just in case, in a species like ours, where the motives underlying those cheater and sucker strategies are self-conscious, those motives will be unjustified.

When Mackie goes on to draw out the moral implications of various strategies, he argues correctly that the grudger strategy is “the only one that [is] healthy in the long run” (Mackie, p. 463). Hence moral theories that argue for moral worlds that are nongrudger grounded are doomed to failure and extinction. He says that the grudger’s reciprocal altruist position resembles the position taken by Polemarchos in book I of Plato’s *Republic*—do good to your friends and harm to your enemies⁸—as well as the position later taken by Edward Westermarck. Westermarck argues, says Mackie, that morality is “an outgrowth from retributive emotions” (Mackie, p. 463). The grudger strategy is the mean between the extremes of sucker and cheater. Sucker-grounded moralities are the moralities of Socrates and Jesus, says Mackie. I would add Kant. As for cheater-grounded moralities, I suppose one would think of Machiavelli or Hobbes, given their views of humanity’s fundamentally egotistic, suspicious, and violent nature.

The game-theoretical approach produces some tantalizing ideas with respect to our moral relationships and aspirations. Let’s now plug this approach into our aesthetic relationships and their aspirations, and see what results.

The art world is populated by two groups of people, artists (creators and performers) and appreciators (scholars, critics, art dealers, publishers, those people who attend concerts and/or theatrical performances, readers of literary works, gallery owners, patrons of the arts, and so on). As in any world, art-world citizens are seeking material resources, status, and sexual access—all for the sake of survival and reproductive success. Correlatively, art-world citizens make and appreciate art for the pleasures inherent in aesthetic experience, the pleasures of self-knowledge, and the expression of their emotions.

Although it is clearly legitimate to speak of the art world, the art world itself is not a clearly defined world. Who counts as an artist or appreciator is never perfectly clear, and, of course, some have argued that art and the art world, just like Wittgenstein’s idea of what constitutes a game, may defy definition altogether. This may be true of other worlds as well; for example, where do the moral, political, social, religious, financial, and military worlds begin and end? One might wonder, too, about the beginnings and endings of the rather pedestrian worlds of plumbing or rail transportation. Dickie recognizes the fuzzy and amorphous nature of the art world when, recalling Hume, he says: “The art world consists of a bundle of systems” (Dickie, p. 88). Notwithstanding the “bundle-y” nature of worlds, worlds can be constructively construed in terms of the

relationships among their members. Of course, I will argue that the art world can be understood quite well in terms of artist and appreciator relationships. Actually, Dewey and Dickie construe the art world in terms of such relationships in order ultimately to understand the very nature of art. Furthermore, those art-world relationships can be analyzed in terms of cheaters, suckers, and grudgers.

Think of the artist behaving either as a sucker, cheater, or grudger on behalf of his/her work. Think, too, of the appreciator behaving as a sucker, cheater, or grudger in response (his/her interpretation, evaluation, and criticism) to the artist's work, whether that response is recorded in some medium or not. Thus, we can think of the relationship between artists' work and appreciators' response in the following shorthand way:

As for artists: 1. An artist may be a sucker, that is, s/he produces high-quality art deserving high-quality praise and receives low-quality responses in return. 2. An artist may be a cheater, that is, s/he produces low-quality art deserving no praise and receives high-quality responses in return. 3. An artist may be a grudger, that is, s/he produces high-quality art deserving high-quality praise and receives equally high-quality responses in return.

As for appreciators: 1. An appreciator may be a sucker, that is, s/he produces high-quality appreciation and receives low-quality art deserving little or no praise in return. 2. An appreciator may be a cheater, that is, s/he produces low-quality appreciation and receives high-quality art deserving high-quality praise in return. 3. An appreciator may be a grudger, that is, s/he produces high-quality appreciation and receives equally high-quality art deserving high-quality praise in return.

