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THOMAS PUTTFARCKEN

PLATO [To explore Plato's philosophy of art, the first of its kind in the history of Western philosophy, this entry comprises five essays:

- Survey of Thought
- Plato on Mimesis
- Plato's Use of Poetry
- Plato on the Effects of Art
- Plato and Modern Aesthetics

The first essay is an overview of Plato's thought in general. The next three essays focus on issues that were central to his thinking about art (a term Plato, of course, did not use the way we now do, anymore than he ever used the word aesthetics): "mimēsis," "the use of poetry," and "the effects of art." The final essay reflects the differences between Plato's philosophy of art and modern aesthetics. For related discussion, see Aristotle; Beauty; Mimesis; Poetics; and Theories of Art.]

Survey of Thought

Plato (428-347 BCE) is one of the principal figures not only in ancient Greek thought but in the history of philosophy as

a whole. His works have played a vital shaping role in many fields of the subject, and his discussions of art and beauty can be regarded as the first great monuments of philosophical aesthetics. Different aspects of his work have influenced artists and philosophers of art in many ages, including Aristotle (in the *Poetics*), medieval and Renaissance philosophy of art, and Romanticism. He is still regarded as an important contributor to debates about the nature and value of art.

The most prominent feature of Plato's philosophy of art is his hostility to artists, especially poets. This has tended to be regarded in two different ways. The first is to dismiss his position as a product of philistinism or political zeal. The second is to assume that so great and subtle a thinker cannot really have been hostile to poetry, and to seek clues that he has a more positive view of "genuine art." Both reactions rest on an apparent assurance that art has a supreme value that philosophers should not impugn. A third, more sympathetic approach sees Plato as highly sensitive to the appeal of poetry, yet fundamentally challenging art's value and its relationship to philosophy. This best reflects Plato's view in the *Republic*, book 10, where he rejects some forms of poetry as antithetical to the pursuit of truth and the good, but confesses that freeing oneself from their attractions is akin to keeping away from a person one loves.

Plato lacks the modern conception of art as a domain of life with a high and unquestionable value. No single Platonic term translates directly as *art*. On the other hand, it is appropriate to speak of his philosophy of art since he frequently treats poetry, drama, music, painting, and sculpture as kindred activities. His thinking about beauty inaugurated a long tradition in aesthetics, although Plato's own concern with the value of beauty is not purely aesthetic in the modern sense, and he makes no privileged link between beauty and the arts.

The chief Platonic texts bearing on art and beauty are the *Republic* (especially books 2, 3, and 10), *Ion*, *Hippias Major*, *Symposium*, *Phaedrus*, and *Laws* (especially books 2 and 7). Similar concerns permeate his philosophy in all its phases, however, and his discussions of art and beauty are best appreciated in the context of his ethics, metaphysics, and epistemology. The dominant questions are always whether the arts increase our knowledge or promote what is ethically valuable.

Republic, 2-3. Plato's best-known treatment of the arts occurs in the *Republic*, the central work of his mature "middle period." In books 2-3 of his description of the ideal human community he discusses *mousikē*, which includes music and dance, but also poetry and dramatic enactment. The concern is to produce the right moral character in the selected class of citizens Plato calls "guardians." He assumes that a training in the arts from infancy will achieve this, along with gymnastics. But it is not only the practices of the young that are to be controlled—he also wishes to set standards for the arts throughout the community.

Plato examines the content of mythical stories and poems, and proposes to remove portrayals of figures such as

gods and heroes unless they present true paradigms of human behavior and give to rise to desirable moral attitudes. The staples of Greek education such as Homer and Hesiod are to be censored by the state in accordance with this rule. Plato has a rudimentary notion of fiction, but insists that a fiction should not be approved unless it gives a good likeness. For example, no divine being is capable of change, deception, or evil, so no fiction will be permitted in which gods are thus portrayed.

Plato makes a division between two forms of poetic diction: pure narration in the poet's own voice, and narration by means of *mimēsis*—dramatic enactment or representation. The two forms may occur separately or combined: tragedy and comedy use *mimēsis* alone, dithyrambic poetry uses pure narration without *mimēsis*, and Homeric epic is a combination of the two, in which dramatic speeches by characters in the story punctuate the poet's pure narration. Plato argues that the person of good character must not pursue dramatic *mimēsis* as an end in itself, despite the pleasure this can bring, but should always emulate people of appropriate character, whether inside or outside a fictional context. One may thus enact the part of a noble, restrained character, but indiscriminate pursuit of *mimēsis* will make one a double or multiple person. The idea is that one becomes similar to what one enacts, and that the guardians must have only a single character to fit them for their single role in the state. A parallel argument supports prescriptions as to which musical modes, rhythms, and instruments may be used, since these will also assimilate the performer to specific traits of character.

In this discussion Plato assigns the arts the high and honorable role of training the growing soul and impressing gracefulness on it, preparing it for the rational pursuit of the good. Yet, he sees no value in artistic products that give pleasure as such. He emphasizes that the most pleasurable and the "most poetic" artists will find no place in his community.

Republic, Book 10. In book 10 of the *Republic* Plato gives a new account of *mimēsis* and excludes "all mimetic poetry" from the ideal state. Painting is used as an example to explain the nature of *mimēsis* in a more general sense, which is the making of representational images or appearances. The painter paints the image of a bed. This is no real thing, but is derivative from real beds made by a carpenter, which are in turn "less real" than the Form of Bed. Plato is using the apparatus of his epistemology and metaphysics in order to analyze artistic activity. Knowledge, for him, requires contact with the eternal, unchanging Forms, such as Justice itself or Beauty itself, which alone have true being. His strategy is to show that a painter does not produce something with true being, but only the appearance of a thing of a certain kind. This is *mimēsis*.

The real focus of this argument is poetry. If poetry is mimetic (as Homer and the tragedians in particular are), then it too produces only appearances of things and people.

Supporters of Homer claim that a poet requires comprehensive knowledge of human life in order to make such appearances. But Plato argues that this is a false assumption. Poets who practice *mimēsis* are far from knowing the truth about human excellence and deficiency, and should not be regarded as "the educators of Greece" on the strength of their poems. Poets produce only images of virtue and everything else they write about.

Plato then examines the psychology of poetic *mimēsis*, asking what part of the psyche it appeals to. Again he uses an analogy with visual appearances. The mind has a split reaction to visual illusions—an "inferior" part of us continues to be deceived by them even when the rational part has attained the correct belief. Analogously, poetic *mimēsis* has the power to arouse a childish, emotional part of the psyche, which reacts independently of our rational beliefs. The "greatest charge" against mimetic poetry is that even disciplined Platonic individuals, whose soul is governed by reason and the search for the good, may be ruined by the pleasures of such poetry: sympathetically following its fictional images of emotional turmoil and excess, they allow the "inferior" part of the soul free rein, a habit that may spill over into their reactions to things in real life.

On the grounds, then, that it is a kind of appearance making masquerading falsely as knowledge, and that it has deleterious effects on the psyche, poetic *mimēsis* is to be banished from Plato's ideal community. Plato retains performances whose aim is moral edification rather than pleasure, considering these to be a kind of poetry. His criticisms are most sharply directed at Homer and tragedy, although he objects to every poetic form whose portrayal of scenes or characters aims at pleasure. Such poetry is to be banished, not only from the model community, but from the individual's soul, which throughout the *Republic* is held to be analogous to the city.

Inspiration. Elsewhere Plato suggests that good poets are divinely inspired. This has sometimes been thought to mitigate the criticisms of the *Republic*, but does so equivocally at best. For Plato opposes inspiration to genuine knowledge, which has the higher value.

The *Ion*, one of Plato's earliest dialogues, portrays Socrates in conversation with Ion, who is a rhapsode, a professional reciter of poetry and would-be literary critic. Socrates argues that the rhapsode's abilities stem not from genuine expertise (*technē*) but from inspiration. A typical *technē* is medicine, which embraces a clear subject matter, is teachable, and has general principles of which a rational account can be given. The rhapsode's ability to discourse effectively on Homer's merits is not of this kind, according to Socrates.

Instead, successful performance and discourse about poetry should be explained in the same way as fine poetry itself, as stemming from a state of possession in which one becomes temporarily "out of one's mind." Fine poetry speaks through the poet as a mouthpiece. The poet can

write finely about any subject when in such a state, but can give no account of the poetry's source. We should admire poets as "divine" because of their beautiful, pleasure-giving works, but must not think that they or their interpreters have the kind of responsibility for their achievements that is characteristic of consciously applied expertise.

