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DONKEY'S DILEMMA: VALUES OR VALOR?

Summary: This paper explores the process of creating artwork, with a particular emphasis on the artist's role in that process. The concept of the 'donkey's dilemma' is used to illustrate the artist's position when faced with the act of creation. Specifically, the artist must decide whether to adhere to the inherent principle of the artwork, ensuring that all stages of its creation are aligned with this internal logic, or to conform to an external principle, thereby adapting the artwork to fit preexisting frameworks. The inherent, inner principle guarantees a coherent relationship between the metaphysical essence of the artwork and its physical form, ensuring that this principle is clearly expressed in the final work. In contrast, the external principle represents external ideas, ideologies, or cultural contexts that assign value and meaning to objects considered art within a given context. The artist, like the donkey, must bear the burden of his choice, and the dilemma lies in deciding which burden to accept – a dilemma we argue is ultimately false. In either case, the artist remains inextricably bound to the moral and ethical consequences of his choice regarding both the artwork and the principle guiding its creation. Art created in accordance with an inner principle possesses intrinsic value – a valor derived from the work itself, grounded in its own internal logic. By contrast, art tied to an external principle lacks inherent value, as its worth depends on the value system the artist adopts. This paper further argues that such external value systems, including widely accepted aesthetic standards, are context-dependent and therefore relativistic. By contrast, the genuine disposition for an artwork to possess value resides in its ontology – that is, in its inner principle. Accordingly, the decision between an inner or external principle in the creative process is, fundamentally, a choice between authentic value – that is, the valor, and imposed perceptions of value shaped by societal constructs.

Keywords: artwork, creation, inner principle, external principle, valor, values.

In this paper, we will address the issue of creating artwork, with a particular emphasis on the artist's role within that process. Our position is grounded in artwork production; this paper results from thinking about art from within the experience of creating works of art.

The concept of the 'donkey's dilemma' in the paper's title is designed to illustrate the artist's position regarding the artwork he aspires to create. It draws a parallel between the artist's decisions and the symbolic figure of a donkey confronted with an impossible choice. In this case, the donkey serves as a metaphor for the artist; such an artist-donkey is facing a particular dilemma within the process of creating a work of art.

The dilemma exemplifies the dual options the artist is presented with while deciding the way and manner in which he will create the artwork. The options in question have to do with the principle according to which the artwork is to be created: the fundamental general idea defining the artwork's meaning, structure, and physical appearance.

The principle of artwork's creation can be either the inherent or the external one. The inherent principle of the artwork (as such) is devised in the artist's mind specifically for creating the artwork in question; the establishment of the principle is the response to the ineffable *poiesis*, which incites the artwork's creation. On the other hand, the external principle inhabits the realm of culture, usually in the form of some ideology or ideology-related ideas. Therefore, when creating according to the external principle, the artist is not responding to the artwork's own being, nor does he define the principle. In this case, the artist conforms to some existing idea, consequently adjusting his creation to it (both as a critic or as an advocate of appropriated external principle, i.e. discourse).

So, the dilemma of the artist is which kind of principle to choose – the inner and inherent principle of the artwork (as such) or the external cultural principle? In other words, the dilemma is either to rigorously follow what is given through *poiesis*, disregarding any dialogue with existing cultural frameworks, or to engage with such cultural frameworks, whether the artist intends to confirm or to subvert them.¹ In either case, the chosen principle will determine the entire process of artwork creation; including all the steps in the mind of the artist and all the steps of physical making the artwork.

In our opinion, such a dilemma should be presented alongside another problem: the choice between valor and values. The two dilemmas are interconnected and overlap in the sense that choosing valor involves

1 Although the division between inner and external principles might seem too strict, we argue this is not the case. The division underlines the possible ways for an artist to understand and conduct his work. Although many artists today choose to interact with cultural traditions or political ideas, we believe they are not restricted to such behavior. Finally, the idea of artists being a priori confined to existing (or traditional) cultural frameworks could also be considered a consequence of the postmodern ideology.

the selection of the inner artwork's principle, whereas choosing values is equivalent to the choice of an external principle. As we will argue, the donkey's dilemma is, in fact, a pseudo-dilemma.

In order to introduce, present, explain and resolve the donkey's dilemma, we will first discuss the concept of artwork's principle and its significance in the process of creating the artwork. Following that, we will address the two main types of artwork principles: the inner (creative) principle and the external (cultural) principle. As a result, the donkey's dilemma and the artist's position in creating the artwork will become evident. Such formal analysis will be further enhanced through questioning the ethical aspects of creating the artwork, i.e. by comparing the artist's decision between two principles to the choice between valor and values.