I will play it safe and define high-quality art, deserving of high-quality praise, as the "bundle" of work that displays profundity, inevitability, power, and grandeur, such as one sees noncontroversially displayed in the overwhelmingly agreed-upon best works of J. S. Bach, Ludwig von Beethoven, William Shakespeare, Dante, Michelangelo, and Raphael. As for high-quality appreciation, again I will play it relatively safe and define high-quality appreciation as the "bundle" of responses that displays profundity, inevitability, power, and grandeur, such as one sees noncontroversially displayed in the overwhelmingly agreed-upon best works of Eduard Hanslick, Roman Ingarden, Edward Dowden, A. C. Bradley, John Ruskin, and Charles Baudelaire.

Obviously, notwithstanding my playing it safe, my definitions are vague and my short lists of artists and appreciators are idiosyncratic,

incomplete, and—quite frankly—haphazard. Others making up short lists would include other artist and appreciator candidates. I imagine that others looking over my lists would consider them examples of easy cases, canonical examples, or what have you. That is, of course, what I intend. Thus, although not everyone would include my choices, no one would legitimately exclude any of them. Also, the sense of high quality I am attempting to convey regarding both artists and appreciators, I believe, is sufficiently clear for my purposes. Low-quality art and appreciation are those “bundles” of works and responses that are not profound, inevitable, powerful, or grand.

So who is a candidate for a sucker artist, the artist who does high-quality work deserving praise and gets a low-quality response? The answer: any artist who is underrated or ignored posthumously or during her/his lifetime. For a time, both Herman Melville’s and Emily Dickinson’s work was sucker’s work. During his lifetime, Vincent van Gogh was perhaps the paradigm sucker artist, producing sucker’s work. During his lifetime, Edgar Allen Poe was a sucker artist. All of the above produced high-quality work deserving high-quality responses and praise; all were met with ridicule, neglect, or both.

Who, then, is a candidate for a cheater artist, the artist who creates low-quality work and gets a high-quality response? The answer: during their lifetimes, Nobel Prize-winning cheaters, such as Maurice Maeterlinck and John Galsworthy. Among painters, during their lifetimes, Thomas Kinkade and Norman Rockwell come to mind. Among poets, I would include cheaters such as Alfred, Lord Tennyson, Charles Bukowski, and Derek Walcott. All of the above are either already in history’s dustbin or are well on their way to receiving the neglect they deserve.

Who is a candidate for sucker appreciator, the appreciator who offers a high-quality response to low-quality work? Nobel Prize committee members (some; not all) who pass over James Joyce and Rainer Maria Rilke and award prizes not only to Maeterlinck and Galsworthy but also other questionable recipients. I’d wager that we could find other sucker appreciators on other art-award committees.

Who is a candidate for a cheater appreciator? Anyone who offers a low-quality response to high-quality work, such as George Bernard Shaw and Leo Tolstoy on Shakespeare. Both Shaw and Tolstoy deserve prominent places among cheater appreciators for their notoriously scathing and thoughtless attacks against Shakespeare. Or how about this 1806 gem reviewing Beethoven’s opera, *Fidelio*:

Recently there was given the overture to Beethoven's opera *Fidelio* and all impartial musicians and music lovers were in perfect agreement that never was anything as incoherent, shrill, chaotic, and ear splitting produced in music. The most piercing dissonances clash in a really atrocious harmony, and a few puny ideas only increase the disagreeable and deafening effect.⁹

Some extreme, but also pathetically familiar, cheaters, currently and throughout history, are those appreciators, better described as propagandists, with fanatical political or religious agendas, or both. One's imagination can supply the abundant examples. A final note: some readers may object to some of my examples of suckers and cheaters, whether artists or appreciators. If you don't like my examples, pick your own. My argument merely requires that examples are available that enable one to speak in sucker and cheater terms when it comes to artists and appreciators.