Similar views of poetic inspiration are repeated in other dialogues, including Plato's last work, the *Laws*. A more positive view appears to be present in the *Phaedrus*, written some time after the *Republic*. Here, Socrates praises the benefits of various kinds of "madness," including poetic inspiration or "the madness of the Muses." A good poet cannot rely on technical expertise alone, but must be "mad" or possessed in a particular way. This view, however, is compatible with the condemnation of poets as lacking knowledge or expertise. For while Plato recognizes that good poetry requires a special explanation, he does not necessarily think that it stands very high in the whole scheme of human values. Later in the *Phaedrus*, poets are ranked sixth out of nine in a list of lives entered by reincarnated souls, while the philosophical lover occupies first place. Although the philosopher is supposed to be "cultured" and enamored of beauty, there is nothing here corresponding to the honorific title of "artist" as used by modern theorists.

Technē (expertise or craft) does not stand in for the modern term *art*. Artistic pursuits such as poetry, painting, and music are deficient when compared with clear paradigms of *technē* such as medicine, building, or arithmetic. The beginnings of a philosophy of the "artistic" lie rather in the idea of inspiration, which is diametrically opposed to *technē*. Given his central belief that the healthy soul should be governed by the disciplined, rational search for knowledge of the good, Plato is suspicious of an activity that he thinks is outside the full control of the rational mind.

Beauty. The term for *beautiful* in Plato's Greek is *kalon*. It is a wide term of approbation, sometimes translated as "fine." Plato often praises poets as producing fine or beautiful works. How close does he come to an aesthetic notion of beauty?

The most notable treatments of beauty are in the *Symposium* and *Phaedrus*. It can scarcely be an accident that Plato's writing in these works reaches heights of brilliance that the modern reader must regard as supremely artistic. Nevertheless, the theme in both cases is love and its relation to philosophical aspiration. Beauty is not tied specifically to works of art, which are comparatively neglected. Plato thinks, first, of the physical beauty of a human individual regarded as the object of desire by a pederastic lover.

In the *Symposium* the objects to which this lover is attached are progressively elevated: attachment is first to bodily beauty, then to the beauty of souls, then to beauty in abstract objects of learning, and finally to a Platonic Form. The Beautiful itself, the eternal Form that is beautiful in a strict and unchanging way, is what the philosopher will as-

pire to love, despising as "mortal trash" the particular sensible objects that are beautiful, including all artifacts and human individuals.

In the *Phaedrus* the philosopher-lover enters a continuing association with the beautiful beloved, who serves as a visible reminder of Beauty itself. Beauty is the one Form that has an easily recognizable sensible aspect. These doctrines are enunciated by Socrates in a fine mythical speech that Plato marks as poetic and even inspired. But there is playfulness here, prompting the reader to question where Plato is being serious, and where the boundary lies between philosophical discourse and the poetic invocation of beauty and love.

Plato's conception of beauty is not straightforwardly aesthetic. The dialogue *Hippias Major* (whose authenticity has sometimes been disputed) gives some insights here. When a definition of beauty or fineness (*to kalon*) is sought, relevant notions are "the appropriate," "the beneficial," and "the useful"—taking us into areas of approbation that are not aesthetic. On the other hand, Plato finds it natural to associate something's being fine with its having a fine appearance, and one species of the fine is "that which pleases through sight or hearing." This category prominently includes the visual arts, music, and poetry. Plato thus recognizes the arts as an area in which objects are praised for being pleasing to the senses, and sees this as one of the areas covered by his term *kalon*.

Pleasure and the Good. A persistent theme in Plato's writings is the opposition between what is pleasing and what is good. In the *Gorgias*, he laments that dramatists and musical performers resemble practitioners of rhetoric, who try to win over the audience with whatever gratifies them, rather than seeking to make them better by imparting to them genuine knowledge of what is good. The most desirable use of the arts would be the opposite of this, as Plato explains in his last dialogue, the *Laws*. In this work he develops a blueprint for a city on more realistic lines than those followed in the *Republic* and makes detailed provision for the arts within it.

One of the questions raised by the *Laws* is what the standard of evaluation for the arts should be. Many people maintain, says Plato, that "the power of music to give pleasure is the sole standard by which it should be judged." But this leads to an unacceptable relativism, in which good music is simply music that a particular audience likes. Plato proposes to institute superior judges, who are familiar with the art form in question, but, more important, have a proper knowledge of what is ethically good. They would use this as the true criterion of music, and similarly with all the arts. Pleasure is not allowed to be a criterion of artistic success in an indiscriminate way. In this way innovations in style are to be curbed.

Nevertheless, Plato is not opposed to pleasure; rather, he demands it for his citizens in the *Laws*, much of whose life

will be spent in play (*paidia*). They must take part in choric dances and music at all stages of their life, which will provide them with "harmless pleasure," at the same time cementing the community and transmitting the correct values. In Plato's view there are correct values, which it is not the business of artists to decide, so play is not allowed to be free. It must be ensured that no new styles develop without the city's approval. The arts are declared not to be personal to anyone, but to belong to the state. Plato gives the arts a weightier role than they enjoy in many modern communities, yet at the same time scorns any notion of self-expression or artistic freedom.

In the *Philebus*, another late dialogue, Plato examines pleasure at length. Pleasure in the beauty of colors, shapes, and sounds is classified as "pure" pleasure, which does not depend on desires or an admixture of distress. Such pleasures are truer than others, and receive approval because they "go with health and self-control" in the psyche. This suggests a positive aesthetic, albeit of an austere kind. But the pleasures of tragedy, which for Plato rely on emotional involvement with images of the morally ambiguous or false, will not be included in the pure pleasures of beauty.

Poetry and Philosophy. Book 10 of the *Republic* refers to an "ancient quarrel between poetry and philosophy." Plato is one of the chief contributors to this quarrel, yet both sides of it play themselves out in his dialogues. His writing is often akin to poetry in its supremely skillful use of metaphor, myth, and rhetoric. The traditional story that Plato was a writer of tragedies in his youth, however reliable, is not belied by the nature of his philosophical writing. It may also be asked why it is dialogues that Plato writes: he is critical of *mimēsis*, yet uses it himself, giving us words that present the mere appearance of what the character Socrates says and does.

A plausible interpretation is that Plato's writings are a deliberate attempt to oust mimetic poetry from its central role in the culture of his day. The ultimate aim of Plato's dramatic portrayals and his poetic use of language is, however, not to bring pleasure or to engage the mind in emotional experiences. Rather, it is to prompt independent inquiry into the truth by means of rational argument. Plato aims to supplant poetry in order to establish philosophy as a discipline. In so doing, he raises profound questions about the relationship between philosophy and art that touch on the very nature of philosophy itself.

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Plato on *Mimēsis*

"Poets tell many lies," says Plutarch, citing a proverb (*Moralia* 16A), and elsewhere reports that Gorgias said that a poet who deceives is wiser than one who does not (348C). Philostratus may record an even earlier view when he claims that it is pleasant and harmless to be affected by things that do not exist as if they did (*Proemium* 391K.4). Plato is the first to raise alarm about deception in poetry, appealing in two different ways to the concept of *mimēsis*.

In Plato's criticism of poetry, *mimēsis* picks out, first, a certain sort of poetry that is to be condemned as deceptive and, second, a broad range of artistic production, including poetry, all of which may be deceptive. The two uses are not consistent, but *mimēsis* carries certain dangers in both of them, and its products are always inferior to their originals. The broader use is probably closer to standard ancient usage, for Aristotle, in the *Poetics*, classifies poetry, theater, music, dance, and the visual arts all under *mimēsis*. To understand the background concept, then, we must first see how poetry, music, and sculpture could all be considered mimetic.

Frequently translated as "imitation," *mimēsis* does not correspond perfectly to any English term and is best left untranslated. As such, it has become a term of art in twentieth-century discussions. Generally speaking, *mimēsis* is the process by which a poet, artist, or other imitator adapts selected features of an original to a product (*mimēma*) in such a way that the product has an effect through its maker's art that the original would have by its nature. A mimetic statue may have the look of a real nude, whereas mimetic poetry or drama may have some of the emotional impact of the action it represents. Even medicine is mimetic when it reproduces, through treatment, the healing of nature. Although not inherently deceptive, *mimēsis* deceives if it deliberately passes off a product in place of its original. So much for the background of the Greek concept.

Plato narrows the focus of *mimēsis*. In his first use of the term in the *Republic*, as a classification within poetry, *mimēsis* is primarily limited to impersonation. In his second

and wider critique of poetry, he uses it for the reproduction of mere images, *image making*, not limited to the visual. Elsewhere, in a third, more neutral, approach to the topic, Plato treats *mimēsis* as reproduction.

