

This Free E-Book is brought to you by Natural-Aging.com.

100% Effective Natural Hormone Treatment
Menopause, Andropause And Other Hormone Imbalances
Impair Healthy Healing In People Over The Age Of 30!

The Basic Dilemma of the Artist

By Sam Vaknin

The Basic Dilemma of the Artist by Sam Vaknin

The psychophysical problem is long standing and, probably, intractable.

We have a corporeal body. It is a physical entity, subject to all the laws of physics. Yet, we experience ourselves, our internal lives, external events in a manner which provokes us to postulate the existence of a corresponding, non-physical ontos, entity. This corresponding entity ostensibly incorporates a dimension of our being which, in principle, can never be tackled with the instruments and the formal logic of science.

A compromise was proposed long ago: the soul is nothing but our self awareness or the way that we experience ourselves. But this is a flawed solution. It is flawed because it assumes that the human experience is uniform, unequivocal and identical. It might well be so – but there is no methodologically rigorous way of proving it. We have no way to objectively ascertain that all of us experience pain in the same manner or that pain that we experience is the same in all of us. This is even when the causes of the sensation are carefully controlled and monitored.

A scientist might say that it is only a matter of time before we find the exact part of the brain which is responsible for the specific pain in our gedankenexperiment. Moreover, will add our gedankenscientist, in due course, science will even be able to demonstrate a monovalent relationship between a pattern of brain activity in situ and the aforementioned pain. In other words, the scientific claim is that the patterns of brain activity ARE the pain itself.

Such an argument is, prima facie, inadmissible. The fact that two events coincide (even if they do so forever) does not make them identical. The serial occurrence of two events does not make one of them the cause and the other the effect, as is well known. Similarly, the contemporaneous occurrence of two events only means that they are correlated. A correlate is not an alter ego. It is not an aspect of the same event. The brain activity is what appears WHEN pain happens – it by no means follows that it IS the pain itself.

The Basic Dilemma of the Artist

A stronger argument would crystallize if it was convincingly and repeatedly demonstrated that playing back these patterns of brain activity induces the same pain. Even in such a case, we would be talking about cause and effect rather than identity of pain and its correlate in the brain.

The gap is even bigger when we try to apply natural languages to the description of emotions and sensations. This seems close to impossible. How can one even half accurately communicate one's anguish, love, fear, or desire? We are prisoners in the universe of our emotions, never to emerge and the weapons of language are useless. Each one of us develops his or her own, idiosyncratic, unique emotional language. It is not a jargon, or a dialect because it cannot be translated or communicated. No dictionary can ever be constructed to bridge this lingual gap. In principle, experience is incommunicable. People – in the very far future – may be able to harbour the same emotions, chemically or otherwise induced in them. One brain could directly take over another and make it feel the same. Yet, even then these experiences will not be communicable and we will have no way

available to us to compare and decide whether there was an identity of sensations or of emotions.

Still, when we say "sadness", we all seem to understand what we are talking about. In the remotest and furthest reaches of the earth people share this feeling of being sad. The feeling might be evoked by disparate circumstances – yet, we all seem to share some basic element of "being sad". So, what is this element?

We have already said that we are confined to using idiosyncratic emotional languages and that no dictionary is possible between them.

Now we will postulate the existence of a meta language. This is a language common to all humans, indeed, it seems to be the language of being human. Emotions are but phrases in this language. This language must exist – otherwise all communication between humans would have ceased to exist. It would appear that the relationship between this universal language and the idiosyncratic, individualistic languages is a relation of correlation. Pain is correlated to brain activity, on the one hand – and to this universal language, on the other. We would, therefore, tend to parsimoniously assume that the two correlates are but one and the same. In other words, it may well be that the brain activity which "goes together" is but the physical manifestation of the meta-lingual element "PAIN". We feel pain and this is our experience, unique, incommunicable, expressed solely in our idiosyncratic language.

We know that we are feeling pain and we communicate it to others. As we do so, we use the meta, universal language. The very use (or even the thought of using) this language provokes the brain activity which is so closely correlated with pain.

It is important to clarify that the universal language could well be a physical one. Possibly, even genetic. Nature might have endowed us with this universal language to improve our chances to survive. The communication of emotions is of an unparalleled evolutionary importance and a species devoid of the ability to communicate the existence of pain – would perish. Pain is our guardian against the perils of our surroundings.