It should be no surprise that the art world is populated by suckers and cheaters "on both sides of the footlights," just as it is no surprise to find suckers and cheaters in other human and animal relationships. It also should be no surprise that sucker and cheater strategies are not determined in any hard, determinist sense: one might be a sucker on one occasion and a cheater on another. Furthermore, no one is immune to sucker and cheater tendencies. The point here, however, is that suckers' and cheaters' works and responses in the art world, as in other human worlds, are not stable strategies; they go extinct. This means that in the long run no one admires, takes seriously, or ultimately remembers suckers or cheaters. Tolstoy, of course, will withstand the test of time because of his extraordinary literary accomplishments. However, his foray into Shakespeare criticism is a joke. And in spite of his fame in Victorian England, Tennyson, when he is read today, is thought of in a positive sense as quaint, in a negative sense as uninspired. As a reminder, Tennyson was the longest-serving English poet laureate: forty-two years. Like the Nobel Prize in Literature list, the English poet laureate roster includes a substantial number of cheaters; I am sure not only that everyone remembers Henry James Pye and Alfred Austin but also that everyone is well aware that their poetry continues to sell and that scholarly and critical interest in their oeuvre is still robust.

It should also be no surprise that the art world is kept alive by grudgers. Grudgers, whether they are artists or appreciators (sometimes they even reverse roles), engage in healthy and fair competition. They engage in a true dialectic, a true symbiosis, where honest and imaginative works

and responses are rewarded by advancing given aesthetic agenda, while false and dull works and responses are punished by justifiable ostracism and ultimate extinction. If one looks at the history of a high-quality artwork and its high-quality responses, one experiences the diversity and fecundity of the art world, analogous to the diversity and fecundity of life's "tangled bank" so richly described in the last paragraph of Darwin's *The Origins of Species*.

So what might be some of the characteristics of art's "tangled bank," or art's grudger world?

1. The grudger art world can be described as one high-quality artwork appreciated by one equally high-quality response—interpretation, evaluation, and criticism—such as F. O. Matthiessen's response to Walt Whitman, or Meyer Schapiro's response to Paul Cézanne. But strictly speaking, such examples would merely be aspects of a grudger art world. Like any world, the art world requires a temporal dimension, a history, as I suggested above, in order to be accurately and richly described. One wants to see many of Whitman's works stand up to the responses of many F. O. Matthiessens. One wants perhaps to see not only how Whitman's works evolve in the Matthiessen environment of appreciation but also how Whitman's works evolve in others' environments of grudger appreciation. Clearly the art world, like any other world, is in process. In this sense, perhaps, no artwork or act of appreciation is ever complete. In the best critical sense, artwork and appreciation mutually feed each other. One might even say that aesthetic quality or value is an emergent property resulting from the artist/appreciator relationship (conversation) in a grudger world.

2. If it is true, and I think it is, that the test of time is a criterion of aesthetic value, then only in a grudger art world is quality art born; there it develops; there it evolves.

In a grudger art world there is, as Mackie suggested, a healthy competitive/cooperative spirit. In a competitive sense, artists and appreciators try to outdo each other, such that aesthetic arms races ensue. Think of Beethoven's piano sonatas and all those piano players who try to outdo one another in their expressive interpretations—who incessantly explore novel means by which to disclose previously obscure territory in Beethoven's musical landscape. Think, too, how, in a cooperative sense, not only do Beethoven's scores provide the material cause of the pianist's performance but also that the pianist's performance (especially a particularly creative one) enhances, makes greater, adds quality to the composition. Hence, Beethoven's work nourishes the performer, the

performer the work. Thus, by small modifications—as it were, a process *à la bricolage*—the history of art unfolds.

3. Thus, again, the game-theoretical view of the artist/appreciator relationship enlarges upon and lends support to the idea that the test of time, as an aesthetic value, is a question of survival. Here, “survival” means that an artwork merits attention—evaluation and reevaluation, interpretation, and criticism—from generation to generation and from culture to culture. The game-theoretical view of the artist/appreciator relationship also lends support to the idea that reproductive success is an aesthetic value. “Reproductive success” here means that an artwork continually exerts influence on other artists, present and future, from culture to culture, so that artworks leave, as it were, an imaginative and expressive “paper trail.”