Impersonation. In book 3 of the *Republic*, Plato defines *mimēsis* as: "likening oneself to another either in voice or in appearance" (*Republic* 393c5; cf. *Sophist* 267a). This is the art of an actor or performer; its product is performance, and its original is speech or other action in real life. Since poetry was made in ancient Greece to be presented orally, all poetry that contains direct discourse is mimetic in that it is written to be performed (392d5). Indirect discourse is not performable in the same way, and is therefore not mimetic (394a). Plato thus has three modes of poetry (394c, 392d):

1. pure *mimēsis*, which produces the direct discourse of tragedy and comedy,
2. pure narrative, such as is found in many dithyrambs; and
3. a mixture of the two, as is found in epic.

Because he holds that poetry can be purely narrative and thus made without *mimēsis*, Plato can bar mimetic poetry from education without barring poetry altogether (398a).

Plato illustrates *mimēsis* with the speech of Chrysis (*Iliad* I.17ff.): the poet "tries his best to make us think that the speaker is not Homer, but a priest, and he an old man" (393b1–2). Here, Plato is clear that it is the author who impersonates the speaker in direct discourse; later in the same passage, he will treat the performer as the impersonator. Both cases satisfy the general definition of *mimēsis*: in the first, the poet borrows words from the original; in the second, the performer borrows expressive features of the original's speech—or, more accurately for a Homeric scene, both poet and performer borrow features from what they imagine the original to have been. Whether the artists are working from an actual or imagined original scene, listeners will have an experience close to that of hearing an old man wailing for the loss of his daughter. Thus, *mimēsis* can be carried out for fiction as well as for fact, and by those who know their original as well as by those who do not. The Aristotelian distinction between history and poetry is not relevant to Plato's criticism of *mimēsis*: a performance is no less deceptive if what it brings to life is history.

The main danger Plato treats in book 3 is that citizens may be beguiled by such poetry; but no audience really believes that the speaker in Homer is Chrysis. Everyone knows Homer wrote the poem. What, then, is Plato's objection to *mimēsis* as impersonation?

1. The first objection to impersonation is that it aims at deception concerning the identity of the speaker, and it entices us to do the same: the poet "tries his best to make us think" what is not the case, and so must the performer. Here is the kernel of Plato's concern. It is not that we are really likely to be taken in by a deception, but that we may be beguiled into becoming performers, and therefore into taking

deception as our aim; and this is morally an unhealthy aim to take.

2. A second objection concerns the bad moral qualities of the people who are to be impersonated in ancient epic and tragedy. Ancient Greek education depended on the recitation (i.e., the performance) of poetry by upper-class youngsters, and Plato was afraid that students would tend to become like the characters they impersonated. Certainly, ancient poetry teems with characters no peer of Plato would want his children to emulate.

3. A third objection is more Platonic: on Plato's account of the ideal state, each student must learn to play only the role proper to his station in life and to avoid all others, in order that justice may be preserved in the city. A course of mimetic performances, however, would require a student to take many parts, and this would be bad practice for the pure life of a guardian.

4. In case the poet does not know the original, a second act of *mimēsis* takes place along with the first, for the poet is then playing the part of one who knows, borrowing the trappings of knowledge to win the confidence of listeners—trying to have, by art, the effect on his listeners that a truly wise person should have by his wisdom (*Republic* 10, esp. 598c). Impersonation of a wise person is the most dangerous of all deceptions, in Plato's view, and he has shown Socrates making a career of bringing such deceptions to light.

Image Making. Plato treats *mimēsis* differently in book 10 of the *Republic*, where he uses the example of the production of images in a mirror (596d) to illuminate the production of images by painters, and, in turn, the production of poems by Homer and the tragedians. Here, he drops his earlier distinction between narrative and nonnarrative forms to build a line of criticism aimed at poetry in any form. His two objections are that *mimēsis* carries a false pretension to knowledge and that it depicts, appeals to, and strengthens the worst element in the human soul.

He compares poets to painters to illustrate his view that poetic *mimēsis* deceives its audience if it makes them accept its expert authority on the subject of the poem (598c). No one would believe that a painter is expert on bridle making merely because he can present us a convincing visual image of a bridle. Poets, on the other hand, offer themselves as moral teachers to the Greeks on the strength of their powerful presentations of heroic action in verse. A poet who paints a convincing word picture of a general beguiles his audience at the same time into thinking they are learning from his poetry what it is to be a good general. Indeed, Plato implies, much of Greece has been fooled into thinking that poets have the authority of experts on moral education.

The analogy to painters is meant to show how foolish this is; and such deception, concerning ethics, is especially dangerous in Plato's view. Unlike statesmen, who may do well without expert knowledge if they have true opinions, poets work only from images, and so are void even of true opinion.

In this too, poets are like painters—third down from those who know. A bed maker works from a unique original Form of bed (made by a god); a painter representing a bed looks only to the manufactured bed, and not even to the bed as it is in its three dimensions, but as it appears from one angle or another. The painter thus ranks third behind god and bed maker, and, because the painter's product is mediated by a mere appearance, it is too remote from the truth to be useful in education. So it is with poets, who occupy an analogous third-ranking position. The "colors" they use are meter, rhythm, and harmony, and the appearances they make convincing by these means are merely vulgar opinions as to what is good or noble (602ab). We have nothing whatever to learn from the reproduction of such opinions in poetry.

The case against poetry is more serious than this; it is bound up with Plato's case against emotion as arising from an inferior part of the soul—the same part of the soul that is unable to distinguish appearance from reality. In a decent person, the rational element in the soul reins in emotion; but poetry is most effectively mimetic when it overrides the better judgment of an audience in order to induce an emotional response. Poetry is most effective in engaging emotions when it represents characters who themselves give way to emotion, and these are bad models. Decent people who are not given to emotion in their private lives may yet find their self-control disarmed in the theater, their intelligence disabled, and their moral character damaged in consequence.

Reproduction. *Mimēsis* is not always based on mere appearances, however, and does not always play to our weaknesses. In the *Laws*, *mimēsis* is a kind of reproduction that can be accurate (668b); in the *Timaeus*, it is the ideal relation between sound thought or speech and the divine reality of the Forms (47bc); and in the *Statesman*, the laws are *mimēmata* of the truth that is known by experts. The rule of such laws is second best to direct rule by the experts themselves, but, in the absence of experts, it is the best we can have (300c; cf. *Laws* 817b). All of these positive uses of *mimēsis* depend on the idea that a product of *mimēsis* should have at least some of the good qualities of the original object. Sound thought as described in the *Laws* is a proper *mimēma* of reality because it has some of the stability of the intelligible world. Thus a *mimēma* can serve a useful purpose so long as its limitations are known.

Every *mimēma* has some features that belong also to its original, but the taking of features from an original is not always a case of *mimēsis*: a child has many of its mother's physical features but is not her *mimēma* by virtue of them, because the child was not produced to take her place by having an effect that is properly hers. By contrast, the laws were produced to take the place of experts in maintaining—albeit weakly—the stability that is the proper result of rule by experts. A *mimēma* takes on just those features of its object that it needs to take over the effect at which it aims. *Mimēsis* does not aim at the same sort of effect in every

case; but it does in every case aim at an effect, and that effect explains the selection of features that are reproduced in *mimēsis*.

Mimēsis in Plato, then, is the reproduction of at least some of the qualities of an original, through impersonation, image making or reproduction. In itself, it is neither a good nor a bad thing to do. When it flows from ignorance, as in the case of poets, it has the aim of deceiving its audience; when it aims to reproduce the emotion-engaging properties of action, as in the theater, it is morally corrupting. But when it provides us with the next best thing to a lost and divine original, then *mimēsis* is our best hope.

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PAUL WOODRUFF

Plato's Use of Poetry

Plato condemns or severely restricts the use of poetry in education, yet he uses poetry extensively in his own works, citing verses with approval, imitating poetic style and imagery, or subjecting poems to critical study. In this Plato follows to some extent the custom of his time and place, for poetry loomed large in a culture to which writing itself, to say nothing of composition in prose, was a relative novelty. Still, Plato makes more use of poetry than any other prose writer of his age, and this calls for explanation. Plato is uniquely interested in evaluating and criticizing Greek culture, and this interest partly explains the efforts he makes to come to grips with both rhetoric and poetry. The poets he uses most are the ones who constituted a canon in his time, the ones who had the most secure places in traditional education—Hesiod, Simonides, and Pindar, but most of all Homer. The

author of *On the Sublime* classifies Plato among those writers who drew on Homer: "Plato, above all, diverted for himself thousands on thousands of channels from the Homeric river" (Pseudo-Longinus 13.3). Yet, Homer is the poet Plato singles out for the most criticism.

General Criticism. Plato's explicit reasons for keeping poetry out of education are well known, and are based mainly on his view that poetry disarms reason, both in poets and in their audiences.