The Artwork's Principle

The donkey's dilemma is a metaphor for the artist's position in the process of creating a work of art. The artist's position is constituted by his relation to the emerging artwork: the artist has to make a decision about what kind of work he will create and in which way he will act to accomplish this. In other words, the artist decides upon a principle of the artwork – a principle which defines the artwork's meaning and being, while at the same time serves as a guideline for the process of artwork's creation. The artwork's principle, as said before, can be either the inner or the external principle.

To put it clearly, the concept of artwork's principle primarily refers to the artwork's being and ontological constitution. The principle determines all essential features of the artwork and provides its meaningful inner structure. In other words, the principle is the foundation of the artwork's constitution, defining its elements and composition in a formal and general way. Such formally defined meaningful composition is further embodied into a material object through the process of making the artwork; an artwork's physical appearance is merely a final manifestation of its principle. Therefore, artwork's ontology and being are defined metaphysically – before the artwork is realized as a physical and material entity (and before its perception by the observer).

To create the artwork, the artist acts according to some particular (inner or external) principle which provides the ontological structure of the work in becoming. The artist creates the artwork according to a particular principle whether or not he is aware of the principle he is following. In other words, the artwork's principle can be explicitly formulated before

the making of the artwork, or it can implicitly guide the artwork's coming into being. In either of these two cases, the principle determines the outcome of acting according to it. Whether the artist is aware of the principle or not, he organizes the entire process of creation in alignment with (or under) that principle, so that the principle determines and regulates the artwork's production in all its constitutive steps.

In other words, for the artist, the principle is equal to *the artistic method* directing the entire way of his acting while creating the artwork (Šarović, 2021, p. 163). Therefore, the principle has two functions: first, it is the ontological foundation of the artwork, and second, in the very process of creation, the principle serves as an artistic method (guiding the process).

The artistic method should not be confused with the (technical) artistic procedures employed in the very act of making the work of art or with the use of diverse techniques in working with materials and media (i.e. with the methodology of technology used and the principles of media and materials). The artistic method (i.e. the principle) is defined before the formation of the artwork's material form. The artistic method directs the artwork's creation completely, including the making of the artwork as a physical being which is simply the concluding phase of the creation process.

An artwork can find its living space in any medium or it can be created using any technology whatsoever; it can present itself as a poem or as a painting, symphony, or an NFT (non-fungible token / crypto art), or be classified as a work of popular, applied, or high art (Grugan, 2009, p. 6). What makes it the work of art is none of the enumerated categories; it is the principle on which the artwork is based and which the artwork manifests. The principle as such is independent of artistic media, technologies, and procedures – so much so, that the creation according to a particular principle can be realized in any medium and through employing any technology and procedure. Moreover, the creation can be realized in multiple media (McIver Lopes, 2014, p. 195–196); an artwork's principle can equally manifest itself in several media, through the employment of various technologies and procedures.

The principle directs the process of creation by providing an order of formal steps to be followed. Firstly, the principle (i.e. the artistic method) determines all the steps in the creation of the artwork prior to its physical making – specifically, the steps in creating the metaphysical artwork and its (metaphysical) meaningful composition. Secondly, the principle (i.e. the artistic method) determines the choice of medium (or several media), the exact procedures and the way of usage of artistic skills within that me-

dium, as well as all particular steps in making the artwork as a physical being (Šarović, 2021, p. 164–165). The process of physical making of the artwork is organized according to the principle so that the physical composition and appearance of an artwork are the embodiment of its metaphysical being and composition. Consequently, the artwork's principle is manifested in the created artwork's appearance (perceivable by the senses).

Therefore, the artwork's perceivable appearance is not all there is to be seen (Dillenberger, 2004, p. 220; Henry, 1973, p. 438). There is also the essential, invisible side of the artwork – its meaning, shining through its perceivable and physical side. The invisible meaning of the artwork is equal to the metaphysical (invisible) world constituted according to the artwork's principle and before the artwork's physical realisation. The visible (and perceivable) appearance corresponds to the invisible meaning of the artwork because both are created according to (and related through) the same principle.

