It has never been easy to locate and identify values in relation to nature. The Greeks were already aware of the distinction between nomos, or variable custom, and physis, or the way things are. This sense of an opposition between what is culturally local and variable and what is fixed and given in nature has only grown sharper with the advent of modernity and the increasing credibility of materialist metaphysics. That birds lay eggs or that water quenches fire seem to be matters of fact, while that Bach’s French Suites are beautiful or that Socrates is virtuous seem to be more problematic matters of value.

At the same time, however, there is a great temptation to see such matters of value as at bottom matters of a special kind of fact. Making judgements of value is important to the conduct of cultural life, and there is enough consensus and argument about them at least to suggest that such judgements indeed track something, rather than being reflexes of what one might call mere taste or idiosyncrasy. The disciplines of aesthetics and ethics have consisted largely of various strategies for locating and identifying the relevant special facts that are tracked by judgements of value, pre-eminently judgements of beauty and artistic goodness, and judgements of duty and goodness of character. Perhaps because of the shared contrast with judgements about the natural world or the putatively materially given, these disciplines have often developed parallel stances and strategies in addressing the natures of values. This chapter will explore these parallels, emphasizing the side of aesthetics, and culminating in an assessment of a family of recent expressivist-holist views that dwell on continuities among aesthetic, ethical, and philosophical expression.
Value realism supposes value properties to be real and discernible features of objects. Both the beauties of nature and art and the goodesses of characters and actions are held to be in the objects that are judged valuable, though it may take special discernment to see them. Trained visual perception of single objects provides the model for the discernment of value properties. Plato notoriously accepts this model, and he equates beauty and moral goodness under the more general heading of \textit{to kalon}: the fine.

Value realism drifts towards \textit{intuitionism} when the primary focus is on the objects of judgement. In ethics, intuitionist views have been held by the early twentieth-century philosophers W. D. Ross and H. A. Prichard. In aesthetics, Mary Mothersill has claimed that certain assumptions of Plato’s ‘that beauty is (i) a kind of good (ii) which can be possessed by items of any kind and (iii) which is linked with pleasure and inspires love… [are] basic in the sense that every theory has to take account of them and that they commend themselves to common sense… as fundamental truths’ (Mothersill 1984: 262). Philip Pettit has similarly argued that aesthetic characterizations of objects as beautiful or grotesque, fine or flawed, dainty or dumpy, are genuine assertions about the properties of objects. Such characterizations are all at once essentially perceptual (one must look and see for oneself whether an object has an aesthetic feature), perceptually elusive (mere seeing of the object, without discernment, will not suffice to determine its aesthetic properties), and dependent on the positioning of the object in an unstable reference class of comparable objects. These features might suggest anti-realism. But because there are reasonable historical and hermeneutic constraints on the positioning of an object in a reference class, aesthetic properties are real enough, and ‘aesthetic characterizations… are… assertoric in the strictest and most genuine sense of that term’ (Pettit 1983: 38).

The advantage of insisting that aesthetic or ethical properties are real and quasi-perceptually discernible is that the normativity of judgements of value is upheld. There is something in the object—whether a character, an action, or a work—that a judgement about the object gets right or wrong. The disadvantage of such insistence is that it risks under-appreciating dramatic historical and cultural shifts both in the vehicles of beauty and goodness and in the qualities needed to discern them. Subjectivity seems more present in both the production and the estimation of good characters and successful works than intuitionist views seem quite to allow. The beauty of a Greek temple seems different in kind from that of a Bartok quartet; the goodness of character of a Greek aristocrat seems different from that of a contemporary democrat. To concede that aesthetic and ethical characterizations are context-relative, but to insist that they are about real features of things, seems like a defensive manoeuvre in the face of historical and cultural variability, an insistent but empty claim that correctness and incorrectness genuinely attach to judgements of value. Such views may not be wrong, but it is unclear how far their illumination penetrates into the details of our aesthetic and ethical practices and our critical judgements within them.
A second, but closely related, form of value realism focuses more sharply on the special qualities of discernment possessed by apt aesthetic and ethical perceivers. The historical inspiration here is generally Aristotle rather than Plato, and attention is directed less towards fixed ideal qualities in objects than towards specific contextual judgements of the goodness or badness of individual things in art and in life. The significant revival of virtue ethics over the last forty years or so, by such figures as Philippa Foot, Alasdair MacIntyre, Bernard Williams, Michael Stocker, Lawrence Blum, Michael Slote, and Martha Nussbaum, has been driven in large measure by particularism, or resistance to universal principles, coupled with a realist sense that the value properties of particulars can be discerned. (Both MacIntyre and Nussbaum have also articulated quite distinctive multi-dimensional general accounts of good human functioning.) On this view, our reasons for our specific judgements about value are enough to indicate that those judgements track something real, at least when those reasons survive wide-ranging critical scrutiny. We need not accept that only what is physically measurable is real. As John McDowell puts it, ‘What emerges here is the possibility that the explanation of [our] perceptions as reflecting ways of life might not amount to an explaining away of what the perceptions purport to discover in reality’ (McDowell 1983: 4, n. 5), however contextually specific such perceptions might be. Hilary Putnam’s internal realism supports a similar stance about judgements of both aesthetic and ethical value. We need not and should not, Putnam remarks, eliminate ‘the normative in favor of something else’ (Putnam 1992: 79), in favour of judgements about matter that are ‘really’ objective. The costs for cultural life would be too high, and such judgements are metaphysically respectable.