1. Poetry emphasizes and appeals to the emotions, thus weakening reason (*Republic* 605c–606d).
2. Living poets cannot explain their work, and therefore must write from inspiration rather than from knowledge (*Apology* 22bc; cf. *Ion* 534a and *Laws* 719c).
3. Dead poets cannot discuss their work at all, but serious discussions require interlocutors who can respond to questioning ("I think you and I should . . . set the poets aside and exchange words entirely on our own, testing the truth and ourselves"; *Protagoras* 348a).
4. Poetry is mimetic (*Republic* 597c) or tends to include *mimēsis* (392d–398b).
5. Poets seem often to represent gods and heroes improperly (*Republic* 377d–392c).

This last is the main point at issue in the "ancient quarrel" between philosophy and poetry.

Citations. It is not surprising that speakers in Plato's dialogues who are marked for refutation frequently appeal to the authority of poets in support of their own views. Their use of poetry may be seen as one of the marks against them. But Socrates and the Athenian Stranger cite poetry as well. At *Meno* 81b, Socrates quotes Pindar in support of the immortality of the soul. In the *Laws*, the Athenian cites Theognis (630ac) and Hesiod (690e) in support of his views. Such an appeal is not uncritical, however: in the *Meno* Socrates adds, "see if you think this is true," and in the *Laws* the Athenian says that poets "often enough hit on" the truth (682a). Plato appeals to poets not because they are poets, but because he thinks they tell the truth on some occasions. Truth therefore matters more than accuracy of quotation, and Plato holds it wrong to care who is the author of a line that turns out to be true (*Phaedrus* 275bc). In fact, Plato is not above inventing lines from Homer, or adjusting them to suit his need, as he does at *Phaedrus* 252b.

Still, Plato treats individual poets as hitting the truth more reliably than do the speakers who cite them. Glaucon and Adeimantus in *Republic*, book 2, Calicles in the *Gorgias*, and Agathon in the *Symposium* all appeal to poetry that they have misunderstood, and that would, if carefully interpreted, undermine their positions. Plato means to exclude the uncritical use of poetry by those who do not question the apparent meaning of the verses they cite. The general danger of poetry is due to its power to weaken our ability to examine its subjects in a rational way.

Imitations. Plato frequently takes over the language and imagery of poets for his own purposes. Homer's influence on Plato's writing pervades much of the corpus. We are told that Ammonius (pupil of the second-century Homeric scholar Aristarchus) picked out the many passages in which Plato drew on Homer (Pseudo-Longinus 13.3). In some instances, Plato seems to pay homage to the wisdom of a poet by imitating him; in others the matter is more complex.

The *Republic*, for example, may be seen to offer implicit homage to Aeschylus. Its guiding metaphor, the ship of state, comes from traditional poetry but is especially significant in *Seven against Thebes*. This play supports Plato's main thesis in the *Republic* and provides a poetic backdrop for its entire argument. By contrast, in the *Phaedrus*, Plato's explicit homage to the poets of love (235c) is undermined by later discussion. Still, Socrates' account of how it feels to be in love probably owes much to Sappho's imagery from such poems as the one now designated fragment 31 (251b ff.). Although the Platonic Socrates cites her with approval before launching into his first speech attacking love (235c), he later retracts that speech as a horrible attack on a god (242d). Sappho, he implies, may have been right to treat love as madness, but wrong not to see that madness can be a valuable gift from the gods.

As for Homer, Plato loves him as the best and most poetic of tragedians but makes reluctant war against him over the enormous influence he has in classical Greek culture (*Republic* 606e–607a). The weight of Homer's canonical authority lay heavily on writers of this era. Plato is not the first Greek prose writer to set himself against Homer while imitating him; the historian Thucydides tries to outdo Homer in the magnitude of the events he recounts while developing a narrative style replete with set-piece speeches reminiscent of Homer's. Both Plato and Thucydides are reaching for scraps of Homer's mantle of authority. Such imitation of Homer is homage not to the poet's wisdom but to his power over the minds of Plato's contemporaries (*Republic* 607c). From time to time, Plato allows that even Homer gets something right (389e with *Iliad* 4.412ff.).

Critical Study of Poetry. Although Socrates has said that dead poets cannot be cross-examined (*Protagoras* 347c–348a), Plato does occasionally examine dead poets with what he regards as success; in other passages he examines poets indirectly through refuting their representatives—speakers who quote or recite their work. Platonic examinations of poetry lead to positive interpretation in some cases, and to outright refutation in others.

Interpretation. Plato's method for interpreting poets, similar to the one he uses for oracles, is a type of cross-examination or *elenchus*. His procedure is to test interpretations by attempting to refute them until he finds one that he cannot refute, and thus to reject any interpretation under which the verse is false. The result is similar to an *elenchus* of a person. When you first answer Socrates you think you

mean one thing, but if you survive his questioning you will find you believe something quite different and much more Socratic. And in some sense of *believe*, you will admit that you have believed what Socrates says all along—you were at least logically committed in that direction from the start, without knowing it. Thus it is with a gobbet of poetry: on its surface it means one thing; but since that is not true, a wise poet would be led by questioning to agree that he or she had meant something else by it all along.

So, for example, at *Republic* 424c, Socrates quotes Homer (in a version differing slightly from ours): "People like best the song that comes newest from the singer's lips" (*Odyssey* 1.351), and proceeds to rule out any interpretation of this that would recommend the introduction of new types of poetry—a kind of innovation he abhors. Socrates thus treats a poetic text as an oracular utterance that must be rendered true by interpretation (cf. *Apology* 21bc).

Socrates uses a similar procedure at *Protagoras* 342a–347a, where he examines a supposed contradiction in a fragment of Simonides, which is brought up by Protagoras as a subject for an exercise in critical thinking relating to virtue or moral goodness. Socrates rejects Protagoras's claim that the poem contains a contradiction; properly interpreted, he argues, it is consistent. The poem begins thus:

It is hard to be a truly good man
foursquare in hands and feet and purpose,
made without blame.

[Here seven lines of the poem have been lost.]

And Pittacus' proverb does not ring true to me,
though it was said by a wise man:
that it is hard to be noble.

Protagoras and Socrates have taken the poem out of context, since its main subject is the vicissitudes of good and bad fortune, and the sort of goodness it treats along the way is more aristocratic than moral in Socrates' sense. The point is that it is not hard to be noble (i.e., rich and powerful) if you are fortunate; but it is hard to be *secure* in this good fortune (i.e., foursquare), since your luck can change (Gagarin-Woodruff, 1995). But, Socrates' resolution of the conflict is possible and accepted by some scholars (Taylor, 1991). The words translated as "be" in the first and last lines quoted above look different, and, although they are usually treated as aspects of the same verb *to be*, the first can carry the different meaning "becomes"—a distinction Socrates (unlike poets) frequently uses for philosophical purposes. If the word means "becomes" in this case, there is no contradiction, as Socrates points out: it is not hard to be good; the difficulty is to become good (343d).

So far so good, but Socrates interprets a later part of the poem in a way that is impossible:

But I praise and love all those
who willingly do
nothing shameful. Not even gods fight necessity.

Socrates believes that this would be nonsense as stated, since on his view no one willingly does anything shameful—and, moreover, no intelligent person would disagree (345d). Accordingly, he transposes the adverb *willingly* to modify *praise* rather than *do*: "I willingly praise . . ." Although grammatically possible, this makes odd Greek and even odder sense. On this reading, we would need an example of a god yielding to necessity and praising someone unwillingly; but we have many examples in poetry of gods being forced to act shamefully. In any case, hardly anyone does agree with Socrates that no one willingly does wrong.

It is tempting to read this passage as a parody on Socrates' part of bad methods of interpretation practiced by Sophists (Taylor, 1991), but we cannot let Socrates off so easily. He has done this sort of interpretation before and will do it again. He is not discussing the text as such at this point; he is, rather, talking about Simonides, because it is the poet (not the poem) who would be brought by *elenchus* to agree with Socrates. Whatever words Simonides uses, Socrates believes that at root the poet must mean what is true, and charity compels him to find a way to construe the words as carrying that meaning (Brickhouse and Smith, 1994, pp. 82–83).

As a method of interpretation this appears to take texts lightly, but it takes their authors with the utmost seriousness. That is why Socrates steers the conversation away from poetry at just this point: "Usually, when people bring up poets, some of them say the poet has certain things in mind; others disagree; and they are conversing on a matter which they cannot possibly put to the test?" (347e). If Socrates meant by this that no one could be certain what was meant by any text, he would be plainly wrong. But that is not what he says; his point, rather, is that we cannot know what poets have in mind unless we are able to lead them—the living, present poets—through the stages of questioning that might reveal—to them as well as to us—what it is they have in mind. This is not a question about what might have crossed their minds when writing the poem (that would merely be a matter of recall); it is, rather, a question of what they believe in the last analysis, in the most timeless sense in which a human being may be said to believe anything.

