

Philosophers
in
Depth



Plato on Art and Beauty

Edited by
A. E. Denham



Plato on Art and Beauty

Philosophers in Depth

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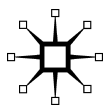
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To Solomon Denham

ἀντὶ τοι μετόπισθ' ἄχος ἔσσεται, ἔϊ κεν ἀοιδὸν
πέφνης, ὅς τε θεοῖσι καὶ ἀνθρώποισιν ἀείδῃ.

Homer *Od.* 22.345-6

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Abbreviations

I Plato's works

<i>Ap.</i>	<i>Apology</i>
<i>Chrm.</i>	<i>Charmides</i>
<i>Cra.</i>	<i>Cratylus</i>
<i>Euphr.</i>	<i>Euthyphro</i>
<i>Euthd.</i>	<i>Euthydemus</i>
<i>Grg.</i>	<i>Gorgias</i>
<i>H. Ma.</i>	<i>Hippias Major</i>
<i>H. Mi.</i>	<i>Hippias Minor</i>
<i>Phd.</i>	<i>Phaedo</i>
<i>Phdr.</i>	<i>Phaedrus</i>
<i>Phil.</i>	<i>Philebus</i>
<i>Pol.</i>	<i>Politicus</i>
<i>Prt.</i>	<i>Protagoras</i>
<i>Rep.</i>	<i>Republic</i>
<i>Smp.</i>	<i>Symposium</i>
<i>Sph.</i>	<i>Sophist</i>
<i>Tht.</i>	<i>Theaetetus</i>
<i>Ti.</i>	<i>Timaeus</i>

II Aristotle's works

<i>Met.</i>	<i>Metaphysics</i>
<i>N. E.</i>	<i>Nicomachean Ethics</i>
<i>Poet.</i>	<i>Poetics</i>
<i>Polit.</i>	<i>Politics</i>
<i>Rhet.</i>	<i>Rhetoric</i>

III Plutarch's works

<i>Alex. Fort.</i>	<i>De Alexandri Magnifortuna</i>
<i>Aud. Poet.</i>	<i>De audiendis poetis</i>
<i>Cimon</i>	<i>Cimon</i>
<i>Comm. Not.</i>	<i>De communibus notitiis</i>
<i>Glor. Ath.</i>	<i>De gloria Atheniensium</i>
<i>Imag.</i>	<i>Imagines</i>

<i>Pyrr. Hyp.</i>	<i>Outlines of Pyrrhonism</i>
<i>Pyth. Orac.</i>	<i>De Pythiaeoraculis</i>
<i>Qu. Conv.</i>	<i>Quaestiones Convivales</i>
<i>Quomodo Adul.</i>	<i>Quomodo adulescens</i>
<i>Sto.</i>	<i>De Stoicorum repugnantiiis</i>

IV Pindar's work

<i>Nem.</i>	<i>Nemeans</i>
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Preface

I have incurred several debts in the course of producing this volume. It has benefited greatly from the advice and guidance of certain colleagues; I wish particularly to thank Roger Crisp, John Hyman, David Reeve, Constantine Sandis and Kathryn Sensen. The project was first inspired more than a decade ago by participants of my *Republic* Reading Groups at St John's and St Anne's Colleges, Oxford. They often posed questions I would have wished better to answer and offered interpretations I would have liked better to assess. Our conversations made it clear that a contemporary collection like this one would be welcomed not only by scholars, but by anyone intrigued by the complicated weave of Plato's thoughts on art and beauty.

Special thanks are owed to Franklin Worrell for the philosophical acumen, scholarly assistance and personal virtues he brought to bear during the final stages of this volume's production. It would not have been completed without his assistance.

A.E.D.
Oxford, July 2011

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Iris Murdoch was a novelist, poet, playwright, philosopher and Fellow of St Anne's College, Oxford. She was made a Dame Commander of the Order of the British Empire in 1987. Murdoch wrote twenty-six novels, including *Under the Net* (1954), *The Unicorn* (1963), *The Black Prince* (1973) and *The Sea, the Sea* (1978). Her writings in philosophy include *The Sovereignty of the Good* (1970), *The Fire and the Sun: Why Plato Banished the Artists* (1977, reissued in 1990) and *Metaphysics As a Guide to Morals* (1992). She died in 1999 at the age of seventy-nine.

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Editor's Introduction

A. E. Denham

Plato's concerns about the epistemic and ethical value of art are well known: art is indifferent to truth; it peddles illusions disguised as wisdom; it subverts the authority of reason, disrupting the proper regime within the soul; it seduces and deceives. That Plato levels all of these criticisms, and levels them repeatedly, is beyond dispute. Equally beyond dispute, however, is Plato's largely positive assessment of beauty, in both natural and created manifestations. Beauty is a canonical Platonic Form – transcendent, mind-independent, absolute, and hence a proper object of genuine knowledge. Moreover, beauty is intimately related to the Form of the good as an important – perhaps indispensable – vehicle of the soul's progress towards wisdom and virtue. Unlike some of the pleasures offered by art, the pleasures of beauty are consonant with those of philosophy; indeed, in more than one dialogue Plato characterizes the experience of beauty as a catalyst for philosophical wonder.

This evaluative mix can seem an uneasy one to Plato's contemporary readers. After all, European aesthetic theory and philosophy of art have for almost three centuries identified beauty as the principal, if not the paramount, value of created art. In this tradition, beautiful form distinguishes mere invention from artistic creation, and the beauty of a work of art, above all else, explains the pleasure it affords. Indeed, this pleasure has often been considered the ultimate *telos* of artistic practices. Even today, despite the fact that many artists have turned their backs on traditional ambitions to beauty, it remains not only a primary term of artistic evaluation but a vital term of artistic praise. Although beauty no longer counts as either a necessary or a sufficient condition of artistic merit, it continues to be regarded as an important one for many artists, critics and spectators.

While Plato undoubtedly honoured and respected 'beauty itself', he also persistently questioned the value of beautiful art and especially beautiful *poesis*. Why? One might suppose that Plato valued natural, rather than artefactual, beauty. (In the *Symposium* – where we find Plato's most sustained and systematic discussion of beauty – its principal exemplar is the alluring, natural beauty of a handsome lover.) This explanation cannot be right, however, for a number of reasons. First, while Plato often consciously avoids too closely associating poetry with beauty, his critical accounts of its appeal – from the *Ion* to the *Republic* – describe it in terms which make it difficult, if not impossible, to dispense with that predicate. In the *Hippias Major*, for instance,

Socrates counters Hippias' example of natural beauty (the beauty of a desirable woman) with an artefactual one: the beauty of a well-turned vase. And in the *Ion* there seems to be little question about the beauty of poetry; it is charismatic, entrancing, even divine. Of course, both the *Hippias Major* and the *Ion* are very early dialogues, inviting the thought that it is when Plato is speaking for himself (rather than recording Socrates' views) that artefactual beauty becomes a target of criticism. But this, too, will not do; in the *Symposium* Diotima explicitly characterizes the poet's creations as motivated by a longing for beauty and observes that Homer and Hesiod are to be envied for so successfully fulfilling this longing through their works of verse. Perhaps most tellingly, Plato's final, unfinished *magnum opus*, the *Laws*, looks to the beauty of created works (principally music) to provide the training ground for moral excellence, and he does so precisely *because* such works expose the soul to what is truly *kalon*, assimilating the aesthetically *kalon* to some part of ethical virtue. In sum, Plato cannot, and did not, fail to recognize the beauty of created works of art.

A different explanation of Plato's scepticism about created beauty is that he believed it only captivated those unfamiliar with the pleasures of philosophy – those not properly attuned to the higher good of rational judgement. Perhaps the philosopher alone rises above beauty's charms, guided as he is by his aim of achieving knowledge of the Forms. This explanation seems more promising, in part because Plato frequently suggests that the charms of poetry are owed to its origins in divine inspiration, which displaces rational authority. But is it true that the philosopher is wholly impervious to the beauty of art? That is unlikely. Even in the final book of the *Republic* – where Plato judges art most severely – he advises the philosophical soul to respond to poetry as one would to a lover whom one knows to be neither good nor true: one 'holds off' from it. The temptations of poetic art, like those of erotic attraction, are certainly felt, even if they are resisted. The analogy between the charismatic force of a lover and that of poetry is telling: it is not that the philosopher does not perceive the beauty of art or fail to feel its pull. Rather, he has found something more valuable, namely, 'the regime within him' (*Rep.* X) in which reason governs the soul as its authoritative charioteer.

The tensions between Plato's evaluations of beauty and of art, and his ambivalence towards the latter, have sometimes been overlooked. This is, perhaps, in part because they so often appear independently of one another in the dialogues. Plato's principal critiques of poetry's epistemic and ethical failings (in the *Ion*, the *Republic* and the *Sophist*, for instance) are textually segregated from those addressing the nature and value of beauty (most directly in the *Hippias Major*, the *Symposium*, the *Phaedo* and the *Laws*). Thus, Plato does not himself meet the problem head on. Indeed, in *Republic* III he transitions almost seamlessly from arguments condemning the corrupting effects of poetic impersonation to recommending that the young guardians'

early education should develop *first of all* a sensitivity to beauty. (Aesthetic acumen, Plato maintains, will encourage them to discriminate the virtuous from the vulgar in human actions and affairs.) Even in this context, however, Plato does not enquire into the role 'beauty itself' plays in explaining the allure of art – let alone of the wrong sort of poetry. It seems not to trouble him that the *reason* poetry is so compelling to young minds, for instance, is that it is beautiful.

Is this because Plato believed that true beauty could not coincide (be instantiated) with what is false and pernicious? This cannot be right either. Plato clearly regards the coincidence of beauty, on the one hand, and ignorance and unreason, on the other, as in need of explanation. Consider, for example, Socrates' proposal in the *Ion* that poetry is 'divinely inspired': its origins lie in some God or gods or other divinities, such as the Muses. The divinities create the work of art (typically a work of poetry) and instil it in the soul of the mortal poet, who in turn inspires the performer, who then moves the spectator. The relationship between the divinity and his or her human vehicle is a purely causal one on this account. The sense in which a poem is 'communicated' to an inspired poet (and thence to the performer and spectator) is analogous to the communication of a virus or other natural force; it is not communication in the sense of a transfer of meaning or understanding. While the work of art may contain truth, the mortals to whom it is conveyed are not gifted with the resources to interpret and evaluate it as either true or false. On the contrary, the condition of inspiration involves precisely a suspension of one's capacity for reasoned criticism in favour of a non-rational engagement with the poem *as if* it were true. Divine inspiration thus produces the effects of belief removed from their proper trajectory – the trajectory of considered reasons, such as would be delivered by philosophical dialectic. Those who are inspired by poetry are *moved*: they are not themselves movers of their thought and experience. With the loss of rational authority comes the loss of personal agency.

Any adequate understanding of the tension between Plato's criticisms of various artforms and his respect for beauty will have to acknowledge the complexity and subtlety of his views of each. Throughout the dialogues, from early to late, we find Plato attempting to navigate a course between the competing claims of beauty and those of mortal rationality and the human kind of agency it alone confers. The work of art is the battleground on which these claims converge and conflict, profoundly challenging the psychological coherence of those who engage with it. According to one standard view, Plato's target of criticism is not art as such, but, rather, certain practices of *mimesis* or imitative representation in which some artforms participate. On this view, Plato's fierce condemnations of those artforms are easily interpreted as a simple endorsement of reason over passion and truth over illusion. But this cannot be the

whole story. Considered carefully and in detail, the dialogues deliver a more nuanced – and more ambivalent – understanding of how the evident beauty of great art (and the direct, non-rational insights it can offer) render it both dangerous and divine.

* * *

All of the contributions to this volume, in one way or another, speak to the complicated and many-sided weave of this theoretical tapestry. They address these issues from very different perspectives, but each serves in its own way to illuminate the sophistication and sensitivity of Plato's conception of art, beauty and their relations. The essays are presented in two parts. Part I (*Understanding Plato's Quarrel*) presents what I regard as the very best recent attempts to defend Plato's seemingly ruthless prescriptions for censorship of much, even most, great art, and his wider programme for its state control. These essays all respond to Plato's recognition of the power and beauty of the artworks he condemns and aim to make sense of the complexity and depth of Plato's conflict with artistry.

The first is an extensive excerpt from a work which has, I believe, often been underestimated: Iris Murdoch's *The Fire and the Sun: Why Plato Banished the Artists*. Murdoch ranges widely across Plato's *oeuvre*, from the *Apology* to the *Sophist* to the *Laws*, elucidating Plato's challenge to the authority of poetry in concert with her own distinctive account of the development of his theory of Forms. Murdoch shows why neither can be properly understood independently of the other, locating both in the context of the conflict between the claims of sensibility (the fire of the cave) and those of reason (the illumination of the sun). Her ambitions, however, are not merely expository ones. An artist of words herself, as well as a classical scholar, Murdoch had a very personal investment in understanding just how and why Plato underestimated the role that art can play in *mediating* that conflict. To that end, she explores the many dimensions of Plato's enduring appreciation of *eros* and beauty, making us feel keenly both the oddity of his hostility to art on the one hand, and, on the other, its inevitability. Perhaps no other scholarly discussion of the subject so vividly captures the depth and passion of Plato's distrust of the arts whilst offering so compelling and sympathetic an account of the ethics and metaphysics that motivated it.

A very different approach is taken by Alexander Nehamas in 'Plato and the Mass Media'. Nehamas does not only look to Plato's texts, but investigates the social role of poetry – and of tragic drama in particular – in Athenian culture, arguing that Plato's brief was not with art as such. Rather, Nehamas argues, Plato was concerned about a specific kind of popular drama which encouraged the spectator to imitate corrupt psychological models; such 'imitations, if they last from youth for some time, become part of one's nature and settle into habits of gesture, voice, and thought' (*Rep.* III.395c7–d3). Subtly interweaving the social psychology of spectatorship and Plato's

particular epistemic psychology, Nehamas calls attention to the powerful cultural authority of popular Greek theatre and the challenges it posed to Plato's agenda of rational social reform. Nehamas's analysis is a novel and striking attempt to legitimate Plato's criticisms of the art, and offers one way to challenge the familiar profile of Plato as a theory-driven philistine given to autocratic political ideals.

Plato's concerns about the role taken by art in the development of a personal and political 'ethos' or moral psychology are developed further in Myles Burnyeat's provocative 'Art and Mimesis in Plato's *Republic*'. Burnyeat forcefully presses various analogies between the challenges facing Athens of the fifth century and those besetting modern liberal democracies. Along the way, he reveals the prescience and psychological insight underpinning Plato's programme of social engineering. Of course, one may not approve of that programme: for instance, one may think the moral, aesthetic and intellectual costs incurred by popular rule are outweighed by the value of enhanced individuality and autonomy. But Burnyeat's defence of Plato nonetheless requires one to recognize what is gained and what is lost when we endorse the authority of popular taste, and to recognize too the deep and pervasive influence of popular, 'mass' art in shaping and forming moral character. 'Think of the impression,' Burnyeat directs,

...made on a really talented soul by the applause and boing of mass gatherings in the Assembly, the courts (an Athenian jury was not 12 good men and true, but several hundred and one), theatres and military camps. Is not the young man likely to end up accepting the values of the masses and becoming a character of the same sort as the people he is surrounded by? A democratic culture does not nurture reflective, philosophical understanding.

On Burnyeat's view, Plato's distrust of art is premised upon recognition of – and due respect for – its extraordinary power as a creator and purveyor of ethical standards. In that regard, contemporary social theory – and practical politics – have something yet to learn from Plato. If we dismiss his analysis on partisan grounds and ignore the psychologically well-founded *reasons* for his austere and dictatorial proposals for state censorship, we do so at our own peril.

The contributions featured in Part II (*Art and Beauty: Before and Beyond Republic X*) focus on a range of dialogues both in relation to and independent of Plato's verdicts in the final book of the *Republic*. I have not attempted to order them overall in accordance with the speculative dating of the dialogues; however, the positioning of the first – David Sider's 'Plato's Early Aesthetics' – recognizes that Plato's earliest sustained discussion of either art or beauty occurs in his *Hippias Major*. Little has been written about this dialogue, and its authenticity was for some time in dispute. Sider follows Grube

in holding, I think correctly, that the *Hippias Major* indeed belongs to Plato's *oeuvre*. His commentary is brief, but rich as a guide to Plato's thought in two ways. First, it serves to locate the dialogue in relation to others (such as the *Timaeus*, *Symposium* and *Philebus*). More importantly, perhaps, it illuminates how very different was Socrates' conception of beauty as a unitary property from the traditional Greek notion of it as a relational property, residing in the symmetry and harmony of the arrangements of a thing's parts. In this respect, the *Hippias Major* offers us an important glimpse into how Socrates himself sometimes foreshadows the later development of Plato's theory of Forms.

Another early dialogue which has been perhaps too often underplayed is the *Ion*. This dialogue takes its name from the rhapsode with whom Socrates debates the epistemic merits and demerits of poetry, its performances, and its effects on the spectator. The *Ion* is easily read as a straightforward endorsement of the authority of reason over non-rational inspiration, in which the rhapsode serves as an almost parodic symbol of ignorance and arrogance. As Stephen Halliwell has suggested, however, the *Ion* may be 'the very reverse of a doctrinaire dialogue' – both ambivalent and undecided about poetry. Dorit Barchana-Lorand's contribution ("A Divinity Moving You": Inspiration and Knowledge in the *Ion*') reflects this view, maintaining that both the structure and the content of the *Ion* merit a more subtle reading. She discusses the *Ion* as an exercise in aesthetic psychology and epistemology, exploring the meaning and significance of Socrates' claim that the origin of poetry is inspiration rather than *technē*. Questioning the received interpretation which regards Plato's view of inspiration as largely pejorative and ironic, Barchana-Lorand argues that the *Ion* also expresses Plato's genuine respect for the 'many fine things' that can be found in poetry and for the intensity of emotion it can elicit.

Moving beyond these earliest dialogues, in which beauty and art are treated independently, Giovanni Ferrari's 'The Philosopher's Antidote' turns to a question which cannot be addressed without considering them in concert: how does the philosopher respond to poetry? The Myth of the Cicadas in the *Phaedrus* suggests that the love of beautiful words can open the way to philosophy; it can do so if the philosopher listens to beautiful words as Odysseus listened to the Sirens, permitting himself to be maddened by their beauty while ensuring that his rational choices continue to govern his conduct. Is this the 'antidote' proposed in *Republic X*, which promises to protect the philosopher from poetry's dangerous effects? (Does that antidote bind the philosopher to rational choice, even whilst he succumbs to poetry's allure, as Odysseus's bonds held him to the mast?) What, then, would the philosopher feel when giving audience to a performance of beautiful words? Could he permit himself to be maddened, to fight against his restraints? Ferrari delivers a negative answer on this score, arguing that, whatever the philosopher's response may be, it cannot be that of the merely 'respectable',

ordinary man described at *Republic* X.605–6c. For the pleasure this man feels in the theatre is release from social inhibitions, and such release the philosopher neither requires nor pursues. Rather, the philosopher's 'antidote' is his understanding of what poetry is: poets are not teachers; they are not in the business of getting at truth. One might think that this need not prevent a philosopher from feeling intense and sympathetic pity as he listens to tragedy. However, Plato elsewhere details a very different picture of the philosophically advisable reaction to a tragic or tragi-comic spectacle, and Ferrari concludes that the recommendation found in the *Phaedrus* – an unusually poetic dialogue – is not Plato's prescription for the philosopher who has renounced passionate engagement in favour of reflective mastery. Although the philosopher recognizes the deep attraction of poetry and is aware of what he has forsworn, his soul is not disrupted and overturned by poetry; like a lover who recognizes that he must turn away from a dangerous beloved, his 'lofty pity [is] mixed with wry regret'.

The theme of the alluring pleasures promised by poetry is continued in Pierre Destrée's contribution, 'Plato on Tragic and Comic Pleasures'. Without the pleasures it offers, poetry would be benign. But it *is* pleasurable, and little by little this allows poets to instil values in the souls of their audience – often (in Plato's eyes) the morally deficient values which poetic heroes represent. At the same time, Plato recognizes that we – and the guardians especially – need poetry in order to learn and to impersonate (and therefore personify) values. It is no wonder, then, that he recommends an 'austere', pleasureless poetry for their education. And yet, Destrée asks, is this truly Plato's last word? Perhaps not, if, some of poetry's pleasures are psychologically necessary and require accommodation. Destrée argues that the tragic and comic pleasures in particular require accommodation, and that Plato allows for this by incorporating them into the myths embodied in his own 'pleasurable artwork'. Through the artwork of his own myth-telling, Plato himself provides material essential to the moral education of the young. The combined emotional and cognitive merits of these works will serve to motivate the young to acquire virtue by emulating the (morally good) gods and heroes; they will also transmit a coherent and systematic worldview. It may even be fair to say that they – like the hymns to the gods and eulogies to good men which Plato always permits – manifest the value of beauty, exercising at once the aesthetic and moral virtues essential to a flourishing human life. Perhaps, Destrée concludes, this is how Homer, and dramatic poetry more generally, might eventually be welcomed again into a well-governed city – as Plato says he would wish.

The contribution of beauty to human flourishing is the focus of C. D. C. Reeve's 'Plato on Begetting in Beauty', a subtle and complex reading of Plato's *Symposium*, drawing on related passages in the *Phaedrus*. Through a close analysis of Diotima's speech, Reeve investigates how beauty differs from – yet is related to – goodness, and how both are bound up with *eros* and desire. Central to his reading is the process of 'begetting', or, as Reeve

conceives of it, 'persistence through becoming', whereby an agent perpetuates his being through his 'offspring' – born of both physical and spiritual procreation. '[D]on't be surprised,' Diotima remarks, 'that everything by nature values what springs from itself; this eagerness, this love, that attends on every creature is for the sake of immortality' (*Smp.* 208b4–6). This general principle underpins the progression Diotima traces from the perception of bodily beauty to a rational grasp of beauty itself, which shares in that elusive and ultimate object of rational love – the good. The process of becoming virtuous is itself a process of begetting: one begets wise and virtuous later stages of oneself, motivated by love, which is in turn inspired by the perception of incandescent beauty. In this way, Reeve observes, Plato 'dramatizes an aspect of begetting in beauty that is easily overlooked, namely, that it requires the successful transmission of values – that is, of a tradition of valuing – both intra-personally and across generations'.

The *Symposium's* investigation of beauty also calls attention to a feature which distinguishes it from other values such as wisdom, justice and moderation: it is sensorily perceptible, or, as Diotima puts it, a clear image of it 'reaches our sight'. That is, beauty, in at least some of its forms, is *visible*. This feature of 'incandescence' allows us to literally see that certain things are good or valuable. The beauty of some works of art – namely, works of visual art – is incandescent in something like this way. Stephen Halliwell's contribution turns to Plato's conception of such art and to visual *mimesis* more widely. Plato's disparagement of naturalistic mimesis in *Republic X* has been well advertised in the scholarly literature. Indeed, Ernst Gombrich commented that this text (and particularly the 'mirror analogy' at X.596d–e) has 'haunted the philosophy of art ever since'. The tendency to focus exclusively on this text has, Halliwell argues, encouraged too reductive and simplified accounts of Plato's attitude to the visual arts.

Taking a broader – and wholly original – view drawing on the *Cratylus* and *Sophist* as well as other passages in the *Republic*, Halliwell reveals that Plato's account is more exploratory and fluid than often appreciated and moves well beyond the 'mirror theory' of mimetic art standardly attributed to him. Visual mimesis for Plato, Halliwell shows, is less a matter of passively registering appearances than of actively interpreting and evaluating them. Likewise, *beauty* in the visual arts is something more than 'optically definable or apprehensible accuracy'. Rather, such works – and their distinctive beauty – are expressive as well as mimetic, and what is expressed is ineliminably evaluative: it embodies and conveys ethical value. The received view of Plato's conception of visual art – drawn largely from *Republic X* alone – presents him as insensitive to its expressive and interpretive possibilities, but Halliwell offers a compelling corrective. He achieves this in part by signalling the satirical and provocative character of *Republic X*, inviting the reader to regard it as (almost) parodic. Most importantly, however, Halliwell directs our attention to the very different proposals Plato offers elsewhere – proposals which acknowledge

the role of skilful selection and interpretation in the creation of visual works of art and the ways in which this process is guided by the central values of 'ethical character, idealization, invention and beauty'. Against the standard view, Halliwell's Plato offers a conception of visual art that is both nuanced and surprisingly modern. Above all, it is wholly cognizant that the value of art extends far beyond the simple task of mirroring nature.

A third artform at stake in Plato's dialogues is music, and here too a central issue is whether and how art contributes to our wider concerns with epistemic and ethical value. Jessica Moss's 'Art and Ethical Perspective: Notes on the *Kalon* in Plato's *Laws*' investigates Plato's evaluation of the nature and function of music as reflected in this dialogue's proposed legislation. Like the *Republic*'s better-known critique of poetry, the critique of music found in the *Laws* both warns against the psychological dangers of harmful art and prescribes beneficial art as indispensable to moral education. The *Laws*, however, gives a more straightforward and explicit account than does the *Republic* of what makes art harmful or beneficial: the value of a work depends on its effects on our desires for *pleasure*. Moss observes several important differences between the role of pleasure in the psychological theory of the *Laws* and of the *Republic*. Nonetheless, she argues, the *Laws*' critique of art illuminates questions that have long vexed the interpretation of the *Republic* and offers us particular insight into Plato's understanding of how and why habituation to beautiful forms – the task of aesthetic education – can bring one to occupy the proper ethical perspective and to 'take pleasure in what is truly *kalon* in human affairs'.

Music takes a lead role in this enterprise, not least because musical forms – while intimately mirroring various states of the soul – are subject to direct and specific regulation by the composer and performer and so present a pleasing model of harmony and virtue – a model in which 'everything fits – unmixed with the accidents and contingencies of ordinary life.' Moss's analysis of the *Laws*'s argument thus provides an apt conclusion to this volume's study of Plato on art and beauty, pointing us as it does towards that ideal of formal perfection which is so often considered the hallmark of artistry of all kinds. While 'a beautiful soul can exist in an ugly body,' Moss observes, 'in art, the knowledgeable artists can make every aspect *kalon*'. To make every aspect of our lives *kalon* – to make of our own lives something *like* a beautiful work of art – is indeed a grand ideal, and one which is less often associated with Plato than with his modern critics. But it is perhaps also an ideal which was, for Plato, never far from view.

Part I

Understanding Plato's Quarrel

1

From *The Fire and the Sun: Why Plato Banished the Artists*

Iris Murdoch

To begin with, of course, Plato did not banish all the artists or always suggest banishing any. In a memorable passage in the *Republic* (III.398a) he says that should a dramatic poet attempt to visit the ideal state he would be politely escorted to the border. Elsewhere Plato is less polite, and in the *Laws* proposes a meticulous system of censorship. Scattered throughout his work, from the beginning to the end, there are harsh criticisms, and indeed sneers, directed against practitioners of the arts. This attitude is puzzling and seems to demand an explanation. However, what sounds like an interesting question may merit an uninteresting answer; and there are some fairly obvious answers to the question why Plato was so hostile to art. He speaks in the *Republic* of 'an old quarrel between philosophy and poetry' (X.607b). The poets had existed, as prophets and sages, long before the emergence of philosophers, and were the traditional purveyors of theological and cosmological information. Herodotus (ii.53) tells us that the Greeks knew little about the gods before Homer and Hesiod taught them; and Heraclitus (fr. 57) attacks Hesiod, whom he calls 'the teacher of most men,' as a rival authority. Also of course any political theorist who is particularly concerned about social stability (as Plato, like Hobbes, had good reason to be) is likely to consider the uses of censorship. Artists are meddlers, independent and irresponsible critics; literary genres affect societies (*Rep.* IV.424c) and new styles of architecture bring changes of heart. A further and related possibility is that Plato simply did not value art (not all philosophers do); he sometimes calls it 'play', and if he thought it, however dangerous, essentially trivial, he would have less hesitation in harassing it. Certainly the Greeks in general lacked our reverential conception of 'fine art', for which there is no separate term in Greek, the word *technē* covering art, craft, and skill.

However, after such considerations one is still uneasy. We, or at any rate we until recently, have tended to regard art as a great spiritual treasury. Why did Plato, who had before him some of the best art ever created, think otherwise? He was impressed by the way in which artists can produce what they cannot account for (perhaps this suggested certain ideas to him), and

although he sometimes, for instance in the *Apology* and the *Ion*, holds this against them, he does not always do so. He speaks more than once of the artist's inspiration as a kind of divine or holy madness from which we may receive great blessings and without which there is no good poetry (*Phdr.* 244–5). Technique alone will not make a poet. Poets may intuitively understand things of the greatest importance (*Laws* 628a), those who succeed without conscious thought are divinely gifted (*Meno* 99d). And although, as the jokes in the *Protagoras* suggest, Plato thought poorly of literary critics ('Arguments about poetry remind me of provincial drinking parties' (347c)), he was obviously familiar with the most cultivated and even minute discussions of taste and literary evaluation. (Soup should be served with a wooden, not a golden, ladle (*H. Ma.* 291a).) He even dubiously allows (*Rep.* X.607d) that a defence of poetry might one day be made (as indeed it was by Aristotle) by a poetry-lover who was not a poet. Yet although Plato gives to beauty a crucial role in his philosophy, he practically defines it so as to exclude art, and constantly and emphatically accuses artists of moral weakness or even baseness. One is tempted to look for deeper reasons for such an attitude; and in doing so to try (like Plotinus and Schopenhauer) to uncover, in spite of Plato, some more exalted Platonic aesthetic in the dialogues. One might also ask the not uninteresting question whether Plato may not have been in some ways right to be so suspicious of art.

Plato pictures human life as a pilgrimage from appearance to reality. The intelligence, seeking satisfaction, moves from uncritical acceptance of sense experience and of conduct, to a more sophisticated and morally enlightened understanding. How this happens and what it means is explained by the Theory of Forms. Aristotle (*Met.* 987a–b) represents the theory as having a double origin – in Socrates' search for moral definitions, and in Plato's early Heraclitean beliefs. He also puts this in terms of the 'one over many' argument and the 'argument from the sciences' (990b). How is it that many different things can share a common quality? How is it that although *sensa* are in a flux we can have *knowledge*, as opposed to mere opinion or belief? Further: what is virtue, how can we learn it and know it? The postulation of the Forms (Ideas) as changeless eternal non-sensible objects for the seeking mind was designed to answer these questions. It is characteristic of human reason to seek unity in multiplicity (*Phdr.* 249b). There must be things single and steady there for us to know, which are separate from the multifarious and shifting world of 'becoming'. These steady entities are guarantors equally of the unity and objectivity of morals and the reliability of knowledge. *Republic* X.596a tells us that there are Forms for all groups of things which have the same name; however, Plato only gradually interprets this large assertion. The earliest dialogues pose the problem of the one and the many in the guise of attempted definitions of moral qualities (courage, piety, temperance), and the first Forms to which we are introduced are moral ones, although very general non-moral Forms such as 'size' appear

in the *Phaedo*. Later, mathematical and 'logical' Forms make their appearance, and at different times Forms of *sensa* are also admitted. The Form of Beauty is celebrated in the *Symposium* and the *Phaedrus*, and the Form of the Good appears in the *Republic* as an enlightening and creative first principle. (The light of the Good makes knowledge possible and also life.) In the *Phaedrus* and the *Phaedo* the Forms become part of an argument for the immortality of the soul. We are aware of the Forms, and so are able to enjoy discourse and knowledge, because our souls were before birth in a place where they were clearly *seen*: the doctrine of recollection or *anamnēsis*. The incarnate soul tends to forget its vision, but can be reminded by suitable training or prompting. (The slave in the *Meno* is able to solve the geometrical problem.) The relation between the single Form and its many particulars or instances is explained variously, and never entirely satisfactorily, by metaphors of participation and imitation. On the whole, the early dialogues speak of a 'shared nature', and the later ones of imperfect copies of perfect originals. The use of the Forms in the doctrine and argument of *anamnēsis* tends to impose a picture of entities entirely separated from the sensible world ('dwelling elsewhere') and this 'separation' is increasingly emphasized. (An aesthetic conception.) The pilgrimage which restores our knowledge of this real world is explained in the *Republic* by the images of the Sun and the quadripartite divided Line, and by the myth of the Cave (VII.514). The prisoners in the Cave are at first chained to face the back wall where all they can see are shadows, cast by a fire which is behind them, of themselves and of objects which are carried between them and the fire. Later they manage to turn round and see the fire and the objects which cast the shadows. Later still they escape from the Cave, see the outside world in the light of the sun, and finally the sun itself. The sun represents the Form of the Good in whose light the truth is seen; it reveals the world, hitherto invisible, and is also a source of life.

... These levels of awareness have (perhaps: Plato is not prepared to be too clear on this (VII.533e, 534a)) objects with different degrees of reality; and to these awarenesses, each with its characteristic mode of desire, correspond different parts of the soul. The lowest part of the soul is egoistic, irrational, and deluded, the central part is aggressive and ambitious, the highest part is rational and good and knows the truth which lies beyond all images and hypotheses. The just man and the just society are in harmony under the direction of reason and goodness. This rational harmony also gives to the (indestructible) lower levels their best possible satisfaction. Art and the artist are condemned by Plato to exhibit the lowest and most irrational kind of awareness, *eikasia*, a state of vague image-ridden illusion; in terms of the Cave myth this is the condition of the prisoners who face the back wall and see only shadows cast by the fire. Plato does not actually say that the artist is in a state of *eikasia*, but he clearly implies it, and indeed his whole criticism of art extends and illuminates the conception of the shadow-bound consciousness.

I shall look first at Plato's view of art, and later at his theory of beauty. His view of art is most fully expounded in Books III and X of the *Republic*. The poets mislead us by portraying the gods as undignified and immoral. We must not let Aeschylus or Homer tell us that a god caused Niobe's sufferings, or that Achilles, whose mother after all was a goddess, dragged Hector's body behind his chariot or slaughtered the Trojan captives beside the funeral pyre of Patroclus. Neither should we be led to picture the gods as laughing. Poets, and also writers of children's stories, should help us to respect religion, to admire good people, and to see that crime does not pay. Music and the theatre should encourage stoical calmness, not boisterous uncontrolled emotion. We are infected by playing or enjoying a bad role. Art can do cumulative psychological harm in this way. Simple harmonious design, in architecture or in furniture, the products of wholesome craftsmanship enjoyed from childhood onward, can do us good by promoting harmony in our minds; but art is always bad for us in so far as it is mimetic or imitative. Take the case of the painter painting the bed. God creates the original Form or Idea of bed. (This is a picturesque argument: Plato nowhere else suggests that God makes the Forms, which are eternal.) The carpenter makes the bed we sleep upon. The painter copies this bed from one point of view. He is thus at three removes from reality. He does not understand the bed, he does not measure it, he could not make it. He evades the conflict between the apparent and the real which stirs the mind toward philosophy. Art naively or wilfully accepts appearances instead of questioning them. Similarly a writer who portrays a doctor does not possess a doctor's skill but simply 'imitates doctors' talk'. Nevertheless, because of the charm of their work such people are wrongly taken for authorities, and simple folk believe them. Surely any serious man would rather produce real things, such as beds or political activity, than unreal things which are mere reflections of reality. Art or imitation may be dismissed as 'play', but when artists imitate what is bad they are adding to the sum of badness in the world; and it is easier to copy a bad man than a good man, because the bad man is various and entertaining and extreme, while the good man is quiet and always the same. Artists are interested in what is base and complex, not in what is simple and good. They induce the better part of the soul to 'relax its guard'. Thus images of wickedness and excess may lead even good people to indulge secretly through art feelings which they would be ashamed to entertain in real life. We enjoy cruel jokes and bad taste in the theatre, then behave boorishly at home. Art both expresses and gratifies the lowest part of the soul, and feeds and enlivens base emotions which ought to be left to wither.

...Some of the views developed in the *Republic* are given a trial run in the *Ion*, a dialogue regarded by scholars as very early; the earliest, according to Wilamowitz. Socrates questions Ion, a rhapsode (poetry-reciter), who specializes in Homer. Socrates wonders whether Ion's devotion to Homer is based upon skilled knowledge (*technē*) or whether it is merely intuitive or,

as Socrates politely puts it, divinely inspired. Ion lays claim to knowledge, but is dismayed when Socrates asks him what Homeric matters he is expert on. What, for instance, does he know of medicine, or sailing or weaving or chariot-racing, all of which Homer describes? Ion is forced to admit that here doctors, sailors, weavers, and charioteers are the best judges of Homer's adequacy. Is there then any Homeric subject on which Ion is really an expert? With unspeakable charm Ion at last says, yes, generalship, though he has not actually tried it of course: a conclusion which Socrates does not pursue beyond the length of a little sarcasm. Ion, though lightly handled by Socrates, is presented as both naive and something of a cynic, or sophist. He may not know much about chariots but he does know how to make an audience weep, and when he does so he laughs to himself as he thinks of his fee. Socrates finally consoles Ion by allowing that it must then be by divine inspiration (θεία μοίρα) that he discerns the merits of the great poet. Plato does not suggest in detail that Homer himself 'does not know what he is talking about', although he speaks in general terms of the poet as 'nimble, winged, and holy', and unable to write unless he is out of his senses. He confines his attack here to the secondary artist, the actor-critic; and in fact nowhere alleges that Homer made specific mistakes about chariots (and so on). In the *Ion* Homer is treated with reverence and described in a fine image as a great magnet which conveys magnetic properties to what it touches. Through this virtue the silly Ion is able to magnetize his clients. The question is raised, however, of whether or how artists and their critics need to possess genuine expert knowledge; and it is indeed fair to ask a critic, with what sort of expertise does he judge a poet to be great? Ion, looking for something to be expert on, might more fruitfully have answered: a general knowledge of human life, together of course with a technical knowledge of poetry. But Plato does not allow him to pursue this reasonable line. The humane judgement of the experienced literary man is excluded from consideration by Socrates' sharp distinction between technical knowledge and 'divine intuition'. The genius of the poet is left unanalysed under the heading of madness, and the ambiguous equation 'insanity–senseless intuition–divine insight' is left unresolved. It is significant that these questions, this distinction and equation, and the portrait of the artist as a sophist, make their appearance so early in Plato's work. Shelley translated this elegant and amusing dialogue. *He* did not mind its implications.

...It may be said that Plato is a puritan and this is a puritanical aesthetic. Plato is of course a puritan; and doubtless had mixed feelings about the great artist inside himself. There is in all his work, and not only in the later dialogues, a recurring tone of sometimes almost vehement rejection of the joys of this world. Human life is not μέγα τι, anything much (*Rep.* VI.486a). The flesh is mortal trash (*Smp.* 211e). We are shadows (*Meno* 100a), chattels of the gods (*Phd.* 62b). Of course the Greeks in general always took a fairly grim view of the human situation, and the Pythagoreans regarded the body as a

prison. But Plato's own austere observations have an unmistakably personal note. This is most evident of course in the *Laws* where we are told that men are sheep, slaves, puppets, scarcely real, possessions of the gods, lucky to be their toys. Human affairs are not serious, though they have to be taken seriously. We exist for the cosmos, not the cosmos for us (644b, 713d, 803b–c, 804b, 902b, 903c). ('You don't think much of men', says Megillus. 'Sorry, I was thinking about God', says the Athenian.) To be happy men must be abject (meek, lowly) before God (716a). E. R. Dodds comments upon this un-Greek use of the word *ταπεινός*, usually a term of abuse (1951, 215). Of course, by the time he wrote the *Laws* Plato had plenty of reasons for thinking poorly of mankind; but the tone suggests a religious attitude rather than a resentful one. God, not man, is the measure of all things (716b).

It can certainly be argued that only simple, even naive, forms of art can be unambiguous companions of a thoroughly sober life. Like all puritans Plato hates the theatre. (And we can understand his feelings from as near to home as Mansfield Park.) The theatre is the great home of vulgarity: coarse buffoonery, histrionic emotion, slanderous ridicule such as Aristophanes directed against Socrates. Good taste is outraged by trendy showmanship, horrible naturalistic sound effects, and the raucous participation of the audience (*Rep.* III.396b, 397a; *Laws* 670a, 700e). We are told in the *Philebus* (48) that the play-goer experiences impure emotion, *φθόνος*, spiteful pleasure, and delights in *τὸ γελοῖον*, the ludicrous, which is a kind of vice, in direct opposition to the Delphic precept; and such impure pleasure is characteristic not only of the theatre but of 'the whole tragedy and comedy of life' (50b). In the *Laws* too (656b) our easy-going amusement in the theatre is compared to the tolerance of a man who only playfully censures the habits of wicked people amongst whom he lives. The serious and the absurd have to be learnt together; but ludicrous theatrical buffoonery is fit only for foreigners and slaves: virtue is not comic (816e). Words lead to deeds and we ought not to brutalize our minds by abusing and mocking other people (935a). After the banishment of the dramatic poet in the *Republic* we are urged to be content with 'the more austere and less amusing writer who would imitate the speech of the decent man' (III.398b). Any gross or grotesque mockery would be regarded as a form of falsehood; and although Plato's work is full of jokes (even bafflingly so), one may sometimes get the impression that the good man (like the gods) never laughs. Plato is of course right in general (and his words are well worth our attention today) about the cheapening and brutalizing effect of an atmosphere where everything can be ridiculed. The question is also worth asking: what may I properly laugh at, even in my private thought?

...The other aspect of the puritanical Plato is the passionate Plato. He commends homosexual love but says that it should be chaste, and in the *Laws* forbids homosexual practices (*Laws* 836–7, 636c; *Smp.* 210; *Phdr.* 256c). He doubtless had his own experience of the divided soul. One may recall

the sufferings of the bad horse in the *Phaedrus* (254e) and the extreme and shameful pleasures mentioned in the *Philebus* (66a) which are ugly and ridiculous and kept hidden in the hours of darkness. Of course much bad art deliberately and much good art incidentally is in league with lower manifestations of erotic love; therefore art must be purged. What art would the aesthetic of the *Philebus* allow the good state to possess? Plato's dictum that some colours and mathematical figures, imagined or bodied forth in objects (51c), are absolutely beautiful and sources of pure pleasure is not on the face of it very clear. His words suggest entities too abstract or too simple to be able to hold the attention in the way usually associated with the experience of beauty. His frequent examples elsewhere may show us what he had in mind. Simple wholesome folk melodies would be acceptable, and certain straightforward kinds of military music. Plato was interested in music and in the Pythagorean discovery that the intervals of the scale could be expressed numerically. He often uses musical metaphors, and treats audible harmony as an edifying aspect of cosmic order (*Ti.* 47e). He takes the symbolic role of music for granted (for instance at *Republic* III.400). However, perhaps because of the nature of Greek music, or because he feared its 'unlimited' expressive powers, he never seems to have been tempted to raise its status by regarding it as a branch of mathematics. (Other more recent censors have paid discriminating tribute to the importance of our emotional response to music, even while favouring this art because it seems void of ideas.) The pure colours envisaged by Plato would be wedded to simple mathematical patterns (that the forms would not be elaborate is made clear at 51c), such as could appear on pottery, or on buildings which could themselves be plainly designed objects of beauty, or upon the embroideries of which Plato more than once speaks. Above all the spirit of the work must be modest and unpretentious. The paintings of (for instance) Mondrian and Ben Nicholson, which might be thought of as meeting his requirements, would I think be regarded by Plato as histrionic and dangerously sophisticated. All representation would of course be barred. In general, folk art and simple handicrafts would express the aesthetic satisfactions of his ideal people. The didactic poetry permitted by the *Republic* and the *Laws* ('hymns to the gods and praises of good men') would be justified by its effective operation upon the soul, although it might no doubt promote a pleasure less than pure.

We may pause here for a moment and compare Plato's views, as expressed in the *Philebus*, with those of two other great puritans, Tolstoy and Kant. Plato's fear of art, and theirs too, is to some extent a fear of pleasure. For Tolstoy, art should be defined not through the pleasure it may give, but through the purpose it may serve. Beauty is connected with pleasure, art is properly connected with religion, its function being to communicate the highest religious perceptions of the age. The kind of art which Tolstoy particularly disliked (and which he freely criticized by the 'can't make head or tail of this stuff' method), the inward-looking art-fostered art of the later

Romantics (Baudelaire, Mallarmé, Verlaine), is deliberately obscure and 'the feelings which the poet transmits are evil'. Tolstoy also condemned Shakespeare for lack of moral clarity. Elaborate art tends to be a kind of lying. Tolstoy would agree with *Philebus* 52d: intensity and bulk are not connected with truth. Academic aesthetic theories are pernicious because they present art as some sort of complex lofty mystery. But there is no mystery. Purity, simplicity, truthfulness, and the absence of pretence or pretention are the marks of sound art, and such art is universally understood, as are simple folk tales and moral stories. Ordinary people know instinctively that art becomes degraded unless it is kept simple. By these criteria Tolstoy was quite prepared to dismiss almost all his own work as bad. Tolstoy particularly detested opera. Plato would have detested it too. Complex or 'grand' art affects us in ways we do not understand, and even the artist has no insight into his own activity, as Socrates says with sympathetic interest in the *Apology* and airy ridicule in the *Ion*.

... Plato distinguishes between very simple permissible beauty in art, and beauty in nature which, as I shall explain, he regards as very important. Kant admits pure beauty in nature only at levels of satisfaction in simple forms, such as leaves and flowers. Beauty in nature is always in danger of becoming merely charming: the song of the nightingale conjures up the 'dear little bird', and is spoilt for us if we are then told that it is produced by a boy hidden in the grove. The wilder aspects of nature have for him a higher role to play. In distinguishing the sublime from the beautiful, Kant gears his whole machine to the attempt to keep the claims of the spiritual world quite separate from the simpler more egoistic and undemanding enjoyment of beauty. We apprehend beauty and rest in the contemplation thereof when sense experience inspires the imagination to formulate some unique non-conceptual pattern. The sublime, on the other hand, is a disturbing feeling (which we regard as an attribute of its cause) which arises in us when reason's authoritative demand for intelligible unity is defeated by the formless vastness or the power of nature; its aspect as 'unlimited', to use the language of the *Philebus*: the starry heavens, mountains, waterfalls, the sea. It is a kind of aesthetic and yet moral feeling of mixed pleasure and pain, akin to the respect which the moral law inspires: pain at reason's defeat, but pleasure at our responding sense of reason's dignity and spiritual value. The sublime stirs and awakens our spiritual nature. In this experience we are not led into theoretical studies of natural form, but receive a shock from nature's lack of form, and our inspiring pleasure is a pure product of our moral faculty. The sublime, not the beautiful, connects us through purified emotion with the highest good and is an active agent of enlightenment. This metaphysical separation, insisted on by Kant, is inimical both to commonsense egoism (which rejects the sublime or treats it as beautiful) and to Hegelian idealism (which demands the reduction of the two areas to intelligible unity).

Thus for instance Bosanquet: 'With Turner and Ruskin before us we do not comprehend the aesthetic perception to which, as to Kant, the stormy sea was simply horrible' (1904, chapter X). This evades Kant's whole point; and the Romantic movement shockingly cheated him in taking over the sublime. Kant is attempting, as Plato is, clearly and finally to separate unresting spiritual aspiration from a restful satisfaction in the pleasing forms of art or nature.

...Plato temperamentally resembles Kant in combining a great sense of human possibility with a great sense of human worthlessness. Kant is concerned both with setting limits to reason, and with increasing our confidence in reason within those limits. Though he knows how passionate and how bad we are, Kant is a moral democrat expecting every rational being to be able to do his duty. Plato, on the other hand, is a moral aristocrat, and in this respect a puritan of a different type, who regards most of us as pretty irrevocably plunged in illusion. Plato (except mythically in the *Timaeus*) sets no theoretical limits to reason, but the vast distance which he establishes between the good and the bad makes him as alien to Hegel as Kant is. Plato is accused of moral 'intellectualism', the view that we are saved not by ordinary morality but somehow by thinking. Let us now look more closely at what Plato considered thinking to be like. He was concerned throughout with how people can change their lives so as to become good. The best, though not the only, method for this change is dialectic, that is, philosophy regarded as a spiritual discipline. The aim of Socrates was to prove to people that they were ignorant, thus administering an intellectual and moral shock. In the *Sophist* (230c), dialectic is described as a purgation of the soul by ἔλεγχος, argument, refutation, cross-questioning; and in the *Phaedo* true philosophers are said to 'practise dying' (67e). Philosophy is a training for death, when the soul will exist without the body. It attempts by argument and the meticulous pursuit of truth to detach the soul from material and egoistic goals and enliven its spiritual faculty, which is intelligent and akin to the good. Now what exactly is philosophy? Some might say that philosophy is certain arguments in certain books, but for Plato (as indeed for many present-day philosophers) philosophy is essentially talk. *Viva voce* philosophical discussion (the ψιλοὶ λόγοι of *Theaetetus* 165a) is the purest human activity and the best vehicle of truth. Plato wrote with misgivings, because he knew that truth must live in present consciousness and cannot live anywhere else.

...Writing, invented by the god who invented numbers and games, so sadly remote from reality, may be viewed as a case of an even more general Platonic problem. Here we must look for a moment first at the doctrine of *anamnēsis* (recollection), and then at the adventures and misadventures of the Theory of Forms. Plato asks the question, which so many philosophers have asked since (Hume and Kant asked it with passion): how do we seem to know so much upon the basis of so little? We know about perfect goodness

and the slave in the *Meno* knows geometry because the soul was once separate from the body (and will presumably be so again) and saw these things clearly for itself. Learning is recollection (*Phd.* 91e). Now when incarnate it is confused by ordinary sense perception, but can gain some refreshment from the contemplation of eternal objects to which it is akin and which it feels prompted to rediscover; although of course (*Phd.* 66) such contemplation must always be imperfect so long as the soul and the body remain together.

...The world rediscovered in *anamnēsis* is the world of Forms, and the Forms have in Plato's thought a history which is both complex and obscure. The most beautiful vision of the Forms as objects of veneration and love is given to us in the *Phaedrus* (250) where (in a myth) they are referred to as 'realities' or 'entities' (ὄντα), quasi-things which can be seen as passing in procession. They are seen 'by the soul alone' when it seeks 'by itself' (*Phd.* 66d, 79d), and are therefore associated with the hope of the soul's immortality. The Form of Beauty shines forth by and in itself, singular and eternal, whereas the Forms 'with us' are infected and fallen 'trash' (*Smp.* 211). The 'lovers of sights and sounds', including connoisseurs of art, at *Republic* V.476 are 'dreaming' because they take a resemblance for a reality. One does not have to read far in Plato to see that the Aristotelian explanation of the origin of the Theory of Forms in terms of 'logic' is only part of the picture. From the start the need for the Forms in Plato's mind is a moral need. The theory expresses a certainty that goodness is something indubitably real, unitary, and (somehow) simple, not fully expressed in the sensible world, therefore living elsewhere. The eloquence and power of Plato's evocation may in itself persuade us, in particular contexts, that we understand, but of course it is never very easy to see what the Forms are supposed to be, since in speaking of them Plato moves continually between ontology, logic, and religious myth. F.M. Cornford argues that when the theory first appears 'the process of differentiating concepts from souls has not yet gone very far in Plato's mind' (1957, §132). On this view the Form was originally conceived as a piece of soul-stuff or a daemonic group-soul. It is scarcely possible to develop any such idea with precision; Plato speaks of the Forms with a remarkable combination of absolute confidence and careful ambiguity. In so far as the historical Socrates was interested in studying moral concepts it might seem that the first Forms were definitions or (in the modern sense) universals. Yet the tendency to reify them also begins early. The Form represents the *definiendum* as it is 'in itself' (αὐτὸ καθ' αὐτό); and *Protagoras* 330c even tells us that Justice is just. The early Forms also 'participate' in particulars and thus give them definition and some degree of reality. But from the *Phaedo* onward Plato develops, especially in moral and religious contexts, a picture of the Forms as changeless and eternal and *separate* objects of spiritual vision known by direct acquaintance rather than through the use of language (propositions). The mediocre life is a life of illusion.

...The *Sophist* (where Theaetetus is questioned by a visiting follower of Parmenides and Zeno) returns to the Forms and picks up problems left unsolved in the *Parmenides* and the *Theaetetus*. What is knowledge? What are negation and falsehood? How is it that the forms are essential to thought? How does Being enter Becoming, how can it? Plato also makes an important move in allowing (248) that what knows (soul, ψύχη) must be as real as what is known (Forms). This leaves the way open for the *Timaeus* and for the much enhanced role of ψύχη in that dialogue and in the *Laws*, where real truth-knowing Soul appears as a mediator between changeless being and the world of sense, whose status as real is from now on quietly upgraded. Being must accommodate both motion and rest; and Plato here concedes the necessity of a theory of motion as part of a theory of the real, and thus comes closer to the scientific interests of his predecessors, interests which he himself pursues in the *Timaeus*. The formal pretext of the *Sophist* is the use of the dialectical method of 'division' to define 'sophist'. This raises questions about kinds of imitation and fake, then about the more general problem of negation, where in the course of a complex discussion the 'Eleatic stranger' criticizes views held by 'the Friends of the Forms' (probably Plato's own earlier doctrine). How can we say what is not? How are false judgements meaningful, how can there be false opinions, imitations, images, pictures, deceptions, copies, products of mimesis? These are the stock-in-trade of the sophist, who is at last defended as an ironical, ignorant, fantastical image-maker who attempts to escape censure by denying the existence of falsehood and the validity of reason. He runs away into the darkness of not-being and feels his way about by practice (254a). The dialogue explains that if we are to see how false judgements are significant we must avoid the old Eleatic confrontations of absolute being with absolute not-being. (The stranger admits to being a bit of a parricide where Father Parmenides is concerned.) Theaetetus is led to agree that not-being does seem to be rather interwoven with being (240c), and the stranger explains that not-being is not the opposite of being, but that part of being which is different or other (257–8). When we deny that something is X, we are not denying that it is, but asserting that it is other. This is possible because the world is neither a dense unity nor an inapprehensible flux, but an orderly network of samenesses and differences (249). This network (συμπλοκή) makes possible falsehood and deception, and also truth and language. What are thus systematically connected are the Forms, here figuring as classes. 'We derive significant speech from the inter-weaving of the Forms' (259e). This inter-weaving depends upon the pervasive presence of certain 'great kinds', very general structural concepts or logical features: existence, same, different, rest, motion. These are compared to vowels which join other letters together in a limited number of permissible groupings (253a). Reality is such that some things are compatible, others incompatible, some arrangements are possible, others impossible (253c).

...What the *Sophist* at last makes clear is that the Form system is available to us only in discourse. Thinking is inner speech (263e, 264a, and *Tht.* 190a). (Plato's argument does not in fact depend on this identification which is rightly denied by Wittgenstein, (1968, §217; see also 1975, 4.002).) This is where truth and knowledge live, and plausibility and falsehood too. Because reality is thus systematic (because of the orderly intrusion of not-being into being), writing and imitation and forgery and art and sophistry are possible, and we are able meaningfully and plausibly to say what is not the case: to fantasize, speculate, tell lies, and write stories. In such a world the sophist, as charlatan and liar, is a natural phenomenon, since for truth to exist falsehood must be able to exist too. Moreover, if knowledge lives at the level of discourse we cannot (as far as the *Sophist* is concerned), in the ultimate perhaps mystical (quasi-aesthetic) sense envisaged earlier, know the Forms. The *Phaedo* speaks of an escape from the body and even the *Theaetetus* (176b) tells us to flee to the gods. The *Sophist* discusses knowledge without insisting upon such removals. The image of knowledge as direct acquaintance, as seeing with the mind's eye (although Plato does use it again later) here gives way to the conception of knowledge as use of propositions and familiarity with structure. Truth lies in discourse not in visions; so neither the little individual particulars (whose unknowability the *Theaetetus* ended by admitting) nor the Forms as separated supersensible individuals, are directly accessible to the mind. The sophist is pictured at 254a as being in the Cave. But the imagery of spiritual progress is absent, and the dialogue makes a less strong claim for knowledge than that rejected in the *Theaetetus* (that knowledge is perception) or put forward in the *Republic* (that it is, somehow, being face to face with the Forms).

It is now perhaps possible to see deeper reasons for Plato's hostility to writing and to the practice of imitation, including mimetic art. One is struck by the similarity of the venomous description of the sophist to the descriptions of the artist which are found elsewhere. If falsehood has to be possible then a whole art of deceiving can exist (264d). The ideal of knowledge is to see face to face, not (*eikasia*) in a glass darkly. However, truth involves speech and thought is mental speech, so thought is already symbolism rather than perception: a necessary evil. (On the ambiguity of necessary evils, and the problems of the *Sophist* generally, see Jacques Derrida's brilliant essay *La Pharmacie de Platon*.) The best we can hope for is the flash of ultra-verbal understanding which may occur in live philosophical discussion when careful informed trained speech has set the scene (*Seventh Letter* 341c). Language itself, spoken, is already bad enough. Writing and mimetic art are the introduction of further symbols and discursive *logoi* or quasi-*logoi* which wantonly make a poor situation even worse and lead the mind away in the wrong direction. (Derrida comments on Plato's frequent use of the word *φάρμακον*, drug, to mean what can kill or cure. Writing is described as a *φάρμακον* at *Phaedrus* 275a.) The sophist is odious because he plays with a disability

which is serious, glories in image-making without knowledge, and, living in a world of fictions, blurs the distinction between true and false (260d). He is a subjectivist, a relativist, and a cynic. In the process of division which leads to the definition of the sophist, even the artist-copyist is allotted a slightly higher place in the realm of *eikasia*, the shadow world of the Cave. The sophist is described as an εἰρωνικός μιμητής, an ironical imitator. (εἰρωνικός is sometimes translated 'insincere', but 'ironical' best conveys the idea of cautious intelligent doubletalk which is required here.) Ironical, as opposed to naive, imitators have been disturbed by philosophy and (286a) through experiences of the hurly-burly of argument uneasily suspect that they are really ignorant of what they publicly profess to understand. We may recall here the ἀδολεσχίας καὶ μετεωρολογίας φύσεως πέρι, the discussion and lofty speculation about the nature of things, mentioned in the *Phaedrus* (269e), of which all great art stands in need, and which Pericles was so lucky to pick up a smattering of from Anaxagoras. We are also reminded of the description of the artist in Book X of the *Republic* (599c) as a false plausible know-all who can 'imitate doctors' talk'. The artist begins indeed to look like a special sort of sophist; and not the least of his crimes is that he directs our attention to particulars which he presents as intuitively knowable, whereas concerning their knowability philosophy has grave and weighty doubts. Art undoes the work of philosophy by deliberately fusing knowledge by acquaintance and knowledge by description.

The argument so far has been about art, and it is time now to talk about beauty, to which Plato gives by contrast such an important role. Beauty as a spiritual agent, in Plato, excludes art. Plato's work is, as I said, largely concerned with ways to salvation. We may speak of a (democratic) 'way of justice' which, without necessarily leading to true enlightenment, is open to anyone who is able to harmonize the different levels of his soul moderately well under the general guidance of reason. The characteristic desires of each level would not be eliminated, but would in fact under rational leadership achieve their best general satisfaction. The baser part is really happier if rationally controlled. This reasonable egoism would be accessible to the lower orders in the *Republic*. Plato certainly thought that few could be 'saved', but allowed that many might lead a just life at their own spiritual level. (The doubts raised at the end of Book IX of the *Republic* concern surely the existence of the ideal state as a real state, and not any dubiety about its far more important efficacy as an allegory of the soul.) The *Laws* presents a somewhat grimmer picture of the status of the ordinary just man. Plato remarks that most people want power not virtue (687c) and must be trained by pleasure and pain to prefer justice. (Art can help here.) Of course justice is in fact pleasanter as well as better than injustice, but even if it were not it would be expedient to say that it was (653, 663). Political systems make men good or bad. The way of justice is subservient to two higher ways, which I shall call 'the way of *Eros*', and 'the way of *Cosmos*'. In so far as

justice involves a harmony of desires, and if all desires are (as Plato tells us at *Symposium* 205e) for the good in the guise of the beautiful, then the way of justice could lead into higher ways, and even the humblest citizen could suffer a divine disturbance. In the *Republic*, although 'the beautiful' is mentioned (for instance at V.476b), mathematical studies rather than science or love of beauty introduce us to the highest wisdom; and although mathematics too is 'beautiful' this is not yet emphasized.

In his conception of the beautiful Plato gives to sexual love and transformed sexual energy a central place in his philosophy. Sexual love (Aphrodite) as cosmic power had already appeared in Presocratic thought in the doctrines of Empedocles (fr. 17). Plato's *Eros* is a principle which connects the commonest human desire to the highest morality and to the pattern of divine creativity in the universe. Socrates more than once claims to be an expert on love (*Smp.* 177e, 212b; *Phdr.* 257a). In spite of Plato's repeated declaration that philosophers should stay chaste and his requirement that the soul must try to escape from the body, it is the whole *Eros* that concerns him, and not just some passionless distillation. The *Eros* described to Socrates by Diotima in the *Symposium* is not a god but a daemon, a mediating spirit of need and desire, the mixed-up child of Poverty and Plenty. He is poor and homeless, a sort of magician and sophist, always scheming after what is good and beautiful, neither wise nor foolish but a lover of wisdom. We desire what we lack. (Gods do not love wisdom since they possess it.) This *Eros*, who is lover not beloved, is the ambiguous spiritual mediator and moving spirit of mankind. *Eros* is the desire for good and joy which is active at all levels in the soul and through which we are able to turn toward reality. This is the fundamental force which can release the prisoners and draw them toward the higher satisfactions of light and freedom. It is also the force which finds expression in the unbridled appetites of the tyrant (who is described in Books VIII–IX of the *Republic*). There is a limited amount of soul-energy (*Rep.* V.458d), so, for better or worse, one desire will weaken another. *Eros* is a form of the desire for immortality, for perpetual possession of the good, whatever we may take the good to be. No man errs willingly; only the good is always desired as genuine (*Rep.* VI.505d), and indeed only the good is desired. This desire takes the form of a yearning to create in and through beauty (τόκος ἐν καλῷ, *Smp.* 206b), which may appear as sexual love (*Laws* 721b) or love of fame (the poets have immortal children) or love of wisdom. (These are the three levels of desire explored in the *Republic*. Desire must be purified at all levels.) Diotima goes on to tell Socrates of these erotica into which even he may be initiated, although the true mysteries lie beyond. The initiate is not to rest content with beauty in one embodiment, but to be drawn onward from physical to moral beauty, to the beauty of laws and *mores* and to all science and learning and thus to escape 'the mean slavery of the particular case'. Carnal love teaches that what we want is always 'beyond', and it gives us an energy which can be transformed into creative virtue. When a

man has thus directed his thoughts and desires toward beauty of the mind and spirit he will suddenly receive the vision, which comes by grace, *θεία μύρις*, of the Form of Beauty itself, absolute and untainted and pure, *αὐτὸ καθ' αὐτὸ μεθ' αὐτοῦ μονοειδὲς ἀει ὄν*.

...The *Symposium* and the *Phaedrus* are two of the great erotic texts of literature. The *Phaedrus* describes spiritual love in the most bizarre and intense physical terms. (How the soul grows its wings, 251.) Plato is here too in softened mood toward poetry, since he allows that the good poet is a divinely inspired madman. However the highest form of divine madness is love of beauty, that is, falling in love (249d). We love beauty because our soul remembers having seen it when before birth it saw the Forms unveiled: 'perfect and simple and happy visions which we saw in the pure light, being ourselves pure' (250c). But when the soul becomes incarnate it partially forgets, and is but confusedly reminded when it sees the earthly copies of the Forms. The copies of wisdom, justice, temperance are usually obscure to the mind of the incarnate soul, but beauty in its instances is most clearly seen (*ἐκφανέστατον*), most moving, most reminiscent of the vision of it in heavenly purity. What a frenzy of love wisdom would arouse if it could be looked at with such clarity. Plato continues his exposition with the image of the soul as a charioteer with a good and a bad horse. As they approach the beloved the bad lustful horse rushes forward and has to be savagely restrained while the good horse is obedient and modest. Beauty shows itself to the best part of the soul as something to be desired yet respected, adored yet not possessed. Absolute beauty, as the soul now recalls it, is attended by chastity. Love prompts *anamnēsis* and the good comes to us in the guise of the beautiful, as we are also told in the *Philebus*.

This account, half mythical, half metaphysical, graphically suggests both the beginning and the end of the awakening process. We restlessly seek various 'goods' which fail to satisfy. Virtue in general may not attract us, but beauty presents spiritual values in a more accessible and attractive form. The beautiful in nature (and we would wish to add in art) demands and rewards attention to something grasped as entirely external and indifferent to the greedy ego. We cannot acquire and assimilate the beautiful (as Kant too explains): it is in this instructive sense transcendent, and may provide our first and possibly our most persisting image (experience) of transcendence. 'Falling in love', a violent process which Plato more than once vividly describes (love is abnegation, abjection, slavery) is for many people the most extraordinary and most revealing experience of their lives, whereby the centre of significance is suddenly ripped out of the self, and the dreamy ego is shocked into awareness of an entirely separate reality. Love in this form may be a somewhat ambiguous instructor. Plato has admitted that *Eros* is a bit of a sophist. The desire of the sturdy ego (the bad horse) to dominate and possess the beloved, rather than to serve and adore him, may be overwhelmingly strong. We want to de-realize the other, devour and absorb

him, subject him to the mechanism of our own fantasy. But a love which, still loving, comes to respect the beloved and (in Kantian language again) treat him as an end not as a means, may be the most enlightening love of all. Plato's insistence that (homosexual) love should be chaste may be read literally, but also as an image of the transcendent and indomitable nature of beauty. That chaste love teaches is indeed a way of putting the general moral point of the erotic dialogues. Plato commends orderly married love in the *Laws*, and announces equality of the sexes. But family life did not touch his imagination and he does not suggest that here essentially unselfishness is to be learnt: a fact which has earned him the hostility of some critics. The metaphysical contention which is so passionately enveloped in the erotic myths is to the effect that a sense of beauty diminishes greed and egoism and directs the energy of the soul in the direction of the real and the good. In so far as this contention is argued by Plato via the Theory of Forms (which he himself admits to be riddled with difficulties), it may appear obscure and less than convincing. What is more convincing and very much more clear (and to some extent separable from the full-dress metaphysical system) is the moral psychology which we are offered here and in the *Republic*: a psychology which implicitly provides a better explanation of evil (how good degenerates into egoism) than Plato's more strictly philosophical arguments have been able to give us elsewhere, for instance in the *Philebus*. *Eros* is the desire for good which is somehow the same even when a degenerate 'good' is sought.