Among contemporary neo-Aristotelians, Martha Nussbaum has dealt in most detail with specific judgements about the values of both particular works of literature and particular actions in highly specific contexts. Though a general theory of the good and reference to principle are necessary as part of the background to such judgements, one must also be “Finely Aware and Richly Responsible” (Nussbaum 1990: 148), in the manner of Henry James, in order to make genuinely discerning ethical judgements. The texture of the novelist’s attention to details of motivation, character, circumstance, tone, and style is what underwrites specific ethical assessment, against a background of principle. We seek, in ethical assessment, ‘the best overall fit between a view and what is deepest in human lives’ (p. 26), and Nussbaum’s critical procedure extends this search for a fit to the evaluation of specific literary works.

To the extent that these neo-Aristotelian value realisms offer multi-dimensional accounts of the good and very flexible appreciations of different virtues (of both character and art) in different contexts, they account well for the varieties of characters, actions, and works of art that we value. But it is not always easy to see exactly how the particularism fits with the objectivism. When there is that much variety in judgements of value, often indexed to local cultural or historical circumstance, then, even if it need not be true, the thought that such judgements are mere expressions of
individual or social preference looms. When, in contrast, the overall theory of the
good or the beautiful is given more shape and content, so that common features of
beauty or goodness in different particulars are discernible, then the particularism
lapses. The middle way, of course, is to weave together the ongoing articulation of
the general theory with specific value assessments, as the meanings of the general
terms of the theory are explored in the specific, partly improvisatory work of a aes-
thetic or ethical criticism. This is surely what Nussbaum has in mind when she
remarks that the neo-Aristotelian style she practises will have to be ‘self-conscious
about its own lack of completeness, gesturing toward experience and toward the
literary texts, as spheres in which a greater completeness should be sought’
(Nussbaum 1990: 49). When this lack of completeness is emphasized, then the view
verges more closely on the expressivist-holist views discussed below.

One peculiarity of modern strategies in aesthetics, in contrast with ethics, is the
emphasis on the role of feeling in the apprehension of art and beauty. We seem less
inclined than the Greeks to talk of beauties of the character, action, or person that
we love or are moved by, perhaps because we are shyer than the Greeks about erotic
attractions and wish to keep them separate from either ethical or aesthetic assess-
ments. Talk of being moved by art comes more naturally.

The exact way, however, in which feelings matter for the identification and appre-
ciation of art has been the subject of dispute. Most straightforwardly, feelings are
sometimes regarded as means for both identifying and engaging with works of art.
Judgements about art are here regarded, in Jerrold Levinson’s apt phrase, as ‘human-
sensibility-indexed’ (Levinson 1998a: 8). How we feel in apprehending an object is
part of how we figure out what it is and how we rightly make use of it. Echoing Plato,
but eschewing his comprehensive account of to kalon, Richard Miller argues that
aesthetic judgements, involving feelings, are objective when and only when they are
‘learning-like enough’, yet without serving any ‘interest in acquiring truths’ or in
making decisions (Miller 1998: 54). His idea is that by engaging with works of art we
explore our capacities for feeling, and so learn something about ourselves, in particu-
lar about our capacities and about the objects we might enjoy in the future. As Peter
Railton puts it, ‘we wish to create and surround ourselves with objects that can be
rich sources of rich, perceptually based pleasure, objects moreover that will provide
the occasion for shared pleasures among family and friends, that will call forth the
admiration of others, and that will afford deeper satisfaction the better we know
them’ (Railton 1998: 78). Alan Goldman similarly argues that