In the *Republic*, Plato uses a similar treatment of the thesis that it is just to render every man his due, attributed to the same poet, Simonides. Here, as in the case of the oracle in the *Apology*, we have no exact quotation. And as in the *Apology*, Socrates sets out to refute vulnerable readings of the text, on the assumption that Simonides could not have meant anything that could be refuted (335c). Later in the *Republic*, Socrates will give new meaning to "render every man his due," but without mention of Simonides.

In the *Laws*, the Athenian gives us an imaginary cross-examination of Tyrtaeus, the legendary poet who celebrated Spartan heroism. This *elenchus* leads to a better theory than the one Tyrtaeus's verses originally expressed (629a; see

667a and 858e). What Tyrtaeus said was that he would not set any value on a man, no matter how rich he was, unless he always excelled in war. The Athenian then imagines a conversation with Tyrtaeus in which he leads the poet to agree that there are two forms of war, foreign and civil, and that civil war (*stasis*) is the more dangerous of the two. He concludes that a man whose loyalty prevents him from taking part in a civil war is more praiseworthy than one who shows his mettle only in foreign wars, bolstering his point with a quotation from Theognis, and implying that he could coax agreement with this from Tyrtaeus himself—an important result in an argument aimed at impressing a Spartan.

Refutation. In the *Laws*, the Athenian addresses Pindar directly and seems to propose to refute him (at 690b; see 714e). In the *Ion*, Socrates refutes the claim to wisdom of a rhapsode, or professional reciter of Homer; the same argument, used directly against Homer, would show that Homer is not wise but (at most) inspired.

Elsewhere, Plato refutes those who quote poetry without implying an attack on the poets. The speakers in these cases are at fault for not examining the verses they quote. Agathon, for example, uses a Homeric couplet about *atē* (madness) without seeing that it undermines his view of love as a gentle peacemaker (*Symposium* 195d, with Agamemnon's excuse for the action that led to the wrath of Achilles at *Iliad* 19.92ff.).

Callicles quotes or cites a number of poems each of which is, in its larger context, disastrous for his case. He identifies himself, for example, with Zethus in Euripides' *Antiope*, a play that features a debate between the herdsman Zethus and the musician Amphion over the value of Amphion's contemplative life (484e, 485e, 486b). As we know from surviving fragments, Amphion is the winner in this play, but Callicles quotes only out of context from Zethus's attack on Amphion and supposes that he has Euripides' support.

The most famous poem Callicles quotes is the "Custom Is King" fragment of Pindar (*Gorgias* 484b; Pindar Fr. 169, *nomosbasileus*).

Custom, king of all,
of mortals and immortals,
brings on the greatest violence
with a supreme hand
and makes it just—or so I learn
from the deeds of Heracles . . .

No two scholars agree on what Pindar meant, but everyone agrees that Callicles has it wrong, and some hold that Plato had it wrong as well: Pindar is not singing the praises of Heracles for stealing the cattle by stealth and violence. He is impressed by the power of custom to render violence into justice, but if Pindar admires anyone in this story, it is not Heracles, but the brave defender Diomedes. To make matters worse, the poem reverses the point about custom and nature that Callicles wanted to make. He wanted to contrast

the natural justice of naked power against the conventional concept of a justice that seeks to curb aggression. But on Pindar's view such a contrast is impossible: it is custom, he says, making no mention of nature, that turns violent crime into justice. Callicles has not examined the poems he cites; if he had, he would see how they provide material for an *elenchus* that would destroy his position.

Glaucou and Adeimantus fall into a similar trap in book 2 of the *Republic*. Glaucon sets up as his ideal the hero who is the opposite of Aeschylus' Amphiaraus, the one good man among the *Seven against Thebes*, of whom it is said that he does not seem, but actually is, just. Glaucon's straw man is the character who wishes "not to seem, but to be unjust" (361b). Here again, the poem refutes the man who cites it: Eteocles, who is, but does not seem to be, unjust—Glaucon's model—is punished; whereas Amphiaraus, who is, but does not seem to be, just, is given the highest of all rewards and becomes a blessing to the people of Thebes.

Adeimantus does no better. He quotes Homer, Hesiod, Pindar, and Archilochus in support of his view that justice is honored only for its consequences; but the poets do not consistently bear him out. Homer and Hesiod are especially damaging to his case. One passage he takes from Homer says that the rewards of the gods are evidence of justice in a ruler (*Odyssey* 19.109 at 363bc—Odysseus in disguise to Penelope, on her good name), while he understands the other to imply that the gods can be bribed to reward the unjust (*Iliad* 9.497 at 364e). The passages are inconsistent: if gods are readily bribed to deliver prosperity to the unjust, then prosperity is not evidence for justice. Worse for Adeimantus, neither passage really supports his position at all, since neither bears on why people should pursue justice.

In two cases, even Socrates seems to have Homer wrong. In the *Hippias Minor* (369e–371d), Socrates argues that Homer makes Achilles a liar, and, in the *Republic* (390e), that he makes Achilles subject to bribes. In both cases, Socrates examines a broad Homeric context to support his unpopular conclusion, but does so without sympathy for the values Homer represents. In the embassy scene of book 9, Achilles does indeed say he will do things that we will not do, but in this he would have seemed more impulsive than devious to a sympathetic reader. In the last book of the *Iliad*, it is Achilles' sense of honor, not greed, that compels him to accept Priam's treasure in return for the body of Hector (*Iliad*, 24.502–594), but such honor is not to be dreamed of in Plato's philosophy. Sensitivity to cultural differences has no place in Plato's interpretations of poetry.

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PAUL WOODRUFF

Plato on the Effects of Art

Popular conceptions of Plato's attitude concerning art focus on *Republic* 398a1–8, where Plato urges us to honor the poet but send him to another city. Behind this famous quotation, however, lurk a number of complex issues involving the natures of different art forms, their expected effects on audiences, various notions of freedom and responsibility, and conceptions of what constitutes a healthy community.

Plato develops a seminormative concept of *technē* or "rational legitimate discipline" in the *Gorgias*. Two of the necessary conditions for being a *technē* in Plato's sense are dealing with genuine and fundamental elements of reality, and being concerned with the public good. Plato blames the rhetorician for not meeting these conditions. This not only denies rhetoric the status of being a *technē*, but also shows that Plato holds practitioners responsible for meeting or not meeting the conditions in question. A putative practitioner of a discipline chooses whether to practice a genuine or only a sham "art." The implicit notion of responsibility in this context is being concerned with the effects of one's actions on the welfare of others.

One can conclude from this that according to Plato an artist is as responsible for the effects his or her work has on audiences as anyone else is responsible for harming or helping a community through actions that emerge out of choice.

How much freedom to create does this leave the artist? This question can only be answered when we agree on a conception of freedom.

As Plato's famous cave allegory (*Republic*, book 7) shows, his notion of freedom entails the following:

1. attaining self-knowledge (this is partly indirect, not purely introspective or behavior);
2. understanding the fundamental elements of reality, and our relations to these; and
3. being able to form attitudes such as interest, orientation, respect, or cooperation on the basis of having met conditions 1 and 2.

If we attain Plato's freedom, then we also have freedom in a more modern sense; that is, we can choose between alternatives, since being able to form attitudes and act on them on the basis of 1 and 2 entails this capacity. Plato's notion of freedom admits of matters of degrees. To the extent that an agent has this kind of freedom she can participate in a legitimate *technē*. Since music meets the *technē*-warranting conditions, it is not subject to Plato's strictures, but literature and painting are. Their practitioners, according to Plato, typically do not have the right kind of freedom, at least not to a sufficient extent. But they are still responsible for this condition, in our sense of this notion. The artists of these "lower" arts therefore have freedom in a minimal modern sense, but not in the Platonic sense. This would be one of Plato's objections to the artists and their activities.

Let us now look at Plato's specific charges against the "lower" arts. These charges rest on two assumptions:

1. Poetry and painting can be, and typically are, beneficial or harmful to audiences.
2. Literature and painting typically function in communal contexts, and in many such contexts are taken to provide guidance or inspiration for our lives.

The second point should be stressed, even if it seems obvious. The artist's functioning in a community and not in a human vacuum is not always part of modern theories of aesthetics. The artist functions in a community, and his or her effects on the community need to be taken into consideration, like the effects of anyone else. This by itself says nothing about censorship. How a community and the artist involved deal with the relevant responsibilities is a separate question. The claim about possible harm is a psychological one. Products of the art forms under consideration please, and pleasures—as Plato keeps pointing out—may be good or harmful for us.