...Freud says, in *Totem and Taboo*, 'only in art has the omnipotence of thought been retained in our civilization'. He shares Plato's deep mistrust of art, as well as his interest in the nature of inspiration, only of course Freud, confronted with the grandeur of the European tradition at its most confident (it is less confident now) does not dare to be too rude to art. 'Before the problem of the creative artist analysis must, alas, lay down its arms' (*Dostoevsky and Parricide, Collected Papers, Vol. V*).

...Plato says in the *Republic* that the artist makes the best part of the soul 'relax its guard' (X.606a). One of the subtleties of Freud's definition is that it is indifferent to the 'formal value' of the artwork, since what is really active and really attractive is the concealed fantasy. As W. H. Auden says, a remark which could have been made by Plato, 'no artist...can prevent his work being used as magic, for that is what all of us, highbrow and lowbrow alike, secretly want art to be' (1948). One could hardly wish for a more thorough characterization of art as belonging to the lower part of the soul and producing what are essentially shadows. (The art object as material thing, a piece of stone or paper etc., would be classed with ordinary visible sense; what the artist and his client 'see' would be the shadow.) W.D. Ross says that 'Plato is no doubt in error in supposing that the purpose of art is to produce illusion' (1976, 78). In fact Plato's view of art as illusion is positive and complex. Images are valuable aids to thought; we study what is higher first

'in images'. But images must be kept within a fruitful hierarchy of spiritual endeavour. What the artist produces are 'wandering images'. In this context one might even accuse art of specializing in the degradation of good desires, since the trick of the aesthetic veil enables the good to descend. The art object is a false whole which owes its air of satisfying completeness to the licensing of a quite other process in the quasi-mechanical fantasy life of the client, and also of the artist, who, as Plato frequently pointed out, probably has little idea of what he is at. The formal properties of the art object are delusive. The relation of art to the unconscious is of course at the root of the trouble. Put in Platonic terms, art is a sort of dangerous caricature of *anamnēsis*. ... Art has no discipline which ensures veracity; truth in art is notoriously hard to estimate critically. Human beings are natural liars, and sophists and artists are the worst. Art undermines our sense of reality and encourages us to believe in the omnipotence of thought. Thus the supposed 'content' of art leaks away into the 'unlimited' and no genuine statement is made. Truth must be very sure of herself (as she is in mathematics) before she allows any connection with art: so, if there must be art, better to stick to embroidery and wallpaper.

... Plato's connection of the good with the real (the ambiguous multiform phenomenon of the ontological proof) is the centre of his thought and one of the most fruitful ideas in philosophy. It is an idea which at an instinctive level we may readily imagine that we understand. We do not have to believe in God to make sense of the motto of Oxford University, displayed upon an open book, *Dominus illuminatio mea*. And I shall argue later that, for all its sins, art can show us this connection too. But what is the 'reality' to which *Eros* moves us and from which art allegedly diverts us? The Theory of Forms was invented to explain this, and the *Parmenides* and the *Sophist* exhibited some of the resultant difficulties. The relation of Forms to particulars remains persistently problematic as Plato moves uncertainly from a metaphor of participation to one of imitation, and increasingly emphasizes that the Forms are 'separate'. The Forms are more like 'imminent universals' at the start; and 'transcendent models' later on. The theory is in evident process of transition in the *Parmenides*. The *Sophist* represents a moment of discovery and offers a new theory. What is of importance here is not the puzzling relation of Forms to particulars, but the now more comprehensible relation of Forms to each other. Because of what is possible and impossible in the Form world, reality has deep rigid structure and discourse is possible. Dialectic, becoming more specialized, can thenceforth operate more confidently though less ambitiously. The philosopher in the *Republic* returns to the Cave, and once he is used to it, can manage better than the captives (VII.520c). (He gives up studying and goes into politics, for which his studies have trained him.) Later on (*Tht.* 172–4; *Phil.* 58c; *Seventh Letter* 344e) the implication is that dialectic is 'for its own sake,' and the philosopher is confused by practical life. The Form of the Good in the *Republic* is a first

principle of explanation and also (if we follow the image of the sun), some sort of general first cause. The *Sophist* is concerned with the logical rather than the moral Forms, and although 'soul' makes its appearance as a principle of life and movement, this idea still lacks moral and theological development, and Plato's earlier 'psychology' still best explains the role of goodness. Art, of course, comes under this 'psychological' heading, together with the problem of appearance and reality as originally envisaged. It remains Plato's (surely correct) view that the bad (or mediocre) man is in a state of illusion, of which egoism is the most general name, though particular cases would of course suggest more detailed descriptions. Obsession, prejudice, envy, anxiety, ignorance, greed, neurosis, and so on and so on veil reality. The defeat of illusion requires moral effort. The instructed and morally purified mind sees reality clearly and indeed (in an important sense) provides us with the concept. The original role of the Forms was not to lead us to some attenuated elsewhere but to show us the real world. It is the dreamer in the Cave who is astray and elsewhere.

What here becomes of the problem of the relation of Forms to particulars, and is it still important? If dialectic is a kind of logic, together with a kind of classification involving a pursuit to *infimae species*, then the problem posed at the end of the *Theaetetus* about the unknowability of the particular may indeed remain, but may also be deemed trivial. In the early dialogues sense experience seems to be at least partly veridical in so far as particular things 'partake' of the Forms; and later on *Theaetetus* 155–7 offers a fairly straightforward (realistic) discussion of perception. In the *Republic*, where the Forms are transcendent, the objects of opinion diminish near the lower end of the scale from 'being' toward 'not-being' (478–9). The *Sophist* turns this awkward ontological distinction into a 'logical' one. But supposing what interests us is the reality which is penetrable to moral insight? (Logic can look after itself; ethics cannot.) What about mud, hair, and dirt (*Prm.* 130c), and in what sense if any are they to be 'given up'? The metaphor of knowledge as vision is not so easily eliminated, at either end of the scale of being. When the veil is removed and the rational and virtuous man sees reality, how much – indeed what – does he see? Are there things, which somehow exist but which are irrelevant to serious thought, as Socrates was inclined to say in the *Parmenides*? Is it possible to see beyond the 'formal network'? (Instinct says yes.) What does the light of the sun reveal; and who sees the most minute particulars and cherishes them and points them out? As one batters here at the cage of language it is difficult to keep the artist out of the picture even when one is attempting to describe the good man. Of course we are in trouble here through doing what Parmenides told Socrates he must do if he was really to be 'grabbed' by philosophy (*Prm.* 130d,e), that is let nothing go and see if what is true of one is true of all. From the point of view of the moralist it looks as if the argument which culminates in the *Sophist* has destroyed too much, since notably it has removed our direct vision of

the Forms and their positive role as (somehow) sources of light and being. However Plato does not here abandon the problem of the reality and intelligibility of the sensible world, but begins to envisage it in a new way.

The early picture of the Forms is unsatisfactory not only because of the unclarified relation of these separate changeless perfect entities to a changing imperfect world, but also because the Forms are supposed to be the only realities. The transmigrating souls of the *Phaedo* and the *Phaedrus* are of unexplained and lesser dignity, although they 'resemble' the changeless (*Phd.* 786); and in the *Phaedo* the sensible world appears as a fallen realm which is a gross irrelevant hindrance to true knowledge, philosophy, and virtue. Hence philosophers 'practise dying' (67e). The earlier dialogues emphasize a contrast between what is moving and unreal and what is motionless and real. Vice is restless, so is art (*Rep.* X.605a). The bad man and the artist see shifting shadows (εἴκονες), not a steady reality. The *Sophist*, however, exclaims with passion, 'Surely we shall not readily allow ourselves to be persuaded that motion and life and soul and intelligence are not really there in absolute being and that it neither lives nor thinks, but all solemn and holy and mindless is motionless and fixed' (248e). Plato, led by the epistemological arguments of the *Parmenides* and the *Theaetetus*, is not ready fully to separate the psychological-moral idea that vice is a state of illusion from the problem of the reality and physical nature of the sensible cosmos. He has already, in *Eros*, established an authoritative active principle which can relate everything to the Forms. (The low *Eros* is the high *Eros*.) But *Eros* as mediator, and as 'redeemer', of the trivia of the ordinary world, is still a detached insight and a psychological myth. The attribution of life and movement to ultimate being in the *Sophist* brings this 'mediation' into the area of philosophical argument; though inconclusively so since Plato soon returns again to 'explanation' by myth. To extend the possibility of knowledge (as opposed to opinion), he here conjures up a moving knower to follow a moving known, and gives a more definite status to the problem of the origin of motion. In doing so he creates a fundamental division in the structure of the ultimately real since κίνησις and ζῶη and ψύχη and φρονήσις (movement, life, soul, intelligence) are now allowed somehow into the company of the still changeless Forms. This 'fissure', and the attempt to relate Forms to particulars by this method, raises its own insoluble problems, though it has also proved a great fountainhead of metaphysical imagery. Soul has already been described as the only self-mover and thus as the origin of motion at *Phaedrus* 245–6 and *Politicus* 272b; and creative intelligence or mind (φρονήσις, νοῦς) now comes forward to be the supreme guide of soul, as life and movement are allowed to be intelligible. One result of this mediation is the extension of the power of Good into the details of the sensible world through a technique of active creation. Throughout his work Plato uses the imagery of *mimesis*, which the Theory of Forms necessitates but cannot explain. In a magnificent myth he at last frankly embraces

the image and sanctifies the artist, while giving to the Forms a final radiant though mysterious role. There is only one true artist, God, and only one true work of art, the Cosmos.

...Throughout his work Plato understands intellectual activity as something spiritual, the *love* of learning spoken of in the *Symposium* and the *Philebus*. Mediation through the beautiful takes place not only in intellectual studies but also through personal love and through the various *technai*, all kinds of craft and skill (excluding mimetic art) to which Plato at different times attaches importance. Love of beauty and desire to create inspire us to activities which increase our grasp of the real, and because they diminish our fantasy-ridden egoism are self-evidently good. Any *technē* gives us knowledge of reality through experience of necessity, and love of people does this too. Plato does not analyse in detail how selfish love changes into unselfish love, but the asides in the early dialogues do not suggest that this should simply be thought of as a transference of affection to philosophy. The wise lover does not only love the glamorous, but discerns the spiritual beauty of the unglamorous, a process movingly described by Alcibiades in his homage to Socrates at *Symposium* 215. Plato is more concerned in his later work, and indeed in the *Republic*, to show how the great structural features of the world, the subject-matter of logic and mathematics and (as he later sees it) of science, are beautiful and spiritually attractive. It is the attraction of beauty (good as harmony and proportion) which leads us into studies of the *a priori* and (to use a subsequent terminology) the synthetic *a priori*: pure studies yielding pure pleasures. In the mythology of the *Timaeus*, only passionate selfless unenvious mind can understand the world since passionate selfless unenvious mind made it, and we see in the light of the Good, to return to the image of the sun. The cosmogony of the *Timaeus* is 'teleological' in that the Demiurge works purposively, but in doing so he seems to satisfy Kant's definition in that his purposiveness is without ulterior purpose. Order is obviously more beautiful and good than disorder, and the 'self-expression' of the Demiurge, who is generous and without envious φθόνος, takes place under the authority of an independent Model. Our participation in these joys must, however, be seen as modest. The contact with changeless truth brought about through insight into pure living mind can only for incarnate beings be limited and occasional, and we are likely to see more of necessary causes than of divine causes. The truth which we can grasp is something quiet, small in extent (*Phil.* 52c), and to be found only in the lived real moment of direct apprehension out of which the indirectness of mimetic art and writing and perhaps language and discursive thought itself always tends to remove us. Those who want to be saved should look at the stars and talk philosophy, not write or go to the theatre.

...One of Plato's evident aims, both here and in the *Republic*, is the moral reform of religious concept and religious practice. Traditional city state religion was now undergoing a crisis of 'demythologization' not totally unlike

that of present-day Christianity. So the *Laws* is not 'wantonly' exploring the possibility of new religious ideas. That such radical change was under general consideration we can see from the dramatists. Book X of the dialogue is devoted to more positive and theoretically coherent theological speculation, mythical in style though picking up a number of familiar philosophical themes. The cosmos again appears, and even more evidently so than in the *Timaeus*, as a harmoniously organized work of art wherein the parts are subservient to the total design. The supreme figures of the *Timaeus* appear here in altered guise, with the function of Soul much increased, and the Forms in eclipse. The many and the One receive mention at 965, in connection with the unity of virtue; and 895d shows that Plato was still reflecting upon problems raised by the Forms, though we are not given the fruit of the reflection. Soul is now the cause of all things, including the details of sensible qualities, and is active everywhere. But although what it brings about resembles an art object, Soul is not, like the Demiurge, an artist-copyist, and our world is at last real and not a copy. There is, moreover, bad Soul as well as good Soul. This dualism is not new in Plato's thought (*Rep.* III.397b; *Pol.* 270a), though it is nowhere discussed at length. Soul is still properly subject to the authority of Mind, but may join itself with unreason (897b). The best 'prelude' to the laws (887c) is refutation of atheism, and especially of the view that the gods do not care. Being their 'property', we are carefully and justly and indeed lovingly looked after. Chattels are not necessarily despised, and the image is a pious one, mentioned as a 'mystery' at *Phaedo* 62b. Divine providence is just and good, even though evil men may prosper. (Plato often muses upon the success of evil.) The gods care for even the smallest things, but they do so also with a view to the whole: just as a doctor looks at the part in relation to the whole body, and statesmen look to the whole state and craftsmen to the whole object (902). Individual souls matter, and, as essential parts of the cosmic art object, move to their appropriate places under the guidance of the divine gamester (πεπτευτής, 903d). (God is not only always doing geometry, he is always playing draughts.)

... Plato, who treated the Olympians with such careful detachment, was of course well aware of the ambiguous nature of a busy personified 'God' or gods except as either necessary cult, or explanatory myth in a philosophical context. He always feared magic and almost the whole of his philosophy is a running fight against misleading and uncriticized images, some of them his own. Any seriously envisaged 'God', once liberated from Zeus, has to recede, since anything said about him is likely to mislead us. 'To find out the maker and father of all things is indeed a task, and having found him to explain him to all men is an impossibility' (*Ti.* 28c). In the *Laws* God appears as a theological device, as quasi-philosophical quasi-mythical theological speculation, or as an absence prompting bitter jokes. Escape from the Cave and approach to the Good is a progressive discarding of relative false goods, of hypotheses, images, and shadows, eventually seen as such. However, even

the most enlightened discourse involves language, and dealing with the world is, as Plato usually envisages it, dealing with instances or copies of the Forms whose relation to their great originals can never be satisfactorily pictured. The glory of the Demiurge never dims that of the Form of the Good as it appears in splendour in the *Republic*. As difficulties emerged Plato changed his imagery, sometimes and finally abandoning philosophical argument altogether. He was always conscious of the possibility of being misunderstood, and the writer of the *Seventh Letter* expresses this anxiety with vehemence. St John of the Cross says that God is the abyss of faith into which we fall when we have discarded all images of him. This is the point at which Plato starts making jokes.

We are now in a position to see the fundamentally religious nature of Plato's objections to art, and why he so firmly relegated it to the mental level of *eikasia*. Art is dangerous chiefly because it apes the spiritual and subtly disguises and trivializes it. Artists play irresponsibly with religious imagery which, if it must exist, should be critically controlled by the internal, or external, authority of reason. Artists obscure the enlightening power of thought and skill by aiming at plausibility rather than truth. Art delights in unsavoury trivia and in the endless proliferation of senseless images (television). Art is playful in a sinister sense, full of (φθόνος) a spiteful amused acceptance of evil, and through buffoonery and mockery weakens moral discrimination. The artist cannot represent or celebrate the good, but only what is daemonic and fantastic and extreme; whereas truth is quiet and sober and confined. Art is sophistry, at best an ironic *mimesis* whose fake 'truthfulness' is a subtle enemy of virtue. Indirectness and irony prevent the immediate relationship with truth which occurs in live discourse; art is thus the enemy of dialectic. Writing and painting introduce an extra distancing notation and by charm fix it in place. They create a barrier of imagery which arrests the mind, rigidifies the subject-matter, and is defenceless against low clients. The true *logos* falls silent in the presence of the highest (ineffable) truth, but the art object cherishes its volubility, it cherishes itself not the truth, and wishes to be indestructible and eternal. Art makes us content with appearances, and by playing magically with particular images it steals the educational wonder of the world away from philosophy and confuses our sense of direction toward reality and our motives for discerning it. Through an unpurified charm masquerading as beauty, art is 'most clearly seen'. 'Form' thus becomes the enemy of knowledge. (See the end of *Death in Venice*.) Art localizes the intelligence which should be bent upon righting the proportions of the whole of life. Form in art is for illusion and hides the true cosmic beauty and the hard real forms of necessity and causality, and blurs with fantasy the thought-provoking paradox. Art objects are not real unities but pseudo-objects completed by the fantasizing mind in its escape from reality. The pull of the transcendent as reality and good is confused and mimicked. The true sense of reality as a feeling of joy is deceitfully

imitated by the 'charm-joy' of art. There is very little good art, and even that (*corruptio optimi pessima*) is dangerous. Enjoyment of art deludes even the decent man by giving him a false self-knowledge based on a healthy egoism: the fire in the cave, which is mistaken for the sun, and where one may comfortably linger, imagining oneself to be enlightened. Art thus prevents the salvation of the whole man by offering a pseudo-spirituality and a plausible imitation of direct intuitive knowledge (vision, presence), a defeat of the discursive intelligence at the bottom of the scale of being, not at the top. Art is a false presence and a false present. As a pseudo-spiritual activity, it can still attract when coarser goals are seen as worthless. We seek eternal possession of the good, but art offers a spurious worthless immortality. It thus confuses the spiritual pilgrimage and obscures the nature of true *catharsis* (purification). Its pleasures are impure and indefinite and secretly in league with egoism. The artist deceives the saving *Eros* by producing magical objects which feed the fantasy life of the ego and its desire for omnipotence. Art offers itself as 'a mechanism of sensibility which could devour any experience'. (T.S. Eliot (1975, 64) on the undissociated sensibility. Plato, perhaps rightly, regards such sensibility as primary in artists.) The separateness, the otherness of art is a sham, a false transcendence, a false imitation of another world. (The negress who sings upon the gramophone record in *La Nausée*.) Art may thus become a magical substitute for philosophy, an impure mediator professing to classify and explain reality. But there is no short cut to enlightenment, and as the *Philebus* (16) tells us, we must sort out the world with patience, not hastily producing a pseudo-unity or *eikōn*. Art practises a false degenerate *anamnēsis* where the veiled something which is sought and found is no more than a shadow out of the private store-room of the personal unconscious. The work of art may even be thought of as a pernicious caricature of the Form, as the Form was originally conceived, the pure daemonic particular, timeless, radiant, reality-bestowing, separate, directly knowable, and unique.

...Throughout his work, including the more cheerful earlier writings, Plato emphasizes the height of the objective and the difficulty of the ascent. On the other hand, even at his gloomiest he is never in essentials a sceptic. The Good (truth, reality) is absent from us and hard of access, but it is there and only the Good will satisfy. This fact is concealed by the consoling image-making ego in the guise of the artist whom every one of us to some extent is. Art with its secret claim to supreme power blurs the distinction between the presence and the absence of reality, and tries to cover up with charming imagery the harsh but inspiring truth of the distance between man and God. This void may of course also be concealed by the metaphysical ladders of the philosopher; it is all very well to tell us to throw away the ladder: the ladder is interesting. Art, in and out of philosophy, may ignore the journey and persuade us we are already there and deny the incommensurabilities of reality and mind. A softening romanticism dogs philosophy

in the guise of art. 'Poetic pluralism is the corollary to the mysticism of the One' (Wind 1958, 176). But awareness of the gap is not itself the bridge. Plato knew the dangers of his own artistry, and the exasperated bitter theological remarks in the *Laws* may express his realization that as soon as philosophy abandons *ψιλοὶ λόγοι*, cool unadorned non-jargon prose, it too is in danger of being used as magic. The strongest motive to philosophy is probably the same as the strongest motive to art: the desire to become the Demiurge and reorganize chaos in accordance with one's own excellent plan.

Any release of spirit may be ambiguous in its power, and artists, both visual and literary, love this area of ambiguity, for reasons well understood by both Plato and Freud. There has always been a dangerous relationship between art and religion, and where theology hesitates art will eagerly try to explain. Art may here be seen as the more 'dangerous' where 'pure thought' is the less powerful. No wonder (from his own point of view) that Plato, who must by then have felt a diminished faith in the 'high dialectic', kept the artists under such rigid control in the *Laws*, where private speculation is discouraged and picturesque popular religion is an instrument of state power. In fact, unless specifically prevented from doing so, art instinctively materializes God and the religious life. This has been nowhere more true than in Christianity, which has been served by so many geniuses. The familiar figures of the Trinity have been so celebrated and beautified in great pictures that it almost seems as if the painters were the final authorities on the matter, as Plato said that the poets seemed to be about the Greek gods. Partly because of the historical nature of Christianity, Christian images tend to be taken 'for real'. Art contributes, in a perhaps misleadingly 'spiritual' way, the material gear of religion; and what should be a mediating agency may become in effect a full-stop barrier. Many modern theologians are attempting to remove this great rigidified and now often unacceptable mythological barrier which divides Christianity from ordinary sophisticated and unsophisticated people. Whether Christian belief can survive this process remains to be seen. Art fascinates religion at a high level and may provide the highest obstacle to the pursuit of the whole truth. A rigid high pattern of integrated 'spiritual' imagery arrests the mind, prevents the free movement of the spirit, and fills the language with unclear metaphor. (The abyss of faith lies beyond images and beyond *logoi* too.) Kierkegaard, as I mentioned earlier, fore-runner of much modern unease about art, sensed these problems and deliberately used art as a destructive anti-theoretical mystification, to promote a more direct relationship to the truth and to prevent the dogmatic relaxation of tension brought about by a hard aesthetically burnished theology. (But art is tricky stuff: did he succeed?)

...Gilbert Ryle describes Plato as an Odysseus rather than a Nestor, and there are of course elements of inconsistency and sheer accident in the work of any persisting thinker. There does, however, seem to be a unity of both thought and feeling in Plato's reactions to art, during the changing pattern

of his attitudes to other philosophical questions, and during the momentous history (not discussed here) of his non-philosophical life, including his agonizingly mixed feelings about taking part in politics. That the *Apology* contains an attack on the poets is doubtless significant. *Phaedo* 61 tells how Socrates, although not *mythologikos*, obeyed his dream command to 'make music'. Plato, the heir, so eminently able in this department, puzzled as his master had done about how best to obey. The politically motivated hostility to a free art, which Plato shares with modern dictators, is separable from more refined objections which are both philosophical and temperamental; and although we may want to defend art against Plato's charges we may also recognize, in the context of the highest concern, how worthy of consideration some of these charges are. There is a kind of religious life which excludes art and it is not impossible to understand why.

In fact Plato himself supplies a good deal of the material for a complete aesthetic, a defence and reasonable critique of art. The relation of art to truth and goodness must be the fundamental concern of any serious criticism of it. 'Beauty' cannot be discussed 'by itself'. There is in this sense no 'pure aesthetic' viewpoint. Philosophy and theology have to reject evil in the course of explaining it, but art is essentially more free and enjoys the ambiguity of the whole man; hence the doubleness which of course it shares with Plato's *Eros*. Where philosophy and theology are purists, art is a shameless collaborator, and Plato rightly identifies irony and laughter as prime methods of collaboration. The judging mind of the skilful artist is a delicate self-effacing instrument; the tone or style by which the writer or painter puts himself 'in the clear' may be very close to a subtle insincerity. (As for instance in what critics call the 'placing' of characters in a novel.) Hence Plato's insight reaches to the deepest levels of our judgement of worth in art.

...It is tempting to 'refute' Plato simply by pointing to the existence of great works of art, and in doing so to describe their genesis and their merits in Platonic terms. Kant, though suspicious of beauty because of its possible lapse into charm, was prepared to treat it as a symbol of the good (*Critique of Judgement* i.59); and could not art at least be so regarded, even if we take Plato's objections seriously? Good art, thought of as symbolic force rather than statement, provides a stirring image of a pure transcendent value, a steady visible enduring higher good, and perhaps provides for many people, in an unreligious age without prayer or sacraments, their clearest *experience* of something grasped as separate and precious and beneficial and held quietly and unpossessively in the attention. Good art which we love can seem holy and attending to it can be like praying. Our relation to such art though 'probably never' entirely pure is markedly unselfish. The calm joy in the picture gallery is quite unlike the pleasurable flutter felt in the sale room. Beauty is, as Plato says, visibly transcendent; hence indeed the metaphor of vision so indispensable in discussions of aesthetics and morality.

The *spectacle* of good in other forms, as when we admire good men and heroes, is often, as experience, more mixed and less efficacious. As Kierkegaard said, we admire and relax. Good art, on the other hand, provides work for the spirit. Of course morality is quite largely a matter of action, though what we look at profoundly affects what we do. ('Whatsoever things are honest... whatsoever things are pure... think on these things' (*Philippians* 4:8).) And of course the practice of personal relations is the fundamental school of virtue. The spiritual revelations involved in dealing with people are in an evident sense more important than those available through art, though they tend to be less clear. What are motives and do they matter? When is altruism an exercise of power? (and so on and so on and so on) Of course such questions need, in particular cases, answers. But art remains available and vivid as an experience of how egoism can be purified by intelligent imagination. Art-beauty must in a sense be detached from good because art is not essential. Art, though it demands moral effort and teaches quiet attention (as any serious study can do) is a kind of treat; it is, like Kant's Sublime, an extra. We can be saved without seeing the Alps or the Cairngorms, and without Titian and Mozart too. We have to make moral choices, we do not have to enjoy great art and doubtless many good people never do. But surely great art points in the direction of the good and is at least more valuable to the moralist as an auxiliary than dangerous as an enemy. How, when, whether bad art (of which of course there is a great deal) is morally damaging is, as we know, a deep question not easily answered. For great art to exist a general practice of art must exist; and even trivial art is a fairly harmless consolation, as Plato himself seems prepared to admit in the *Laws*.

Of course art is huge, and European philosophy is strangely small, so that Whitehead scarcely exaggerates in calling it all footnotes to Plato. General talk about 'art,' to which one is driven when discussing Plato's view, is always in danger of becoming nonsense. There is no science of criticism; any so-called critical 'system' has in the end to be evaluated by the final best instrument, the calm open judging mind of the intelligent experienced critic, unmisted, as far as possible, by theory. Confronted with academic aesthetics as he knew it, Tolstoy's instincts were sound, and his reply to the effect that all we need to know is that good art promotes good, is one with which we can sympathize. However one is tempted, and partly in order to do justice to Plato's argument, to try to explain in more detail just how great art is good for us, and in doing so to take our best material out of Plato himself. Art is a special discerning exercise of intelligence in relation to the real; and although aesthetic form has essential elements of trickery and magic, yet form in art, as form in philosophy, is designed to communicate and reveal. In the shock of joy in response to good art, an essential ingredient is a sense of the revelation of reality, of the really real, the ὄντως ὄν: the world as we were never able so clearly to see it before. When Burne-Jones is reported as saying 'I mean by a picture a beautiful romantic dream of something that

never was, never will be – in a light better than any light that ever shone – in a land no one can define or remember, only desire – and the forms divinely beautiful', we are embarrassed, not least because this does indeed seem to describe many of his pictures in an aspect which marks them as delightful or marvellous but not exactly great. (See de Lisle 1904, 173...) One would not think of applying such language to the work of (for instance) Seurat or Cézanne, or to remoter and apparently 'fanciful' art, such as mythological subjects treated by Botticelli or Titian. When Artemis speeds by as Actaeon falls, the revelation remains mysterious but somehow true, and with the 'hardness' of truth. A reading of Plato helps us to see how good art is truthful. Dream is the enemy of art and its false image. ... The prescription for art is then the same as for dialectic: overcome personal fantasy and egoistic anxiety and self-indulgent day-dream. Order and separate and distinguish the world justly. Magic in its unregenerate form as the fantastic doctoring of the real for consumption by the private ego is the bane of art as it is of philosophy. Obsession shrinks reality to a single pattern. The artist's worst enemy is his eternal companion, the cosy dreaming ego, the dweller in the vaults of *eikasia*. Of course the highest art is powered by the force of an individual unconscious mind, but then so is the highest philosophy; and in both cases technique is useless without divine fury.

What is hard and necessary and unavoidable in human fate is the subject-matter of great art. To use a mixture of Platonic and Kantian language, we see in a dream that art is properly concerned with the synthetic *a priori*, the borderland of *dianoia* and *noesis*, the highest mental states described in the *Republic*. Art is about the pilgrimage from appearance to reality (the subject of every good play and novel) and exemplifies in spite of Plato what his philosophy teaches concerning the therapy of the soul. This is the 'universal', the high concern which Tolstoy said was the proper province of the artist. The divine (intelligent) cause persuades the necessary cause so as to bring about the best possible. It is the task of mortals (as artists and as men) to understand the necessary for the sake of the intelligible, to see in a pure just light the hardness of the real properties of the world, the effects of the wandering causes, why good purposes are checked and where the mystery of the random has to be accepted. It is not easy to do justice to this hardness and this randomness without either smoothing them over with fantasy or exaggerating them into (cynical) absurdity. Indeed 'the absurd' in art, often emerging as an attempt to defeat easy fantasy, may merely provide it with a sophisticated disguise. The great artist, while showing us what is not saved, implicitly shows us what salvation means. Of course the Demiurge is attempting against insuperable difficulties to create a harmonious and just world. The (good) human artist, whom Plato regards as such a base caricature, is trying to portray the partially failed world as it is, and in doing so to produce something pleasing and beautiful. This involves an intelligent disciplined understanding of what may be called the structural problems of

the Demiurge. There is a 'sublime absurd', comic or tragic, which depends on this insight into where the 'faults' come. (Both *2 Henry IV* III.ii and *King Lear* V.iii.) Forgivably or unforgivably, there is a partly intelligible causality of sin. The good artist helps us to see the place of necessity in human life, what must be endured, what makes and breaks, and to purify our imagination so as to contemplate the real world (usually veiled by anxiety and fantasy) including what is terrible and absurd.

...The sight of evil is confusing, and it is a subject on which it is hard to generalize because any analysis demands such a battery of value judgements. One would like to think that the just man sees the unjust man clearly. ('God sees him clearly.') Art is (often too) jauntily at home with evil and quick to beautify it. Arguably however, good literature is uniquely able publicly to clarify evil, and emulate the just man's private vision without, such is his privilege, the artist having to be just except in his art. That this separation is possible seems a fact of experience. Art accepts and enjoys the ambiguity of the whole man, and great artists can seem to 'use' their own vices for creative purposes without apparent damage to their art. This mystery belongs indeed to the region of the unmeasured and unlimited. Plato understands what criticism must be constantly aware of, how the bad side of human nature is secretly, precariously, at work in art. There is a lot of secret cruelty there and if the art is good enough (consider Dante, or Dostoevsky) it may be hard to decide when the disciplined 'indulgence' of the cruelty damages the merit of the work or harms the client. But to see misery and evil justly is one of the heights of aesthetic endeavour and one which is surely sometimes reached. How this becomes beautiful is a mystery which may seem very close to some of the central and most lively obscurities in Plato's own thought. (The divine cause is always touching the necessary cause.) Shakespeare makes not only splendour but beauty out of the malevolence of Iago and the intolerable death of Cordelia, as Homer does out of the miseries of a pointless war and the stylish ruthlessness of Achilles. Art can rarely, but with authority, show how we learn from pain, swept by the violence of divine grace toward an unwilling wisdom, as described in the first chorus of the *Agamemnon* in words which somehow remind us of Plato, who remained (it appears) so scandalously indifferent to the merits of Aeschylus. (A case of envy?) And of course art can reveal without explaining and its justice can also be playful.

...It may be tempting here to say that the disciplined understanding, the just discernment, of the good artist must depend (if one wants to play further with the *Timaeus* myth) upon some kind of *separate* moral certainty. Again the metaphor of vision: a source of light. However it is difficult to press the idea beyond the status of a tautology. Good artists can be bad men; the virtue may, as I said earlier, reside entirely in the work, the just vision be attainable only there. After all, however much we idolize each other, we are limited specialized animals. Moreover, even

the work itself may be less perfect than it seems. We are creatures of a day, nothing much. We do not understand ourselves, we lack reality, what we have and know is not ὄντως ὄν, but merely ὄντως. We are cast in the roles of Shallow and Silence; and must not, in favour of art or philosophy, protest too much. (The best in this kind are but shadows, and the worst are no worse, if imagination amend them.) Because of the instinctive completing activity of the client's mind, its 'unlimited' cooperation with the artist, we often do not see how unfinished even great work may be; and if the artist presses this upon our attention we are shocked since we so much want to believe in perfection. Great works of art often do seem like perfect particulars, and we seem here to enjoy that 'extra' knowledge which is denied to us at the end of the *Theaetetus*. But because of the muddle of human life and the ambiguity and playfulness of aesthetic form, art can at best only explain partly, only reveal almost; and of course any complex work contains impurities and accidents which we choose to ignore. Even the Demiurge will never entirely understand.

...One need not, however, enter into metaphysical or psychological arguments to diminish art or to defend it either. Its simpler solid merits are obvious: a free art is an essential aspect of a free society, as a degraded lying art is a function of a tyrannical one. Art as the great general universal informant is an obvious rival, not necessarily a hostile one, to philosophy and indeed to science, and Plato never did justice to the unique truth-conveying capacities of art. The good or even decent writer does not just 'imitate doctors' talk', but attempts to understand and portray the doctors' 'world', and these pictures, however modest, of other 'worlds' are interesting and valuable. The spiritual ambiguity of art, its connection with the 'limitless' unconscious, its use of irony, its interest in evil, worried Plato. But the very ambiguity and voracious ubiquitousness of art is its characteristic freedom. Art, especially literature, is a great hall of reflection where we can all meet and where everything under the sun can be examined and considered. For this reason it is feared and attacked by dictators, and by authoritarian moralists such as the one under discussion. The artist is a great informant, at least a gossip, at best a sage, and much loved in both roles. He lends to the elusive particular a local habitation and a name. He sets the world in order and gives us hypothetical hierarchies and intermediate images: like the dialectician he meditates between the one and the many; and though he may artfully confuse us, on the whole he instructs us. Art is far and away the most educational thing we have, far more so than its rivals, philosophy and theology and science. The pierced nature of the work of art, its limitless connection with ordinary life, even its defencelessness against its client, are part of its characteristic availability and freedom. The demands of science and philosophy and ultimately of religion are extremely rigorous. It is just as well that there is a high substitute for the spiritual and the speculative life: that few get to the top morally or intellectually is no less than the truth.

...The most obvious paradox in the problem under consideration is that Plato is a great artist. It is not perhaps to be imagined that the paradox troubled him too much. Scholars in the land of posterity assemble the work and invent the problems. Plato had other troubles, many of them political. He fought a long battle against sophistry and magic, yet produced some of the most memorable images in European philosophy: the Cave, the charioteer, the cunning homeless *Eros*, the Demiurge cutting the *Anima Mundi* into strips and stretching it out crosswise. He kept emphasizing the imageless remoteness of the Good, yet kept returning in his exposition to the most elaborate uses of art. The dialogue form itself is artful and indirect and abounds in ironical and playful devices. Of course the statements made by art escape into the free ambiguity of human life. Art cheats the religious vocation at the last moment and is inimical to philosophical categories. Yet neither philosophy nor theology can do without it; there has to be a pact between them, like the pact in the *Philebus* between reason and pleasure.

Plato says (*Phdr.* Letter VIII) that no sensible man will commit his thought to words and that a man's thoughts are likely to be better than his writings. Without raising philosophical problems about what a man's thoughts *are*, one may reply that the discipline of committing oneself to clarified public form is proper and rewarding: the final and best discoveries are often made in the actual formulation of the statement. The careful responsible skilful use of words is our highest instrument of thought and one of our highest modes of being: an idea which might seem obvious but is not now by any means universally accepted. There may in theoretical studies, as in art, be so-called ultra-verbal insights at any level; but to call ultimate truth ineffable is to utter a quasi-religious principle which should not be turned round against the careful verbalization of humbler truths. Nor did Plato in practice do this. He wanted what he more than once mentions, immortality through art; he felt and indulged the artist's desire to produce unified, separable, formal, durable objects. He was also the master, indeed, the inventor, of a pure calm relaxed mode of philosophical exposition which is a high literary form and a model forever. Of course he used metaphor, but philosophy needs metaphor and metaphor is basic; how basic is the most basic philosophical question. Plato also had no doubt a strong personal motive which prompted him to write. Socrates (*Tht.* 210c) called himself a barren midwife. Plato often uses images of paternity. Art launches philosophy as it launches religion, and it was necessary for Plato, as it was for the evangelists, to write if the Word was not to be sterile and the issue of the Father was to be recognized as legitimate.

Plato feared the consolations of art. He did not offer a consoling theology. His psychological realism depicted God as subjecting mankind to a judgement as relentless as that of the old Zeus, although more just. A finely meshed moral causality determines the fate of the soul. That the movement of the saving of *Eros* is toward an impersonal pictureless void is one of the

paradoxes of a complete religion. To present the idea of God at all, even as myth, is a consolation, since it is impossible to defend this image against the prettifying attentions of art. Art will mediate and adorn, and develop magical structures to conceal the absence of God or his distance. We live now amid the collapse of many such structures, and as religion and metaphysics in the West withdraw from the embraces of art, we are it might seem being forced to become mystics through the lack of any imagery which could satisfy the mind. Sophistry and magic break down at intervals, but they never go away and there is no end to their collusion with art and to the consolations which, perhaps fortunately for the human race, they can provide; and art, like writing and like *Eros*, goes on existing for better and for worse.

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2

Plato and the Mass Media

Alexander Nehamas

Book X of the *Republic* contains a scathing attack on poetry which is still, by turns, both incomprehensible and disturbing.¹ Plato's banishment of the poets from his model city has always been a cause of interpretative difficulties and philosophical embarrassments, even for some of his greatest admirers. But I am now beginning to believe that the difficulties are not real and that the embarrassments are only apparent, and my purpose in what follows is to offer an outline – I cannot do more than that on this occasion – of my reasons for thinking so. I am convinced that close attention to the philosophical assumptions which underlie Plato's criticisms reveals that his attack on poetry is better understood as a specific social and historical gesture than as an attack on poetry, and especially on art, as such. But, placed within their original context, Plato's criticisms, perhaps paradoxically, become immediately relevant to a serious contemporary debate.

I

The interpretative difficulties of Book X are relatively easy to dispose of. The first is that this book seems to return to a subject which Plato, as we know, had already discussed extensively in Books II and III. But the fact is that the subject of Book X is different. The earlier books concern the function of poetry in the education of the young Guardians, in which it plays an absolutely central, if rigidly censored and controlled, role. Book X, however, concerns the almost total exclusion of poetry, with the exception of a few 'hymns to the gods and praises of noble people' (X.607a4), from the life of the adult citizens – an exclusion which must have been absolutely shocking to Plato's Athenian audience, accustomed as it was to a large variety of dramatic festivals and poetic contests throughout each year.² Moreover, Book X addresses this new subject by new means, on the basis, namely, of the metaphysics, epistemology and psychology developed in Books IV–IX and unavailable to Plato (X.595a5–b1) on the earlier occasion.

The second difficulty, which has bothered many commentators, concerns a conflict between Plato's first discussion of poetry and his return to it in Book X. The latter notoriously begins with the statement that all mimetic poetry has already been excluded from the city, while Book III has actually encouraged the young to engage in the imitation of good characters (III.397d4–7). I once tried to eliminate this conflict, without ultimate success, on the basis of the distinction drawn in the previous paragraph (Nehamas 1982, especially 48–51).³ But the conflict can in fact be eliminated on the basis of another distinction. This is the contrast between being an imitator (*mimētēs*) on the one hand and being imitative (often expressed by the term *mimētikos*) on the other.

Plato clearly allows the young Guardians to be imitators of good characters. But, actually, he allows them to imitate bad characters, if it is necessary and if they do so not seriously (*spoudēi*) and only in play (*paidias charin*) – that is, in order to satirize and ridicule them (396c5–e8). Plato forbids not imitation, which he considers essential to education, but imitativeness, the desire and ability to imitate anything independently of its moral quality and without the proper attitude of praise or blame toward it (III.395a2–5, III.397a1–b2, III.398a1–b4). When Socrates says in Book X that 'all mimetic poetry' (*poiēseōs hosē mimētikē*) has been excluded from the city, he does not refer to all imitation but only, as his own word shows, to poetry which involves and encourages imitativeness: the conflict disappears.⁴

The elimination of these interpretative difficulties may help to show that Book X is an integral part of the *Republic*.⁵ But this only adds to the philosophical embarrassments it creates. Why, after all, does a work of moral and political philosophy end with a discussion of aesthetics? The obvious answer is that Plato simply does not distinguish aesthetics from ethics. His argument against poetry depends on ontological principles regarding the status of its objects and on epistemological views about the poets' understanding of their subject-matter, but his concern with poetry is ethical through and through. It is expressed in just such terms both at the very beginning of the argument, when Socrates claims that tragedy and all imitative poetry constitute 'a harm to the mind of its audience' (X.595b5–6), and at its very end, when he concludes that if we allow poetry in the city 'pleasure and pain will rule as monarchs... instead of the law and that rational principle which is always and by all thought to be the best' (X.607a5–8).⁶

It is just this obvious answer, however, that causes the greatest philosophical embarrassment by far because it suggests that Plato is utterly blind to the real value of art, that he is unable to see that there is much more than an ethical dimension to art, and that even in its ethical dimension art is by no means as harmful as he is convinced it is.

It is against this embarrassment that I want to defend Plato, though I do not want to have to decide whether he was right or wrong in his denunciation of Homer and Aeschylus. I believe, and hope to convince you as well,

that the issue is much too complicated for this sort of easy judgement. But I do think that Plato's view deserves to be re-examined and that it is directly relevant to many contemporary concerns. Plato's attitude toward epic and tragic poetry is in fact embodied in our current thinking about the arts, though not specifically in our thinking about epic and tragedy. Though his views often appear incomprehensible, or reprehensible, or both, we often duplicate them, though without being aware of them as his. If this is right, then either Book X of the *Republic* is more reasonable and more nearly correct than we are ever tempted to suppose or we must ourselves reevaluate our own assumptions and attitudes regarding the arts.

First, a preliminary point. Plato is not in any way concerned with art as such. This is not only because, if Paul Kristeller (1951–2) is correct, the very concept of the fine arts did not emerge in Europe until the eighteenth century. The main reason is quite specific: Plato does not even include painting in his denunciation. His argument does, in fact, depend on a series of analogies between painting and poetry, and he introduces all the major ideas through which he will eventually banish the poets by means of these analogies. This has led a number of scholars to conclude that, and to feel they should explain why, Plato banished the artists from his model city. But a careful reading shows that neither painting nor sculpture is outlawed by Plato.⁷ This suggests, as we shall see in more detail below, that no general account of Plato's attitude toward the arts is required. It also implies that we must determine which specific feature of imitative poetry makes it so dangerous that, in contrast to the other arts, it cannot be tolerated in Plato's city.

This feature, on which Plato's argument against poetry crucially depends, is that poetry (in telling contrast to painting and, particularly, to sculpture) is as a medium inherently suited to the representation, or imitation, of vulgar subjects and shameful behaviour:⁸

The irritable part of the soul gives many opportunities for all sorts of imitations, while the wise and quiet character which always remains the same is neither easy to imitate nor easy to understand when imitated, especially for a festival crowd, people of all sorts gathered in the theatres. (X.604e1–5)

Plato makes his 'greatest' objection to poetry on the basis of this idea. Not only average people but good people as well, even 'the best among us', are vulnerable to its harmful influence (X.605c6–10). Socrates speaks for these select individuals when he says that, confronted with the excessive and unseemly lamentation that is the staple of tragic and epic poetry, 'we enjoy it, surrender ourselves, share [the heroes'] feelings, and earnestly praise as a good poet whoever affects us most in this way' (X.605d3–5; cf. *Phil.* 48a, *Ion* 535a, *Laws* 800d). And yet, at least in the case of the best among us if not also among the rest of the people as well, this sort of behaviour is exactly

what we try to avoid when we meet with misfortunes of our own: in life, Plato claims, we praise the control and not the indulgence of our feelings of sorrow. How is it, then, that we admire in poetry just the kind of person we would be ashamed to resemble in life (X.605d7–e6)?

Socrates tries to account for this absurdity by means of the psychological terms provided by the tripartition of the soul in Book IV of the *Republic*. The lowest, appetitive, part of the soul, which is only concerned with immediate gratification and not with the good of the whole agent, delights in shameful behaviour as it delights in anything that is not measured. Now, poetry depicts the sufferings of others, not our own. The rational part of the soul, accordingly, is in this case indulgent toward the appetite, and allows it free expression. The whole agent, therefore, in the belief that such indulgence is harmless, enjoys the pleasure with which poetry provides the appetite (X.606a3–b5).

What we fail to realize is that enjoying the expression of sorrow in the case of others is directly transferred to the sorrows of our own. Cultivating our feelings of pity in spectacles disposes us to express them in similar ways in our own case and to enjoy (or at least to find no shame in) doing so: thus it ultimately leads us to make a spectacle of ourselves (X.606a3–b8). Plato now generalizes his conclusion from sorrow in particular to all the passions:

So too with sex, anger, and all the desires, pleasures, and pains which we say follow us in every activity. Poetic imitation fosters these in us. It nurtures and waters them when they ought to wither; it places them in command in our soul when they ought to obey in order that we might become better and happier...instead of worse and more miserable. (X.606d1–7)

In short, Plato accuses poetry of perverting its audience. Poetry is essentially suited to the representation of inferior characters and vulgar subjects: these are easy to imitate and what the crowd, which is already perverted to begin with, wants to see and enjoys. But the trouble is that all of us have an analogue to the crowd within our own soul (cf. IX.580d2–581a1). This is the appetitive part (the counterpart to the third and largest class, the money-lovers, in Plato's analogy between city and soul), to the desires and pleasures of which we are all more or less sensitive. And, since – this is a most crucial assumption to which we shall have to return – our reactions to poetry are transferred directly to, and in fact often determine, our reactions to life, poetry is likely to make us behave in ways of which we should be, and often are, ashamed. Poetry 'introduces a bad government in the soul of each individual citizen' (X.605b7–8). But this is to destroy the soul and to destroy the city. It is precisely the opposite of everything the *Republic* is designed to accomplish. This is why poetry is intolerable.

We must now turn to Plato's deeply controversial assumption that our reactions to life follow on the lines of our reactions to poetry: the whole

issue of the sense of Plato's charges against poetry and of their contemporary importance depends just on this idea. On its face, of course, this assumption can be easily dismissed. Enjoying (if that is the proper word) Euripides' *Medea* is not likely to dispose us to admire mothers who murder their children for revenge or to want to do so ourselves or even to tend to adopt as our own Medea's ways of lamenting her fate.⁹ But this quick reaction misses precisely what is deep and important in Plato's attitude.

To begin to see what that is, we should note that Plato's assumption does not seem so unreasonable in connection with children. Almost everyone today would find something plausible in Plato's prohibition of children from imitating bad models 'lest from enjoying the imitation they come to enjoy the reality' and something accurate in his suspicion that 'imitations, if they last from youth for some time, become part of one's nature and settle into habits of gesture, voice, and thought' (III.395c7–d3). On this issue, Aristotle, who disagrees with Plato on so many issues regarding poetry, is in complete agreement: 'We should also banish pictures and speeches from the stage which are indecent... the legislator should not allow youth to be spectators of iambi or of comedy' (*Polit.* VII, 1336b14–21).¹⁰ But, also like Plato, Aristotle does not confine his view to children only: 'As we know from our own experience... the habit of feeling pleasure or pain at mere representations [*ta homoia*] is not far removed from the same feelings about realities' (*Polit.* VIII, 1340a21–5).

To a great extent, in fact, Aristotle's vindication of tragedy against Plato involves the argument that poetry is actually morally beneficial. And the reason for this is that *katharsis* both excites and purifies emotions which, in Stephen Halliwell's words, 'although potent, are properly and justifiably evoked by a portrayal of events which, if encountered in reality, would call for the same emotional response' (1986, 200).¹¹ The assumption that there is some direct connection between our reactions to poetry and our reactions to life is common to both philosophers. The main difference is that Aristotle argues, against Plato, that this parallel tends to benefit rather than to harm the conduct of our life.

The Platonic argument seems plausible in the case of children because many of us think (though this view is itself debatable) that, unclear about the difference between them, children often treat representations simply as parts of, and not also as symbols for, reality. They don't always seem able, for example, to distinguish a fictional danger from a real one. But Plato, as we have seen, believed that the case is similar with adults. Their reactions to poetry, too, determine their reactions to life because, to put the point bluntly, they are exactly the same kind of reactions. And the reason for this is that, as he believed, the representations of poetry are, at least superficially, exactly the same kind of objects as the real things they represent. The expression of sorrow in the theatre is superficially identical with – exactly

the same in appearance as – the expression of sorrow in life. Though actors do not, or need not, feel the sorrow they express on the stage, this underlying difference is necessarily imperceptible and allows the surface behaviour of actors and real grievers to be exactly the same.

'Paradoxically,' Jonas Barish has written, 'Plato makes much of the ontological difference between an actual thing and its mimetic copy (or the dream of it) yet allows little psychological difference' (1981, 29).¹² On the account I have just given, however, Plato's view is not at all paradoxical. It is precisely because the difference between imitations and their objects is ontological, a difference which cannot be perceived, that our reactions to both, which are based on our perception, are so similar. Plato's view is that the pleasure we feel at the representation of an expression of sorrow in poetry is pleasure at that expression itself, and for that reason likely to dispose us to enjoy such behaviour in life. He does not consider the possibility that the pleasure may be directed not at the expression of sorrow but at its representation, and that this representation is an independent object, having features in its own right and subject to specific principles which determine its quality.¹³

What I mean by this is that, for Plato, representation is transparent. It derives all its relevant features, the features that make it the particular representation it is, solely from the object it represents, and which we can see directly through its representation (we shall have to return to this 'directly'). The imitation of an expression of sorrow is simply sorrow expressed, identical in appearance to the real expression of sorrow, though not actually felt.

All imitations are treated in Book X of the *Republic* simply as apparent objects, as appearances of their subjects, and not as objects with a status of their own (X.597e7–601b8). God, carpenter, and painter all produce a bed (X.596b5), though the painter's bed is only 'apparent' (X.598b4). The painter does not primarily produce a painting, a physical object with a symbolic dimension; the portrait of a cobbler is simply 'a cobbler who seems to be' (X.600e7–601a7). The clear implication is that the poets produce apparent crafts and apparent virtues in their imitations of what people say and do; they duplicate the appearance of people engaged in the practice of a craft or of virtuous activity (X.600e3–601b1). Even more frequently, of course, they duplicate the appearance of vicious activity – this is the seductive, and appropriate, subject-matter of poetry. Imitators, for Plato, lack a craft of their own (and are, in this respect at least, like sophists and rhetoricians). They therefore do not know the nature of what they imitate, and simply transcribe the appearance of various things and actions by means of colours and words.¹⁴

This metaphysical view is reflected in Plato's ambivalent language.¹⁵ Painters, he writes, are both *imitators* and *makers* of appearances (X.598b3–4, X.599a2–3); Homer is a *producer* of images, though poets in

general are imitators of images (X.599d3, X.600e5). In the latter case, the image is the object of imitation, something that exists before imitation begins. In the former, it is the product of imitation, and comes into being only as imitation proceeds. This ambivalence suggests that, for Plato, the object and the product of imitation are identical in kind, that is, totally similar; it is almost as if the imitator lifts the surface of the imitated object and transfers it into another medium. What is different in each case is the depth – physical in the case of painting and psychological in the case of poetry – which imitation necessarily leaves untouched. If it were in some way possible to add to the imitation this missing dimension, we could produce a duplicate of its subject or, if no antecedent subject exists, a new real thing. The real object is the limiting case of the representation: this is exactly Plato's argument at *Cratylus* 432a–c; it is the metaphysical version of the myth of Pygmalion.

II

The metaphysics of Pygmalion is still in the centre of our thinking about the arts. To see that this is so, and why, we must change subjects abruptly and recall Newton Minnow's famous address to the National Association of Broadcasters in 1961. Though Minnow admitted that some television was of high quality, he insisted that if his audience were to watch, from beginning to end, a full day's programming,

I can assure you that you will observe a vast wasteland. You will see a procession of game shows, violence, audience participation shows, formula comedies about totally unbelievable families, blood and thunder, mayhem, violence, sadism, murder, western badmen, western goodmen, private eyes, gangsters, more violence, and cartoons. (quoted in Barnouw 1982, 300)

This general view of the vulgarity of television has been given a less extreme expression, and a rationale, by George Gerbner and Larry Gross:

Unlike the real world, where personalities are complex, motives unclear, and outcomes ambiguous, television presents a world of clarity and simplicity. ... In order to complete a story entertainingly in only an hour or even half an hour conflicts on TV are usually personal and solved by action. Since violence is dramatic and relatively simple to produce, much of the action tends to be violent. (Gerbner and Gross 1976, 44)¹⁶

An extraordinary, almost hysterical version of such a view, but nevertheless aversion that is uncannily close to Plato's attitude that the lowest part of the

soul is the subject-matter of poetry, is given by Jerry Mander. Television, he writes, is inherently suited for

expressing hate, fear, jealousy, winning, wanting, and violence... hysteria or ebullience of the kind of one-dimensional joyfulness usually associated with some objective victory – the facial expressions and bodily movements of antisocial behavior. (Mander 1978, 279–80)

Mander also duplicates, in connection with television, Plato's view that poetry directly influences our life for the worse: 'We slowly evolve into the images we carry, we become what we see' (Mander 1978, 219).¹⁷ This, of course, is the guiding premise of the almost universal debate concerning the portrayal of sex, violence, and other disapproved or antisocial behaviour on television on the grounds that it tends to encourage television's audience to engage in such behaviour in life.¹⁸ And a very sophisticated version of this Platonic point, making use of the distinction between form and content, has been accepted by Wayne Booth:

The effects of the medium in shaping the primary experience of the viewer, and thus the quality of the self during the viewing, are radically resistant to any elevation of quality in the program content: as viewer, I become *how* I view, more than *what* I view.... Unless we change their characteristic forms, the new media will surely corrupt whatever global village they create; you cannot build a world community out of misshapen souls. (Booth 1982, 56–7)

We have seen that Plato's reason for thinking that our reactions to life duplicate our reactions to poetry is that imitations are superficially identical to the objects of which they are imitations. Exactly this explanation is also given by Rudolph Arnheim, who wrote that television 'is a mere instrument of transmission, which does not offer any new means for the artistic interpretation of reality' (1981, 7). Television, that is, presents us the world just as it is or, rather, it simply duplicates its appearance. Imitations are substitutes for reality. In Mander's words,

people were believing that an *image* of nature was equal...to the experience of nature...that images of historical events or news events were equal to the events...the confusion of...information with a wider, direct mode of experience was advancing rapidly. (1978, 26)

Plato's argument against poetry is repeated in summary form, and without an awareness of its provenance, in connection with television by Neil Postman: 'Television,' he writes, 'offers viewers a variety of subject-matter,

requires minimal skills to comprehend it, and is largely aimed at emotional gratification' (1985, 86). The inevitable result, strictly parallel to 'the bad government in the soul' which Plato would go to all lengths to avert, is, according to Postman, an equally dangerous 'spiritual devastation' (Postman 1985, 155).¹⁹

Parallels between Plato's view and contemporary attitudes such as that expressed in the statement that 'daily consumption of *Three's Company* is not likely to produce a citizenry concerned about, much less committed to, Madisonian self-government' are to be found wherever you look (Collins 1987, 1.31.2). Simply put, the greatest part of contemporary criticism of television depends on a moral disapproval which is identical to Plato's attack on epic and tragic poetry in the fourth century B.C. In this respect, at least, we are most of us Platonists. We must, therefore, re-examine both our grounds for disapproving of Plato's attack on poetry and our reasons for disapproving of television.

It is true that television is also the target of another criticism, a purer aesthetic criticism concerned with the artistic quality of television works. This is not a criticism which Socrates, who confesses to 'a love and respect for Homer since childhood' (X.595b9–10) and who describes his love of poetry in explicit sexual terms (X.607e4–608b2), would ever have made. We will discuss this criticism in the last section of this essay.

III

My effort to establish a parallel between Plato's deep, complex and suspicious hostility toward Homer and Aeschylus on the one hand and the obviously well-deserved contempt with which many today regard *Dynasty* or *Dallas* may well appear simply ridiculous. Though classical Greek poetry still determines many of the criteria that underlie the literary canon of our culture, most of television hardly qualifies as entertainment. Yet my position does not amount to a trivialization of Plato's views. On the contrary, I believe, we are bound to miss (and have already missed) the real urgency of Plato's approach if we persist in taking it as an attack against art as such. Plato was neither insensitive to art nor inconsistent in his desire to produce, as he did, artworks of his own in his dialogues; he did not discern a deep characteristic of art that pits it essentially against philosophy, nor did he envisage a higher form of art which he would have allowed in his city.²⁰ Plato's argument with poetry concerns a practice which is today paradigmatically a fine art, but it is not an argument directed at it as a fine art as such. At this point, the history of art becomes essential for an understanding of its philosophy. Though Plato's attack against poetry in the *Republic* may be the originating text of the philosophy of art, his argument, without being any less profound or disturbing, dismisses poetry as what it was in his time: and poetry then was popular entertainment.

The audience of Attic drama, as far as we now know, was 'a "popular" audience in the sense that it was a body fully representative of the great mass of the Athenian people' (Walcot 1976, 1) and included a great number of foreign visitors as well (Pickard-Cambridge 1946, 140–1). During the Greater Dionysia in classical times no fewer than 17,000 people, perhaps more,²¹ were packed into the god's theatre. Pericles, according to Plutarch, established the *theōrikon*, a subsidy to cover the price of admission and something more, which ended up being distributed to rich and poor alike, and made of the theatre a free entertainment (Pickard-Cambridge 1968, 266–8).

The plays were not produced in front of a well-behaved audience. The dense crowd was given to whistling (*syrinx*) and the theatre resounded with its 'uneducated noise' (*amousoi boai plēthous*, *Laws* 700c3). Plato expresses profound distaste for the tumult with which audiences, in the theatre and elsewhere, voiced their approval or dissatisfaction (*Rep.* VI.492c). Their preferences were definitely pronounced, if not often sophisticated. Since four plays were produced within a single day, the audience arrived at the theatre with large quantities of food. Some of it they consumed themselves – hardly a silent activity in its own right, unlikely to produce the quasi-religious attention required of a fine-art audience today and more reminiscent of other sorts of mass entertainments. Some of their food was used to pelt those actors whom they did not like (Demosthenes, *De Corona* 262),²² and whom they often literally shouted off the stage (Pollux, iv.122; Demosthenes, *De Corona*, 265). In particular, and though this may be difficult to imagine today, the drama was considered a realistic representation of the world: we are told, for example, that a number of women were frightened into having miscarriages or into giving premature birth by the entrance of the Furies in Aeschylus' *Eumenides* (*Vita Aeschyli*; Pollux, iv.110).²³

The realistic interpretation of Attic drama is crucial for our purposes. Simon Goldhill, expressing the recent suspiciousness toward certain naive understandings of realism, has written that Electra's entrance as a peasant in the play Euripides named after her 'is upsetting not because it represents reality but because it represents reality in a way which transgresses the conventions of dramatic representations, indeed the representations of reality constructed elsewhere in the play'. In fact, he continues, 'Euripides constantly forces awareness of theatre as theatre' (Goldhill 1985, 252–3). This, along with the general contemporary claim that all art necessarily contains hints pointing toward its artificial nature and undermining whatever naturalistic pretensions it makes, may well be true. But it doesn't alter the fact that it is of the essence of popular entertainment that these hints are not, while the entertainment still remains popular, consciously perceived. Popular entertainment, in theory and practice, is generally taken to be inherently realistic.

To be inherently realistic is to seem to represent reality without artifice, without mediation and convention. Realistic art is, just in the sense in

which Plato thought of imitation, transparent. This transparency, I believe, is not real. It is only the result of our often not being aware of the mediated and conventional nature of the representations to which we are most commonly exposed. As Barish writes in regard to the theatre, 'it has an unsettling way of being received by its audiences, at least for the moment and with whatever necessary mental reserves, as reality pure and simple' (1981, 79). Whether or not we are aware of it, however, mediation and convention are absolutely essential to all representation. But since, in such cases, they cannot be attributed to the representation itself, which, transparent as it is, cannot be seen as an object with its own status and in its own right, they are instead attributed to the represented subject-matter: the slow-moving speech and action patterns of soap operas, for example, are considered (and criticized) as representations of a slow-moving world.

Attributed to subject-matter, mediation and convention appear, almost by necessity, as distortions. And, accordingly (from the fifth century B.C. through Renaissance and Puritan England as well as Jansenist France in connection with the theatre, through the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century attacks on the novel, to contemporary denunciations of the cinema and of television), the reality the popular media are supposed to represent has always been considered, while the media in question are still popular, as a distorted, perverted and dismal reality. It has regularly involved campaigns to abolish or reform the popular arts, or efforts on the part of the few to distance themselves from the arts as far as possible. And, insofar as the audience of these media has been supposed, and has often supposed itself, to react directly to that reality, the audience's undisputed enjoyment of the popular arts has been interpreted as the enjoyment of this distorted, perverted and dismal reality. It has, therefore, also been believed that this enjoyment both reflects and contributes to a distorted, perverted and dismal life – a vast wasteland accurately reflected in the medium which mirrors it.

This is the essence of Plato's attack against poetry and, I believe, the essential idea behind a number of attacks against television today. Nothing in Plato's time answered to our concept of the fine arts, especially to the idea that the arts are a province of a small and enlightened part of the population (which may or may not be interested in attracting the rest of the people to them), and Plato holds no views about them. His quarrel with poetry is not disturbing because anyone seriously believes that Plato could have been right about Homer's pernicious influence. Plato's view is disturbing because we are still in agreement with him that representation is transparent – at least in the case of those media which, like television, have not yet acquired the status of art and whose own nature, as opposed to what they depict, has not yet become in serious terms a subject in its own right.²⁴ And, because of this view, we may indeed react to life, or think that we do, as we react to its representations: what is often necessary for a similarity between our reactions to life and our reactions to art is not so much the fact that the two

are actually similar, but only the view that they are. Many do, in fact, enjoy things on television which, as Plato wrote in regard to poetry, some at least would be ashamed, even horrified, to enjoy in life.

The problem here is with the single word 'things', which applies both to the contents of television shows and to the situations those represent. What this suggests is that what is presented on television is a duplicate of what occurs in the world. No interpretation seems to be needed in order to reveal and to understand the complex relations that actually obtain between them.

By contrast, no one believes that the fine arts produce such duplications. Though we are perfectly willing to learn about life from literature and painting (a willingness which, in my opinion, requires close scrutiny in its own right), no one would ever project directly the content of a work of fine art onto the world. The fine arts, we believe, bear an indirect, interpretative relationship to the world, and further interpretation on the part of audience and critics is necessary in order to understand it. It is precisely for this sort of interpretation that the popular arts do not seem to call.

IV

Yet the case of the *Republic* suggests that the line between the popular and the fine arts is much less settled than is often supposed. If my approach has been right so far, Plato's quarrel with poetry is to a great extent, as much of the disdain against television is today, a quarrel with a popular form of entertainment. Greek drama, indeed, apart from the fact that it was addressed to a very broad audience, exhibits a number of features commonly associated with popular literature. One among them is the sheer volume of output required from any popular genre. 'Throughout the fifth century B.C. and probably, apart from a few exceptional years, through the earlier part of the fourth century also,' Pickard-Cambridge writes, 'three tragic poets entered the contest for the prize in tragedy, and each presented four plays' (1968, 79). If we add to these the plays produced by the comic poets, the plays produced at all the festivals other than the City Dionysia (with which Pickard-Cambridge is exclusively concerned), and the plays of the poets who were not chosen for the contest, we can see that the actual number of dramas must have been immense. The three great tragedians alone account for roughly 300 works. And this is at least a partial explanation of the fact that so many plays were different treatments of the same stories. This practice is imposed on popular authors by the demands of their craft and is in itself a serious source of satisfaction for their audience.²⁵

The most important feature of popular art, however, is the transparency to which we have already referred. The idea is complex, and it is very difficult to say in general terms which of a popular work's features are projected directly onto reality, since, obviously, not all are. A television audience

knows very well that actors shot during a show are not really dead, but other aspects of the behaviour of such fictional characters are actually considered as immediate transcriptions of reality. On a very simple level, for example, it is difficult to explain otherwise the fact that the heroines of *Cagney and Lacey* invariably buckle their seat belts when they enter their car, whether to chase a murderer or to go to lunch. And many aspects of their relationship are considered as perfectly accurate transcriptions of reality. Popular art is commonly perceived as literally incorporating parts of reality within it; hence the generally accepted, and mistaken, view that it requires little or no interpretation.