moral and aesthetic judgments refer to relations between nonevaluative properties (them-
selves relational) of their objects and responses of ideally situated evaluators.... Attention
to paradigm works educates one as to the sorts of aesthetic properties or relations to seek in
other works themselves unique. Argument on a set of paradigms also establishes a reference
class of critics who share taste.... Aesthetic education of this sort, while not as vital to the
continuation of society as is moral education, is vital to the continuation of its culture.
(Goldman 1990: 718, 730)
Lacking, however, any general theory of the good other than a very abstract utilitarianism, Miller, Railton, and Goldman have difficulty explaining exactly why this learning is either urgent or objective. Much of it seems to be a matter of coming to feel whatever others in general, or intimates, or those of high status in one's culture, feel—or, if not that, then a matter of enjoying whatever one enjoys. For this reason, Stuart Hampshire, who holds a similar view about the nature of aesthetic properties, draws the conclusion that, unlike morality, which we must have, 'a work of art is gratuitous. It is not essentially the answer to a question or the solution to a presented problem' (Hampshire 1952: 652). When feelings, and especially pleasure and enjoyment, are made so central to the experience of art, independently of any further functions, then the empirical claim that we, or some of us, are enough alike either to enjoy the same things or to esteem the same evaluators seems forced. It is an attempt to erect a philosophical fact about what might be called the enjoyable as such, in the face of considerable evidence to the contrary. Since morality is generally thought to be urgent, it is no surprise that there has been little talk in recent moral philosophy of the morally enjoyable as such, though Hume, of course, held such a view, in moral theory as in aesthetics. We would be better off, contra Hampshire, to regard works of art as a solution to a problem, if the objectivity of judgements of taste is to be upheld. As Eva Schaper has argued, it is a mistake 'to seal off the aesthetic tank hermetically from the wide waters of philosophy' (Schaper 1983a: 39), as Hampshire does. But what problem does art answer to, if we are not to talk of the objective achievement of to kalon, of the fine as such?

The most prominent and promising way to specify a general problem of human life that is not that of the achievement of the objectively beautiful and good, independent of human sensibility, is in neo-Kantian terms. The problem defining human life, according to Kant, is that of the proper expression of our capacity for autonomy. This problem is set for us within, by the fact that we have free will, and hence can be more than playthings of external forces. As Paul Guyer usefully summarizes Kant's stance, 'moral worth attaches to the active use of our free will, rather than to any inclinations we have, precisely because it is what distinguishes us from all other animals as mere products of nature' (Guyer 1993: 347). One must seek to achieve self-mastery, or Oberherrschaft (p. 349), in acting according to a self-legislated moral principle.

A major preoccupation of recent neo-Kantian moral philosophy, at the hands of Onora O'Neill, Christine Korsgaard, Marcia Baron, Barbara Herman, Allen Wood, and Richard Eldridge, among others, has been to show that the pursuit of Oberherrschaft need not commit one to moral rigorism or to the denigration of feelings or personal relationships, contrary to the criticisms of Kant made by particularists and virtue theorists. In order to make this case, it is typically emphasized that 'our sentiments and inclinations are plastic' (Guyer 1993: 367). As a result, 'reason can... operate upon initially unruly and polymorphous passions, partially transform them, and thereby attach our inclinations and feelings to actions and ongoing modes of activity... that
have been taken to express respect for persons' (Eldridge 1989: 45). Eldridge has then
turned to certain works of narrative literature as offering exemplars of this trans­
formative education of feeling.