With this much understood, let us look at Plato's charges. One of these is that the poet has a harmful effect on the audience (378c–d, 386a–b). He can do this by drawing attention

away from what is ontologically fundamental, or by causing pleasures that will make us less than ideal agents, and in many other ways. The second charge is that the poet does not fit into the educational framework whose development and maintenance are the primary responsibilities of the state (377a4–b10). One might respond, Why should art be expected to fit into this grand educational scheme? Plato's response would be that the educational scheme (*paideia*) is designed to help the citizens toward self-improvement and freedom—in the Platonic sense—and that every institution has to fit itself somewhere in this scheme. If art does not contribute to what all justified practices contribute, it loses its legitimacy. For of what use can it be? If the answer is that it brings us pleasure, we run up against Plato's attack on hedonism, which says—among other things—that pleasure as such is neither good nor bad. The enjoyments that go with the life of a good person are good, and those that prevent us from approximating that life are bad. The arts in question, when considered on their own merit, are construed by Plato as causing the wrong kinds of pleasure.

Another response to this charge could be that the artist does not determine how the audience will respond to the work of art. The audience is constituted by humans who have choices, and thus they can determine how to respond to different features in a work of art. One would, however, have to admit that only to a certain extent does the audience have control over its response to different kinds of artworks. If art caters to what are for Plato our "lower" desires, this will work to prevent us from applying appropriate criteria in assessing products, and hence in responding to them. (This issue raises the same psychological problems as modern debates about the harm television violence can do to the audience.) There are many issues here that Plato does not take up. To what extent are we aware of how a given artwork affects us? Even if we are in some cases aware of this, to what extent do we have control over the effects?

As a further response to Plato's charges one might say that the artist merely describes human action, emotion, and agency, and does not present normative conceptions of these items. Plato disagrees. He thinks that artists present normative conceptions of human agency, and he scolds some for, as an example, presenting the agent as doing too much crying and lamenting (387b11–c5). The notion that human agency, seen from the first person point of view, is necessarily normative pervades all of Plato's moral psychology (e.g., book 4 of the *Republic*). Herewith the implicit assumptions supporting this stance.

Kinds that we describe partly in terms of their basic potentialities must be given a partly normative characterization. For example, biological kinds are characterized partly in terms of basic potentialities. Spiders weave webs, beavers build dams, and so forth. But these species also have other dispositional characteristics. It is a partly normative assessment to claim that web weaving and dam building are gen-

uine species-defining natural potentialities rather than one among many other dispositional properties that many or most members of these species might have. It is a matter of deciding what is a healthy specimen, a challenge that may be theoretically complex but normally does not cause much headache to physicians or biologists. As Plato stresses throughout the dialogues, health is a partly normative and partly descriptive property.

Further arguments apply more specifically to the conception of human agency from a first person point of view. The basic question of Greek drama is, "Ti dran?" ("what is to be done?") presented from the point of view of a hero or heroine. So the question becomes, "What shall I do?" There are two elements in this question that need to be analyzed from a partly normative standpoint. One is the *what* in the question. This calls for a conception of what is good—derivatively, what will lead to happiness and what will lead to suffering. But from Plato's point of view, there is a less obvious but equally normative component in the characterization of the self, or "I," as an agent. Implicit in a decision will be some conception of how I construe the self. Which elements have priorities over others? One cannot make decisions without some assumptions about priorities. We might assume that reason has priorities over certain emotions, or some kind of reasoning capacity over others, and so on. Furthermore, the way we make a decision (e.g., calmly or overcome by emotion) implicitly presents a partial conception of the self.

These implicit assumptions about agency can be seen clearly both in Greek literature and in Plato's dialogues. In the *Iliad*, Achilles is held up as the main hero, and his key decisions are made in fits of passion, as he is overwhelmed and driven by some powerful force such as wrath. In contrast, in Plato's *Phaedo*, Socrates is portrayed as making key decisions in a calm, reasonable mood, and the source of his way of deciding is presented as his commitment to detached, rational investigation of choices to be made. One could go on, beyond the Platonic text, and show that similar implicit conceptions underlie the portraits of agency in the works of William Shakespeare, Friedrich von Schiller, and others, up to Samuel Beckett's *Endgame*.

If we accept the claim that the representation of an agent's dilemma and her response is always partly normative in literature, be it philosophical or dramatic, then we can hardly deny that such portraits should be subjects of critical evaluation. We engage in such evaluations in other walks of life—for example, when we assess the activities of physicians, judges, politicians, and parents. Why should literature be exempt? The response that nothing really happens, it is all make-believe, hardly meets the point. The portrayal affects other humans for better or worse. Hence, it should be subjected to criticism. To Plato, as to most of us, it would sound strange for someone to say that the play of one's imagination should not be subject to moral criticism.

If it is expressed in a communal setting, and affects the welfare of others, why should it be exempt from the critical reflection that we apply to all other activities with the same effects?

Plato's stance is echoed by recent writers such as Albert Camus (*L'homme révolté*) who maintain that the artist, like anyone else, is responsible for predictable effects on his or her audiences. We can summarize Plato's conclusions about the effect of art and the artist's responsibility in two layers.

1. In a community such as the Athens of Plato's time, the presentation of literature and the plastic arts would have a predictable effect on the audience, even if we ascribe to it free choice concerning alternative modes of reaction. These effects can be harmful or beneficial, and can be judged as such by the community. The artist is responsible for the nature of the products and their normative implications, and thus for the consequences of what happens when these are influencing the values of the community.

As we saw, this conclusion presupposes the communal setting in which art takes place and that a typical artwork of a literary or plastic sort will have normative implications. But it is also crucial to see that the artist should understand the ways in which art can be used. Plato uses aesthetic qualities in his work so as to have the sensual and visual point beyond itself—toward higher layers of reality. The artist is responsible for not availing himself of that mode of presentation, but for appealing instead to the taste of the "lovers of sights and sounds."

We can attempt to abstract from the Athenian setting and Plato's times, and restate Plato's position in its most general terms.

2. In any communal context C , products of poetry, drama, and painting will have certain predictable effects $E' \dots E_n$ on the audience, taking into account their choices and preferences of interpretation. It is a matter of objective evaluation whether these effects are harmful or beneficial, and the artist is responsible for the nature of his product, and for the consequences of its presentations for whatever audience can be reasonably predicted.

Stating the conclusion about artistic responsibility in this manner shows the obvious legitimacy of some responsibility to be assigned to the artist. At the same time, it shows the difficulty of assessing harm or benefit. For given the longevity of some artworks, it is difficult for the artist to project the nature of future audiences. In order to see the plausibility of Plato's stance, one must keep in mind his rich conception of what is permanent and basic in human nature. For him, audiences do not differ that much. This is probably one of the key points on which Plato and many modern aestheticians disagree. Keeping this in mind, let us restate—speculatively—how Plato's view would be applied to modern industrial societies.

As we saw, his view on the artist's responsibilities depends on certain presuppositions. Many of these are not met by

modern societies. First, we do not stress the communal context of art. In fact, there are even aesthetic theories stressing the separateness of what they call the art world. Plato would find such a notion incomprehensible. The communal context for him is the city, the state, and so on—in short, the political unit within which art develops. Second, Plato would insist on the need of at least a partial agreement on communal values and conceptions of how art products and their effects relate to these. Finally, his conception of the main task of a political community as educational, and hence the politician as an educator, is not met by modern societies.

Still, Plato's view that anyone who chooses to create certain items that can harm or benefit people is responsible for the predictable effects of his or her work is relevant even to our world. It should be the key issue underlying discussions of freedom and censorship.

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Plato and Modern Aesthetics

The view that has dominated modern philosophy of art assumes that there is conceptual unity binding together what we call the fine arts, and that the same is true of aesthetic qualities, with beauty assumed as the highest genus, as well as aesthetic appreciation. According to this view the major task of aesthetics is to define art, beauty, and aesthetic appreciation. Defining aesthetic appreciation is assumed to be centered on articulating the concept of taste as a distinct human faculty.

Plato belongs to what one would broadly label the essentialist camp—those who attempt to define art in terms of necessary and jointly sufficient conditions—but he draws the conceptual map in a, to us, unfamiliar way. In particular, he has a lot to say about the arts and about their understanding, without having a general concept corresponding to our notion of fine art, and he does not have a concept corresponding to that of taste. Let us sketch briefly how one can "do" aesthetics without these two pillars of the modern approaches.

In addition to not having a generic notion of the "fine arts," Plato also lacks a generic and autonomous notion of beauty, and he has no autonomous concept of aesthetic taste. To be sure, English translations use "beauty" as an

equivalent to the Greek *kalon* in many places, but this is misleading. The Greek word designates a wide genus that applies to much of what we might call “outstanding,” such as work in mathematics, geometry, political institutions, or character, in addition to items we would describe as beautiful. Something that is *kalon* is taken to have intrinsic value, but this value need not have either strictly aesthetic or moral connotations. Since it is used in what we might call moral contexts, translators at times render *kalon* as “noble”; but this is just as bad a translation as “beautiful.” Plato has no autonomous domains for either the aesthetic or the moral.

