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GOLD, SILVER AND BRONZE ESSAYS

Adaptation to PDF: Øyvind Olsholt, Children and Youth Philosophers
<http://www.buf.no/en>

Gold: Sarri Nironen (Finland)

Topic III: Must a work of art be beautiful?

Picasso's Cubist paintings, Philip Glass's eccentric music, Duchamp's famous statue of a toilet seat – although considered art now, all have been criticized of being ugly, too left-field or simply unsuitable to bear the 'art-tag'. Moreover, pop music, mainstream movies and television shows have long been criticized for not providing any real depth and solely existing for entertainment purposes, therefore, again, not being art at all. When answering this question I understand art meaning all its forms possible – music, visual arts, literature, not limiting myself to one branch only and thus trying to answer as comprehensively and holistically as possible.

The question of whether an ugly piece of art can be called art is as long-lasting as art itself, and is difficult to answer precisely because we haven't defined the words with which we try to discuss the topic. First I will try to define the terms with which I will try to answer the question: can a work of art be ugly, and – and this, perhaps, is the most difficult part -- if so, why should we take interest in it?

Part A – Beauty and its place in art world

The definition of beauty has changed during the course of time, although some notable similarities exist at all times. A historical viewpoint is needed, particularly in order to understand that the definitions of art and beauty vary from time to time.

In Ancient Greece, what was symmetrical was considered beautiful. A person, particularly a woman or a young man, was beautiful if his features were symmetrical; both sides of the face were similar and there were no notable faults to this accordance. Art, in its form if not content (for it is important to note that Greek tragedies were full of horror and cruelty, people going against Gods and ending up in tragedy), was supposed to follow the same pattern. For example, in the field of literature / theatre this aim at symmetry was summarized in Aristotle's view on theatre: a theatre piece should have a beginning, middle and an ending. Thus the beginning should have a worthy ending and everything should be in order and in its right place. The view was behaviourist: the clue to the characters minds' was in their actions. Of some importance is also the term 'catharsis', which theatre was supposed to have: where the audience is left with a satisfied feeling, a feeling of something soiled being finally cleansed, a hero put through dark times coming out golden, untouched, his morals intact through and through. There was a definite line of defining art through the audience's eyes – as opposed to treating art as a purpose in itself. Art's form had a purpose, and that purpose was pleasure, and art's content had a purpose, and that purpose was teaching morals.

In medieval times, this view was painted more vividly and colorfully as Thomas Aquinas continued on the theme of beauty: beauty was now harmony and clarity, and in medieval Europe art was made to serve the church and was made to commemorate God. Art, in particular visual arts, still was defined through the audience, the people. Where it once had been made for pleasure it now served as a tool for teaching people, mostly illiterate, about God. What remained was the understanding that art had the power to move the viewer in a profound level. During this time, from mid-Medieval art to renaissance to baroque to rococo to neo-classicism, the focus was shifted from God back to symmetrical form, and although the ideal form was defined and re-defined from dark and heavy to pretty and conscientious, there still was a definite ideal -- until the 19th century.

In 19th and 20th century, the understanding of beauty and of art changed drastically. Where once there had been clear definitions for the form as to what can be considered art, now the demarcation was more difficult. Dostoyevsky and Tolstoy wrote about the human psyche and political undercurrents, Proust, Joyce and Woolf focused on the inner workings of the mind with their stream-of-consciousness technique, Picasso, Monet and Van Gogh changed the visual arts completely, from showing pictures to showing emotions, and there were risks taken in the musical world as well, form changing from tonal to atonal music, choosing to put the rules on the shelf for a while. All this was done before the Second World War, and, indeed, the reason for these changes can be found in the political climate. With the rise of democracy in the 19th century and the line between a servant and a ruler now blurred, the artist was now free to pursue his own self through art: he was now free to define art for himself. He was now an artist: someone who strives and dies for his art. Artists were outsiders of the society, they were observers and commentators (rather like a Greek choir, if you like). As the individual was freer and the political climate during the World Wars was messier it had an effect on art and a lot of art focuses on the existential despair of an individual. It is no wonder either that existential philosophy was born during this time. As for the form, in modern art there was no definite pattern, rather, patterns and rules were made to be broken (which, of course, makes it a rule in itself). With the rise of the individual and Freud's psycho analysis, art also was able to show ugly sides of someone whose behavior was beautiful, thus blurring the line between beautiful and ugly. James Joyce stated in his first novel *A Portrait of an Artist as a Young Man* that beauty means brokenness: it has to have a quality that breaks the harmony, and, consequently, the viewer's heart.

From what we can now conclude is this: there has been a tendency to define art through its purpose, and where at first the purpose was in its effect on the audience – whether causing them pleasure or making them understand God – now it seems that art has a purpose in itself, and art defines itself. Curiously enough, nowadays it seems that art with a clear dogmatic purpose is considered unworthy, whether it be causing pure pleasure or teaching black/white about something. However, what is perhaps most important to note from the course of history is that the meaning of both art and beauty has changed, thus in part justifying a relativistic view, where nothing can be said for certain.

Part B – Ugliness and its place in art world

St. Augustine defined evil as a lack of goodness, and taking this route, I suppose we can define ugliness as a lack of beauty in a painting for example. However, as beauty in itself was so hard to define, it is probable that this definition of ugly is null-and-void to begin with. Moreover, bearing in mind the Joycean definition of beauty – brokenness – it is difficult to pinpoint 'ugliness', because if beauty is brokenness, what room does that leave for ugliness?

The dictionary gives a synonym for 'ugly' – 'bad-looking', ie. something that is not pleasing for the eye. In real world this might just as well be the case. You see a person not fit in your beauty standards and you might think them ugly – you see a house in the middle of renovation and that's not beautiful either – etc. etc. There is no point in arguing about whether or not ugliness exists – it is difficult to define objectively but we all definitely know what pleases us and what doesn't. I'm taking a concept realistic view here.