This line of argument relies upon and endorses the task that Kant specifically
assigns to art in *The Critique of Judgement*. Through symbolic representation,
works of art can ‘make moral ideas evident to the senses’, as Guyer (1993: 39) puts
it. ‘The rational autonomy that underlies morality... can be made palpable to fully
embodied rational agents like ourselves’ (p. 19). Such a stance runs evident risks of
both aesthetic didacticism and moral rigorism, if the most successful works of nar­
rative art are taken to be stories of protagonists smoothly doing the right thing and
living happily ever after. Eldridge has emphasized, however, that there are at best
only ‘partial and anxious exemplars’ (Eldridge 1989: 187) of the achievement of self­
mastery. Drawing in detail on Kant’s historical and anthropological essays, he has
argued that, for Kant and in fact, ‘every exercise of power or virtue, every act of
originality or courage or kindness or justice or love that we might look to as
advancing our culture, will be at the same time marked by vainglory and antag­
onism’ (Eldridge 1996a: 184). And yet, the ideal of free expressiveness coherently
draws us, in art as in life. The difficulty that this complex view faces is to make evi­
dent the roles in our arts and lives of such abstract ideals as freedom, self-mastery,
and free expressiveness. From a more naturalist point of view, it may well seem that
human life and art are much more about eating, sleeping, procreating, and enjoy­
ing than about these ideals. This criticism can be met only by tracing in detail what,
in art and in life, we truly care about.

Just as this neo-Kantian line of thinking brings the function of art into connec­
tion with the conduct of life, so the most important work on value of the last forty
or so years has seen the philosophical activity of thinking about value as itself tak­
ing place within the conduct of life, rather than through the discovery of fixed
philosophical facts about either ideal forms or human nature. Inspired significantly
by the work of the later Wittgenstein, *expressivist-holist* views see critical assess­
ments of particulars, both aesthetic and ethical, and more general remarks about
the kinds of things that are worth doing and making, as interrelated, ongoing, con­
tested, conversationally arguable moves within ongoing human life. Here Iris
Murdoch talks of the importance of *attention*—all at once aesthetic, ethical, philo­
osophical, and specifically critical—to ‘the texture of... being’ (Murdoch 1956: 39), as
it is developed both in one’s own life and in the lives of others. Human life is seen
as requiring continual thoughtful redirection, never as the complete achievement
of an ideal shape. As Murdoch puts it, ‘There are innumerable points at which we
have to detach ourselves, to change our orientation, to redirect our desire and refresh
and purify our energy, to keep on looking in the right direction: to attend upon the
grace that comes through faith’ (Murdoch 1992: 25). Making and closely following
works of art are paradigms of close attention to life, carried out within life. ‘Art is
informative and entertaining, it condenses and clarifies the world, directing attention
upon particular things. . . . Art illuminates accident and contingency and the
general muddle of life. . . . (p. 8). There are, always, things to get right about human
life, from within human life. Art, ethics, and philosophy all partake in this ongoing
effort.

Within this expressivist-holist paradigm, there is less talk of right action or duty
überhaupt and more attention to the display and development of character in con-
text; there is less talk of autonomous beauty or significant form and more talk of
the uses of art in embodying and clarifying specific visions of things. In this vein it
is natural for Eva Schaper to remark upon analogies between close attention to an
artistic object and love for another person, where both are ‘not self-regarding but
not self-forgetting either in the absorption in the loved one. . . . The emotion of love
permeates the entire life of the person who loves. And so it is also with the pleas­
ures of taste’ (Schaper 1983a: 51). Here there is no separating off of ethics from
aesthetics, or of critical attention to particulars from broader reflections. As
R. M. Hare puts it, ‘It is as if a man were regarding his own life and character as
a work of art, and asking how it should best be completed’ (Hare 1965: 150).
‘To become a mature moral person’, in Marcia Eaton’s formulation, itself ‘requires
aesthetic skills’ (Eaton 1997: 361).

Such expressivist-holist views carry evident risks of aestheticism. Everything
seems to be a matter of pattern or arrangement. The boundaries between aesthetics,
ethics, philosophy, and criticism seem tenuous, and the idea of really getting right
what is required of us by our nature, by our wills, by God, or by the good seems
threatened.