Arthur Danto has recently drawn attention to art which aims to incorporate reality directly within it, and has named it the 'art of disturbance'. This is not art which represents, as art has always represented, disturbing reality. It is art which aims to disturb precisely by eradicating the distance between it and reality, by placing reality squarely within it (Danto 1986a).²⁶ Disturbational art aims to frustrate and unsettle its audience's aesthetic, distanced and contemplative expectations: 'Reality,' Danto writes, 'must in some way... be an actual component of disturbatory art and usually reality of a kind itself disturbing... And these as components in the art, not simply collateral with its production and appreciation' (1986a, 121). 'Happenings' or Chris Burden's viciously self-endangering projects fall within this category. And so did, until relatively recently, obscenity in the cinema and the theatre.

The purpose of disturbational art, according to Danto, is atavistic. It aims to reintroduce reality into art, as was once supposedly the norm: 'Once we perceive statues as merely designating what they resemble... rather than containing the reality through containing the form, a certain power is lost to art' (Danto 1986a, 128). But contemporary disturbational art, which Danto considers 'pathetic and futile', utterly fails to recapture this lost 'magic' (Danto 1986a, 133).

This failure is not an accident. The disturbational art with which Danto is concerned consists mainly of paintings, sculptures and 'happenings' that are essentially addressed to a sophisticated audience through the conventions of the fine arts: you dress to go see it. But part of what makes the fine arts fine is precisely the distance they have managed, over time, to insert between representation and reality; this distance can no longer be eliminated. Danto finds that disturbational art still poses some sort of vague threat: 'Perhaps it is for this reason that the spontaneous response to disturbational art is to disarm it by cooptation, incorporating it instantaneously into the cool institutions of the artworld where it will be rendered harmless and distant from forms of life it meant to explode' (Danto 1986a, 119). My own explanation is that the cool institutions of the artworld are just where the art of disturbance, which is necessarily a fine art, has always belonged.

Disturbational art aims to restore 'to art some of the magic purified out when art became *art*' (Danto 1986a, 131). This, I believe, is not a reasonable goal: once a genre has become fine, it seldom, if ever, loses its status; too much is invested in it. And yet, I want to suggest, 'the magic purified out when art became *art*' is all around us, and just for that reason almost totally invisible. The distinction between representation and reality is constantly and interestingly blurred by television – literally an art which has not yet become *art*, and which truly disturbs its audience: consider, as one instance among innumerable many, the intense debate over the influence on Soviet–American relations of the absurd mini-series *Amerika* in the spring of 1987.²⁷

As a medium, television is still highly transparent. Though, as I have admitted, I don't yet have a general account of which of its features are projected directly onto the world, television clearly convinces us on many occasions that what we see *in* it is precisely what we see *through* it. This is precisely why it presents such a challenge to our moral sensibility. The 'magic' of television may be neither admirable nor even respectable. But it is, I am arguing, structurally identical to the magic Plato saw and denounced in Greek poetry, which also, of course, was not *art*.

Plato's attack on poetry is duplicated today even by those who think of him as their great enemy and the greatest opponent of art ever to have written. It is to be found not only in the various denunciations of television, many of which are reasonable and well supported, but even more importantly in the total neglect of television on the part of our philosophy of art. Aesthetics defends the arts which can no longer do harm and against which Plato's strictures hardly make sense. His views are thus made incomprehensible and are not allowed to address their real target. Danto writes that every acknowledged literary work is 'about the "I" that reads the text...in such a way that each work becomes a metaphor for each reader' (Danto 1986b, 155). The keyword here is 'metaphor': we do not literally emulate our literary heroes, in the unfortunate manner of Don Quixote; we understand them through interpretation and transformation, finding their relevance to life, if anywhere, on a more abstract level. But such literal emulation was just what Plato was afraid of in the case of tragic poetry, and what so many today are afraid of in regard to television: 'we become what we see.' Plato's attack on 'art' is still very much alive.

V

A reasonable reaction to these speculations is that, whatever the similarities between Plato's attack on poetry and contemporary attitudes toward television, the difference between the media themselves is immense. Not only did Greek poetry have its Homer and its Aeschylus, but Plato was acutely, even painfully, aware of its beauty. Toward such beauty, Socrates says, 'we shall

behave like lovers who see their passion is disastrous and violently force themselves away from the object of their love' (X.607e4–6). But television, almost everyone seems to agree, has no aesthetic value: it is not only harmful but ugly; why bother?

This issue is extremely complicated, and I can only touch on it lightly here. The common view that television is aesthetically worthless seems to me profoundly flawed. This is not because I think that television is aesthetically valuable, but because this sort of statement is the wrong sort of statement to make. Television is a vast medium which includes a great variety of genres, some of which have no connection of any kind with the arts. A similar statement would be something like 'Writing is good (or bad),' which wears its absurdity on its face. Even a more specific view to the effect, say, that 'Literature is valuable' seems obviously untenable once we consider the huge numbers of absolutely horrible literary works, most of which are, mercifully, totally forgotten.

We must, therefore, gradually develop principles and criteria suited to the criticism of television. We need to articulate classes and categories to help us organize its various species and genres – the kind of project with which, for example, the serious study of poetry first began. We need principles which will be more than mechanical applications of the principles developed already for other arts and which, naturally, television always miserably fails to satisfy.²⁸ We need, for example, especially in connection with broadcast television, to face the fact that the unit of aesthetic significance is not the individual episode – though individual episodes are all we ever see – but the serial as a whole (Cavell 1982, 77–9). The fact that the serial somehow inheres in its episodes raises radically new aesthetic questions as well as venerably old metaphysical ones. As Aristotle remarked when, after dismissing Parmenides and Melissus as physical thinkers of any significance, he nevertheless proceeded to discuss their views in detail, 'there is philosophy in the investigation' (*Physics A*, 185a20).

We finally need, as Stanley Cavell has correctly pointed out, to think seriously about the fact – and it *is* a fact – that 'television has conquered.' Two questions need to be asked: 'first how it has happened; and second how we [intellectuals] have apparently remained uninterested in accounting for its conquering' (Cavell 1982, 75). The first question can only be answered through the development of television criticism. The second also requires such criticism, but also an explanation of why the criticism has been so slow in developing. Cavell attributes this to the fear of

the fact that a commodity has conquered, an appliance that is a monitor, and yet what it monitors... are so often settings of the shut-in, a reference line of normality or banality so insistent as to suggest that *what* is shut out, that suspicion whose entry we would at all costs guard against, must be as monstrous as, let me say, the death of the normal, of the familiar as such. (Cavell 1982, 95)

But, I think, there is another aspect to this fear, another – connected – reason for it. It is a reason provided directly not by what television shuts out but precisely by what it lets in, by what it shows and by the conditions under which we look at it.

Broadcast television, which until recently was practically identical with the medium itself, works primarily through the serial. Each episode, precisely because it instantiates the serial of which it is a member, is essentially repetitive, however novel a storyline it may exploit on a particular occasion. The set is always the same. The characters' personalities are usually the same.²⁹ Their habits, their facial and verbal expressions, their peculiarities are the same. The surroundings in which conversations occur are the same. The groupings in which those conversations occur are the same. Membership in the serial is established through this sameness, which is therefore essential to the genre. And the serial is repetitive in another dimension as well: it is broadcast at exactly the same time each week. Watching a particular show – and to come to appreciate a show at all requires watching a number of episodes: the features they share as members of a species cannot be otherwise noticed and interpreted as such – imposes a rigorous routine on the viewer. Unless one owns a recording machine, one must arrange one's life, one must establish a routine, in order to accommodate the show. And what one sees then, with or without a recording machine, is nothing other than the representation of routine itself.

Routinization, however, is either something we want to avoid or something we want to forget. Television brings it, as it were, home to us. It imposes a routine on its viewers, it portrays routine for them, and it suggests that their own life mirrors what it portrays. Television will be resisted as long as routine remains, in the absence of criticism and interpretation, its most salient feature. Interpretation is necessary in order to determine whether there are other features there to be noticed and, perhaps, appreciated. In the meantime, of course, the critics may themselves be trapped in routine: this danger is endemic to the enterprise. But nothing, in principle, deprives the depiction of routine of aesthetic value, just as nothing, in principle, prevents the depiction of foolishness, cruelty, murder, incest, ignorance, arrogance, suicide and self-mutilation from constituting, as it has on at least one occasion, an unparalleled work of art.

Notes

1. Poetry is also discussed in Books II and III (376e–403c) of the *Republic*. Plato's negative attitude, of course, is not confined to this work. The *Ion*, one of his early works, is devoted to the issue of whether rhapsodes, and poets, possess a *technē*, or rational craft, and to the proof that they do not. The heavy censorship of poetry is brought up on a number of occasions in the *Laws*, his last work; for example, at 659b–662a, 700a–701b, 802a–c, 829a–e. The case of the *Phaedrus* is more complicated and ambiguous for the following reason. Though it is true that Socrates,

in his 'Great Speech', praises poetry as a 'divine madness' and puts it in the same group as medicine, prophecy and – of all things – philosophy (243e–245c), this statement is made within a rhetorical context. And Socrates, in his later discussion of rhetoric, claims that an orator must always make use of what his *audience*, in this case Phaedrus, is likely to find persuasive, not necessarily and strictly speaking the truth (271c–272b). Cf. Cooper 1986 (especially 80–1).

2. Four major festivals were held in Athens and its vicinity: the Anthesteria, the Lenaia, the Rural Dionysia and the Great or City Dionysia. Each involved a variety of dramatic and poetic performances. The major study of these festivals is Pickard-Cambridge (1968). Ion's recitations of Homer may have occurred as part of such festivals, but they may have also taken place independently; we know (VII.530a2–3) that he had participated in a festival at Epidaurus.
3. In what follows, I will rely on the analysis of Plato's argument in Book X offered in this article, to which I will refer as 'Plato on Imitation'. The most forceful earlier effort to resolve the conflict in Plato's favour had been that of J. Tate, who, in a series of articles, tried to distinguish between a good and a bad sense of 'imitation' and to limit Plato's exclusion to the latter; cf. 'Plato on Imitation', 48–9 and nn. for references to Tate's work and for criticism of his position.
4. This resolution of the conflict follows the view of Ferrari (1989).
5. This has been most forcefully denied by Else (1972) as well as in his posthumously published Else (1986). A number of commentators on the *Republic* have found it difficult to see how Book X fits with the work's overall argument; cf. 'Plato on Imitation', 54 and nn. for references. Most recently, Julia Annas (1981, 335) has described the book as an 'excrement'.
6. I have generally, though not always, relied on the translation of the *Republic* by George Grube (1974).
7. A detailed defence of this claim can be found in 'Plato on Imitation', 54–64.
8. Plato has many reservations in connection with painting and sculpture. He argues in this book, for example, that painting produces only imitations of things, that it can fool simple people, and that it confuses the mind. In the *Sophist*, he attacks at least one species of sculpture because it essentially misrepresents the proportions of its original (235c8–236a7). This is only a sample, but a fair sample of the sorts of objections he raises against these two art forms. He does not attack them on moral grounds. It is interesting in this connection to note that Aristotle claims that painting does represent people 'who are worse than we are' (*Poet.* 2, 1448a5–6). But Aristotle did not consider this as an objection either to painting or, of course, to poetry.
9. There is a crucial problem here concerning the way in which the action depicted in an artwork is described. Are we to be moved by Medea's murder of her children or by the impossible situation in which this stranger, a woman in a man's country, is placed? These are questions of interpretation, which I shall have to avoid here.
10. I have used Barnes (1984).
11. Halliwell's book is extremely valuable in its demonstration of the common ethical and psychological ground between Plato and Aristotle on poetry.
12. Barish makes a similar point in connection with Tertullian's view, which is even more extreme than Plato's: 'In the world of Tertullian's polemic,' he writes, 'the difference between art and life has no status.... For Tertullian [to witness a spectacle] is to approve it in the most literal sense: to perceive it as raw fact and to rejoice in it as fact. "The calling to mind of a criminal act or a shameful thing... is

- no better than the thing itself” (1981, 45). Tertullian, of course, is also interested in showing that a sin in intention is as damning as a sin in act, but his conflation of representation with reality, as Barish shows, is rampant.
13. On this point, I disagree with Ferrari (1989). Ferrari is admirably clear on the fact that Plato is concerned not so much with feelings themselves, but with their expression, in poetry. On the basis of this he argues that Plato’s suspiciousness of poetry is justified. But Ferrari, like Plato, identifies the representation of (the expression of) sorrow with that expression itself. This identification, I am arguing, is illegitimate.
 14. It might be asked at this point why someone who did have knowledge of a craft could not produce a more profound imitation of it. This is a very vexed question. The short answer, which is defended at length in ‘Plato on Imitation’, 59–60, is that to produce something in the full knowledge of what it is simply is no longer to produce an imitation, but a further instance of it.
 15. A more extensive treatment of this point can be found in ‘Plato on Imitation’, 62–4.
 16. It should be remarked in this context (and this is a subject I propose to discuss in detail elsewhere) that the short length of many television programmes is not necessarily a shortcoming. It is a convention of the genre and, as such, it can be exploited in very interesting ways, much as, say, the fact that the classical tragedians, on the average, had to compose four plays for presentation within a single day, between sunrise and sunset. The question is raised in Thornburn (1981).
 17. A similar view is expressed by Novak (1981, 19–34).
 18. A fascinating alternative view is proposed in Gerbner and Gross (1976). Their research suggests that the more television one watches the more one tends to be afraid of the violent world that is so often depicted there: the heavy viewer is likely to withdraw from this world rather than to engage in the behaviour depicted on television.
 19. Postman’s attack on television, duplicated, among other places, in Booth (1982), Martin Esslin (1981; otherwise sympathetic) and Cater (1981, 11–18), demands serious and extensive attention. The basic idea on which this sort of attack depends is a contrast between the medium of print, which is assumed to be complex, articulate and highly suited to the communication of complicated information, on the one hand and the visual media, especially television, on the other: television is supposed to be incapable of answering serious questions, of examining complicated issues in depth, and of truly involving the rational capacities of its audience – this is said to be due both to some technical features inherent in the television image and to the immense time constraints to which television is always subject. The irony here is very deep. Almost every argument this approach uses to demonstrate the inferiority of television to writing repeats, without most of those authors’ knowledge, the arguments Plato used in the *Phaedrus* to demonstrate the inferiority of *writing* to speech and, in the *Gorgias* and the *Theaetetus*, the inferiority of rhetoric to dialectic. The fact that Plato’s arguments for the superiority of speech over writing can be so easily used to show the superiority of writing over another form of communication is a subject with far-ranging implications which I propose to discuss in detail on another occasion.
 20. References to such interpretations of Plato can be found in ‘Plato on Imitation’, nn. 4, 60, 75, 96, and in the passages to which those notes are appended.
 21. If, that is, we are to believe Plato’s statement that Agathon faced an audience of over 30,000 at the Lenaia on the day preceding the dramatic date of the *Symposium* (175e).

22. Demosthenes, *De Corona* 262. The passage refers directly to the Rural Dionysia, but there is no reason to suppose that the situation in the City Dionysia was significantly different.
23. Whether the story is or is not true is not important; what matters is that stories of this sort circulated and were found believable.
24. In some cases in which television is examined as a medium, the standards applied to it are implicitly drawn from other media and artforms and, not surprisingly, yield the conclusion that (by those unacknowledged standards) it is an utter failure as a serious art. This is particularly obvious in the case of Postman (1985).
25. This is well discussed in Cawelti (1976). See also Radway (1984), especially 5–6, 29, 34. It should be pointed out, though, that, on the basis of Euripides' *Hippolytus*, 451–6, and Aristotle, *Poet.* 9, 1451b25, Pickard-Cambridge doubts that the Athenian audience was familiar with the myths explored in drama. He considers 'even without the context... an easy and obvious joke' the comic poet Antiphanes' complaint (fr. 191K) that the tragic poets, whose stories were known to their audience, had an advantage over the writers of comedy (275–6 and nn.). I don't find the joke either easy or obvious. On Aristotle's statement, cf. Lucas (1968), n. *ad loc.*
26. Some of the ideas of the following paragraphs are also presented in my review of Danto's book (Nehamas 1988).
27. The show's director at one point denied that his hostile portrayal of United Nations troops and Soviet characters was significant, since this was after all a work of fiction, but insisted that his strongly sympathetic and always more complex portrayal of his American characters was intended to show how Americans really are, and should be the main focus of his audience's attention.
28. Cf. Thornburn (1981).
29. This statement needs to be qualified in light of shows like *Hill Street Blues*, *St. Elsewhere*, or *L.A. Law*, which allow some character development. Such development, however, is both slow and conservative.

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3

Art and Mimesis in Plato's *Republic*

M. F. Burnyeat

Plato is famous for having banished poetry and poets from the ideal city of the *Republic*. But he did no such thing. On the contrary, poetry – the right sort of poetry – will be a pervasive presence in the society he describes. Yes, he did banish Homer, Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides, Aristophanes – the greatest names of Greek literature. But not because they were poets. He banished them because they produced the wrong sort of poetry. To rebut Plato's critique of poetry, what is needed is not a defence of poetry, but a defence of the freedom of poets to write as, and what, they wish.

No big problem, you may think. But suppose poetry was not the minority pursuit it has become in Britain today. Suppose it was the most popular form of entertainment available, the nearest equivalent to our mass media. That is not far from the truth about the world in which Plato wrote the *Republic*. The Athenian democracy, audience for much of the poetry Plato objected to, accepted that it was their responsibility to ensure the quality of the poetry funded by the state. In modern terms, they thought that democracy should care about whether the mass media encourage the right sorts of values. Do we want Rupert Murdoch to determine the overall quality of the culture? Should money decide everything? If not, what can we do about it?

Plato was no democrat, and had no qualms about proposing Soviet-style control from above, by those who know best. But democrats who reject such authoritarian solutions may still learn from Plato's disturbing presentation of the problem. What he is chiefly talking about is the words and music by which the culture is transmitted from one generation to the next. Tragedy and comedy were performed before a crowd of 14,000 people at the Great Dionysia and other civic festivals. We hear of 20,000 people attending a recital of Homer. Then there are hymns sung at religious ceremonies and songs at feasts or private symposia. Forget about reading T.S. Eliot to yourself in bed. Our subject is the words and music you hear at social gatherings, large and small. Think pubs and cafés, karaoke, football matches, the last night of the Proms. Think Morning Service at the village church, carols from King's College Cambridge, Elton John singing to the nation from

Westminster Abbey. Think popular music in general and, when Plato brings in a parallel from the visual arts, forget the Tate Gallery and recall the advertisements that surround us everywhere. Above all, think about the way all this is distributed to us by television, the omnipresent medium at work in every home. What Plato is discussing in the *Republic* when he talks about poetry is how to control the influences that shape the culture in which the young grow up. How to ensure that what he calls the *ethos* of society is as ideal as possible. Even as adults, none of us is immune.

Books II–III of the *Republic* present Plato's proposals for reforming the culture in a carefully arranged sequence of stages. The first stage concentrates on the content of musical poetry, the last on its material and social setting – with special reference to the symposium or drinking party. In between come various other elements of poetic performance. This sequence of stages is not a sequence of independent topics. Each should be thought of as one layer among others in the analysis of a single cultural phenomenon: the performance of poetry with music (and sometimes dance as well).

From time to time the discussion touches on a non-musical topic, be it nursery tales or the content of the visual arts. But the central thread is the performance of musical poetry at a social gathering. This, for Plato, is the main vehicle of cultural transmission. This is what he is trying to get right when he designs a musical education for the warrior class in the ideal city – the Guards, as they are called, from whose ranks a select few will go on to become philosopher-rulers. All else is subordinate.

One further preliminary. Plato is well aware that what he has to say will shock and appal his readers, then as now. His proposals for the ideal city amount to a complete reconstruction of Greek culture as it existed in his day. What motivates the proposals is his profound understanding of the many subtle ways in which the *ethos* of a society forms the souls who grow up in it. If you shudder at the authoritarianism of his programme, remember that shudder when the newspapers next debate whether bad behaviour in schools is the fault of parents or teachers. As if parents and teachers were anything but a tiny facet of the total culture of our time. Either grasp the nettle of devising democratic alternatives to Plato's authoritarianism, or stop bleating.

Plato's first charge, and perhaps the most shocking to ancient readers, is that, from Homer onwards, poetry has been full of lies about the gods. The entire religious and mythological tradition stands condemned for blasphemy. It is like someone today proposing to ban the Bible and all reference to Biblical stories, because the Bible presents a wrong picture of divinity. None of the stories of God's dealings with humankind can be true; and, even if some of them were true, they are morally unsuitable for young ears.

And what is unsuitable for ears is unsuitable for eyes as well. Stories it is wrong to sing, like the battle of gods and giants, must not be represented in embroidery. This is no joke. Plato's readers would think at once of the

colossal embroidered robe (πέπλος) carried in procession at the festival of the Panathenaea. The robe showed the battle of gods and giants, spotlighting the victory of Athena over the giant Enceladus. A ban on such embroidery is a stake through the heart of Athenian religion and Athenian civic identity. Though Socrates does not stop to mention it, the censorship of embroidery will inevitably extend to painting and sculpture. The battle of gods and giants will be removed from the carved metopes of the Parthenon (currently on display in the British Museum). In the ideal city, the religious content of the visual arts will be as restricted as that of poetry and music.

How much Greek literature would survive enforcement of the following norms? (1) Divinity, being good, is not responsible for everything that occurs, only for the good. So gods never lead mortals into crime. (2) Divinity is simple, unchanging, and hates falsehood and deception. So gods never appear in disguise to mortals, never send misleading dreams or signs. (3) Hades is not the dreadful place the poets describe. So a good man finds no great cause for grief in the death of himself, his friend or his son. (4) Heroes are admirable role models for the young. So they never indulge in lamentation, mirth or lying (save for high purposes of state), impertinence to their commanders or arrogance towards gods and men, sexual passion or rape, longing for food and drink, or greed for wealth; nor, *mutatis mutandis*, should any such thing be attributed to the gods. Finally, (5) the moral argument of the *Republic* itself, when completed, will prove that it is justice, not injustice, that makes one happy. So no poet may depict a happy villain or a virtuous person in misery. Under this regime very little of the Greek literature we know would remain intact, and much of the art would disappear.

Nearly all the poetry cited in the *Republic* so far will be banned. Many of the themes of the earlier discussion came from poetry, because poetry articulates the values and beliefs of the culture. In Book I, Cephalus recounts how, when old age comes and death is near, one begins to take seriously the stories about Hades and the terrors it holds for wrongdoers. In a society with no Bible or canonical sacred text, the chief source for these stories is poetry. Conversely, it is poets like Pindar who hold out the hope of a pleasant afterlife for those who have lived in justice and piety. On the other hand, a major theme of Adeimantus' speech at the beginning of Book II is the way the poets instil in the young a wrong attitude towards justice, because they praise it for its contingent consequences rather than its intrinsic value. Justice, the poets say, is a real sweat in this life, much harder and less pleasant than injustice (provided you can get away with it). It is only in the very long run that justice pays: the poet Musaeus, for example, promises the righteous that their afterlife will be an unending symposium, as if the ultimate reward for virtue were eternal intoxication. But at the same time his teaching is that the wicked can always bribe the gods with sacrifices and festivals to let them off. None of this is compatible with the norms that Socrates has now put before us.

To begin with, however, Socrates speaks as if he is merely purging the culture of certain objectionable features. He asks Homer and the other poets not to be angry if he and Adeimantus expunge all the passages that breach the norms. He takes the scissors to Aeschylus, but implies that tragedy (cleaned up by himself) will still be performed. At this stage, Plato is concerned only with the *content* of the arts, especially their religious content. Like many later (and earlier) religious reformers, he will have his new orthodoxy, utterly different from traditional Greek religion, rigorously enforced throughout the society. The next stage of the discussion, concerned with the manner of poetic performance, will justify banishing Homer and the tragedians altogether.

But already it is clear that the norms for art in the ideal city will reshape the whole culture. Students of Plato are sometimes told they need not be shocked by the censorship advocated in *Republic* II–III, because its target is the education of young Guards, and any responsible parent today keeps watch on the entertainment and reading matter of young children. The proposals are made for the sake of the young. But Plato's insight is that, if you are concerned about the souls of the young, it is no good simply laying down rules for parents and teachers, or agreeing to keep sex and violence off the TV screen until after 9 p.m. His conclusion: for the sake of the young, the entire culture must be purged.

The text makes this quite plain. The stories which must not be told to very young children by nurses and mothers should not be heard anywhere in the city – or if at some ritual they have to be told, the audience should be kept as small as possible. Conversely, once we have the right kind of stories for the very young, we will compel the poets to tell them the same kind when they grow older. The norms about the representation of divinity apply to all poetry, whether epic, lyric or tragic: epic and tragic meters are primarily used for public occasions, while lyric is for smaller group gatherings like the symposium. And things that must not be said in verse must not be said in prose either, must not be said or heard by anyone in the city, young or old. They are not fit for the ears of boys or men. Such things are not merely false, but impious, and therefore harmful for anyone to hear. The one mention of schoolteachers is a sharp passage at the very end of Book II, referring to some objectionable lines of Aeschylus: 'When anyone says such things about the gods, we shall be angry with him, we will refuse him a chorus, and we will not allow teachers to use him for the education of the young' (*Rep.* II.383b–c) Nothing is to be put on in the theatre unless it is fit for classroom use afterwards. The Greek word παιδεία means both culture and education. Plato's message is that culture should be taken seriously for what it is: education.

Yet telling false, blasphemous, immoral and passionate stories is not the worst thing a poet can do, in Plato's opinion. Such stories corrupt the young by filling their minds with dangerously wrong ideas about matters

of great moment. But a more enlightened, grown-up mind, with the aid of philosophy, may come to reject the community's religious narratives, as Socrates does in the *Euthyphro*. Stories as such are something a rational mind can resist, question and reject. With visual images and likenesses in sound and music, resistance is not so easy. The manner of poetic performance is more insidious than the content. Even the best philosophical minds are at risk.

The advanced industrial countries of the West have fewer occasions for community singing than more traditional societies, but one that survives is Christmas:

Once in Royal David's city
 Stood a lowly cattle shed,
 Where a mother laid her baby,
 In a manger for his bed.
 Mary was that mother mild,
 Jesus Christ the little child.

This carol is a third-person narrative, all the way through. Listeners hear about the birth of Jesus. But when someone reads the Lesson from the Gospel and their voice modulates to express kindness or anger in words that Jesus speaks in the first person, or when in Bach's *St Matthew Passion* Jesus sings those words in recitative – then it is mimesis. We do not merely hear *about* the Son of God. In a certain sense, we hear *him*. We hear him in the same sense as we see him on the Cross in a picture of the Crucifixion.

In Book X of the *Republic*, painting is the paradigm Plato uses to explain the meaning, and the menace, of poetic mimesis. His example is a painted couch, and the point he emphasizes is that the picture shows only how the couch appears when viewed from a particular angle – from the side, the front, or some other perspective. Christ on the Cross is also seen in a fixed perspective. But that does not stop us saying we see him there. Just so when we view the painting of an ancient Greek symposium. It need not be particularly naturalistic for people to say, if asked what it represents, 'I see couches and tables, a lyre and pipes for the music, people enjoying a party'.

It is the task of the philosophy of art to explain what grounds this way of speaking, why it is not only possible but the correct thing to say in the presence of a wide range of representational painting. My interest here is in what happens when the same language is applied to the likenesses of poetry and music.

Back to the *St Matthew Passion*. As in a rhapsode's recital of Homer, there is a narrator (the Evangelist) to tell the story, and speeches sung in recitative by the different characters. There is also a Chorus, which plays two roles. It is both the jeering voice of the crowd hostile to Jesus and, in the Chorales,

the voice of the Congregation reacting to the events with sorrow and repentance for what humanity did to the Son of God. This dual role expresses rather well the idea I think is fundamental to mimesis, that the audience – in this case, the Congregation – is actually present, in a certain sense, at the events depicted. They do not merely hear about them. In a Greek tragedy the Chorus has a similar dual role, both participating in the drama and voicing the audience's reaction. The Athenians did not merely hear about Antigone's conflict with Creon. In a certain sense, they witnessed it.

We may find it easier to speak of seeing Jesus in a picture than of hearing him in Bach's music. Plato relies on the analogy with painting to make his point vivid. But no help is needed when we move to opera, which began as Monteverdi's and others' attempt to re-create the multimedia experience of Greek tragedy, where speech (for the iambic verse) alternated with flute-accompanied recitative or lyric choruses sung and danced. We do not merely hear the characters of an opera, as in the *St Matthew Passion*. We also see them – moving, dancing, fighting, dying; not motionless as in painting and sculpture. The absence of a narrator is another contrast with the *St Matthew Passion*. Tchaikovsky's *Eugene Onegin* cuts out the narrator whose ironic commentary is crucial to Pushkin's poem, and shows us Tatiana herself in the intimacy of her bedroom, writing the fateful love-letter. Afterwards we see and hear Onegin crushing her hopes. At the end we see and hear Onegin declare his love – too late. It would be ridiculous to refuse to describe the opera-goer's experience in these terms; absurd to insist that all we see and hear are singers playing their parts. As Stanley Cavell said in reply to a parallel suggestion about film: 'You might as well tell me that I do not see myself in the mirror but merely see a mirror image of myself' (Cavell 1979, 213).

It is this sense of being present at the events enacted on stage, not merely at the theatrical event of enacting them, that Plato aims to capture when he introduces the concept of mimesis. Mimesis is the production of visual and auditory likenesses which give us that sense of actual presence.

For the second stage of the discussion of the Guards' musical education in *Republic* II–III, Socrates turns from the content of poetry to the manner of its performance. He introduces a distinction, which at first Adeimantus is slow to grasp, between mimetic and non-mimetic storytelling. I take Adeimantus' initial slowness as Plato's signal to his readers that the distinction will be new to them. 'Mimesis' is of course an ordinary Greek word, meaning 'imitation', but the distinction between mimetic and non-mimetic storytelling cuts across the more familiar classification by poetic genres. The distinction is probably Plato's innovation.

Non-mimetic storytelling is third-person narrative, as in 'Once in Royal David's City' and ancient dithyrambic choral singing. The *Iliad* starts out that way, but at line 17, Chryses, the Trojan priest of Apollo, speaks to Agamemnon, Menelaus and the Greeks, imploring them to release his daughter. His words are in direct speech: 'you' and 'I' replace the pronouns

‘they’ and ‘he’ of the preceding narrative. Here is how Socrates describes the difference:

You know then that up to these verses, ‘and he made prayer to all the Achaeans,/But especially to the two sons of Atreus, the marshallers of the host’, the poet himself is the speaker. He does not try to divert our mind into thinking that someone else is speaking. But the following verses he delivers as if he were himself Chryses. He tries his best to make it seem that the person speaking is not Homer but the priest, an old man. (*Rep.* III.393a–b)

Much more is packed into the concept of mimesis here than results from the change of pronouns.

When I read the *Iliad* to my children at home and came to the words of prayer at line 17 –

Sons of Atreus and the rest of you strong-
greaved Achaeans,
May the gods who dwell on Olympus grant
That you sack the city of Priam and return safe
to your homes;
But release my dear daughter to me, and
accept the ransom,
Out of awe for Zeus’ son Apollo, who strikes
from afar. (*Iliad* I.17–21)

– I did not put on a quavering voice to make it seem that an old man was speaking. Evidently, Socrates has in view a performance of some kind, not just reading aloud to an audience. A performance that involves impersonating an old man or some other character-type.

The performer Socrates talks about is Homer, the poet himself. But he is long dead. What Socrates and Adeimantus are actually familiar with is rhapsodes reciting at the festival of the Panathenaea from the official Athenian text of Homer, fixed a hundred years earlier by order of the tyrant Peisistratus. The rhapsode Ion is about to do just this in the dialogue Plato named after him. But the message of the *Ion* is that the rhapsode is a mere mouthpiece for the poet. The poet’s voice speaks through his, as the Muse speaks through the poet. There is a chain of inspiration, which Socrates compares to a chain of iron rings suspended one after another from a magnet, through which the divine power pulls the audience’s emotions this way and that. So, when Ion recites, it is the divinely inspired Homer we hear.

This makes the rhapsode rather like an actor, voicing someone else’s words. In the *Ion* he is pictured in terms that bring to mind a modern pop singer: up on a dais in extravagant clothes before a festival audience of over

twenty thousand people, he chants the verse, melodiously and dramatically, with tears in his eyes during the sad bits. The innovation in the *Republic* is Socrates' stress on the way 'Homer' modulates his voice or diction (λέξις) so that it becomes like that of an old man praying. The poet – performer 'hides himself' and does everything he can to make it seem that Chryses is present to our ears.

From this introductory example Socrates proceeds to a generalization that covers visual as well as auditory likenesses. It is mimesis, he says, if the poet likens himself to someone else either in voice or in σχῆμα. Σχῆμα can refer to gesture, posture or movements, including the movements of dance. This extends the concept of mimesis to the silent miming (as we still call it) of Jean-Louis Barrault in *Les Enfants du paradis*, or the dance and music of modern ballet. For a case fulfilling both clauses of the disjunctive generalization, imagine a performance in which not only the rhapsode's voice, but also his gestures, posture, perhaps even some movements, are like those of an old man's supplication. He goes down on his knees (rather stiffly) and stretches out his hands. Chryses seems to be present to our eyes as well as our ears.

The generalization still does not provide a definition of mimesis, only a sufficient condition. Socrates will not offer a general, explanatory account of mimesis until Book X. We have to catch on piecemeal as he adds in new types of example. Next come tragedy and comedy, which are entirely mimetic, without any narrative in the poet's voice. Yet Socrates continues to speak of the poet as the imitator. Just as Homer speaks through Ion, so in drama it is the poet who tells the story – through his characters' speeches. It is as if the actors, like the rhapsode, are mere conduits for the poet's own voice. Euripides speaks the words of Medea, his voice modulating like a ventriloquist's into that of the (male) actor playing the part.

This way of thinking about actors as extensions of the poet is taken further when Socrates goes on to say the Guards should not imitate neighing horses, lowing bulls, the noise of rivers, the roar of the sea, thunder, hail, axles and pulleys, trumpets, flutes, Pan-pipes and every other instrument, or the cries of dogs, sheep and birds. Is he talking about some crazy pantomime, in which people mimic everything under the sun, including axles and pulleys? Or about the dramatist's use of sound effects? I suggest the latter. In Aristophanes' *Frogs* the Chorus croak 'Brekekekex, koax, koax' – after all, they are a chorus of frogs. If the imitator is taken to be the poet rather than the actors, then it is Aristophanes himself who makes these noises, while his voice modulates into the trumpets and flutes of the accompanying music, or rumblings from the thunder-machine offstage.

If you find it grotesque, this picture of the poet sprouting extensions of himself and his voice all over the theatre, Plato will be well pleased. His point is to forbid the Guards to engage in dramaturgy. They must practise one craft only, that of defending the freedom of the city. They are not even to do what cultivated Athenians often did, combine their main pursuit with

the writing of tragedies. (In real-life Athens, Sophocles did it the other way round: he served twice as general.) The ideal city is founded on the principle that each man devote himself to a single craft.

In itself, this is not an argument for a ban on purely mimetic storytelling. There are lots of things the Guards must not do which, nevertheless, someone in the ideal city has to do: pottery and painting, for example. But the 'one man – one job' principle can be reapplied to block the suggestion that, provided he made tragedy or comedy (not both) his specialty, a professional dramatist could be admitted into the city. The ideal city is like a symphony orchestra, in which each member plays just one instrument, so that together they create a beautiful whole called 'Kallipolis'. The dramatist is a walking–talking–singing–trumpeting–thundering subversion of the 'one man – one job' principle responsible for this happy result. Not only must no Guard write plays, but, if a professional dramatist turns up at the city gate and asks to present his works, he will be treated as if he were a one-man band at the street corner asking to join the Berlin Philharmonic. It is not even lawful for such a multiplex personality to grow up within the ideal city, let alone for one to be let in.

You may object that a professional dramatist does not really exhibit the multiple personality disorder Socrates ascribes to him. He only seems to do so. Plato knows this very well; in Book X he will insist on it. But he also knows that 'imitations, if continued from youth far into life, settle down into habits and (second) nature in one's body, voice, and thought.' In John Banville's novel *The Untouchable*, a young recruit to MI5, out on his first assignment and moving in to detain the spy for questioning, 'narrows his eyes as the thrillers had taught him to do'; by the time he retires, that eye-movement will be second nature to him (thereby proving the realism of the next generation of thrillers). Imitation may have consequences. It is not a thing to take up lightly, still less to make a profession of. Some film stars have been said to lack a stable self of their own, to live only in the public appearance of a bundle of different roles. Given Plato's conceit of the actors as so many extensions of the poet, for him it is the dramatist who is like that. Not a person who will contribute to the austere civilized life of Kallipolis.

At this stage, then, Plato's objection is to the dramatist rather than the drama. His ban on dramaturgy (amateur or professional) is not primarily due to concern about what will happen to the souls of Guards who recite speeches from Euripides or act in his plays, or to worries about Euripides' effect on the souls of his audience; this will be discussed in Book X. In Book III the decision is political. Euripides is an undesirable character to have around; so are politicians and military men who write plays in their spare time. Plato here is like someone who would ban rock music not because of its heavy beat and racy words, but because of the singers' lifestyle. And beware of politicians (like Tony Blair and Bill Clinton) who play musical instruments.

Contemporary readers would be sensitive to the political aspects of Plato's decision. Athenian tragedy and comedy were intensely democratic institutions, not only in the way they were organized, but also in their physical presence. During the Great Dionysia, 1200 citizens – 700 men plus 500 adolescents – took part in the choral singing and dancing of the various competitions (tragedy, comedy, dithyramb). Under Pericles' cheap ticket scheme, even the poorest of the rest could join the audience, which was further swollen by visitors from the Empire and abroad, reaching a total of 10,000–14,000 people. In oligarchic Sparta there were choral festivals, but no theatre. The link between theatre and democracy is not explicit in Book III of the *Republic*, but elsewhere the connection is loud and clear.

Book VI includes a discussion of what is likely to happen if, in a non-ideal state like Athens, a truly philosophic nature is born, capable of becoming one of the philosopher-rulers of the ideal city. Would the young man escape the corrupting influence of the culture under which he grows up? The chances are small, says Socrates. Think of the impression made on a really talented soul by the applause and booing of mass gatherings in the Assembly, the courts (an Athenian jury was not 12 good men and true, but several hundred and one), *theatres* and military camps. Is not the young man likely to end up accepting the values of the masses and becoming a character of the same sort as the people he is surrounded by? A democratic culture does not nurture reflective, philosophical understanding. Mass gatherings set the standards of goodness, justice and beauty, in painting, in music (where 'music' includes poetry and drama) and in politics. Plato knows all about democratic control of the general quality of the culture; in the *Laws* he will call it 'theatrocracy'. His vitriolic denunciation of the mass media of his age argues for rejecting democratic control in favour of his own, authoritarian alternative.

Even stronger is the claim at the end of *Republic* VIII that tragedy both encourages and is encouraged by the two lowest types of constitution, democracy and tyranny. Note the interactive model of cultural change. As in a bad marriage, playwright and polity bring out the worst in each other. Each indulges the other's ways.

So what occasions for the performance of poetry will remain in the ideal city, after the dramatists have been turned away at the gate? The Guards' musical education will include dance, which usually implies singing too. They will eat, as if they were permanently on campaign, in common messes (ξυσσίτια); this Spartan practice implies sympotic drinking after the meal and much singing of lyric poetry. Despite a stringent ban on innovation in musical technique, new songs are allowed – provided they are in the same old style. Delphi will be invited to prescribe rules for religious ceremonies (founding temples, sacrifices, burials, etc.), all of which would in the Greek world involve singing hymns and other poetry. Hymns are an important element also in the ideal city's annual breeding festivals. 'Our poets' will

compose verse and music appropriate to the forthcoming unions. Again, at sacrifices and 'all other such occasions' there will be hymns (that is, songs of praise) to honour men and women who have distinguished themselves in battle. Like Heroes of the Soviet Union, the good will be constantly extolled in public – to reward them and hold up models for everyone else.

This list is enough to show that poetry, of the approved sort, will be a pervasive presence in the life of the warrior class. *Republic X* sums it up as 'nothing but hymns to the gods and encomia for the good' (*Rep. X.607a*), yet the occasions for these will be plentiful enough to keep the poets of the ideal city busy. But I have had to compile the list from scattered remarks. No detail is given about how the various ceremonies will proceed. Worse, phrases like 'hymns to the gods' may suggest the wrong sort of detail to a modern reader. The Greek ὕμνος covers a variety of forms more interesting than the hymns we are used to. The *Homeric Hymn to Hermes*, for example, is an engaging narrative, nearly 600 lines long, with lots of mimesis, about the birth and impudent tricks of the robber god. Equally, any Greek reader would expect 'encomia for the good' to include tales of their noble deeds. Adventure stories will often be the order of the day.

One occasion for poetry does receive fuller treatment – the symposium. Book III's discussion of poetry reaches its climax with a set of norms for symposia. This has not been noticed, partly because Plato expects readers to recognize the familiar setting without being told. Another reason is that in the past scholars have preferred not to wonder why the discussion of poetry ends by imposing austere limits to homoerotic sex.

Drama is not all the Guards are deprived of. Their epic recitals will be very unlike those the ancients were used to. No rhapsodic display, and much less speechifying than in the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*. The story will be mostly plain narrative, interrupted by the occasional stretch of mimesis. The mimesis will be largely restricted to auditory and visual likenesses of a good person behaving steadfastly and sensibly. The impressiveness of this steadfast, sensible behaviour will be reinforced by the speaker's even delivery (λέξις). There will be little variation in his voice, and the accompanying music will stick to a single mode and a single rhythm. Even good people are struck down by disease, fall in love or get drunk, but mimesis of such events is to be very sparing. The other side of the coin is that a villain may do the odd good deed: mimesis of that is admissible, but it is not likely to happen often. The final exception is that poets may imitate bad characters in jest, to scoff at them.

Thus far, Chryses' prayer would survive, but not Agamemnon's angry, unrelenting response at line 26. Already it seems that the *Iliad* will have to stop as soon as it has started, but Plato delays until Book X the shocking news that Homer will be banished as well as the dramatists.

But remember that Book II implies that a purged tragedy will still be allowed. Tragedy and comedy are not explicitly banned until Book III. Plato

deals out the pain in measured doses, allowing his readers to get used to one shock as preparation for the next. No objections have been raised to mimesis or to poetry in themselves. There will, in fact, be lots of poetry in the ideal city, some of it mimetic. The shock is how little is to be mimetic; and how thoroughly edifying it all has to be.

The third stage of the discussion confirms that Plato has no objection to mimesis as such. Here Plato deals with the non-vocal side of music: the modes, instruments and rhythms which make the music in our narrower sense of the word. Socrates' norms in this department are as austere as the norms governing content and performance. Some Bach might scrape by; certainly not Beethoven, Mahler or Stravinsky. This is where Plato gives examples of the kinds of mimesis to be permitted. The examples remove all doubt about the answer to the question: 'What does Plato think is so bad about mimesis?' Nothing – provided it is mimesis of a good and temperate character, the character (we later discover) of which gracefulness in architecture and bodily movement is also a likeness (*μίμημα*). On the contrary, mimesis has a formative educational role to play in the culture. What you imitate regularly is what you become, so from childhood the Guards must imitate appropriate models of courage, temperance and other virtues. These things must become second nature to them. Just as graceful architecture and bodily movement have a gradual, unnoticed influence on the souls of those who grow up in their presence, so, too, do the mimetic likenesses of the poetry Plato allows for the Guards. The passage I shall quote is designed to illustrate the permitted modes of music, but appropriate words are taken for granted. In the songs permitted at social and sacred gatherings, both music and verse will imitate the way persons of good character deal with the ups and downs of fortune; later we will meet the contrasting case of bad mimesis, the way a tragic hero reacts to misfortune.

The musical modes (*ἄρμονίαι*) under discussion are the ancient alternative to our musical scales. A mode is an attunement, a way of tuning the instrument to certain intervals, which lends a particular character to the tunes that can be played with it. When Socrates bans all but two modes, the Dorian and Phrygian, it is like saying: 'Scrap all the minor keys, but leave just two of the major keys.' Here are Socrates' examples of good mimesis:

Leave me that mode which would fittingly imitate the tones and cadences of a brave man engaged unsuccessfully in warfare or any other enforced endeavour, who meets wounds, death or some other disaster but confronts it steadfastly with endurance, warding off the blows of fortune. And leave me another mode for the same man engaged in unforced, voluntary activities of peace: he may be persuading someone of something or entreating them, either praying to a god or teaching and admonishing a human being. Or, contrariwise, he may himself be attending to another's entreaty, teaching, or attempting to change his opinion. In either case he

does what he is minded to do without arrogance, acting throughout and accepting the outcome with temperance and moderation. Just these two modes, the one enforced, the other voluntary, which will best imitate the tones of brave men in bad fortune and of temperate men in good – leave me these. (*Rep.* III.399a–c)

If it were always these two types of song that we heard when we turned on the radio or went out to a social gathering, our culture would be very different. But not necessarily boring. Nothing stops a poet weaving the permitted types of mimetic display into a gripping third-person narrative, short or long; nothing stops a story including the imitation of more than one good character. A narrative of comradeship and dignified courage before death in a concentration camp could well satisfy Socrates' norms for what he calls 'enforced endeavour'. We might even be sympathetic to the idea that it would be indecent to give the Nazis any significant speaking parts.

The second type of permitted mimesis is for 'voluntary' activities. In Oliver Sacks's *Awakenings* a doctor persuades the hospital authorities to let him try a new treatment on patients sunk in a permanent catatonic trance. They are unable to react to people or the world around. This treatment brings the patients to life again, but only for a while. The doctor accepts the outcome with temperance and moderation. He did what he could; medical science made a modest advance. It is an engaging, sympathetic story. But, if you want more action, Plato has nothing against adventure stories. Heroism in military and civil life is exactly what this education aims to promote.

So do not think of the artistic culture of Plato's city as boring. Austere, yes; an even-toned, calm expressiveness prevails. Plato's word for it is 'simplicity' (ἀπλότης). Growing up in such a culture would be like growing up in the presence of sober people all of brave and temperate character.

But the ideal city already ensures, so far as is humanly possible, that the young grow up in the presence of sober people of good and temperate character. Why worry about likenesses, the cultural icons, if kids are already surrounded by the real thing in flesh and blood? Plato's answer is that, even in the ideal city, where the family and private property have been abolished, the people you know are only one part of the culture. When the influence of human role models is at odds with the cultural icons, there is a risk of change. It is not just that multiplicity and variety are bad in themselves. That is, indeed, at the heart of Plato's objection to Homeric epic and Athenian drama, which revel in variety and the clash of different characters. But the main point is that change from the ideal is change for the worse. To avoid change as long as possible, the entire culture must be in harmony both with the people you meet in life and with those you know from poetry. That is why the discussion of musical poetry turns next to gracefulness in architecture, clothing, and everything that craftsmen make. A graceful material environment will ensure that the young are always and

everywhere in the presence of likenesses of the same good and temperate character as the people whose lives and stories they know. The entire culture unites in harmonious expression of the best that human beings can be.

A musical education which forms a sensibility able to recognize gracefulness, and respond to it as an image of good and temperate character, also lets you recognize, and respond to, other images of good character – images of courage, liberality, high-mindedness. A Guard so educated, and old enough to understand some of the reasons why these are images of goodness, is ready to fall in love. Thanks to his education, the younger male comrade he favours will be one with beauty of character to match the beauty of his physical appearance. Love (ἔρωϛ) of such a person is the goal and consummation of musical education. Socrates' last word on poetry in Book III is a summons to erotic desire: 'Music should end in the love of the beautiful' (*Rep.* III.403c).

Socrates has now moved from the material environment to the social setting for musical poetry. The symposium is not the only social gathering where musical poetry is performed, but it is the one most relevant to love. Among the musical modes banned earlier, at stage three of the reform, were certain soft 'sympotic' modes, which encourage drunkenness; in the ideal city, as in Sparta, drunkenness is forbidden. But the rule presupposes they will drink wine. No Greek ever equated sobriety with abstinence. After the meal in their Spartan-style common messes, the Guards will drink in convivial moderation. (We have actual figures for Spartan wine consumption: Sparta was famous for its sobriety, yet their daily ration was well over our driving limit.) And the symposium is the main social occasion for dalliance: the couch is wide enough for two. In the ideal city, a lover may 'kiss and be with' his beloved, and 'touch him as if he were a son, for honourable ends, if he persuade him' – but nothing further, on pain of being stigmatized as 'unmusical and unable to enjoy beauty properly' (*Rep.* III.403b–c). The combination of wine, music and homoerotic love at the symposium was widely used in the Greek world (not only in Sparta) to forge bonds of loyalty and comradeship among those who fight for the city. Plato is adapting this institution to the austere controlled ethic of Kallipolis.

Later, when readers have recovered from the shock of being told in Book V that in this city women, too, are to be warriors and rulers, equally with men, they learn that those who distinguish themselves on campaign (which would include symposia in camp, on beds of leaves) will exchange kisses with everyone else. Indeed, they will have an unrefusable right to kiss anyone they desire, male or female, and will be given more frequent opportunities to take part in the breeding festivals. The better you are, the more you can breed. Heterosexual desire, like homosexual, is harnessed to the ends of the city.

Looking back over the long discussion of musical poetry in *Republic* II–III, we should be struck by how widely it ranged. Starting with religion,

ending with sex, taking in architecture and embroidery by the way, Socrates has broached all the issues that affect the *ethos* of society. All were woven around the central thread of musical poetry, because this, for Plato, is the main vehicle of cultural transmission, the main determinant of the good or bad character of the city.

In recent years, we have seen the *ethos* of British society go through a quite dramatic change as a result of the Thatcher years. The change was not planned in every detail from above. But there was a deliberate, concerted effort by the Conservative Government to purge the prevailing values and substitute the values of 'enterprise' and the spirit of the free market. In the political arena, whether national or local (including universities), it became increasingly difficult to appeal to the idea that the better-off should contribute to the welfare of the disadvantaged, for the overall good of the community. This attack on the values of community was pursued in every area of life, even in areas (like universities) where 'the market' is at best a metaphor. Metaphors and images, as Plato knew better than anyone, are potent weapons, especially in the wrong hands. If there are lessons for today in Plato's discussion of musical poetry in Books II–III, the unit of comparison I would propose is not the details of censorship in the carefully guarded, closed world of the ideal city, but Plato's concern for what he calls the *ethos* of society. Plato, like Mrs Thatcher, saw this as a prime political responsibility. Democrats can only undo the damage done to our society by the excesses of market ideology if we find democratic alternatives for fostering a better *ethos* in society at large.

Most of us do not share Plato's confidence that objectively correct answers to these questions exist, and that, given the right education, men and women of talent can come to know what the answers are. Even if we did have that confidence, we would not think it right to impose our answers on everybody else. Democracy, both ancient and modern, puts a high value on individual choice and autonomy. That complicates the task. But it hardly relieves us of responsibility for thinking about what we can do to improve the world in which our children grow up.

It is not until *Republic X* that Socrates braces himself to denounce Homer openly as 'the first teacher and instigator of all these beauties of tragedy'. Even the revered Homer, whom Socrates has loved since boyhood, must fall to Book III's ban on the mimetic genres of musical poetry: tragedy and comedy. Homer is expelled because he is the master of tragic mimesis. But the main task of Book X is to explain why, in existing cities like Athens, it is dangerous, even for the most morally secure individual, to go to the theatre, or to Ion's performance of Homer at the Panathenaea. The passive mimesis you undergo when you join that audience is a threat to the constitution of your soul.

The problem with uncontrolled mimesis, as Plato sees it, is not just the character of the likenesses it brings into our presence. It is how those

likenesses gradually insinuate themselves into the soul through eyes and ears, without our being aware of it. Unlike narrative stories, which tell us about something, the seeming presence to our senses of the imitated characters can bypass the rational mind's normal processes of judgement. To account for this phenomenon, we should return to the painted couch.

When we look at a painting, or (to take a second example) when we look at an oar half submerged in water, we know perfectly well that the painting is flat with no depth to it, that the oar is straight. But knowing this does not stop the oar looking bent or the painting seeming to have depth. How is the persistence of the false appearance to be explained? Only, so Socrates argues, by supposing there is some part of us, some level of the soul, which believes, or is tempted by the thought, that the oar actually is bent, that the painting does have depth. We are not inclined to believe it, but something in us is – just as something in the most sceptical person may shiver at a ghost story. At some level, we entertain beliefs, thoughts and fantasies that run counter to our better judgement.

Similarly, when we sit in the theatre and witness Oedipus discovering who he is, we know we are not hearing Oedipus' own voice. Not because Oedipus is a fiction (for the ancient audience Oedipus is no more a fiction than Agamemnon or other heroes), but because Oedipus is not really there, only a likeness of him, just as there is no couch there in the picture, only the likeness of one. But knowing this does not stop us being affected by the appearances before us. Oedipus still seems to be on the verge of his terrible discovery. Even though we know they are only images, the false appearances persist, and stir our feelings. It is as if eyes and ears offer painter and poet entry to a relatively independent cognitive apparatus, associated with the senses, through which mimetic images can bypass our knowledge and infiltrate the soul.

In modern discussions of the influence of the media, it is often said that normal, healthy individuals are not unduly influenced by images they know are unreal. For Plato, the audience's knowledge is the source of his deepest anxiety about mimesis. Normal, healthy individuals are undoubtedly influenced, all the time and in ways they are mostly unaware of, by images that pervade the culture. So knowing the image is only an image is no protection. Schools used to give lessons to make the young more aware of the wily tricks of the advertising industry. The advertisers had no need to protest. They knew that Plato has the better of the argument. A sexy jeans ad invites the viewer to notice its brazen appeal – and then go shopping.

Similarly in the theatre:

Even the best of us, you know, when we listen to Homer or some other tragedian imitating one of the heroes in a state of grief, delivering a long speech of lamentation, or chanting and beating his breast with the chorus, we enjoy it and give ourselves up to it. We follow it all with genuine

sympathy for the hero. Then we praise as an excellent poet the one who most strongly affects us this way ... And yet when the sorrow is our own, you notice that we plume ourselves on the opposite response, if we manage to stay calm and endure. The idea is that this is the conduct of a man, whereas the sort of behaviour we praised in the theatre is womanish. (*Rep.* X.605c–e)

In the theatre we take pleasure in emotions we would try to restrain in real life: grief, joy, pity, fear, erotic excitement, anger, scorn. (The point does not depend on agreeing with Plato's ideas about restraint: anyone will accept that there are times when emotion should be restrained.) Worse, we deliberately allow ourselves to indulge these feelings. As Socrates puts it, in the theatre our better judgement relaxes the guard it would maintain in real life. There are two rather different ways in which our guard is relaxed.

One is what we now call suspension of disbelief. We do not keep reminding ourselves of what we know perfectly well, that the events on stage are not really happening there now. They may have happened in the past. (For the Greek audience, a tragedy's plot is not fiction; it is more like Shakespeare's history plays or medieval mystery plays.) But the events are not actually unfolding before our eyes and ears. We would be upset if we turned on the television one evening, watched what we took to be the end of a rather violent film, and then the announcer came on to say: 'That's the end of the News.' The jolt would prove how completely we had suspended normal judgement about what was apparently taking place. Conversely, I recall a news commentator during the Los Angeles riots exclaiming in disbelief: 'This is not a film; this is for real.'

But Plato worries more about our suspending moral judgement about what is apparently taking place. When we sympathize with a grieving hero, we not only allow ourselves to share feelings we might wish to restrain in real life. We also allow ourselves, as part of that emotional bonding, to share a while, at some level of our soul, the hero's belief that a great misfortune has happened. And here the mistake is not that no such event took place, it is only a play. The mistake in Plato's eyes is allowing yourself to believe, even vicariously and for a short while, that an event like the death of your child would be a terrible loss, a great misfortune, if it really happened. The law in the ideal city is stern:

The law declares, does it not, that it is best to keep as calm as possible in calamity and not get upset, (1) because we cannot tell what is really good and bad in such things, (2) because it will do us no good in the future to take them hard, (3) because nothing in human affairs is worthy of deep concern, (4) because grief will block us from taking the necessary measures to cope with the situation. (*Rep.* X.604b–c)

The whole culture is set up to reinforce this law – remember the songs about calm endurance in adversity. The mimetic genres of poetry – epic, tragedy and comedy – encourage people to suspend the moral principles they try to live by, so as to enter the viewpoint of emotions which their better judgement, if it were active, would not approve. This is how the analogy with visual perspective carries over to the theatre. When we share an emotion with a character on stage, we enter (despite our better judgement) the moral outlook from which the emotion springs. The images created by theatrical mimesis are so sensuously present to eyes and ears that they lock the audience into a distorted moral perspective. Epic and drama encourage us to feel, and to some extent believe, against our better judgement, that the ups and downs of fortune are much, much more significant than they really are.

This is not Mrs Whitehouse's argument that showing a violent film on Tuesday brings about a rape on Wednesday. It is a more interesting claim about the longer-term influence of mimesis. By encouraging us to enter into the perspective of strong emotions, epic and drama will gradually erode the ideals we grew up with, even if they go on being what our better judgement tries to live up to. This argument does not depend on the stern, other-worldly morality on which Plato's ideal city is founded. Let the prevailing morality be more relaxed and humanistic: it will still include ideals we think we should live up to, and Plato will still caution us about mimesis. It is dangerous to enter feelingly and uncritically into viewpoints that our better judgement, if it were active, would not approve. That is why he would banish Homer, tragedy, comedy and their modern equivalents.

Some writers have naively supposed they could defend Homer and imaginative literature generally against Plato's critique by claiming that literature enlarges the sensibility and makes us more feeling people, because it fosters empathetic understanding of all sorts of different characters, both good and bad. As if Plato did not know that. 'Yes,' he would reply, 'that is what we need to prevent.' Opposite conclusions are drawn from the same premise. What you cannot do, it seems to me, is accept that mimesis has the effects on which Plato and these critics are agreed, and then argue that anything and everything should be allowed. If we agree with Plato about the power of mimesis (ancient or modern, epic and drama, or advertising, film and TV), but reject his authoritarian solution, then democratic politics has to take responsibility for the general *ethos* of society. Plato's problem is still with us. It needs a modern solution.

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Part II

Art and Beauty: Before and Beyond *Republic X*

4

Plato's Early Aesthetics: The *Hippias Major*

David Sider

The authenticity of the *Hippias Major* is disputed. Neither clearly genuine nor clearly spurious, hidden under a cloud of doubt, it has suffered from a neglect that far surpasses that of the other minor but undeniably genuine dialogues. My aim here is not to go into the many arguments for and against authenticity,¹ but to show, within a modest scope, how the *Hippias Major* makes sense as an early expression of Plato's views on aesthetic principles.² This piece, therefore, may be considered, at least by those sympathetic to it, an indirect argument for its genuineness.

In form, the *Hippias Major* is what Richard Robinson has called a what-is-x dialogue, that is, one of the dialogues that, however it starts, soon finds itself investigating the matter under discussion in the form of a question that asks what is such and such; for example, piety, as in the *Euthyphro*. These are usually ethical subjects: Sophrosyne (roughly, soundness of mind) in the *Charmides*, friendship in the *Lysis*, bravery in the *Laches*, and so on. If we except the *Theaetetus*, where the x is knowledge, and which, unlike the other dialogues of this sort, is a late dialogue, the *Hippias Major* is the only dialogue where the x is – at least at first glance – only partially ethical. This alone should make us suspicious of any attempt to extract from the dialogue a theory of aesthetics which ignores ethics and morality. Nevertheless, this is what I intend to do. How dangerous it is to ignore the ethical question I can indicate by saying something about the x of this dialogue. In Greek it is *to kalon*,³ which is usually translated as 'beauty', and indeed the adjective whence it is derived can mean 'beautiful', but it just as commonly can refer to usefulness and mean 'good, of fine quality' (to quote Liddell-Scott-Jones's Greek-English Lexicon), or refer to someone's 'noble' or 'honourable' moral qualities: three rather distinct areas of usage, all of which can be found in Greek as early as Homer. For example, Achilles is the most *kalos*, the most beautiful, warrior at Troy. And clothes, armour and buildings are also beautiful. But harbours, winds and wine are *kalos* in respect to use. In the moral sphere, *kalos* appears in a somewhat limited set of phrases in Homer; it appears nevertheless, and is certainly common enough thereafter.

Antigone's words to her sister may serve as an example for all: 'It is *kalon* for me to die having done what I have done' (Sophocles, *Antigone* 72). Thus, the three basic meanings that are indicated by the lexicographers can all be found in Homer; and, of interest to us here, these same three meanings are investigated in the *Hippias Major*.

The etymology for *kalos* is disputed – some would say unknown – but, if one of the three basic meanings discussed above is more basic than the others, it would probably be the visual one. And that the visual aspect of *kalos* was more strongly felt than the others can be illustrated by a joke in Euripides' *Cyclops*: Silenus, the father of the satyrs, praises the aroma of a wine, saying that it is *kalos*. 'Oh,' says Odysseus, 'you can see the smell, then?' (153 f.).

With these as preliminaries, we can proceed to the dialogue proper. It begins with Socrates greeting Hippias with the words 'Hippias the *kalos* and *sophos* – the beautiful and wise'; except that *sophos* can also mean skilled in a craft, as Hippias was in many (see the *Hippias Minor* for this), and *kalos*, as we know from the hindsight provided by a reading of the whole dialogue, is not so unambiguously 'beautiful'. But beautiful Hippias certainly is, as we learn later in the dialogue when Socrates compares himself unfavourably with the dapper Hippias, who is well dressed and well shod. Socrates we can imagine to be his usual shoeless self. This is a contrast we shall return to later. For now, it will be enough to notice that the word *kalos* appears in the first sentence of the dialogue, and that in the following pages Socrates praises Hippias' answers with the words 'you have answered beautifully.' The reader for the first time cannot help but notice these tongue-in-cheek answers.

Our first hint of a statement on aesthetics is slight and typically oblique. Hippias, here as in the *Hippias Minor* and *Protagoras* an intellectual lightweight with exaggerated ideas of his own brilliance, believes in progress in the arts. With irony that Hippias fails to detect but which seems obvious enough to the readers, Socrates asks if Daidalos, the archetypal archaic sculptor, would not be a laughingstock if he were alive today and practising his art. 'Certainly,' says Hippias (281d–282a). If this is a joke – it is – the positive aesthetic statement is easily extracted: a thing of beauty is so forever. For confirmation of this not very surprising but heretofore unexpressed thesis, we may compare *Republic* VII.529de, where Daidalos' creations are considered to be still beautiful. At 291d, with Socrates' approval, Hippias himself, although unaware of any contradiction, states this positively: 'You are looking, I think, for a reply ascribing to beauty such a nature that it will never appear ugly to anyone anywhere.'

As the discussion of the *Hippias Major* continues (the subject of the discussion, by the way, is Hippias' *sophia*, about which Hippias is not at all loath to speak), the word *kalos* continues to appear in one form or another. When we learn that Hippias has delivered a lecture in Sparta and is planning to deliver the same lecture in Athens (among other things, the Greeks may be

credited with the invention of the lecture circuit), and that the subject of this lecture is *kalos* practices to which a young man ought to devote himself, Socrates must interrupt: 'But now,' he says, 'answer me a trifling question on the subject; you have reminded me of it in the nick of time.' (The Greek translated by Jowett as the 'nick of time' is *eis kalon*, a colloquial phrase that catches our eye.) 'Quite lately,' Socrates continues, 'when I was condemning as ugly some things in certain compositions, and praising others as beautiful, somebody threw me into confusion by interrogating me in a most offensive manner, rather to this effect. "You, Socrates, pray how do you know what things are beautiful and what are ugly? Come now, can you tell me what beauty is?"' Here it is: the what-is-x. But who is this other person who is so rude to Socrates, and whose presence is felt until the very end of the dialogue? I am not alone in suspecting that it is Socrates himself, who, by being rude to himself, can in fact manage to be rude to Hippias. All examples of Socratic irony are also examples of what we call dramatic irony; few, I think, are as neat as this. We should probably compare this mysterious stranger's curt ways with those of Diotima, who, in the *Symposium*, treats Socrates in a similar manner.⁴

If we ask why Plato should have Socrates fabricate episodes in which he allows himself to be treated roughly, we could answer in general terms that Plato/Socrates consider the truth to be of paramount importance; and for this we could offer numerous passages from other dialogues from the earliest to the latest. But, more particularly, what we seem to have here is Socrates' going out of his way to make plain the difference between Hippias and himself. Thus, Socrates says, 'I do not want to be made to look a fool a second time, by another cross examination. Of course you know perfectly well what *to kalon* is. It is only a scrap of your vast learning.' To which Hippias replies, 'a scrap indeed, and of no value'. In any case, Socrates says that he will become this other person in order to continue the discussion.

Hippias, for his part, answers the what-is-x question, as so many do in Plato's aporetic dialogues, not with an abstract answer, but with a particular one. Beauty, he says, is a beautiful girl. A beautiful answer, says Socrates, but not quite adequate perhaps, for is not a mare beautiful, and cannot a pot be beautiful?

Hippias thinks that Socrates is not treating the matter seriously enough, but I do, and I should like to look more closely at this pot, for it affords us our second hint of aesthetic theory in this dialogue. Here is Socrates' description of the pot:

If it has been potted by a good potter, and is smooth and round and well (*kalōs*) fired, like some very beautiful pots I have seen, the two handled ones that hold six choes [that is, about five gallons], if he were to ask his question about a pot like that, we should have to admit that it is beautiful. (Jowett (trans.) 1953, 288, adapted)

For most of us the words 'Greek pottery' call to mind the artfully glazed and decorated vases reverentially put on display in our museums. This is not what we should think of here. Socrates makes no reference to painting on the pot, and the word he uses, *chytra*, when it is not used loosely for pot in general, refers to the most common kind of cooking ware. The *chytra* is so common, that it finds no place in Richter and Milne's excellent little pamphlet on the names of Greek vases.⁵

There is sufficient evidence, moreover, to associate the name *chytra* with the rather globular (perhaps dumpy is a better word) pot found in great numbers in the Athenian agora and elsewhere. Although bronze examples are known, they are usually of clay; and not only were they not decorated with pictures, they were usually left unpainted, as the smoke from the fire in the kitchen would soon provide a black surface as dark as any glaze. There even seems to have been a proverb, 'to paint a *chytra*', to indicate useless effort.