In 20th century Duchamp, a modern artist, put a lavatory in a museum and called it art. In their own home, no one would call a lavatory beautiful, but in museum, it suddenly was. Did the lavatory change from ugly to beautiful by changing the context or did it stay ugly? Can something that is ugly be ugly when it exists in a beautiful context? And, if not yes, what purpose can it possibly serve – why change a beautiful context into an ugly one when there is a whole world filled with ugliness should one need some?

Goethe was once quoted as saying ‘Art and Life are different. That is why one is called Art and one is called Life.’ Although simply put, I think this quote holds heavy meaning. In context of art, one doesn’t need practical knowledge. When seeing a lavatory, it serves the sole purpose of being there and for being looked at. It doesn’t need another dimension; one doesn’t need to use their common sense to work it. It exists in a world of its own. Even if one goes to a modern art museum where one can do something with the statues, one still doesn’t do it to further any other purpose than art itself. With art, one experiences it, but is still left strangely cold. The objective-subjective –dichotomy exists: the object, piece of art, lures the viewer, who thinks he does all the work by watching, analyzing and understanding, when in reality the object is the one that captures and manipulates. They both stay passive.

The Heideggerian thought of In-der-Welt-sein, of being a part of the world wholly and not being reduced to being a subject whose only dimension is its subjectivity seems to be nullified here, but that isn’t the case at all – I’d rather define art as a safe haven when one is in need of a place where he can feel and dare to feel sympathy without constraint. One of these things he can feel and see and experience is ugliness – either his own faulty ways of thinking or the ugliness of the piece of art.

Therefore the ugliness in an art piece is justified because one cannot watch and analyse it freely in the real world – one needs the context of art to observe ugliness objectively.

Therefore I come to the conclusion that yes, there can indeed be things that are ugly in the field of art, and yes, art itself can be ugly without it losing any of its ugliness by changing the context. Next I will try to explain why we should take interest in this ugliness.

Part C – Why should we take interest in ugliness?

Yes, indeed – why should we?

There have been different ways of defining art in the field of aesthetics – art defined by context, where something that is in a museum or respected in the art community is art; art by the form: something that pleases us in one way or another; artist’s view, if a painter (who paints pictures) paints his home walls he can decide whether or not they are a part of his oeuvre; the meaning, if it says something real and true then it is art – but these definitions do not help us when trying to argue successfully for the case of ugliness in art. Indeed, why on earth should we take interest? Why can’t we just watch quaint comedy theatre and listen to Mozart all day long?

One answer would be that ugly things happen in life and if we are informed then we know and hopefully can do something about it. Morrissey’s lyrics about handicapped persons might not have been necessarily pretty but they had an impact on youth who might otherwise have been ignorant about it. Knowing about different ways of life makes one understand life better, which, in turn, makes one more knowledgeable and understanding. This helps the community as well as the individual. This argument is universal whereas the second appeals to the individual.

There is a term called ‘sublime’ in art world. It is an adjective that can loosely be translated as ‘other-worldliness’ or ‘supreme beauty’ – a piece of art that moves us so profoundly that it takes us to another, better world. I think that sublime transcends the terms ‘beautiful’ and ‘ugly’ and therefore something that is ugly can be sublime and life-changing. This experience is something that is similar to William James’s theory of truth where he investigated the pure experiential way of understanding truth in the field of religion. Ugly pieces of art or ugly art (because some even argue that commercial things, such as pop music, are ugly – which is of course silly, as many classical composers put on a pedestal today were just mere craftsmen in their time) can be a way to experience something truly magical, as they are often so open in their ugliness and in their

vulnerability. It is hard to love something that is perfect; a flawed object gives room for empathy and sympathy.

We should take interest in ugliness because that way the ugliness lifts itself into another level. The ugly becomes beautiful when in contact with an audience who sees it so. Seeing ugliness in art can be a form of escapism from the ugly of the world. The reason here is purely egoistical but also sincere and honest: because taking interest in art – ugly or beautiful – can result in transforming the viewer as well. And what could be more appealing than that? If life is egoistical desire, as Schopenhauer argued, then surely it is good to channel this desire somewhere where it doesn't hurt.

Perhaps this is what Ludwig Wittgenstein meant when he cryptically wrote that "Ethics = Aesthetics". They are both subjects that despite our analyzing, criticizing and problem-solving, we cannot say anything about them. Words fail us when used to try to understand transcendental things: goodness, art, death. Continuing the Wittgensteinian view, "There is nothing that can be said about art that is better than staying silent"; we can try to define ugliness, then why it can exist in art, then why we should take interest in it, but in the end, there is nothing that when said can even vaguely resemble the subject it tries to talk about. The reason one should take interest in ugly art is in its possible impact on a person in the purest level, but if one does take interest, he does it for and by himself and not when forced from outside – as personally he defines the things, ugliness and beauty, that he takes interest in.

Silver: Petar Penev (Bulgaria)

Topic II: Immanuel Kant

Theodore Adorno claimed that progress in society and enlightenment in culture are closely connected and it is impossible to have one without the other. However, the application of this principle in a transnational, multicultural environment can lead to two different inferences, which are presented in the books “The End of History and The Last Man” by Francis Fukuyama and “The Clash of Civilizations” by Samuel Huntington. In Hegelian fashion, Fukuyama envisioned the development of international relations as a process of constant convergence in which different customs and worldviews were both annulled and preserved according to the concept of ‘sublation’. The view of Huntington was that different cultural traditions are extremely difficult to reconcile and that the inevitable process of cultural interaction will result in a struggle between a number of civilizations, each of which is based on a range of values that often contradict those of other civilizations. This two contrasting views about the course of development of cultural interaction illustrates a larger and fundamental issue: ‘How are we supposed to organize the course of international relations in a world where differences between people are sometimes more important than the resemblances they share?’ I intend to analyze this problem by presenting the views of Immanuel Kant and contrasting them with my own ideas and the claims of other prominent philosophers.