To put it differently: the artwork presents and communicates its state of being through its composition and appearance. This means that the overall reception of the artwork – grasping both its physical appearance and its metaphysical being – depends on and is essentially regulated by the artwork's principle. Since the artwork's principle is present and manifested in all aspects of the artwork, including the ones that are perceptible by the senses, the audience is also presented with the principle regardless of whether or not the principle was explicitly communicated by the artist. If the principle (i.e. artistic method) is adequately articulated and communicated, this will prevent misunderstandings regarding possible interpretations of the artwork, clearly showing which interpretations acknowledge the artwork's being (and meaning) and which ignore it. If the principle is not explicitly formulated and communicated, the recipient has to infer the principle, given the artwork's physical being and appearance.

Finally, the artist can attempt to produce an artwork without any principle. This occurs when the artist is focused solely on the physical making and appearance of the artwork, thereby emphasizing artistic skills and technological proficiency. In this situation, the artist attempts to combine the artwork's elements into a coherent and harmonious (physical) composition without any specific meaning guiding his work. However, since there is no meaning to his work, the outcome manifests and communicates (literally) nothing meaningful (Beardslay, 2019, p. 24).² Without the principle involved, such an attempt will fail as artwork, although the skill

2 If the artist deliberately chooses to create a meaningless artefact, such a choice would represent a specific principle of creation. However, such a principle could only be an external principle.

in using materials, presented with the created product, can be highly perfected.

This proves that artistic skill and technology alone are neither equivalent to, nor sufficient for the creation of art, and explains the observer's confusion when presented with such a product devoid of any principle. The observer can resolve his confusion by imposing some external meaning on the artefact by inventing a (new) principle as a framework for its interpretation. In this case, the observer is taking the position of a conceptual artist: he converts a meaningless work into a seemingly meaningful one by utilizing such a product (Osborne, 2000, p. 88–89).

The Inner Principle and the External Principle

When the artist creates an artwork according to some principle, the principle can be either the inner creative principle (of the artwork as such) or the external principle. Artwork with an inner principle is autonomous; it has its own essential constitution and meaning, independently of any further interpretation and explanation (Lamarque, 2013, p. 61). In contrast, artwork with an external principle is not autonomous (Roberts, 2023, p. 71–73). Therefore, such artwork is dependent on subsequent interpretations, which provide the meaning of the artwork by construing it from a particular viewpoint – by clarifying the relations between the created work, its (external) principle, and the culture into which the work is introduced (Danto, 1973, p. 15; Young, 2001, p. 29).

The inner principle. The creation and the meaning of artwork with an inner principle are inherent to that artwork. The artwork's creation begins with a certain something that wills itself to be, which comes upon the artist and cannot be ignored; this part of the creation process is traditionally known as *poiesis* (or inspiration, etc.) (Gaut/Livingston, 2003, p. 13–14). The inner principle is formed in the mind and soul/spirit of the artist as an answer to the question of how to adequately respond to whatever came through *poiesis* and to bring it forth into physical existence as a created work of art.

Therefore, the artist participates in the artwork's autonomous coming into being: the formulation of the artwork's principle is the first step of such participation, but the conditions of possibility for the inner principle to be formulated come through *poiesis*. The inner principle vouches for the autonomous (self)organisation of the artwork, and enables the artist to remove himself from the artwork's ontology; otherwise, the artwork has no being without the artist. Finally, if properly followed, the inner princi-

ple guarantees a consistent relationship between the artwork's metaphysical being and its physical appearance, ensuring that the principle is clearly manifested in the completed artwork.

When an artwork is created according to its inner principle, the artwork directs its own creation from within and autonomously organizes itself into a specific visibility and appearance. However, the artwork's elements and composition are not arbitrarily chosen. On the contrary, the artwork's inner principle directs the creation process towards particular elements in a particular order, so that there is an inner necessity manifested in the completed composition. In other words, artwork's inherent meaning is consistently conducted from an abstract (metaphysical and conceptual) composition to some particular physical composition and appearance. In such a process, the role of the artist is to remove anything that would prevent or constrain the artwork's autonomous self-organization. To do so, the artist has to recognize, comprehend, fashion and rigorously follow the principle (i.e. the method) up to the point the artwork has reached its completion.

Such an autonomous artwork is the embodiment of its inner principle, and so the principle is manifested through the artwork's perceivable appearance. Therefore, the artwork with an inner principle is the only point of reference to which we should turn to understand what the artwork is, how it is constituted, and what it means – to comprehend it ontologically and aesthetically. The autonomous artwork presents itself in a manner that escapes full rational explanation but enables complete comprehension of what it manifests and communicates.