Socrates, then, is not offering a museum piece as an object of beauty; only an ordinary cooking utensil. Nor is he suggesting that it is its usefulness that makes it worthy of the word *kalos*. The section on usefulness in this dialogue is yet to come. We must return to his words: Smooth, round, and well (or beautifully) fired. Anyone who has tried his hand at pottery knows how much difficulty is entailed in these words. Socrates has an eye for the details of the craft, and he implies that what is in itself not an object of great beauty can be considered beautiful by one who knows and appreciates the skill that went into the making of it.

Hippias offers no objection to the statement that a *chytra* can be beautiful, but he does regard it as too vulgar an example to set beside a beautiful girl and beautiful mare. This is not surprising, for Hippias himself made pots, as we learn from the beginning of the *Hippias Minor*. And Socrates was said to have been a stonemason, so that these two men would have less than the usual hostile feeling towards the banausic trades. Socrates, of course, as we learn from the anecdote about Simon mentioned earlier, from Plato and from Xenophon, often spent time with the craftsmen of Athens, where he must have learned a lot about the fine points of each craft.

With this much granted, is it possible to find any parallels to this passage? One may think of the detail with which Homer describes the making of a boat or a bed by Odysseus, but no aesthetic judgement is there made explicit. Craftsmanship is praised in the *Prometheus Bound*, but only as a symbol of civilization. Xenophon, in the *Oeconomicus*, his book on how to run a household, says that it is a beautiful sight to see a row of *chytras* in their proper place; also beautiful to see are the spaces between the pots. This, however, seems less an aesthetic judgement than the pleasure expressed by a fussy housekeeper who believes in a place for everything and everything in its place.

Socrates' aesthetic appreciation of a humble *chytra*, therefore, seems to be without literary parallel. For this reason alone this passage would be of

interest to us. There may be another. The picture of Hippias drawn for us so carefully by Plato is consistent with that found in the *Hippias Minor* and the *Protagoras*, and (as is the case with all Platonic characters) with what little we know of the historical Hippias.⁶ Certain features, however, stand out. For example, his success in Sparta depends not upon any theoretical lecture (the Spartans do not like, for example, to 'analyse...rhythms and harmonies' 285d), but upon lectures on 'the genealogies of heroes and of men, and stories of the foundations of cities and, in short, all items of antiquarian interest' (ibid.). What Hippias is describing is, in fact, the first Greek 'histories', which we know to have been, when not mere lists of rulers and priests, chronicles and founding stories. History as literature first came of age with Herodotus and Thucydides, who recognized that an understanding of some few basic causes of human action and a unified literary form are necessary in order to make sense of the vast amount of data which are to be described.

I think it highly likely, especially when we consider that Hippias did, in fact, write works of the earlier sort (*Nomenclature of Tribes, Olympic Victors*), that Plato did intend criticism of Hippias (and the Spartans). That is (to look ahead to Socrates' statement at 295d), 'the thing as a whole [to *holon*] must be beautiful in its constitution, in the way it has been fashioned, and in its arrangement.'

Let us return briefly to the subject of pottery. We can be reasonably sure that potters had an appreciation of their own craft not far distant from that of Socrates (which is why I said '*literary parallels*' above). Of interest to us here is a fourth-century inscription that allows us to see how at least one potter looked at his own craft. A certain Bakkhios took first prize in a contest of potters, who are here called 'those who combine earth, air, and fire into one'. To put things together in an artistic way is called composition, a Latin term derived from the Greek word *sunthesis*, literally 'placing together', which is much more common in this sense than *sunagein*, the word that appears in the Bakkhios inscription. *Sunagein*, in fact, may connote a mere collection of items, without there being any attempt to put them in order.

This leads us in a roundabout way to what I think is another criticism of the kind of aesthetics represented by Hippias. Hippias wrote a work called *Collection, Sunagoge*, of whose contents we know only one thing, namely that mention is made of Thargelia of Miletus, the wisest and most beautiful of women (which leads me to believe that Plato had this work in mind when he wrote the first sentence of the dialogue, 'Hippias the beautiful and wise', and when he has Hippias suggest as an example of beauty a beautiful girl). Of its form, we have what may be Hippias' own words in description:

It may be that some of this has been said by Orpheus, some briefly by Hesiod, and some by Homer, some in other poets and some in prose-writers both Greek and foreign. For my part, I have collected [*sunthesis*]

from all these writers what is most important and belongs together to make this new and composite [literally, 'of many kinds'] work. (Frag. 6, trans. Guthrie)

Whether we think of this work as a florilegium or a hodgepodge, it looks as if the items, however intelligently arranged, would not form an artistic unity. Perhaps also relevant here is what we learn of Hippias' prodigious memory: He can reel off fifty names after hearing them once (285e). Plato, therefore, depending upon his readers' knowledge of the historical Hippias, seems to be dealing with an aesthetic and philosophical equivalent to Heraclitus' statement that knowing many things does not teach one to be intelligent; something to the effect that it is not so much what you have in your work of art as how you have it.

As a crude basis for aesthetic theory, this is familiar to us from early Greek thought down to the present. For examples from early Greek literature,⁷ we may cite Solon, who contrasts prose with song, which he calls *kosmos epeon*, an ordered arrangement of words (frag. 1 West); or Empedocles, who uses the word *harmonia* (on which, see below) to describe a painter's arrangement of colour and form (frag. 23 Diels-Kranz); or Alkman, who claims to have learned from the sound of birds how to compose (*sunthesis*) poetry (frag. 39). We should also refer to Polyclitus' famous work on statuary, the *Canon*, which explained (so we are told) the relationships among all the parts of the body, starting with the smallest finger joint.

In general, we may see that built into the Greek language is the notion that order is the distinguishing mark of the universe, man's mind, and all that man fashions. *Kosmos*, as noted above, means 'arrangement' and is the word used of the universe. *Logos*, also 'arrangement' or 'gathering', comes to mean, in a passive sense, 'argument' and 'proportion' (among many other meanings), and, in an active sense, 'intelligence', that is, the ability to comprehend, to put things together mentally. *Harmonia*, from the root *AR (whence Latin *ars*), 'join', comes to mean an intelligent or proper joining of parts, and helps us to understand how Socrates and Hippias can entertain the notion that Beauty is what is appropriate, although *harmonia* is not the word used.

Plato's criticism of Hippias' aesthetics, if I read it correctly, runs along conventional lines: the lack of artistic order and arrangement typified by Hippias' writing and attitude can never be considered beautiful. But the same view that is used to criticize Hippias is in turn analysed and criticized in the dialogue. For, however attractive and natural Plato may have found the common Greek view that Beauty lies in the symmetry and harmony of different elements, it must have conflicted not only with his sense of the moral force of art, but also with the epistemological basis of his theory of Forms, whatever the precise formulation of this was at this time. If Beauty actually exists, as Socrates says it does (287d), and if *things* partake of it

(the usual phrase), it cannot be said to lie in the harmonious *arrangement* of parts, whether of a larger whole or of two or more units.

As Socrates says to Hippias: 'If I am beautiful and you too, are we also both beautiful and if both, then each singly?' (303b). (Of course, any beauty manifested by Socrates would be of a different order from that of Hippias.) Similarly, when Socrates suggests that Beauty is the pleasure that 'we enjoy through our sense of hearing and sight' (297e), he soon runs into difficulty. One can argue, as Socrates does, that the pleasure derived from the other senses is not beautiful; it seems essential, however, to Plato's plan to have at least two sources of Beauty, for now he can have Socrates raise the question, without finding any answer, wherein lies Beauty if it can come through sight and hearing or merely from one or the other:

Then each of them singly is not beautiful by that which does not belong to each, and it follows that while from our agreed positions we may rightly say that both together are beautiful, we may not say it of each singly. (302e)

If no answer is forthcoming in the *Hippias Major*, what light do the later dialogues shed? To trace in detail the development of Plato's theory of Beauty would extend beyond the limits set for this chapter. We can, however, say that, except perhaps for the *Symposium*, where Beauty is purposefully referred to in words designed to conceal its true nature, wherever the matter is discussed we find an emphasis on formal, that is, ordered, beauty. In the *Phaedrus*, Beauty itself is once again described in mystical terms, but the emphasis placed by Socrates on the necessity for a work of art to be perfectly arranged, and what this implies for the unity of the *Phaedrus*, leads us to conclude that Plato intends some intimate connection between the formal beauty of art and true Beauty.

The *Philebus* makes somewhat clearer the necessity for formal art. Here, the organic metaphor of the *Phaedrus* is rejected; in its place Socrates prefers a purely intellectual art: 'Something straight, or round, and surfaces and solids which a lathe, or a carpenter's rule and square, produces from the straight and the round. Things like that... are always beautiful in their very nature.... And there are colours too which have this characteristic' (51cd, Hackforth (trans.) 1945).

In the *Timaeus*, everything in the universe (cosmos) and the universe itself are said to be copies of some reality that is unchanging and apprehensible only by reason. This cosmos is unarguably beautiful, and its maker good. Whatever the nature of this reality is, and on this the *Timaeus* is less than clear, the universe can best copy it by means of harmony, order and proportion. Likewise for human intelligence, which is itself a copy of the universe.

It would be wrong to read into the *Hippias Major* the theory of Beauty found in the *Timaeus*, but enough has been said, I think, to show how much

of the confusion of the last half of this dialogue (some of which I have indicated above, but most of which I have spared the reader) can be traced not merely to inexperience on Plato's part, as was suggested earlier, but more specifically to the seeming irreconcilability between the theory of Forms and the symmetry theory of Beauty – an irreconcilability the later dialogues in effect bypass by concealing the true nature of Beauty and by separating copy from reality even further.

If the dialogue seems, as a result, to fall into two parts, it is not too wild a conceit to see them as reflections of Plato the artist and of Plato the philosopher. Socrates, too, has been split into two people, one the gentle person who is delighted to hear traditional stories about beautiful practices and objects, the other the boor who never stops asking embarrassing questions, although both are interested in the truth of the matter. Plato has striven hard to unite the two halves of his own personality, the two Socrates, and the inwardly beautiful Socrates with the outwardly beautiful Hippias in order to create one beautiful work of art: The *Hippias Major*.

Notes

1. Dorothy Tarrant is the foremost advocate for the cause of spuriousness: cf. Tarrant (1928). Opposing her in a series of articles is G. M. A. Grube; cf. Grube (1926, 134–48) and Grube (1927, 296–88). See now Guthrie (1962–81, vol. 4, 175–91) for a summary of earlier views as well as of the dialogue itself. Guthrie argues for its genuineness.
2. For the problems involved in dating Plato's works, cf. Ross (1953, 1–10).
3. *Kalós* is the adjective; *kalón*, the neuter of the adjective, is 'a beautiful thing'; *to* (the definite article) *kalón* is 'the beautiful thing', that is, beauty itself; *kalōs* is the adverb.
4. The personified Laws of the State in the *Crito* are similarly blunt in 'talking' to Socrates. At the end of the *Protagoras*, Socrates says: 'It seems to me that the present outcome of our talk is pointing at us, like a human adversary, the finger of accusation and scorn. If it had a voice it would say, "What an absurd pair you are, Socrates and Protagoras..."' (trans. W. K. C. Guthrie).
5. Richter and Milne (1935). The best study of the *chytra* is Sparkes and Talcott (1970, pt 1, 224–6) (with plates). For a well-illustrated treatment of the methods (and problems) of Attic pottery, cf. Noble (1965). Also to be recommended in this context is Burford (1972), who quotes the Bakkhios inscription (178).
6. All the important ancient testimony is collected in translation in Sprague (1972, 94–115). Cf. also Guthrie (1962–81, vol. 3, 280–5 and passim).
7. Russell and Winterbottom (1972) is satisfactory for almost everything except the early (and usually fragmentary) material, and must be supplemented by Lanata (1963).

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5

'A Divinity Moving You': Knowledge and Inspiration in Plato's *Ion*

Dorit Barchana-Lorand

I Plato's Conundrum

Our beliefs often fail to meet even very minimal epistemic conditions: they fail to be true, or they fail to be justified. Even where some belief is both true and justified, the believer may hold it for the wrong reasons; That is, the reasons he adduces may not be those which in fact justify the belief. The project of identifying and evaluating our reasons for – and sources of – belief is central to contemporary philosophy, but its present-day form first found expression in Plato's early 'Socratic' dialogues. These dialogues aim less at positive conclusions than at negative critique, many of them ending with an *aporia*, leaving their central question unresolved. They typically pose definitional problems – What is beauty? What is piety? What is virtue?, but seldom yield conclusive answers.

These dialogues also typically aim to call into question – and sometimes definitively to discredit – generally accepted reasons for standard answers to such questions, with the aim of exposing instances of false belief and unjustified conviction. Very often Socrates' targets are authority-based beliefs. Indeed, it is tempting to read the early dialogues as united by the project of challenging recognized authority in a range of political and cultural guises. One cultural authority that is repeatedly mentioned persists as a target of inspection in Plato's writings throughout his life: the authority of literary discourse or 'poetry', widely conceived as including epic, lyric and dramatic forms as well as song. Plato's hostility to poetry is well recorded and his infamous banishment of mimetic poetry in the *Republic* has long been a focus of both scholarly and popular attention.

Also well recorded is Plato's ambivalence about the value of poetry. While he repeatedly challenges its epistemic pretensions – its claims as a vehicle of wisdom and truth – his challenges are most often qualified, even hedged, by concessions to its power, its beauty and the allure of the pleasures it offers. Perhaps this ambivalence in part explains why Plato was never able

to leave his quarrel with the poets entirely behind; the problem of the epistemic claims of poetry makes an appearance in the *Apology* and reappears in almost a dozen subsequent dialogues. Even after what might seem to be his final word on the matter (in Book X of the *Republic*) the problematic status of poetry is reconsidered and appears in what is probably his latest extant work, the *Laws*.

Despite the resilience of the 'problem of poetry' in Plato's *corpus*, only one early dialogue, the *Ion*, addresses it head-on and takes it as its central theme. Despite being Plato's shortest early dialogue, it is structurally complex. While the first part of the *Ion* is typical of early dialogues, in terms of both its limited scope of discussion and its style, the dialogue ends with a clear and definite answer to the questions raised at its beginning, that is, what the rhapsode, Ion – a performer and interpreter of Homer – knows and does not know, and what explains the undeniable allure of his performances. Thus, unlike Plato's other early dialogues, the *Ion* does not appear to leave the reader with an *aporia*. Another unusual feature of the *Ion* is the style of argument in the second part of the dialogue. Instead of developing Socrates' dialogical dispute with the rhapsode, Plato here offers a long, discursive soliloquy by Socrates – a narrative monologue more typical of the middle or late dialogues. I will argue that these stylistic and structural features are not mere idiosyncrasies, but derive from an important feature of the dialogue's substance, namely, Plato's ambivalence about the *value* of poetic discourse. This ambivalence, moreover, is perhaps evidenced in the *Ion* more clearly than in any other dialogue, in two ways. First, unlike the *Republic*, the *Ion* does not attempt to impugn the truth of beliefs either embodied in or produced by poetry. For all that is said in the *Ion*, there is no reason to doubt the beliefs poetry delivers and very good reason to accept them. The *Ion* does not address the justification of such beliefs; indeed (if we assume the veracity of divine sources), their justificatory credentials are unimpeachable. But an unresolved worry remains, and this is the topic and the driving force of Plato's dialogue and the source of his ambivalence: while the insights of the poets may be both true and justified, the way in which we come to endorse them undermines the very condition under which we can ourselves achieve wisdom: rational agency. The rhapsode is not unlike the psychotic whose delusions happen to be true. Perhaps he is not being deceived, but neither does he know anything. The *Ion* thus illuminates a kind of conundrum, I believe, which ultimately eluded Plato's best attempts at resolution: the tension between poetry's poor epistemic credentials on the one hand, and its evident power, on the other hand, to compel belief with a force rivalling the logic of philosophical dialectic. Poetry can deliver true beliefs, and these beliefs may even be justified. But the way in which we access poetry's messages requires a sacrifice: the possessed rhapsode is no longer master of his soul but 'inspired and out of his senses, and reason is no longer in him' (534b).¹

The proposed account of the import and interest of the *Ion* is not uncontroversial. Indeed, recent scholarship has often either ignored or denigrated the dialogue.² Morris Henry Partee provides an extreme, if not uncharacteristic, example of the dismissive treatment the *Ion* has often received. Partee proposes that the dialogue is ‘trivial’ and merits little attention as a resource for untangling the fundamental enigmas in Plato’s treatment of poetry. The *Ion*, he holds, is entirely overshadowed by *Republic*: ‘Plato’s final comment on poetry [in the *Republic*] in the most complete exposition of his thought surely takes precedence over the trivial *Ion* and the important but pedestrian *Laws*’ (Partee 1970, 213). Partee even claims that ‘Plato never considers poetry by itself. He is always pressing toward some other conclusion, usually the ignorance of rhapsodes or the education of the youth’ (1970, 210). Moreover, Partee remarks that ‘in no place in the dialogues does Plato consider what poetry is together with its source in the Muse’ (1970, 214). However, the *Ion* arguably achieves all of these things. To read it as merely ‘pressing toward’ the conclusion of ‘the ignorance of rhapsodes’ misses out its far-reaching treatment of the nature of poetry. Read carefully, the *Ion* is precisely that indispensable dialogue in which Plato considers the value of ‘poetry alone’, canvassing in turn its epistemic status, its metaphysical nature and its psychological force, and providing along the way a vivid profile of Plato’s ambivalence towards the authority of divine inspiration and its mortal artefacts – works of literary art.

II Interpretation, evaluation and the rhapsode’s expertise

Let us begin at the beginning. Typically, the focal discussion in the *Ion* emerges from the circumstances of the encounter between Socrates and his interlocutor, Ion.³ Plato arranges for the reader an accidental meeting between them upon the latter’s return from the celebrations in Epidaurus, where he has just won an important rhapsodes’ contest.⁴ As in many early dialogues, the encounter between Socrates and his interlocutor resembles the encounter between two characters of ancient Greek comedy: the *eiron* and the *alazōn*.⁵ Socrates is a typical *eiron*, often commenting on both himself and his interlocutor with mocking, ironic exaggeration. He appears to attribute grand qualities to Ion and refers to himself in self-deprecating terms. In fact, as an *eiron*, the evaluative significance of his comments is precisely the opposite of their literal meaning (as when Socrates says that he envies Ion’s position principally on account of the fine garments which go with it). Ion, in contrast, is a typical *alazōn*: utterly lacking in cunning or irony and intellectually flat-footed, but also vain and arrogant. The encounter between the *eiron* and the *alazōn* was a common feature of comedies in Plato’s time, enabling his contemporary readers to easily identify narrative expectations and to appropriately interpret conversational allusions. Plato’s reliance on such typecast characters both

sets the stage for Socrates' undermining of Ion's grand self-conception and invites the reader to mock him as a representative of rhapsodes as a type or class.

In keeping with his *ironic* role, Socrates begins by feigning innocence of Ion's reputation, inviting him to boast that at Epidaurus he 'obtained the first prize of all' (530b). Socrates continues with some flattering remarks, and then subtly turns the conversation to questions of poetic meaning and interpretations, commenting that

To understand [Homer's] mind, and not merely learn his words by rote; all this is a thing greatly to be envied. I am sure that no man can become a good rhapsode who does not understand the meaning of the poet. For the rhapsode ought to interpret the mind of the poet to his hearers, but how can he interpret him well unless he knows what he means? (530b-c)

Responding like a true comic *alazōn*, Ion leaps incautiously into conversation with Socrates by bragging about his abilities:

Very true, Socrates; interpretation has certainly been the most laborious part of my art; and I believe myself able to speak about Homer better than any man; and that neither Metrodorus of Lampsacus, nor Stesimbrotus of Thasos, nor Glaucon, nor anyone else who ever was, had as good ideas about Homer as I have, or as many....Socrates...you really ought to hear how exquisitely I display the beauties of Homer. I think that the Homeridae should give me a golden crown. (530c-d)

Such arrogant, '*alazōnic*' behaviour is typical of many of Socrates' conversational targets in the early dialogues: the speaker's announced self-importance turns on the esteem of his social role or profession, with the text signalling in one way or another that society acclaims the speaker as the best of his kind. As in the *Euthyphro*, the speaker's smugness rests on the premiss that he excels in his profession – a premiss which in turn rests on the putative authority of public opinion.⁶

These developments foreshadow what will be Socrates' two principal tasks in the dialogue. The first is to expose the spuriousness of Ion's recognized authority by adducing arguments defeating his claims to expertise. The second is to propose an alternative account of the evident power and allure of Ion's performances – an account which relies not on Ion's own abilities, but on his (non-rational) role as a divinely inspired mouthpiece of the gods. I will briefly consider the first task before turning to consider the second in more detail.

The initial argument against Ion's claim to expertise is short and simple, and appears almost immediately following Ion's boast that he is deserving

of golden crowns. Socrates presses Ion as to the breadth of his 'art', asking whether it 'extend[s] to Hesiod and Archilochus' (531a). Ion admits that he is only able to interpret Homer's poetry. This may not seem obviously problematic to a contemporary reader; after all, performance artists can and often do specialize in narrow genres, principally confining themselves to the performance of, say, Shakespeare or Chekhov. However, as a classical rhapsode, Ion not only performs Homer in recitations, but *interprets and evaluates* his poetry. It is these functions which Socrates targets. He elicits from Ion an admission that his ignorance of the activities which are *subject matter* of Homer's poetry compromises his ability to interpret (and evaluate) the meaning and merits of Homer's claims. Socrates achieves this concession by leading Ion through a step-by-step argument:

1. Ion is only able to interpret and evaluate what Homer says about various subjects, or other poets insofar as they say the same as Homer says (where 'they agree');
2. A knowledgeable expert on some subject (a practitioner who possesses the 'expertise' or *technē* related to that subject) is the one best placed to interpret and evaluate the poets' claims about that subject (for example, prophets are best placed to interpret and evaluate what the poets say about divination);
3. A knowledgeable expert on some subject would be able to interpret and evaluate *any* poet's claims about that activity, whether the poet describes it well or badly ('he who judges of the good will be the same as he who judges of the bad speakers' (531e));⁷
4. Ion is unable to interpret and evaluate poets other than Homer (unless they say the same as Homer); indeed, he admits, 'I lose attention and have absolutely no ideas of the least value and practically fall asleep when anyone speaks of any other poet' (532b–c).
5. Ion is not an expert on the subjects of which Homer speaks. As Socrates remarks, 'No one can fail to see that you speak of Homer without any art or knowledge. If you were able to speak of him by rules of art, you would have been able to speak of all other poets' (532c).⁸ Unlike genuine experts on those subjects, he does not possess the 'rules of art' which would allow him to discuss and especially to evaluate what anyone says about them: he is unable to assess poetry as a whole (532c).

Socrates goes on to underscore his conclusion by pointing out that it holds not just of Ion in relation to the subjects presented in Homer, but for judges of every acknowledged *technē* – whether this is painting, sculpture or harp-playing. Further, and by the same token, Socrates points out, these 'experts' have nothing to say about the merits and demerits of rhapsodes.

This argument, while successful against the feeble Ion, is in fact very limited in what it can establish: in particular, it cannot show that there exists no special skill of 'performance rhapsody' – a special practical know-how guiding the recitation of poetry. Indeed, by pointing out that experts in other arts are unable to evaluate Ion's and other rhapsodes' performances, it indirectly implies that there is a *technē* of performance rhapsody.⁹ Be that as it may, the argument suffices to leave Ion puzzled by his own ability to present and eulogize on Homer's meanings. He asks Socrates for his own explanation, opening the door for Socrates to offer a remarkable account of poetry in terms of divine inspiration. I shall turn to this shortly; let us first look more closely at how Socrates has directed the development of the conversation thus far.

In a typical *ironic* move, Socrates has pretended to be naively working through Ion's claim that he cannot properly interpret or evaluate other poets. He effectively proposes that Ion should refer to the 'common denominator' between Homer and other poets: the content of poetry, the subjects it deals with.¹⁰ Surprisingly, Ion never protests against the reduction of poetry to its content alone, without any consideration for its form, structure or style. If Homer and Hesiod talk about the same matters, agrees Ion, then he should be able to render Hesiod too: 'I can interpret them equally well, Socrates, where they agree' (531a–b). But does agreement between Homer and Hesiod regarding any given subject render them 'the same' in literary terms? After all, a poem is marked by its unique style even when it treats the very subjects addressed by other poems. (Were two poets to 'say the same' entirely, that is, present the same subject in exactly the same manner, at least one of them must be redundant.) Throughout, the conversation ignores differences in style between poets. Indeed, the only reference to 'style' in any sense of the term is Socrates' aforementioned allusion to Ion's fine clothes: 'I have often envied the profession of a rhapsode, Ion; for your art: for it is a part of your art to wear fine clothes and to look as beautiful as you can' (530b). This comment reveals Socrates' opinion on matters of style *tout court*: his own shabby appearance is a personal trademark and he is so indifferent to appearance that he hardly ever bothers to wear shoes.¹¹ Thus, Socrates' *ironic* comment implies that what is 'fitting to the rhapsode's art' is sheer vanity.

Rather than defending the poet – and his own profession – by appeal to the special 'how' of poetic speech, Ion falls into the trap Socrates has set for him. Preposterous though it may (or should) seem, he haplessly agrees that the different quality of different poets can only be decided by reference to their commensurable subject matter or extra-aesthetic/extra-poetic referents. Once the rhapsode's expertise is redefined in terms of the content of a poem, it is but a short step to the conclusion that this is not an expertise Ion possesses. (Socrates asks, 'Would you or a good prophet be a better interpreter of what these two poets say about divination, not only when

they agree, but when they disagree?’ and Ion replies, ‘A prophet’ (531b.) And so in due course it transpires that, regarding every subject with which Homer may deal, there will be a professional more knowledgeable than Ion to interpret him correctly and evaluate his work (for example, a driver, a fisherman or a sailor). By agreeing that the interpretation and evaluation of poetry turns on knowledge of a poem’s ‘real world’ referents, the prospect of defining a particular and distinctive expertise in performance disappears from view altogether. But that is not because Socrates’ *argument* has excluded the possibility; rather, it is because Ion, in the buffoonish role of the *alazōn*, has conveniently failed to consider it.

Ion’s *alazōnic* position thus in part directs the course of the conversation. He first invites Socrates’ challenge by his boasts of prizes, claiming to deserve ‘a golden crown’ from the Homeridae for his ‘exquisite’ renderings of Homer, revealing his respect for the disreputable authority of popular opinion. Second, and more significantly, he fails to attend to Socrates’ comment that ‘to understand [Homer’s] mind, and not merely learn his words by rote, all this is a thing greatly to be envied’. This comment leads directly to the loaded question: ‘How can [a rhapsode] interpret [a poet] unless he knows what he means?’ (530b–c). By shifting the conversational focus away from performance to interpretation, and by shifting the task of interpretation away from style and structure to descriptive content, Socrates loads the dialogical arsenal against the only distinctive skills which Ion might possess: a heightened sensitivity to the affective associations of poetic language (which would guide rhapsodic performance) and an appreciation of the workings of poetic form – with its analogies, metaphors, similes and other tropes and its skilful use of sense-based imagery (guiding interpretation). Ion’s claims to expertise *could* be justified; his pronouncements might even be true. But Ion represents someone whose beliefs are based on a mixture of bad reasons (his misguided reliance on a false authority) and no reasons. He never once adduces the considerations that might justify his proud claims to a specialized poetic *technē*.

With this in mind, recall that the first phase of the dialogue has proceeded largely in a then-familiar format of popular comedy. Can this be a merely stylistic feature – a literary idiosyncrasy serving no theoretical end? It seems more likely that Plato was making a deliberate and significant rhetorical point by choosing this comedic frame. Perhaps the comedic structure presents Ion as not merely ignorant of the rhapsode’s art in the ways indicated by Socrates’ argument, but also as incapable of appreciating the nature and value of that art even in his own terms, or of adducing any of the most natural and simple defences for it. Knowing that Ion is an *alazōn*, we may infer that he is so easily ensnared by Socrates in part because of his own insouciance – his failure really to *care* about the rational standing of his own beliefs. In an interesting analysis of Ion’s psychology, Nicholas Pappas suggests Ion’s epistemic degeneracy is not just a matter of lacking good reasons

for true beliefs but, more seriously, a matter of indifference to the normative force of truth altogether:

Ion not only possesses no general knowledge, but rejects it. On every important issue he turns his back on a search for the truth, preferring to know only what Homer thinks about the issue. He will not aim separately at the truth of the matter. From Socrates' point of view, Ion's attitude is thus a perverse choice of ignorance over knowledge. (Pappas 1989, 385)

Perhaps it is extravagant to read this much into either Plato's comedic form or the narrative development of the *Ion's* opening section. But the turn which the dialogue next takes in respect of both style and content will, I think, only reinforce the idea that this 'trivial' dialogue has a more subtle and complex agenda than first appears.

III On the best authority: divine inspiration and the magnetic art

At the close of the first section, Socrates and Ion have reached some initial agreement concerning the rhapsode's expertise: he speaks 'of Homer without an art or knowledge', for if he 'were able to speak of him by rules of art' (by appeal to some general, evaluative standards of correctness) he 'would have been able to speak of all other poets; for poetry is a whole' (532c). The statement that 'poetry is a whole' expresses the idea 'that when a man has acquired a knowledge of a whole art, the inquiry into good and bad is one and the same' (532e). Such a man will know the rules deciding success and failure in his professional field, and on that basis he is in a position to evaluate indefinitely many instances of the same art. With this much agreed between the discussants, there is arguably no reason for the conversation to continue: the dialogue could apparently end right there, for its dialectical goal has been reached. Socrates has proven to Ion that he does not have the knowledge to which he pretended. Yet the dialogue does not end: it continues through two more phases.

A typical early dialogue would end with an *aporia*. Here we already have a resolution. Why, then, does the conversation continue? Immediately after admitting that he cannot deny Socrates' claims, Ion uncharacteristically takes the initiative. Turning to Socrates, he asks for an explanation of his peculiar and powerful abilities:

I cannot deny what you say, Socrates. Nevertheless I am conscious in my own self, and the world agrees with me, that I do speak better and have more to say about Homer than any other man; but I do not speak equally well about others. After all, there must be some reason for this; what is it? (533c)

If Ion is not an expert, then it remains to be explained why he is considered the best interpreter of Homeric poetry, both by society and by himself. Ion's question provokes a remarkable turn in the dialogue – a turn that is particularly exceptional for an early dialogue.¹² Not only does the conversation progress beyond the original dialectical goal, but *from that moment on Plato abandons the comedic structure*: Socrates and Ion are no longer typecast as the *eiron* and *alazōn* we met at the beginning of the dialogue.¹³ When Ion renounces his *alazōn's* arrogance, Socrates replaces his own sarcastic irony with prophetic pathos and strikingly poetic imagery, launching into a positive account of poetry's power in a monologic speech.

Socrates' soliloquy, forming a second distinct phase of the dialogue, addresses the causal source of both the composition of poetry and the rhapsode's art. Socrates replies to Ion that

The gift which you possess of speaking excellently about Homer is not an art, but ... an inspiration; there is a divinity moving you.... (533d)

How does Plato justify his claim that 'a divine power' drives those who engage with poetry? Two types of evidence are adduced in Socrates' soliloquy, both of which refer principally to poets themselves, rather than their rhapsode performers. The first evidence offered is that different poets choose different modes of expression (for example, epic or lyrical): Socrates observes that

Many are the noble words in which poets speak concerning the actions of men; but like yourself when speaking about Homer, they do not speak of them by any rules of art: they are simply inspired... and when inspired, one of them will make dithyrambs, another hymns of praise, another choral strains, another epic or iambic verses, but not one of them is of any account in the other kinds. For not by art does the poet sing, but by power divine; had he learned by rules of art, he would have known how to speak not of one theme only, but of all.... (534b–c)

The suggestion that the use of different poetic modes and metres is evidence that the poet follows no 'rules of art' is not terribly compelling, to say the least. After all, poetry is a highly rule-governed, order-driven use of language; next to music, it is arguably the most tightly constrained art form, even today. And in Greek times the rules even more strictly circumscribed the poet's possibilities. So what is Plato's objective here? It may be tempting to doubt that his account is sincerely offered. However, that temptation should evaporate when one attends to the first, comedic phase of the dialogue and then proceeds to the soliloquy: the absence of sarcasm, of irony, of provocation, as well as the sheer beauty of the images, abolishes any thought of insincerity. Plato is surely making a point about

the distinctive voices of individual poets – their unique and irreplaceable poetic manner. Today, these features would likely be explained in terms of the psychological uniqueness of each artist's character and life experience. However, in Plato's time, when one's upbringing, social role and profession so often profoundly defined the individual, this explanation might have seemed even more incredible than Plato's appeal to the divinities.¹⁴

Plato's second piece of evidence is the phenomenon of 'one-off' compositions in which those who are 'the worst of poets' are subject to an outburst of poetic excellence.

And Tynnichus the Chalcidian affords a striking instance of what I am saying: he wrote no poem that anyone would care to remember but the famous paean which is in everyone's mouth, one of the finest lyric poems ever written, simply an invention of the Muses, as he himself says. For in this way God would seem to demonstrate to us and not to allow us to doubt that these beautiful poems are not human, nor the work of man, but divine and the work of God; and that the poets are only the interpreters of the gods by whom they are severally possessed. Was not this the lesson which God intended to teach when by the mouth of the worst of poets he sang the best of songs? (534d–535a)

Again, a contemporary explanation of the phenomenon of the one-off, ingenious composition by 'the meanest of poets' would be cast in terms of some anomalous psychological considerations: people do sometimes experience extraordinary artistic outbursts due to changes in their personal or environmental circumstances. (Consider Henry Roth's sixty years of literary silence after the publication of the exemplary *Call It Sleep* in 1934 until the publication of *A Star Shines over Mt. Morris Park* in 1994.) Yet Plato presents this as evidence that poets are effectively puppets of a divine source, compelled entirely by forces external to their rational natures.

Plato's appeal to the moving power of divinity is also perplexing on other levels. First, and most troublingly, it is difficult to interpret and assess the idea without a better view of Plato's personal theological convictions, something we still do not have.¹⁵ Nonetheless, Plato clearly entertained theological commitments which were alien to Socrates and which consistently informed his epistemology and metaphysics: the doctrines of recollection (*anamnēsis*), of the immortality of the soul, and the theory of forms itself are all more consistent with the soliloquy than with Socrates' advertised agnosticism. Perhaps this is Plato permitting himself to speak his own mind.

Second, while there are good reasons to date the *Ion* as a very early dialogue and so to construe it as principally a record of Socrates' own position, this does not debar us from considering its anomalous claim in light of Plato's later works. Doing that, we find that the account of divine inspiration resonates in both language and content with passages in other 'purely

Platonic' later dialogues, most notably in the *Symposium*, the *Phaedrus* and the *Laws*. Plato was *not* averse to appeals to non-rational inspiration, and he struggles repeatedly to reconcile that phenomenon with his theory of forms to which reason is our only path of access. So the dating of the *Ion* should not put paid to the idea that his proposal is offered as a genuine and plausible explanation – particularly in light of a similar appeal in the *Apology*.

Third, there is a puzzle about the function of the soliloquy within the dialogue itself. Plato no longer needs to attack the vanity and self-deceit of those who engage in poetry; that battle is won with Ion's agreement that he is not an expert in the requisite sense. Moreover, the presentation of a divinity as the trigger behind the poet and rhapsode appears to be a source of pride in its own right. Indeed, at the end of the dialogue, Ion claims that it is 'by far the nobler' to be called divine than to be labelled a dishonest impostor pretending to expertise (542a–b). Thus, Plato's goal is unlikely to be a new way of perpetuating his controversy with Ion.¹⁶ In this context we should note, too, the placement of the soliloquy at the dialogue's turning point – the resolution of the dialectical negotiations between Socrates and Ion. Perhaps the soliloquy responds to more than Ion's request for an explanation; it certainly serves as more for the reader, for it bridges the gap between Plato's scathing attack on Ion's claims to knowledge and the apparent value of his performances. Plato needs to explain how a poet (and the rhapsode) can, with no proper *technē*, produce language which is so powerful and so moving – and perhaps often true. What noble occupation can poetry be, however, if it is not one borne of expertise?

Until his soliloquy, Socrates ignores that ability which is nowadays considered the basis of artistic talent: the poet's imagination. An author does not need to have experienced everything he narrates: Homer need not be a slave to echo a slave's style of speech in the first person. Both the British and German idealists of the nineteenth century identified imagination as the source of the poet's talent. However, for Plato, our capacity for imagination is inconsequential at best, and deceitful at worst: it is certainly not a rational ability, nor one which can be taught.¹⁷ Were Plato to agree that the source of poetry is an idiosyncratic faculty such as imagination, he would be in no position to account for the special value of poetry, and in particular the possibility that poetry is able to identify and communicate visionary truths. Socrates' account in terms of divine inspiration plainly leaves that possibility in place: while the poet and rhapsode themselves have no privileged understanding (indeed, they lack knowledge altogether), they do offer a kind of privileged *access* to truths of a kind, that is, divine inspiration.

For all good poets, epic as well as lyric, compose their beautiful poems not by art, but because they are inspired and possessed. And as the Corybantian revellers when they dance are not in their right mind, so

the lyric poets are not in their right mind when they are composing their beautiful strains: but when falling under the power of music and metre they are inspired and possessed; like Bacchic maidens who draw milk and honey from the rivers when they are under the influence of Dionysus but not when they are in their right mind. (533e–534a)

Socrates tells Ion that 'The gift which you possess of speaking excellently about Homer is not an art, but...an inspiration; there is a divinity moving you' (533d). Moreover, he offers a *causal* account of how that divine power does its work: it is 'like that contained in the stone which Euripides called a magnet' (533d). That is, the power transmitted from the divinities through poetry operates in a manner analogous to magnetic forces passing through and uniting contiguous iron rings or lodestones. He elaborates:

This stone not only attracts iron rings, but also imparts to them a similar power of attracting other rings; and sometimes you may see a number of pieces of iron and rings suspended from one another so as to form quite a long chain: and all of them derive their power of suspension from the original stone. In like manner the Muse first of all inspires men herself; and from these inspired persons a chain of other persons is suspended, who take the inspiration. (533d–e)

All those engaging in poetry, from the poet to the rhapsode to the audience of readers or listeners, are like iron links, drawn to each other by an external magnetic power. The magnet in this fable is the connecting link, but it is only the transmitter, not the *source* of power. That source is a divinity who draws the poets, rhapsodes and the audience towards his 'field of force'. Those drawn in have no power or will of their own, but are imbued with the power of inspiration:

Do you know that the spectator is the last of the rings which, as I am saying, receive the power of the original magnet from one another? The rhapsode like yourself and the actor are intermediate links, and the poet himself is the first of them. Through all these God sways the souls of men in any direction which He pleases, causing each link to communicate power to the next. (535e–536a)

According to this fable, both poet and rhapsode do not act of their own accord but serve as the vehicle of the muse's visionary words. Therefore, just as Ion is drawn only to Homer, so every poet is only attracted to that one style of writing appropriate to the Muse that operates within him. Here the usefulness of Plato's choice of a rhapsode over a poet for Socrates' interlocutor is plain; as a rhapsode, Ion participates in this chain of rings both as an artist–performer and as Homer's audience (in his role of interpreting and

evaluating his poetry). Thus he exemplifies both affinities with poetry: the zeal of the artist and the entrancement of the spectator. Similarly, Socrates compares the poets to bees looking for nectar: like the bee, the poet does not create *ex nihilo*, but is a vehicle for carrying ‘divine nectar’:

[T]hey tell us that they bring songs from honeyed fountains, culling them out of the gardens and dells of the Muses; they, like the bees, winging their way from flower to flower. And this is true. For the poet is a light and winged and holy thing, and there is no invention in him until he has been inspired and is out of his senses, and reason is no longer in him.... (534a)¹⁸

What are we to make of this remarkable account? Note, first, that it is not entirely anomalous: inspiration is a persisting theme in Plato’s writings. Moreover, numerous dialogues attest to his deep appreciation of poetry in general and of Homer in particular; Plato was wholly fluent with Homer’s works and cites them frequently. At the same time, Plato *nowhere* allows that poetic productions derive from an epistemically legitimate part of the soul. Whatever else poetry may be, it does not arise out of an exercise of rational agency. This is precisely what is targeted by Ion’s question – the problem of ‘poetic agency’. Whatever is happening in or to Ion when he performs? Socrates’ answer must satisfy two explanatory aims, which are clearly in tension. The first aim is to explain the respect and deference which is accorded to poetry, and in particular its traditional status as a repository of wisdom – its recognized cognitive authority. Later in his philosophical development, of course, Plato becomes more aggressively critical of the truth-claims of poetry; in Book X of the *Republic*, mimetic poetry is effectively identified as a pernicious form of deceit. But it is significant that, in the *Ion*, Plato never directly challenges the truth of poetry’s ‘priceless words’ (534d).

Second, Socrates’ answer must explain the dialogue’s earlier conclusion that the practice of poetry, whether by the poet or the rhapsode, is a non-cognitive affair. The divine inspiration theory provides exactly what is required, simultaneously supporting the truth-claims of poetic utterances whilst undermining any claims to rational authority on the part of poets and performers. (They carry no rational authority because they are, when inspired, no longer even rational agents.) Interestingly, the theory does not require us to condemn Homer; while poetry fails to derive from the only reputable source of human agency (reason), it does not derive from a disreputable one either. For it does not derive from a *human* source at all, but a divine one. Homer is an empty vessel, a marionette: he is the vehicle, not the causal source of the poetry which he produces.

As it happens, there does exist a rational justification for attending to and endorsing his utterances, namely, that they derive from a virtually

unimpeachable source. But, critically, we can see now that this not *why* the poet or the rhapsode (or we spectators) find Homer's words compelling: the condition which in fact justifies our respect for them is unrelated to the condition which *causes* Homer (and his rhapsodes and their spectators) to declare them true. Socrates' soliloquy thus both identifies a reason why poetry *could* be an authoritative source of wisdom (why its assertions might be both true and justified) and explains why our human understanding of it typically fails to constitute knowledge on any level.

This analysis of the theoretical aims of Socrates' soliloquy is supported, I believe, by certain features of style and structure. From the moment Socrates begins, he not only abandons his ironic tone and dialectical procedure, but effectively makes no effort to develop a well-supported argument. As we saw, such evidence as he offers consists of (merely empirical) observations about the characteristics of poetry, claims which hardly require the explanation he wishes to press. (Nothing that he offers, for instance, permits us to regard the divine inspiration theory as an inference to a best explanation.) The theory is, relative to Socrates' usual standard of argument, scarcely more than bare assertion. But, as if to compensate for this, Plato provides the reader with affectively compelling images of striking and seductive poetic richness; the form of his delivery exemplifies its non-rational, but remarkable, subject. In this respect, Socrates himself is transfigured, becoming something like a poet himself. Hence Ion responds to the speech in a manner that confirms its tale: 'Socrates...your words touched my soul' (535a), he remarks. Ion is touched in the way that the Gods touch the poet and the poet touches the rhapsode: he is moved and drawn to the magnetism of Socrates' vision. But that is not to say he truly understands it – as the reader will be reminded in the third and final phase of the dialogue.

IV Inspiring dialectic

We have seen that when Plato shifts to his positive presentation of poetry's divine origins he sets aside dialectic in favour of poetic image, suggesting that poetry cannot be understood in philosophical terms. If it is to be redeemed, this must be by its own devices – its distinctive form. While Socrates' opening argument against Ion's claims to knowledge precisely ignored all considerations of form, his soliloquy implicitly acknowledges their significance. The transfiguration is only temporary, however: following the soliloquy, Socrates abruptly reverts to his usual manner of speech and critical posture, now developing a less attractive image of divine inspiration as a kind of 'muse-driven madness'. Once again the *ieron* to Ion's *alazōn*, Socrates turns his attention to Ion's role as a performer (rather than, as before, an interpreter) of Homer's poetry. He points out to Ion that, when he performs Homer, he seems to leave all

reason behind. Ion's own experience as a rhapsode confirms this: he is subject to the very emotions – especially the distress, fear and sadness – related in his narratives, although he himself has no *reason* for them. Thus Socrates asks,

Well, Ion, and what are we to say of a man who at a sacrifice or festival, when he is dressed in a embroidered robe, and has golden crowns upon his head, of which nobody has robbed him, appears weeping or panic-stricken in the presence of more than twenty thousand friendly faces, when there is no one despoiling or wronging him; – is he in his right mind or is he not? (535d)

Plato's question is, on one level, absurd: it is, after all, an important part of the rhapsode's professional remit to *enact* or *embody* the passions of his characters – to engage in a pretence in which his audience participates. (If there is a special *technē* of rhapsody, this surely is its essence.) However, Ion again fails to offer this most obvious of defences; captivated by Socrates' suggestions, he accepts that 'he is not in his right mind' when enacting the Homeric dramas (535d). Be that as it may, he is never so possessed that he forgets to keep an eye on the audience's reactions:

I am obliged to give my very best attention to them; for if I make them cry I myself shall laugh, and if I make them laugh I myself shall cry, when the time of payment arrives. (535e)

In response, Socrates returns to the analogy of the iron rings, painting even more vividly the affinities between inspiration and madness or possession, and how thoroughly they are deprived of any personal agency:

God sways the souls of men in any direction which He pleases, causing each link to communicate the power to the next. Thus there is a vast chain of dancers and masters and undermasters of choruses, who are suspended, as if from the stone, at the side of the rings which hang down from the Muse. And every poet has some Muse from whom he is suspended, and by whom he is said to be possessed, which is nearly the same thing; for he is taken hold of. (536a–b)

Going on in this manner, Socrates finally returns to Ion's initial question and points out that it is now answered:

And you, Ion, when the name of Homer is mentioned have plenty to say, and have nothing to say of others. You ask, 'Why is this?' The answer is that your skill in the praise of Homer comes not from art, but from divine inspiration. (536c–d)

Ion is happy with the description of himself as inspired, and agrees that Socrates has offered a good answer. At the same time, he is plainly uneasy with the suggestion that this amounts to being gripped by a kind of madness:

I doubt whether you will ever have eloquence enough to persuade me that I praise Homer only when I am mad and possessed; and if you could hear me speak of him I am sure you would never think this to be the case. (536d)

Socrates' response to this challenge is, somewhat curiously, simply to return to the opening problem of why Ion's talents exist solely for the poetry of Homer. (This was, if you recall, introduced at the start of the dialogue by Socrates asking Ion, 'Would you or a good prophet be a better interpreter of what these two poets say about divination, not only when they agree, but when they disagree?' (531b).) He revisits the question, that is, of whether a rhapsode or a professional would have a better understanding of the activities and skills described in the poems he performs. It is a curious direction for the conversation to take, not least because Ion has already conceded the inferiority of his own understanding of much poetic content: where that content lies properly in the provenance of a professional, his knowledge will always be greater than the rhapsode's and indeed of the poet himself. Nevertheless, Socrates now repeats this, rather laboriously leading Ion through a range of other professional *technai*, showing that the same point holds for the charioteer, the doctor, the fisherman, the seer (again), the horseman and the lyre-player. Ion concedes that he possesses little understanding of any of these *technē*.

However, Plato offers us a small joke at Ion's expense, as well as a rehearsal of his earlier arguments: he has Ion suggest that there is one profession the 'art' of which is identical with rhapsody – that of the military general. What Ion has in mind, of course, is that the General's exhortations of his troops aim to move them and excite them just as the rhapsode aims to move his audience. The absurdity of Ion's choice here is evident: for, if the message of Socrates' soliloquy was correct, then the inspired, performing rhapsode, far from being a 'general among men' (a master, authority, leader of action), is not even master of himself. A general possesses a kind of exceptional 'super-agency', not only governing his own judgements but his judgements governing the conduct of those he commands. Ion, by contrast, is the epitome of compromised agency: when performing, he commands nothing and no one, not even himself. Socrates mocks the very idea, asking Ion why Athens has not then appointed him a general, rather than giving him a golden crown for his rhapsode's talents. Indeed, Socrates does not even dignify Ion's idea with any argument. Instead, he confronts Ion with the choice between just two self-descriptions:

You only deceive me, and so far from exhibiting the art of which you are a master, will not, even after my repeated entreaties, explain to me

the nature of it...But if, as I believe, you have no art, but speak all these beautiful words about Homer unconsciously under his inspiring influence. (541e–542a)

Unsurprisingly, Ion opts for inspiration as ‘by far the nobler’ alternative (542b).

What is accomplished by this third phase of the dialogue’s conversation? Given Ion’s previous concession to the point that his speech is not guided by knowledge of the rules of any *technē*, one may well wonder why Socrates revisits it – and does so with virtually the same arguments. But, considered more closely, this postlude to Socrates’ soliloquy is not without point or purpose. Consider, first, the rhetorical implication of Socrates’ return to his earlier, *ironic* character and its dialectical strategies. While he here reiterates much the same general position, the very fact of his doing so is telling: repetition of strategies is, after all, characteristic of a conflict between equally or almost equally matched forces in which neither is capable of ever wholly defeating the other – and neither is prepared to concede the battle. Plato’s rehearsal of the reasons why poets and rhapsodes possess no genuine reason-driven agency – no knowledge, in one sense of that term – underscores the wider dynamics of the struggle between philosophical and poetic authorities within the dialogue itself. One might even venture that this repetition signals the deeper battle at the heart of the dialogue – the *Ion’s* true, underlying *aporia*, and, indeed, the *aporia* at the heart of Plato’s persisting ambivalence concerning the *value* of poetry. Certainly, the third phase of the dialogue calls attention to evaluative questions posed by the inspiration theory – questions of how, in light of that theory, poetry (and its performance) may or may not be compatible with other human goods. In particular, Socrates here offers a more critical appraisal of the apparent ‘agency’ of those inspired, suggesting that it is like the agency of marionettes hanging from strings: ‘God sways the souls of men in any direction which He pleases, causing each link to communicate the power to the next’ (536a). This is an uneasy picture for anyone who stands to be ‘suspended’ from the rings leading to the Muse, whether poet, rhapsode or spectator. If the magnet account correctly explains the causal source of poetry’s allure, then we are faced with a new problem concerning whether and how our admiration for poets and rhapsodes can be reconciled with our valuation of autonomous agency. So the magnet analogy, while resolving Ion’s question, now presents to the reader another, more troubling one: ‘If this is how poetry comes about, can it be a part of, or even compatible with, what is truly good?’ Plato’s critical appraisal of poetic agency – in concert with the repetition of the dialectical argument against Ion’s claims to knowledge – expresses (rather than states) this evaluative *aporia*.

The *Ion’s* final phase expresses Plato’s evaluative ambivalence in a further way, through subtle transformations in the character of Ion himself.

Ion's encounter with Socrates has already provoked him to question, probably for the first time, the nature and cause of his acclaimed abilities; his question – unsolicited by Socrates, and eliciting in response the latter's soliloquy – arguably signals a nascent capacity for wonder and reason. This hint is developed in the final phase, for Ion begins to resist Socrates' easy conclusions and offers the occasional thought of his own. At one point very near the conversation's close, Ion even ventures a positive suggestion regarding the rhapsode's specialized knowledge which prefigures Aristotle's defence of poetry as embodying knowledge of general principles of human psychology ('[The rhapsode] will know what a man and what a woman ought to say, and what a freeman and what a slave ought to say, and what a ruler and what a subject' (540b)). Socrates dismisses this suggestion without acknowledgement, in the usual way, but Ion, by offering it at all, has nonetheless shown a bit more tenacity and verve than he previously displayed. While Socrates is still treating him as an *alazōn*, Ion is not fulfilling the role quite so easily. When the dialogue began, Ion was a buffoon. At its close he remains intermittently preposterous – a mere stage performer who imagines he possesses the know-how of a general. However, Ion arguably is no longer altogether incapable of independent, rational thought or altogether insensible to the possibilities of reasoned argument: he is no longer just an inspired vessel for the Gods. At the dialogue's start he was perhaps possessed of many true beliefs, but he had no notion whatsoever of their justification. Socrates' soliloquy provides an explanation of their origins which at once also renders them justified: if the divinities are a reliable source, then the utterance which Ion finds so compelling really *ought*, rationally, to be endorsed. But that is not yet enough to count him as possessing any kind of knowledge (as Socrates reminds us), and it will not be enough unless and until he is able to free himself from the magnetism of the Muses and come to think and reason for himself; rather than being merely caused to accept this or that belief, he must do so for *reasons*. Does this begin to happen, however quietly, in the final phase of the dialogue? If so, then perhaps Ion himself is beginning to instantiate the implicit *aporia* concerning poetry's value: Socrates has *both* given him good reason to value the condition of inspiration *and* nudged him to question it and seek its justification – to value and pursue the path of reason. Moreover, Socrates requires him to face up to this dilemma by requiring him to choose between being called an unjust mortal or a vehicle of the divine.

The evaluative conflict is not conclusively settled either way in the *Ion* (or, indeed, in any other of Plato's dialogues). Instead, as I have argued here, the struggle between poetry and philosophy is expressed through a series of digressions from the explicit dialectical goal. These digressions leave the reader with an *aporia* concerning the value of poetry. How ought we to assess the beauty and power of poetry if it is not an expression of expertise, and indeed undermines our capacity for rational agency? Plato

leaves the question unanswered, and for good reason. For, according to his account in the *Ion*, to endorse a work of poetry as good would be to endorse its hold over our thoughts, our speech, our actions – to endorse its displacement of rational agency. If poetry works by magnetizing poet, performer and audience, then the better the work of poetry, the worse for human reason.

The claim that the art of poetry originates in divine inspiration is a powerful reply to Ion's question. It successfully explains why Ion is so gifted with regard to Homer and so ignorant and indifferent when it comes to other poets: he is attracted solely by the divine power that works on Homer. However, this reply introduces the problem of whether and how we should *value* poetry. Plato's determination that poetry is an expression of divinity does nothing to challenge the common understanding that works of poetry can be judged, evaluated and scaled. On the contrary, just before Socrates' soliloquy he mentions 'the finest poems ever written'. What does it mean for a poem to be 'the finest'? I have argued that the *Ion* implicitly poses this question, and reveals Plato's ambivalence about its answer. However, it provides no key to its resolution. Much later, in the *Republic*, Plato does offer that key. Unfortunately, the key opens the door to usher the very finest poets out of the state:

If a man, then, it seems, who was capable by his cunning of assuming every kind of shape and imitating all things should arrive in our city, bringing with himself the poems which he wished to exhibit, we should fall down and worship him as a holy and wondrous and delightful creature, but should say to him that there is no man of that kind among us in our city, nor is it lawful for such a man to arise among us, and we should send him away to another city, after pouring myrrh down over his head and crowning him with fillets of wool, but we ourselves, for our souls' good, should continue to employ the more austere and less delightful poet and tale-teller, who would imitate the diction of the good man and would tell his tale in the patterns which we prescribed in the beginning, when we set out to educate our soldiers. (397e–398b)

Thus, the stronger the poet's muse-driven madness and the less vulnerable it is to rational control, the more 'wondrous and delightful creature' he is. The fine poet is, therefore, unwelcome in the well-ordered state, where only the 'more austere and less delightful poet' can serve it according to patterns prescribed by law. The *Republic* thus tells us how to behave towards fine poetry: we are to exile it from the state and from our souls. But neither here nor elsewhere does Plato decisively tell us how to regard such poetry – how to estimate its value, how to think about its beauty and promised pleasures. Perhaps the *aporia* first introduced in the *Ion* ultimately finds no resolution, even for Plato himself.

Notes

1. Unless otherwise noted, translations of the works of Plato are from Jowett (1953).
2. The *Ion* has received little interpretive attention and few scholarly accolades. Very few publications focus on the *Ion* relative to the multitude of publications dealing with Plato's other early dialogues. Even within the somewhat narrow range of publications dealing directly with Plato's aesthetics, the *Ion* is often overlooked. Thomas Gould, for instance, refers only to Ion the person, but not to the dialogue, while Martha Nussbaum does not mention the *Ion* at all. Various other works discussing Plato's theory of art mention the *Ion* only in passing, often suggesting that the *Ion* is a simple and clear dialogue that does not require any special interpretive attention. No wonder, then, that, as Penelope Murray notes, since the beginning of the twentieth century not a single annotated edition of the *Ion* in English had been published, until Murray herself undertook the task in 1996.
3. For example, in *Eutiphron*, a chance encounter next to the courthouse serves as a trigger for a discussion of the concept of justice.
4. Readers are divided as to the nature of the rhapsode's art. Among the possibilities are: a person who recites poetry on stage (performer), a person who praises poetry (ancient form of advertisement), an interpreter of poetry (ancient form of a literary critic or literary scholar). Regardless, in reading *Ion* it seems that Ion does all of the above: he recites Homer's poetry and praises and interprets his work. Socrates and Ion do not distinguish sharply between stage performance and the scholarly aspect of interpretation. I will refer mostly to Ion's ability to interpret poetry, since the dialogue focuses on his ability to understand poetry and explain it to others. For more on the art of the rhapsode, see Dorter (1973), LaDriere (1951), Halliwell (1992), Janaway (1998, 518–21) and Woodruff (1998, 523–7).
5. Ranta (1967). Similarly, Hayden Ausland traces the origin of Socrates' characteristics in the prevalent mime.

What the characteristically Socratic dialogues exhibit par excellence, on the other hand, is in one way or another present in all Plato's dialogues. This Socrates is clearly imitative of the historical Socrates. But he is at the same time a modified type recognizable from the mime, regularly confronting others with a characteristic dissimulation, professing to know little or nothing while averring his readiness to inquire along with another who does (1997, 383–4).

6. Similarly, Protagoras approaches Hippocrates and tells him:

Young man, if you associate with me, on the very first day you will return home a better man than you came, and better on the second day than on the first, and better every day than you were on the day before. (*Prt.* 318b)

Likewise, we can almost blush in his stead when we see Hippias admit that 'I have never found any man who was my superior in anything' (*H. Mi.* 364a), or when Gorgias replies to Socrates' question 'Then I am to call you a rhetorician?' with the 'humble' reply: 'Yes, Socrates, and a good one too' (*Grg.* 449a), or when he boasts to Socrates that 'You will certainly say that you never heard a man use fewer words' (*Grg.* 449c). Finally, Euthydemus is certain that '[he] can impart [virtue] better and quicker than any man' (*Euthd.* 273d).

7. Socrates presupposes that the knowledge of all professionals encompasses their entire field. This presupposition is dubious not only in relation to poetry but also in relation to all professionals. Ion's limitation will not distinguish him from the physician, the carpenter or even the philosopher (with Plato as one of the few exceptions of the latter).

8. Again, expertise must encompass the field in its entirety. See note 7 above.
9. This reference to rhapsodes is certainly puzzling: only a few sentences later, Socrates places the rhapsode with the poet in relation to the question of the source of their talent. If it can be so easily determined which rhapsode is better, then surely there are criteria for the judgement, and no cause for argument. It would, therefore, be reasonable to assume that here Socrates refers to the rhapsode as a professional performer of poetry – a role essentially similar to that of the actor. In contrast, during most of the dialogue, Socrates refers to the rhapsode as an interpreter. Similarly, we can find in the ‘Phaedrus’ a distinction between two aspects of being a poet or two types of poets: the poet acting out of madness – the first type of soul that Socrates mentions there – and the mimetic poet – the sixth type of soul.
10. This move typifies Plato’s Socrates when he criticizes other forms of verbal expressions. See, for example, his attack on Hippothales’ encomium in *Lysis*. For further consideration of Plato’s critique of encomia, see Nightingale (1993).
11. See, for example, ‘he met Socrates fresh from the bath and sandalled’ and ‘the sight of the sandals was unusual’ (*Smp.* 174a). Likewise Phaedrus’ words to Socrates: ‘I am fortunate, it seems, in being barefoot; you are so always’ (*Phdr.* 229a, trans. Fowler 1913).
12. A similar turn famously appears in *Republic* when, in Book II, Glaucon does not settle for the *aporia* with which Book I ends, but urges Socrates to explain why virtue is a worthy goal rather than a mere instrument. Yet *Republic* is not an early dialogue.
13. On this point I disagree with Jerrald Ranta. On Ranta’s reading, the dialogue is consistent in its presentation of Socrates as the *eirōn* and Ion as the *alazōn*.
14. That said, the notion that stylistic difference can be attributed to diversity of the poets’ personalities is not entirely alien to Plato’s time, and, indeed, is precisely the explanation Aristotle provides for the development of different genres on the ground of stylistic difference:

Poetry now diverged in two directions, according to the individual character of the writers. The graver spirits imitated noble actions, and the actions of good men. The more trivial sort imitated the actions of meaner persons, at first composing satires, as the former did hymns to the gods and the praises of famous men. ... Thus the older poets were distinguished as writers of heroic or of lampooning verse. ... But when Tragedy and Comedy came to light, the two classes of poets still followed their natural bent: the lampooners became writers of Comedy, and the Epic poets were succeeded by Tragedians, since the drama was a larger and higher form of art. (*Poet.* 1448b24–1449a6, trans. Butcher 1898)

Moreover, Plato himself acknowledges the fact that people are drawn to different occupations on account of their personalities, as he explains in Book II of *Republic*.

15. As Nickolas Pappas comments, ‘Religion has not been explored in connection with Plato’s aesthetics to the degree that it should, even though a religious orientation informs what he has to say about beauty, inspiration, and imitation. He even forces divine considerations upon the subjects’ (2008).
16. In trying to decipher the meaning of this turn of the dialogue I follow Ausland’s claim that ‘[t]he possibility that Plato himself has either logically or tactically erred is therefore to be reckoned with as a last resort and not as the first’ (1997, 377).
17. Murdoch (1990) makes a similar claim.
18. ‘Divine nectar’ is Jowett’s elegant translation. Lamb refers to ‘the sweets they cull from honey’ (534a, trans. Lamb and Fowler 1975). In *Phaedrus*, Socrates claims

that Lysias' speech 'is miraculous...I am quite overcome by it. And this is due to you, Phaedrus, because as I looked at you, I saw that you were delighted by the speech as you read. So, thinking that you know more than I about such matters, I followed in your train and joined you in the divine frenzy' (*Phdr.* 234d, trans. Fowler 1913). Paul Woodruff (1982) explains that Plato, in contrast to Kant, does not rely in his analysis of poetry on the concept of judgement or taste, and therefore divine inspiration can be the only explanation for poetic talent. Woodruff's explanation helps clarify Plato's incentive for alluding to inspiration. While for Kant a judgement of taste can be universal due to the structure of the mechanism of reflective judgement in all thinkers, for Plato the explanation of a shared enjoyment of art relies on the viral nature of ecstasy.

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6

The Philosopher's Antidote

G. R. F. Ferrari

I

I begin with a palinode. It is not true, that tale I told about the myth of the cicadas in Plato's *Phaedrus*. Some years ago now I used the little songsters as emblems of a malady that, I claimed, afflicts Phaedrus in that dialogue: the indiscriminate love of beautiful words (Ferrari 1987). I emphasized only the danger of their Siren song, which I represented as a distraction from true philosophy. But Bruce Gottfried has a better story, in his article 'Pan, the Cicadas, and Plato's Use of Myth in the *Phaedrus*'. The cicadas' example of divine inspiration is positive. Its function is not to deprecate Phaedrus' love of beautiful words, but to suggest how this love can open the way to philosophy. The potential of beautiful words, at least for sensitive souls like Phaedrus, is comparable in this regard to the effect Socrates attributes earlier in the dialogue to the sight of a beautiful boy on a lover whose memory of the beautiful itself is still fresh.

The Siren song of the cicadas is dangerous only to those whose intellect is lazy; these the song will bewitch or beguile (the verb is *kēlein*) and put to sleep (259a). To sail past in safety, they would need to have their ears stopped with beeswax. For those whose inclination is to spend their noontime conversing rather than taking a nap, however, there is another way to skirt the Sirens. It is only a little riskier, and has the huge advantage of permitting the sailor to hear the beauty of their voices. We can sail past not as Odysseus' crew did, but as Odysseus himself did. The myth of the cicadas thus becomes a 'lesson in the right way to use the beauty of earthly sound in the search for truth...we should lash ourselves to the mast and allow ourselves to be driven mad by the exquisite arousals of earthly beauty' (Gottfried 1993, 190). For it is a divine madness, and can awaken us to the true beauty we have lost. But for this to happen the charioteer of our soul, reason, must remain in charge – here no less than when the soul is confronted by a beautiful boy. We must remain lashed to the mast.

I am going to take this opportunity to make amends for my transgression against the cicadas, and will do so by pursuing Gottfried's thought into an area where he did not venture: the critique of poetry in *Republic* Book X. I want in particular to consider the 'drug' or 'antidote' (*pharmakon*) and the 'spell' or 'charm' (*epōidē*) that the philosopher will bring to bear when listening to poetry, and ask whether these measures are the equivalent of Odysseus' being lashed to the mast in order to listen to the Sirens. What will the philosopher feel when in an audience, at a performance of beautiful words? Can he permit himself, like Odysseus, to be maddened, to strain against his bonds?