Kant claimed that there are at least three conditions which are necessary for the establishment of conditions for peaceful interaction between states: first, that they share a republican form of government in which those that pay the price for the decisions of the political authority have an opportunity to participate in them; second, that all states participate in a federation encompassing all states; and third, that they adopt the idea of universal hospitality. These three conditions seem to satisfy the minimum requirement for the foundations on which international order should be organized, but there still remains the question: ‘Is it absolutely necessary to include them in our idea about the principles of organization of cosmopolitan world order?’ According to me, the correct answer is ‘Yes’. First of all, they clearly protect the rights of the individuals in the political community by emphasizing the importance of republican form of government. Secondly, they seem to give equal weight to the dignity of each person regardless of their race, social status or sex. This is achieved by adopting the view of universal hospitality – the idea that states are obliged to treat foreigners according to a set of rules applicable to all persons, including their own citizens. And last, these three conditions seem to be derived by the principles of reason. By applying them, Kant formulated a concept that all rational persons should endorse. Since they cannot resign being part of the group of rational beings, they have a duty to support each concept based on these conditions if other aspects of its structure do not contradict the principles of reason. Formulating a concept based entirely on laws of reason is the only possibility of respecting people as possessing rationality and morality and, in my opinion, Kant succeeded in this difficult task.

According to Kant, the view that states should unite in a state of nations regulated by the abovementioned conditions is underpinned by a number of arguments. First, he seems to make a parallel between people and states being in a state of nature before submitting themselves to laws formulated by the public. Since this lawless condition is characterized either by a war of all against all (according to Hobbes) or by inability to reach reasonable consensus about the problems at hand because of the ‘threat advantage’ stronger individuals (or states) have, the principles of reason dictate that states have to substitute this lawless condition for the organized state of nations. By doing so, nations will be able to live together peacefully without being faced with the constant

danger of conducting war with their neighboring states which have not accepted the rules of the international order and are guided in their actions by the principle of self-interest.

Another argument in support of Kant's concept is the idea that both people and nations should be viewed as autonomous. According to Wolff, autonomy can be described as freedom and responsibility - people are free, but they have the responsibility to constitute their freedom by formulating rules guiding their actions. They do not act in complete lack of rules; rather, they can only act freely if they act according to laws formulated by their reason. This idea is supported by Fichte's understanding of freedom. According to him, freedom is never absolute, but always limited and conditioned. The 'I' can set itself up as an individual only if it is summoned by another individual and if it limits its freedom out of respect for the freedom of the other. Similarly, states can be part of a federation of states (or state of nations) only if they recognize the freedom of the other members and limit their own in order to make the mutual peaceful existence of different interests possible. The 'civitas gentium' is possible only via the formulation of efficient international laws regulating relations between states and defending their autonomy.

However, there seems to be a contradiction between the ways Kant envisioned the realization of his concept – in his early pieces of writing on the problem he stated that it was necessary for states to settle their internal problems and then take part in the state of nations, whereas in later passages he seems to support the idea that regulating relations between states should precede the establishment of internal social order formulated by principles of reason. These two views make the discussion of various interpretations of this Kantian concept possible – both the idea that national problems are more important than international ones and the view that serious problems of international political and social relations should be solved with priority to the problems of the particular states. But both this two contradicting positions seem to neglect the fact that in a world with constant economic, cultural and political interaction between all states national problems can easily become international ones and international problems clearly influence the condition of every state in the world. Only by treating them simultaneously and by trying to reconcile the various requirements necessary for their solution can we hope to tackle them in the long term.

The concept of state interaction formulated by John Rawls is a good example of a theory that recognizes the need to address these two issues simultaneously. He divides states (peoples) in four categories – liberal (applying the principles formulated in 'Justice as Fairness'), decent (illiberal, but unaggressive and not violating human rights), outlaw (aggressive and illiberal) and burdened (unable to solve their particular problems). First, he stated that the system of international relations should encompass both liberal and decent nations since the exclusion of the latter will surely hinder the progress towards their integration into the group of liberal people and will make impossible the establishment of state of nations encompassing all states. Secondly, Rawls simultaneously claims that liberal and decent societies should take the necessary measures when natural rights of people are not respected (as in outlaw nations) or where people are unable to solve the problems they are facing (as in burdened societies). By following these two principles he addresses both problems of the external social order of nations and of the system of international relations without giving priority to either. Thus, he formulates a theory that is able to provide a solution to the complicated problems of the contemporary world of transnational politics.

Some ideas of Max Weber also support the view that national and international problems should be addressed simultaneously. He defines the state as having exclusive control over the legal application of the means of violence over a certain territory. However, this claim can be understood in two different ways – that the state is recognized to have this exclusive control or that it actually possesses the means necessary to establish it. These different interpretations make it impelling to draw a distinction between 'de jure' and 'de facto' states. 'De jure' states are recognized as such by the international community of states even if they do not actually control the means of violence in

their territory, whereas 'de facto' states are the ones that are able to impose the legal means of violence over a certain territory regardless of whether they are internationally recognized as having this capacity. If we give preference to national rather than international problems, we may be faced with the perspective of having different groups claiming to fit Weber's definition of a state (de facto), but lacking international recognition (de jure). This situation may make it impossible for governments to deal with separatist and may endanger not only their authority, but also the possibility of establishing a state of nations. However, if we choose to solve only transnational problems and pay insufficient attention to the particular problems of certain societies, we are faced with the same perspective – inability of governments to assert their authority and the principles of international toleration, which results in failure to achieve the ends this very choice was made for. Hence, national and international problems should be assigned equal weight and neither should have priority over the other.

