

"The painter who depicts merely by practice and judgement of the eye, without reason, is like a mirror, that imitates on itself all things in front of it, without knowing them."

When Leonardo Da Vinci uttered these words, he was situated in the era of the Italian Renaissance, when western artists started to emerge from the anonymity and stiffness of standard in the Medieval era and were embracing the jewels of ancient civilization. This was also a time when the focus of culture shifted from the sacred to the secular, and increasingly the individual was emphasized as the locus and agent of both decision and creation. Leonardo's quote can be read as hailing exactly this attitude of individual creativity, and through the faculty of reason, the emphasize on which the Italian artists inherited from the classical antiquity.

In this essay, I attempt to defend Leonardo's idea that good artistic creation is done with the involvement of reason. I proceed, first of all, by illustrating the possibility of artistic creation without the use of reason, so as to make sure that the target of attack is not an empty reference. Next, I offer two arguments on the inferiority of such practices. Having defended Leonardo's attack, I will further argue that he is not asking artists to complete a mission impossible by proving that it is possible, by participation of reason, that artists overcome the shortcomings previously identified. Lastly, I conclude a comment on the modern relevance of the idea of rational involvement in creative processes.

1. The possibility of artistic creation without the use of reason

Before I launch into this argument, I would like to avoid some conceptual complications by discussing the concept of artistic creation, as is used in my essay. Art itself is a particularly contentious and ambiguous concept. It has been debated, for example, if the prevalent field of conceptual art, which is generally regarded as art, constitutes an art form. Even if it does, it is unclear what certain works in the field - for instance, the ready-made snow shovel by Duchamp - have in common with art from technical masters such as Raphael and Michelangelo. As the method from which art is created, the concept of artistic creation bears a complexity derivative of its object. In the example of Renaissance vs. modern conceptual art, it has been argued that creative process without intensive participation on the part of the artist can hardly constitute an artistic practice. In this case, discussing the artistic creation of conceptual art would be making an empty reference all along. Granted, the discussion will still be apparently understandable, but when scrutinized, this will bring about great theoretical difficulties. Similarly, it might be possible to argue that without the involvement of reason, there can be no artistic creation. However, it is beyond my ability to get into the intricate complexities surrounding the definition of art. In an attempt to avoid meaninglessness, then, I shall disregard that possibility in this essay. In other words, this essay operates on a premise about artistic creation - and art in general - namely that, all things being equal, the creative process without reason still counts as artistic creation, and the product of which, still art.

Without further ado, I shall engage the topic of this session. Is it possible to create art without reason? At first, this may seem quite obvious. Even a robot - the most basic of its kind, software-wise able to do nothing but follow clear orders such as "move joint A 5cm left" - can paint a picture. Matters are complicated once we realize that such a robot is capable of following procedures, and that the most explicit form of the use of reason - logic - is governed in a similar way by a set of logical procedures such as *modus ponens*. However, one may notice that this aspect has been neatly captured in the word "practice" from Leonardo's quote. I understand practice as having the same meaning in the phrase "practice makes perfect", as a repetitive process aimed at perfecting one's skills in performing a certain procedure, for example, mixing pigments. The reason we are looking for, then, must go beyond the a faculty capable of merely following an established procedures. The other clue that can be taken from Leonardo's quote is "judgement of the eye", which I understand as experience. This is another aspect that Leonardo's account of reason seems to avoid.

But if this is the case, what, then, is reason? It will be helpful to recall a typical reasoning process:

P1. All men are creatures which will die.

P2. Socrates is a man.

C. Socrates is a creature which will die.

Both P1 and P2 are true, and we judge that with the help of our experience. We reach the conclusion, C, by our ability to perform logical procedures. But for this reasoning to be accepted, a crucial account is missing, i.e., the validity of the form of reasoning. This shows that we have an ability to judge that any reasoning of the following form is correct:

P1. All X is Y.

P2. A is X.

C. A is Y.

This judgement of the quality of forms cannot come from experience, because we seem to organize our experiences in one form or another all the time. Thus the judgement of form must proceed all experience, i.e. it must be a priori, while experience is a posteriori. It is the judgement of forms, albeit a cultivated one, I believe, that is the reason which Leonardo was talking about. The artistic equivalent of the judgement of logical forms would be the judgement of artistic forms, for instance, in painting, the principles governing the combination of colors, the organization of elements, the choice of theme, etc. A good logical form is said to produce sound conclusions; a good artistic form is said to produce beautiful (in the broad sense) artworks. Further, I believe this interpretation fits well with Leonardo's description of "knowing them", because judgement is bound to be reflective.