To summarize: we manage our inter-human emotional communication using a universal language

The Basic Dilemma of the Artist

which is either physical or, at least, has strong physical correlates.

The function of bridging the gap between an idiosyncratic language (his or her own) and a more universal one was relegated to a group of special individuals called artists. Theirs is the job to experience (mostly emotions), to mould it into a the grammar, syntax and vocabulary of a universal language in order to communicate the echo of their idiosyncratic language. They are forever mediating between us and their experience. Rightly so, the quality of an artist is measured by his ability to loyally represent his unique language to us. The smaller the distance between the original experience (the emotion of the artist) and its external representation – the more prominent the artist.

We declare artistic success when the universally communicable representation succeeds at recreating the original emotion (felt by the artist) with us. It is very much like those science fiction contraptions which allow for the decomposition of the astronaut's body in one spot – and its recreation, atom for atom in another (teleportation).

Even if the artist fails to do so but succeeds in calling forth any kind of emotional response in his viewers/readers/listeners, he is deemed successful.

Every artist has a reference group, his audience. They could be alive or dead (for instance, he could measure himself against past artists). They could be few or many, but they must exist for art, in its fullest sense, to exist. Modern theories of art speak about the audience as an integral and defining part of the artistic creation and even of the artefact itself.

But this, precisely, is the source of the dilemma of the artist:

Who is to determine who is a good, qualitative artist and who is not?

Put differently, who is to measure the distance between the original experience and its representation?

After all, if the original experience is an element of an idiosyncratic, non-communicable, language – we have no access to any information regarding it and, therefore, we are in no position to judge it. Only the artist has access to it and only he can decide how far is his representation from his original experience. Art criticism is impossible.

Granted, his reference group (his audience, however limited, whether among the living, or among the dead) has access to that meta language, that universal dictionary available to all humans. But this is already a long way towards the representation (the work of art). No one in the audience has access to the original experience and their capacity to pass judgement is, therefore, in great doubt.

On the other hand, only the reference group, only the audience can aptly judge the representation for what it is. The artist is too emotionally involved. True, the cold, objective facts concerning the work of art are available to both artist and reference group – but the audience is in a privileged status, its bias is less pronounced.

Normally, the reference group will use the meta language embedded in us as humans, some empathy,

The Basic Dilemma of the Artist

some vague comparisons of emotions to try and grasp the emotional foundation laid by the artist. But this is very much like substituting verbal intercourse for the real thing. Talking about emotions – let alone making assumptions about what the artist may have felt that we also, maybe, share – is a far cry from what really transpired in the artist's mind.

We are faced with a dichotomy:

The epistemological elements in the artistic process belong exclusively and incommunicably to the artist.

The ontological aspects of the artistic process belong largely to the group of reference but they have no access to the epistemological domain.

And the work of art can be judged only by comparing the epistemological to the ontological.

Nor the artist, neither his group of reference can do it. This mission is nigh impossible.

Thus, an artist must make a decision early on in his career:

Should he remain loyal and close to his emotional experiences and studies and forgo the warmth and comfort of being reassured and directed from the outside, through the reactions of the reference group, or should he consider the views, criticism and advice of the reference group in his artistic creation –

and, most probably, have to compromise the quality and the intensity of his original emotion in order to be more communicative.

I wish to thank my brother, Sharon Vaknin, a gifted painter and illustrator, for raising these issues.

ADDENDUM – Art as Self-Mutilation

The internalized anger of Jesus – leading to his suicidal pattern of behaviour – pertained to all of Mankind. His sacrifice "benefited" humanity as a whole. A self-mutilator, in comparison, appears to be "selfish".

His anger is autistic, self-contained, self-referential and, therefore, "meaningless" as far as we are concerned. His catharsis is a private language.

But what people fail to understand is that art itself is an act of self mutilation, the etching of ephemeral pain into a lasting medium, the ultimate private language.

They also ignore, at their peril, the fact that only a very thin line separates self-mutilation – whether altruistic (Jesus) or "egoistic" – and the mutilation of others (serial killers, Hitler).

About inverted saints:

<http://samvak.tripod.com/hitler.html>

About serial killers:

<http://samvak.tripod.com/serialkillers.html>

Sam Vaknin is the author of *Malignant Self Love – Narcissism Revisited* and *After the Rain – How the West Lost the East*. He is a columnist for *Central Europe Review*, *United Press International (UPI)* and *eBookWeb* and the editor of *mental health* and *Central East Europe* categories in *The Open Directory* and *Suite101*. Web site: <http://samvak.tripod.com/>

Buying An Abstract Painting

By Tim Seaward

You may be mistaken in thinking that buying a piece of abstract art would be a simple thing to do. You just select the work you want... and buy it!