The external principle. In contrast, the external principle is not derived from the artwork's own being (Thompson, 1999, p. 260). The external principle is constituted independently of the artwork and only then applied as a prescribed canon of its production. Once such an artwork is created, the external principle also functions as an established criterion of the artwork's (aesthetic) evaluation within the culture.

The external principle refers to any preexisting idea, ideology, or cultural standpoint that establishes the value framework against which some meaning and role are being ascribed to objects regarded and acknowledged as art within that context. In other words, in every culture, there are some ideas and values which determine the criteria for what is to be acknowledged as an artwork in that culture (Lamarque, 2010, p. 172–174; Carroll, 2012, p. 123–124). Being acquainted with such cultural norms, the artist can choose to accept them and turn them into a principle according to which he will act while creating the artwork. Such an external principle will then determine the steps in the process of the artwork's cre-

ation and also the entire constitution of the final product (Hemingway, 2017, p. 35). Therefore, formally speaking, the external principle becomes a sort of pseudo-inner principle of such work; it is an internalized external principle – the external-inner principle.

The external principle is not inherent to the artwork, but rather borrowed from some cultural ideology or paradigm; as a result, the artwork is an instantiation and embodiment of the paradigm from which its (external) principle originates.³ In creating an artwork, the artist directs the product along cultural (or sub-cultural, or contra-cultural) norms and standards, and so the governing cultural norms operate as a regulative framework for the production (and reception) of his work. In this situation, the artwork is projected according to some prescribed purpose and imposed meaning; thus, the resulting outcome is more appropriately referred to as an artefact rather than an artwork (Beardslay, 2019, p. 28).

The creation of such a work of art is adjusted to external criteria and purposes, and so the artefact's meaning is also determined externally. Such an artefact is not autonomous; its meaning and (aesthetic) value are transferred from the paradigm of its external principle (Groys, 2013, p. 13). In that case, the artwork/artefact will be ascribed various interpretations derived from the external principle of its making, and such interpretations will pose as its pseudo-meanings (Carroll, 1994, p. 11–13; Crowther, 2013, p. 14).

The Dilemma?

Hence, the dilemma: while creating the artwork, the artist must choose between the inner creative principle and the external cultural principle. In other words, the artist-donkey must decide which burden to carry. Opting for the external principle, the artist decides to play along with the rules of an already established system, hoping for the benefits of being acknowledged and verified by the cultural institutions. The artist who adheres to such norms may hope to enjoy visibility, validation, and success within the existing cultural framework. Opting for the inner creative principle, the artist risks that his work will not be recognized or properly evaluated within society. However, in that case, the artist chooses the artwork as such and preserves its integrity. It seems that both options are equally reasonable and equally valid; and so, the donkey (artist) is stuck.

However, the donkey's dilemma is a false one. The choice between the inner and the external principle is not a choice between two equal options.

3 A clear example of this would be any politically engaged art: Social realism, Feminist art, etc.

The 'donkey's dilemma' is more than a mere choice between two burdens; the choice comes with profound consequences regarding the artist's and artwork's role in society. This ethical dilemma shows that artwork creation is, undoubtedly, an act with significant moral consequences regardless of context, historical circumstances, and prevailing ideologies in the culture.

The donkey's dilemma – whether to choose the inner or the external principle of creation – is a matter of evaluation of principles. Principles can be evaluated according to the worlds they constitute and propose, and which are manifested through the works created according to those principles. The world that can be seen through the artwork clearly shows what kind of principle it is based on – namely, whether the order established under the principle is meaningful and harmonious or not, and which values such an order proposes. The same holds true for the artefact, as it also demonstrates its principle and the underlying value system (i.e. the ideology of its external principle). Artwork with an inner creative principle brings forth the (artwork's) world constituted according to that principle, whereas artefacts made according to an external principle produce nothing of importance. It simply supports and manifests some ideology.

Consequently, the artefact lacks the valor, i.e. the autonomous value. The value of an artefact is solely determined by the system/paradigm to which the artist subscribes and from which its principle originates (Carroll, 2021, p. 64). The degree to which a work successfully supports its paradigm is the criterion of evaluation; hence, artefacts may have less or more value relative to one another depending on how effectively they represent and reinforce their associated paradigm/system. In contrast, creating according to an inner principle results in an artwork with intrinsic worth (valor) – a 'value' that is immutable and inherent to the artwork. Such artwork is autonomous regarding cultural (or sub/contra cultural) paradigm: autonomous artwork can be a critique of the cultural paradigm not as a mirror of society but as a normative or corrective proposal to society.