II

If we are to find our answer, the place to begin is the description in *Republic* Book X (X.605c–606d) of the emotions felt by the 'respectable' (*epieikeis*) audience-members, the 'best sort' (*beltistoi*) (X.605c). The terms are freighted with associations of class superiority; this is the class with which Glaucon would identify. No surprise, then, that, when Socrates asks him if he knows how it is for a respectable member of the audience to share in the sufferings of the tragic hero and to enjoy the experience, he responds: 'Yes, I know how it is. How could I not?' (X.605d).¹

But the emotions attributed to the best sort are not those that the philosopher would feel at a tragic performance, whatever his social class. There is no reason to doubt that those 'few' described by Socrates as impervious to the harm that poetry can do (X.605c) are the group he describes at the beginning of Book X as having the drug that counteracts this harm (X.595b). (Notice the correspondence of terms, *lōbē* at X.595b with *lōbasthai* at X.605c.) The drug consists in knowing what sort of thing the creations of mimetic artists in fact are. And this, it emerges, is knowledge that a philosopher would have; for in order to explain mimesis Socrates employs the apparatus of the Forms.

It is in any case clear from Socrates' description that the emotional response of the decent or respectable audience-member is not that of a philosopher.² For one thing, the response comes about in part because the rational element in the person's soul has been 'inadequately educated, whether by reason or even by habit' (X.606a7–8). This is a description that could hardly apply to the philosopher's soul.

For another thing, the respectable fellow's reaction is conditioned above all by his sense of propriety. We have been told in the preliminaries to this description that a respectable man (the word is again *epieikēs*, X.603e) would attempt to restrain his feelings of grief over the loss of someone dear to him and in particular would not permit himself to give way to public lamentation. He would be ashamed to be seen or heard giving vent to such a display. Yet for that very reason he is likely to lose his grip on himself when alone,

and say and do the things that reason and custom (*logos kai nomos*) frown upon (X.604a).

In the theatre, however, his inhibitions are removed; he no longer even attempts to restrain his feelings. He is prepared now to accept that real men *do* cry (X.605d–e); or at least he will not allow the disapproval he would normally feel at the sight of a man dissolved in grief to interfere with the pleasure he gets from sharing in the grief of the tragic hero (X.606b). So, too, at a comedy he is happy to indulge a delight in buffoonery that he would be ashamed to let govern his own behaviour, for fear of the harm it would do to his good reputation (X.606c).

The key to the respectable man's emotional response in the theatre is the likelihood that in his personal tragedies he will lose control of himself when left on his own. For this reveals that his is not true self-control at any time; it is, rather, a control imposed primarily from without, a pressure exerted on him by society. Reason in him requires the assistance of custom (*nomos*) to prevail over his emotion, when it does prevail (X.604b–c). It is ready to follow custom's lead, and give ear to a litany of sentiments on the value of keeping a stiff upper lip and on the ultimate insignificance of human beings, a litany that our respectable man will have heard in a variety of social contexts, not least among them the poetic performances at which he also finds emotional release from the inhibitions that those sentiments encourage.³

Release from inhibitions – that is the pleasure the respectable man experiences in the theatre and at other performances of poetry. It is more than just the pleasure of satisfying his appetite for tears, which may be supposed to be the experience of the common sort in the audience (suggested, but not made explicit, at X.605a–b). Rather, he is satisfying an appetite that he has deliberately starved, kept down by force in his regular life (X.606a3–5 – *biai katekhomenon; pepeinēkos tou dakrusai*). And hunger, as we know, is the best sauce. In the theatre, then, he receives temporary relief of a pressure that weighs on him at all other times. This is catharsis in the sense that the term has come to have in popular psychology: not the relief of a tension developed in the audience by the performance itself – say, the suspense generated by the twists of its plot – but the relief of tensions that accrue in life, and are brought to the performance fully formed. For once, our respectable man can allow himself to have a good cry and not feel bad about it.⁴

The demeanour and behaviour of the true philosopher in other roles than that of audience-member may, in fact, be outwardly indistinguishable from the demeanour and behaviour of any respectable person; for the philosopher too will be sober, gracious and restrained, and show courage under pressure. But it will not be the desire for respectability that motivates him to be or to do these things. The opening pages of Book VI derive his spotless conduct from an inner drive towards wisdom, a drive that leaves no room in his soul for the temptations that seduce less remarkable natures.

He requires no vigilance from society to stiffen his resolve. For the respectable man, as we saw, the claim that human affairs are insignificant is a deliverance of custom, a mantra to which his good sense will conform (X.604b). For the philosopher, however, it is more than a fine sentiment: it is the way human affairs look to him as he reaches out for the cosmic view, in a life-long quest for the grand thing (VI.486a). This is not a man who is in danger of relapsing when alone; he is self-motivated. He leads a disciplined life, not an inhibited one. So he does not stand in need of the kind of relief that the respectable folk receive from the theatre. Whatever he feels as he watches a performance, it cannot be what the respectable feel.

III

Perhaps we will come closer to understanding what the philosopher does feel at a poetic performance if we consider the drug that protects him from its harmful effects, the drug of knowing what the creations of mimetic artists in fact are. What the philosopher actually knows, at least if what he knows is the account Socrates gives of these products and of their creators in Book X, is, rather, what they in fact are *not*. Poems and plays are not lessons; poets are not teachers.

Not that Socrates ever suggests that poets claim this status for themselves: it is other people who make the claim on their behalf. 'We hear from some people,' says Socrates, 'that [Homer and the other tragic poets] know about all the arts, and that they know about everything human – as it bears on virtue and vice – and everything divine as well' (X.598e). In which case, he claims, these people have been taken in by the mimetic power of poetry much as a child or a simple-minded adult might be deceived by a well-executed painting of a carpenter in his workshop; deceived, that is, into supposing the painter has the carpenter's knowledge, knows how to craft tables and chairs as well as portraits (X.598c). (Here I follow Myles Burnyeat's construal of X.598c in the third of his Tanner lectures.⁵)

The same message emerges from the challenge Socrates proceeds to issue to Homer, asking him what city he has written laws for, he who supposedly is such an expert on human virtues and vices; or whether he has been a moral educator in private like Pythagoras, who founded a sect, or perhaps a public educator like Protagoras, the star professor (X.599d–600e). For Plato ensures that, in Socrates' discussion of this issue, the reader hears about the kind of life that Homer himself chose to live and the kind of legacy that Homer himself chose to bequeath. While Protagoras and Prodicus were touring the Greek world giving moral and political lectures, Homer and Hesiod were on tour giving performances (*rhapsōidein*, X.600d6). No city preserves Homer's poems in the guise of laws; instead, his poems are preserved for performance by a guild of reciters, the Homerids, who make no claims for Homer as a lawgiver (X.599e6).

In short, despite the fact that Book X is a denunciation of poetry's effects, Plato is doing all he can within this framework to give the poets due credit for understanding better than their audience what their business really is. They know, most of them, that they are artists and performers rather than teachers.⁶

If poets will know this with a practitioner's and professional's knowledge, from a direct sense of what it is they do, philosophers will know it from a more theoretical standpoint. The philosopher who knows what mimesis is will understand that, as imitator, the poet uses the power of fine writing to bring us to imagine states of affairs;⁷ and that that is all he does. The philosopher will not, of course, deny that we may learn something as a result. But, to the extent that a literary work is a communication between author and reader, it is one where the author has said his piece in the book. Socrates points out in the *Protagoras* (347e) that poets are generally not around to be questioned as to what their poems mean, and that there is in fact widespread disagreement as to what their poems mean. Nor would it help if the poets did step in as interpreters of their own works. Plato has Socrates report in the *Apology* (22b–c) that in his interviews with poets he discovered them to be worse explicators of their own meaning than a casual bystander might have been.

(Here in the *Apology* Socrates provisionally joins in the general view that poets are wise, just as, for the purposes of his investigation, he joins in the general view that politicians are. And this view reaches its apogee among those people in *Republic* X who attribute to the poets expertise in all matters that feature in their works. But notice that even in the *Apology* Socrates does not report *the poets* as sharing this full-strength view of their wisdom. Rather, he concludes that, on account of their poetry, they thought themselves the wisest of men in other matters too (22c); and he compares this with the case of the manual craftsmen who thought themselves wise in other matters, including the most important matters, just because they had expertise in their particular craft (22d). Socrates is not claiming, then, that the poets thought themselves wise in the most important matters on the grounds that they addressed such matters in their poems. Rather, like the craftsmen, they know they are successful at their craft, and they therefore imagine, as citizens of democratic Athens, that their success entitles them to speak up in public on moral and political questions, such as those evoked in their poems.)

IV

The philosopher will not accept that the poet has a worthwhile understanding of the human and divine matters that he imitates, and so will not permit himself to take mimetic poetry seriously (*Rep.* X.602b). He will treat it as a kind of play (*paidia*). His approach is a special instance of the caution

that he brings to writing of whatever sort in the *Phaedrus*. No written work is capable of teaching the truth, not adequately at any rate (*Phdr.* 276c). None, then, should be taken very seriously; each must be approached in a spirit of play (276d, 277e–278a).

The philosopher's playful approach to mimetic writing, however, is a special instance because mimetic art is not merely an insufficient teacher of truth: it is not in the business of getting at truth at all. It imitates only appearances (*Rep.* X.598b); it is successful if it merely convinces, transports us into the imaginary situation by the vividness and aptness of its representations. The writer of laws or of public orations or of philosophic books may legitimately be expected to possess such knowledge of the truth about his topics as would enable him to defend his written position in live debate (*Phdr.* 278c–d) – although this is an expectation that may be disappointed. But with the poet there should be no such expectation in the first place. If a poet were in fact wise in the most important of human affairs, it would not be as poet that he possessed this wisdom. As poet, Homer is not trying and failing to be a Lycurgus, a Pythagoras, a Protagoras; he is in a different game altogether. So the *Republic* locates him on a different plane from these figures – one remove further from the truth (X.599d).

The philosopher's knowledge of what the products of mimetic artists in fact are acts as a drug to counteract their harmful effects; and the drug is associated with a spell. In the *Charmides* (155e) Socrates claims to know a herb that can cure headache, but explains that this drug (*pharmakon*) is no use unless combined with a spell (*epōidē*), which turns out to consist in fine words that engender self-discipline (157a). The drug is one thing, the spell another, and the spell consists of words. So too in *Republic* X. The drug is the philosopher's understanding of mimetic art, but the spell consists of the argument in Book X.⁸ Socrates announces as much at the argument's close:

We shall recite to ourselves, as we listen to her [sc. mimetic poetry that aims at pleasure, X.607c], this argument we have put forward, as a kind of spell... And this will be the spell we shall recite, that this kind of poetry is not something to be taken seriously, as something important, with some bearing on the truth. The listener should be on his guard against it if he is concerned about the regime within him, and his views on poetry should be the ones we have put forward today. (X.608a–b)⁹

Socrates is not here describing how philosophers in Kallipolis will protect themselves against the effects of the kind of poetry that aims at pleasure; for he has just finished banishing such poetry from Kallipolis. A philosopher–king would presumably be just as capable as Socrates himself is of listening to the poetry that aims at pleasure while under the protection of this spell. If he must renounce the experience, that will count as yet another of the many deprivations he must endure for the sake of the common good.

Perhaps, though, he will not miss it; after all, he has never known it. Socrates supposes at X.607e6–608a1 that his own feelings of good will towards such poetry come from his upbringing in a city where poetry was esteemed (compare X.595b9–10). But that is not to say the philosopher-king isn't suffering deprivation after all. As founder of Kallipolis, Socrates is depriving the philosopher-king of something he would have found beautiful had he been allowed to pursue a normal philosophic life.

What Socrates is describing at X.608a, then, is how the philosopher in a conventional city will listen to its poetry – the poetry that aims at pleasure. In Kallipolis, by contrast, poetry will aim at the civically useful – as Books II to III amply demonstrate – and must surrender a good deal of its sweetness as a result (III.397d–e, X.607a). For, even if poets themselves do not aim to teach, the civic authorities can certainly ensure that their poems have this effect, by compelling them to present only morally correct and uplifting examples of human behaviour. If the poets with their sweet song are like dangerous Sirens, censorship ensures that the citizens of Kallipolis, philosophers included, get to sail past them with wax in their ears.

V

Outside Kallipolis, however, the philosopher will protect himself differently. Socrates and Glaucon admit they are susceptible to the 'bewitching' effect of poetry (X.607c; the verb is *kēlein*, as in the *Phaedrus*). A spell is required to counteract this effect, so that they can listen to Homer and the tragedians without disturbance to their inner regime, much as Socrates and Phaedrus were able to listen to the cicadas 'unbewitched' (*akēlētos*, *Phdr.* 259b) – with their minds still active, not lulled to sleep. This is how the philosopher will listen to poetry.¹⁰

But, if this is how the philosopher will listen to poetry, what emotions will he permit himself to feel? Granted that his intelligence remains in charge, will it give the nod to that part which feels pity, but keep it, perhaps, on a long leash rather than allowing it to roam free as the merely respectable audience-member did? As he stands lashed to the mast, will the philosopher feel sympathetic pity for the tragic hero? Gottfried spoke of allowing ourselves 'to be driven mad by the exquisite arousals of earthly beauty'. This suggests strong emotion indeed. Will the philosopher be shaken by the feelings that the imaginary drama arouses in him? Will he strain at his bonds as Odysseus did? Will he go hot and cold, shiver and thrill in the presence of this beautiful work of art as the true lover of the *Phaedrus* shivers and thrills in the presence of the beautiful boy?

That last is not an arbitrary comparison; for Plato's best clue to the answer we seek is contained in an erotic metaphor that Socrates applies to the philosopher and his antidote. With his argument complete, Socrates has professed himself more than willing to hear a counter-argument to show that

poetry is 'not only pleasurable but also a good thing – for political regimes and for human life' (X.607d). But if such an argument is not forthcoming:

then we must do what lovers do when they have fallen in love with someone and decided their love is not a good thing. They hold off from it. It may be a struggle, but they hold off from it nonetheless. The love of this sort of poetry has grown in us as a result of our being brought up in these wonderful regimes of ours, and this will predispose us to have her appear as good and as true as possible. But while she remains incapable of making this defence, we shall recite to ourselves, as we listen to her, this argument we have put forward, as a kind of spell to prevent any relapse into our childish but popular passion. (X.607e–608a)

If the anecdotes that have Plato renouncing his youthful ambitions as a writer of poetry when he encountered Socrates find anchorage anywhere in Plato's dialogues, it is surely here. Let us imagine a young Plato – there is no harm in it – who thought for a time that poetry really was the truest and best intellectual activity; that it would enable him to grasp the whole of things, not just an image of the whole (compare X.596c–e). Then in the wistful aside about the invisibility of wisdom at *Phaedrus* 250d we could hear the echo of that vain aspiration of his youth. Sight is the sharpest of our bodily senses, says Socrates in the *Phaedrus*, but it fails to see wisdom. And he adds, almost as an afterthought: Just think how fearsome a love wisdom might arouse if it could come before our eyes, as beauty does! Plato may once have felt that poetry – which enters through the eyes and ears – was wisdom's body, and his life's passion.

Not only is there no harm in this exercise of biographical imagination, there is some benefit: it helps us feel more keenly that what Socrates is describing at *Republic* X.607e–608a is the skeleton of a tragedy, or, at least, of a story apt to evoke our pity.¹¹ A man was once in love, but saw that this love was no good for him, and eventually renounced it. But the struggle was hard; and still he continues to wish that it could have been otherwise – that this love could have proved a good thing after all. This is a story, then, of renunciation for the sake of the good.

Now imagine a philosopher hearing such a story. What should he feel? Set aside the speculation about the course of Plato's own life; the *Republic* itself presents a story of renunciation for the sake of the good. What is more, Plato has contrived to include within the *Republic* a suggestion of the appropriate emotional response to this imagined state of affairs.

In Kallipolis we see philosophers bred to surrender the dream that animates all philosophers, the dream of a life lived entirely outside the Cave. This they will do for the sake of the good. Now, any philosopher who for whatever reason is compelled to turn his attention to practical matters after a long period of intense philosophic speculation is likely to need some time

to adjust his perspective. Socrates compares how our eyes take time to adjust when we move from a bright place to a dark one (VII.517a). In a society where philosophers must mingle with those who cannot appreciate them, the response of the ignorant to the philosopher's difficulty in dealing with mundane affairs will be laughter and mockery, when it is not outright hostility. He has ruined his eyes, they will say, with all that fancy contemplation (VII.517a).

No such response will be permitted in Kallipolis, of course. There, philosophers command general respect (V.463a–b), even though the uneducated cannot be supposed to understand philosophic activity any better than their counterparts in an ordinary city. But what would the response of an educated person be to the spectacle of the philosopher's return to the Cave? Socrates tells us at VII.518a–b:

Anyone with any sense would remember that people's eyesight can be impaired in two quite different ways, and for two quite different reasons. There's the change from light to darkness, and the change from darkness to light. He might then take it that the same is true of the soul, so that when he saw a soul in difficulties, unable to see, he would not laugh mindlessly, but would ask whether it had come from some brighter life and could not cope with the unfamiliar darkness, or whether it had come from greater ignorance into what was brighter, and was now dazzled by the glare. One he would congratulate on what it had seen, and on its way of life. The other he would pity. Or if he chose to laugh at it, his laughter would be less absurd than laughter directed at the soul which had come from the light above.

The person who can appreciate what the philosopher has had to give up will not pity him for it, nor will he even feel indignant, as Glaucon apparently does at VII.519d. He will not feel the emotions typical in the audience of a tragedy, despite understanding that what he is witnessing is a story of loss and renunciation. Instead, he will focus resolutely on the positive, and feel happy for the philosopher, who must have seen the light to be disconcerted now by the darkness. The tragic emotion of pity he will reserve for those with whom, unlike the philosopher, he does not share a sense of solidarity. In this his feelings resemble those of the philosopher who has quit the Cave and thinks back on the ignorant folk still scurrying in the dark: himself he congratulates (*eudaimonizein*) on the development; those left behind he pities (*elein*) (VII.516c).

VI

Yet there is something else besides pity that our man of sense is quite likely to feel when considering the plight of those who have not returned from the

brighter region, and that is the urge to laugh. He feels this because the spectacle he sees is not one of simple ignorance – which is what the philosopher saw when looking back from outside the Cave – but of ignorance unmasked. The person he both pities and at whom he wishes to laugh has moved from ‘greater ignorance’ (*amathias pleionos*) into ‘what is brighter’ (*phanoteron*). He has not become enlightened; he has merely moved from a greater to a lesser ignorance, and this has gotten him into practical difficulties. He blinks at the light and tries to clear his eyes, but cannot. And this is standard fare for comedy: a character’s foolishness is not allowed to go unscathed; instead the plot leads him into comic scrapes which, while they may not remove the scales from his eyes, at least confront him with the consequences of his errors. (Think of Strepsiades in the *Clouds*.)¹²

Looking on the plight of those with whom he feels no solidarity – the plight to which their ignorance has delivered them – the man of sense will feel pity, certainly, but he might temper his pity with at least a desire to laugh, if not outright laughter (*ei gelan... bouloito...*, VII.518b). Something like this, I propose, is what the philosopher, fortified by his antidote and protected by his spell, would feel as he listens to tragic poetry. For no poet writes tragedy whose protagonist is of a type with which the philosopher can identify – whether because poets are out to please the lowest common denominator in their audience (X.604e) or because they themselves are incapable of thinking their way into a philosopher’s character (*Ti*. 19d–e). There will be none of the congratulation, the admiration that a philosopher would feel for a kindred spirit caught up in secular travails and struggling to cope; the philosopher feels no kinship with the heroes of the tragic stage or of rhapsodic performance. (Odysseus, at least as he appears in Homer, is possibly an exception, and would be an interesting one.) What he sees in them is a very human spectacle of moral ignorance coming home to roost. At this spectacle he will feel pity, but pity from a lofty height, pity with a wry grace-note. *Sunt lacrimae rerum*, he may think; but he is unlikely to weep as he thinks it.

VII

I have compared the poetry-lover’s renunciation of his love with the philosopher-king’s renunciation of a life lived entirely outside the Cave. But are the two cases truly comparable? Philosopher-kings, after all, are renouncing for the sake of the common good something that they would have found good for themselves personally, while the lover of poetry is renouncing for his personal good something that he has decided is bad for him. Is his story, then, not tragic at all, but just a case of moral progress? No: what makes it tragic is the struggle required for progress, and the dissociation between beauty and the good that causes the struggle in the first place.

It is a struggle we should contrast with the respectable man’s forceful suppression of his emotions (*biai katekhomenon*, X.606a). The philosopher who

forces himself to hold off from his love of poetry (*biai men*, X.607e) is not doing so for considerations of propriety. He is not under pressure from anyone but himself. So he is not looking for a socially sanctioned and cathartic release from this pressure. Instead, he is looking for an argument that could show he need not apply this pressure in the first place.

We are to congratulate, not pity, the lover of conventional poetry who succeeds in renouncing his love; but that does not mean we fail to appreciate how much he is giving up. We can see how wistful he remains about the possibility of still saving and defending poetry. The poetry of Homer is beautiful, and its beauty is bewitching. If it is true that rational thoughts cannot in themselves possess such beauty, this truth is sad. We should not pity the philosopher who renounces his love of poetry, but that does not mean we cannot feel a larger pity: a regret that things should be so.

VIII

The upshot of my argument so far is that the philosopher will not, after all, experience the sympathetic pity enjoyed by the respectable audience-member. He will not 'surrender' himself, 'follow and share the hero's sufferings' (*endontes hēmas autous hepometha sympaskhontes*, X.605d); won't imagine himself in Achilles' entourage, weeping with him and seconding his grief. His will not be the powerful emotions that, in the respectable man, are stepped up by long suppression.¹³

If the emotions that the philosopher would experience as he watches a tragic performance are not powerful emotions, then Gottfried's description of the philosopher as permitting himself to be 'driven mad by the exquisite arousals of earthly beauty' would not apply to the philosopher in *this* context at least. Admittedly, Gottfried is speaking in the first instance about the philosophic lover of a beautiful boy. But he feels free to generalize the point to 'the beauty perceived with our senses', and includes under this head 'the Muse-inspired song of the cicadas' and 'the beauty ... of language' (Gottfried 1993, 189 and 190). And this extension cannot, I think, be right.

In the *Phaedrus* the genuinely philosophic lovers are a subset of those true lovers who respond with proper passion and madness to the earthly beauty of their beloved. They are that subset of true lovers who leave their passion unconsummated, and live a disciplined and orderly life together (*enkrateis hautōn kai kosmioi ontes*, *Phdr.* 256a). Philosophers renounce the pleasure of sex with each other in order not to betray the memory of true beauty that is stirred by each other's company. But the thrill is not gone. After all, it was the soul's charioteer that felt the thrill originally (253e–254a), and the charioteer's initial refusal to make a sexual advance was an expression of awe in the remembered presence of the beautiful itself (254b).

In the continence of the philosophic lovers, then, this combination of feelings can continue to find its expression. The wings of the soul continue

to develop (*hupopteroi*, 256b) – indeed, they grow faster than for any other kind of loving couple – and wing-growth is an ecstatic experience for all true lovers (251b–e). All true lovers continue to feel the joy that comes from inspired memory of the beautiful itself (*enthousiōntes*, 253a), even after they have learnt to follow the beloved with the reverence he merits as channel for that memory (*sebetai*, 250e, 251a); even after they have achieved their victory over the black horse.

But this is not how Socrates in the *Republic* describes the philosopher's erotic relation to poetry. The philosopher there does not simply renounce sexual consummation of his passion; he renounces his passion. He is like a man caught in a love affair who has forced himself to break off the affair because it is doing him no good (X.607e). If he continues to keep company with the conventional poetry that he once loved, continues to listen to it, it is not in the manner in which the philosophic lover continues to keep company with the boy he fell in love with long ago. For what those philosophers share remains passionate, and spurs growth in the soul. The philosopher listening to conventional poetry, on the other hand, is cautious and defensive (*eulaboumenoi*, *eulabēteon*, *dediōti*, X.608a–b). He recites the counter-spell to himself as he listens. Far from looking for his soul to grow from the experience, he is worried about the disruption to his soul's regime that the experience might cause.

His worry in regard to poetry is also described as a concern that he should not 'relapse into' his 'childish, popular passion' (*ton paidikon te kai tōn pollōn erōta*, X.608a) – the love for poetry that was instilled in him by his upbringing, and which stays strong in those who, by comparison with philosophers, remain children all their lives. Does this phrase suggest that the philosopher – once he has secured himself against relapse – might be able to listen to poetry with a different and more philosophic passion than the childish and popular sort? Does it suggest that he renounces one passion in order to replace it with another?

The answer must be no. If the philosopher is concerned about the threat poetry poses to the regime within his soul, his fear cannot simply be that he will take poetry too seriously, as having a bearing on truth. For that might be a mere misapprehension, a failure to appreciate that poets are not teachers, which need not disrupt the balance of power in his soul. Reason's failure in this regard need not feed the appetitive or spirited parts and make them strong. But this is what conventional tragic and comic poetry does (X.606d). This poetry is not designed to appeal to the refined sensibility for beauty that is represented by the charioteer in the soul of the philosophic lover; its appeal, claims Socrates, is grosser than that (X.604e). So the philosopher's fear must be that he will respond to the demands such poetry makes of its listeners as if this were a path to truth: a path that goes via pity, anger, longing and all forms of passion. His fear must be that the performance will draw him into acting as if he believed that our emotions teach us more

about the human condition than reflection ever can, responding emotionally and intuitively rather than reflectively – as children and the many do. He knows better, of course; but mimetic poetry has a terrible vividness, and, if the philosopher is not susceptible to its power in the same way as the respectable man, this is not to say that he is invulnerable. Socrates in the *Phaedrus* presents himself as word-sick, as a lover of words in the worst way (228b). If any pleasure could act as the nail that rivets such a person's soul to his body and distorts his sense of truth (*Phd.* 83d), it would be the pleasure of poetry.

IX

Alas, Plato does not anywhere have Socrates or anyone else say outright what emotions the philosopher will feel as he listens to conventional poetry. To answer that question I have had to turn to the description of how a man of sense will feel at the spectacle of ignorance unmasked, and at that of philosophers engaging with non-philosophers. But this description is surely meant to apply in the first instance not to conventional poetry, but to the kind of tragi-comedy that Plato himself wrote. It is in Plato's dialogues, not on the tragic stage, that we watch philosophers at work in the Cave. We congratulate Socrates for his eccentricity; we do not mock him for it. We feel pity for his victims but temper it with a good dose of derision.

Plato's dialogues are more comic than tragic; so we must make some adjustments when transposing this description to the case of a philosopher at a performance of tragedy. It will surely be no more than a touch of scorn, not outright derision, that colours the philosopher's pity. Only of the young guardians – who live by the honour-code and are not, and may never become, full-blown philosophers – is it required to feel scorn unmixed with pity for the unworthy behaviour depicted in poetry (*Rep.* III.388d).

It is true that, if the philosopher finds in tragedy a spectacle of moral ignorance and feels over this the pity I have described, then he is indeed listening to tragedy in a different and more philosophic manner than the general run of the audience can manage. But it would be hard to think of this as listening with passion. That would be incompatible with the emotional distance he maintains by his application of the counter-spell, as well as by the touch of scorn in his pity. Nor are these the reactions that the poet wrote to evoke in him. The philosophic lover can take a Zeus-like boy and mould him ever closer to the ideal (*Phdr.* 252c–253a); but conventional poetry is not Zeus-like to begin with.

The *Phaedrus* itself presents the theoretical basis for this distinction between the philosopher's feelings for the beautiful boy and his feelings for beautiful poetry. By comparison with writing words on paper – sowing seeds of thought in black ink through a reed-pen – the philosopher's practice of writing directly in the soul of a suitable companion, sowing seeds of

thought through conversation, is a serious matter rather than play (276a, c–277a, 277e–278b). A beautiful boy of Zeus-like soul can become this sort of companion for the philosopher, and unlike a text the boy is alive, can grow and learn and become intellectually independent. A text can only become independent in a bad way, by breaking free of its author and circulating indiscriminately; the boy's independence, by contrast, will manifest itself in his ability to defend what he has learnt and to share it responsibly (275e–276a).

(Diotima at *Symposium* 209c–e does not make this distinction between written and spoken 'progeny' when declaring both kinds better successors than mere human children can be. But what she denigrates here is the ambition to have a family, not the ambition to have living philosophic followers. Her claims are not inconsistent with what is said in the *Phaedrus*.)

The *Phaedrus* confirms, then, that the defence of poetry sought by Socrates in the *Republic* will not be forthcoming. There will be no argument to show that poetry should be taken seriously, as bearing on truth; indeed, we have seen that the *Phaedrus* generalizes the criticism to all forms of writing.

X

And yet the *Phaedrus* has much to say about the beneficial power of beautiful words, poetic and otherwise.

For one thing, poets are among those declared capable of the divine type of madness – the type that is a boon sent from the gods (245a). It is what distinguishes the truly inspired poet from the frigid technician. The wider benefit that results, however, is to preserve and glorify (*kosmoussa*) the achievements of the past and teach them (*paideuei*) to subsequent generations. This seems hardly different from the restriction of poetry in Kallipolis to praise of the gods and of good men. Small wonder, then, that later in the very speech that gave poets credit for their inspiration Socrates ranks the life of a poet sixth lowest out of nine possibilities (248e). A poet's beautiful words can be of use to cities, but the god who inspired him is the true benefactor – with some help, perhaps, from the civic authorities.

It is not the explicit account of poets and poetry in the *Phaedrus* that suggests a step beyond the *Republic's* critique of them (and in making this point I have no chronological or developmentalist intent); rather, it is Phaedrus' reaction to the beauty of Lysias' and Socrates' speeches, and the use Socrates makes of his reaction. (This is what Gottfried saw.) Phaedrus beams with pleasure as he reads Lysias' words out loud (234d); and the more poetic and luxuriantly beautiful Socrates' own speeches grow, the better Phaedrus is pleased.¹⁴ Socrates is reeling Phaedrus in with his beautiful words. But he is looking all along to turn him towards true philosophy: 'so that [he] may no longer play both sides as he does now, but simply devote his life to Love through philosophical discussions' (257b; Nehamas and Woodruff (trans.) 1995).

Phaedrus belongs to that group Glaucon in the *Republic* (V.475d) describes as ‘those who love to be spectators’ (*philotheamones*), or ‘those who love to be members of an audience’ (*philēkooi*). Socrates is ready to regard such people as akin to philosophers, who love the spectacle of truth (V.475e). It is a kinship that he tries to turn to good effect in the *Phaedrus*.

For this purpose, it does not matter that two out of three of the speeches that Phaedrus found beautiful turn out to be making a point that Socrates comes explicitly to reject. The *Phaedrus*, unlike the *Republic*, finds a use for beautiful words that give pleasure, regardless of whether their message is healthy or true.¹⁵

Phaedrus’ attunement to the sheer beauty of good writing (a description which includes *inventio* and *dispositio* as well as word-music, 235d), like the true lover’s attunement to a boy’s physical beauty, betokens something fine in him – something that a skilful guide such as Socrates can develop in the right direction. But the appropriate guide is essential, and finding him takes luck – the good fortune, say, of bumping into Socrates on your way out of town (228c). At the level of public entertainment and the improvement of a whole civic culture, chance cannot be allowed so large a role. In Kallipolis the philosophers will play it safe, and make sure the poetry is healthy from the start.

So Plato in the *Phaedrus* presents a use for beautiful words in general that he did not admit into the *Republic*. Does he not also defend from the *Republic*’s critique of *mimetic* wordsmiths in particular one special kind of mimetic writer – his own kind? Poets, as imitators, need know only how to represent their dramatic characters convincingly; they do not need to know what those characters know. (So *Rep.* X.) But the same is not true of the writer of convincing philosophic dialogue – at least, if the audience he is to convince is itself of a philosophic bent. There is no way to put convincing philosophic talk in the mouths of your characters unless you are yourself a real philosopher.

Philosophers were staple characters of comic drama, of course; but the best that comic dramatists could do (indeed, the best they ought to have done, whatever their native philosophic talents, if they wished to succeed with their audience) was to have their philosophers spout magnificent pastiche. Homer knows both what the king should say and how his subject should respond; can make female as well as male characters speak appropriate words (*Ion* 540b); but he knows this in the way that Hesiod knows and can present the lore of the sea while declaring that he lacks the skills of a sailor or navigator (*Works and Days* 648–9).¹⁶ A body of conventional lore exists in such cases, and the poet is familiar with it. But his talent is for expressing it, not applying it. Likewise, the audience has its expectations of how princes and politicians, free men and slaves will act and speak, and the poet, because he shares them, will know how to incorporate them in his fictional world, and know also how to play with them.

But what sort of familiarity does the poet have with the behaviour and the talk of philosophers? Here is what Socrates has to say on the topic in the *Timaeus*:

I have no disrespect for poets in general, but everyone knows that imitators as a breed will best and most easily imitate the sort of things they've been raised among,¹⁷ whereas what falls outside each person's milieu is difficult to imitate successfully with actions, and still more difficult with words. (19d–e)

I propose that we interpret the concluding phrase along the lines of *Republic* III.396a, where we are told how the guardians will resist 'imitating the actions and words' of lowlifes or of anyone behaving badly: they will resist 'modelling themselves, in their words or their actions', on such people. The context at this point in the *Republic* slips easily and deliberately between the words and actions of regular life and those that are part of a dramatic performance, but certainly includes the latter. Here in the *Timaeus*, then, Socrates is claiming that the breed of imitators – a term broad enough to include actors and reciters along with poets – can more convincingly bring off the demeanour of philosophers than the words that a philosopher would say, although it finds both tasks difficult.¹⁸

XI

Whether or not this interpretation of what is admittedly an obscure passage in the *Timaeus* is correct, the contrast that I have drawn from it seems to me generally valid, and something that Plato, given what he chose to write, is likely to have believed. The contrast is not based simply on the fact that the imitation of actions – whether by an actor on stage or by a writer in narrative or in the construction of a plot – is more apt to depict the characters of a drama from the outside than is the imitation of a character's words, which requires a greater empathy. (Truer of writers than of actors, to be sure.) Because philosophy is a theoretical rather than a practical art, imitating a philosopher's actions and words brings with it a special difficulty. Hesiod did not need to know how to navigate, he needed only to know the lore of navigation, and how to express it. Expressing it and applying it are two different things, because navigation is a practical art. Not so with philosophy. To talk the philosophic talk just *is* to apply the philosophic art.

That would be why there is so little stage-business in a Platonic dialogue, so little dramatic action. The welcome attention to the writerly values of Plato's dialogues in recent decades has perhaps inclined us to forget that, with few exceptions, the dialogues do not offer us elaborately fictionalized worlds. Plato is not trying to sweep us off into a world of his invention – however vivid the conversation, however fascinating the intellectual joust

that he depicts. Nor is he interested in subordinating philosophic arguments to philosophic actions; he does not write anecdotally. His aim remains to write philosophy, and, by writing it, to do it. The paucity of dramatic action in the dialogues both serves and declares his intention.

By this means, also, Plato created a kind of mimetic drama designed to appeal to a quieter, purer, more reverential sensibility for beauty than any working tragedian or comic dramatist could permit himself to target. Let us not forget, in this connection, that the *Phaedrus* is exceptional among Platonic dialogues. Plato's writing in the second of Socrates' speeches on love is notably more poetic than is the norm for Platonic dialogue, and Socrates is allowed to allude to this fact from within the dialogue itself (257a). It seems likely, then, that the warning to lash oneself to the mast in order to listen to beautiful language, not allowing one's intellect to be narcotized by its beauty, is directed at the reader of the *Phaedrus* in particular. We have seen already that it cannot be intended as a general prescription for appreciating literature, since it does not apply to the appreciation of tragedy. But, if the assessment of Platonic writing just given is correct, then it cannot be intended even as a general prescription for the appreciation of Plato's own dramas. Their typical song is not that of the Sirens – at least, not of Homer's Sirens. It may be thought closer to the song of those Sirens in the *Republic's* myth of Er who sing the Music of the Spheres (X.617b). To hear that purer sound, no soul need lash itself to the mast.

If Plato is in this way both writer and philosopher, then he will have been mindful of the stricture laid on all writers at the end of the *Phaedrus*: that they cannot call themselves philosophers unless they write knowing where the truth lies, and are capable, if challenged, of defending what they wrote. Otherwise, they are mere writers (278c–d). But the other problems declared endemic to writing in the *Phaedrus* will continue to apply even to Plato's philosophic writing. It, too, will be inferior in various ways to writing in the soul. After all, the third criterion of the writer who is a philosopher (and not merely a writer) is that he can himself make the argument that his writing is of little worth (278c).¹⁹

Notes

1. Translations from the *Republic* are lightly adapted from Ferrari and Griffith (2000).
2. That the respectable men are to be distinguished from philosophers is appreciated by Halliwell (1988), *ad* X.605c10 and Murray (1996), *ad* X.605c6–8. In Ferrari (1989) I did not raise this issue.
3. Thumb through the fragments of Sophocles and you will quickly come across this: 'The clever dice-player must put up with the throw of the dice and make the best of it, but not lament his fortune' (fr. 947, trans. Lloyd-Jones); and this: 'Any mortal who is excessively afraid of death is a fool. This depends on fortune; but when the moment of death comes, you could not escape even if you came to the courts

of Zeus' (fr. 951). Or think of Pindar's 'Man is the dream of a shadow' (*Pythian* 8.95). These citations are not untypical. So I cannot agree with Halliwell (1988), *ad* 604b11 that this litany goes beyond the normal cultural encyclopaedia and strays into purely philosophic territory.

4. That tears and not just an inward emotion were a typical response in the Athenian audience is clear from *Ion* 535e and *Phil.* 48a.
5. Burnyeat (1999). Burnyeat argues convincingly that 598c3–4 should be understood as follows: 'because it looks just like a real carpenter, the painter might deceive children and foolish persons [sc. into thinking he did know that craft]'. Burnyeat also stresses that it is not to the poets but to their audience that Socrates attributes the claim that poets possess the knowledge of the characters they portray.
6. I am not, of course, claiming that no Greek poet was ever complicit in the didactic view of poetry; nor am I claiming that Plato thought this. But I am broadly sympathetic to Malcolm Heath's doubts about the didactic intentions of the Greek poets – as contrasted with the didactic effects and reception of their poetry. See Heath (1987, 38–47).
7. With X.605d compare *Ion* 535b–e.
8. Belfiore (1983, 62) appreciates that the argument of Book X is itself the counter-spell, but she does not distinguish this from the drug.
9. My translation retains the emendation *aisometha* in the Greek text. But even if this emendation is rejected – as it is by Slings in his updated Oxford Classical Text of the *Republic* – the sense of the passage remains clear.
10. At this point it may be objected that Socrates invites Glaucon to share the philosopher's antidote, even though Glaucon seems to be an honour-lover (VIII.548d) and so might be thought to respond as the respectable people do. But Glaucon is not merely an honour-lover. At VIII.548d Socrates makes a point of distinguishing him from the timocratic individual. And the argument Plato assigns him in Book II has him wanting to govern his behaviour from the inside. He is not the sort of person who would behave one way in public and another way in private.
11. I am grateful to Tarik Wareh (my teaching assistant at the time) for suggesting the relevance of Socrates' erotic metaphor to my thoughts about the philosopher's emotional response to tragic drama.
12. The *Philebus* makes the spectacle of ignorance, construed as ignorance about oneself, central to comedy (48c–d). What the decent but unphilosophic man of *Republic* Book X gets out of comedy is different, though, as we might expect: he simply gets to join in acting the fool, an urge he suppresses in his ordinary life (X.606c).
13. Painting and poetry are presented as parallel throughout *Republic* Book X; but when it comes to the emotions of the audience a distinction between the two becomes relevant. Although both involve a 'disturbance' (*tarakhē*) in the soul, only in painting is that conflict constitutive of the very illusion on which all painting depends (X.602c–d). Refuse to be taken in by the effects of perspective and the like and you simply cease to see what is being pictured. The same is not true of poetry. Here the disturbed soul is the character on stage (X.603c–d), and only *may* also be the audience-member – if the audience-member is of the type inclined to surrender himself to sympathetic pity. A different type of person, while remaining undisturbed himself, could nevertheless see what is at issue for the disturbed character on stage.
14. 235d, 238c–d, 241d–e, 243b8–9, 257a5–6, c1–2.

15. Certainly, Socrates in the *Phaedrus* insists that writers or speakers must know the truth of the matters about which they write or speak, if they are to write or speak 'beautifully' or finely, *kalōs* (see 258d, 259e, 262c, 277b, 278c). But he does not insist that their writings or speeches must express that truth; indeed, he makes knowledge of the truth a precondition also of successful deception (262b–c).
16. Burnyeat uses the Hesiodic passage to make this point in his third Tanner lecture.
17. Donald Zeyl in his Hackett edition translates *entrapphēi* as '[the sort of things they've been] trained to imitate', and *ektos tēs trophēs* as 'outside their training'. But, in context, Socrates is speaking of one's milieu rather than one's particular training, as is clear from his explanation at 19e of why sophists too will not be familiar with the behaviour and talk of philosophers. Certainly, a poet's *trophē* will include his education and training (compare how the term is applied to Hermocrates at 20a7); but the reference of the word should not be restricted to this.
18. To those who understand Socrates to be claiming that it is even harder for a poet to imitate philosophers in words than in the poet's own actions in life, Proclus reasonably objects that most people talk a better game than they can actually play (*In Timaeum*, vol. 1, 63 Diehl). And, even if this interpretation were correct, still its point would be that the hardest thing of all, when it comes to imitating philosophers, is to talk the philosophic talk.
19. An earlier version of this chapter was delivered at the Princeton Classical Philosophy Colloquium, Princeton University, in 2002. I am grateful to my commentator Stephen Halliwell for his formal remarks at that venue and to the audience for helpful discussion. Some paragraphs from my analysis of the emotions felt by a respectable man at the theatre have appeared in the service of a quite different argument in chapter 7, section 7 of Ferrari (2007).

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7

Plato on Tragic and Comic Pleasures

Pierre Destrée

A recurring theme in Plato's critique of poetry is the pleasures it affords. Poetry's pleasures allow poets, little by little, to instil values in the soul of their audience – that is, the values which their protagonists represent. In Plato's view, these are very often morally degraded values. At the same time, Plato holds that we need poetry in order to impersonate the right values and to develop the best moral attitudes and habits. Thus, he recommends an 'austere' poetry for pedagogical purposes, and outlines a programme of censorship for poetry that meets these quite demanding 'austerity standards'.

Yet, one might wonder whether this is truly Plato's last word on the fate of poetry in Kallipolis. I argue in this paper that it is not. In fact, it seems on closer inspection that Plato can't help but recognize the inescapable allure of some of poetry's pleasures, especially the comic and tragic pleasures, and that he tried to accommodate them. I argue further that his own myths can be read as providing these tragic and comic pleasures, and are thus to be considered as Plato's own pleasurable creation. In this way we may gain a clue as to how Homer, and dramatic poetry may be allowed back into a well-governed city – just as Plato says he desires.

I

In his first critique of poetry in *Republic*, Books II and III, Plato attacks Homer for encouraging in his young hearers and readers patterns of actions and emotions that must be considered morally bad; Homer's poetry instils these patterns in their souls little by little by means of pleasure. In Book III, Plato explicitly speaks of two types of pleasures. There is a first pleasure which we might call the 'pleasure of the images': it seems to consist in the pleasure one takes in poetical images, and, more broadly, in the picturesque language of poems. A second pleasure comes from imitation itself. People, Plato observes, greatly enjoy actors impersonating various characters, and that is the very reason why dramatic poetry, both tragic and comic,

is even more enjoyable than epic, which is a mixture combining simple narrative and dramatic enactment. The pleasure of imitation might well explain (although Plato does not explicitly say as much) why we so enjoy the way Homer presents the Olympian gods: they themselves behave like actors, changing their shapes as actors change their masks. This will seem completely harmless to modern ears. Yet combined with the fact that the gods and the Homeric heroes are presented as role models to be 'imitated' or emulated, allowing impressionable children and adolescents to attend such spectacles might prove to be very dangerous entertainment indeed: they would not only enjoy seeing actors (or, in recitations of epic poetry, rhapsodists) imitating gods and heroes, but also, and more crucially, enjoy imitating them, themselves playing, so to speak, the gods and heroes. Such play would tend to make them uncritically absorb their models' values (lying, intemperance, etc.).

In the case of adults, one might think that the situation would be completely different. Enjoying such a pleasure, we moderns might say, should have no consequences for our actual moral natures, at least if we have received a suitable moral education. As a (more or less) morally good person, one may perfectly well enjoy a horror movie in which innocent people are tortured and killed; that pleasure surely will not induce you to become yourself a torturer or a killer. But Plato is less optimistic. In a crucial passage, he emphatically says that his 'greatest charge against poetry' is that 'it can even corrupt morally good people'; this is because, he explains, 'when even the best of us hear Homer, or some other tragic poet, imitating one of the heroes in a state of grief and making a long speech of lamentation ... we enjoy it and give ourselves over to it. We suffer along with the hero (*συμπάσχοντες*), and take his sufferings seriously. And we praise he who affects us most in this way as a good poet' (X.605c–d).¹ We must take Plato's hypothesis seriously: being a morally good adult might not enable one to resist the potential damage such a spectacle can do to one's soul. While knowing that such spectacles show morally wrong behaviour, we (morally sound) people can't help being 'moved' or 'passionately touched' by them; and, more precisely, we can't help 'suffering along' with those heroes. And here again, pleasure functions as the main vector. The pleasure in question is what we may call an 'emotional pleasure' – a pleasure paradoxically linked to such suffering. (Aristotle will coin this later as 'the pleasure coming from pity and fear through mimesis' (*Poet.* 14, 1453b12)). Because we so enjoy engaging with such plays, we willy-nilly intend to impersonate the values inherent in the actions presented on stage. Thus, it is no wonder that Plato again ends up firmly condemning pleasure so derived calling it the *hēdusmena Mousa*: it will cause of 'pleasure and pain [to be] kings in the city instead of law and the thing that has always been generally believed to be best – reason' (X.607a). Plato is here certainly referring to images and songs which are, as it were, the 'flavour enhancer' for poetical pleasure (*hēdusma*

being the common term for a flavour enhancer in cooking). However, we must bear in mind that the term is etymologically equivalent to our 'attractive' (*hēdusma*, or the corresponding verb *hēdunein*, coming from the adjective *hēdus*, which is the general term for pleasurable). Hence Plato may also be implicitly referring to the attractiveness a prostitute exercises in attracting a client, since Plato himself will compare poetry to a sometime mistress who must be discarded.²

Yet contrary to what is still maintained in many presentations of Plato, he did not propose to banish all poetry, as if poetry were *per se* a bad and harmful thing. Plato knew very well that we need imitation, and specifically emulation, in order to become virtuous – and also to remain so. In a passage of the *Laws* (I.643b–c), Plato proposes that we give children play tools (which he calls *mimēmata*) to learn how to garden, or build houses, by 'imitating' or emulating gardeners or architects. In a similar way, a poem, which is the *mimēma* of an action, may function constructively as a sort of 'tool' to acquire a certain kind of sub-rational, habituated 'knowledge', that is, the 'knowledge' of certain moral values, and of how one should act and react in such and such a circumstance. Nonetheless, in view of the perils of poetry's pleasures, the only good sort of poetry – poetry suitable for the moral development of the young – must be rather 'austere': as founders of *Kallipolis*, 'we would employ a more austere and less pleasant poet and storyteller – one who would represent the speech of a good person' (III.398b). Consequently, the only (and much less pleasurable) image that would be allowed in this poetry would be 'the image of a good character' (III.401b). Moreover, the same sort of poetry must also be offered to adults who are still in need of improvement. Hence we find Plato's repetition in Book X that 'hymns to the gods and eulogies of good people are the only poetry we can admit into our city' (X.607a).

Admittedly, Plato will not go as far as to suggest that a 'good poet' must be, like a Plotinian poet, someone who has contemplated the Form of the Good; he need not materialize the patterns, so to speak, corresponding to or deriving from that Form, in creating histories and moral heroes. Plato says that the philosopher is the one who has contemplated that Form, and so the philosopher is charged to give these poets the patterns of their poems; the good poet, by obeying the philosopher, offers shape to those pattern deriving from the Form of the Good. So conceived, poetry is not to be confused with philosophy, and the poet is not a philosopher: he is in the service of philosophy. As Plato repeats in Books II and III, a good sort of poetry should lead its young audience to contemplate the *kala*, that is, the right actions done, and emotions felt, by morally good (*kaloí*) characters. These are the *kala* that this audience, in the second, philosophical, stage of their education, will be able to recognize as caused by the Form of the Good, which is, as Plato points out, 'the cause of the *kala*' (VII.517c). By urging such a new form of poetry for *Kallipolis*, Plato is advocating for a new kind

of poet who would be able finally to realize what Homer was not able to do (X.599c–600e): become a real educator of the youth, the only one on which a morally good city, a Kallipolis ('Noble city'), can be built.³

Plato's proposal is innovative and its implications far-reaching. So it is perhaps surprising that Plato does not, in fact, seem to have very much to say about this poetry – not even in favour of it – at least as this proposal relates to an adult audience. In one passage (X.604e–605a), he comments that 'the wise and quiet character (τὸ δὲ φρόνιμον τε καὶ ἡσύχιον ἦθος) is neither easy to imitate nor easy to understand when imitated – especially not at a festival where multifarious people (παντοδαποῖς ἀνθρώποις) are gathered together in theatres.... The imitative poet, then, clearly does not naturally relate to this best element in the soul, and his art is not directed at emulating it – not if he is going to attain a good reputation with the masses (τοῖς πολλοῖς). Rather, the imitative poet specialises in the indignant and varied character (πρὸς τὸ ἀγανακτικὸν τε καὶ ποικίλον ἦθος), because it is easy to imitate.' At first blush, Plato seems simply to be admitting that such poetry won't please the masses; it is certainly not that easy to represent the sort of *phronimos* character he wishes us to model. The reason such poetry would be unalluring is that it would be addressed not to the irrational parts of their soul, but to their rational part, which the masses have not properly developed: they won't be able to understand this species of representation and, we must suppose, will be bored by such a calm and 'unvaried' spectacle. In using words like 'varied' and the 'masses', which always have a negative connotation in Plato's dialogues, he makes his point clear: tragic as well as comic spectacles appeal to the vulgar, and are addressed to the irrational parts of their souls that are leading them.

Nonetheless, it would be rather naive to take these remarks at face value. For, in a passage I have already quoted (X.605c–d), Plato also frankly admits that even the best of us – that is, even exceptionally virtuous persons – also take great pleasure in such spectacles; they even praise and honour (and, presumably, are ready to generously pay for) the poets who provide them with such pleasures. To be sure, we are not dealing with poets (here, tragic poets) practising their art in order to please the rational part of their souls. On the contrary, as Plato emphasizes, the real worry is that even virtuous people, those who are supposed to control the irrational part of their souls, can't help but feel a strong pleasure related to that very part of their souls.⁴ It is with the 'indignant' part of their souls that they 'suffer with' the indignant and varied hero who is suffering on stage! As Plato observes, it is just such poetry which 'wakes up that part of the soul' (X.605b). When the virtuous person attends to such a spectacle he ends up having the irrational part of his soul awakened and excited, and he obtains pleasure thereby. Put differently, the virtuous person can't help but feel and obtain pleasure from these spectacles – as do the masses. Thus, even if Plato might have every reason in the world to condemn it, he is ready to admit, as a matter of psychological

fact, that tragic pleasure (and also, we shall see, comic pleasure) is simply a pleasure no human being is willing or, in fact, able to forswear completely. They are not to be avoided.

The tragic and comic pleasures are, first of all, unavoidable because they are 'natural' pleasures: they evolve from the irrational part of our human soul which itself is irremediably bound up with our embodiment. Perhaps one way of understanding this is suggested by a passage from the beginning of Book IX. In that passage, Plato wants to review some of the so-called 'unnecessary desires and pleasures', that is, unnecessary to our being alive, and flatly admits that 'they are probably present in all of us' (IX.571b). These desires may be kept in check and under control in the daytime, thanks to the *thumoeidetic* (spirited) part of the soul, and the shame (and other moral emotions) it yields when allied with reason. But when the person falls asleep, his reason and thumoeidetic part do so too; these desires may then awaken, and try to gratify themselves: 'Then the bestial, and savage part, full of food or drink, comes alive, casts off sleep, and seeks to go and gratify its own characteristic instincts. You know it will dare to do anything in such a state, released and freed from all shame and wisdom (*ἀπηλλαγμένον αἰσχύνης καὶ φρονήσεως*). In fantasy, it does not shrink from trying to have sex with a mother or with anyone else – man, god, or beast. It will commit any fool murder, and there is no food it refuses to eat' (IX.571c).

This passage serves to elucidate my point in two ways. In the first instance, it very much emphasizes that these sorts of desire are 'natural', that is, they are by our very nature 'present in all of us'. Thanks to dreams that we can be sure of that, especially when we are dealing with morally good people whom we might naively think would be immune to these desires: 'What we want to pay attention to is this: there are appetites of a terrible, savage, and lawless kind in everyone – even in those of us who seem to be entirely moderate. This surely becomes clear in dreams' (IX.572b). In other words, dreams reveal for even we moderate and morally good people the reality of our lawless appetites and allow us to indulge these appetites, that is why Plato recommends that we had better try to avoid indulging them at night, by 'awakening [our] reasoning part', and also 'feasting it on fine arguments and investigations' instead of feasting it on wine and rich food (IX.571d–572b). Secondly, it is noteworthy that in this passage the examples offered all implicitly, yet very clearly, refer to tragic plays: Oedipus and Thyestes are the most obvious examples that would have come to any Greek mind. A modern reader might be tempted to wonder why Plato refers to these examples here, since Oedipus or Thyestes can't possibly be held responsible for their acts, which they didn't choose to commit; moreover, nothing indicates that we should take them as role models of any kind, (unlike Achilles, who is presented as such in Book III). But that is not what is at stake here. Following Sophocles himself (who has Jocasta say that 'Many men before now have slept with their mothers in dreams' (*OR* 981–2)), Plato wants to suggest that these tragic

characters, who are in fact morally good men, present to us what we would secretly desire were we to unleash our 'natural', irrational appetites. And that is why we are so attracted by poetry featuring such characters.

Does this passage directly illuminate Plato's critique of the tragic pleasure in suffering in respect to the hero who recognizes the terrible deeds he has unwillingly done? Perhaps not. But it does so at least indirectly, for the two cases are in some respects similar. What a spectacle of tragedy makes us see is not unlike what dreams allow us to see and understand: both represent and thereby 'awake' desires that morally good people tend to try and hide or forget. Plato's good people are intellectually committed to the view that excessive pity for another (or oneself) is a moral failing. More than that, however, they are emotionally trained to respond calmly when confronted with the loss of a loved one. Yet as spectators to a tragic drama, they can't help feeling pity and grief in the typically immoderate way tragedy elicits from its audience. This is because, as Plato says, the irrational part of the good man's soul has, among its irrational desires, also the desire or appetite for grieving and pitying: 'what is forcibly kept in check in our personal misfortunes and has an insatiable hunger for weeping and lamenting – since this is what it has a natural appetite for – is the very factor that gets satisfaction and enjoyment from the poets' (X.606a).

To be sure, Plato would have liked to see these appetites fully controlled, or even eliminated, but he is well aware, it seems to me, that that is psychologically unrealizable. One can advise and urge morally good people to awaken their reason before going to bed, but one cannot prevent them having appetitive dreams. Plato seems to consider that a similar story applies to tragic and comic poetry as well: you might be willing to forbid your citizens to attend spectacles of tragedy or comedy, but you will never be able to eradicate their craving for them, as they provide such intense 'natural' pleasures! There are two very strong indications that this is in fact Plato's own view.

The first indication comes at the very beginning of Socrates' defence of justice in *Republic*, Book II. There, Socrates suggests to Adeimantus what the ideal of a 'first', or original, city state would look like, wherein every basic or 'necessary' appetite of the people would be completely satisfied, removing any temptation to be unjust. The calm and quiet Adeimantus does not object to this, but his much more vehement brother Glaucon immediately rejects it as a poor, and indeed absurd, suggestion: 'If you were founding a city of pigs, Socrates, isn't that just what you would provide to fatten them?' (II.372d). And, as Plato goes on to show us, the main reason why Glaucon rejects such an ideal is because it would leave out entirely all those appetitive desires, the unnecessary ones, that are of a piece with our embodiment. Indeed, as Socrates reluctantly admits, people won't be satisfied in this city unless one provides them with 'relishes, incense, perfumes, prostitutes, pastries – and the multifariousness of each of them (παντοδαπά)' (II.373a) – the typical and 'multifarious' objects that feed these appetites.

Interpreters have wondered how we are to situate Plato's exact stance between Socrates' suggestion and Glaucon's reaction, and how this discussion fits into the whole argument. Leaving aside here the problem of its place in the wider argument,⁵ I would like to suggest that we take it as the expression of Plato's own ambivalence. It is difficult, I think, to consider Socrates' description of his proposal of a 'sane' city to be completely ironic or, as some have suggested, as an implicit critique aimed at Antisthenes, who defended a similar view: just like Plato's endorsement of an 'austere' poetry, Socrates' suggestion of what he describes as a 'true' and 'healthy' city (II.372e) seems to express a sort of 'puritanical' wish on Plato's part.⁶ And just as such poetry would never satisfy any inhabitant of *Kallipolis*, having solely healthy, yet 'austere', 'olives and cheese' (II.372d) for dinner won't do either. Unnecessary appetites must be given their due, too, in one way or another; at the very least, such appetites can't be simply ignored as Socrates proposes. As a matter of fact, it is no surprise that it is Glaucon who so vigorously reacts against Socrates' suggestion, for it is also Glaucon (not Socrates, who tells all the other myths in the *Republic*) who has just a little earlier told the myth of Gyges (II.359b–360d), which represents the ever possible irruption of appetitive desires, as if he were Gyges' spokesman. Thus, Glaucon incarnates the morally good person who may more or less readily give in to the temptations of his own strong appetites, and he is the character throughout this 'long tale' (as Plato himself refers to it at II.376d) who is our reminder of the very existence of these irrational desires.

Now, this passage is not only important as an indication of Plato's ambivalence. It also gives us a clue as to why pleasurable poetry, or the *hēdusmena Mousa*, must be part of the picture of the 'feverish city'. In describing that community, Socrates spells out in detail its inhabitants' demand for pleasurable and multifarious artworks: 'painting and embroidery... gold and ivory and all sorts of such things... and all those imitators. Many of the latter work with shapes and colours; many with music: poets and their assistants, rhapsodists, actors, choral dancers, theatrical producers, and also craftsmen with multifarious devices (σκευῶν τε παντοδαπῶν δημιουργοί)' (II.373a–b). Visual art and, most importantly, epic and dramatic poetry are the typical features people are in need of (as Socrates vehemently insists at II.373c) in the feverish city. Socrates' description sounds very negative, and his tone is undoubtedly condemnatory. And yet, since this is due to Glaucon's (Plato's own brother's) requirement, it is hard not to hear Plato's own voice there, too.

In the course of the argument, we understand that the description of such a feverish city (which, of course, resembles Athens) provides the main reason for the introduction of the guardians into the structure of the *Republic*: only they would be able to deal with such appetites and pleasurable temptations, and in particular the alluring pleasures of poetry. Yet once again, it would be premature to decide that Plato's final verdict is to entirely displace

Homeric and dramatic poetry in favour of the ‘austere’, morally good lyric poetry that is to be recited in Kallipolis. Instead, I propose that we should turn our attention to the (at first sight rather odd) comment Plato appends to his second critique of poetry in Book X. This is the text’s second indication that Plato himself understood that – and why – we can never wholly abandon the pleasures of poetry. He concludes this critique with the well-known excuse that he has, in fact, merely been exposing another episode of ‘an ancient quarrel between philosophy and poetry’ (X.607b), from which we are probably to understand that he has been fighting back against poetry, especially comedy, seemingly referred to in the preceding quoted verses. Whatever the exact meaning of this very puzzling passage⁷ – and contrary to what we might have expected – the fight does not end with the definitive victory of philosophy over poetry.⁸ For Plato himself quite emphatically adds: ‘All the same, let it be said that, if the imitative poetry that aims at pleasure has any argument to show that it should have a place in a well-governed city, we would gladly welcome it back, since we are well aware of being charmed by it ourselves’ (X.607c). Given the mercilessness of his critique against mimetic poetry, this suggestion is rather unexpected. It is, however, quite understandable if one has clearly in view (as I have urged we should) the inescapability of our appetitive desires, including our appetites for grieving and laughing. Even so, Plato has aimed unswervingly to show in his two critiques that this poetry is damaging to our souls, and therefore unsuitable in a ‘well-governed city’. If that is right, however could it, and should it, be allowed back in? In what possible circumstance might we enjoy such poetry without suffering the ill effects Plato has so vividly described? This is, I am suggesting, the questions we must answer if we hope to gain a full picture of Plato’s philosophy of art.

II

Before analysing how pleasurable Homeric artwork might be allowed back into a well-governed city, we need first of all to look at how Plato has Socrates elaborate on this proposal. Plato seems to signal that there are in fact two different areas, so to speak, where poetry might – and perhaps should – be defended. On the one hand, there is Homeric poetry itself, about which Socrates says that it would be ‘just for her to re-enter [the city] when she has defended herself in lyric or some other meter’ (X.607d). So perhaps it is Homeric poetry itself, or even Homer himself, who must defend himself in order to be allowed to make his comeback. But this is only one possibility. A second possibility is this: ‘Then we will surely allow her defenders – the ones who are not poets themselves, but lovers of poetry (ῥσοι μὴ ποιητικοί, φιλοποιηταὶ δέ) – to argue without meter on her behalf’ (X.607b). Obviously here the defender of Homer must be *Plato* himself, who has Socrates declare in the beginning of Book X how much he has loved Homer from childhood

on.⁹ Yet there is no defence of Homeric or dramatic poetry to be found in Plato's arguments anywhere in the *Republic*, or in any other dialogue. Where else may we look? I suggest that the only plausible possibility is that Plato's own myths play such a role.¹⁰

In the context of the *Republic*, the myth of Er, it seems to me, imposes itself as one such poetical defence in prose of Homeric poetry.¹¹ This myth, which ends the *Republic*, makes this whole 'long tale' of the foundation of Kallipolis a well-rounded one in which the end corresponds nicely to its beginning. That tale began with a critique of the traditional, Homeric *muthoi*, and ends with a Platonic *muthos*. More than that: Plato's *muthos* – and this is crucial for my point – is explicitly presented as a sort of rewriting of Homeric poetry (that is, of Homer's famous description of Odysseus' journey in the underworld of Hades)¹² and is full of Homeric references and reminiscences. In keeping with this, Plato makes it plain that Glaucon is very keen on listening to the myth because of the great pleasure it will bring him: 'There are not many things it would be more pleasant to hear' (X.614b).

Now what does this pleasure consist in? Indeed, what sort of pleasure should we be expecting from such a tale concerning the punishments of Hades? Recall that the central scene of this tale is about the choice one has to make of another life before returning to earth. Every soul that is allowed back to earth (that is, the souls of people who are either good or have spent their time in purgatory) must now choose its future character and destiny. We thus enter the myth at a moment of extreme importance: once a person has freely chosen his fate, he won't be able to change his mind and will be irrevocably determined to live out that destiny. Every soul has, in fact, received a number, according to which they are queuing up to draw lots, and the 'prophetes', that is, the spokesman of Necessity, begs the first one in the queue to make his choice: 'When the spokesman had told them that, Er said, the one who was to draw the first lot came up and immediately chose the greatest tyranny. In his foolishness and greed, you see, he chose it without adequately examining everything, and did not notice that it involved being fated to eat his own children, among other evils. Once he had the time to examine his life, however, he beat his breast and bemoaned his choice, ignoring the spokesman's warning, for he did not blame himself for those evils, but fortune, the gods and everything except himself' (X.619c). Here, again, it is the tragic figure of Thyestes who is evoked, and his reaction to his fate is typical of what the spectator at a tragic play expects: like someone grieving, he laments, cries and beats his breast, and with indignation accuses fortune and the gods for being the cause of all of this. Hearing Socrates tell this story, what sort of pleasure does Glaucon feel, and the audience present around them? Plato gives us an explicit hint of on this score: 'This was a spectacle (θέα) worth seeing, Er said, how each of the souls chose their lives: it was a pitiful, and ridiculous – an amazing spectacle to

see (ἐλεεινὴν τε γὰρ ἰδεῖν εἶναι καὶ γελοίαν καὶ θαυμασίαν) (X.619e–620a). Of course Socrates is reporting Er's account of what he himself witnessed in Hades, but there is little doubt that Glaucon and the audience are anticipating the same sort of reaction: this scene of choosing lives – described as if it were a theatrical spectacle – is supposed to evoke both pity and laughter. We therefore may suppose that the pleasure Glaucon is expecting from the tale is precisely the pleasure associated with these too. Yet how could Plato have justified this? Aren't such pleasures unequivocally condemned for corrupting our souls?

So it may seem. However, there is one principal difference between the spectacle of dramatic poetry (or the recital of epic poetry) and the hearing (or reading) of a Platonic *muthos*, and this difference explains, I would like to suggest, why the pleasure to be had from the latter, unlike the former, does not harm the soul of the audience. Recall that the pleasure of spectacles depends in part upon mimesis as enacting, or impersonating. Dramatic poetry, Plato repeatedly argues, is damaging to our soul because, as we have seen, we naturally take pleasure in viewing actors or rhapsodists impersonating various figures, and we in turn enjoy impersonating them in our own souls. This is evident in the case of youth, who do so easily, because they have no reasoned view about the worth of what they are watching, and succumb to a pleasure which makes them internalize the values inherent in whatever they happen to view. It is true, as one interpreter has insisted,¹³ that we shouldn't read into Plato's text too strong a (modern) theory of 'identification'. Everyone, even a child, is well aware that he is not Achilles, and Plato insists that it is particularly amusing to have various heroes on stage; it is fun to 'imitate' all those various heroes. Nevertheless, since Achilles is presented as a *kalos* person, or a 'hero', taking pleasure in 'pretending' to be Achilles and in doing what Achilles does, or in sharing his feelings (or what one takes to be his feelings), cannot but invite one to share some part of his worldview: for instance, that genuine happiness is beyond reach, and that, therefore, the morality which is the main condition for happiness is worthless.