So we arrived to the idea that international cooperation is necessary but possible only in the context of states being able to deal with their particular problems. But there still remains the question how we will achieve that and whether we possess the necessary means. The progress in various scientific fields in the past few decades and the process of globalization which started as a result of this technical development give us a clear answer to this question - just cooperation between states is possible and can be achieved by the means science gives us. By enhancing our perspectives and giving us better understanding of nature and other people it helps us overcome our prejudices and adopt a cosmopolitan perspective towards the world and other cultures. This possibility of science to overcome national, cultural and social borders was envisioned by Herder in the 17th century in his concept about science breaking national prejudices by making it necessary to recognize transnational achievements in certain research fields and by providing a common 'scientific' language in which members of different cultures can communicate and achieve understanding despite the differences existing between them. This clearly illustrates the role of science for creating mutual understanding that appears crucial for international toleration. However, this view was questioned by C. P. Snow in his famous lecture 'The Two Cultures'. In it he argued that the aim of the exact sciences is the convergence of knowledge and thus they contribute to the establishment of cultural toleration. In contrast, he claimed that sometimes human sciences tend to emphasize differences rather than similarities and thus they stimulate divergence rather than convergence. However, this inference fails to consider the fact that unlike the exact science, human sciences are not entirely focused on formulating general and unrevisable laws – rather, they tend to focus on particular problems and appreciate the fact that some of them may fail to fit the general norms that are established in the scientific community. Thus, human sciences are not aimed at excluding, but at including. They respect the differences that exist between different people and cultures and tend to preserve them by finding ways to reconcile the contradictions between them, rather than make them fit a general norm and thus destroy their individuality. Thus, they can serve as an effective means to promote international toleration and cooperation.

It is clear that in a world of vast contrasts between different people and nations international cooperation is crucial, but possible only by adopting the principle of toleration. Kant is right in his claim that 'in accordance with reason' our societies have to support the formation of the state of nations by placing themselves under public coercive laws. However, we should try not to enforce our views about the structure and the functions of this state of nations in the process of its establishment. Rather, if it is supposed to 'finally encompass all the nations', we should try to enhance our perspective by considering the viewpoints of other nations and trying to integrate them in a discourse process that determines the way in which we are to achieve stable and tolerant system of international relations. This means that we should try to overcome our prejudices and abandon dogmatism in intercultural communication. This is crucial to the achievement of peaceful intercultural dialogue which is a necessary prerequisite for the establishment of the state of nations.

On philosophical level, dogmatism legitimizes fixed patterns of thinking and hinders human progress. On political level, it legitimizes violence which cannot serve as a basis for the state of nations. I believe that the Kantian concept presented in this quotation is devoid of dogmatism and condemns the use of violence in international relations.

Silver: Eliza Tymianska (Poland)

Topic IV: Existence of God

In this essay I would like to consider whether the following two are problematic – the existence of God or the coherency of the idea of God. First I would like to think for a moment if the questions about God are important and why, then if the coherence of the idea of God is problematic or not and finally decide if it is more or less problematic than the existence of God.

Is the question about existence of God truly important? Maybe it's not even worth asking? Since the idea of God is one of the most important ideas in our culture, maybe even the most important one, this question is surely significant. The idea of God exists as long as human beings do and although during the centuries it was changing – people believed in one or many gods (there were mono- and polytheistic religions), God was severe or loving, the idea of him was always somehow present in human life. But 'somehow' does not really tell us anything about the significance of the idea of God. God is not only present in our culture but he is very often the central part of it. People are praying, going to temples, they try to (or at least they should) live the way they believe God demands, some are even able to kill in the name of God. Although today in Western countries God is not the center of the culture anymore, we still cannot escape from the question about his existence – we have to answer to ourselves whether we believe that God exists or we believe that it is just a delusion as some contemporary atheists claim?

It's not surprising that philosophers have always been conducting a dispute about the existence of God. Right from the beginning in ancient Greece to today's world this question is always current. During the middle ages so called 'proves' has been formulated – the most famous are those of Saint Anselm and Saint Thomas but there are many philosophers who tried to refute them and don't think those proves actually prove anything. The dispute is not yet finished and it probably never will since it's not possible to prove whether God exists or not. That's why many modern philosophers don't even try to formulate any prove (which does not mean they don't devote any attention to God itself.)

Nowadays many people who participate in discussion about the existence of God claim that question about the coherence of the idea of God is much more important and much more problematic than this about the existence of God. But what do they mean by 'coherence'? Many people who believe in God are aware of the fact that the idea of God may not be as coherent as they wish. In medieval times theologians were often considering this problem, but the questions they asked may sound a little bit funny for us – they wondered, for example, whether God could create a stone that he wouldn't be able to lift. God is omnipotent so he should be able to create such a stone. On the other hand he is omnipotent so he should also be able to lift every stone. It seems that the idea of omnipotent God doesn't really make much sense.

When we think about God there are also another attributes that come to our minds. People regard God as infinitely good and believe that he made us free. But if they do so, there are also other problems: Why is there so much evil in the world created by infinitely good God? If God knows everything, how can we be free? If God were really infinitely good, he wouldn't let all bad things happen – there wouldn't be any wars, any violence, nobody would ever be hurt. But since there are wars, hunger, poverty and evil in our world exists, God cannot be infinitely good. What's more, it seems that he's not good at all – maybe he is even evil? But we all agreed that goodness is a part of the idea of God. And the second question – people believe that God knows everything and at the

same time we think that we are free. But how is it possible if God already knows what we are going to do? It seems absurd...