We are now in a position to understand why the basic robot which paints a picture is involved in artistic creation without the participation of reason. It performs according to a certain set of procedures, but exactly because of this, the robot has no judgement of forms. It does whatever it is asked to do, and shows no sign of being able to understand what form is better than others.

In the human society, such creative process has its less radical manifestation in a village in Guangdong, China, famous for its cheap oil paintings. However, in this village, original artistic creation is frowned upon. This is because most people in the village make a living producing authentic-looking copies of great oil painting, e.g. the Mona Lisa. There, artistic creation becomes mere imitation, by way of careful observation of the techniques used in the original, and years and years of training, usually from early childhood, on procedures to achieve the desired effect. Of course, this is not to say that the artists in that village had no judgement of forms, or somehow are lacking in reason. In fact, being daily immersed in the trade, they have great abilities of appreciation, and many have developed their own tastes. However, these judgements are rarely reflected in their works, for otherwise the products would lose their market values. This, then, is an example of artistic creation without the involvement of reason.

2. Inferiority of the reason-less practice

In this session, I offer two arguments against the practice identified in the first session: that of imitation and unoriginality.

The argument of imitation has its roots in a really old one. In his *Republic*, Plato criticized art for being "twice removed" from truth. For Plato, the real truth lies not in the temporal world but in the

world of forms. When I look up, foreexample, I see lots of computers of roughly the same size and design. Plato saw this kind of similarity in all things under the same name. The argument is that only when there is something identical amongst, for example, all circles, be them drawn on paper, built with wax, etc, will we be able to recognize them all as circles. For Plato, moreover, the circles we experience with our senses are but imitations of the true circle, which he calls the form of the circle. The form of the circle is the real circle; circles on earth are somewhat less real. Therefore, when an artist creates, for example, a marble sculpture of a pig, she does so by imitating the pig she experiences, which in turn is an imitation of the form of the pig. The artwork, being an imitation of an imitation, is therefore twice removed from reality.

I do not assent to this argument fully. For one thing, I am hesitant to assert a formal world that is somehow more real than, well, the so-called real world. But what Plato importantly emphasized was that art can be mere imitations. Artworks from the village of oil paintings, whose value is determined by likeness above anything else, can be easily replaced by machine reproctions. It seems, therefore, a waste of talent to have humans agents engage in this kind of work. Indeed, from the viewpoint of ethics, it may even be argued that it is not a morally recommendable practice, for, by putting a lot of time into learning the trade from an early age, people may miss vital opportunities to cultivate such virtues as autonomy.

But this argument can be justly criticized to have too much theoretical burdens, for it relies heavily on the particular branch of virtue ethics. My second argument would hopefully avoid this short coming. This argument focuses on originality, which is often posited as a category for good art. I believe this standard is at least consequentially justified, because the encouragement of originality can act as a vital force to push artistic creation forwards. Aiming to be original, ambitious artists will seek ever newer methods of creation, thereby enlarging the repertoires of tools available for future generations. As an amateur composer, for example, I benefit from the Brahms's transcendence from Beethoven's formats, which owe, at least partly, to the composer's wish to be not just a second Beethoven, but a composer with a name of his own. Even conceptually, this expectation of originality is quite fitting in our time, since we now differentiate between art and craft. For us, the latter bear the license to repetition.

The creation of art without reason is also an easy prey to unoriginality. This is because every artist learn their trade from old masters and from the previous generations. To be original, however, requires one to transcend the old patterns and techniques, not by abandoning them all together, but by selectively choosing which ones to employ and which not. In music, this amounts to, for example, breaking voice leading rules when needed (voice leading is the technique of coming up with - sometimes even deducing - what the next chord should look like based on existing ones). The practice of art without reason and with careful observation and imitation alone is apparently not sufficient to motivate this change - it will only lead to typical and conventional voice leading results.

3. Reason comes to rescue

Despite all these short comings, the argument against artistic creation without the involvement of reason, can still be weak, if by adding reason we cannot fix the problem. For if the problems are inherent in the nature of the artistic creation, then the only option left for us is to live with these shortcomings. If, on the other hand, the problem lies not inherent to artistic creation, but cannot be fixed by the involvement of reason, then it is unfair to criticize the artistic practice in question on grounds that it excludes something that is probably useless. It is my task in this session, therefore, to show that artistic creation can indeed be enhanced by the inclusion of reason.

It has been argued that artistic creation without reason fails to cultivate autonomy. This can be fixed by an addition of reason because it is practice by every rational agent on their own. The judgement

of forms involves thinking through different forms of creation and, as a result, choosing the most beautiful to be employed in the artwork. As this hinges on's background and intuition, which vary from person to person, the result of reason also varies. The cultivation of autonomy, therefore, not only comes from the fact that the aesthetic decision is made by the agent herself, but also that the agent, having made that decision, will likely compete with different judgements. By persisting with her choice, she takes up genuine responsibility for her artwork, and thus obtains and retains control of her decision.

