

.... The most tantalizing question of all: If a fake is so expert that even after the most thorough and trustworthy examination its authenticity is still open to doubt, is it not as satisfactory a work of art as if it were unequivocally genuine? Aline B. Saarinen

INTRODUCTION

In order to answer this question, I first consider mandatory to briefly acknowledge what lies beyond the question itself. The general topic that the question refers to is as old as philosophy. It has always been a matter of discussion since the dawn of time: What is real, and how can we be sure it? This primordial subject has many variants, and one of those is expressed on the chosen topic for this essay, and specifically the question itself: if a counterfeit is so similar to the original that even the experts are not able to distinguish them, is it as satisfactory as the genuine work?

Some questions are to be answered before we seek the solution to the problem posed above. What defines what is fake and what is original? Is it wrong to choose fake over authentic when the difference between them are nonexistent? Throughout this essay, we will try to find explanations to these and other questions, and with these answers we will be in a position to solve the problem posed. Firstly we must define the terms, fake and original.

WHAT IS FAKE AND WHAT IS ORIGINAL?

The topic of this essay refers, specifically, to a counterfeit and an original in the field of art, but in the case of this question it is equally acceptable to speak on a general level about this topic, as the conclusions can be applied to a more specific matter, such as a painting or a sculpture. Firstly, what is fake? Fake is a deception. An imitation of an original and therefore, a fake is not as perfect as the original, even though it may seem equal. When considering something a fake it is important to understand that fakes are those that claim to be an original, in other words a counterfeit. This means that an imitation not pretending to be an original, but revealing itself as what it truly is (an imitation) must not be considered a fake, as it does not try to deceive or trick us. However, replicas claiming to be originals are a deception, and if it is necessary to establish distinction between copy and original, we must consider the differences in order to establish said distinction. The problem arises when those differences are so small that we cannot distinguish them.

The ultimate difference between a replica and an original is their existence. This is obvious of course if we consider that, in order for a fake to exist, there has to be an original which is the source and origin of the fake. An imitation without an original is impossible, because then it would not be considered fake (but an original on its own), this means that the existence of an original is mandatory if we are to consider something a “fake”. This does not mean, of course, that an original may cease to exist, and that the imitations of said original are preserved, in which case we may fall into the error of considering the counterfeits as originals. Nevertheless, the destroyed original existed before the imitations. Therefore, it is safe to presume that an original

is or was first, and that the imitations followed. The tool then, which allows us to distinguish replica from original is time. Whatever existed first must be an original, and everything that comes afterwards claiming to be the original, is undoubtedly a fake.

IS IT WRONG TO CHOOSE REPLICA OVER GENUINE?

Once the terms fake and original are fully understood it is time to ask ourselves: is it ethical to choose fake over original? To begin with, we must assume that in a hypothetical, case we know replica from original. If it was not this way, if we had not the ability to know the distinction, then we would not be choosing but picking at random, and therefore it would not be fair to evaluate our actions ethically, as we would be ignorant. To answer the question we consider a situation in which we are faced with a dilemma.

In this hypothetical case we are presuming that we do know which item is a counterfeit and which one is the original, and also know that there are differences between them, but these are not shown to us, so that we ourselves cannot appreciate the differences, and therefore both items seem equal to us. Having established the situation of the dilemma, now it is time to consider the consequences of choosing replica.

If we chose replica over original, knowing that we have chosen the imitation, then it seems a moral defeat. Precisely, why choose replica knowing it is exactly the same as the original in every aspect? The replica is not in any case as meritorious as the original, and (to place the topic in context) especially so when considering a work of art. The artist creates; the counterfeiter copies. No matter how exact the copy is and how worthy the imitation is on a technical level, the original was there beforehand. Of course the counterfeit may be as meritorious on a technical level as the original. In fact, imitating something to the point of not recognizing the forgery from the original may be more impressive than the technical value of the original itself, because of the difficulties the counterfeiter may have had. But nevertheless, the recognition must always go to the creator of a concept or idea, and not its imitators. When the artist created, a concept was born; something that did not exist suddenly appeared. When the counterfeiter finished his forgery, nothing new was there. In the same way, the technical merits of a piece of art, be it forgery or original, should not be preferential to the artistic value.

Choosing replica over the original (while knowing the distinction) is considering the original unworthy of recognition and therefore it seems a waste of time to even choose one or the other if both are equal and both are unworthy.

On the other hand, choosing original over replica is placing the concept behind a work of art on a higher level than the technical merits of said work. This is the case when it comes to art. Technical merits should not be preferential to artistic values, because then every piece of art before our time would be technically outdated, and unworthy by those standards. The technical limitations present at the time of the creation of a work of art should not impair the artistic value

of said work. They should only be taken into account once the own value of the idea behind the piece of art has been fully understood.

To summarize the answer to the question: “is it wrong to choose fake over original?” we can state that choosing counterfeit over original means considering the technical value of the forgery preferential to its artistic value. Therefore, in the case of a piece of art, choosing forgery means betraying the very essence of art, as this action is detrimental to the artistic value and benefits the technical aspects of a work of art. Following this line of thinking, choosing the forgery over the original is wrong in the field of arts. This does not mean, of course that in other fields technical merits should be more important. In the same way, it does not mean that the way in which art is expressed (this is: the technical aspect) is unimportant. However it is secondary, because the idea and the emotions that are being expressed are the essential part of a piece of art. If it were to be the other way around, pieces of art from the past would be worthless as they were created with fewer advances in technology, and this of course does not happen, because we still admire pieces of art that were created hundreds or even thousands of years ago.

IF A FAKE IS EQUAL TO ITS ORIGINAL, IS IT JUST AS SATISFACTORY?

To answer this question we must briefly consider what has been stated above, in answer to the question: is it wrong to choose replica over genuine? While answering the latter question, it has been stated that, in order to consider all the implications, one must know which item is forgery and which is genuine. In other words, one must choose, and choosing implies knowing the difference.

The question at hand implies that a hypothetical certain piece of art is a counterfeit, but that it is impossible for experts to know with certainty its true nature. Once we have taken into account that, in this case, it is in fact impossible to distinguish fake from original (even though we know it is in fact fake) we ask ourselves the main question of this essay: is a counterfeit that is equal to an original, just as satisfactory artistically as the genuine work?

The answer to this question is similar to the answer to the second question in this essay: is it wrong to choose replica over genuine? If the true nature of a piece is known to be fake, then treating it as equal as an original (or even better than the original) is wrong, and therefore it cannot be as satisfactory as an original (in accordance with what was stated above). If, however, we do not know the fake origin of a piece and treat it as an original, then it is just as satisfactory because we do not know the difference.

To summarize, the merits of work of art rely on their originality. To treat a counterfeit as an original, knowing it is in fact a fake, is wrong. Therefore a replica of a piece of art, no matter how perfect it is, will always be less valuable and less satisfactory than the original work, even if they are so equal that the differences are not appreciable to us.