This questions show that the idea of God may not be coherent, may not make much sense. And if it doesn't make sense, if it's contradictory, then why should anybody believe in God? And since there's not a lot of people who don't want to believe in something that is senseless, questions like this have always bothered people who believed in God. Many philosophers tried to answer them to make the idea of God more coherent. The theodicy of Leibniz is perfect example of the attempts of explaining the first question. He agreed that God is infinitely good and didn't deny that there is evil in the world. But as he claimed there has to be evil in the world, human being must have a choice between good and evil otherwise he would not be free. Of course God might have created a world where there would be no evil at all, after all he's omnipotent but people living in world like this wouldn't be free because they wouldn't have any choice – they only could make good deeds. And they wouldn't even know they choose the right way as there would be only one way to choose. So God created the best world of all possible ones and it wouldn't be the best without evil. But this answer is just not good enough for many people (we all remember Voltaire who ridiculed Leibniz's idea) and many deny that the idea of God is coherent. This lack of coherence is nowadays one of the most popular arguments against the existence of God.

But we're not wondering about the coherency of the idea of God just because it is the biggest problem, because it is the most important questions. We are doing this because it depends on the coherence of the idea of God if he might exist or not. Of course just because somebody proves that the idea is coherent, it does not yet mean that God exists. But if we prove that it is not coherent it would probably mean that God does not exist. That's why we might say that the coherence of the idea of God is more problematic than its existence itself, but the existence of God is problematic as well.

But there is another issue connected with the coherence of the idea of God – it may not only be contradictory itself but may not be coherent with our knowledge of the world. Many people say that they don't believe in God because its existence does not explain anything. For many science is enough, belief in God is unnecessary and actually makes the world less understandable. Many people say that they don't believe in God because science is just offering much more coherent way of explaining the world. Of course science does not exclude existence of God, it doesn't deny that he exists and it has never proved neither that he exists or not. But since science is enough to explain the world, many people don't need God. As somebody said – it's more important which of the two – science or religion – creates more coherent, more convincing picture of the world. And religion is not offering it anymore – at least not in Western countries. The Old Testament claims that world was created in six days, woman was created from a rib of a man etc. Bible is not the only way to explain the world, what's more if we treat it literally it's simply wrong. And if it's allegory then it may be hard to interpret it correctly and since we now know how many times Churches and clergymen were wrong, we prefer to trust in science which seems to be much more coherent than the religion.

The existence of God and the coherence of the idea of God are both problematic. There are many problems that seem to deny the coherence of this idea and it is important to consider whether the idea of God is coherent or not, because if it isn't it means the existence of God is impossible. The question which of the two is more problematic doesn't really make sense to me because it is irrelevant. We should remember that it is not the coherence of the idea of God that is the most significant question – the most important issue is the existence of God and considering the coherence is just a way to find an answer to this question.

Bronze: Kristina Kashfullina (Russia)

Topic III: Must a work of art be beautiful?

Must a work of art be beautiful in order to be a work of art, or may a work of art be ugly as well? If the latter is possible, why should we take interest in it?

Art...is a thin peel that isolates us from
the horrors and wildness and why
shouldn't it be beautiful?

O. Spengler, The setting of Europe

I love the ugly pictures,
I do appreciate
That awful illustrations
The things which collocate...
The truth.

G.G. Byron

We have gone too far from the gorgeous ideals of Renaissance, from the chic of ampere, from the motto of Oscar Wilde – “Art for art’s sake”, but do you feel like, even after so many years and so many changes in our conscious, we are still asking each other the questions of “antithesic” words “the ugly art”? And are we sure this words are truly “antithesic”? The thing is that the question we are referring to again is eternal, due to the humanity will hardly ever find the answer to it. That comes from every person will still have his own opinion, even if there would be any cultural dominant, as Hegel used to call it. The topic of “ugly art” has become actual nowadays as never else – the society tends to create a new cultural revolution, to collapse the old system of ideals and principles on the edge of the new historical epoch – on the verge of globalised society. That is why it is essentially important to turn to that question again in order not to lose the wisdom of the past or not to conserve our ideas, not being able to adopt them to contemporary conditions, not being able to create our own.

The problem, which is raised in the question, the problem of coherence of beauty and art seems difficult to be discussed even more, thanks to it was being tried to solve not only by the philosophers (as “the philosophy is a theoretical explanation of culture”, according to Spengler), but by the people of art (“as every work of art is a new theoretical basement of itself”, according to Hugo), and somehow or other – by most of us. Thus, the ocean of already accumulated ideas, conceptions and theories is so enormous that the only thing left to do is to look at them one more time and try to solve it by yourself...

The art doesn't know what it is

I'm sure that Volter was true, saying that “all the explanations are coming from the notions”. And I can hardly try to give my version of answering the question, if I don't give the definition of the art itself. Only when the notion becomes clear, we are to judge about the content of the notion, as there are immediately connected. The thing I'd like to mention that the views on the problems of art of philosophers and masters of art should not be opposed, but should be organically connected and should be considered in synthesis.

Thus famous culturologers were creating schemes of understanding art as one of the most important parts of culture. (The question of correlation of culture and art is a bit different one that is why we