The truth will creep up on you as soon as you look at the first painting "it is not quite the right one, so I will look for another".

Here is the first realization – and question to ask yourself – why exactly is this piece you are looking at "not quite right"? The answer can be manifold:

1. It includes a colour I do not like
2. I am not sure it will go with another item in the space I would like to place it
3. A slow realization that a certain personal undesirable association is being emitted from the painting
4. It looks great but I am not sure it will fit the space
5. It is just right but the price is a little bit more than I wanted to pay... and the list goes on.

Although I do not have all the answers I will endeavour to reveal, from my own personal experiences, a few solutions.

So, you see a picture you like but the colour combination is wrong. Put simply the thing to do is to contact the artist and tell them your dilemma. You will find that some of them will either be able to reproduce a similar work in the colours you prefer, or they will be willing to notify you when and if they produce a work that might be nearer to the colours that you require.

If size is an issue then I would advise the same as above – contact the artist and tell them the problem. I believe you will receive a similar reply to that which I have written above.

Make sure that when you do make a purchase that the artist is offering a return policy. I have a ten day return policy which means that if you buy a painting and hang it in your space – if within ten days of purchasing it you become uncomfortable with it for any reason and you cannot live with it, then you may return the piece and your money will be returned. An important point here worth mentioning is the fact that you have made certain decisions on buying this piece of work, therefore it is worthwhile

The Basic Dilemma of the Artist

mentioning it to the artist which will enable them, if they so inclined, to produce a work that has omitted the undesirable entity. This way you may well end up with a work that will be of greater value to you – having communicated your dilemma.

Price can be a tricky challenge – but many artists offer different ways to help you buy the piece you want. If, for instance, the piece you like is too expensive for you then you have a number of choices. Perhaps the most preferable choice is for you to negotiate the price with the artist. However, please bear in mind that the artist has produced a totally unique painting – there is nothing like it in all the world! Also spare a thought for the fact that the artist will have spent time struggling to get the work out onto the canvas. A well known saying is that a piece may well have taken only a few hours to produce, but you should also take into account the years the artist has been at work – so if someone says to me "it can only have taken you three hours at the most" I reply "no... it has taken me FORTY YEARS and three hours!" If you keep these in mind then negotiate with what you might see as a realistic price for you and a price that will have taken the above into account for the artist.

Some artists will not barter prices – but they may be willing to sell you the work if you pay by installments. You have to ask yourself here "Do I REALLY want this piece?" If you answer yes then you will find the money... because you want to – you want the work.

Let us say that you see an artists work – you love the style – you would very much like to have a painting on your wall... but you see nothing that grabs you. Try contacting the artists and commissioning them to painting you a picture... this way you may be able to influence the end result by instructing the artist to use certain colours, or specific shapes. Or if they are not inclined to work that way then they might put you on their mailing list that will inform you when their latest piece is about to go on show – you will be offered "first refusal".

One final thing worth mentioning is the fact that a growing number of artists are making their works available as high quality giclee prints. These reproductions are very close to the original work, and some of the reproduction houses actually ensure that every brush stroke has the appropriate texture and "feel". So in many ways you could purchase a work that is almost identical to the original piece except for one very big fact – the price of the print. The print will be of a limited edition, making it a collectible investment – and it will have been checked, numbered, and signed by the artist.

If none of the above proves to be useful to you then the simplest thing to do is contact the artist and just talk to them, tell them what you think of their work, what you are looking for – anything... just communicate with them, and I think you will find that you will not only buy yourself something that you will love and cherish ... but you will also bond with the artist themselves in a way that you could never do if you walked into a place selling paintings and chose a piece hanging on a wall.

Tim Seaward is the author of "Buying an Abstract Painting". He is also a practicing fine artist living and working in the UK. Visit his site to find out exactly what he paints.

or <mailto:tim at>

(replace "at" with "@" for the actual email address).



This Free E-Book has been brought to you by Natural-Aging.com.

100% Effective Natural Hormone Treatment
Menopause, Andropause And Other Hormone Imbalances
Impair Healthy Healing In People Over The Age Of 30!