Works created according to an inner principle cannot be classified as more or less valuable. Rather, such works transcend any form of evaluation based on external value systems; they are subjects for evaluation solely if the evaluation is based upon the soundness of the world proposed through the artwork itself. The world of the artwork constituted through its inner principle, is either possible, necessary, coherent and consistent, or impossible, unnecessary, incoherent and inconsistent (and therefore of no significance). There is no external value system that applies to the sound world of the artwork; an external system is just that – something not intrinsic to the artwork. In other words, genuine works of art are invaluable

and of inestimable worth. External values, including observers' accepted aesthetic values, are paradigm-dependent and hence relativistic.

To put it in another way, the artist creating the artwork must make a conscious and mindful choice, because his choice between the principles (whichever he chooses) reflects his own moral autonomy or lack thereof. Even if the artist is truly supporting some ideology or trying to subvert it, choosing the external principle is equal to the relativistic selection of the values for one's own benefit; including the mercantilist one, which is, in one way or the other, the basis for all other external values (Groys, 2013, p. 18–19). In this, the artist is free to act according to his own interests relative to the context; he can adhere to one ideology at a time, and then switch to the other with no particular repercussions (Gover, 2018, p. 13–14). However, such behavior is anything but moral. Even if this is a deliberate and conscious choice, it is a Sophistic response to a dilemma, presenting a wrong choice as a legitimate one.

On the other hand, if an artist deliberates on an inner principle of artwork's creation, he has chosen valor over (all external) values. The valor belongs to the world proposed with the created artwork as a sound, coherent and harmonious whole. It implies an autonomous choice, regardless of all context-related value systems, relativistic interests, and cultural norms. It also demands an *arete* to acknowledge and confirm the function of the artwork within the society. To accomplish this, the artist has to be fully aware of the (metaphysical) world that his work will bring into being. The artist must consider his position, his approach to creation and the principle he adheres to. In other words, the artist, as the accountable one, has to be a philosopher – constituting and evaluating an ontological model.

Concluding remarks

The donkey's dilemma results from an imbalanced relationship between the artwork (and the artwork's creation) and the society to which the artwork is introduced. At its core, the artist's dilemma is about the moral and ethical responsibility regarding the artwork he creates. The true question here is whether the culture should define and determine the boundaries of the artwork's being, meaning and role in the society. Or, perhaps, should the artwork provide a model for the organization of society and culture? In creating the artwork, the artist is faced with a choice between two possible worlds: the one in which the meaning of the artwork is marginalized and essentially (constitutively) insignificant, being in the function of an already existing societal order, and the other in which

the artwork has a crucial role in the way the society organizes and understands itself, providing the model for a different (and better) society.

In other words, if there is such a donkey's dilemma, that means that the artist attempts to absolve himself of moral responsibility for the artwork he creates and for the way his work will impact society. The artist-donkey hopes to lighten the load, and therefore he is tempted to conform to the preexisting cultural and societal order. The burden of responsibility is then transferred to the ideology or the paradigm to which the artist has subscribed and from which he has borrowed the (external) principle of his artefact. However, by choosing to create the artwork according to an external principle, the artist is committing himself to a specific set of values (and depriving himself of valor). Regardless of which particular value system is adopted, the artist is the one who makes the choice between such value systems. Consequently, he cannot be relieved from the responsibility for his choice.

Therefore, the donkey's dilemma is a false dilemma: whichever principle he decides for, the artist will bear the burden of his choice. In either instance, the artist cannot detach himself from the moral and ethical implications of his decision regarding the artwork he creates and the guiding principle behind it. This is due to the fact that the artwork's constitution and composition are equal to a formal structure of co-organisation of various elements. By introducing an artwork to the audience, the artist presents it with a particular model of organisation and harmonization, such that it can be a model for the (organisation of) society. Thus, he bears moral responsibility for the created artwork and the model he provides – so much so that the dilemma is rendered false. In other words, there are different choices at the artist's disposal, hence the dilemma; however, the dilemma is revealed as false because only creation according to the inner principle escapes relativism. The artist is obliged to create a work of art following valor, or he (and his art) is to be valued as more or less useful to some frame of reference. The donkey is to be the one who carries Valor into a City or the one who carries others' (value) gold.

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