One neo-Nietzschean reply to this worry, urged by Alexander Nehamas, is to
embrace the thought that ‘artistic decisions provide the model for all action’
(Nehamas 1996: 233), but then to argue, first, that in both art and life there are
always enough contextual considerations available to point to something specific,
and, second, that we should free ourselves from a cowardly ‘metaphysical’ urge to
justify our choices from everywhere and nowhere. It remains to be seen, however,
whether this form of aestheticism is adequate to guide choices in context and
whether it can either answer or undo our intuition that there is something more
than contextual that such choices aim at getting right.

Richard Shusterman has attempted to provide somewhat more normative con­
tent for this kind of view by reminding us that art has ‘deep roots in life’s needs and
interests’ (Shusterman 1997: 6), as Nietzsche, Foucault, Wittgenstein, and Dewey all
held. In a specifically Deweyan vein, Shusterman then goes on to suggest ‘somatic
exploration’ (p. 34), or an exploration of the body’s possibilities of movement and
response, as in dance or as in the Alexander technique, which Dewey himself prac­
tised, as one valuable route of artistic self-making, alongside others. His emphasis on
the body is meant to temper both a freer, more thoroughly Nietzschean, eclectic aes­
theticism and a Rortyan insistence on a distinction between public justice and pri­
vate self-experimentation. The body is present in manifold forms of practice, both
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public and private, and its claims can tell us specifically how we ought to cultivate
ourselves, Shusterman urges. It is not always easy to see, however, just what these
claims are and exactly how they should be balanced against the claims of, say, wit
or justice or integrity. As in other varieties of this expressivist–holism, the details
will be crucial.

Ted Cohen has pursued a more distinctively neo-Humean stance within this
expressivist–holist framework, in the context of a study of jokes. If one becomes
estranged from one’s natural emotional life, then one faces ‘a threat to one’s con­
ception of his own humanity’ (Cohen 1999: 26). Eschewing the demand for abstract
proof in matters of value, we should speak from who we emotionally are. It is
absurd and incomprehensible that we should be aware of our own deaths and
hence, unlike other animals, be open to guilt, love, reciprocity, melancholy, and preju­
dice. We are responsible for the shapes of our lives, but we do not know how to
discharge that responsibility, and we inherit many bits of style and sensibility, in	angled ways, from our families, cultures, and embodiment. In the face of all this,
‘laughter is an expression of our humanity, our finite capacity, our ability to live
with what we cannot understand or subdue’ (Cohen 1999: 41). In laughter we are
‘joined in feeling’ (p. 25) with some others and with ourselves, at least for a time,
and it is not clear that we can do much better than that. Cohen is acutely aware of
both the humour and the absurdity of his own remarks, expressing his own feel­
ings. If there is a difficulty with this expressivist–holist neo-Humeanism, it is, as
with Humeanism in general, that little attention is paid to the point that Kantians
emphasize: the plasticity of feeling and its openness to transformation through
reflection.

Robert Pippin has recently given a distinctively Hegelian turn to the expres­
sivist–holist sense of the ongoing construction of a life. According to Pippin, what
we, at least in modernity, aim at is the freedom of self-understanding, where one
can ‘only comprehend [one’s life] as one’s own in the freely given recognition by
others’ (Pippin 2000: 164). The expressivist catch against Hegel is that freedom ‘has
no unambiguous realization’ (p. 157); we are instead always caught up in sociality as
a play of ‘endlessly struggling, mutually reflecting, refined, interrogative, imagina­
tive consciousnesses’ (p. 162). A kind of guarded achievement of freedom is pos­
sible, involving an intimate mixture of ‘tragic self-renunciation’ (p. 166) with
‘having one’s own life’ (p. 168), as one comes to terms with one’s particular place in
this play. Pippin’s central figure for this achievement is Lambert Strether in Henry
James’s The Ambassadors, when Strether decides to renounce both Maria, who loves
him, and Mme de Vionnet, with whom he may be in love, and return to America.
Pippin takes Strether’s closeness of attention to his situation and James’s attentions
to the complexities of desire, relationship, material circumstance, history, glance,
and voice to be models of the exercise of modern moral intelligence in the con­
struction of a life. It can be argued against Pippin that there is also either a principle
that does or ought govern such attentions and constructions (as neo-Kantian
expressivists such as Eldridge hold), or a general, multi-dimensional theoretical conception of the good that should inform deliberation (as neo-Aristotelian expressivists such as Nussbaum hold). Without some such more fixed background structure, Pippin’s view risks collapsing back into the more aestheticist–contextualist position of Nehamas.