The reason why Plato also condemns epic and tragedy in the case of adults is not that different. Upon seeing a tragic hero 'suffering', that is, weeping, lamenting and being indignant as to his fate, the adult spectator 'suffers with' that hero, Plato says (X.605d). That means, we may suppose, that, in seeing Achilles lamenting over Patroclus' death, one can't help feeling sad and even weeping 'with' Achilles. And since (as Plato adds) one can't help transferring this emotional reaction to our own, lived experience, taking pleasure in doing so will inevitably lead one to consider that weeping and getting indignant over our 'fate' is a good thing to do: 'The enjoyment of other people's sufferings is inevitably transferred to one's own, since, when pity is nourished and strengthened by the former, it is not easily suppressed in the case of one's own sufferings' (X.606b). So we can now identify more

precisely just why Plato says that this is his 'greatest charge' against poetry: it is because even morally good persons, who know what the conditions for happiness are, and what an 'eudaimon' worldview is like, can't help but find pleasure in such spectacles, believing that they are safe behind the doors of mimesis. But they too, should they become aficionados of such spectacles, would be drawn to impersonate these heroes and their values, with the consequence of losing their fine habits and moral wisdom (see also X.605b–c).

The case of comedy is very similar, as Socrates himself goes on to observe: 'Doesn't the same argument also apply to ridicule? You see, if there are jokes you would be ashamed to tell yourself, but that you very much enjoy when you hear them depicted in a comedy or even in private, and that you don't hate as something bad, aren't you doing the same as what you do with the things you pity? For the element in you that wanted to tell jokes, but which you held back for the sake of reason, because you were afraid of being taken for a buffoon, you now give free reign to; and despite having remained strong in that way, you have been led unawares into becoming a comedian in your own life' (X.606c). This account presents, one by one, all the steps that even a morally good person goes through in becoming a buffoon or comedian. A morally good person hates bad jokes, which have contempt and malice as their cause, and will, therefore, be quite ashamed of laughing at them (shame being the reaction of a well-trained spirit). But behind the glass barrier of mimesis, in (say) one of Aristophanes' comic spectacles, he feels safe, and, as with tragic spectacle, he drops the guard of his spirit and lets the reasonable part of his soul regard it as harmless and unimportant. Moreover, he takes pleasure in the awakening of his appetitive part (and also from some aggressive tendencies of his spirit), with that part's desire being fulfilled. Yet, contrary to common belief (as Plato explicitly says), this is not without consequence: if you repeatedly allow the irrational part of your soul to be nourished by impersonation, you might well end up yourself becoming such a buffoon in real life!

If such is the influence of mimesis as impersonation, one may safely infer that only a non-mimetic spectacle or recital of poetry would offer aesthetic pleasure without threatening to damage one's soul. And this, I want to suggest, is exactly what happens in Plato's myth of Er. First of all, it is noteworthy that, contrary to what Plato has presupposed in the case of mimetic poetry, this tale is narrated in a very indirect way: Socrates in fact reports a story reported by a soldier who witnessed the scene. Second, and correlatively, Socrates frequently interrupts his report with his own philosophical remarks, remarks aimed at making Glaucon and the audience understand the message we must draw from it, as if Socrates were making sure that Glaucon does not lose himself entirely in the world of the tale. Put differently, Socrates interrupts his report in order to ensure that Glaucon is respecting a cautious distance from what he is listening to.¹⁴ Thirdly and finally, the emotion we are to feel is not just a tragic one, but also, and at the

same time, a comical one: the whole scene is both pitiful and ridiculous. This last point is, I think, absolutely central. For here the typical tragic emotion, pity, is, so to speak, undercut by laughter: the pathos Glaucon is induced to feel is not at all a *sumpathein*, not a pitying with, or 'going along with', the suffering 'hero', but a sort of distant, ironic and contemptuous pity for him. There is no chance of having Glaucon 'sympathize' with the suffering hero, and therefore impersonating his values; on the contrary, by eliciting more ambivalent emotions Socrates is trying to make Glaucon realize that serious philosophizing is urgently needed if one wants to avoid unwittingly falling prey to the allure of poetry's pleasure. To be sure, Glaucon is emotionally engaged, even touched, and this, we may suppose, gives him pleasure. Nonetheless, because it is all also so laughable, there is little prospect that he will be snared into any *sumpathein*. Therefore, we may further suppose, there is also little chance that he might mimetically impersonate that hero and transfer his nature into his own character and actions.

Further evidence for my suggestion is the allegory of the Cave, which is also a sort of rewriting of a theatrical spectacle. There, too, pity is explicitly mentioned at a crucial juncture, just after Socrates describes the prisoner's release and ascent out of the cave: 'What about, he asks Glaucon, when he reminds himself of his first dwelling place, what passed for wisdom there, and his fellow prisoners? Don't you think he would count himself happy (εὐδαιμονίζεσθαι) for the change and pity (ἔλεειν) the others?' (VII.516c). The Cave is quite obviously a description of Athens (or any other existing democratic city), where, according to Plato, people are 'enchained', that is, bound by the chains of their false representation of values, which Homer has contributed to forging and transmitting. Hence one can probably interpret this mention of pity as a sort of ironic reference to Homeric and tragic poetry. But it is also, it should be noticed, an emotion of pity that clearly fails to induce any *sumpathein*: here the prisoner, and also Glaucon (perhaps indirectly) feel pity for those prisoners still trapped in the bottom of the Cave, but also relief that he has managed to escape that dreadful condition.

It is in the same manner that Plato can defend comic poetry as well. Comedy, we have seen in Book X, is potentially damaging for one's soul: in the mimetic case one is misled into transforming oneself into a buffoon. Yet the pleasure we get from such (rather aggressive) laughter is very intense and, as yet just as compelling as our irrational craving for grieving and pitying. So how can Plato possibly accommodate it?

In a way, the myth of Er has already offered such an example of a ridiculous spectacle that is, in part, a piece of comedy. And we may perhaps add a telling detail here: among those choosing their future lives is Thersites offering Glaucon the spectacle of the paradigmatic buffoon of the *Iliad* (II.212–77) who paradoxically becomes himself the target of laughter, choosing the life of an ape. This should certainly solicit in Glaucon a measure of ironic distance and pitying laughter.

This dynamic comes to light in a particularly vivid way in another famous place in Plato's dialogues: Alcibiades' last speech in the celebrated, so-called 'seduction scene' ending the *Symposium*. This scene is undoubtedly one of the most poignant, and also one of the funniest, Plato ever contrived. It is rightly named 'a scene' because Plato evidently positions his readers there as theatrical spectators. For we are reading the report of a spectacle which is explicitly called (or at least compared to) a satyric play (222d), that is, a sort of burlesque of a tragic play, or theme, that in the classical period followed the staging of the cycle of three tragedies. In the context of the *Symposium*, it might be read as the burlesque destined to revisit, through laughter, the themes the reader has just encountered in Diotima's preceding speech which may be considered tragic at least in that it possesses grandiloquence. (I am alluding to the word *σάμνος*, a term frequently associated with tragedy in Plato's work). But, whatever its precise meaning and scope in the *Symposium*, what interests me here is the way Plato presents the climax of Alcibiades' speech. Alcibiades tells his audience (the guests of the tragic playwright Agathon, who has organized this party to feast his first victory at a theatre festival) that he tried to get Socrates into his bed, persuaded that this would be the best way of obtaining Socrates' knowledge. (In a pederastic context, knowledge would be imparted from the mature lover to the young beloved through sexual contact). But against his wish, and his audience's expectation, Socrates does not yield to this temptation, but very calmly explains that, like the Trojan warrior Glaucos who in the *Iliad* (VI.232–6) exchanged with the Greek Diomedes his golden arms for bronze ones, he would be making a bad bargain, exchanging his real 'beauty', that is, his philosophical knowledge, for the merely apparent, sensuous attractions of Alcibiades. Hence Alcibiades' bitter complaint: 'And you can't say this is a lie, Socrates! Despite all I tried, this man here despised, scorned and insulted (*ὑβρίσεν*) my young beauty which I thought was worthy, judges – for you are the judges of Socrates' arrogance!' (219c)

According to the satyric genre, the scene is supposed to be very funny indeed. Here we have a very strange satyr (to whom Alcibiades has compared Socrates a little earlier, at 215a–b) who, instead of having sex with the most beautiful young man of Athens, practises abstinence. Much like we witness in Euripides' *Cyclops*, when the old satyr is almost raped by the young Polyphemus, we have here the young beloved, who is supposed to be courted by his lover, doing all he can to have sex with the much older Socrates as if he were himself the lover. So, when Alcibiades dramatically states that Socrates despised him, one can imagine his audience (Agathon's guests) laughing at such a parody of an 'assault' on his beauty (according to context, the verb *ὑβρίζω* can mean to insult, or to rape). But that is certainly not the way Plato wants his own audience, that is, his readers, to laugh. For he knows they will remember that Alcibiades was eventually due to cause Athens to tragically lose the Peloponnesian war, and himself met a tragic

end by assassination. So Plato's readers, and we modern readers too, can only laugh from a certain uneasy distance, the comic element always in the shadow of the protagonist's wretched history. Here again, we readers may have a good laugh, but there is no real danger that impersonation might lead us to emulate Alcibiades, and to become a bufoon in our turn.

III

I have suggested that, by rewriting Homeric and dramatic poetry in a non-mimetic way, Plato is able to defend a sort of pleasurable poetry, and invite it to re-enter a well-governed city. But what, then, are we to make of Socrates' remark that Homer might, and perhaps should, defend himself as well? After all, Plato's myths are in part a sort of (philosophical) rethinking of Homeric poetry; they are certainly not Homeric or tragic poetry, strictly speaking. What of the real Athenian theatre festivals and recitals that all citizens in Athens are supposed to attend? Indeed, contrary to what one might have expected after his harsh critique of poetry, Plato does not have Socrates prohibit Glaucon from attending such spectacles. Rather, he explicitly urges Glaucon, when going to such theatre, to repeat his argument as an incantation in order to prevent himself 'from falling back into his childish passion' (X.608a). Plato does not explain just what that childish passion amounts to. Yet, if he does not prohibit theatre-going, but on the contrary permits them to attend *and* to obtain certain pleasures from it, it is very tempting to interpret this 'passion' in terms of a specifically, mimetic form of spectatorship that may have deleterious consequences. In urging Glaucon to recall that as an incantation, Plato seems to be telling him to bear this firmly in mind, so that he can safely attend such spectacles.

It is Aristotle who, in his own vision of the ideal city in Books VII and VIII of the *Politics*, explicitly says that 'younger people should not be permitted to attend spectacles of iambus or comedy until they have reached the age when their education has rendered them immune (*ἀπαθεῖς*) to the harm such things can do' (VII 17, 1336b20–3). Interestingly enough, Aristotle does fully endorse Plato's view that younger people must be prevented from attending such spectacles, and he most likely agreed with Plato that they would too easily impersonate the morally wrong values of scorn and malice that these spectacles contain. He also claims, as I argued Plato does too, that his citizens should be allowed, perhaps even encouraged, to attend such spectacles on condition that they engage with them in the right manner. But what exactly is that? How are we to understand this 'immunity condition'?

To be sure, when attending such spectacles, a citizen of Plato's Kallipolis will experience some *pathē* in their souls, and presumably obtain some pleasure from them; no citizen would ever attend a comic spectacle if he did not laugh and obtain pleasure from it! Thus, the *apatheia* here can't possibly refer

to their mental state when attending such plays. And, indeed, what the passage indicates is that this *apatheia* is to be conceived as the consequence of their morally right education: it is because they know that scorn and malice are morally wrong that they are protected against the possible bad consequences of their watching these comic plays. In other words, they may go to the theatre without fear of harm because they are protected from impersonating these wrong values. From this we may surely conclude that the only way to attend such comic spectacles without damaging one's soul is to regard them with appropriate detachment, that is, in a non-mimetic way.

Aristotle's remark might thus offer us a clue as to how Homer, as well as real comic and tragic theatre, may be defended. 'Just recite to yourself' – I take Plato having Socrates urge Glaucon, and his readers, to do – 'the philosophical argument showing you how easily you can fall into impersonation, and you may go and attend any recital of epic poetry, or any comic, or tragic spectacle you may want to without damage to your soul; attend these spectacles, and watch them at a certain distance, as if you were being narrated a mythos in a non-mimetic way, as is the case in the narration of my own myths.' It is under this condition, and under this condition alone, that there is no longer any reason for condemning the 'aesthetic pleasures' poetry affords, as we moderns would put it, from the requisite aesthetic distance. In this way, the pleasure of poetical images, and the emotional pleasures linked to tragedy and comedy, may be reclaimed.¹⁵

Notes

1. Throughout my chapter, I am quoting Reeve's translation (2004), sometimes with slight modifications.
2. I am endorsing a suggestion made by Halliwell (1988, 153).
3. It is well known that *kalos* also, and in fact primarily, means 'beautiful' in an aesthetic sense. I take the link between both senses of the terms to be 'admiration': an action is *kalos* if it is admirable, and performed by an 'admirable' man, that is, both a handsome and a morally good one, as Achilles is meant to be. I have elaborated on this in Destrée (2009).
4. On this, see also the very precise and thoughtful reading offered by Lorenz (2006, 59–73).
5. For a very suggestive interpretation of this theme, and its role in the whole argumentation of the *Republic*, see Barney (2001).
6. I am endorsing this term as regards Plato from Halliwell (2002) (see especially his chapter 2).
7. For a fresh interpretation of that famous passage, see Most (2011).
8. See also Halliwell (2011), who offers an alternative solution to this.
9. 'I will have to tell you, although a sort of reverential love I have had for Homer since childhood makes me hesitate to speak. You see, he seems to have been the first teacher and leader of all these fine tragedians. All the same, a man should not be honoured more than the truth' (595b–c).

10. I am following a suggestion made by Rutherford (1995, 215). Another possibility would be, as Else (1972) has proposed, to read this as a sort of invitation to the young Aristotle to defend poetry, but that is pure speculation.
11. Many interpreters nowadays seem to think that Plato's myths are nothing but another way of putting forward arguments (see the recent volume on Plato's myths edited by Partenie (2009), especially Rowe (2009)). It is not entirely mistaken, of course, to think that Plato wrote these myths with some philosophical ideas behind them; but they are also, and perhaps primarily, intended to be poetry as well. At II.379a, Plato has Socrates say that 'for the time being, we are not poets, but founders of a city', which indicates that, at another moment, he might well be a poet.
12. 'It is not an Alcinous-story (Ἀλκίνοῦ ἀπόλογον) I am going to tell you, but that of a brave (ἀλκίμου ἀνδρός) man called Er' (614b). 'Alcinous-story' is the name which was traditionally given to book 11 of the *Odyssey*. It is noteworthy that the adjective *alkimos* is a typically Homeric one which appears only here in Plato's work.
13. See Lear (2011).
14. I am endorsing the concept of distance that Andrea Nightingale has suggested in her important paper on Plato's art of writing myths (Nightingale 2002), but with a different perspective.
15. I have purposefully avoided the question of the 'benefit' one can get from this non-mimetic poetry, be it Plato's own myths or Homeric poetry. I have treated that point in the companion piece to this, in my Destrée (2012).

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8

Plato on Begetting in Beauty

C. D. C. Reeve

My aim in this chapter is to understand a famous idea that Plato puts into the mouth of Diotima in the *Symposium*: the idea is that the work or function of love is begetting in beauty (*Smp.* 206b1–8). To understand it, however, I think we have to range quite widely, looking not just at other dialogues, such as the *Republic* and *Phaedrus*, but also at how beauty is related to goodness, and how politics enters into love. The chapter isn't directly about Plato's views on art, but it is about the values he thought central to good art.

I The distinctive features of goodness and beauty

Beauty possesses a feature, we learn in *Republic* VI, that serves at once to distinguish it from goodness and to group it together with certain other forms:

Isn't it also clear that many people would choose things that are reputed to be just or beautiful, even if they are not, and to act, acquire things, and form beliefs accordingly. Yet no one is satisfied to acquire things that are reputed to be good. On the contrary, everyone seeks the things that *are* good. In this area, everyone disdains mere reputation... That, then, is what every soul pursues, and for its sake does everything. It has a hunch that the good is something, but it is puzzled and cannot adequately grasp just what it is or acquire the sort of stable belief about it that it has about other things, and so it misses the benefit, if any, that even those other things may give. Are we to accept that even the best people in the city, to whom we entrust everything, must remain thus in the dark about something of this kind and importance?... Anyway, I imagine that just and beautiful things won't have acquired much of a guardian in someone who does not even know why they are good. And I have a hunch that no one will have adequate knowledge of them until he knows this. (*Rep.* VI.505d5–506a7)

People know that they want what is good, not what is merely believed or reputed to be so, but they cannot readily distinguish the advantages of being beautiful from those of seeming beautiful, or those of justice from those of having a just reputation. That, indeed, is the nub of the challenge Glaucon and Adeimantus pose in *Republic* II. Show us, they say to Socrates, that being just pays higher eudaimonistic benefits than does having a reputation for justice while really being unjust.¹ Beauty and justice are, as I shall put it, *reputation–reality indifferent* in a way that goodness – and it alone, it seems – is not.

In Diotima's elenchus-like examination of Socrates in the *Symposium*, it is this contrast that lies behind the following exchange:

'If someone were to ask us, "Why, Socrates and Diotima, is love of beautiful things?" – or to put it more clearly, the person who loves, loves beautiful things: why does he love them?' I said, 'To possess them for himself'. 'But', she said, 'your answer still begs a question of the following sort: what will the person who possesses beautiful things get by possessing them?' I said that I didn't find *this* question at all easy to answer. 'Well', she said, 'answer as if someone changed things round, and questioned you using the good instead of the beautiful: "Come on, Socrates: the person who loves, loves good things: why does he love them?"' 'To possess them for himself', I said. "'And what will the person who possesses good things get by possessing them?'" 'That', I said, 'I'm better placed to answer: he'll be happy'. 'Yes', she said, 'because those who are happy are happy by virtue of possessing good things, and one who no longer needs to go on to ask "And what reason does the person who wishes to be happy have for wishing it?" Your answer seems final.' 'True', I said. 'This wish, then, this love – do you think it common to all human beings, and that everyone wishes always to possess good things, or what's your view?' 'The same as yours', I replied, 'that it's common to everyone'. (204d4–205a8)²

The reputation–reality indifference of beauty, but not of goodness, explains why it is easier to answer Diotima's question about why we love or desire good things than about why we love or desire beautiful ones. The specification of a desire is incomplete, however, when all we know is its object, *x*. We also need to know what it motivates us to *do* as regards *x*. What we desire, as contemporary philosophers put it, is not *x*, but to φ or *verb x* – not food, but to eat food; not a book, but to read a book; not a form, but to contemplate a form. Though they don't single out this feature of desire for explicit mention, Socrates and Diotima are sensitive to it. What we desire are not good things, they agree, but to *possess them*. The question immediately arises, then, of why we desire to do *that* to them. Once we are reminded that possessing them will make us happy, we have what we need – a final, why-question-settling explanation. When happiness enters the picture, there is important

conceptual backflow: 'For a single swallow does not make a spring, nor does a single day; in the same way, neither does a single day, or a short time, make a man blessed and happy' (Aristotle, *N. E.* I.7.1098a18–20). Happiness, in other words, brings in the notion of time. It isn't clear, to be sure, that the time it brings in must be *always*; Aristotle's 'complete life' might do. Nonetheless, *always* arguably has the greater intuitive appeal. That point aside, the general direction of Diotima's thought is hard to gainsay.

Conceptual relationships, especially when obvious to those with even a minimal grasp of the concepts involved, make for easy agreement; but that agreement can also conceal deep disagreement. 'Pretty well most people are agreed,' Aristotle tells us, 'about what to call [the topmost of all achievable goods]: both ordinary people and people of quality say "happiness", and suppose that living well and doing well are the same thing as being happy. But they are in dispute about what happiness actually is' (*N. E.* I.4.1095a17–21). Plato makes essentially the same point. 'Whatever name a city applies to it [the good],' he writes in the *Theaetetus*, 'that surely is what it aims at when it legislates' (177e4–6). That the good is the aim is a simple conceptual truth – that *this* (for instance, 'what is advantageous to the governing group') is a name for it (so that what it names is what happiness actually consists in) is not. In fact, as Socrates tells Adeimantus, our grip on what the good is, actually or substantively, is notably insecure: 'The soul has a hunch that the good is something, but is puzzled and cannot adequately grasp just what it is or acquire the sort of stable belief about it that it has about the other things (*ta alla*), and so it misses the benefit, if any, that even those other things may give' (*Rep.* VI.505e1–5).

The source and nature of the soul's puzzlement are revealed by a point made about stable beliefs in the *Meno*:

True beliefs are a very fine thing as long as they stay in their place...so that they are not worth very much, until someone ties them down by rationally calculating the explanation. This, my friend Meno, is recollection, as we have agreed in what we said before. When they are tied down, they first of all become pieces of knowledge, and then stable. (97e5–98a7; cf. *Smp.* 202a5–9)

Our grasp of the substantive good is unstable, we may infer, because of the difficulty involved in calculating its explanation; which is what Socrates has just been saying to Adeimantus. The masses believe that pleasure is the good, he says, but admit that there are bad pleasures. The more refined believe the good is knowledge, but identify the knowledge in question as knowledge of the good. With one explanation ending in circularity, the other in contradiction, puzzlement reigns and security eludes us (*Rep.* VI.505b5–d3). Although goodness may not be reputation–reality indifferent, then, it does have a characteristic feature of its own: it is *explanation-elusive*. Moreover,

we know why it has this feature. It is a first principle – indeed, *the* first principle of everything (*Rep.* VII.532a5–533d1). Hence, the question of its explanation – which is an intensified version of a problem infecting all first principles – is sure to be particularly vexed (*Rep.* VI.510b2–d3).

The things contrasted with the good, as ones we do have secure beliefs about, are referred to simply as *ta alla* – the other things (*Rep.* VI.505e4). The immediate reference is to justice and beauty, which were under discussion a few lines before. Socrates seems to imply that we actually have secure beliefs about these. But secure beliefs – beliefs tied down – are items of knowledge, and Socrates is explicit that we cannot have knowledge about justice or beauty until we first have it about the good itself (*Rep.* VI.506a4–7, VII.534b8–c6). Hence, his original thought must be something closer to this: There is no problem about *how* to tie down our beliefs about beauty, justice, and other such subordinate good things. All we need do is relate them appropriately to the good. But there is such a problem about how to do the same for the good itself, since it is explanation-elusive.

Though beauty shares the feature of being reputation–reality indifferent with other forms, it has a special place both among forms in general and among the images of them in the world around us that our senses reveal:

In the earthly likenesses of justice and moderation and other things that are valuable to souls, there is no light, but through dulled organs just a few approach their images and with difficulty observe the nature of what is imaged in them. Beauty, however, could be seen blazing out at that time when our souls, along with a happy company, saw a blessed sight before them...And now that we have come to earth we have, through the clearest of our senses, found it most clearly. For of all the sense perceptions coming to us through the body, sight is the sharpest.. We do not see wisdom. The feelings of love it would cause in us would be terrible, if it allowed some clear image of it itself to reach our sight, and so too with the other lovable objects. As it is, though, beauty alone has acquired this privilege, of being most clearly visible and most lovable. (*Phdr.* 250b1–e1)

The class of things valuable to souls, which includes the forms of justice, moderation, wisdom and also beauty, is the same, we shall see later, as the class of lovable or desirable things. The ‘earthly likenesses’ of some of these, namely, justice and moderation, contain no light, and so the organs that perceive them are dulled.³ At first, wisdom seems to differ from them in having *no* earthly likenesses, so that our eyes are literally blind to it (‘we do not see wisdom’). The next clause, however, suggests that its problem is, in fact, the same as the others – it lacks the inner light that would allow ‘some *clear* image of it itself to reach our sight’. It is this that beauty alone has the privilege of allowing. Since the form of beauty has this feature at least in part, it seems,

because it itself can be seen blazing out in a way that other forms do not, I shall say that beauty's pre-eminent visibility is due to its *incandescence*.

The conceptual typology of values (or of the forms corresponding thereto) we have uncovered may be summarized as shown in table below.

	Explanation- elusive	Reputation–reality indifferent	Incandescent
Goodness	Yes	No	No
Beauty	No	Yes	Yes
Justice, moderation, wisdom	No	Yes	No

Our task now is to explore it and its consequences more fully. It is already clear, however, that the form of beauty and that of goodness have features that distinguish them from one another and from all other forms.

II Love as begetting in beauty

That the class of things valuable to souls is identical, as I claimed we would see, to that of lovable or desirable ones is shown by the fact that in the *Symposium* Diotima relies on their identity to solve a problem. If, as Socrates has agreed, the wish or love of good things is common to all human beings, why don't we say that everyone is in love, she asks, but rather 'that some people are in love, others not?' (205a5–b2). The answer she proposes is that, just as poetry has usurped a name, *poiēsis*, that applies to the 'productive activities that belong to all the different kinds of crafts' (205b8–c9), so, too, a part of love has by synecdoche usurped a name that properly belongs to the whole:

The whole of desire for good things and for happiness is 'the supreme and treacherous love' to be found in everyone; but those who direct themselves to it in all sorts of other ways, in making money, or in their love of physical training, or in philosophy, are neither said to be 'in love' nor to be 'lovers', while those who proceed by giving themselves to just one kind of love have the name of the whole, 'love' – and they're the ones who are 'in love' and 'lovers'. (205d1–7)

Properly or non-figuratively speaking, love is the desire for *all the good things in the possession of which happiness consists*. So they are the ones valuable to a soul. Only narrow interpersonal erotic love is the sort that is said to make

us *lovers*, or that we are said to be *in*, but it is the broader sort that is the real natural kind.

Diotima's own account, which we now begin to explore, thus deals with love of the broader sort:

'There is nothing else that people are in love with except what is good. Or do you think there is?' 'By Zeus, I certainly don't', I replied. 'Is it true then to say, without qualification, that people love what is good?' 'Yes', I said. 'But', she said, 'oughtn't we to add that what they love includes their *possessing* what is good?' 'We ought.' 'And then', she said, 'not only possessing it, but *always* possessing it?' 'We must add that too.' 'In that case', she said, 'we can sum up by saying that love is of permanent possession of what is good'. 'What you say is very true.' 'Given, then, that love is always of this',⁴ she said, 'in what way and through what activity would eagerness and effort in those pursuing it be called love? What really is this work (*ergon*)? Can you say?' 'If I could, Diotima', I said, 'I certainly wouldn't be admiring you for your wisdom, and visiting you to learn just these very things'. 'In that case', she said, 'I'll tell you. It's begetting in beauty (*tokos en kalō(i)*), in respect both to body and to soul.' (*Smp.* 205e6–206b1–8)

The object of love is clear: it is the permanent possession of good things. What is it, though, that would constitute such possession? What does love actually motivate us *to do*? The answer specifies what Diotima calls the *ergon* of love – its work, function or job in the soul (*Rep.* I.352e3–4, I.353a10–11). That work, she claims, is to (motivate us to) beget in beauty either through our bodies or through our souls. *It* is what the permanent possession of good things actually consists in. That is why Diotima feels entitled to infer that love is 'not ... *of* beauty', but '*of* procreation and begetting in beauty' (*Smp.* 206e3–5). The latter follows from the definition of love by simple substitution.

That love is for the permanent possession of good things, we may accept. But why the permanent possession of *good* things generally should consist in begetting specifically in *beauty* is difficult to understand. The difficulty is deepened by a passage in the *Republic* discussing the love of learning:

A real lover of learning strives by nature for what is ... He does not linger over each of the many things that are reputed to be, but keeps on going, without dulling his love or desisting from it, until he grasps what the nature of each thing itself is with the part of his soul that is fitted to grasp a thing of that sort because of its kinship with it. Once he has drawn near to it, has intercourse with what really is, and has begotten understanding and truth, he knows, truly lives, is nourished, and – at that point, but not before – is relieved from his labour pains. (*Rep.* VI.490a9–b7)

Knowledge is achieved when the form of the good, ‘the most important object of learning’, is finally grasped (*Rep.* VI.505a2). So the love of it, too, consists in begetting. But begetting in *what*? The answer should be, in *beauty*. But why should the love of learning, and so of its object, the form of the good, consist in *that*? Why doesn’t it consist, as we might expect, in giving birth in *goodness*? One important feature of the conceptual typology we uncovered earlier is that it seems designed to answer this question. Some good things – namely, beautiful ones – are *incandescent*; we can just *see* that they are good or valuable. So they can provide a reliable starting point in valuing – a path, perhaps, to the explanation-elusive good itself.⁵

For beautiful things to motivate us to do anything to get them, however, once we do see their goodness, their incandescence is not enough – in addition, we must lack them:

‘Then see’, said Socrates, ‘whether instead of your “probably” it isn’t necessarily like this: that what desires desires what it lacks, or, if it doesn’t lack, it doesn’t desire it? To me this looks amazingly necessary, Agathon: how about you?’ ‘It looks so to me too’, he said. (*Smp.* 200a9–b2)

Generally speaking, indeed, desires are simply defined as painful states of emptiness or inaction either of the body or of the soul, the appropriate filling up of which is pleasure (*Rep.* IX.585a8–b4, IX.585d11, *Phil.* 31e8). The question naturally arises, therefore, of what painful lack makes us love or desire beauty. In the next part of her account, Diotima provides a complex answer:

‘All human beings (*pantes anthrōpoi*), Socrates, are pregnant both in respect to body and to soul, and when we come to be of the right age, we naturally desire to beget. We cannot do it in ugliness, but in beauty we can. [a] The intercourse of man and woman is a begetting. And this affair is something divine: living creatures, despite their mortality, contain this immortal thing, pregnancy and procreation. But it is impossible for this to take place in what is discordant. Ugliness, however, is in discord with everything divine, while beauty is concordant. Thus beauty is both *Moira* and *Eileithyia* for birth. [b] For these reasons, if ever what is pregnant approaches beauty, it becomes gracious, melts with joy, and begets and procreates; but when it approaches ugliness, it contracts (*skuthrōpon*), frowning with pain (*lupoumenon suspeiratai*), turns away (*apotrepetai*), curls up (*aneilletai*), and fails to procreate (*ou genna(i)*), retaining what it has conceived, and suffering because of it. That is why what is pregnant and already full to bursting feels the great excitement it does about beauty, because it frees it from great pain. For Socrates,’ she said, ‘love is not, as you think, of beauty, ... [but] of procreating and begetting in beauty.’ (*Smp.* 206c1–e5)

Initially, Diotima seems to be attributing both sorts of pregnancy she recognizes to everyone. In developing her views, however, she attributes pregnancy in soul exclusively to males. What she probably means by *pantes anthrōpoi*, therefore, is not all human beings, but (as is also linguistically possible) all *male* ones. No wonder, then, that her description of pregnancy and its effects sounds so much like a description of *male* sexual response. In espousing a view of pregnancy as an exclusively male prerogative, moreover, and so of semen as embryophoric, Diotima is not being eccentric or original. Such views were a commonplace of Greek thinking on reproduction. We find them in Aeschylus' *Eumenides* (658–61), for example, in Anaxagoras (Aristotle, *Generation of Animals* 763b21–3), and later in Diogenes of Apollonia (DK 64A27). Diotima's version does have the additional peculiarity of correlating the desire for good things, which is a sort of emptiness, with the bursting fullness of pregnancy. But, once we keep in mind that what a male is filled with isn't what he desires, this oddness emerges as insignificant.

A human male, painfully pregnant with embryophoric semen, seeks a female in whom to discharge it. But why must he seek a beautiful one for this purpose? Why won't an ugly one do? Diotima's explanation seems to have two quite different strands. The first is a metaphysical or meta-biological theory specifying the condition in the world – harmony between beauty and the divine – that enables begetting to take place. Though this strand is not further discussed in the *Symposium*, when Diotima extends her account to all animals (207c9–d2, below) it becomes reasonably certain that what she has in mind is the reproductive cycle. As regulated by the seasons, this is controlled ultimately by the sun, which 'not only gives visible things the power to be seen but also provides for their coming-into-being, growth, and nourishment' (*Rep.* VI.509b1–3; also VIII.546a3–c8). A female must be ovulating, as we would put it, or a male must be pregnant, as Diotima would, if conception is to be possible. When a pregnant male responds with desire to a beautiful female, however, what he is responding to directly cannot be this underlying harmony, since it is inaccessible to him. This is where the second strand comes in. It is a psychological or epistemological theory specifying the condition in a female – clearly visible, because incandescent, beauty – which draws a pregnant male to her. In our own evolutionary theory of animal reproduction, a bridge between these two sorts of theory is provided by a reliable correlation between (visible) symmetry of face and body and (invisible) reproductive fitness. In Diotima's theory, a bridge seems unnecessary.

This is how her story might go. At the appropriate age, as regulated by the sun and the seasons, a male becomes pregnant with semen. The resulting discomfort makes him desire a female in whom to discharge it. But if the female is ugly, he won't love or desire her: love is of good things and he can just see that she is not something (in the relevant way) good. Failing to desire

her, he also fails to get an erection. Witness Diotima's description: *skuthrōton te kai lupoumenon suspeiratai kai apotrepetai kai aneilletai kai ou genna(i)*. The picture is that of a face at once frowning, grimacing and pulling back. A somewhat inflammatory translation might be: 'it [what is pregnant] goes limp, wrinkles up as if in pain, pulls back, and shrivels.'⁶ Without an erection, however, the male can't ejaculate, and so fails to beget or procreate. On the other hand, when a pregnant male finds a beautiful woman, he desires her as something incandescently good, so that what is pregnant, as Diotima puts it, 'rises up in exultation and melts with joy (*hileōn te gignetai kai euphrainomenon*)'. In other words, ejaculation and begetting occur.

III Love, immortality and persistence through becoming

We might think that with the account of love as being of the permanent possession of good things, and so of begetting in beauty, we have reached explanatory bedrock, since happiness, which stops all why-questions, simply consists in such possession. But Diotima thinks we must go further:

'What do you think, Socrates, is the cause of this love, and this desire? Don't you see how terribly all animals are affected whenever they feel the desire to procreate, whether they go on foot or have wings – all of them stricken with the effects of love, first for intercourse with one another, and then also for nurturing their offspring, so that the weakest are prepared to do battle with the strongest on their offspring's behalf and even to die for them, torturing themselves with hunger so as to rear them, and doing everything else necessary. Human beings', she said, 'one might suppose, do this as a result of rational calculation; but what cause makes animals be so powerfully affected by love?' (207a5–c1)

Though she doesn't explicitly mention it, we can see the problem that lies behind her question. Love motivates animals – including human ones – to do things that seem positively inconsistent with their own happiness and well-being: the *Republic* refers to 'the perplexities and sufferings involved in bringing up children' (V.465c3). But how can love do that if it is related to happiness in the way Diotima claims?

In our theory of reproduction, this problem is addressed, at least in the case of other animals, by appeal to genes and *their* so-called interests. In Diotima's, it is answered by a surprisingly innovative re-appeal to the desire that, in her account, is most basic of all – the desire for the permanent possession of good things:

Love is... of procreation and begetting in beauty... Why, then, is it of procreation? Because procreation is something everlasting and immortal, as far as anything can be for what is mortal; and it is immortality, together

with what is good, that must necessarily be desired, according to what has been agreed before – if indeed love is of permanent possession of what is good. (206e2–207a2)

This is the basis for the claim that begetting is ‘something divine’ (206c6), in that it partakes to a degree of the immortality (206c7) that is the mark of divinity. But it isn’t just human begetting that partakes of it: ‘The same account applies to animals as to human beings’ (207c9–d1). So animals, too, love or desire – at least in the sense of having a conatus toward – permanent possession of good things.

Thus far we are squarely in the realm of what is recognizably sexual reproduction, in which two members of a species unite to produce offspring they then rear. Had Diotima known about the phenomenon of asexual reproduction, which requires only one progenitor, she could have stayed in that realm to produce an intermediate case. Instead, she is forced to leave it altogether – or, better, to expand it out of all recognition:

‘Mortal nature seeks so far as it can to exist forever and to be immortal. And it can achieve it only in this way, through the process of coming-into-being, so that it always leaves behind something else that is new in place of the old, since even during the time in which each living creature is said to be alive and to be the same individual – as for example someone is said to be the same person from when he is a child until he comes to be an old man, and yet, if he’s called the same, that’s despite the fact that he’s never made up of the same things, but is always being renewed and losing what he had before, whether it’s hair, or flesh, or bones, or blood, in fact the whole body. And don’t suppose that this is just true in the case of the body; in the case of the soul, too, its traits, habits, opinions, desires, pleasures, pains, fears – none of these is ever the same in any individual, but some are coming into existence, others passing away.’ (207d1–e5)

Our traits, habits, opinions and so on, then, are of different sorts over time. But that isn’t the only kind of change to which we are subject:

It’s much stranger even than this with the pieces of knowledge we have: not only are some of them coming into existence and others passing away, so that we are never the same even in respect to pieces of knowledge, but in fact each single piece of knowledge is subject to the same process. For what we call ‘going over things’ exists because knowledge goes out of us; forgetting is the departure of knowledge, and going over something creates in us again a new memory in place of the one that is leaving us, and so preserves our knowledge in such a way as to make it seem the same. (207e6–208a6)

So it isn't just the sorts of things we know that change over time; even an apparently persistent particular piece of knowledge is, in fact, a series of different particular pieces of the same sort. And there is nothing peculiar to knowledge in this:

‘In this way *everything mortal* is preserved, not by always being absolutely the same, as the divine is, but by virtue of the fact that what is departing and decaying with age leaves behind in us something else new, of the same sort that it was. It is by this means, Socrates,’ she said, ‘that the mortal partakes of immortality, both body and everything else; and what is immortal partakes of it in a different way’. (208a6–b4)

The account of animal reproduction has now been absorbed, as simply a special case, into a vastly more general theory, which we might call *persistence through becoming* (PTB). It is courtesy of this that Diotima draws her conclusion: ‘So don't be surprised that everything by nature values what springs from itself; this eagerness, this love, that attends on every creature is for the sake of immortality’ (208b4–6). In the event, her admonition falls on deaf ears: ‘When I heard what she said,’ Socrates says, ‘I was surprised indeed’ (208b7).

Before turning to what Diotima does to diminish Socrates' surprise, it is useful to diminish our own by spelling out PTB a little. Suppose that a human being, A, possesses, at time t_1 , a particular piece of knowledge, k_1 , of sort Kappa. If k_1 is beautiful, x can just see it to be good. So he will want to possess it at t_2 as well. To do so he must – perhaps by means of going over it – beget another particular piece, k_2 , that is also of sort Kappa. What goes for k_1 , however, goes for A as well. If he is to survive from t_1 to t_2 , a t_1 -time-slice of the sort of being (namely, a human) he is must beget a t_2 -time-slice of a being of the same sort. Self-love, then, turns out to be itself a sort of begetting in beauty. (No real surprise there. Just look at the definition of love.) But if the self-love of A really is just love for (unconventional) offspring, for offspring *of the same sort* as A himself, then A's love for his (conventional) offspring is much more like A's love for himself than we thought – the value he places on their survival is much more like the value he places on his own. Diotima's conclusion is now, imaginatively at least, within reach. We can see how her mind might be working.

To diminish Socrates' surprise, however, Diotima takes an entirely different tack from ours:

If you look at human beings and their love of honour, you'd also be surprised at their irrationality in relation to what I've talked about, *unless you keep in mind* how terribly they are affected by love of acquiring a name for themselves, and of 'laying up immortal glory for all time to come', and how for the sake of that they're ready to run all risks, even

more than they are for their children – they’ll spend money, undergo any suffering you like, die for it. Do you think’, she said, ‘that Alcestis would have died for Admetus, that Achilles would have added his death to Patroclus’s, or that your Codrus would have died before his time for the sake of his children’s succession to the kingship, unless they thought at the time that there would be an immortal memory of their own courage, the one we now have of them? Far from it’, she said; ‘I imagine it’s for the sake of immortal virtue and this sort of glorious reputation that everyone does everything, the more so the better people they are, because they are in love with immortality. Those, then’, she said, ‘who are pregnant in their bodies turn their attention more towards women, and their love is directed in this way, securing immortality, a memory of themselves, and happiness, as they suppose, for themselves for all time to come through having children’. (208c1–209a1)

What is perplexing is that this argument seems to make no use of *PTB* at all. Perhaps this is why Socrates introduces it with a nicely ambiguous editorial comment. She produced it, he says, ‘in the manner of an accomplished sophist’ (208c1). What he has in mind, I think, is not that her response is sophistical, but that it is clever. Instead of using it explicitly, it embodies a set of puzzles that *PTB* helps resolve. In that respect, it is like Socrates’ own clever elenctic (and often aporetic) conversations, which Diotima is clearly imitating.

Human beings who love honour, Diotima claims, beget conventional offspring, in the last analysis, because they want to possess good things permanently. But how could being posthumously remembered for possessing such things count as success in that endeavour? That’s the first puzzle. The second is that Diotima’s argument applies only to those particularly good human beings who love immortal virtue and honour. What, then, explains the behaviour of the less good ones who, like other animals, also beget offspring and sacrifice for them? Non-offspring can preserve one’s memory, as we preserve that of Alcestis and Achilles; offspring who do not share one’s values will hardly continue to honour an ancestor they no longer think worth remembering. How, then, can begetting offspring be either necessary or sufficient for being remembered? This puzzle will turn out to be particularly seminal.

Now let’s factor *PTB* into Diotima’s argument. Great courage, of the sort Achilles possessed, is something *kalon* – beautiful in the sense of fine or noble. His *aristeia* is the canonical occasion for its exhibition. There, it shines forth incandescently. Anyone present who values it will preserve a memory of it. As something produced by Achilles, such a memory (together with the causal trace that sustains it) is one of his (unconventional) offspring. As he lives on in what we ordinarily call his life by begetting similar (unconventional) offspring, so he lives on in the memory of the (conventional)

offspring in whom the memory exists, possessed of courage still. Just as his (conventional) offspring are forward continuers of him, however, he is a backward continuer of *theirs*. Hence, the good things he possessed they possess too. They have a special reason, therefore, provided by their desire for their own happiness, to keep the memory of their ancestor's courage alive. Putting it the other way around, he has reason of the same sort to produce them. By comparison with the way a god possesses good things permanently, to be sure, Achilles' way of permanently possessing them is but a pale imitation. Diotima is quite open about that. Her point is that prior to what we conventionally call his death it was no less so.

The mention of honour, and those who love it, is bound to remind us of the *Republic's* triadic division of human beings into wisdom-loving or philosophical ones, honour-loving ones, and appetitive (or money-loving) ones. Though this division is not explicitly mentioned in the *Symposium*, it seems foreshadowed or presupposed in Diotima's triadic division of begetters in beauty – those pregnant in soul (and also in body, whom we shall soon meet) who love wisdom, those pregnant in body (and also in soul, as we shall see) who love honour, and those pregnant in body who love something else. The last are the subject, you will remember, of the second of the problems we raised for the part of her account currently under review. Suppose, as the *Republic* would lead us to think, that they are appetitive people. They will, then, love food, drink and sex, and think that happiness consists in their permanent possession. To want to possess them permanently, however, is – if *PTB* is true – to want a continuer of oneself to possess them. At this point, the third puzzle, already encountered in the case of honour-lovers, resurfaces. For what, as an appetitive person, one wants a continuer of oneself to do is to continue oneself *as such a person*. But for success in that project it isn't enough to beget (conventional) offspring; one must also ensure somehow that they share one's values.

This problem about the sharing of values between ancestors and descendants, now twice encountered, dramatizes an aspect of begetting in beauty that is easily overlooked, namely, that it requires the successful transmission of values – that is, of *a tradition of valuing* – both intrapersonally and across generations. If Diotima has omitted any explicit reference to this fact so far, it isn't because she is unaware of it. In her long account of that other sort of begetting – the one engaged in by those who are predominantly pregnant in their souls – it will be a prominent exhibit.

IV Two types of blindness to beauty

A modulating bridge, as music theorists call it, between that account and the one we have been exploring of pregnancy in body is provided by Socrates' account in the *Phaedrus* of how to reconcile beauty's incandescence with its being reputation–reality indifferent. The account begins

with a description of the reactions of two different sorts of men to beauty's earthly likenesses:

As it is, though, beauty alone has acquired this privilege, of being most clearly visible and most lovable. All the same, the man (A) whose initiation [into 'the most blessed of mysteries' that culminate in seeing the forms (250b8–c1)] was not recent or who has been corrupted (*mē neotelēs ē diephtharmenos*) does not move sharply from here to there, to beauty itself when he observes its namesake here, hence he does not revere it when he looks at it, but surrendering himself to pleasure does his best to mount like an animal and sow offspring (*paidosporein*), and keeping close company with excess has no fear or shame in pursuing pleasure contrary to nature (*para phusin*). Whereas the man (B) who observed much of what was visible to him before [the forms], on seeing a godlike face or some bodily shape that imitates beauty well, first shudders and experiences something of the fears he had before, and then reveres it as a god as he looks at it, and if he were not afraid of appearing thoroughly mad would sacrifice to his beloved as if to a statue of a god. (*Phdr.* 250d6–251a7)⁷

A doesn't move sharply from earthly beauty to beauty itself. And the reason he doesn't is that he is *mē neotelēs ē diephtharmenos*. A little later, the intent of the first disjunct is clarified: 'each man lives after the pattern of the god in whose chorus he was, honouring him by imitating him as far as he can, so long as he is uncorrupted and living out the first of the lives which he enters here' (252d1–3). One of the causes of A's problem, then, is the passing of time as measured not by years, but by number of reincarnations. But what exactly is the second cause – corruption?

We learn in *Republic* X that the 'badness natural to each thing – the deficiency peculiar to each – is what destroys it, but if that does not destroy it, there is nothing else left to corrupt it' (X.609a8–b1). Thus ophthalmia, which is naturally bad for the eyes, corrupts them (X.608e7–609a1). Here we are talking about literal eye disease. But that, of course, can't be A's problem, since he sees the incandescent beauty of a potential sex partner all too clearly. When the philosopher descends from the bright sunlight into the cave, he also has eye problems:

If he had to compete once again with the perpetual prisoners in recognizing the shadows, while his sight was still dim and before his eyes had recovered, and the time for readjustment was not short, wouldn't he provoke ridicule? Wouldn't it be said of him that he had returned from his upward journey with his eyes corrupted? (*Rep.* VII.516e7–517a4)

The philosopher's difficulty lies in finding the likeness or shadow that matches the form of beauty he firmly grasps. The easy transference of the

epithet 'sharply' from sight (250d3) to a mental movement instigated by seeing a beautiful person suggests that A's problem is the reverse – namely, of finding the form that matches the likeness he sees quite clearly. Because he doesn't have a vivid recollection of beauty itself, the beauty he sees (however sharply) fails to remind him of it quickly enough – and so he fails to involve the right property in his perception. Hence he stops with the earthly likeness, remaining focused on it, when he should move up to its intelligible or heavenly original.

The continuation of the discussion of the philosopher's blindness explains why A's vision is defective in this way:

Eyes may be confused in two ways and from two causes: when they change from the light into the darkness or from the darkness into the light. If he kept in mind that the same applies to the soul, when he saw a soul disturbed and unable to see something, ... he would see whether it had come from a brighter life and was dimmed through not having yet become accustomed to the dark, or from greater ignorance into greater light and was dazzled by the increased brilliance... So here is how we must think about these matters, if that is true: Education is not what some people boastfully declare it to be. They pretty much say they can put knowledge into souls that lack it, as if they could put sight into blind eyes... But here is what our present account shows about this power to learn that is present in everyone's soul and the instrument with which each of us learns: just as an eye cannot be turned around from darkness to light except by turning the whole body, so this instrument must be turned around from what comes-to-be together with the whole soul until it is able to bear to look at what is and at the brightest thing that is – the one we call the good... Of this very thing, then, there would be a craft, namely, of this turning around, concerned with how this can be most easily and effectively turned around, not of putting sight into it. On the contrary, it takes for granted that sight is there, though not turned in the right way or looking where it should look, and contrives to redirect it appropriately... The other so-called virtues of the soul, then, do seem to be closely akin to those of the body: they really are not present in it initially, but are added later by habit and practice. The virtue of wisdom, on the other hand, belongs above all, so it seems, to something more divine, which never loses its power, but is either useful and beneficial or useless and harmful, depending on the way it is turned. Or haven't you ever noticed in people who are said to be bad, but clever, how sharp the vision of their little soul is and how sharply it distinguishes the things it is turned towards? This shows that its sight is not inferior, but is forced to serve vice, so that the sharper it sees, the more evils it accomplishes. However, if this element of this sort of nature had been

hammered at right from childhood, and struck free of the leaden weights, as it were, of kinship with becoming, which have been fastened to it by eating and other such pleasures and indulgences, which pull its soul's vision downward⁸ – if, I say, it got rid of these and turned towards truly real things, then the same element of the same people would see them most sharply, just as it now does the things it is now turned towards. (*Rep.* VII.518a1–519b5)

A is *upwardly blind*, as we may call it, because his appetitive desires – which include his sexual ones – pull his soul's vision downward. The philosopher is *downwardly blind*, as the remainder of the discussion goes on to point out, because his rational desires, his self-defining love for the truth, pull his soul up toward the forms (*Rep.* VII.519a7–521b10). The blindness of A and that of the philosopher thus have cognate causes – causes that are not ophthalmic, but appetitive.

The characterization of A's eye problems – or the behaviour they cause – as 'contrary to nature (*para phusin*)' (*Phdr.* 251a1) suggests that the desires that give rise to them are paiderastic:

[Whether among human beings or beasts,] when what is by nature female enters into partnership with what are by nature males in procreation, you must bear in mind that the pleasure involved seems in accord with nature (*kata phusin*), but when males do so with males, or females with females, it seems against nature (*para phusin*), and the recklessness (*tolmēm'*)⁹ of those who first engaged in it seems to have been caused by a lack of self-control where pleasure is concerned. (*Laws* I.636c2–7)

The fact that they cause A to 'do his best to sow offspring (*paidosporein*)' (*Phdr.* 250e5), on the other hand, suggests that his desires are heterosexual appetites. Of course, the offspring A does his best to sow might simply be his (embryophoric) semen, and this he could try to sow as readily in a male as in a female. We might think here of *Laws* VIII, in which the Athenian speaks of 'sowing ... sterile seed in males against nature' (841d4–5). But the rare verb *paidosporein*, which occurs nowhere else in Plato, does seem a peculiarly inept choice to describe such an act, since its root *paido* inevitably brings actual children (not seed or embryos) to mind. One might almost think, indeed, that it was selected, perhaps even coined, precisely to rule out the paiderastic interpretation of what A attempts.

When Plato says that something is against (or in accord with) nature, the nature in question is always the nature of something, never anything like a natural law. Consequently, it is always appropriate to ask which nature is the relevant one. Usually this is answered by specifying the type of thing

the nature belongs to. But in the case of human beings we need more than that:

We must not think...that the [human] soul in its truest nature is full of complexity, dissimilarity, and conflict with itself...It is not easy, you see, for something to be immortal when it is composed of many elements and is not composed in the most beautiful way – which is how the soul now seemed to us...Yet both our recent argument, and others as well, compel us to accept that the soul *is* immortal. But what it is like in truth, seen as it should be, not maimed by its partnership with the body and other bad things, which is how we see it now, what it is like when it has become pure – *that* we can adequately see only by means of rational calculation. And you will find it to be a much more beautiful thing than we thought and get a much clearer view of the cases of justice and injustice and of all the other things that we have so far discussed. So far what we have said about the soul is true of it as it appears at present. But the condition we have seen it in is like that of the sea god Glaucus, whose original nature cannot easily be made out by those who catch glimpses of him, because some of the original parts of his body have been broken off, others have been worn away and altogether mutilated by the waves, while other things – shells, seaweeds, and rocks – have been fastened to him, so that he looks more like any wild beast than what he naturally was. Such, too, is the condition of the soul when we see it beset by myriad bad things. But, Glaucon, we should be looking in another direction...toward its love of wisdom. We must keep in mind what it grasps and the kinds of things it longs to associate with, because it is akin to what is divine and immortal and what always is, and what it would become if it followed this longing with its whole being and if that impulse lifted it out of the sea in which it now is, and struck off the rocks and shells which, because it now feasts on earth, have grown around it in a wild, earthy, and stony profusion as a result of those so-called happy feastings. And then you would see its true nature, whether multiform (*polueidēs*) or uniform (*moneidēs*),¹⁰ or somehow some other way. But we have given a pretty good account now, I think, of what its condition is and what elements it possesses in human life. (*Rep.* X.611b1–612a6)

When we speak of a human being's nature, then, we may be speaking of his *true* nature or his *embodied* nature. In human life, the human soul is partnered with the body, but also with other bad things. These, as the reference to feasting makes clear, are (or include) appetites. As the shells, seaweed and rocks that have become fastened to him obscure Glaucus' true nature, so these appetites obscure the true nature of the soul. What gets struck free of the appetites and so on that get fastened to it by eating or feasting, *Republic* VII (518a1–519b5, quoted above) tells us, is the rational part of the soul,

which is the exclusive locus of wisdom (IV.442c4–7). What we would see to be the soul's true nature, therefore, were these encumbrances removed, is that of the rational part.¹¹ Justice, temperance and courage are only *so-called* virtues of the soul (VII.518d9), we may infer, because, unlike wisdom, they are not intrinsic to the true soul, but are found only in the complex, tripartite, embodied one.

In the *Laws* passages we looked at, the human nature under discussion must be embodied nature: heterosexual intercourse cannot be in accord with the nature of something unless its nature is in part sexual – unless it includes appetitive sexual desires. In the *Phaedrus*, however, A and B are introduced following a description of the human soul's *disembodied* life and subsequent reincarnations – reincarnations in which 'a human soul may pass into the life of a wild animal' (249b3–4). This human soul, we learn, has 'by its nature observed the things that are' (249e5). Since these (the things that are) are forms, the soul that observes them must be the simple rational soul that is akin to them, and its nature must be true human nature.

The nature that A acts against, therefore, in doing his best to sow offspring, is almost certainly not his embodied nature, but his true human nature.¹² Hence, he will be acting contrary to that nature even if the intercourse he attempts is heterosexual. A is an exemplar, in other words, of the class of men Diotima characterizes as pregnant in body. The explanation of his behaviour thus applies to them, too. Such men see sharply the beauty of bodies, but their sexual appetites, which cause upward-blindness, prevent them from moving on from there to any other beauty.

V Different types of begetting in beauty

The beauty that attracts a male pregnant in body is that of a female. This suggests that the dative construction in the definition of love as *tokos en kalō(i)* is to be understood as locative. Begetting in beauty is begetting inside a beautiful female – inside a beautiful vessel or container. Once we see that the role of her beauty involves exciting or producing an erection, however, this interpretation is more difficult to sustain. It is just an accident, if you like, from the point of view of her beauty, that ejaculation takes place inside her. When we extend the formula to the begetting of unconventional offspring, the difficulties multiply. Consider Achilles. What excites him, as an honour-lover, is the beauty of his own acts of courage – good things he would like to possess permanently. The containers in which he deposits, as it were, the memory of these actions are his conventional offspring. The trouble is that *their* beauty seems to play no role at all in the account.

In the context of *PTB*, these beautiful acts of courage are analysed as an ancestral–descendant causal chain of beautiful act tokens of the same courageous type. In such a chain, each ancestral token plays two roles. First, it incites Achilles' love or desire, and so causes him to beget a descendant

token. Second, it provides a blueprint – a *typic* – for that descendant. It is by looking to it, if you like, and copying what he sees that Achilles must do his begetting if the beauty of the ancestor is to be inherited by the descendant offspring. Reflecting on the place of beauty in this story suggests that the dative construction *en kalō(i)* is one not of location but of manner or conformity.¹³ To beget in beauty is to beget in conformity to beauty – that is, in conformity to a token of beauty that serves for the male progenitor as a *typic* for his offspring.

What makes a token serve that role is not just its beauty, but the type of love characteristic of the male progenitor. If, like Achilles, he is an honour-lover, for whom happiness consists primarily in virtuous, honour-attracting states of character and actions, it is tokens of these that will arouse his desire to beget. He cannot succeed in begetting unconventional offspring of this sort in the long run, however, unless he also begets conventional ones who preserve them in memory. But, to ensure that they will preserve his memory, he must also transmit his values to them. He must ensure that they will be beautiful – and beautiful, moreover, in the way that he himself is beautiful. We have only to recall the eugenics programme of the *Republic* to imagine how the consequent love he will have for them might manifest itself.

Turning back, now, to someone who, though pregnant in body, is not an honour-lover but an appetitive man, we can see that a similar account applies to him. What attracts him is the beauty of his own appetitive unconventional offspring. It is in conformity with this beauty that he wants to beget. The (bodily) beauty of a female is essential to this enterprise because it is the sort that he both recognizes and is attracted to – it is the sort that can excite his body to respond appropriately. In a sense, therefore, her beauty *is* of the sort that he wants to beget in. That such begetting occurs inside her body is neither here nor there.

Men who are pregnant in soul – to come finally to them – ‘with things that it is fitting for the soul to conceive and beget’, namely, ‘wisdom and the rest of virtue’ (209a2–3), turn not towards women and heterosexual intercourse, but towards boys and pederasty. Poets and ‘those craftsmen who are said to be inventive’ have souls of this sort (209a3–5). ‘By far the greatest and most beautiful kind of wisdom’, however, is the kind that statesmen, such as Solon and Lycurgus, possess, which is concerned with ‘the putting in order of the affairs of cities and households’ and is called temperance and justice (209a5–8). When someone is pregnant with such wisdom, through ‘a divine gift’ (209b2),¹⁴ he ‘warms to beautiful bodies because he is pregnant’, since he will never ‘beget... in the ugly’ (209b4–5). Up to this point, then, the pregnant in soul behave just like the pregnant in body. And that should be no surprise, since such people are pregnant in their bodies too – it is just that they are ‘pregnant in their souls still more than in their bodies’ (209a1–2). When they discover someone with a beautiful body who also has

a beautiful soul, therefore, they ‘welcome the combination – beautiful body *and* soul – even more’ (209b7).

The reason for the warm welcome is that such a boy has the prerequisites needed to inspire or instigate begetting of the relevant sort. As a woman must be beautiful to produce an erection and subsequent ejaculation in a male pregnant in body, so a boy must be beautiful in body and soul to produce their equivalents in a male pregnant in soul. For such a male, the equivalent of the first is being *euthus euporei* – ‘straightaway fluent’, while the equivalent of the second is *logōn peri arētes* – ‘telling stories [or speaking about] virtue’ (209b8). As embryophoric semen, once deposited in the body of a suitable female, begins to grow, so these stories, once deposited in the soul of a suitable boy, begin to shape it towards virtue, since the purpose of telling them is ‘to try to educate’ (209c2).¹⁵ That is why giving birth to stories about virtue can constitute ‘begetting virtue of all sorts’ (209e2–3) – the very thing with which a man pregnant in soul is filled. Some of these stories are poems, like those of Homer and Hesiod, which are used in ethical education (works of art, in our sense); others are the sorts of laws and political constitutions that Lycurgus and Solon are ‘honoured for having begotten’ (209d7–9).¹⁶ What is particularly important for our purposes about these stories, especially those of the legislative and constitutional variety, is that they transmit what their progenitor loves, values and is pregnant with to the next generation, in part by creating (or helping create) a community that inculcates and transmits them.

VI The correct kind of boy-loving

The aspects of ‘the art of love (*ta erōtika*)’ Diotima has discussed to this point are advertised as ones into which Socrates himself could be initiated (209e5–210a1). He can understand appetitive love (the desire for food, drink, sex and the like), that is to say, and also the love of honour and the love of virtue for the sake of honour. But will he be able to take the next step? Diotima is not sure: ‘As for those aspects relating to the final revelation, the ones for the sake of which I have taught you the rest, if one approaches them correctly – I don’t know whether you would be capable of initiation into *them*’ (210a1–2). Her uncertainty parallels an accusation made by Adeimantus, and stems, I think, from the same source:

Amazing Socrates, of all of you who claim to praise justice, beginning from the earliest heroes of old whose accounts survive up to the men of the present day, not one has ever blamed injustice or praised justice except by mentioning the reputations, honours, and rewards that are their consequences. No one has ever adequately described what each does itself, through its own power, by its presence in the soul of the person who possesses it, even if it remains hidden from gods and humans.

No one, whether in poetry or in *private discussions*, has adequately argued that injustice is the greatest evil a soul can have in it, and justice the greatest good. (*Rep.* II.366d7–367a1)

As justice remains reputation–reality indifferent even after the heroes of old (Achilles), the poets (Homer, Hesiod) and those who deal with it in private discussions (Socrates) have done their best to defend it, so beauty, too, remains that way, given what has so far been said (below). As a result, love itself also remains in shadow.

The account that follows is of ‘the correct kind of boy-loving’ (211b6) – the importance of correctness is emphasized (210a2, 4, 6, 8). Couched in the language of initiation into the cult of a mystery religion, it involves A, a man who is still young (210a5), and – in the initial stages, at least – the boy or boys who, one way or another, are the objects of his love. At first, it also seems to involve ‘the one leading (*ho hēgoumenos*)’ A (210a6). As the equivalent of the *mystagōgos*, who was already initiated into the mysteries, he is a ‘teacher (*paidagōgos*) of the art of love’ (210e2–3), and so must already know it, and (presumably) its goal. Were he essential to the story, therefore, the transmission rather than the acquisition of knowledge would apparently have to be its topic. But, in fact, he seems inessential. ‘This is what it is to approach the art of love,’ Diotima says, ‘or be led by someone else in it, in the correct way’ (211b8–c1). It is nonetheless true that, just as her earlier story appeals to divine inspiration to explain the wisdom possessed by craftsmen, poets and statesmen, so this second part partakes not just of the language of mystery cults, but of some of their mystery as well.

Pregnant in soul and body, though less so in the latter, desiring to possess permanently the good things in which happiness consists, and attracted, therefore, by incandescent bodily beauty, A must first ‘love a single body and there beget beautiful accounts’ (210a7–8). Then, as the result of a cognitive process that is not described but is presumed to be correct or reliable, he must ‘realize for himself that the beauty that there is in any body whatever is the twin of that in any other, and that if one is to pursue beauty of outward form, it’s entirely unreasonable (*pollē anoia*) not to regard the beauty in all bodies as one and the same’ (210b3–4). Moreover, that cognitive change must be accompanied by a conative one: ‘having realized that, he must become a lover of all beautiful bodies, and slacken this intense love for one body, disdaining it (*kataphronēsanta*)¹⁷ and considering it a small matter’ (210b4–6). Nothing is said, however, about how that conative change is to be brought about. The assumption is that A’s literally sexual desires are simply weak enough that they do not pose an obstacle – do not render him upwardly blind.

Though the process which results in cognitive change is left largely in the dark, something of its nature can be inferred from its results. The beautiful accounts A produces, for example, are probably attempts to say what beauty

is that cite his beloved's body as a paradigm case, as Euthyphro cites his own action in order to define piety:

I say that what is piety is precisely what I am doing now: prosecuting those who commit an injustice, such as murder or temple-robbery, or those who have done some other such wrong, regardless of whether they are one's father or one's mother or anyone else whatever. Not prosecuting them, on the other hand, is what is an impiety. (*Euphr.* 5d8–e2)

Once A realizes – or is made to realize – that other bodies, besides that of his beloved, are also beautiful, he will need to beget a new account that captures this larger class. But doing so should have the effect of posing him a puzzle: 'Why, given that love is for giving birth in beauty, should I love only this body and not the larger class?' If his love is compliant, if it is not 'entirely unreasonable' but susceptible to reason's intrinsic generality (or universalizability), he will love his beloved's beautiful body less obsessively, because he now loves all other beautiful bodies too.

Next, and again as the result of an undescribed but supposedly reliable cognitive process, A must consider 'beauty in souls more valuable than beauty in the body' (210b6–7). Again, this cognitive achievement must be coupled with conative change: 'so that if someone who is decent in his soul has even a slight physical bloom, even then it's enough for him' (210b6–c2). His appetitive sexual desires, we infer, are weaker than those of the honour-lover – so weak that, if the *Phaedrus* is our guide, he does not need to satisfy them through literal intercourse at all (255e4–c1). Loving and caring for his beloved, however slight his physical bloom, he 'begets and seeks the sorts of accounts that will make young men into better men' (255c2–3). He does this, we are told, 'in order that he may be compelled in turn to contemplate beauty as it exists in practices and laws, and to observe that all of this is mutually related, in order that he should think beauty of body a small matter' (255c4–7).

As in the earlier stage, then, the undescribed process seems to be one of seeking an account of beauty that will apply to all beautiful bodies and to beautiful souls, practices and laws as well. These are 'mutually related', because beauty in souls – virtue – is a consequence of the sort of education mandated by beautiful laws and social practices. Compared with that beauty, the beauty of bodies in general no doubt *should* seem a relatively 'small thing'. The presupposition that laws and social practice will be available to the young man for study, however, and that he will have the cognitive resources necessary to study them, is surely contentious; so much so, indeed, that we can all too readily appreciate the attraction of having a knowledgeable teacher lurk ambiguously in the narrational wings. At the next stage, the attraction proves so irresistible that Diotima herself makes explicit reference to him.

'After activities,' Diotima says, 'he [the teacher or guide] must lead him [A] to the different kinds of knowledge in order that he may in turn (*au*) see the beauty that belongs to kinds of knowledge' (210c7–8). In *Republic VII*, we are given a (partial) list of these, comprising arithmetic, plane and solid geometry, astronomy and harmonics. Moreover, it is recognized that their existence cannot simply be assumed, since their development is a social or political undertaking that remains incomplete (528b5–c7). In what city or social community, then, are we to imagine A finding these kinds of knowledge – these sciences – ready to hand, or finding himself sufficiently educated in them to be able to access and appreciate their beauty? He would need not just a teacher, we see, but one equipped with the sort of supernatural powers to which an adept of a mystery cult might lay claim. Indeed, he would need to share in such powers himself.