Thus we can speak of the influence of Dante, Rembrandt, and Beethoven, along with the respective anxieties each has produced, as well as the “children” of those masters. Thus the grudger art world is the only way of ultimately making legitimate and knowing that a given culture’s art world is populated by quality artworks. In a sucker or cheater art world, aesthetic value is never confirmed by the test of time; works in such a world do not “survive” and therefore do not enjoy “reproductive success.”

4. Aesthetic value is somewhat, not entirely, analogous to market value. Just as market value in a monetary sense is determined by supply and demand, so, too, is aesthetic value in a grudger world determined in a sense by supply and demand. One reason why Shakespeare’s *King Lear*, Beethoven’s Ninth Symphony, or Michelangelo’s *David* is valuable in an aesthetic sense is because the supply of such works is astonishingly meager. Shakespeares, Beethovens, and Michelangelos just don’t appear very often on the face of the earth. So, in respect to the question of rarity, market value and aesthetic value are similar.

The difference, however, between the two kinds of value is this: where the price of corn or wheat depends upon how much corn or wheat is available, the question of how much of Michelangelo’s work is available is relevant to aesthetic value, but not essential. What is essential is how much conversation has gone on, and for how long, in a grudger relationship between artist/artwork and appreciator. In this sense, just as wheat prices fluctuate, so too do aesthetic “prices.” To be clear, although aesthetic price and monetary are directly proportional, aesthetic “price” is not merely a question of dollars and cents. “Coin” in the art world, as I have suggested, is the “exchange” of expression, representation, pleasure, imagination, intellectual challenge, virtuosity, and creativity.

5. In all worlds, agents perform actions that are both within and outside their control.

In a brute physical and psychological respect, not all media are amenable to an artist's desired expression; even among the most gifted artists, creativity has its limits. Also, in all worlds, what a "player" gets is not entirely determined by what he or she does but also what the other "player" does. In all worlds, getting what you want is often a matter of taking the other side's perspective into account. One is furthermore limited by others, "on both sides of the footlights," trying to reach similar goals.

As to goals, sometimes artists' and appreciators' goals are shared, sometimes they are opposed; perhaps most of the time they are a little bit of each. Being self-conscious game players, artists and appreciators, insofar as they assess what others are doing, make themselves better game players: If she makes this, then I'll write that. He's probably thinking of writing that, so I'll try composing this. Clearly, as suggested above, the result of their necessary "play" is the longevity of the artwork and the appreciative response, as well as their respective "reproductive successes." This play or interdependence of artist and appreciator mutually sculpts their characters and roles. Such interdependence, analogous to organisms' interdependence and characterized by the grudger strategy, is at the heart of the art world. Thus, the grudger relationship continues to add to a work's greatness. Without the grudger relationship, the artwork remains unrealized, as it were, forever an acorn.

6. The grudger view of the art world, as a process, suggests that neither artist nor appreciator is autonomous in his or her respective and sometimes fluid role. This fluidity may be among the most important implications of examining the art world through game-theoretical lenses. In a strict sense, the artist is not merely a creator and the appreciator is not merely a responder. As in many human (or animal) relationships, artists and appreciators have needs that they alone cannot fulfill. These specifically aesthetic needs are only best fulfilled in the context where fair reward is possible under the threat of fair punishment. In such a sustainable relationship, sustainable art is produced. In this sense, artist and appreciator are truly complementary characters.

Therefore, as in understanding any world, so, too, understanding art is not merely a matter of understanding what the artist does, it is a matter of understanding what the artist does in the environment of appreciators, and what appreciators do in the environment of artists. Think of the artist/appreciator relationship as an extension of the

creative process, an “extended phenotype.”¹⁰ This is somewhat analogous to the gene/environment distinction. So what produces a phenotype, genes or environment? The answer: both. So what produces an artwork, artist or appreciator? The answer: both. Thus, this view of the art world furthermore suggests that the artist is not a rugged individualist, a romantic hero of any kind, or one who is original in some sense of creating *ex nihilo*. The artist holds no privileged place; he or she is at once the appreciator’s partner and adversary. Such a relationship may seem counterintuitive, especially when one considers towering figures such as Michelangelo, Shakespeare, or Beethoven. Nevertheless, the game-theoretical model of the art world forces us to think of them more modestly and, I should add, more realistically.