Admittedly, the previous characterization of reason may appear to diverge too far from our conventional understanding of reason as something impersonal and publically accessible. To this I respond that the reason, even as it appears in normal understanding, is not immune from intuition and cultural backgrounds. Indeed, there are even empirical evidence for this assertion.

In the 20th century philosopher Nozick came up with a thought experiment called the experience machine. His readers were asked to imagine a very advanced machine that is capable of producing whatever experience for those that choose to go in. In that machine, I can be president for this moment and astronaut for the next. I can feel the taste of 100-dollar meals even when, in reality, I am fed by a tube. In short, the machine can make me happy in every way I can think of. The problem is, you are told, that although you can stop the machine any time you want, no one has ever done that. The question was: would you step in?

It was Nozick's intuition that no one would step into this dire future, and built a huge, almost book-length arguement on top of lesson learned from this experiment, a characteristic exercise of reason as commonly perceived. But it was the intuition of many others that life in the machine is happy and worth-living one, and some of them, too, also built elaborate arguments upon lesson learned from their intuition. The serious problem here is that for each rationally-supported statement, there has to be at least one premise, and for that premise yet another, in written form:

$P1 \Rightarrow P2 \Rightarrow P3 \Rightarrow P4 \Rightarrow \dots$

The chain extends to infinity if no first premise can be reached. Yet the truth of the first premise cannot be justified by reason (otherwise it will have premise of its own). The result, then, is that we have to resort to intuition.

Going back to reason in artistic creation, now it shouldn't seem to deviate too far from our common conception, to the extent that it can no longer be called reason. There are, of course, still differences between the two, but it seems to me that this can be explained by the difference between art and the quest for objective knowledge, the former being a quite personal field after all. it should be noted, however, that in art reason can hardly operate completely independently, without contributions from experience and practice. For only by practice can one learn the nuts and bolts of the artistic creative process, and practice presumes careful observation. Only after some engagement in the field can one start to make practical judgements about the forms. Reason, therefore, does not walk alone. Rather, the relationship between reason, practice and experience is somewhat similar to the relationship between reason, passion and appetite in Plato's chariot analogy of the soul, where reason is the rider, and passion and appetite the horses: the soul is "corrupt" if reason loses control of the chariot, but a "healthy" soul is not where reason toils alone - it is one in which passion and appetite submit to the control of reason, and by this means the three parts of the soul achieves harmony. In the case of artistic reason, reason can only be successful with the cooperation of practice and experience.

In any case, since time and space is limited, here I will allow, albeit somewhat rushly, that artistic reason is personal. Because it is personal, then, it is also original, even in the strictest sense of the

world, because artistic works that stem from a creative process with the help of artistic reason is, by definition, stemming from the artist herself, and, as such, it is not merely a repetition of works from past masters.

4. Conclusion

The above discussion brings to the fore an emphasis on artistic reason, conceived of as an independent, and sometimes personal, judgement of the forms. I argued that although it is possible to create artworks without employing reason, such art would be merely imitative and unoriginal, and that devotion in this kind of art fails to cultivate the autonomy of humankind. I then illustrate that reason, so conceived, can solve these problems by adding authentic personal involvement into the creative process.

Up until now, however, my discussion has been chiefly within the field of art. However, I believe the power of reason as judgement of forms has greater implications. Going back to the example of the basic machine artist, it is, I hope, now evident that its art is not good art at least partly because it lacks reason. Contending this, however, one hardly feels any pity, or any other adverse emotions, because the machine simply lacks such an ability. The human artists in the oil painting village is another story. Contending their situation, I feel all sorts of adverse emotions - I am appalled at the waste of talent and time, I feel that it's a shame they cannot engage in the artistic creation that involves reason even when they want to, without paying a big social price. In other words, I consider it no big thing when machines fail to exercise reason, but I feel concerned when humans do the same. I believe many others feel the same: when there is news about the machine artist, people respond in cheerful awe; when it is the human artists in the news, people respond in the opposite of cheerfulness. This suggests that a crucial part of my conception of personhood is reason, therefore I feel adverse feelings when my expectation is disappointed. But by this reason it is meant not the procedural reason that enables us to follow rules, the pre-reflective ability to follow rules, as Leonardo's predecessors followed the Medieval standard, but the reflective ability to judge, choose and create, the what-it-is-like-ness of being a person. For Leonardo, reason prevented an artist from becoming a mirror, a non-human being capable only of mechanical reflection; in our age of ever-more-advanced Artificial Intelligence, artistic reason, our legacy from the master mind of Leonardo, may shed light to our ability to identify, with confidence, as persons.