“Fine” is probably the best equivalent for *kalon* in modern English. Plato uses it in that sense in *Symposium* 210–212, where he includes the theoretical sciences, political and civic institutions, as well as items with a fine appearance in his list of species of this notion. The examples listed suggest that our “beauty” corresponds in Plato to what he regards as fine in appearance. But this is not a mere genus-species articulation. The “species,” if we may call them such, are hierarchically arranged, with what is fine in appearance (only fine in appearance?) at the lowest rank. Thus, items that we would call beautiful occupy the lowest rank of a wider genus that includes items we would typically describe as fine, for example, a fine mathematical proof, fine character, or a fine painting. As a common denominator, Plato singles out the elements of order and harmony, which although they do not yield a definition, do permeate everything that is *kalon*; together they constitute the mark of what it is to be *kalon*.

Before we push on with further elucidation of what is *kalon*, let us consider what can be said about the fine arts in Plato’s framework. The Greek *technē* is often translated as “art,” but this too is misleading. *Technē*, like *kalon*, is a wide genus that includes just about anything that one would regard as a rational and legitimate discipline, or complex of skills, ranging from the production of artifacts to mathematics and the *technē* of living. In *Gorgias*, Plato exploits the normative implications of this notion and argues that, for example, rhetoric is not a *technē*, and hence it should not have the honorific status that it occupied in Athenian public life. According to Greek mythological tradition, all *technai* are gifts from Prometheus. Plato thinks that mathematics should be included among such gifts but not rhetoric. Do the various art forms qualify as *technai*? As we shall see, some do more so than others. Hence, what is a unified genus in modern aesthetics appears as a scattered collection within the Platonic landscape.

Plato does not define *technē*, nor does he define the various art forms. But we know from the *Republic* 474–475 that he would define such items in terms of the objects with which they deal or produce. Thus, music would be the art that deals with sound and harmony; painting, perceptible objects; and literature, human passion and action. From the

Platonic point of view, these items constitute an ontologically heterogeneous list; hence, no strong conceptual unity would be expected. This, in turn, reflects on their respective status as *technai*. The *technē*-making conditions include being concerned with what is ontologically fundamental and with the public good. For Plato, music meets these conditions, but literature does not. Painting and literature deal with “sights and sound,” the lovers of which are described in pejorative terms in *Republic* 475; musical harmony deals with the Forms, as we see in *Philebus*.

Plato finds different features uniting different subsets of art forms. In *Republic* 398–399 he points out that music and literature both have some concern with rhythm and sounds, but later at 597e literature is paired with painting because both represent the objects of the senses. These differences reflect differences in terms of what an art form leads us to, and in terms of whether it will have negative effects on us. Music can focus on the appropriate objects and can thus enable us to develop attitudes leading toward harmony within ourselves and in relation to others. But this is not unique to music; mathematics has the same effect. Since keeping our minds on the most fundamental elements of reality is, for Plato, a necessary condition of moral improvement, most of the art forms receive low grades on that score.

Stepping back for a moment from Plato’s own ontology and ethics, we should note that the questions of what music is about and what the ontological status of tone and harmony is, as well as how painting and literature represent, are still with us. Plato thinks that similarity plays an important role in representation. Today some philosophers try to characterize representation without ascribing a key role to similarity. This difference is yet to be resolved.

In turning to the characterization of appreciation we should ask whether Plato’s questions are the same as those of modern aesthetics, and whether his explanatory notions are the same as ours. We can start addressing these issues by considering whether the alleged aesthetic capacity of taste could be a genuine human capacity in Plato’s framework. In the *Republic*, book 5, 474–477, Plato says that cognitive capacities are distinguished by their respective domains of objects and by their characteristic results. This characterization is important also in its omissions. It does not regard behavioral or introspective data as definitive for these individuations. In the text Plato distinguishes on this basis the capacity to have insights and to understand from the capacity to process beliefs and pieces of information. Given the ontological heterogeneity of the arts for Plato, he could not have a concept of taste uniting aesthetic appreciation. His approach involves, rather, various analyses of the appropriate responses to specific art forms. The appreciation of the kind of music he respects—namely, that which is based on harmony—involves the ability to discover and understand harmonious structures and to derive enjoyment from that.

Unfortunately, he does not offer details concerning how one discovers and understands harmony. For him this is a basic capacity, but it is not a purely aesthetic one; he sees it also in mathematical work. He points to being able to think of representations as real, and of being affected by the passions expressed in drama as crucial to the enjoyment of literature and the plastic arts. Again, it was left to his successors to attempt to give more detailed characterizations. In summary, there is no property running through the appreciation of all art forms, and the properties Plato singles out with respect to appreciating specific art forms are for him applicable also to what we would call various nonaesthetic modes of appreciation.

Looking at this brief review of what Plato says about the objects, about “beauty,” and about appreciation, we see that a salient feature of Platonic aesthetics is its strong links with both metaphysics and ethics. His ontological conception involves not only priorities in terms of what accounts for what, but also a tie between these priorities and the human task of self-improvement. If one ignores these facts, one ends up with shallow interpretations according to which Plato is just “moralizing” about art or subordinating art to politics. He does not, however, subordinate art to what we today would call politics, but insists on art being analyzed in a communal setting, and thinks of the ideal community as dedicated to helping citizens in their task of self-improvement.

There are two kinds of audiences: the ones that do and the ones that do not understand the ontological status of any given art form. Assigning to literature, for example, the ontological status Plato deems as proper clashes with how most artists view their own work. They think of a poem or painting as having intrinsic value and thus being self-contained. Aesthetic appreciation is meant to be interpreting and enjoying the work of art within its own rights and merits.

Plato can see merit in similes, metaphors, or certain types of graphic illustrations. But this is instrumental merit. We can see this in his own employment of such devices. The Divided Line is a helpful image, the cave allegory an effective literary device. But in all such instances the artistic device is meant to point beyond itself. It functions to direct the mind to elements on higher ontological levels, and by analogy make items on those higher levels more intelligible. A Sophoclean tragedy is meant to be understood and appreciated on its own terms; the literary devices employed by Plato are meant to be merely tools and aids for the imagination in areas of understanding in which the mind has difficulties grasping directly the natures of certain abstract entities and their interrelations. One might think that at least in this role one could locate a distinctive place for artifacts in Plato’s scheme. But this is false. Plato assigns the same “pointing to beyond itself” role to diagrams in geometry, as we see in *Meno*.

Why could Plato not see drama as having intrinsic merit? For this to be possible, drama would have to have a vital and unique role in our coming to understand our nature and virtues. Such a role seems plausible when we think of kindness, sympathy—in short, virtues whose application does not depend on some merit possessed by the object. Respect or approval must be earned, but kindness or sympathy need not be. Plato does not have among his virtues, however, the sort that can be directed even at undeserving objects. Hence, the person who should command respect can be described in general terms, indicating something about her that warrants respect. But it might be difficult to teach and articulate the concept of kindness without relying to some extent on individual examples, and this is the place at which drama and poetry can enter as part of the wider educational process.

Underlying Plato’s views is a very deep intuition. It shows that some attitudes are rational in the sense that directing these toward certain humans depends on quality; that is, the person who is the object must possess certain good characteristics. But the states of character, feelings, and passions that are in the focus of literature are not of this sort. These (e.g., hatred) can be, and often are, directed toward specific persons, without consideration of their good or bad characteristics. This explains not only Plato’s stance but also why we cannot have a drama about wisdom or about respect. Painting and literature have their own domains, even more narrowly describable than what Plato offers.

These remarks should show us why Plato neither has nor needs a concept of taste. That concept is invoked to help explain what underlies the unity of aesthetic appreciation. But Plato has no such unity in his aesthetics. As we saw, different capacities are needed to appreciate different art forms, and singly these capacities are exercised also with respect to the nonaesthetic. He still succeeds in giving interesting characterizations of salient cognitive and affective attributes needed for appreciating this or that art form. Reading Plato and contrasting him with modern aestheticians yields the following contrast. One conception tries to find a common feature in all fine arts, posits a corresponding capacity of aesthetic appreciation, and tries to explain this in terms of a putative faculty of taste. The other approach construes what we call aesthetic appreciation as a series of partly interwoven capacities, each strand of which applies also to some nonaesthetic context. The difference is not a matter of analytic definitions, but rather one of differing general hypotheses about parts of cognitive psychology. For Plato, given the link of this material to metaphysics and ethics in his philosophy, he *must* be right. We can detach the psychology, take it on its own merit, and see it as an interesting and challenging alternative to taste-oriented philosophical explanations of our enjoying different art forms.