Rugged individualists or heroes exist in perfect worlds. Perhaps a perfect world is a world of pure altruists. Perhaps the *übercheater* would argue that the perfect world is the world in which he is the only cheater in a world of pure altruists. However, as we have seen, pure altruists as well as cheaters on this planet are doomed to failure and extinction. The only viable world is the grudger’s world, that is, doing what is justifiably good to your friends and what is justifiably harmful to your enemies. In such a world of reward and punishment, great (not perfect) art can flourish and, indeed, has flourished. As in any grudger world, the art world has its times of ascendancy and its times of decadence. I suppose the time that prevails depends on the standards of competition, which change from time to time and place to place.

Think, for example, of the rise of classical Greek sculpture and theater compared with the mannerism and slavish imitation of Roman art. Or think of the classical and mannerist periods of the Italian Renaissance. Higher or lower standards are dependent on a particular world’s gene pool and environment. In a materially rich biological environment, where meteorological factors are conducive to survival and reproductive success, with an abundant food supply and fewer predators and pathogens, the mutual grudgers’ payoffs will be higher than in materially poor biological environments. Analogously, in an aesthetically rich environment where grudger artists produce work in response to keen grudger criticism—such as the environments of ancient Greek or Elizabethan theater, or the Italian Renaissance or French Impressionist visual arts—the mutual payoffs will be concomitantly higher. Although we cannot yet control the weather, we can tinker with and tweak the aesthetic environment. Thus, whenever and wherever we have more or less control, we should strive to establish, through grudger strategies,

if not the best of all possible art worlds, at least those art worlds that are likely to work well.

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1. James E. B. Breslin, *Mark Rothko: A Biography* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), p. 305.
2. John Dewey, *Art as Experience* (New York: Capricorn Books, 1958), p. 13; hereafter abbreviated Dewey.
3. George Dickie, "What Is Art? An Institutional Analysis," in *Art and Philosophy*, 2nd ed., ed. W. E. Kennick (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1979), p. 87; hereafter abbreviated Dickie.
4. Game theory applies in many contexts. Along with Dawkins and Mackie, see the work of John von Neumann, John Maynard Smith, Robert Axelrod, Brian Skyrms, and David Barash; see also Charles Darwin, *The Origin of Species* (New York: Mentor Books, 1958), chap. 13. Darwin seems to have game-theoretical intuitions and sensibilities when discussing the problem of the dissimilarity of species in similar environments, specifically on the Galapagos Islands. He says: "How is it that many of the immigrants have been differently modified, though only in a small degree, in islands situated within sight of each other, having the same geological nature, the same height, climate, etc.? *This long appeared to me a great difficulty, but it arises in chief part from the deeply seated error of considering the physical conditions of a country as the most important; whereas it cannot be disputed that the nature of other species with each has to compete, is at least as important, and generally a far more important element of success*" (p. 386, my emphasis).
5. All citations of Aristotle come from Aristotle, *The Basic Works of Aristotle*, ed. Richard McKeon (New York: Random House, 1968), hereafter abbreviated *NE* and cited by chapter, section, and line.
6. J. L. Mackie, "The Law of the Jungle: Moral Alternatives and Principles of Evolution," *Philosophy* 53, no. 206 (October 1978): 456; hereafter abbreviated Mackie.
7. See Richard Dawkins, *The Selfish Gene* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), chaps. 10 and 12.
8. See also Robert Trivers, "The Evolution of Reciprocal Altruism," *The Quarterly Review of Biology* 46, no. 1 (March, 1971): 35–57.
9. Nicolas Slonimsky, *Lexicon of Musical Invective: Critical Assaults on Composers since Beethoven's Time* (New York: W. W. Norton and Co., 2000), p. 42.
10. See Richard Dawkins, *The Extended Phenotype: The Long Reach of the Gene* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), chap. 1.