Very early on, Stanley Cavell cast the problem of human life as that of living both between and amidst avoidance and acknowledgment of others. It is little exaggeration to say that his reception of Wittgenstein’s opening up of this sense of human life has been the most striking, detailed, continuous, and self-conscious working out of an expressivist–holist stance over the past thirty-five or so years. Cavell began this work by taking from Wittgenstein the sense that we are both bound to ordinary language, as the enabling background to any distinctively human thought and perception, and yet are in resistance to it, wanting to go our own ways, to achieve independence in our stances, and to escape the demands of acknowledgement of the ordinary. Working from this sense of human life, Cavell argued in ‘Aesthetic Problems of Modern Philosophy’ (1969b), and again in Part III of The Claim of Reason (1979), that both aesthetic and moral argument are continuously critical, involving the situated working out of a thought or perception, in a way that seeks agreement. Reason is displayed more in this working out, in critical claim-making in conversation with oneself and others, than in simply holding to a theory of value from which specific judgements deductively follow. Sounding the key note of expressivist holism, Cavell reads philosophical theorizing about value as one more move—sometimes deft, self-conscious, and self-revising, sometimes dogmatic and escaping into false certainties—within this critical claim-making activity. Scepticism provides Cavell with his central figure for the plights of thought:

Skepticism is a place, perhaps the central secular place, in which the human wish to deny the condition of human existence is expressed; and as long as the denial is essential to what we think of as the human, skepticism cannot, or must not, be denied. This makes skepticism an argument internal to the individual, or separate, human creature, as it were an argument of the self with itself. (Cavell 1988: 5)

Cavell has been unusually self-conscious about his own claim-making activity as a philosophical writer, as he seeks agreement with himself and with others. He typically follows tracks or traces of thinking, as they are produced by philosophers, including Emerson, Thoreau, Austin, Kierkegaard, and above all Wittgenstein, by writers, including Coleridge, Wordsworth, Kleist, and above all Shakespeare, and by filmmakers and their figures—Preston Sturges and Henry Fonda; Howard Hawks and Cary Grant; Josef von Sternberg and Marlene Dietrich. In this, he often explicitly recalls bits of his own progress along his own earlier tracks. Some readers have found Cavell’s tracings to be mannered rather than responsibly argumentative—unsettled, even antinomian, rather than objective. Given, however, the range and
detail of his tracings of thinking about value, as they occur in all sorts of situations and media, this charge seems more than anything else a sign of mere impatience and of a general wish for definite results within a well-demarcated discipline of philosophy. In matters of value, this may be a wish that it may be more reasonable to forgo.

People have historically found a spectacular variety of things to be of value—good or beautiful or honourable or deep or absorbing. There is no settled methodology for constructing a theory of value. How to think about values at all is one of the standing topics of both aesthetics and ethics. Yet we seem able sometimes to give persuasive reasons in some contexts for some particular judgements of value. Given these facts, it seems likely that the most fruitful work in both aesthetics and ethics for the foreseeable future will take place within the expressivist–holist framework. Whether that work is neo-Aristotelian, neo-Humean, neo-Kantian, neo-Hegelian, or neo-Nietzschean in sensibility, the effort will be simultaneously to sustain particular judgements of value persuasively and to articulate a general way of looking at values, where these joint efforts will be part of the ongoing self-conscious construction of a point of view. Certainly no more fundamentalist views, which would settle things once and for all, seem quite available.

David Wiggins, in worrying about how to think about values and the meaning of life other than in fundamentalist terms, has usefully described the basic features of the expressivist–holist stance. We need, he suggests, to accept ‘the compossibility of objectivity, discovery, and invention.... We need to be able to think in both directions, down from point [purpose or end] to the human activities which answer to it, and up from activities to the forms of life in which [human beings] by nature can find their point’ (Wiggins 1976: 371, 374–5). This kind of double-aimed thinking has been carried out at the intersection of aesthetics and ethics, in thinking about the artful and meaningful construction of a life, to the mutual enrichment and profit of both disciplines.

See also: Art and Morality; Art and Emotion; Tragedy; Value in Art; Expression in Art; Aesthetic Realism 1; Aesthetic Realism 2.

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