should not digress on it.) Thus American philosopher-sociologist Toynbee and Russian religious philosopher Berdyaev used to explain that art is the expression of free immanent God's spirit that is why it cannot be ugly by the definition. That is why it is not human's concern to evaluate the art's works, because they were created under the influence of God. These theories, which are quite close to each other do not concretize – which work of art is worth to be called the work of art. That is why the explanation comes idem per idem, even obscures per obscurum. Ancient eastern civilization used to define art as a gift of Gods. The theoretic of art – Moliere had his own opinion of that art should not be defined somehow, it should just be understood by every individuality, but should be created according some laws. Another point of view comes from Spengler, but it also admits that every art, which is created in the time of “culture” but not at the time of “civilization”, is beautiful – it simply cannot be ugly. Hegel in his work “Aesthetics” explains that the Absolute spirit realizes itself as he wishes threw our work, and the items that may seem to us ugly is above our understanding now, that is how he comes to the conclusion – culture is the realization of Absolute spirit and can be understood differently. Here we come to the point I share partially – Ung in his book “Archetypes and Symbols” muses on culture as the reflection of personal symbols, but one phrase is worth being mentioned here – “The art comes from the free creating person as the subjective reflection of archetypal symbols and the reality around him”. Thus let me now try to give my own definition, based on the experience of the past generations. As far as I am concerned, the art is a deeply individual reflection of the immanent and transcendent world of the creator, understood exclusively subjectively according to the emotional and intellectual impressionability. Because the creator does not speak to the army of audience as the orator, but he tries to speak to everyone personally, so to keep invisible “eye to eye contact”. Thus the art is so much universal and even eternal that the creators sometimes cannot give the definition of it, and that is correct – the wider the notion is, the weaker is its content. Here I also would like to quote Aristotle, who said that “you should be very subjective, discussing the art, but not individual, cause you cannot be simply objective, thanks to the subject of the discussion”.

As far as I have tried to give the definition, let me now try to share my point of view about the paradox or the normal fact of “ugly art”, based on the very notion.

To create or not to create?

As the art has two so called “components” – objective (let's say the technical – the way the picture was drawn, the play was performed, the way the song was sang etc.), and subjective (what is depicted on the picture, what is written in the book, what the play is about). So, as I have already said if the art can and should be created and understood in the most individual manner, not even talking about the subjective side, even the objective can be treated differently, often polarilly different. The manner of drawing of impressionists and then fovists was estimated by the society in the most negative way – they said Mone and Dega didn't know how to draw well. The same thing then happened to abstractionists and primitivists. The modern dancers are accused of not knowing the classical theory of dance. But as Beethoven has said “The new and genius things and trends are born as heresy, and appreciated only by the descendants”. Now the picture of Wan Gog “The sunflowers” is the most expensive picture in the world. That is why what is considered to be ugly even technically, even in the way it is presented can be a true art, because it can simply bring new vision of the world, it can go ahead its time.

Then comes the ugly content. I believe the thing you call ugly can be absolutely beautiful for me. It again and again repeats the ancient thought that the beauty is relative.

First let's define “ugly” in art. The most correct in my mind will be the thing that does not collocate our ideals. The modern standards of beautiful woman would e considered unbelievable to the

people of Renaissance. Moreover, ugly is something that is subjectively not pleasant or calls for emotions, not satisfying you. The works of Goya (“The Mars eating his son”), Bosch (“The garden of earth satisfaction”), Rembrandt (“The Western front has no changes”) and thousands of other classical and respected works possess some extracts, expressing horrors, death, sins, ugly bodies and so on. However, it doesn’t mean they are not worth being called the art works. Furthermore, they are widely appreciated, even though they depict unpleasant for most of human beings symbols and descriptions. Thus, I can undoubtedly conclude – ugly content doesn’t prevent people from calling their works “true art”, and I’m sure they are right. But what do we have to do with the art works, which are not considered to be beautiful by everyone? The composer Beethoven didn’t hear any of his works played during the whole life. The authors, who presumably guess they would not be understood as their works will be considered ugly, usually have to ask themselves the Hamlet question, I have put as the title of the paragraph. And in my opinion the answer is – to create. The work of art must not be beautiful, this is not the imperative, even if the ideals of time insist on it. For example, the early Christian works were totally against the ideals the ideals of Roman beauty. The medieval works of the religious themes are full of blood and horror, following the motto “Memento mori”, but aren’t they the real art works, spiritually beautiful?

The functions of art are not only entertaining and bringing peace into person’s soul – they are polyhedral as the art itself. One of the functions is to tell the truth, to reflect the inner and outer world, as I have already mentioned, to fix the reality. Art, purified from the moments, which cannot be excepted without closed eyes and pain in heart loses the very nature of art – it stops being different! It becomes limited and turns into one-sided embodiment of culture.

For what the bell tolls?

The ugly art is a subject of fierce argue not only because “ugly” is different for everybody, but moreover, because it is that force, by the way very powerful, that creates a great variety of clashes in cultural world, in our minds and souls. The discussed question asks “why should we take interest in it”. Let me disagree with such a word used as “should”. That is true. Nobody is obliged. But we can. Omar Hayam used to say that – “stop thinking of the art if you want to stop thinking at all”. As far as I feel the ugly art tolls for thinking. Beautiful story impresses us, it raises our mood and purifies our heart may be from aggression and envy. But the beautifully written books of Kafka, Dickens, and Dreiser, which contain the description of evil and ugly truth make us oppose, think and fight mentally. I can’t but mention – art without beauty is not an art, it loses its origins, it turns into a science of morality. However Konfuziy in his “Thoughts of the state” mentioned an unforgettable wisdom – “the power is in the balance”. Thus the balance of two opposing and at the same time correlating universes can help us develop.

Leo Tolstoy used to write that the real author describes real things. So imagine, the awful, truly ugly things happen in the some state, in the culture, in the nature. Should the writers keep silence? So the ugly art tolls for the truth.

The art of Daly and Ray Bradbury imagine new worlds, numerous science fiction authors try to analyze the existing facts and predict the future. Their aim is to warn future generations about the reality they can face if continue to follow this or that trends. Such creators follow the Socrates method “from against” – show the ugly thing in order people to be afraid to behave badly. Thus the ugly art tolls for the future.

The secret to define

The thing that is really important to touch upon is the greatest problem – the problem of defining the ugly art. Except the subjective emotions and appreciation art as ugly I must admit – there is almost no ugly art. All the examples, mentioned above, all the works of art, contending ugly episodes follow the noble aims. They can even reveal the inner world of the creator, still teaching us something, showing the real or imaginary situation – the philosophers are not afraid of this, J.P. Sartre and his work “Nausea” is one the brightest examples. Thus the answer on the topic question is dualistic – yes, there may and should be ugly art, if it is created ugly or contents unpleasant ideas and fiction symbols. But at the same time, no, down to such kind of art is not ugly; it is sometimes even more beautiful than sweet images, if to take beauty as a philosophical category.