[See also *Beauty, article on Classical Concepts; and Taste, article on Early History.*]

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PLAY. From the perspective of many contemporary theorists, especially literary theorists, the concept of play seems to be internally connected to the concept of the artwork. A brief glance at the history of the concept of play reveals that this was not always the case: it was first by means of a detour through the cultural theories of play, above all through those of Johan Huizinga and Roger Caillois, on the one hand, and the sign theories of the structuralists and the deconstructionists, on the other, that the concept moved, if not to the center, then to the most interesting margins of contemporary aesthetic theory. From there it was possible to rediscover the idealist concept of play in the aesthetic theory of Immanuel Kant and Friedrich von Schiller as well as that of the early Romantics critically based on it.

Reference to the renaissance of the aesthetic concept of play in the twentieth century should not, however, be mistaken for the thesis that modern and postmodern works of art exhibit more of a play character than do so-called traditional artworks. The most interesting theories of play concerning the aesthetic strive rather to describe the structure of the artwork itself in terms of play—not to designate specific epochs or genres. This implies that the aesthetic concept of play should be limited neither to so-called nonsense poetry—for example, of the Dadaists or Surrealists—nor to play as the content of artworks or any particular games that are not intrinsic to the structure of the artwork such as anagrams, palindromes, or plays with numbers or names (see Hutchinson, 1983, and its wealth of examples). Games at the level of content take on a totally different status if the artwork itself is understood as a play unity; when this is the case, those games are no longer to be understood as isolated events but rather as a reflection of the structure of the artwork as a whole and, as such, as part of that structure. An extreme example of games as the content of artworks is François Rabelais's *Gargantua* in which 217 names for different games are listed and on which Mikhail Bakhtin remarks:

This famous enumeration had a considerable resonance. Rabelais' first German translator, Fischart, completed the long list with 372 German card games and dance tunes. The English seventeenth-century translator, Thomas Urquhart, also increased the lists of recreations by adding English names. . . . the Dutch version initiated research in the field of children's games, resulting in the greatest work ever undertaken in world folk studies.

(Bakhtin, 1968, p. 125)

This zeal on the part of the translators is no accident. Not a few of those theorists who describe the artwork as play see an advantage to their strategy in the fact that their description of the structure of the artwork already accounts for the activity of the recipient in such a way that reception does not carry a mere secondary or contingent status: if something is a game, it is oriented toward other players for conceptual reasons—that is, in order to be a game for all—and it suggests a configuration that provokes activity on the part of its recipient. Among the most prominent theoreticians to assert this argument, alongside Karl Wilhelm Friedrich von Schlegel and Novalis, are Hans-Georg Gadamer, Wolfgang Iser, and Jacques Derrida. The latter did not develop his position in correspondence to Stéphane Mallarmé without reason. Mallarmé wrote the celebrated text on a throw of the dice and precedes his *Igitur* with an epigram that can be read as bringing those aestheticians who inscribe the recipient as a constitutive element within the structure of the artwork to their point. It also qualifies Mallarmé as a theoretician of play in his own right. Loosely translated (the English edition did not include the epigram), it says, "This tale is addressed to the intelligence of the reader, which stages the scenes itself."

The explosive power of such curious forms of knowledge as those cited by Bakhtin or in learned collections detailing motifs and themes in the concept of play (see Hutchinson, Bakhtin, and Guinness and Hurley, 1986) depends on whether they can be brought into connection with the structure of the work of art. That is also true, by the way, of the clownish, circuslike, and comical aspects of the artwork that Theodor W. Adorno addressed in *Aesthetic Theory*—an attention that should be reason enough to read these together with a theory of play and not to mistake them as isolated elements. Because it is clear that the concept of play can have a significant role for aesthetics only if it indicates more than just a motif or theme within particular works of art, those aestheticians will be discussed here for whom the structure of the artwork is a game and, in many cases, one that comprehends the recipient as one who plays along.

Despite the fact that the concept of play, as stated before, has at least since Kant always reappeared in a prominent role, systematic consideration of the various levels on which this concept plays a role (operates) in the aesthetic process and as to the status of different types of play was undertaken only at a much later date. In this regard, Huizinga's nondifferentiation of the various types of play was paradoxically in-

fluent because of the responses it provoked. His one-dimensional characterization of all kinds of play as agonal actions left in its wake a whole series of interesting classifications. The best-known system of classification, critically but also sympathetically based on Huizinga, is that proposed by Caillois in *Man, Play, and Games* between competitions, games of chance, those of disguise, and imitation and ecstatic games. In Caillois's terminology they are called *agon*, *alea*, *mimicry*, and *ilinx*. It is astounding how many aestheticians have taken up these categories originally elaborated for the cultural sciences, even though they are not, at least not immediately, applicable to aesthetics (see Hutchinson, pp. 9ff.). Clearly, the cultural theorists named here furnished the decisive incentive and instigation for bringing the concept of play back into the theoretical discussion of art. This is reflected most strikingly in the nearly canon-establishing special volume in the Yale French Studies series from 1968, *Game, Play, Literature*, in which almost all authors cite Huizinga, Caillois, and the phenomenologist Eugen Fink; but also in Iser's much later work, *The Fictive and the Imaginary*, in which he makes a not very enlightening effort to render Caillois's four categories productive for the analysis of the literary artwork (Iser, 1993, pp. 445ff.). Iser's own four-part division of aesthetic play, which has nothing to do with Caillois's, should be considered as much more important and illuminating: namely, the distinction he makes between games with the referential worlds of a text, plays on the assembled positions within a text, plays on possible worlds, and plays on the reader's expectations. Another system of ordering tailored to aesthetic texts is that offered by Robert Detweiler between play as subject matter or content, play as fiction, and play with the reader. Susan Stewart, on the other hand, elaborates five nonsense games when she separates aesthetically understood nonsense from common sense. Inasmuch as these and comparable systems of differentiation of aesthetic play have shown the good sense to claim neither totality nor exhaustiveness, it is not a matter of the number of differentiations made, but rather of whether they touch on what is decisive in the artwork and thereby facilitate a departure from categories primarily relevant to the social sciences and social philosophy. Before taking up this problem again, it is, in any case, important to mention the play between the semantic and material elements in the artwork that Martin Heidegger places at the center of his consideration of the mode of being (*Seinsweise*) of the artwork when he calls it the "opposition" (*Gegeneinander*) or "striving" of "world and earth" (Heidegger, 1971, p. 49).

For the preceding reasons, the games as content that came back into play with Detweiler's categories will not be discussed here. Also omitted will be the play of fiction, as it has nothing to do with specifically literary plays. Insane fictions and speculations are one possible content for literary texts, but they also exist in the sciences: there one finds fictions concerning the origin of the world and of language,

and speculations on worlds run by computers or on how our lives would look if we were bats. What remains, then, of the previously cited aesthetic plays is that on reference, that between different positions within a text and that with readers, and—if one includes Heidegger here—that between meaning and materials. At first glance, it would seem we are very close to the traditional, frequently proposed binary between play internal to a text and play between the text and something external to it. In this distinction, the play between meaning and materials counts as internal to the text, readers belong to those things external, and the issue of reference remains undecided: according to Iser, for example, artworks can refer to "reference worlds" or to the "real" world beyond the domain of texts, but their reference can just as easily proceed "from the return of other texts" (p. 449). The following discussion of Romantic and idealist theories of play describing the aesthetic as inherently playful in its structure should, however, illustrate that this distinction is unproductive, if not indeed misleading.

In Kant's *Critique of Judgment*, play—the "free . . . play . . . of imagination and understanding" (Kant, 1987, p. 132)—appears, for the most part, to provide the basis of aesthetic pleasure and its peculiar subjective universality: such free play is "the basis of this pleasure in the harmony of the cognitive powers" (ibid.). In other passages, Kant calls it the "harmony between the cognitive powers in a judgment of taste" (p. 133). Apart from the fact that Kant describes the free play as harmony without any statement as to causes—in striking contrast not only to Huizinga, who characterizes all play as agonal, or Heidegger, who immediately speaks of a striving—the remarkable aspect of Kantian play theory is its localization of play in the subject alone. The question as to whether the play structure in the experiencing subject corresponds to something in the object is left problematically open in Kantian aesthetics, as is well known. Kant describes neither the aesthetic object, nor the relation between the work of art and its recipient in terms of play, but only the relation between two faculties within the subject in those terms.

One encounters a similarly subject-centered account of aesthetic play in a popularized variant of Kant's theory, namely, Schiller's letters *On the Aesthetic Education of Man*. In this case, play is described not as a balance achieved between two cognitive faculties, but rather as the harmony between two drives. When Schiller writes that "it (beauty) is the object common to both drives, that is to say, the object of the play-drive" (Schiller, 1967, p. 106), it is clear that the play drive forms not a third drive but rather the correct relation—one could almost say play relation—between the sensuous drive and the formal drive that otherwise tend to exclude one another. Schiller grants the aesthetic object even less attention than does Kant, because for Schiller the prime issue is the idea of a human being who falls victim neither to the senses nor to understanding. This is the hu-