The mysterious cognitive process of coming to grasp the beauty belonging to kinds of knowledge has, like its predecessors, a conjoint conative purpose. The guide leads A to it

in order that...looking now towards a beauty that is vast, and no longer slavishly attached to the beauty belonging to a single thing – a young boy, some individual human being, or one kind of practice – he may cease to be worthless and small minded, as his servitude made him, but instead, turned toward the great sea of beauty and contemplating it, may beget many beautiful, even magnificent, accounts and thoughts in a love of wisdom (*philosophia(i)*) that grudges nothing... (210c8–d6)

The threat of upward-blindness can only be neutralized, after all, by an attack on its appetitive causes. In that fecund state of philosophical begetting A remains, 'until having grown and been strengthened there, he may catch sight of a certain single kind of knowledge, which has as its object a beauty of a sort I shall describe to you' (210d6–7).

This beauty, which is 'what is beauty itself' (211d1), is the Platonic form of beauty, of which, now properly trained in the art of love, A will 'all of a sudden' catch sight (210e4). When he has seen and come to know it, Diotima says, 'he would *practically* have the final goal within his reach' (211b7–8). For, although it is easy to forget while reading her rapturous description of beauty itself, and the joys of contemplating it, beauty – however perfect – is never as such the end of the journey. As before, when A reaches it, he has begetting to do:

'Do you think it's a worthless life', she said, 'if a person turns his gaze in that direction and contemplates that beauty with the thing with which one must contemplate it [that is, the rational element in the soul] and is able to have intercourse with it? Or are you not convinced', she said, 'that it is under these conditions alone, as he sees beauty with what has

the power to see it, that he will succeed in begetting, not phantoms of virtue, because he is not grasping a phantom, but true virtue, because he is grasping the truth; and that when he has begotten and nurtured true virtue, it belongs to him to be loved by the gods, and to him, if to any human being, to be immortal?' (212a1–7)

At this point, Diotima stops. But in what sense exactly has she come to the end? Has happiness, the permanent possession of good things, been achieved by A? We are left to solve the mystery for ourselves.

VII Socrates' art of love and its limits

Part of the solution, to be sure, has already been carefully scripted. What A, who is, we may suppose, newly wise and virtuous at time t_1 , will initially have to beget is a t_2 -time-slice of his wise and virtuous self. *PTB* assures us of that much. For such begetting to continue past A's so-called death, too, he must also beget similar time-slices of other, younger, men, who will outlive him. Hence he must find a boy, with a beautiful soul and just enough of a physical bloom, and educate him, so that he becomes of the same wise and virtuous sort as A himself. Again, the foundations for this have been laid. The love he feels for – what we call – his own future possession of good things, his own happiness, will then bind him in the same way to the boy.

He is in love, but with what he does not know; and he neither knows what has happened to him, nor can he even say what it is, but like a man who has caught an eye-disease from someone he can give no account of it, and is unaware that he is seeing himself in his lover as if in a mirror. (*Phdr.* 255d3–6)

A's arrival at the end of his initiation is for that reason also a return to the beginning of his journey. Beautiful boys remain as important to his enterprise as his own later stages.

At the beginning of his initiation, A is already pregnant in soul with wisdom and the rest of virtue. What Diotima purports to be describing, therefore, is a lengthy process of giving birth, even if – as in the case of Socrates' examination of the slave-boy in the *Meno* – it may look more like one of embryo implantation. What justifies her description, if anything does, is the aetiology and educative cure proposed in *Republic* VII (518a1–519b5, above) for upward-blindness combined with the *Phaedrus's* account of beauty's incandescence. There in A's soul is divine reason; there in the body of a particular boy is incandescent beauty. Start with his attachment to that. Then show him the right things in the right order (or ask him the right questions) – again, think of Socrates and the slave-boy – and, on the assumption that the appetites that tie him to the boy's beauty are weak enough, he will

simply *see* what he is supposed to see. The mystery of divine inspiration has been replaced, in other words, by the near-mystery of an intellect or reason that works correctly because it is itself divine.

When Socrates has finished the long report we have been exploring of what Diotima told him about love, he adds an editorial comment about himself:

That's what Diotima said, and I am persuaded by her; since I am persuaded, I try to persuade everyone else too that for acquiring this possession [true virtue] one couldn't easily get a better co-worker with human nature than Love is. That's why I declare that everyone must honour Love, and I myself honour what belongs to him and practise it more than anyone, and call on everyone else to do so, and both now and always I eulogize the power and courage of love to the best of my ability. (212b1–8)

It is a comment, mysterious in itself (where else do we find Socrates practising or honouring love or calling on others to do so?), that recalls another that is equally mysterious: 'The only thing I say I know is the art of love (*ta erōtika*)' (177d8–9). How, we wonder, could a man famous precisely for knowing that he is wise 'in neither a great nor a small way' (*Ap.* 21b4–5) make a confident knowledge claim like that? The answer lies, I think, in a piece of wordplay. The noun *erōs* (verb: *eran*) and the verb *erōtan* ('to ask questions') have cases or parts that are homophonic and homographic. 'Allow me to ask Agathon a few little questions' (199b8–c1), Socrates says to Phaedrus. 'You have my permission,' Phaedrus replies; 'ask away (*all' erōta*)' (199c3). A few lines later Socrates says to Agathon: 'Now try to tell me about love (*peirō dē...kai ton erōta eipein*)' (199e6). It is as if Phaedrus had told Socrates to love away and Socrates had told Agathon to ask him questions. In the *Cratylus*, a basis for the wordplay is provided by a mock etymology: 'The name "hero" (*hērōs*) is only a slightly altered form of the word "love" (*erōs*) – the very thing from which the heroes sprang. And either this is the reason they were called "heroes" or else because they were sophists, clever speech-makers and dialecticians, skilled at questioning (*erōtan*)' (398c5–e5). When Socrates says he knows about the art of love, then, what he really means is that he knows how to ask questions, how to examine or converse elenctically. Thus, when he recalls his confident claim to know the art of love (198d1–2), he explains what he meant by drawing a contrast between the sort of encomia to love given by the other symposiasts and the one he knows how to give:

It seems, you see, that what was proposed was that each of us should *appear* to be offering an encomium to Love, not that he should really offer him one. It's for that reason, I imagine, that you rake up everything you can

think of saying and attribute it to Love, declaring him of such a character and responsible for so many things that he will *appear* as beautiful and good as possible – evidently, to the ignorant sort of people (not, surely, to those with knowledge) ... I'm not prepared to give another encomium in that way; I wouldn't have the capacity to give it. However, if you like, I *am* willing to say what is actually true, on my own terms, and not on those of your speeches, because by your standards I'd be a laughing-stock. So, Phaedrus, see whether you want this kind of speech too – whether you want the truth being told about Love, and in whatever words and arrangement of expressions happen to occur to me. (198e4–b5)

The closing sentence itself recalls the opening of the (earlier in composition though dramatically later) *Apology*, where a similar contrast is drawn in similar terms (17a1–c5). There, as here, it heralds an elenctic examination – of Meletus, in the one case; of Agathon, in the other. Similarly, in the *Lysis*, when Socrates offers to give Hippothales a 'demonstration' of how the art of love should be practised, the demonstration is elenctic in nature (205e2–206c6). And elenctic examination *is* something that Socrates practises 'more than anyone' and advises everyone else to honour and practise, too: 'I say it's the greatest good for a man to discuss virtue every day, and the other things you've heard me discussing and examining myself and others about, on the grounds that the unexamined life isn't worth living for a human being' (38a1–6).

Having solved, in this way, the mystery of Socrates' claim to know, honour and advocate the art of love, we are in a position to make some headway with some of the other mysteries we encountered in exploring Diotima's account of boy-love correctly practised. The young man, pregnant in soul with wisdom and virtue, is ready to love. Love, however, stands revealed now as, so to speak, an elenctic passion – one that correctly proceeds by elenctic examination. Canonically undertaken with the help of Socrates, who is already knowledgeable in the erotic art of asking questions, this can also take the form of self-examination (*Chrm.* 166c7–d2, *H. Ma.* 298a9–c2). We can see in this a basis for Diotima's apparent ambivalence about the need for a guide. When it proceeds correctly, or in the proper order, moreover, elenctic examination always begins by trying to answer the question 'What is it?' before turning to other questions about the target phenomenon (199c5–8; also *Rep.* I.354a13–c3). It tries to produce an account (*logos*) or definition (*horos*). Herein might lie the basis for Diotima's claim that what the young man produces at each stage are accounts of love.

The identification of love with elenctic questioning suggests another identification or association, that of Love (*Erōs*) with the hero (*hērōs*) of the elenchus, Socrates. Though usually thought to be a god, Love, according to Diotima, is not a god but a *daimōn* – a being 'intermediate between god and mortal', whose function is that of 'interpreting and conveying things

from human beings to gods and from gods to human beings' (202d11–e4). He is 'always poor', she says, 'hard, dirty, barefoot, and homeless' with 'lack always as his companion', 'a schemer after the beautiful and good, courageous, impetuous, and intense, a clever hunter, always weaving new devices, both passionate for wisdom and resourceful in looking for it, philosophizing throughout all his life' (203c6–d8). She could almost be describing Socrates, whose *daimonion* or daemonic sign is a perennial feature of his life (*Ap.* 31c8–d4, 40a4–b2), and whom Alcibiades later refers to as a 'genuine *daimōn*' (219b7–c1). 'One couldn't easily get a better co-worker with human nature than Love is,' Socrates says. If elenctic questioning can lead human nature, through its literally sexual attraction to a beautiful body, to divine beauty itself and genuine virtue, he is surely right, and his own daemonic status is ironically self-confirmed. At the same time, working the association between Love and Socrates in the other direction, so to speak, we can see the young man's own love of beauty as itself a daemonic guide that could, in the right circumstances, lead him unaided from his boyfriend's beautiful body to a beauty that will not 'appear to him the sort of thing a face is, or hands, or anything else in which a body shares... but rather as being always itself by itself, in its own company, uniform' (211a5–b2).

When Diotima says that she doesn't know whether Socrates would be capable of initiation into the mysteries of loving boys correctly (210a1–2), the grounds for her reservations might be found, I suggested, in this question: can Socrates show that beauty is valuable for its own sake? Can he show that it is *good* by or because of itself? I noted that Diotima stopped her account of these mysteries before explicitly re-engaging with the issues of goodness and happiness. She refers, to be sure, to the fact that the young man has begotten *true* virtue, but the only connection between it and permanent happiness she so much as intimates requires that the gods notice his virtue and, approving of it, reward him for it. But this is the sort of connection on which a defence of a virtue as something valuable for its own sake cannot rely (*Rep.* II.366e6, above). Diotima's reservations are thus re-echoed by her silence, bringing her account full circle.

VIII Erotic love re-conceived

Reservations, though negative, also have a positive side: 'I don't know whether you could, but maybe you could.' In the present instance, the basis for the positive side lies, I think, mostly in the *non-impossible*. In the *Republic* this is what is appealed to whenever the issue arises of whether Kallipolis could ever be established in practice (VI.499b1–d6, 502a4–c7). The thought, in its relevant form, is that it is *not impossible* that A, pregnant in soul and with suitably compliant appetites, should find himself in a world where laws, constitutions, and kinds of knowledge are available for him to study, and in which he either finds a Socrates to help him study them in the right

order and way or is correctly guided in this by his own love of beauty. It is not impossible, therefore, that a love that begins with an incandescently beautiful body should lead (or be led) through Socratic or elenctic questioning to beauty itself, and to the begetting of genuine virtue.

Suppose that this does happen, so that A, in the manner required by *PTB*, does beget wise and virtuous later stages of himself and others. The question then arises of whether the things he has thus begotten are genuinely good ones, in the permanent possession of which his true happiness consists. It is not a question to be settled by a supposed fact of divine inspiration or divine approval or divine insight. What is wanted is some sort of justification. The mere assertion that the beautiful itself *is* true beauty does not provide it. And we know why. Beauty is reputation–reality indifferent. To show that true beauty is genuinely good, we need to relate it appropriately to the one thing that is not indifferent in that way – namely, the good itself. That we will then come face-to-face with the good's own explanation-elusiveness is, to be sure, a major problem, but it is a different major problem.

One effect of *PTB* is already familiar to us: it forces us to reconfigure our concept of self-interest by redrawing or softening the boundary between ancestor and descendant, self and other. Another, also familiar, is that it softens the boundary between conventional and unconventional offspring – between animate children and inanimate good things such as honour. In effect, conventional offspring, like later stages of oneself, are valuable, lovable or desirable only to the extent that they preserve – in the only way possible for a mortal creature – one's possession of (other) good things, such as the pleasures of food, drink and sex, or honour, or wisdom and virtue (if they are good). A third effect remains to be explored. For what *PTB* also does – at least in the context of the larger Platonic theory of which it is a part – is to force a radical re-conceptualization of the notions, crucial to any theory of erotic love, of the genital, and hence of the very notion of real or literal sex itself.

In the case of an appetitive male pregnant in body, his genital is what produces embryophoric semen, namely, his testes. His erect penis is simply a delivery system for this – an erotogenic zone, a seat of sexual excitation. An honour-loving pregnant male, on the other hand, has two genitals. The first produces embryophoric semen, and so conventional offspring. The second produces unconventional offspring – things like honour-attracting courageous actions and memory traces thereof. Inspired by the knowledge that in the *Republic* honour-lovers have a soul ruled by its spirited element or *thumos*, let us call this a *thumogenital*, which is simply *thumos* in its capacity as generator of unconventional offspring. Similarly, a philosopher has three genitals, the two he shares with the honour-lover, and a third unique to him, which, since his soul is ruled by its rational element or *logistikon*, we may call a *logigenital*, which is simply *logos* in its capacity as generator of unconventional offspring of a distinctive sort – wise and virtuous time-slices of self or of beloved boys.

Because there are these three kinds of genitals, we can ask what kind of genital sex is literally, or really, sex. Most people would say it is the kind that involves the penis – the *epithumigenital* – since this is what begets conventional offspring, little animals of the sort that we really are. But this answer presupposes that we really are little animals. Suppose, however, that what each of us really is, as Plato believed, is the rational element in our souls. Then real sex would involve not the penis, but the *logigenital* – reason. It would be the philosopher talking about virtue to a beautiful boy who would be having real sex, therefore, not the man who ‘does his best to go on four feet like an animal and father offspring’ (*Phdr.* 250e4–5). It is conventionally thought – indeed, it is in dictionaries – that Platonic sex is aim-inhibited or non-genital. That’s not entirely false, obviously, but there is a deeper truth that it conceals.

Implicit in this way of thinking about sex is something that destabilizes or threatens the assumption – common to both *Symposium* and *Phaedrus* – that philosophy, beauty and the complete repression of the epithumigenital somehow go together to ensure that a Platonic philosopher must be a beauty-focused, aim-inhibited paiderast. But, if the true genital is reason, not the testes, and upward-blindness has merely adventitious, non-gender-specific appetitive causes, why should women not be as capable of philosophically begetting in beauty as men? It is a question that intersects with the unsolved mysteries in Diotima’s account of loving boys correctly. Laws and social practices, kinds of knowledge, the educational institutions needed to make their study possible – all these must be available, we saw, if the perception of bodily beauty is to lead to a rational grasp of beauty itself. Imagine a city in which all of them are available, and where reason – by dint of knowing not just beauty, but the good – has adopted the truly best laws and practices as its own. Imagine it possessed of a eugenics programme that breeds people whose weak or pliant appetites make them naturally resistant to upward-blindness, and an educational programme accessible to all of them, regardless of their sex. Imagine that its social roles are open to all capable of filling them, again regardless of sex. In that city, if the *Republic* is to be our guide, we will find women philosophers, for whom the good, not the beautiful, is the greatest object of study, having all sorts of non-aim-inhibited sex – including the sort that we used to think alone deserved to be called real.

Notes

1. See my (2008).
2. Translations of the *Symposium* are based on C. J. Rowe (1998).
3. Hackforth (1952, 94) follows Hermeias in claiming that the “dull organs” are in fact the inadequate reasoning powers of man’. But this seems mistaken. The fact that these organs are dulled specifically by the absence of light suggests that they

must be the eyes, which are ‘dimmed (*amblyōttousi*) and seem nearly blind’ when ‘the light of day (*to hēmerinon phōs*)’ gives way to the dimmer ‘lights of night (*nukterina*)’, that is, the stars (*Rep.* VI.508c4–7). This is made certain by the generalizing claim made at d5–6: ‘if it [wisdom] allowed some clear image of itself to reach *our sight*, and so too with *the other lovable objects*’.

4. Reading τούτου with Bast for mss τοῦτο.
5. See *Phil.* 65a1–2: ‘If we cannot capture the good in *one* form, we will have to take hold of it in a conjunction of three: beauty, proportion, and truth’.
6. *Skuthrōpon* means (among other things) ‘sad-looking’, so, like sad-looking vegetables, limp; *lupoumenon suspeiratai* means ‘to frown with pain’.
7. Translations of the *Phaedrus* are based on C. J. Rowe (1986).
8. See *Rep.* X.611b9–612a6.
9. Cf. *hubrei* at *Phdr.* 250e5.
10. Here *eidos* means part, as it does elsewhere in the *Republic*, so that that the sense is ‘having many parts or just one’.
11. One problem for this way of interpreting these texts is the sentence ‘it is not easy... for something to be immortal when (τε) it is composed of many elements and (καί) is not composed in the most beautiful way.’ For it seems to allow that even a complex soul could be immortal provided it is beautifully put together. Τε... καί, however, is ‘often used to unite complements’, where ‘the second may be stronger than the first’ (Smyth 1980, 667). And that is how consistency requires it to be taken here. The sense is: ‘when it is composed of many elements and, moreover, not composed in the most beautiful way’. Only one possibility, in other words, is in view – that of a soul which cannot easily be immortal, because it is composed of many elements. To be sure, the complex soul does become ‘entirely one’ (443e1–2) when reason rules in it. But the unity it then achieves, since it is ‘out of many’, is not of the natural or metaphysical sort that constitutes an absolute barrier to disintegration and belongs to reason alone. I discuss this more fully in ‘Soul-Parts in Plato’ (forthcoming).
12. Rowe (1986, 184, ad loc.) comments that *A*’s pleasure is *para phusin* because ‘it is the pleasure of an animal, not a man’.
13. See Smyth (1980, 377, 1687 c).
14. Compare *Meno* 99c–d, where statesmen, like poets and soothsayers, are said to guide their cities correctly, not through wisdom, but through divine inspiration.
15. A man who has ‘[seeds] of knowledge about what is just, and what is beautiful, and what is good’ (*Phdr.* 276c3–4) and is ‘in earnest (*spoudē*) about them... makes use of the craft of dialectic, and taking a fitting soul plants and sows in it stories accompanied by knowledge (*met’ epistēmēs logous*), which are able to help themselves and the man who planted them, and are not without fruit but contain a seed, from which others grow in other soils, capable of rendering it forever immortal, and making the one who has it as happy as it is possible for a man to be’ (276e5–277a4).
16. ‘We ourselves are poets,’ the Athenian Stranger says in the *Laws*, ‘who have to the best of our ability created a tragedy that is the finest and the best; at any rate, our entire constitution is constructed as an imitation of the finest and best way of life – the very thing which we claim is the truest tragedy’ (817b1–5).
17. See Price (1989, 44): ‘taking *no* interest in physical beauty (216d8) and thinking it of *no* account (e3) go with “disdaining” it “to an almost incredible degree” (d8–e1); an unintensified “disdaining” (more literally, “looking down upon”) need amount to no more than... putting in its place’.

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9

Beyond the Mirror of Nature: Plato's Ethics of Visual Form

Stephen Halliwell

La peinture est l'art d'aller à l'âme par l'entremise des yeux.

(Diderot)¹

The figurative arts, above all painting, constitute an almost ever-present paradigm and point of reference for ancient discussions of mimesis. While poetry may be the artform that commands the most attention, painting and sculpture are seldom far from view: the affinities of poetic and visual mimesis are reflected in the numerous references to visual works of art in texts concerned primarily with literature. The tradition of such appeals goes back beyond Aristotle's *Poetics*, in which painting is cited as a parallel to poetry on a total of eight occasions, and even beyond Plato's own frequent comparisons of the two arts, not least in the momentous conjunction of painting and poetry in *Republic* Book X.² The aesthetic association of poetry and painting is at least as old as the poet Simonides, who near the end of the sixth century B.C. famously described poetry as 'speaking painting' or 'painting with a voice' (*zōigraphia phtheggomenē/lalousa*), painting as 'silent poetry'.³ In doing so he provided some impetus to a line of thought that, via a long and influential tradition conventionally summed up by Horace's phrase 'ut pictura poesis', descends all the way to Lessing's *Laokoon* of 1766 and, beyond it, to continuing modern debates about the affinities and contrasts between various species of art.⁴ Lessing's treatise begins with an explicit protest against the exaggerated influence of Simonides' aphorism, though not, significantly, against the aphorism itself. In fact, Lessing displays his own adherence to a mimetic conception of art precisely by his approval of the idea that underlies Simonides' saying. Lessing interprets this idea as the insight that both poetry (that is, on his definition, all the arts which use 'progressive' or sequential means of representation) and painting (that is, all visual arts) put before us, in the words of his preface, 'absent things as present, appearances as reality' (*Beide [Künste] ... stellen uns abwesende Dinge als gegenwärtig, den Schein als Wirklichkeit vor*), a formulation that could plausibly serve to encapsulate the nucleus of the entire tradition of mimeticism (Lessing 1970–9, vol. 6, 9).⁵

Mimesis is still a widely misunderstood concept; its continued translation as ‘imitation’, which has become largely inimical to any effort to do justice to the scope and ramifications of the concept, is only the most immediate index of this state of affairs. In so far as ‘imitation’ suggests the replication of ‘mere appearances’ – a mirroring, as Gombrich puts it, of visible surfaces – we may justly wonder whether any mimetic theory of art that relies on such a conception can generate a credible aesthetics. The traditional metaphor of a painting or other work of art as a ‘mirror’ of reality could be thought to be doubly unfortunate, because it obscures not only the interpretive character of representation itself but the responses of a cooperatively engaged viewer. Can a mimetic theory of pictorial art, in particular, be profitable, we ought to ask, without admitting the need to regard a painting as something more than a purely visual field, something more than a construction of (mere) ‘appearances’? If not, where does this leave the mimetic ‘mirroring’ of reality? I hope to show that these questions are highly pertinent to understanding the famous Platonic treatment of painting in *Republic X*.

I The pre-platonic debates: the bridge from art to life

We can be confident that questions regarding the status and character of visual mimesis were under discussion in classical Athens even before Plato’s incisive entry into the argument. Although direct evidence for fifth-century arguments about images is scarce, we have enough clues to make it reasonable to believe that there was much more of a culture of interpretive debate about visual art than we can now reconstruct in detail. Consider the implications of Plato’s *Ion* 532e–33b, where Socrates alludes in passing to the critical exposition or exegesis (*epideiknunai* and *exēgeisthai* are the verbs) of the productions of major painters such as Polygnotus. The reference, though embedded in a context of heavy irony about Ion’s own credentials as poetic exegete, marks the recognition of a parallelism within established cultural practice between ‘expert’ discourse about pictures and about poetry; and, while Plato can be notoriously insouciant about historical consistency, it is implausible to suppose there could have been anything incongruous about making Socrates take for granted the existence of expert discussion of pictorial art. Moreover, the verb *epideiknunai* (literally ‘to give a demonstration’) used in this passage, matching Ion’s own hermeneutic activities with poetry (530d5, 541e–2a), belongs to a word group that has strong associations with sophistic display-rhetoric, ‘epideictic’ rhetoric no less. Sophistic discussion of visual art was surely more extensive than the hints in our sources now reveal. We have evidence that Hippias of Elis discussed painting and sculpture, while the *Dissoi Logoi* applies to painting, as well as tragedy, the paradox of aesthetic ‘deception’ articulated in connection with poetry by Gorgias, who himself refers to painting and sculpture in his *Helen*.⁶ Other possible echoes of pre-Platonic debates about visual art include Alcidas’ *Sophists* 27–8, of

disputed date though placed by many scholars in the 390s or 380s, in which mimesis terminology is applied to visual art without any sign of novelty, and the 'Hippocratic' treatise *De victu* 1.21, arguably of fifth-century origin, which states that sculptors produce mimesis of the human body 'except for the soul' (*plēn psuchēs*), a remark whose resonance chimes with a passage of Xenophon shortly to be discussed.⁷ It is wholly unwarranted to suppose that the application of mimetic terminology to pictorial art was an innovation of the fourth century, whether by Plato or anyone else.⁸

The earliest non-Platonic text to give us a fuller flavour of discussion of the relationship between appearances and meaning in visual mimesis is the passage of Xenophon's *Memorabilia* in which Socrates speaks to the painter Parrhasius and the sculptor Cleiton and invites both of them to ponder the representational capability of their artforms.⁹ Although this text may have been written as late as the 350s, its rich vocabulary of visual representation is likely to give us a glimpse of issues and debates already under way in the previous century, even if the relationship of these issues to Socrates himself and to the actual artists concerned must remain a matter for speculation. However fictional Xenophon's elaboration of these conversations may be, they suggest that he expected his readers to recognize not just the possibility of informed discussion of visual images, but, more significantly, the emergence of philosophical considerations about mimesis from technical questions about figurative art. To that extent at least, these anecdotes open a window, I submit, on the background to certain Platonic arguments.

Socrates' questions to the artists focus on how one gets, or whether one can get, from the design of a visual field ('shapes and colours') to the representation or expression of non-sensory, perhaps non-material properties.¹⁰ With Parrhasius, Socrates starts from the premise that painting is 'imaging/modelling of the visible world' (*eikasia tōn horōmenōn*) and moves to overcome the painter's initial doubt whether visual mimesis can depict 'character' (*ēthos*) by proposing that painting can show character 'through' (*dia*) its physical expression, especially on the face.¹¹ Socrates is here raising a basic question about the relationship of 'appearances' (*phainomena*) to human meaning. In part, it is worth adding, this question is about 'life' as much as about 'art': the question how we can 'see' or perceive character at all. In this connection Socrates' intransitive use of the verb *diaphainein* (to show through) at 3.10.5, of the link between outer bodily signs (including the face) and 'inner' *ēthos*, is extremely interesting.¹² Character 'shows through'; it is a sort of emergent property. This metaphorical transparency is first applied to the phenomenology, the direct experience, of character in general, and then turned by Socrates into a justification for ascribing to figural art the capacity (which Parrhasius had originally doubted) to depict or express character in its visual medium.

A bridge from life to art is constructed once more by Socrates' question to the sculptor Cleiton, 'how do you produce/realize (*energazesthai*) the

appearance of life (*to zōtikon phainesthai*) in your figures?’, which crisply epitomizes a concern running through both earlier and later Greek ideas of what one might call the quasi-vitalistic quality of mimesis.¹³ In the phrasing of this question, the adjective *zōtikon* identifies the simulation of ‘life’ that a viewer may experience ‘in’ an image, the sense of what might be termed its vividly ‘world-like’ properties, while the verb *energazesthai*, literally ‘to work into’, contrastingly marks the artefactuality, the concretely ‘manufactured’ status, of the image. These two things are held together, so to speak, by the concept of appearances (*phainesthai*). The notion of artistic appearance, semblance or even illusion has a long history in aesthetics; it is the realm, for instance, of what eighteenth-century German aestheticians liked to call *Schein*. As Lessing remarks in his preface to *Laokoon*, both painting and poetry, notwithstanding their differences, ‘put before us... appearances as reality’ (*stellen uns ... den Schein als Wirklichkeit vor*). Even within the limitations of the short conversations related by Xenophon in the *Memorabilia*, we can discern a tension – a tension that turns out, on my reading, to be pivotal to the entire legacy of mimesis – between divergent views of representational art as, on the one side, fictive illusion, the product of ‘deceptive’ artifice, and, on the other, a reflection of and engagement with reality (that sense of ‘life’). We need not attribute to Xenophon a deep insight into fundamental issues of aesthetics in order to take Socrates’ alleged conversations with a painter and a sculptor as at any rate oblique evidence for the development of a philosophical analysis of images in the intellectual climate of late fifth and early fourth-century Athens. It was within that climate that Plato’s thinking about visual mimesis evolved.

II The ethics of form

It is worthwhile, in approaching the place of painting in Plato’s conception of mimesis, to register that both he and Aristotle mention visual arts on many occasions and in many kinds of context – psychological, political, scientific, even metaphysical. Neither of them, however, addresses the subject in a sustained way, although Plato, in *Republic X*, comes closer to doing so than Aristotle. For the most part their references to painting consist of analogies, metaphors, and *obiter dicta*. But that does not make them negligible: the analogies and metaphors of philosophers can be revealing, indeed partly constitutive, of their patterns of thought. Both philosophers refer often to figurative art partly because of its prominence in the surrounding culture, especially in Athens, where painting, sculpture and other visual arts had a pervasiveness reflected in Plato’s description of the ‘city of luxury’, with its pathology of cultural ‘fever’, in *Republic II* (*Rep. II.373b*).¹⁴

Aristotle, as one might expect, generally mentions painting in ways that concede its respectable existence as an artistic activity: Aristotle, we can say, has no quarrel with painting. In keeping with this, he shows signs of

careful observation of some of the things that painters do, noticing, for example (in a passage rather neglected by historians of Greek art), a technique involving the overlay of less vivid upon more vivid colour for the depiction of objects under water or in haze; or citing the kinds of colours that painters can and cannot produce by mixing.¹⁵ Plato, on the other hand, is often apparently dismissive of pictorial technique. Even when he seems to acknowledge its importance, as he tends to do in passing allusions to 'good' painters or painting (for example, at *Rep.* X.598c2), or when he touches on quasi-technical details, as in a series of highly controversial mentions of *skiagraphia*, literally 'shadow painting', he rarely displays an Aristotelian interest in such things on their own terms.¹⁶ But that, perhaps paradoxically, is precisely why Plato's references to painting (and, like Plato himself, I sometimes use 'painting' as a synecdoche for the figurative arts as a whole) tend to be philosophically more far-reaching than Aristotle's, above all in the sense that they come to attach themselves to central elements in his own thinking and writing. Although Aristotle is respectful of the practices of pictorial and other visual arts, his remarks on them are almost always peripheral to his own thought. If painting had not existed, it would perhaps not ultimately have mattered much to Aristotle's philosophical scheme of things, but it would have deprived Plato of a recurrent and telling, if profoundly ambiguous, source of reflections on human attempts to model and interpret reality.¹⁷

From *Cratylus* onward, at any rate, Plato returns repeatedly to the idea and language of mimetic images in order to pose questions about how the nature of those images, both pictorial and otherwise, and particularly their relationship to putative originals or models, might be construed. Such concerns occur in some of the most memorable and widely discussed contexts of the Platonic dialogues, such as the unforgettable Sun, Line and Cave analogies in *Republic* VI–VII, or the *Timaeus*'s discussion of the creation of the world, by the demiurge and his assistants, as an image, in matter and time, of a timeless model – a work of cosmic mimesis.¹⁸ Despite their frequently polemical tone, Plato's references to images and pictures become associated with anxieties that are integral to his own lines of philosophical inquiry, especially in the later dialogues. While taking some account here of this important factor, my own aim is not to re-examine the independent philosophical uses to which Plato puts the concept of images, both literal (visual) and metaphorical, in his work. Nor do I want simply to try to extract art-historical information from Plato, a task fraught with dangers and one that many others have undertaken.¹⁹ I want, instead, to foreground some of the various ways in which pictorial art is approached in the dialogues, and thereby to counteract the common belief that Plato possessed both a unitary and a severely reductive view of the status of visual mimesis. Central to my account is the claim that Plato's attitude to the visual arts is more exploratory and fluid than is usually realized. Standard accounts of Plato's

supposed ‘hostility’ to painting, including many attempts to trace evolving patterns in his references to the art and its practitioners, are greatly simplified; they depend on over-dogmatizing readings of individual arguments, and they often miss subtleties within those arguments. Crucial, of course, is *Republic X*, in particular the infamous mirror analogy of 596d–e. But, as a prelude to a fresh discussion of that most notorious of texts, I want first to construct a broader chart of some of Plato’s more philosophically important references to visual art.

Perhaps the nearest Plato comes to providing a definition of pictorial mimesis is in the *Cratylus*, which may be the earliest Platonic dialogue in which the subject of artistic mimesis arises. In the course of attempting to work out a hypothetical semantics of language (later rejected, we need to remember), Socrates here sketches an analogous ‘semantics’ of visual signification (*sēmainein*, *Cra.* 422e4) based on the idea of resemblance or correspondence (*Cra.* 422e–23e).²⁰ Pictorial mimesis, on this admittedly rudimentary account, uses a visually organized field (‘shape and colour’) to produce ‘likenesses’ (*homoia*, *homoiotētes*) of things. But the *Cratylus* importantly acknowledges that the relationship between a graphic image or likeness and its object or model is not confined to the copying of actual particulars in the world. In addition to images such as portraits, which are by definition correlated with individuals, there are images that represent imaginary members of classes such as ‘man’ and ‘woman’, or even, perhaps, the classes themselves (*Cra.* 430a–31d). This passage is, therefore, incompatible with the common belief that Plato consistently limits visual mimesis to the ‘mirroring’ of visible reality, an issue that will later prove central to the interpretation of *Republic X*. And there are two sides to this point: one touches the ‘semantic’ status of an image’s representational content (its relationship to identifiable items in the world); the other concerns the optical conditions of visual mimesis (the nature of the ‘likeness’ of its perceptual properties to the perceptual properties of objects in the world). My denial that we can discover a uniform ‘mirror theory’ of mimetic art in Plato applies in both these respects, as will later become clear.

It is highly germane in this connection to recall the admiration expressed by the Athenian in the *Laws* for Egyptian art as a paradigm of cultural stability and conservatism.²¹ Whatever else Plato believed about Egyptian art, he must have known – although the Athenian does not comment expressly on this – that its pictorial traditions did not depend on the pursuit of optical naturalism through techniques of foreshortening, modelling and the like, as employed by Greek artists in Plato’s own time. So the Athenian’s praise of Egypt implies the possibility of approval for at least some kinds of non-naturalistic and heavily stylized figural art. Now, another much-cited Platonic text explicitly contrasts different types and conventions of visual representation, namely, the *Sophist’s* distinction between two kinds of mimesis or image-making, the ‘eicastic’ and the ‘phantastic’. However,

this distinction (whose primary function is to enable the unfavourable dissection of the sophist's own intellectual pretensions) is not the same as that between naturalistic and non-naturalistic images, but marks the difference between an image that preserves (measurable) ontological fidelity to the proportions (*summetriai*) and surface features of whatever it depicts and, on the other hand, an image that is deliberately adjusted to suit the perceptual point of view from which a human observer contemplates it.²² Precisely because this passage of the *Sophist* places most painting, and indeed most mimesis, in the second category (*phantastikē*), it actually corroborates my thesis that Plato does not take the pursuit of literal correspondence between depictions and objects in the world to be a necessary condition for visual mimesis *per se*. Furthermore, juxtaposition with the *Laws*' references to Egyptian art shows that the consequences of this point are not intrinsically negative.

It is also instructive here to recall the passage from *Cratylus* which adumbrates a 'qualitative' conception of visual images and rejects the need for mimesis to justify itself in terms of replicatory fidelity (*Cra.* 432a–d). 'Correctness' (*orthotēs*), the criterion of acceptable representational rendering, is there explicitly construed as something different from measurable ('mathematical') correspondence to the depicted object. That might in turn make us wonder how strictly Plato would have wanted to press the definition of eicastic mimesis in the *Sophist*.²³ But, leaving that unanswerable question aside, my immediate point is that, if we put the *Cratylus*'s 'qualitative' conception of pictorial correctness together with the basic implications of the eicastic–phantastic distinction in the *Sophist*, what emerges is a Platonic recognition that the kinds of relationship to the world that qualify images as types of 'likeness' (*homoiotēs*) are not unitary but artistically and culturally variable. These two passages thus give some broader conceptual support to the contrast drawn between the pictorial (and other artistic) traditions of Greece and Egypt in the *Laws*.

It is my provisional contention, then – provisional, because still to be tested against *Republic X* – that Plato's argumentative strategies toward painting do not depend on the supposition that visual mimesis is intrinsically or necessarily mirror-like in its aspirations, and do not suggest that such aspirations furnish the sole, or even the most important, criterion of the value of artistic images. There is no such thing, I maintain, as a single, fixed Platonic paradigm for the evaluation of the images of figurative art. In fact, Plato's multifarious references to painting betray a recurrent tension between at least two models and standards of visual representation: the first, as, for example, in the *Sophist*'s concept of 'eicastic' image-making, that of a maximized match or fidelity between a mimetic image and the visible properties of its (supposed) original or exemplar; the second, as, for example, at *Cratylus* 432a–d, that of the artistic selection, manipulation and 'reconfiguration' of appearances, with a concomitant awareness of the image's inescapable

divergence from the properties of its 'original'. The reasons for this tension reach down far into the foundations of Platonic philosophy.²⁴

It is clearly pertinent in this context that a number of Platonic texts, including *Cratylus* 430a–31d (with its indication that not all depictions are of individuals), recognize that the objects of visual representation need not exist independently in reality, a principle Aristotle was to apply more thoroughly to the interpretation of mimesis in *Poetics* 25.1460b8–11. Particularly remarkable is the fact that we encounter this point in as many as five passages in the central books of the *Republic*, four of which include the term *paradeigma* – 'model', 'exemplar', but also 'ideal'. At V.472d Socrates compares the status of his hypothetical city to a good painter's rendering of an ideal (*paradeigma*) of human beauty that might never be found anywhere in the flesh, and he proposes that such a representation would not for that reason be artistically any less valuable.²⁵ At VI.484c Socrates says that, unlike true philosopher–rulers, political leaders who lack philosophical knowledge 'have no vividly clear *paradeigma* in their mind' to which they can constantly 'look' and refer, as painters do, in trying to match their work with their models.²⁶ Shortly after this, in the prelude to his parable of the deaf shipowner and the unruly sailors, Socrates cites painting's invention of such fictive entities as goat-stags, compounded from different elements of reality (*Rep.* VI.487e–88a).²⁷ In a more extended comparison between philosophers and painters, at VI.500e–501c, Socrates restates his programme for philosopher–rulers by asserting that the city will never flourish in happiness 'unless its form is delineated by the painters who use the divine model (*paradeigma*)'.²⁸ And this fascinating sequence of passages is concluded at VII.540a, in terms that echo all the earlier ones, with a description of the climax of philosophical training as the moment when the mind's eye can be opened to the light of the good itself, which the philosopher–rulers will then take as their perpetual ideal model (*paradeigma*).

In addition to intimating that the *Republic* itself is a kind of philosophical word-picture,²⁹ the cumulative force of these analogies seems to converge on the thought that philosophers are painters in another medium, in the sense that they endeavour to give vivid realization or embodiment to ideals conceived in and held before their minds. The metaphorical character of these passages should not, of course, be allowed to obscure critical differences. The philosopher's *paradeigma* is putatively immaterial and, in some sense, transcendent; the painter's, even if fictive or imaginary, has to be linked to possibilities of the visible.³⁰ These passages, with others already cited, nonetheless confirm a Platonic awareness that the status of a painter's *paradeigma*, and therefore the significance of what he paints, is variable. Although they imply an effort to match a depiction as closely as possible to a model or 'original', they leave entirely open the source and status of the latter in particular cases.

The contention that Platonic texts do not reduce either the aim or the value of visual mimesis to that of mirror-like reflection of the phenomenal world can be both reinforced and deepened by bringing into the reckoning some Platonic references to ‘beauty’ (*kallos*, *to kalon*) in painting and other figural arts. Without attempting to harmonize the diverse contexts of these references into anything like a seamless doctrine, I suggest that we can detect behind many of them an earnest Platonic commitment to what might be called the ethics of form. This is perhaps most concisely, though not unproblematically, summed up by *Laws* II.668e–69b, in which the judge of the beauty of any mimetic image (*eikōn*) is required to know three things: first, the identity of the object shown; second, how ‘correctly’ (*orthōs*) it is represented (though we have already seen that the criteria of such correctness need not be simple); third, how ‘well’ (*eu*) it has been depicted. It is reasonable here to recognize overlapping and connected criteria – the ‘what?’ the ‘how?’ and the ‘what for?’ – of the beauty of representation, and this nexus of considerations entitles us to speak in terms of a concept of ethical form.³¹ On this account, the beauty of a mimetic work (visual or otherwise; 669a8) depends not on straightforward, one-to-one correspondence to a (putative) model but on a complex relationship in which a certain kind of purposiveness (‘what it [sc. an image] wants/intends/means’, *ti pote bouletai*, 668c6) must be taken into account, and in which mimetic imaging turns from a technical into an ethical activity. This section of *Laws* II does not yield a wholly perspicuous theory of the connections between the representational form and the ethical significance of mimetic art, but it does unquestionably try to formulate an interplay between them, and thereby offers something much less unambiguous, in the case of the visual arts, than a concept of mimetic mirroring.

Something comparable can be seen at *Republic* III.401a–d, a very important passage that stands as the culmination of the analysis of the use of poetry and music in education. As a tailpiece to that analysis Socrates generalizes the principle of ethical form to all mimesis – in fact, to the entire fabric of a culture – and in the process re-extends the concept of mimesis, as I stressed elsewhere, beyond the category of dramatic impersonation previously defined at 392d–394c.³² At 401 he states that painting is ‘full’ of formal manifestations of ‘character’ (*ēthos*), and he speaks of mimesis in a way that should be construed, in part at least, as a concept of expression (matching the earlier, Damonian idea of music as ‘mimesis of life’, *Rep.* III.400a7),³³ saying that beautiful form (*euschēmosunē*) involves *mimēmata* of good character: beauty of form is a matter not just of appearances but of appearances that embody and convey ethical value. This last passage contains one of the most wide-ranging statements about mimetic art to be found anywhere in Plato, and it rests on the proposition that in the visual arts (and elsewhere) form is not neutrally depictive but communicative of feeling and value. Although the view Socrates puts forward here is not exactly the same as the

one attributed to him in the passage of Xenophon's *Memorabilia* discussed earlier, there is an intriguing kinship between them: it would be a bold, though not unsustainable, hypothesis that an authentically Socratic view lies behind them. In both cases we can see at work an idea of the enrichment of representation by an implicitly evaluative dimension: in Xenophon's anecdote it is a case of character (*ēthos*) showing 'through' the figures depicted; in *Republic* III it is a matter of the form of the mimetic artwork as a whole (including that of individual figures) serving as a medium for affective and ethical attitudes. In both contexts, but much more forcefully in the *Republic*, mimesis is taken to be inescapably engaged in making moral sense of the human world – not just *registering* appearances, but actively *construing*, interpreting and judging them. That gives us a vital sense of why beauty in the figurative arts is regularly taken in Plato to entail something other, or more, than optically definable or apprehensible accuracy.³⁴ Mimetic beauty, for Plato, is an expressive form of ethical value.

III More than meets the eye: the mirror of *Republic* X

It is time to confront the longest and most notorious Platonic treatment of painting – the first part of *Republic* Book X. It is time, in other words, to face the spectre of Plato's mirror, the mirror to which the painter's mimetic activity (and therefore that of the poet too) is, it seems to many, directly compared at 596d–e, a passage Ernst Gombrich suggested had 'haunted the philosophy of art ever since' (Gombrich 1977, 83).³⁵ *Republic* X's use of the mirror motif, which we know was not original to Plato,³⁶ is part of a larger argument that relegates the products of both painting and poetry to a level 'twice removed from the truth', making them in some sense inferior even to the artefacts produced by carpenters and others, let alone to the realm of truth and reality constituted by forms or ideas. One thing that needs saying immediately is that, although painting here serves an analogical function, and is certainly of secondary interest in relation to poetry, this does not give us justification for dismissing Socrates' remarks about painting as somehow lightweight, though that is precisely how they have often been treated. On the contrary, the question posed by Socrates at the very start of this section is: 'What is the nature of mimesis *as a whole*?' or 'of mimesis in general?' (*holōs*, X.595c7; cf. X.603a11). Poetry, for various reasons, is Plato's main concern; but the conjunction of two mimetic arts is nonetheless significant as a means of broaching larger themes about all mimetic representation. This will prove a key factor for the direction of my own argument.

Much that has been written about this section of Book X has underestimated, and sometimes altogether missed, the rhetorical and even satirical dimensions of the passage.³⁷ What we come up against here is a testing instance of the need to read many, maybe most, Platonic arguments as more than formal structures of reasoning, and to take account of the tonal

and attitudinal factors with which particular speakers, above all, of course, Socrates, put forward particular claims. It is a quality of Plato's writing in general – a quality plausibly to be thought of as inspired by his experience of Socrates' own personality³⁸ – that it calls for a constant alertness in its readers to the presence of 'subtexts'. In the present case the tone is set at the start by Socrates' paradoxical suggestion that 'making everything' (a motif already found in connection with painting in Empedocles) is, where a mirror is involved, 'not difficult' (X.596d8), a slur that cannot be applied literally to the visual arts themselves, because their status as *technē*, an accomplished skill, is conceded throughout the dialogues.³⁹ This semi-satirical touch is sustained later both by the sarcastic gibe that *trompe l'oeil* effects can fool only 'children and stupid adults' (598c2) and by the choice of cobblers and carpenters as objects of figural art (598b–c).

The significance of this last detail has been generally obscured by the mistaken assumption that Plato's argument here is about the kind of Greek painting we still have substantial access to, namely, vase painting. But the idea of *trompe l'oeil*, with the requirement of distance viewing at X.598c3,⁴⁰ establishes a reference to the major but largely lost forms of wall and panel painting in whose predominantly mythological and historical subjects (subjects, we need to remember, largely shared with poetry) the depiction of low-grade artisans cannot have been at all typical.⁴¹ Too many readings of *Republic X* have completely ignored the rhetorically provocative character of the argument about painting, and have consequently failed to consider the possibility of taking the mirror as part of a challenge to refine the conception of (pictorial) mimesis that is at stake here. To treat a Platonic argument as a challenge of this sort is hardly arbitrary: it is precisely what Socrates himself indicates later in Book X, in relation to the critique of poetry, when he invites the art's defenders or advocates to produce a new justification of it that takes account of the problems raised by the preceding discussion (X.607d–e).⁴² It is certainly reasonable to suppose that it mattered much more to Plato whether such a challenge could be taken up in the case of poetry than in that of painting. But to ignore the equivalent possibility in the case of painting, and to take the earlier part of Book X as an unequivocal condemnation of visual mimesis, is to run the risk of missing part of Plato's point.⁴³

But how exactly can a recognition of rhetorical and satirical tone affect our interpretation of the arguments that Plato here gives to Socrates? My suggestion is that the rhetoric makes a specific difference if we see it as serving a provocative function – that is, as a way of issuing an intellectual challenge to those who hold certain unquestioned assumptions about mimesis. Even as regards the immediate implications of the mirror comparison itself, the force of the passage is more subtle and teasing than common paraphrase would make one believe. Socrates refers to the use of a mirror not as an exact analogue to what mimetic artists do, but as a provocative illustration of

how 'easy' it is (cf. X.599a1), in a certain sense, to 'make everything' (*panta poiein*, X.596c–e; cf. X.598b); at the same time, the passage introduces a cardinal (but also, note, a far from esoteric) ontological distinction between appearance and reality. It is crucial, therefore, to notice two things that the mirror simile (and its sequel) does *not* say or entail: first, that all painting actually purports to be a 'mirroring' of the world, in the sense of striving for optimum optical fidelity to the appearances of things; second, that painters always or even normally aim to represent actual models in the world (a supposition that we have seen would clash with other passages of the *Republic*).⁴⁴ These two negative observations add weight to the claim I have already advanced that the introduction of the mirror analogy is presented as part of a deliberately provocative stance on Socrates' part. The assimilation of painting's capacity of 'making everything' to something as easy and commonplace as holding up a mirror does not constitute a direct condemnation of painting as necessarily or limitingly mirror-like, but issues a challenge to consider whether, and with what consequences, it is appropriate to think of painting as a reflector of appearances. The mirror is not a definitive conclusion but a dialectical gambit.

It is sometimes thought that Book X's arguments about painting depend so heavily on the metaphysics of forms, introduced at the start (X.596a–b, actually before painting has been mentioned), that those arguments must stand or fall *with* that metaphysics. But I want to insist, in the first place, that Socrates' use of painting as an analogy does not hang on any particular view of the so-called theory of forms. At X.596e–97e Socrates puts forward a tripartite and hierarchical scheme of (i) perfect being, reality and truth (the realm of 'god' and 'nature'), (ii) material particulars (including the products of artisan crafts such as carpentry), (iii) 'semblances' or 'simulacra', *phainomena*, *eidōla*, *phantasmata* (the realm of mimetic artists, *mimētai*). The status of the top tier of this scheme has often embarrassed Platonic specialists, both because it appears to posit metaphysical forms of general classes such as 'couch' and because it appears to give even a carpenter mental or conceptual access to such forms (X.596b7).⁴⁵ Now, it is important to see that, whatever the thrust of Platonic metaphysics may be in other passages, Socrates' tripartite schema in Book X can function as a stimulus to further scrutiny of the status of mimetic art (both visual and poetic) provided we can give *some* sense to the notion of a domain of truth and reality that goes beyond that of material or sensible particulars. If we call this domain the domain of philosophical truth, then one aspect of Socrates' analysis will be the double suggestion that such truth cannot be captured by an account of the material world alone, and that representational art, because it is embedded in experience of the world as empirical phenomenon, inevitably distances us from the search for philosophical truth. But the carpenter's grasp of a 'form' or 'idea' of his artefact, whether *qua* mental blueprint or a set of constitutive principles, shows that Plato cannot want the top tier of his schema

to signify something exclusively philosophical, let alone transcendent of human experience. The carpenter's knowledge must be the summation of technical competence, not abstract intellectual insight.

It calls for some emphasis, in any case, that the second and third levels of Socrates' tripartition frame a problem that is, or can be made, independent of the top level itself. The suggestion that painting deals in 'simulacra' – in insubstantial appearances that are ontologically secondary and inferior to the particulars of the material world – does not depend for its force on a 'theory of forms' (in whatever version or interpretation), or even on a conception of strictly philosophical truth. It is often overlooked that most of what is said about painting in *Republic X* addresses the relationship between painting and the visible or material world, not that between mimesis and some 'higher' domain of truth or reality. Even the second phase of the argument (X.598a–d) does not really depend on forms for its main point, namely, that painting produces appearances that are, when judged in relation to relevant kinds of real objects in the world, mere simulacra (*phantasmata*, *eidōla*). We can get a purchase on this point by noticing the parallelism of language between X.597a and 598b (which belong, respectively, to what I have called the first and second phases of the argument). In both cases an ontological contrast is drawn between that which is more and that which is less real or true; but, whereas in the first passage the contrast is between forms (however construed) and the material world, in the second it is between the material world and the images of mimesis.

When we reach the third and fourth phases of the inquiry into mimesis (X.601c–2b, 602c–3b), which arrive at the conclusions, first, that mimetic artists are themselves ignorant (regarding the things that their works purport to represent) and, second, that their works appeal to lower, irrational parts of the mind, there is no explicit role for 'forms' at all. Moreover, the commonly made claim that book X treats mimetic works as 'imitations of imitations' or 'copies of copies' is seriously misleading.⁴⁶ No such formulation appears in Plato's text, nor can it capture the impetus of the arguments here. Book X's conception of mimesis implies human intentionality: mimetic works are produced by painters, poets and others who aim in some sense to model or fabricate images of (possible or imagined) reality. But this kind of mimetic intentionality cannot be a property of other objects (whether natural or humanly designed) in the material world. To suppose that it could is to conflate Book X gratuitously with the *Timaeus*, in which the material world as a whole is regarded as the 'mimetic' creation of the demiurge, though even there it is never exactly asserted that each material particular (least of all, those produced by human artifice, like the carpenter's couch or bed in *Republic X*) is an 'imitation' or 'copy'.⁴⁷

What all this comes to, I suggest, is that the treatment of painting in the context of Book X operates as a critique of its relationship, *qua* paradigm of mimesis, not only or even principally to a putative realm of philosophical

truth but to the world of human experience in general. More specifically, it becomes a critique of the *look* of the real – a critique, that is, of the status of visual verisimilitude or naturalism (or, in its extreme form, illusionism) – as a justification of pictorial mimesis. Seen from this viewpoint, what I earlier called the rhetorically provocative force of the mirror analogy can now be brought into sharper focus. By claiming that ‘making everything’, in the sense of simulating the appearance of every kind of material entity, gives painting an aspiration that can already be easily accomplished with a mirror, Socrates issues a challenge to those who value visual art, just as he later does to the lovers of poetry, to find a justification for pictorial representation that will endow it with something other than the cognitively redundant value of merely counterfeiting the ‘look’ of the real. The mirror analogy stands for the threat, not the final assertion, of a reductive conception of visual mimesis. Stated in an inclusive form, the message of Socrates’ mirror analogy amounts to a denial that what I earlier called the world-like properties of artistic representation are worth having *for their own sake*.⁴⁸ If the only (or main) justification for pictorial mimesis is visual verisimilitude, then paintings are in danger of being as cognitively superfluous as mirror images, in the case of which we almost always have independent access to what they show. We cannot, in most circumstances (at any rate, most circumstances envisageable by Plato), learn anything from a mirror that we could not learn better in some other way.⁴⁹ Who would choose to use a mirror where direct vision of an object was available? Contemplating what we can see in a mirror is, for the most part, a trivial pastime.⁵⁰ Why should it be different with paintings?

If it is legitimate to interpret the treatment of painting in *Republic X* as conducting a critical inspection of the idea that naturalism, the look of the real, is a self-sufficient justification for mimesis, then the argument ought to make provision for two alternative possibilities: one, that visual art (and, by implication, other mimetic arts too) may just as usefully, if not more usefully, turn to non-naturalistic styles of representation as to the pursuit of, at the extreme, illusionism (*trompe l’oeil*); the other, that naturalism, or verisimilitude more generally, may have instrumental, though not intrinsic, value. In the case of the first of these alternatives, we do not need to speculate about Platonic attitudes to types of artistic stylization, or even types of conceptual art, which were unknown at the time. Instead, we can remind ourselves that, at any rate later in his life, when writing the *Laws* (II.656–7), Plato allowed the Athenian to express strong admiration for the (supposedly) unchanging canons of one non-Greek artistic tradition, the Egyptian. Such admiration, from a Greek perspective, implies the recognition of stylization as a valuable artistic option, as well as the repudiation of naturalistic truth-to-appearances as an invariable desideratum of pictorial mimesis. This consideration connects with a more general Platonic tendency, which I count as his anti-aestheticism, to reject the idea of autonomous artistic

criteria of value and, with it, the acceptability of appraising artistic styles or techniques from within a purely artistic perspective rather than from a wider angle of ethico-cultural judgement.⁵¹ As such, it leads on directly to the second possible response that might be prompted by the critique of painting in *Republic X*, namely, that it remains thinkable that artistic naturalism, the 'look' of the real, is indeed potentially valuable to mimetic art, but in ways that contribute instrumentally to the overall psychological and social impact of the artforms in question.

Now, it is true that, because of the priorities of his text (in which poetry is the major target), Plato shows no immediate interest in pursuing this point vis-à-vis painting as such. But that need not, and should not, prevent us from identifying the kind of direction in which we would have to move in order to satisfy the challenge implied by his discussion of painting. We can do that precisely because of the discussion's analogical function in relation to poetry, the focus of the larger argument. In the case of poetry, Plato's critique revolves around intertwined ethical and psychological considerations; the eventual invitation to the lovers of poetry to justify the object of their love calls for a defence that will show 'the benefit, and not just the pleasure, that poetry brings to human societies and to individual lives' (X.607d). Equally, if pictorial naturalism can be valuable, on Plato's terms its value can only be instrumental, subject to judgement by 'external' ethical, not artistically intrinsic or technical, criteria. This entitles us to say that an account of painting that satisfied the challenge of the Platonic argument in *Republic X* would have to be, at bottom, an ethical account, an account that took painting to involve something substantially more than the mirroring, the successful replication, of appearances.

That such an account could have been contemplated by Plato is shown, I submit, by several of the other references to painting in his work, both inside and outside the *Republic*, that I documented earlier. I have drawn attention to the fact that in some of those passages it is accepted that there is more to painting than 'meets the eye', and that a philosophically adequate approach to pictorial mimesis needs to accommodate such factors as ethical expression, idealization and beauty. This emerges particularly strongly in a crucial passage of Book III, at 401a–d, where I earlier interpreted mimesis as in part a concept of expression.⁵² That passage, which happens to come at the conclusion to the *Republic's* first critique of poetry, places painting at the head of a list of arts said to be capable of embodying and communicating ethical qualities in mimetic form, not just reflecting appearances but filling them with meaning and value: painting is 'full' of good and bad forms of 'character' (*ēthos*), forms that are simultaneously a matter of visual representation and ethical expression and qualify as cases of mimesis in both these respects (III.401a8). It would, no doubt, be exorbitant to maintain that Plato took painting to have the same intensity of psychological-cum-ethical power as he ascribes to poetry. But, given the general prominence of visual art in

Greek religion and society, not least in classical Athens, we should not after all be surprised to find – as the total evidence of his references to it reveals – that Plato discerned in figurative mimesis the potential (and the obligation) to achieve much more than the simulation of appearances. Whatever else the mirror of *Republic* X.596d–e bespeaks, it must be something other than a trope for the whole truth about painting.

The justification for looking to Book X's painting–poetry analogy for clues to a richer reading of the mirror simile is not, however, simply external. The reversibility of the analogy is actually entailed by its own logic, although this feature of the argument has been scarcely noticed by interpreters of the book, who have been understandably preoccupied with the text's own momentum toward its major target, poetry. But if, as X.597e suggests (and in keeping with the aim of investigating 'mimesis as a whole', 595c7), whatever is essentially true of the painter as a *mimētēs* (a representational artist) must be equally true of the poet as *mimētēs*, then it ought to be feasible also to read other parts of the analogy in reverse. The point of doing this, as I have maintained, would be to move beyond, and to engage dialectically with, the 'rhetorical' downgrading of painting in the first part of Book X, and to make out the contours of a view of painting more in line with other Platonic passages examined earlier.

Now, where poetry is concerned, Plato's arguments strongly urge the case for treating mimesis as something more than the simulation of appearances, or the production of simulacra capable of deceiving only 'children and stupid adults'. For the critique of poetry does not simply put the equivalent of the reductive *trompe l'oeil* model; if it did, it would need to maintain that only children and the stupid can be deceived by poems into taking dramatic fiction for reality. Rather, it contends that poems are highly charged and expressively loaded bearers of meaning, whose projection and communication of human significance and ethical values are so great that they can affect 'even the best of us' (X.605c10). Contrast this with the implications of the standard view that the first part of Book X really does urge us to regard painting as mere mirroring of appearances. On the mirroring model, treated as a 'straight' analogy, painting would actually be denied any expressive value, because expression, which I am here treating as one dimension of the concept of mimesis, requires recognizable traces of human intentionality and cannot be ascribed to the 'raw' optical phenomena of mirror images⁵³ – hence, as we shall shortly see, the careful qualifications adopted by some later proponents of a 'mirror theory' of artistic representation. But it is hardly open to us to suppose that this is evidence for outright Platonic insensitivity to the possible expressiveness or representational richness of pictorial art, because my previous arguments have established that Plato's works as a whole, including several earlier parts of the *Republic*, take account of much more than the strictly optical properties of works of visual mimesis, allowing for the painter's selection and interpretation of what he

depicts and therefore for the importance of ethical character, idealization, invention and beauty in such artforms.

Moreover, I have also insisted on the provocatively 'rhetorical' and even 'satirical' tone of the first part of *Republic X*, including Socrates' introduction of the mirror motif itself. If we now bring together this consideration of tone with the reversibility of Book X's painting-poetry analogy at the level of mimetic principle, and also with the collective evidence of Plato's references to painting, we are left with a powerful set of reasons for refusing to read the mirror simile at X.596d–e as a conclusive depreciation of visual art. Instead, as I have already proposed, the consequence of looking into Plato's mirror, and of comparing its reflection with the arguments that follow it, should be to see the *insufficiency* of any conception of painting that emphasizes sheer appearances – including naturalistic verisimilitude, the 'look of the real' – at the expense of representational and expressive significance. *Republic X* itself does not attempt to supply the developed and complex account of pictorial representation which Book III, 401, as well as other Platonic texts cited earlier, would ideally require. But, on the interpretation I have put forward here, it does add its own peculiar weight to the need for such an account.

IV Beyond the mirror of nature: modern reflections on beauty and artistic truth

If the central thesis of my previous section is upheld, then the history of Western attitudes to visual art has been 'haunted', in Gombrich's term, not so much by Plato's mirror itself as by a ghostly misapprehension about what it reflects. But, if so, this state of affairs accentuates what might be thought a larger paradox to emerge from the reading I have offered of *Republic X*'s treatment of painting. On my interpretation, Plato's arguments offer a mimetic conception of art at whose core lies a critique of precisely those ideas – truth-to-appearances, verisimilitude, realism, illusionism – that have often been considered to define the mimeticist tradition in aesthetics. After all, the mirror motif itself, whether as 'mirror of life' or 'mirror of nature', has been repeated by numerous later thinkers in that tradition.⁵⁴ But it is only on the most simplified versions of the tradition that the mirror motif can be understood as committing a theory of representational art to the pure, self-sufficient reflection of appearances. For instance, Lessing's view of visual art, though belonging to that tradition, certainly does not adopt such a model of representation, because it insists both on the selective, interpretative character of the artwork and on the active, interpretative response of the collaborative viewer. But even those mimeticist thinkers who have directly espoused a 'mirror theory' of art have, in the most interesting cases, done so in a manner that shows them alert to the need to avoid treating naturalistic or realistic truth-to-appearances to be a supreme value in its own right. I would like now to glance at some striking illustrations of this claim.

My first example, which relates directly to literature but has wider implications, is taken from a *Rambler* essay of Samuel Johnson, a thinker whose aesthetic convictions are in part a kind of Platonism without the metaphysics. In the course of expounding the view that authors of realistic narratives ought to select their material partly on the basis of moral considerations, Johnson presents a combination of ideas that resembles the position I have attributed to Plato. Johnson grounds his case on a general statement of mimeticism, in characteristically neoclassical idiom ('it is justly considered as the greatest excellency of art to imitate nature'). He proceeds immediately, however, to demonstrate that his mimeticism is not a principle of pure or unqualified realism. Johnson sees very clearly that a literary or artistic aspiration to a perfect 'surface' of verisimilitude, if taken as an absolute or unconditional aim, would necessarily prove self-confounding, because the most complete achievement of this aim could only amount, *ex hypothesi*, to the duplication or reproduction of the appearance of such things as are in principle already available to our experience of the world. 'If the world be promiscuously described,' he writes, 'I cannot see of what use it can be to read the account, or why it may not be as safe to turn the eye immediately upon mankind, as upon a mirror which shows all that presents itself without discrimination.'⁵⁵ It is important to spell out the corollary of this point, which constitutes a less rhetorically slanted version of Socrates' notion that to 'make' (the appearance of) 'everything' can be easily accomplished with a mirror. Johnson recognizes that, as soon as one attributes to a realistic artform, whether literary or pictorial, an aim that in some degree either diverges from or supplements the aspiration to perfect verisimilitude, there is an implicit recognition of artistic values that cannot be explained in exclusively technical terms (that is, where 'technique' is understood to imply an aspiration to illusionism). The mirror that 'shows all... without discrimination' therefore designates something decisively inferior to a more famous Johnsonian mirror, that 'faithful mirror of manners and of life' that Shakespeare 'holds up to his readers' and whose status as an emblem of ethical art is signalled both by its concern with the general, not the particular, and by its direct attention to morality ('manners') (Johnson 1977, 299–336).⁵⁶

But, even if, as Johnson's case helps to confirm, the message of Plato's mirror can be incorporated into a fully mimeticist position, is it not also true, an objection might run, that the idea of a mirror as a metaphor of artistic excellence has often attracted both artists themselves and the theorists of mimesis? It is well known that as sagacious a thinker as Leonardo da Vinci actually recommends the use of a mirror by painters and, in addition, suggests more than once in his notebooks that the painter's mind should resemble a mirror in its openness to the appearances of things all around it.⁵⁷ But the practical or technical use of a mirror on the part of a painter need not imply agreement with an aesthetic of mimesis as direct copying

of reality. It is interesting, in this connection, that when one of Leonardo's predecessors, Alberti, in the second book of his treatise *De pictura* (finished in 1435, and extant in both Latin and Italian versions), likewise says that a mirror is a good judge of a painting, he seems to suppose that the mirror in some way heightens both the merits and the weaknesses of a pictorial composition. Alberti regards the mirror as an instrument by which the artist can refine and adjust his habits of viewing nature: indeed, he recommends using a mirror to *correct* the appearances of things taken from nature (*De pictura* 2.46).⁵⁸ Like Leonardo, Alberti recognizes that a mirror presents and 'frames' its images in a manner that is itself quasi-pictorial, lending them a form subtly different from the natural appearances of things. It is, after all, an optical fact – though one either unknown to, or ignored by, Plato – that even a completely flat mirror does not precisely reproduce appearances as experienced directly by the eye.⁵⁹ We can infer this much, at any rate, about Alberti's mirror, that it functions within a process that leads from natural appearances to *beautiful* appearances. And we know that Alberti does not consider the latter to be coextensive with the former, because he is prepared to reproduce a negative ancient judgement on excessive realism achieved at the expense of beauty, as well as arguing more generally for the importance of naturalistic technique (in the rendering of planes, volume and light) not for its own sake but in the service of both beauty and a morally edifying, quasi-poetic use of (*h*)*istoria*.⁶⁰

In the case of Leonardo, the question can be resolved more decisively, I think. In another passage in the notebooks he writes that the painter who relies exclusively on the eye, without the use of reason, is no better than a mirror, 'which *reproduces without knowledge*'.⁶¹ By insisting on a distinction between raw perception – corresponding to the mirror as passive reflector – and a deeper kind of cognitive experience in which appearances are not just registered but interpreted and comprehended, Leonardo ostensibly comes close to the position I earlier traced out in the arguments of *Republic* Book X. The resemblance to Plato's argument is, however, only partial, insofar as Leonardo's conception of painting as a branch of 'natural philosophy' requires him, more generally, to attribute importance to what can be learned by means of the eye (which he holds to be 'the window of the soul') and then transferred by the painter into the intelligible and universal forms of his art. In a larger perspective it is sufficiently obvious that the view of painting held by Leonardo practically inverts the priorities indicated in the *Republic*, since his beliefs endow the phenomenal world, the world of appearances, with a significance that contradicts the values conveyed by Plato's argument. In Leonardo's writings the phenomenal world is an integral part of divine creation, whereas in the tenth book of the *Republic* Socrates ascribes to (a) 'god' (X.597b6–7, whatever the rhetorical force of the term in this context) the creation not of the material world but of the 'forms' or 'ideas' that in some sense lie behind or beyond it.