The thing, worth mentioning here – finding truly ugly art is practically pretty difficult. I keep the criteria of “opened idea”, but I believe – art, created under pressure, or by somebody’s order is ugly. It remains art, however, because it is still individual, but it loses freedom. Not in the existential meaning of this category, but in the understanding of such philosophers as P. Sorokin. The unique finding has recently been made in Egypt – on the back of the statue the sculptures wrote “I am sorry for this statue, because I was made to do it like this by my master”. The frightening lines about such kind of art are in sonnet 66 of William Shakespeare:

...

And art, made tongue-tighted by authorities,
And folly doctor-like controlling skills

...

The very delicate question, whether such things as drawing with the blood of killed animals or creating sculptures from rubbish is worth being called art, even if it is ugly. The matter here is in the very thin boundary that distinguishes true art from the insanity or the desire to seem eccentric or to make money. This problem has to be solved individually by everybody, but I’m sure, Toffler was true, saying that “Time has a power to define true from false”. The thing, left to us, is to create this time by our deeds.

Will the ugly art save the world?

The famous phrase of Russian writer Dostoevsky – “The beauty will save the world” is a wonderful wisdom to follow, but let me be brave or insolent enough to change it and affirm that today’s world is not so ugly as someone thinks and the dialectical law of “unify and struggle of oppositions” should really work. I’m sure ugly art, revealing the truth, opening eyes, predicting and warning is the thing we need now to sober ourselves from the art, turning into entertaining industry. May be then we are to understand the gorgeous ideals of Renaissance, the chic of ampere, the motto of Oscar Wild in another way and find the authentic world of art as a heritage, time has carefully saved for us.

Bronze: Luiza Pasca (Romania)

Topic III: Must a work of art be beautiful?

Apology of the Expressive Ugly

In a century of speed, when all people complain that they do not have time, what can be the meaning and purpose of Art? Nobody seems to be able to go to an art exhibition or to read a book, simply because they do not have time. For some people, educated or non-educated, Art presupposes a suspension of time (even if they are not conscious of this effect); when one looks at a painting or reads literature, then one gets access to an unconscious, unseen part of oneself – a new “time”, perhaps the real one, the interior duration, in Bergson’s terms, where everything is considered as intuition, intensity of feeling – and manages to forget, even for a short period of time, that the outside world, with the problems it involves, exists. For other people, art is a mere waste of time, in the sense that it does not involve a practical result or a pragmatic activity. They consider that everything that is devoid of a pragmatic core is pointless and invaluable. Can it be so? Can Art really mean nothing?

For anyone who considers the human being as the most evolved of all animals and denies the existence of a spirit or soul, the answer seems obvious. Although the problematic of what defines a human being is very complicated, one thing is quite clear: humans have created culture, and culture involves Art, thus Art must have a meaning, even if only for that undefined and ineffable thing that resides in us and we like to call spirit.

Art seems to transcend reality; the meaning of the concept of art itself becomes hard to be caught in words. Art is generally regarded in close connection with the main categories of aesthetics: the Beautiful and the Ugly, and a usual definition of art would include a reference to one of these: art as a form of spiritual manifestation, an expression of beauty. The debate about a definition of art is not over, but in this essay shall try to follow a new perspective over art and shed a new light over the problem: Art itself should not be defined as subservient to one aesthetic category or another; art transcends these categories and adumbrates itself as superior to these, encompassing both. Art may be regarded as beyond good and evil (to use Nietzschean terms), as beyond beautiful and ugly, but closely related to meaning – a form of significance. The value of art does not reside in the aesthetic distinction between Beautiful and Ugly, but in the meaning it encompasses. Of course, then comes the question, what does meaning mean? Are there grades of meaning, which may become criteria to assess a work of art? These questions do not make the real subject of this paper, although we shall encounter some points of view regarding these problems as well. Categorical answers cannot be given, only subjective ones, because art has a personal meaning for each and every one of us, and thus subjectivity becomes an obstacle in giving a certain answer. We shall consider, generally, that meaning implies both manifestations of the intellect (is the work of art capable to invite us to meditate?) and affects, strong emotional impressions that are provoked by the mere looking at of a work of art – relevant for the interior dynamism of the intuition (in Bergsonian meaning) and also stimuli for the intellect.

1. Art in connection with Truth and Knowledge

Art becomes the center of a problematic, in relation with knowledge: can art offer real knowledge? Can this be its real function? Plato and Nietzsche offer two antagonistic points of view over

knowledge and thus over truth, which may lead us to conclude over (at least one of the) functions of art.

The simplest idea that most of us have if art is that it presupposes Beauty. From Plato's point of view, Beauty is an immutable, eternal and self-consistent Idea, Form, situated beyond the visible world; he considered that Beauty is of the same value with Truth, two forms that immediately follow and "obey" the supreme Idea, that of Good. But for Plato, beauty in art is simply a pointless, a vacuous imitation of the Idea of Beauty. He places Art at the second level of imitation. First, there is the world of the immutable Forms, which our own, so-called "real" world imitates. But Art imitates our world, so it only shows us the copies of copies. Through art, people do not free their souls from this world (supreme goal in Plato's view); on the contrary, they only deepen themselves into falsity, fakeness, strengthening the bounds of the soul to matter.

For Nietzsche, the truths of human beings are only illusions, metaphors of which people have forgotten to be such. He explains that at the dawn of humanity the ancestors have created these truths in order to be able to survive (especially in a spiritual way), and this is perfectly comprehensible, if we imagine the first of our ancestors paralyzed with fear and wonder regarding the world that they knew so little about and that seemed to overwhelm them. Nietzsche further states that all truths are relative and that there is no such thing as an absolute, general truth (thus totally opposing Plato's view). People make their own truths, depending on their needs and on the strength with which the will of power manifests through them. The real creator of values and truths is the Uebermensch, whom weaker people must turn to.

To draw an immediate conclusion, it seems that if all concepts and values are relative, it results that there is no absolute Beauty and no absolute Ugliness, to which we may turn for comparisons. Where does art find its essence then?

Also, Nietzsche seems to be giving an explanation of the beginning of mythical and religious beliefs. As the history of religions tells us, myths were of the highest importance in the life of the primitive human – they were explanatory tales about the gods and the activities people were obliged to do in order to have a safe, regulated life and be in harmony with the nature and the whole universe. Thus the people did not complain about anything, if the gods had left it be so. Their myths brought them consolation and serenity. Myths are the base of religious doctrines and furthermore, for the first cultural manifestations. Could myths be placed at the base the first literary manifestations? Considering the hindu ancient writings or even the works of Homer and Hesiod, which contained the cosmogony myths, it can be asserted that myths played a big role in the development of culture and implicitly, in that of art.

Thus could have art taken further the role of the myths, that of ensuring spiritual survival? In other terms: What is the role or function of art for the human being? Following the next points of view, we shall arrive to our conclusion.

2. Homo symbolicum

Paul Ricoeur seems to think that meaning, significance, describes our deepest nature: we are conscious beings, capable of giving meaning to things, and to translate and perpetuate this meaning through expression. Expression may take various forms, as we can distinguish various forms of art, but the form that has the ability to easily encompass and transmit meaning is the image. Even a literary work of art transmits its meanings to us through images, through symbols; this type of communication is very complex, and presupposes a multi-level organized meaning. On one hand, the author of a work of art wishes to encompass a certain meaning into a certain image, but the viewer or reader may not interpret that particular image in that certain way, because an

interpretation always presupposes making reference to one's particular view over life, to one's particular nature. On the other hand, a work of art may be the result of "inspiration", this meaning that the artist does not consciously give significance to his artistic images, and that they are the result of some subliminal mechanisms, or of a divine consciousness that uses the artist as an instrument and the creation of the artist as a mundane expression (this was widely believed in Antiquity, if we are to think of the Muses or daimonions which inspired the ancient poets and musicians).

Therefore, these main considerations conduct only to relativism and perspectivism, which lead back to Nietzsche and to his point of view from above.

3. The Dasein and the Light of Art

As suggested by the point of view expressed above, the concept of meaning can also be regarded in connection with Aristotle's concept of telos, to which Heidegger gave an interesting and original interpretation in his theory about the Being and the Dasein. The Dasein is defined as that specific form of manifestation of the Being, which is capable of making inquiries about the Being itself. The Dasein is able to identify, to recognize the different purposes, meanings of all other forms of manifestation of the Being.

Heidegger regards art as a form of aletheia, where the earth, the world, the human and the divine meet, where the two poles, two constituents of all things dual nature of all things fuses and is perceived as unity; this doesn't mean that the two antithetic components of unity lose their shape, but that the tragic, eternal conflict between them becomes visible (in the sense that it can be clearly perceived) into this "open space", non-ensconced anymore. Heidegger regards the Greek aletheia as defining a state of non-ensconcing, where the true being of things comes to the surface and can be "seen", perceived consciously. Aletheia has often been translated as "truth", but truth becomes for Heidegger a state, a context where the being of things becomes "visible". Thus for Heidegger Art offers the ideal "place" where the Being of things (represented in paintings or suggested by words - but he had in mind mostly paintings) emerges and allows the Dasein to actually be the Dasein - to become aware of the true significance of all mundane things.

Thus art becomes the cure for alienation. The estranged person may become itself again through art, regaining all the lost significances of things and of itself.

Conclusion: Art as a form of survival through meaning

A work of art seems not to admit a single interpretation, we are free to give our own interpretation, depending on the way we see things. It is true that we can see things differently at different times, but perhaps that is the genius of art: it encloses stimulates not only our emotional faculties, but also our intellect, helping us to see the same thing from many perspectives. All relativism may be for the best: if the world we see is in flux (*ta panta rhei*, as Heraclitus wisely asserted), how can we get knowledge of things, if they do not have an immutable essence to which we could have direct access to? Perhaps a solution is trying to see things from all perspectives, and since we cannot reach that "all", we could take knowledge of as many perspectives as we can, to as many sides of that thing as we can. Therefore, ugliness may be just another perspective over a thing or a situation, as beauty also. Why should the works of art reproduce only beautiful things? Should we despise and refuse to take into account an ugly work of art as a form of art, just because it represents things in a another light?

Art may be a helpful “tool”, to adopt a pragmatic view, in one’s process of constructing his life. The meanings revealed through art can be very useful and help us perform a metanoia, a change of mentality and perspective in our own advantage.

Apart from this, when the rapid flow of time seems to give birth to illness among the people, Art may be considered one of the last forms of spiritual survival. In a world of nihilism, where the man is “condemned to be free”, free to interpret and give meaning, meaning relevant for his own condition, art is a subtle form of communication and may help us in remembering what the world and our specific way of being are all about: giving sense and cultivating our spirit. Art may still encompass all lost meaning and may reveal the old values that modeled our cultural being and that may be contained in what C.G. Jung’s calls collective unconsciousness; through writing, these meanings unconsciously receive expression; through a symbolic lecture, old, forgotten meanings can be brought forth again and re-interiorized, under a new light, but nonetheless most useful for us.

In the end, perhaps art should not be regarded only as a form of expression of the beautiful, but just as a form of expression.