This more general contrast, however, is secondary to my main contention, which is that even for Leonardo, whose naturalistic aesthetic and whose mimeticist presuppositions are beyond doubt, the notion of painting as a mirror is not, after all, unconditional.⁶² Leonardo's observation that a mirror produces images without knowledge is, from the point of view of aesthetics, tantamount to affirming that, however seductive may be the goal of artistic realism – the goal of fidelity to the appearances of nature – pictorial images must be something more than the images of a surrogate mirror. They need to be informed by, and correspondingly able to offer the mind of the viewer, ways of seeing that do not simply 'register' appearances but interpret and make sense of them. Only in this way, Leonardo intimates, can observed phenomena be turned into the material of that 'natural philosophy' which he believes to be the essence of painting; only thus can sight be turned into insight. Just as it is necessary for the soul to observe actively and attentively through the window of the eye, in order to grasp the truths discoverable and discernible in nature, so the painter's work ought to show us something that requires rational contemplation for its complete appreciation. We may doubt whether a Renaissance aesthetic of this kind would have convinced Plato of the capacity of painting to incorporate and communicate knowledge, just as, equally, we may suspect that the Platonic critique of the visual arts rests ultimately on too radical a renunciation of sensory perception. But, if I am right, this is nonetheless an aesthetic that in its own way confronts the urgent issues raised by the simile of the mirror, and by its context of argument, in the last book of the *Republic*.

Plato's mirror has not been, and certainly does not deserve to be, considered as quite so oppressive a spectre as Gombrich's statement might suggest, at any rate if we judge it in the light of the views of exponents of mimeticism as eminent and subtle as Leonardo and Samuel Johnson. For thinkers of such acumen, the symbol of the artistic mirror was always to some degree ambiguous, always an encouragement to ponder more deeply on the relationship of painting or literature to reality, rather than a naive formula for the aspiration to artistic verisimilitude. If this is true, it confirms that the traditions of mimeticism have always been capable of a self-critical attitude toward their own central doctrines. But that in turn prompts my final thought: that the Platonic analysis of painting, as I have interpreted it here, poses a permanently stimulating challenge, not only to philosophers but to all lovers of painting, to produce an aesthetic of the visual arts that can address questions of meaning and value without reducing them to the unprofitable terms of simulation or illusion.

Notes

1. 'Painting is the art of gaining admission to the soul by means of the eyes': Diderot, *Salon de 1765* (Diderot 1957–79, vol. 2, 174; spelling modernized).

2. See Halliwell (2002), chapter 5, note 15, for the *Poetics*' references to painting and chapter 1, note 15, for Platonic comparisons of poetic and visual art.
3. The four occurrences of this remark in Plutarch, with slightly different wordings, are at *Aud. Poet.* 17f–18a, *Quomodo Adul.* 58b, *Glor. Ath.* 346f, *Qu. Conv.* 748a. On the context of Simonides' apophthegm, see Morris (1992, 311), with Halliwell (2002, 21–2). It is unlikely that Democritus fr. 142 DK, which calls the names of the gods 'speaking statues' (*agalмата φῳνῳνῳντα*), plays on the same idea; cf. Cole (1990, 68, n. 17).
4. Lee (1967) remains important for the Renaissance development of the painting–poetry *paragone*; cf. Braider (1999) (reading 'Plutarch' for 'Pliny' on 168). Steiner (1982, 1–18) traces the development as far as its modern revival; other treatments include Praz (1970, esp. 3–27); Graham (1973); Marshall (1997).
5. *Laokoon*, preface. Lessing's mimeticism is also flagged by his Greek quotation on the title page (*ibid.*, 7), then repeated in the preface (*ibid.*, 10), from Plutarch *Glor. Ath.* 347a (which follows one of Plutarch's citations of Simonides' apophthegm; see note 3): poetry and painting 'differ in the materials and modes of their mimesis' (*hulῳi kai tropois mimῳseῳs diapherousi*). Gebauer and Wulf (1992, 262–88) give one account of Lessing's mimeticism; cf. Berghahn (1997, 532–8) on Lessing's approach to mimesis in relation to other German thinkers of the period.
6. Hippias A2 DK; anon. *Dissoi Logoi* 3.10 (cf. the mention of the sculptor Polykleitus at 6.8); Gorgias on deception, fr. 23 DK, with the introduction to Halliwell (2002), note 49; Gorgias on visual art, fr. 11.18 DK (with my later note 39); cf. Philipp (1968, esp. 42–61), for a survey of pre-Platonic references to the visual arts. With *epideiknunai* at *Ion* 533a2, compare *Rep.* X.598c3, *Soph.* 234b9, though these other passages seem to refer only to 'exhibiting', not to expounding, paintings.
7. On the long debate over the date of Alcidas' treatise consult, for example, Richardson (1981, 6–8, with 5, 10 n. 40); O'Sullivan (1992, 23–31, with 63–5, 95); and cf. my note 8. For different views of the date of pseudo-Hippocrates *De victu* 1, see, for example, Kahn (1979, 4, with 304 n. 12) (favouring the late fifth century) and Kirk (1954, 26–9) (favouring late fourth), with the introduction to Halliwell (2002, note 34), on the work's larger concept of mimesis; the words *plῳn psuchῳs* quoted have been doubted by some scholars.
8. Application of mimesis terminology to visual art is at least as old as Aeschylus fr. 78a.7 (Radt 1985): see Halliwell (2002, 15–22). The thesis that Plato innovated in this respect (Tatarkiewicz 1970–4, vol. 1, 122; Keuls 1978, 9–32) is therefore false; cf. Halliwell (1986, 110–12). Likewise with the common suggestion (Tate 1932, 162; Koller 1954, 62–3; Vernant 1991, 165; and Gebauer and Wulf 1992, 47) that Xenophon *Memorabilia* 3.10 (discussed in my text) *innovates* by applying the language of mimesis to figurative art: this book of the *Memorabilia* almost certainly postdates (for example) Alcidas' *Soph.* 27–8 (see my note 7) and Plato's *Rep.* (see 373b, with the introduction to Halliwell 2002, note 53). *Memorabilia* 3.5 is generally regarded as written after the battle of Leuctra in 371, and parts of book 3 might be as late as the 350s, though cf. Sörbom (1966, 80–1) (NB, incidentally, that Sörbom's book nowhere mentions Alcidas' *Soph.* 27–8).
9. Xenophon *Memorabilia* 3.10.1–8; note the detailed vocabulary of visual representation, especially the verbs *apeikazein*, *proseikazein*, *apomimeisthai*, *ekmimeisthai* and *aphomoion*; Tatarkiewicz (1970–4, vol. 1, 101; cf. 121–2) preposterously maintains that the noun *mimῳsis* 'was still not available' in the context of this discussion. Cf. note 8 here, with the introduction to Halliwell (2002, note 39). On the relationship of the discussion to the practice of artistic realism, see Stansbury-O'Donnell

- (1999, 111–14); a possible link with the actual art of Parrhasius is seriously entertained by Robertson (1975, vol. 1, 412–13). Pollitt (1974, 30–1) links the passage to early fourth-century artistic ‘subjectivism’, though his discussion is unreliable in several details. The fullest analyses of Xenophon’s text are in Sörbom (1966, 80–98) and Preißhofen (1974).
10. For my claim that mimesis here and elsewhere straddles matters of representation and expression, see my notes 32, 53 here. Wollheim (1987, 80–9) gives a rewarding philosophical account of the problem of pictorial expression.
 11. The aesthetics of facial or bodily expression becomes part of a long-lasting tradition in the interpretation of visual art: an ancient locus classicus is the proem to Philostratus maj. *Imagines* (note that Philostratus calls the interpretation of pictures both *hermēneuein* and *epideixis*, *ibid.*, 5); for other views and reflections of the issue, cf., for example, Plutarch *Qu. Conv.* 681e, *Cimon* 2.3, *Alex. Fort.* 335b, Philostratus min. *Imag. proem*, Callistratus *Imag.* 3.2, 5.1. A notable Renaissance instance is Alberti *De pictura* 2.41–4 (Alberti 1973, 70–9); Alberti was familiar with Xenophon *Memorabilia* 3.10 (see *De pictura* 2.31, Alberti 1973, 54–5).
 12. Compare, though with obvious differences, Aristotle *De sensu* 440a7–8 (colours appearing ‘through’ one another: *phainesthai di’allēlōn*), with my note 15. I discuss Aristotle’s own approach to the question of whether and how character can be depicted in visual art in Halliwell (2002), chapter 5, section I, and chapter 8, section II.
 13. See, for example, Halliwell (2002, 20, note 48), for some earlier cases of this motif, with chapter 10, note 43, and chapter 11, note 54, for other uses of *zōtikos*. With Xenophon’s use of *energazesthai*, compare *enapergazesthai* at Plato *Soph.* 236a6.
 14. For visual arts other than painting and sculpture, note especially Plato’s references to figurative textiles (both on cult statues and in domestic use) at *Euphr.* 6c1; *Rep.* II.373a7, 378c4, III.401a2; and perhaps *H. Mi.* 298a2.
 15. Visual effects of water or haze: *De sensu* 3.440a8–10 (where it is said that colours show ‘through’ one another: cf. my note 12); see Halliwell (2002, 182), and cf. Gage (1993, 15) for a rare art-historical citation of this intriguing passage. Colours: *Meteor.* 3.2, 372a5–8. A philosophically somewhat more sustained Aristotelian analogy from visual art is *De mem.* 1.450b20–31.
 16. Some Platonic references to technicalities of graphic, pictorial or plastic art: mixing of colours (*Cra.* 424d–e, with the reference to ‘flesh tints’, *andreikelon*; *Rep.* VI.501b uses the same details as metaphor; cf. *Pol.* 277c2, and Empedocles fr. 23.3–4 DK); contrast between a sketch or outline (*perigraphē*, *hupographē*) and a finished or detailed work (*Rep.* VI.501a–b, VIII.548c–d, *Pol.* 277b–c); erasure and correction (*Rep.* VI.501b9); adjustment of proportions to allow for angle of viewing (*Soph.* 235e–36a); clay modelling technique in sculpture (*Pol.* 277a–b); modification of already applied colour (*Laws* VI.769a–b, with Rouveret 1989, 42–9). On the vexed question of *skiagraphia* see note 40. I leave aside the extremely remote possibility, asserted in ancient biographical texts (Diogenes Laertius 3.5, Apuleius *Dogm. Plat.* 1.2), that Plato had himself been a painter at one stage: see Riginos (1976, 42–3).
 17. Morgan (1990) attempts to explain why painting came to matter to Plato against a cultural background of increasingly self-conscious ‘representational viewing’; see also Janaway (1995), esp. chapter 5, for a probing analysis of the dialogues’ ideas on painting. Of older writers, Schweitzer (1953) takes most seriously the influence of visual art on Plato’s thinking and experience, though he overstates some aspects of Plato’s affinities with it.

18. See esp. *Timaeus* 38a, 39e, 41c, 42e, 44d, 48e, 50c, 51b, 69c, 88d, with Theiler (1957), Curtius (1953, 544–6), for the concept of the demiurge.
19. Art-historically orientated surveys of references to painting in Plato can be found in (among others) Sartorius (1896); Steven (1933); Schuhl (1952); Webster (1952) (a wildly speculative article); Schweitzer (1953, esp. 83–7); Demand (1975); Keuls (1978); and Rouveret (1989, 24–59), though all contain overconfident, and mutually discrepant, views on Plato's relationship to the art-historical background.
20. Cf. the more general definition of mimesis at *Soph.* 265b ('a kind of making, but the making of simulacra (*eidōla*) not of things themselves').
21. Plato *Laws* II.656–57, VII.799a–b: the Egyptians laid down obligatory standards of beauty and correctness in figurative arts and in *mousikē* (all of which count as mimetic: see 655d, 667c–69e) which have allegedly not changed for ten thousand years. Davis (1979) considers Plato's familiarity with Egyptian art; Brisson (2000, 151–67) examines the broader status of Egyptian culture in Plato's work. For a later but related contrast between Egyptian and Greek art, see Diodorus Siculus 1.98 with Pollitt (1974, 12–14, 28–9); cf. Panofsky (1970, 90–100) on the difference between Greek and Egyptian treatment of human bodily proportions. Contrast, however, *Pol.* 299d–e on the need for inquiry and exploration, *zētein*, rather than mere written rules, in all *technai* (both mimetic and otherwise); cf. the reference to technical progress in sculpture at *Hippias Major* 282a. Morrow (1960, 355–8) stresses that the *Laws'* remarks on Egyptian art and on the fear of artistic innovation (cf. esp. II.657b, VII.798e), like the more famous passage at *Rep.* IV.424b–e, do not altogether rule out variety and change.
22. Plato, *Soph.* 235d–36c: mimetic art (*mimētikē*) or image-making (*eidōlopoiētikē*) is subdivided into (a) 'likeness-making' (*eikastikē*, cf. *Laws* II.667d1, 668a6), which matches the proportions and surface attributes of its *paradeigma*, and (b) 'semblance-making' (*phantastikē*), which adjusts its properties, and thereby 'distorts' its original, in order to produce a certain appearance when viewed from a particular position. Most painting falls into the second category (236b9); cf. Halliwell (2002), chapter 1, section III.
23. Cf. Halliwell (2002), chapter 1, section III, for various difficulties in making sense of the concept of *eikastikē*.
24. Cf. Halliwell (2002), chapter 1, section III.
25. In Halliwell (1993a, 196–7), on 472c4 and 7, I suggested that the language of idealism in Plato is sometimes influenced by the terminology of the visual arts; cf., somewhat differently, Carpenter (1959, 107–8). Flasch (1965, 270) goes too far in speaking of mimesis of 'the Idea itself' at *Rep.* V.472d, though this passage may have encouraged such a line of thought in others; and Panofsky (1968, 15) is mistaken in saying of this passage that such an artist would be excellent '*precisely because* he could not prove the empirical existence' (my emphasis) of the man depicted. It is unjustified to see here, with Schweitzer (1953, 55), an allusion to Zeuxis.
26. This passage could, in isolation, be construed without idealistic implications for the painter's side of the comparison; but such a construal would, I think, be forced, and we have seen idealistic painting clearly acknowledged elsewhere in the *Republic*. It remains unclear, however, whether and in what sense the words *eis to alēthestaton* ([looking] at/toward the truest object) at VI.484c9 are applicable to painters as such. I posit a possible echo of this passage in Philostratus *Vita Ap.* 6.19: see Halliwell (2002, 276, note 36).

27. The idea of an image constructed from many exemplars, which becomes such a topos in later art criticism (see Jex-Blake and Sellers 1896, lxi–ii), was already familiar at this date: the phrasing of 488a5 is akin to Xenophon, *Memorabilia* 3.10.2; cf. my notes 8–9. Aristotle, *Polit.* 3.11, 1281b12–15, is germane but has a different emphasis.
28. Aissen-Crewett (1989, 269) rightly sees in this passage at least an oblique implication for painting's own scope, but misleadingly describes it as implying something *more* than mimetic; Tate (1928, 21) speaks too bluntly of 'genuine painting'. For different interpretations of the *Republic's* philosophers as visual artists, see Zimbrich (1984, 293–300); Büttner (2000, 162–7).
29. Cf. *Timaeus* 19b–c, where the *Republic* itself is referred back to as a painting.
30. *Politicus* 285e–86a suggests that immaterial (*asōmata*) entities cannot be visually represented, because they allow no perceptual 'likeness' (*homoiotēs*) or image (*eidōlon*) to be produced, but can be grasped only by logos: see Rowe (1995, 211–12). The concept of representation here is implicitly mimetic, and excludes the possibility of symbolism (cf. Dio Chrysostom 12.59, where symbols are used to represent that which cannot be depicted by [sc. mimetic] images). Thus *eidōlon* here lacks pejorative connotations and is equivalent to a mimetic image; cf., for example, *Soph.* 241e3, with Halliwell (1988, 119) for Platonic usage, as well as Halliwell (2002, 19, note 45).
31. See my fuller discussion in Halliwell (2002), chapter 1, section III.
32. In Halliwell (2002, 51, note 35), I point out what is often overlooked, that the narrower definition of mimesis at III.392d ff. is both preceded (III.373b, 388c) and followed (399a–400a of music, plus 398a2, 401a) by a broader use of the term, and one whose applicability to music makes reference to some notion of expression inescapable. The fact that mimesis in this context actually covers non-figurative art, including architecture (III.401a3, b6), only strengthens the case for seeing a concept of expression at work here. Mimesis at 401a is treated as a concept of 'expression' by Bosanquet (1925, 105); Burnyeat (1999, 218) says, apropos 400d–e, 'style...expresses...character' (though he continues to translate mimesis terms by 'imitation'); Sörbom (1966, 127–8), concedes the point grudgingly, with an inadequate appreciation of what is at stake. Cf. note 10.
33. On the Damonian tradition underlying this passage, see Halliwell (2002), chapter 8. Scruton (1997, 119) finds Plato 'insensitive' to the distinction between representation and expression (which Scruton strangely thinks does not predate Croce); I would prefer to say that Plato has a stronger sense than Scruton permits of some of the overlaps and connections between phenomena that might be covered by these two concepts (cf. Halliwell 2002, 14, note 31).
34. Note here also the force of *Rep.* III.402b–c, which refers to the need for future Guardians to be able to recognize the virtues both in themselves and in 'images' (*eikōnes* 402c6). Cf. the later Stoic view that virtues and vices manifest themselves, and are therefore perceivable, in outward forms (Plutarch *Sto. Rep.* 1042e–f = *SVF* 3.85, *Comm. Not.* 1073b).
35. Sartorius (1896, 133) interestingly speculates that X.598d alludes to the actual use of mirrors by contemporary artists; I am not aware of any Greek evidence for this practice (which is, of course, well documented for the Renaissance: see section IV below): Pliny *NH* 35.147 may refer to a mirror *in* a picture (see Croisille 1985, 257, n.14).
36. The most important earlier uses are Pindar *Nem.* 7.14 (the mirror of poetic glory) and Alcidas at Aristotle *Rhetoric* 3.3, 1406b12–13 (the *Odyssey* as a 'beautiful

mirror of human life', *kalon anthrōpinou biou katoptron*, a metaphor deprecated by Aristotle). Note that neither of these passages treats the mirror as a pure or passive reflector; both imply some sort of artistic enhancement of life. On the Pindar, cf. Frontisi-Ducroux and Vernant (1997, 117–18). In Alcidas' metaphor, Richardson (1981, 7) finds a point about 'ethical value' as well as 'realism'; O'Sullivan (1992, 7) an impressive 'scale of vision in literary judgement'. The contextless citation hardly supports either view. Indeed, 'realism' may be precisely not the point: 'a beautiful mirror' rather suggests idealization, something Alcidas certainly ascribes to visual art at *Soph.* 28, where 'real bodies' (*alēthina sōmata*) are contrasted with 'beautiful statues' (*andriantes kaloi*) and the latter (*ibid.*, 27) are nonetheless classed as mimesis (cf. note 7). As to whether Plato could have had Alcidas in mind in *Republic X*, see the contrasting views of Richardson (1981, 6–8) and O'Sullivan (1992, 63–6, 95); Solmsen (1968, vol. 2, 139) certainly goes too far in taking Alcidas' mirror metaphor as the chief spur to Plato's treatment of mimesis in that book.

For more general discussion of mirrors in ancient metaphors, see Mette (1988, 350–6) and Curtius (1953, 336 and n. 56); Grabes (1982) richly documents the longer legacy of mirror imagery. For later mirror motifs in aesthetics, see section IV below, with notes 54–61. Frontisi-Ducroux and Vernant (1997) offer a cultural psychology of Greek mirrors.

37. Robb (1994, 230) detects humour and satire in the first part of Book X, but his interpretation of its thrust is rather different from mine.
38. The idea expressed by Alcibiades at *Symposium* 221e–22a, that Socratic arguments have a sometimes enigmatic 'outside' and a many-layered 'inside', is especially germane here as an oblique clue to one of Plato's own aspirations.
39. Pictorial *technē*: for example, *Ion* 532e–33b; *Grg.* 448b, 450c10; *Rep.* VII.529e; *Soph.* 234b7; *Pol.* 288c; *Laws* II. 668e7–69a1. Empedocles' reference to painting's production of 'forms like all things' (*eidea pasin aligkia*) is in fr. 23.5 DK; Inwood (1992, 36–7) rightly surmises that this fragment may have influenced Plato (as it may also have done Gorgias fr. 11.18 DK: see Buchheim 1985 and Buchheim 1989, 172–3). Too (1998, 62) (cf. 61) blunders in taking the 'sophist' who 'makes everything' at *Rep.* X.598c–d to be the divine demiurge, rather than the mimetic artist.
40. The reference to distance viewing, paralleled at *Soph.* 234b, is elsewhere linked to *skiagraphia*: for example, *Rep.* VII.523b, *Theaetetus* 208e, *Parmenides* 165c, with Rouveret (1989, 24–6, 50–9) for the best analysis of the vexed issue of *skiagraphia*, a term that I do not believe Plato used with rigorous consistency. Distance-viewing makes little sense for vase painting.
41. The point is blurred by, for example, Burnyeat (1999, 300–1), who supplies an illustration from a vase painting of a carpenter. It is not clear, in fact, that Plato ever has vases in mind when he refers to painting; the only painters he mentions by name are Polygnotus (*Ion* 532e–33a, *Grg.* 448b12), his brother Aristophon (*Grg.* 448b11), Zeuxis (*Grg.* 453c) and Zeuxippus (= Zeuxis?, *Prt.* 318c–d), who all worked in large-scale forms of mythological art (cf. Philostr. maj. *Imagines* proem 1 for the sharing of heroic myth by the visual arts and poetry). I offer the speculative suggestion that the proverbial story about Apelles and a cobbler at Pliny *NH* 35.85, including the artist's proverbial saying 'cobbler, stick to your last,' may go back to someone who was reacting to Plato's provocative choice of example at *Rep.* X.598b9. (A similar nuance may be present at Strabo 1.2.5: see Halliwell 2002, 270, note 21.) If Jex-Blake and Sellers (1896, lix) are right to link

- the anecdote to Duris of Samos, it is attractive to suppose we are dealing here with a Peripatetic response to *Republic X*, picking up on Aristotle's own assertion of the distinctness of mimetic art from the standards of other *technai* (*Poet.* 25.1460b 13–21); on Duris and mimesis, see Halliwell (2002, 289–92). The cobbler is a standard example of the artisan in Plato's *Republic*, for example, I.332a, II.374b–c.
42. Cf. Halliwell (2002), chapter 1, section III.
 43. I am here partly modifying the emphasis of my own previous approach in Halliwell (1988), which I now consider too rigid in some of its formulations. Wehrli (1957, 44–5) is right to deny that *Republic X* is Plato's 'last word' on painting or that it offers a dogmatically conceived theory of art.
 44. Janaway (1995, 119–20) states this second point forcefully, apropos 598a1–3; others, including Gombrich (1977, 83); Annas (1981, 336); D. Scott (1999, 34) ('imitation of a particular'); and Yanal (1999, 14), have got it wrong. On the status of the mirror analogy, cf. also Babut (1985a, 85) (though Babut 1985b, 135, is less satisfactory).
 45. It is one of several paradoxes about this passage that the carpenter's mental access to an idea or form (of what he makes) is reminiscent of the language used in the analogies between philosophers and painters at V.472c–d, VI.501b (see section II above); cf. also the general distinction between a craftsman's (*dēmiourgos*) use of an unchanging or changing 'model' (*paradeigma*) at *Timaeus* 28a–b, though that passage prepares us for the divine 'demiurge'. For two recent, rather different approaches to the 'forms' in *Republic X*, see Fine (1993, 110–13, 116–19) and Burnyeat (1999, 245–9), but neither of them resolves the issue of the craftsman's relation to the form at X.596b7 (ignored by Fine 1993, 196), a problematic passage for many scholars: cf., for example, Reeve (1988, 223), who simply 'rewrites' the passage (his earlier treatment, 86, is also unsatisfactory: the expert user of an artefact is not a philosopher-king but the relevant specialist, for example, the musician at 601d10). Steckerl (1942) relates the passage to subsequent developments in Platonism but without doing justice to its own contextual force.
 46. Such descriptions (anticipated, with reference to tragedy, as early as anon. *De philos. Plat.* 25.22–3; Westerink 1962, 47) have become a cliché of the literature; see, for example, Tate (1928, 20) (and Tate 1932, 164–5); Assunto (1965, 96); Babut (1985a, 82); Coulter (1976, 33); Hathaway (1962, 7); Murray (1996, 6); Schweitzer (1963, vol. 1, 53); Redfield (1994, 49); D. Scott (1999, 34); Sheppard (1994, 13); Watson (1988, 212–13); White (1979, 248); Weinberg (1966, 701) (compounding matters with the false assertion that Plato thought poetry imitated the 'Ideas' by imitating natural objects which were themselves imitations). *Rep. X.598b3*, however construed, does not warrant the 'copy of copy' claim, despite the supposition of such a luminary as Diderot in his *Salon de 1767* (Diderot 1957–79, vol. 3, 57). There is no good reason, in any case (and as *Cra.* 389a–b helps to show), for saying that the artisan 'copies' or 'imitates' the form to which he looks (for example, Annas 1981, 336 and Hwang 1981, 35, the latter a seriously defective analysis), still less, *contra* Kosman (1992, 88), that he 'imitates God in his making of a bed' (or that the poet 'imitates' the artisan as such).
 47. The nearest to such a claim is at 50c, whose interpretation is uncertain; cf. Taylor (1928, 324). For the dialogue's other references to mimesis, see my note 18.
 48. At the same time, Plato's argument implicitly spurns the idea that artistic skill (cf. note 39) in achieving convincing visual likenesses is its own justification: an idea

- found, for example, in Adam Smith's 'Of the Nature of that Imitation which takes place in what are called The Imitative Arts', I §§5–18 (in Smith 1980, 176–209), where great stress is placed on the difference of kind or medium between an artwork and its 'model'.
49. But this might not be so with other *metaphorical* mirrors: one has limited access to thought (except one's own) other than through language, but language is described as a mirror of thought at Plato *Theaetetus* 206d.
 50. It perhaps needs spelling out that, while Plato's argument leaves largely on one side the commonest use of a mirror, namely, for self-inspection (something alluded to at X.596e2, as at *Timaeus* 46b2; cf. *Alcibiades* 132d–33b for an interesting reference to 'the eye seeing the eye', and *Phaedrus* 255d5–6 for a remarkable erotic simile, seeing oneself in the 'mirror' of the beloved), this is not a problematic neglect: in terms of the analogy its implications would be limited to self-portraits (and, what is more, to the artist's, not the viewer's, relation to a self-portrait). However significant self-portraits have become in the subsequent history of painting, they cannot count as paradigmatic of the nature of the art (or, more pertinently, of a viewer's relationship to a painting), and the mirror motif serves to characterize the general relationship between (visual) mimesis and the (visible) world.
 51. On Plato's anti-aestheticism, see esp. Halliwell (2002), chapters 1 and 2, with Halliwell (1991).
 52. See Section II above.
 53. This is not to deny that mirrors might be used for quasi-expressive effect, by deliberate human design, for example, in the arrangement of a room. Comparably, the presence of human intentionality allows (some) photographs, in contrast to ordinary mirror images, to be treated as expressive objects. Cf. Halliwell (2002, 14, note 31).
 54. In addition to the instances discussed here, see Halliwell (2002), chapter 10, note 7, for antiquity, and chapter 12, notes 42, 50, 53–4 for later periods.
 55. *Rambler* 4, 31 March 1750, in Johnson (1977, 155–9, at 157). Cf. Hegel's objection to the 'superfluity' of art considered as *mere* 'imitation of nature' (Hegel 1975, 42); see Halliwell (1993b, 6–8) for application (and qualification) of this point.
 56. Johnson, preface to Shakespeare (1765), in Johnson (1977, 299–336); the 'manners and life' (301) reflected in Shakespeare's mirror are a matter of the 'general nature' referred to just a little earlier by Johnson (*ibid.*) and surely echo the famous mirror simile at *Hamlet* 3.2.16–20. Cf. Halliwell (2002), chapter 12, section I.
 57. See Richter (1970), vol. 1, 320–1 (nos. 529–30: the use of a mirror to test a painting's qualities); vol. 1, 306 (no. 493: the painter's mind like a mirror; cf. vol. 1, 310, no. 506).
 58. In Alberti (1973, 82–5), with parallel Italian and Latin texts.
 59. Plato never shows any doubt that a mirror produces an exact reflection, but Plutarch *Pyth. Orac.* 404c–d is an interesting ancient acknowledgement that even mirrors – plane as well as concave or convex – make a difference to the likenesses they reflect (cf. Sextus Empiricus, *Pyrr. Hyp.* 1.48–9, for an argument from mirrors to the material relativity of perception).
 60. Alberti's negative judgement on the excessive realism of Demetrius of Alopece is at *De pictura* 3.55 (Alberti 1973, 96–7, and cf. Quintilian 12.10.9 for Alberti's source); 3.55–6 (Alberti 1973, 96–7) indicates more generally the subordination of naturalistic technique, as set out especially in book 1 of the treatise, to beauty

- (*pulchritudo, vaghezza, bellezza*). For the importance of quasi-poetic (*h)istoria*, see esp. 2.40–2 (Alberti 1973, 68–75), 3.54 (Alberti 1973, 94–5).
61. Richter (1970, vol. 1, 119, no. 20): '*il pittore che ritrae per pratica e gviditio d'occhio senza ragione è come lo specchio che in sé imita tutte le a sé cotraposte cose senza cognitione d'esse*' (Richter's punctuation slightly changed). This negative use of a mirror simile is overlooked by Gilbert and Kuhn (1953, 163–4), who also give a spurious quotation from Alberti; both points are then regrettably duplicated from them by Abrams (1953, 32). See Alpers (1989, 46–8) (which I found after forming my own argument) for a subtle discussion of the tension between 'simple' and 'selective' mirroring in Leonardo.
62. On Leonardo's mimetic conception of painting, cf. Halliwell (2002), chapter 12, notes 7, 15.

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10

Art and Ethical Perspective: Notes on the *Kalon* in Plato's *Laws*

Jessica Moss

Education comes originally from Apollo and the Muses...So by an uneducated man we shall mean a man who has not been trained to take part in a chorus; and we must say that if a man has been sufficiently trained, he is educated...And this means that the finely-educated man will be able both to sing and dance finely [*kalōs*]. (*Laws* 654a–b)¹

Suppose you believe that there are objective truths in matters of value: mind-independent facts about what is worth pursuing, knowledge of which is crucial to living well – to being virtuous and happy. Suppose you also believe that these facts are very difficult to grasp, and, indeed, that most people get them badly, dangerously wrong. Now suppose that you are a vastly ambitious moral reformer: you want to design a system whereby all members of society will be as virtuous and happy as possible. You lay out all kinds of laws to regulate every aspect of life, major and minor, public and private, all with a view to the virtue of the citizens. You hold that the most important part – the foundation of all the rest – is moral education (*paideia*), a program for instilling virtue in the citizens in the first place. What will you prescribe?

One thing is clear: you will have to start on people when they are young. For you have observed that feelings and habits formed in youth are hard, or even impossible, to alter later on. So you cannot rely on the kind of rational instruction – arguments about what is good and bad, and why – that could only engage adults. In fact, you've watched someone devote his whole life to arguing with morally confused adults, and the results were dispiriting indeed. What you want is a method for shaping people's values when they are still young, and, furthermore, one that can be used to maintain those values when people have grown. What method will succeed?

If you are Plato at the end of your career, writing your never-to-be-finished *magnum opus*, the *Laws*, the answer you give is one bound to surprise

modern readers. The foundation of moral excellence – indeed, the whole of moral education – consists in exposing people to the right music.

The aim of this paper is to present a new explanation of why Plato holds this view. I want to show that, according to the *Laws*, musical education is the best means of moral education, because through exposure to the right music one comes to occupy a certain perspective. This perspective is that from which one can correctly view the defining feature of ethically good characters and actions: the beautiful or fine – the *kalon*. Occupying this perspective is a matter of feeling the correct pleasures and pains: being pleased by what is truly *kalon*, and pained by the opposite.

There are other ways to explain the aim of musical education, which are closely related to this one: that musical education channels feelings of pleasure in the correct direction, that it produces love of the *kalon*, that it instills virtue, or that it harmonizes the soul. These are all compatible with my account, and I think them all correct.² What I want to show is that understanding the function of musical education as the transformation of ethical perspective, as the *Laws* encourages us to do, helps us in understanding the relation of art and ethics. It sheds some light on Plato's notion of the *kalon*; it also suggests an answer to a glaring question about moral education as Plato presents it: why it should proceed through art rather than through more direct means.

I The *Kalon* in art and in ethics

Kalon is a notoriously ambiguous term. Most broadly it means 'admirable' or 'praiseworthy'. It can also mean 'noble', 'honourable' or 'genteel' in a social sense.³ Coming to the uses that interest us here, it is the standard term for 'beautiful', used to describe, for example, a good-looking person. But it also has an ethical use: Socrates frequently insists that acts are virtuous only if *kalon*, and his interlocutors agree (see, for example, *Prt.* 349e ff.). Moreover, in some contexts he uses it as interchangeable with – coextensive, and apparently even synonymous with – 'good' (*agathon*), where 'good' means what benefits the soul, and thus (given Socrates' ethical views) what we would call ethically good (*Rep.* V.452e, V.457b; *Meno* 77b; *Smp.* 204e).

If you look up '*kalon*' in a lexicon, you will get separate headings for the aesthetic and ethical senses of the word. The assumption that these senses are distinct is natural enough for us moderns; I want to show that it nonetheless seriously hampers the interpretation of Plato's aesthetics.

As we have already seen, Plato thinks that music (and other art) contributes to moral education. But he does not say merely that it is in virtue of being morally beneficial that art is useful, or appropriate; he seems to say that it is this same quality that renders art *kalon*. In *Laws* II the Athenian

Stranger (the dialogue's main speaker) asks what is *kalon* in song and dance (654d). The answer he gives is clear:

The postures and tunes that attach to virtue in soul or body, or to some image of them, are all *kalon*, while those of vice are all the opposite. (655b)

If we assume that there are two distinct senses of *kalon*, aesthetic and ethical, then the natural conclusion is that Plato here ignores the former sense, and, in a most anti-aesthetic spirit, uses the latter as the standard of artistic value. We find this complaint forcefully expressed in Janaway's comment on this section of the *Laws*:

Plato insists that the right standards of evaluation for the arts are those of morality.... The educated person must be able to sing and dance well or finely [*kalōs* (from *kalon*)]. But what does it mean to perform these activities well?... Instead of developing any aesthetic criterion, Plato sticks to the idea that... a good song is one which... presents you with an accurate likeness of [ethical] goodness. (Janaway 1995, 177)

Janaway's complaint certainly looks to be borne out by the rest of *Laws* II, which continues to characterize *kalon* art as art that accurately represents the *kalon* in human characters and actions. When we look at the 655b in context, however, the picture becomes more complicated:

What then must we say is the *kalon* posture or tune? Consider: when a brave soul is faced with troubles, and a cowardly soul faced by the same, are the postures and utterances that result similar? – How could they be, when even the colours [of their complexions] are different? –... The colours of a brave man are *kalon*, those of a cowardly man *aischron* [the opposite of *kalon*]. And in order that we not go on too long about this, let us simply say that the postures and tunes that attach to virtue in soul or body, or to some image of them, are all *kalon*, while those of vice are all the opposite. (654e–55b)

In calling the colour of the brave man's complexion *kalon* Plato is most naturally taken to mean that it is good-looking, not that it is ethically fine; in calling the coward's complexion *aischron* he is most naturally taken to mean that it is ugly, rather than morally shameful (another possible sense of the term). Thus, when a few lines below he uses *kalon* to refer to another physical feature of the brave man, postures, he is presumably making that same point. But now we seem to be pushed toward a conclusion diametrically opposed to Janaway's: the standard for assessing both artistic images and their human originals as *kalon* is aesthetic, not moral at all.

Which interpretation is correct – which sense does Plato have in mind? Translators are evidently at a loss: it is worth combing through English translations of the *Laws* II like R.G. Bury's (1952) or T.J. Saunders's (2004) to see just how many different words they use for *kalon* in different passages (with no warnings or explanations): good, beautiful, noble, high quality, and fine, to name the most frequent. But this should strike us as odd. Plato chooses his words carefully. Moreover, he has a view about what explains the possibility of assigning the same word to different things:

We customarily hypothesize a single form [εἶδος] in connection with each of the many things to which we apply the same name. (*Rep.* X.596a, Grube and Reeve (trans.) 1992)

There is not much talk of Forms in the *Laws*, but the Form of the *Kalon* plays a prominent role in other dialogues: it is the ultimate object of love in the *Phaedrus* and *Symposium*, and a paradigm form in the *Republic* and *Phaedo*. Moreover, when we come to the metaphysical discussion in the last book of the *Laws* (again in the context of a discussion of education, although this time an intellectual education reserved for the guardians), we find the Stranger saying that, in order to know about virtue or about anything else, one will have to look to the 'one form [μίαν ἰδέαν] out of many and dissimilar things' (965c); he then adds:

About the *kalon* and the good do we think this same thing? Must our guardians know only that each of these is many, or also in what way and how they are one? (966a)

The answer is the latter: here, too, Plato holds that there is one, single Form common to all *kalon* things. Presumably, then, he also still holds the view most explicit in the *Phaedo*: that what makes worldly things *kalon* is participation in the Form of the *Kalon* (*Phd.* 100d).⁴

Thus, we have every reason to take it that Plato means to be using *kalon* univocally in the *Laws*. *Kalon* art is art that resembles (or otherwise participates in) the Form of the *Kalon*, and it is by participation in this same Form that virtuous actions and characters too are called *kalon*. If this is right, then the ethical and aesthetic uses of *kalon* are deeply intertwined. In dialogues which have a lot to say about the Form of the *Kalon* translators nearly always give 'the Beautiful'; this is not wrong, but what we have seen suggests that it is incomplete: the term has some ethical dimension too.

The position I am recommending is, thus, a middle ground between two natural but ultimately uncharitable accounts of Plato's view of the relation between the *kalon* in art and the *kalon* in ethics. The first is Janaway's: Plato uses only the ethical sense of the term, ignoring the aesthetic. The second is subtler: Plato uses the term in two distinct senses, but thinks that there is

some interesting and important relation between them such that a sensitivity to the aesthetically beautiful will somehow encourage or yield a sensitivity to the ethically fine. There is a third view, represented by Richardson Lear in her discussion of the *Republic*: the primary sense of *kalon*, both in art and in human affairs, is something closest to our 'beautiful'. The position I want to advocate is compatible with her claim, but not committed to it. We are most charitable to Plato if we take him to use the term in one sense only: all *kalon* things are *kalon* in the same way. On Plato's view, this means that they all participate in one Form. Participation in this Form renders art beautiful, and actions and characters ethically fine, but these are not two different qualities. (Compare: participation in the Form of the Good makes food nutritious, and knives sharp, but on Plato's view both are good in a univocal sense. Or: participation in the Form of the Large makes numbers high and cats fat, but this does not show that there are two distinct senses of 'large'.) Thus, it is a mistake to ask which sense of *kalon* Plato has in mind at various points, or whether the ethical or aesthetic sense is prior.

As to what the *kalon* is – what unifying feature is bestowed on things by participation in the Form of the *Kalon* – I will not have much to say. Perhaps it is something closest to aesthetic beauty, as Richardson Lear argues; perhaps it is simply admirableness, as the broadest sense of the term suggests. I return to this question briefly below, but my main aim is to emphasize that, whatever this quality is, Plato takes it to be just one quality.

The advantage of this view, I will argue, is that it makes sense of music's role in moral education. If all *kalon* things are participants in one single Form, a process that makes one good at recognizing and responding appropriately to participants in the *Kalon* in any sphere will thereby make one good at recognizing and responding appropriately to them in the ethical sphere as well – which is to say that it will thereby improve one's moral character. This, I argue in what follows, is precisely Plato's argument in the *Laws*. The clearest way to bring this out will be by examining what Plato has to say about the importance of perspective.

II Aesthetic perspective

To understand Plato's use of the notion of perspective in art we can begin with a passage that seems to treat the *kalon* in art quite independently of any moral standard. The passage comes from the *Sophist*, and in it Plato gives his fullest treatment of a theme he mentions elsewhere: that visual art involves certain illusions, which depend for their effect on the viewer occupying a certain perspective.⁵ Here he distinguishes between two types of art. Some artists preserve the proportions and colours of what they represent, but:

As to those who sculpt or paint very large works, if they reproduced the true proportions of the limbs,⁶ you know that the upper parts would

appear smaller than they should, and the lower parts would appear larger, on account of the former being seen by us from farther away and the latter from closer ... So don't these craftsmen, saying goodbye to truth, produce in their images not the real proportions but instead the ones that seem to be *kalon*? ... [They produce] *something which appears, on account of the view being from somewhere not kalon* [διὰ τὴν οὐκ ἐκ καλοῦ θέαν], *to resemble the kalon* [ἔοικέναι τῷ καλῷ], but which, if someone acquired the power to see such large things adequately, would not resemble that which it claims to resemble ... (*Sph.* 235e–236b)

Here we see what appears at first to be a purely aesthetic claim about perspective. It is natural to translate *kalon* here as 'beautiful', for the passage seems to be making a point about visual beauty. The danger of viewing things from the wrong perspective is not simply that an inaccurate representation appears accurate but also that something not beautiful appears beautiful. The converse is implied as well: if the artists were to reproduce the true proportions, these would seem not beautiful from the bad perspective. Oddly to our ears, the perspective itself is described as 'not *kalon*'. I return to this point below.

This *Sophist* passage assumes a deeply controversial aesthetic thesis: that there is a perceiver-independent fact of the matter about what art is *kalon* and what not. This is why perspective matters in art: if there were no objective standard of beauty, then something's looking beautiful from a certain angle would suffice to make it beautiful. Only on the assumption that there are objective facts about the beautiful does the idea of a correct or incorrect aesthetic perspective make sense.

Turning now to the *Laws*, we see that it makes much of the objectivity of the *kalon* in art. *Laws* II, like *Republic* II–III, argues that exposure to the right music, and protection from the wrong, are crucial to achieving and maintaining virtue in the citizens' souls. But what is 'rightness' (or 'correctness' – ὀρθότης (657a–b)) in music? The dialogue's main speaker, the Athenian Stranger, argues that music is a kind of imitation (*mimēsis*), and thus that the criterion of correctness in music is accuracy: truthfulness in representing what it imitates (667e–668a). More specifically,

The kind of music we ought to cultivate is the kind that achieves similarity in its imitations of the *kalon* [τὴν ἔχουσαν τὴν ὁμοιότητα τῷ τοῦ καλοῦ μιμήματι]. (668b)

Good music, then, is music that accurately imitates the *kalon*. But what does this mean? It is possible, but unlikely, that Plato is here referring directly to the Form of the *kalon*: he has various unambiguous phrases to refer to that (such as 'the *Kalon* itself'); no other metaphysical comments are made in the course of Book II's discussion; and, as Nehamas

has pointed out, there are no (other) uses of 'imitation' to describe the relation between particulars and Forms. Instead, we should look to the preceding discussion, which we saw quoted in part above. What music imitates is character and action. *Kalon* music is music that imitates virtuous characters and actions:

For I suppose no one will say that the choric performances depicting vice are more *kalon* than those depicting virtue. (655c)

Meanwhile, a virtuous character is precisely a character that is itself *kalon*:

Justice and all just people and affairs and actions are all *kalon*...the most just character will be to that extent thoroughly *kalon* [παρακάλλους]. (859d)

Thus, *kalon* music is music that imitates *kalon* characters and actions. This, of course, entails that it also resembles or otherwise participates in the Form, but what Plato emphasizes here is the resemblance between music and human affairs. But this seems to support Janaway's claim that Plato's standards of evaluation for art are purely ethical rather than aesthetic. For it might well seem that here Plato is not talking about aesthetic beauty at all. After all, to focus on the representational content of music is to focus on a factor most people would think irrelevant in the assessment of music as beautiful, and to ignore a factor they would think crucial: whether or not it tends to evoke a certain response in the hearer – a response generally identifiable as aesthetic pleasure.

Plato is certainly aware of this view, for he has considered it in the course of his discussion, and dismissed it outright:

It is not fitting for any imitation to be judged by the criterion of pleasure or of false opinion [ἡδονῆ κρίνεσθαι καὶ δόξῃ μὴ ἀληθεῖ]... What is equal is equal and what is proportional is proportional, and this does not depend on anyone's opinion that it is so, nor does it cease to be true if someone is displeased at the fact. Truth, and nothing else whatever, is the only permissible criterion... So we should not at all accept someone's argument if he says that music is to be judged by the criterion of pleasure. (667e–8a)

Here he rejects two criteria for judging music: the fact that someone believes it good ('opinion'), and the fact that someone takes pleasure in it. He lumps these two criteria together, and we can see why. A very natural account of aesthetic judgement (of what it is to find something beautiful) has it that we judge things beautiful on the basis of finding them pleasant: see, for example, Hume's and Kant's accounts of the 'judgement of taste'. Meanwhile,

a subjectivist account of what aesthetic beauty is holds that, if someone judges something beautiful, it thereby is beautiful: the pleasure-based aesthetic judgement is itself the standard of beauty. Plato attributes precisely this subjectivist account to ‘the many [*hoi polloi*]’ (658e), and also to the artists or composers (*ποιηταί*) themselves, who:

[I]gnorant of the correct and legitimate standards laid down by the Muse...unwittingly bore false witness against music, as a thing without any standard of correctness [in itself], [thinking] that what judges correctness is the pleasure of the person who enjoys it, whether a good person or a bad one. (700d–e)

On this kind of view, there is no ‘correct’ perspective or standpoint on musical beauty. If my tastes run to the mournful, then for me the mournful is beautiful. If your tastes run to the martial, then for you the martial is beautiful. It makes no more sense to say that one of us has a more accurate view of true beauty than it does to say that lovers of chocolate are discerning the delicious more accurately than those who prefer cassoulet, or that biologists have a truer sense of the interesting than historians. It all depends on one’s perspective: one’s tastes, one’s interests, one’s opinions.

We should not be surprised to see Plato reject this subjectivist account of beauty, of course, for throughout the dialogues we see him reject subjectivist views of everything he thinks important. One might take his whole theory of Forms as an extended refutation of the view he attributes to Protagoras in the *Theaetetus*: that ‘Man is the measure of all things’. On Plato’s view subjective human opinion is the measure of nothing (or at least nothing worth measuring): not only are there objective facts of the matter about what is true and real, but also, and much more controversially, about value. What is good is so independently of what is judged good, and the same holds for the just, the pleasant and the *kalon*. There are objective facts about what is *kalon*; indeed, there is a Form of the *Kalon*, and other things are *kalon* only by partaking in it in some way. The subjectivist view of beauty thus fares no better than would a subjectivist view of a mathematical property like rectangularity. At one point the Athenian Stranger asks, with regard to differing tastes in music,

Is it that the same things aren’t *kalon* for us all, or that the same things are, but they do not seem to be the same? (655c)

He argues, as we have seen, for the latter: there is only one kind of music that is *kalon*, namely, that which accurately imitates *kalon* characters.

What is surprising about the *Laws*’s account of music, however, is that it holds on to more of the subjectivist account than we might expect. We have

seen passages explicitly rejecting opinion and pleasure as criteria in music, in favour of knowledge of the original which it imitates (667e–669a). But an earlier passage in Book II seems to contradict this:

I agree this far with the many, that one should judge music by the criterion of pleasure [δεῖν τὴν μουσικὴν ἡδονῇ κρίνεσθαι], but not the pleasure experienced by just anybody. Instead one should judge that music most *kalon* which delights the best and the sufficiently educated people, and most *kalon* of all if it delights the one person who excels in virtue and education. (658e–9a, emphasis mine)

We need not take Plato to be here conceding that the virtuous and educated person is actually the measure of the *kalon* in Protagoras' sense – that the pleasure of the educated perceiver constitutes the beauty of art – for that would put this passage in stark contradiction to all his claims that there is a Form of the *Kalon*, by participation in which all *kalon* things are such (see most explicitly *Phd.* 100d). What he is saying, however, is nearly as surprising: that the educated perceiver's pleasure is the proper criterion for judgement.

What are we to make of this? A few pages later the Stranger will say that 'we should not at all accept someone's argument if he says that music is to be judged by the criterion of pleasure' (668a, quoted above); here he gives precisely this argument himself. We can reconcile the contradiction if we take Plato's view to be as follows. What makes music *kalon* is an objective, perceiver-independent feature: accurate resemblance to *kalon* characters. (If the *Laws* were more in the business of doing metaphysics the Stranger would further explain this, as Socrates does elsewhere, as participation in the Form of the *Kalon*.) Therefore, a qualified judge of music is one who can recognize what is objectively *kalon*: in musical as in other matters it is the expert, the well-educated person, who is the qualified judge. The surprising thing Plato tells us at 658e–9a is that expertise in music manifests itself not (or not merely) as knowledge, but (also) as pleasure. To put it another way, occupying the correct perspective in musical matters – occupying the *kalon* perspective, as the last line of our *Sophist* passage puts it – is a matter of feeling the proper pleasure.

Now I come to my main argument against Janaway: we have every reason to take it that the kind of pleasure Plato has in mind is precisely what we would call aesthetic pleasure. Plato's disagreement with the many, and with the composers, is not over the type of response that constitutes the criterion for judging artistic beauty, but only over which people's manifestation of that response counts. The response in question is just what ordinary people think it is: the distinctive kind of pleasure we take in art. Most people enjoy the wrong kind of art: they take the kind of pleasure they ought to

take in good music in bad music instead. Indeed, this can happen even to someone who has correct intellectual beliefs about what is *kalon* in music:

What if someone judges correctly what things are *kalon* and what *aischron*, and treats them accordingly? Do we regard such a man as better educated in chistry and music if he is able to serve his conception [διανοηθέν] of the *kalon* adequately with body and voice, but doesn't rejoice in things that are *kalon* and hate things that are not, or if he is not wholly able to get right in voice and body what he conceives, but gets things right with pleasure and pain, welcoming whatever is *kalon*, and being disgusted by what is not? (654c–d)

The interlocutors agree that the latter is preferable: being well educated musically is primarily a matter of taking pleasure in the *kalon*. What I want to emphasize is that these complaints – that people take pleasure in the wrong sort of music, even when they recognize that it is of the wrong sort – are just the sort of things contemporary aesthetes might say about people with what we would call bad aesthetic taste. Those who enjoy trashy music, even if they are able to judge intellectually that refined music is better, lack a good aesthetic sense. The response they are failing to have is precisely what we would call aesthetic pleasure.

Let us return now to the *Sophist* passage: distorted statues which only seem to resemble well-proportioned bodies 'appear, on account of the view being from somewhere not *kalon*, to resemble the *kalon*' but do not (*Sph.* 236b). The passage is echoed by one in the *Laws* on correctness in representation: one cannot judge a song *kalon* if one is ignorant of the original it represents (*kalon* characters and actions), just as one cannot judge a statue *kalon* if one does not know 'whether it preserves the proper dimensions and the positions of each of the bodily parts... and their colours and shapes as well' (668d–669a). Moreover, it fits well with what we have seen above: the standard of correctness of the *kalon* in art is resemblance to the *kalon* in life.

As to the *Sophist's* claim that 'the view is from somewhere not *kalon*', we now have a new way to understand this: one occupies a bad perspective from which to view art insofar as one's pleasures and pains are out of line with correct judgements (one's own or others) as to what is truly good. Thus, Plato need not be taken to say in the *Sophist* passage that one's physical perspective in viewing statues (down on the ground below the pediment) is somehow ugly or base; the claim is best taken as a metaphor for the state of soul of those who are poor judges of art, taking pleasure in the wrong things. And this is precisely what we find in the *Laws's* discussion of the *kalon* in music: people with bad characters take pleasure in, and call *kalon*, musical representations of base characters; people with good characters take pleasure in and call *kalon* the opposite (see especially 655d–e).

In a paper on Plato's critique of poetry in *Republic X* (Moss 2007), I argued that Plato's charge there is that most people mistake what Homer and the tragedians offer up for accurate depictions of human virtue, because those poems appeal to the ignorant, pleasure-seeking, appetitive parts of their souls, particularly those that are corrupt and base. The *Laws* spends more time on good art than bad, but my arguments above show that its basic account is the same: viewing things from the wrong perspective – that is, from the standpoint of one's badly educated desires for pleasure – makes one wrong about which art correctly depicts the *kalon* in human affairs.

III Ethical perspective

So far we have seen (a) that one occupies the correct perspective on music – the perspective from which one can accurately judge whether it is *kalon* – insofar as one responds correctly to music with feelings of pleasure, and also (b) that *kalon* music is music that resembles *kalon* characters. If this is correct, it has a crucial implication for moral education: by coming to occupy the correct perspective on the *kalon* in music – that is, by coming to feel correct aesthetic pleasure – one will thereby come to occupy the correct perspective on the *kalon* in human affairs.

The notion of a correct perspective on human affairs may sound odd; that Plato thought it an important one is manifested in a later passage from *Laws II*'s discussion of musical education. The Stranger is explaining the need for revisionary music about justice as part of the citizens' musical education:

Looking at a thing from a distance fogs nearly everyone's vision, especially children's. But the lawgiver will reverse how things seem to us by lifting away the fog, and will persuade us somehow or other – by habits and praises and accounts – that just and unjust things are like shadow-paintings [ὡς ἐσκιαγραφημένα]. Unjust things appear pleasant to the enemy of justice, and just things most unpleasant, because he views it from his own unjust and evil standpoint [ἐκ μὲν ἀδίκου καὶ κακοῦ ἑαυτοῦ θεωρούμενα]. But from the standpoint of the just man both appear in all ways entirely the opposite. (*Laws* 663b–c)

Here Plato emphasizes something analogous to what we saw in the *Sophist* passage: the importance of what we might call ethical perspective. In truth, the ethically best life – the just life – is also the most pleasant, and whoever is aware of this will pursue the just life (for everyone pursues what they think most pleasant (*Laws* 663b). Unfortunately many people fail to grasp this truth, and so live badly. The reason they fail to grasp it, according to this passage, is that they are looking at justice from the wrong perspective – from the befogged standpoint of their own unjust characters – and so it does not appear to them as it really is. In the passage, then, Plato uses a visual

claim – that things look different to people occupying different viewpoints – as a metaphor for an ethical claim: that in matters of value things seem different to people with different ethical characters. The visual example he chooses is one drawn from one of the visual arts. Just and unjust things are like *skiagraphia*: shadow-painting, something akin to *trompe l'oeil*, which presents an illusory appearance when viewed from a certain perspective.⁷

In the ethical realm, then, just as in the aesthetic, there is such a thing as occupying the right perspective. Moreover, as Plato reminds us in the discussion surrounding the ethical perspective passage, here too it is a question of taking pleasure in things that are truly *kalon*. The unjust life is *aischron*, the opposite of *kalon* (662a, 663d). The problem with most people can be put by saying that they fail to recognize that the life of justice (and other virtues) is pleasant, or equivalently by saying that they fail to take pleasure in things that are really *kalon*.

That pleasure and pain are crucial to character, and thus that the aim of moral education must be to train them appropriately, has been explicit from the start of Book II's discussion of education:

In children the first childish perceptions are pleasure and pain, and these are the things through which virtue and vice first arise in the soul... I call 'education', then, the virtue that arises first in children, when pleasure and friendship, pain and hatred arise correctly in the souls of those not yet able to grasp the *logos*. Then when they have grasped the *logos*, they will harmonize with the *logos*, since they are correctly habituated (ἐθίσθαι) in the proper habits (ἔθῶν). This whole harmony is virtue, while the part concerned with pleasures and pains, the correct training of them so as to hate the things one should hate from first to last, and love the things we should love, if you mark this off and call it 'education' then I at any rate think you would be naming it correctly. (653a–c)

It has been equally explicit that the way to train these pleasures and pains is through music. Shortly after this passage comes the one with which I began this paper: 'education comes originally from Apollo and the Muses... So by an uneducated man we shall mean a man who has not been trained to take part in a chorus' (654a). And, in summing up the discussion of musical education, Plato says:

The soul of the child has to be prevented from getting into the habit (ἐθίζηται) of feeling pleasure and pain in ways not sanctioned by the law... That is why we have what we call songs. (659d–e)

See also 656a–b: taking pleasure in the wrong kind of music is 'probably or even necessarily the same' as enjoying bad companions, and thereby coming to be like them.

The claim of the *Laws*, then, is that proper habituation in the right music can bring one to occupy the correct ethical perspective – can lift away the fog or remove the distance. The result is that one comes to take pleasure in what is truly *kalon* in human affairs. I have argued that this works because the *kalon* in music and the *kalon* in human affairs are instances of the same property, and the way to judge this property correctly is to take the right sort of pleasure in it.

I have said almost nothing about what this property is, nor do I think Plato's account in the *Laws* presupposes anything more detailed than what we have seen above: the *kalon* is a quality manifested both in good art and in good human action, the appropriate response to which is a certain kind of pleasure. Certainly he has more to say about the *kalon* elsewhere, for example in the *Hippias Major*. My main point has simply been to emphasize that, whatever this quality is, it is in the same both in art and in life, and that this explains why art is of such ethical importance. Dangerous art is dangerous because it panders to and reinforces a bad ethical perspective from which things that are not *kalon* seem so. Good art, the art which Plato prescribes as the main component in moral education, is useful because it transforms one's ethical perspective: it brings one to an excellent perspective – a *kalon* viewpoint, to use the *Sophist's* language – from which things appear as they are.

IV Why music as the means?

What I have argued above leaves two crucial questions hanging. First, how does exposure to *kalon* music make one come to take pleasure in it – what guarantee is there that correct education will shape one's aesthetic tastes and bring one to the right perspective, rather than leaving one unmoved? That is, even granting that occupying the right aesthetic perspective thereby puts one into the correct ethical perspective, how does music get one there? Second, even if music can be used as a tool of moral education, why not use more straightforwardly ethical means instead? If the goal is to get people into the right perspective, which is simultaneously the right ethical and aesthetic perspective, why use aesthetic means to bring them there rather than training people to take pleasure in *kalon* characters and actions directly – in virtuous role models, or in one's own virtuous actions (as Aristotle prescribes in the *Ethics*)? I think Plato has one answer to both questions. The main idea is that the *kalon* in music is easier to regulate and control than the *kalon* in human affairs.

The last passage quoted above says that we have songs in order to bring people's pleasures and pains in line with what is sanctioned by law. In the next lines Plato elaborates on how songs can perform this task:

Those who care for the sick and weak in body try to administer wholesome nourishment in pleasant foods and drinks, and unwholesome

nourishment in unpleasant ones, in order that the patients will welcome the former and become correctly habituated to hate the latter. In the same way then ... [the composer should] correctly render the postures of temperate and brave and generally good men in his rhythms and their tunes in his harmonies. (659d–669a)

Pleasant music should be used to represent *kalon* characters and actions, just as pleasant flavours should be used to deliver wholesome food. This may seem to imply, in conflict with my arguments above that aesthetic pleasure is taken in the *kalon*, that pleasantness in music is contingently related to its being *kalon*, just as pleasantness in food is only contingently related to its being nutritious: a clever practitioner in either sphere can manipulate things so that the two qualities coincide, but this takes some doing. A difficult passage later in *Laws* II shows that Plato's point is importantly different. Here the Stranger argues that the grace or charm (*χάρις*) of food or music, namely its pleasantness, is distinct from its correctness (*ὀρθότητα*) (667b–c). Pleasantness can exist without correctness (667e), and, since we learned above that the correctness of music is its accurate imitation of the *kalon* in human affairs, this might seem to confirm that the pleasantness of music is only contingently related to its being *kalon*. Plato adds, however, that, where there is correctness, charm follows and results from it (*παρεπόμενον, ἐπακολουθῆ*) (667d–e). I suggest that we take his idea to be the following. Music that accurately represents human affairs will by its very nature be charming and pleasant; all we need do by way of supervising the artists is to constrain them to produce accurate representations, and prevent them from also composing inaccurate representations with an artificial charm. (Arguably the same is true in regulating dieticians: wholesome foods are by nature pleasant, but if you raise someone on unhealthy sweets this will distort their tastes.)

Thus, *kalon* music is by nature pleasant, and in a very accessible and obvious way: it is charming. This explains how music works to bring us to the right perspective, and why it is better equipped to do so than more direct means: even children will enjoy *kalon* music, for its charm is obvious, just as even children can enjoy wholesome food, provided that its natural flavours are allowed to stand out.

Even if there were some more straightforwardly ethical equivalent to this aesthetic strategy, moreover – for example, exposing the child to *kalon* actions only when performed by charming people – it would be of much less use to the lawgiver, and this for two reasons.

First, each individual piece of music can be controlled by the artist, while human actions and characters are not thoroughly under the agent's control. An aesthetically pleasing artwork is one where everything fits (see 669b–d, and compare *Rep.* III.398d and 400d). In real life – as Alcibiades' speech on Socrates in the *Symposium* reminds us – a beautiful soul can be in an

ugly body; in art, the knowledgeable artist can make every aspect *kalon*. Therefore, a *kalon* representation may be more thoroughly *kalon* – or more purely *kalon*, or more obviously and manifestly *kalon* – than the character or action it imitates. This is arguably part of the reason why charm follows musical representations more readily than human originals.

Second, music can be thoroughly legislated and controlled by the state in a way that human actions, even Plato must admit, cannot. The Stranger dwells at length on the example of Egypt:

There long ago, it seems, this principle which we are now speaking of was recognized, that the young in the city should practice in their habituations *kalon* postures and tunes. Having ordered in detail what these are and what they are like, they posted this in their temples... And if you examine that place now you will find that the things drawn or imprinted there 10,000 years ago... are no more *kalon* or *aischron* than those crafted now, but produced by the same art... [This shows] that it was possible as regards music for the tunes which possess a correctness by nature to be firmly legislated and consecrated. (656d–657a)

Legislators cannot control our every posture and utterance in our ordinary affairs, but they can control our every posture and utterance in song and dance. They can thereby ensure that in this realm we are thoroughly and consistently habituated into enjoyment of the *kalon*.

Notes

1. Translations of the *Laws* are based loosely on translations by T. J. Saunders (2004) and by R. G. Bury (1952).
2. Although my emphasis on and account of perspective are, I believe, new, the broad lines of my interpretation have much in common with G. Richardson Lear's account of the role of musical education in the *Republic* (Richardson Lear 2006), and also with R. Kamtekar's account of musical education in the *Laws*: 'the direction of pleasures and pains is a development of proral powers to perceive goodness' (Kamtekar 2008, 357).
3. For citations from Greek literature and rhetoric for all these uses see Dover (1974, 69–73). I will use the neuter singular *kalon* for all forms of the word in quotations below.
4. Compare Richardson Lear's argument (2006, 105).
5. Compare the discussion of the painting of the cobbler at *Republic* X.598c; perspective plays a similar role in the optical illusions discussed at *Protagoras* 356c and *Philebus* 41e ff.
6. Reading τῶν κῶλον with mss; later editors suggest τῶν καλῶν, things that are *kalon* (beautiful or fine).
7. He uses *skiagraphia* in *Republic* IX to illustrate a similar point about pleasures: the pleasures that appeal to most people, bodily pleasures mixed with pain, are mere shadow-paintings of true pleasures (IX.586b). Again the idea of perspective

is important: these shadow-painting pleasures appeal to people who occupy the wrong standpoint – the bottom and middle of the hedonic scale (pain, or the neutral state of relief from pain) rather than the top (pure pleasure) (584d ff). For an interesting analysis of *skiagraphia* as metaphor for mixed pleasures, see Keuls (1978, 82).

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This unique collection of essays presents various aspects of Plato's views on art and beauty, not only in the *Republic* but in the *Ion*, *Phaedrus*, *Symposium*, *Laws* and related dialogues. The selection aims to address a representative range of issues including the moral status of music and visual art, the allure of artistic and sensual beauty, censorship, the relations between aesthetic and moral emotions, truth and deception in art, and the contest between philosophy and poetry. The essays are not exclusively interpretive, although some (such as those by G. R. F. Ferrari, Jessica Moss and C. D. C. Reeve) are close scholarly readings of specific dialogues. Other authors, including M. F. Burnyeat and Stephen Halliwell, aim to locate Plato's thinking on art and beauty within wider controversies in ethics, politics and aesthetics. A common thread uniting them is their appreciation of the extent to which certain of Plato's texts are contributions to aesthetic and moral psychology, as much as exercises in metaphysics and epistemology.

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