PLATO'S ARTISTIC ETHICS

by

Kyle E. Gann

All references to the Republic in this paper refer to F. M. Cornford, The Republic of Plato, (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1941), unless otherwise stated. All references to the Laws are from the translation of A. E. Taylor in Huntington Cairns and Edith Hamilton, Eds., Plato: The Collected Dialogues Including the Letters, (Princeton, Princeton Univ. Press, 1961).

"EDUCATION IN MUSIC is most sovereign," says the Socrates of the Republic, "because more than anything else rhythm and harmony find their way to the inmost soul and take strongest hold upon it, bringing with them and imparting grace" (401d).[1] Deprived of the influences of the arts, a man will live in "a dull stupor of ignorance with no touch of inward harmony or grace" (411e). On the other hand, since art can be a very great influence, it has equal potential as a dangerous one. Although music seems a "harmless pastime", "the introduction of novel fashions in music is a thing to beware of as endangering the whole fabric of society" (424c). Few people would attribute to art such importance and power as Plato does here.

Later, however, in Book X, Plato sets forth a theory of mimesis, or artistic representation, the conclusion of which is that "art is a form of play, not to be taken seriously" (602b). In the same passage, it is said that "poetry has no serious claim to be valued as an apprehension of truth" (608a). Clearly this is a different attitude from that taken in Book III. Since "the same thing cannot act in two opposite ways or be in two opposite states at the same time... in relation to the same object" (436b), Plato in these passages seems to be referring to two different kinds or conceptions of art, one not worth serious consideration, and another that is of supreme

importance in education.

This theory of representation in Book X seems to conflict with several of the most common ideas about artistic experience - e.g., that a painter need not know carpentry to paint a carpenter (598b) - and to greatly underestimate the function of the artist. The theory is basically a resemblance theory, and is devastatingly critiqued as such by Nelson Goodman in his Languages of Art. Plato, however, was a man who admitted having fallen under the spell of Homer (Rep. 607c), who greatly admired the Sculpture of Phidias (Meno 91d), and who had himself written plays; an unlikely person to have greatly undervalued art, or to have misunderstood its essence.

It will be the purpose of this paper to show that, under a fuller reading combining Book III of the Republic, the Laws, and other dialogues, Plato's theory of representation is in essential agreement with that of Nelson Goodman; and to further suggest that Plato's aesthetic of mimesis, with its conceptions of the educationg and humanizing influence of art, the dangers of bad art, and other art which is not worth consideration, is still very relevant to artistic experience in the twentieth century.

Plato's Theory of Mimesis (Representation)

Plato's theory of mimesis is worked out in Book X with reference to painting and poetry. In both cases, representation is based on the idea of resemblance. In painting, the artist aims for a visual resemblance between the subject of his painting and its two-dimensional rendering. In poetry the resemblance is between the

poetic diction and the speech of the characters the poet has drawn from life.

The painter is assumed to have an object which exists in real life. The god is responsible for creating the forms, living creatures, and nature. The craftsman, the practitioner of a techne, creates artifacts which imitate the forms. The painter "represents the things which the other two make" (597e).

The second point of the theory is that the artist represents the appearances of these human and divine products, rather than their reality. Art has a lower ontological status than human artifacts because it is a representation of a semblance rather than the truth (598b) and therefore twice removed from the forms. The contrast is more strikiknglY drawn in the case of the poet, who

> can paint in words his picture of any craftsman so as to impress an audience which is equally ignorant and judges only by the form of expression; the inherent charm or meter, rhythm, and musical setting is enough to make them think he has discoursed admirably...(600b)

The poet can give a description the appearance of truth without having any real knowledge of the truth himself.

The intent of the artist, under this theory, is to produce as close a resemblance to this real object as possible; in fact, Socrates begins the theory with the analogy of someone creating images in a mirror (596d). A painter portraying a carpenter, Socrates states, "if he were a good painter,...might deceive a child or simple-minded person into thinking his picture was a real carpenter, if he showed it them at some distance" (598bc). The poet is limited in his choice

of subject to persons of a low and intemperate character because "the calm and wise character in its unvarying constancy is not easy to represent" (604e). It is the criterion of resemblance which limits the poet, because the character must appear on stage just as he appears in life.

The result of this distinction between appearance and reality, and the artist's ability to deceive, is that art "has no serious claim to be taken as an apprehension of truth" (608a); and because the artist's function and intention is the realistic imitation of sensible appearances, art "is a form of play, not to be taken seriously" (602b).

Nelson Goodman's Critique of the Resemblance Theory

Plato's theory of representation, then, as given thus far is dependent on the concept of resemblance. Most recent writers on representation still assume that a painting represents its subject to the extent that it resembles it. Yet, as Nelson Goodman points out, "more error could hardly be compressed into so short a formula."[2]

Goodman begins his book Languages of Art with a devastating critique of common assumptions about visual resemblance. In the first place, the relation of resemblance is both reflexive and symmetric, whereas representation is neither. Secondly, very similar objects seldom represent each other. A man's twin brother resembles him, but does not represent him, while a picture of the man represents him, although it will resemble him much less, being two-dimensional. A

"painting of Marlborough Castle is more like any other picture than it is like the Castle, yet it represents the Castle and not another picture."[3]

To circumvent the foregoing difficulty, it is assumed that Plato's "good painter", who is intent on a deceptively close likeness, must produce a painting which delivers to the eye a bundle of light rays which match those delivered by the object depicted. Goodman points out that this requirement precudes all normal conditions for viewing art. In addition, a painting which did match the set of light rays would look unrealistic to us; because, among other things, while we expect horizontal parallel lines, such as railroad tracks, to converge, we see vertical parallels as such only when they do not converge. "Thus we have cameras with tilting backs and elevating lens-boards to 'correct distortion'- that is, to make vertical parallels come out parallel in our photographs."[4] To connect this argument with Plato, we need only remember that Greek columns were made slightly wider in the middle in order to give the illusion of straightness. Moreover, the transformations that produce visual realism are not inherent in perception, but culture-relative. A person solely accustomed to Oriental or African art has to learn to "read" a Western perspectival painting as realistic.[5] The criteria for realism differ not only from culture to culture, but can change within a society in a relatively few years' time.

The first result of Goodman's argument is that pictorial representation is denotative at its core, and concerned with classifying and characterizing. In these respects it is no different from verbal

representation, or description. A picture of Napoleon is a picture of a general, but while the picture denotes Napoleon, it may portray him as a civilian. Likewise a verbal description of Napoleon may also be a description of him as a civilian. Pictorial representation, like description, is concerned with classification, interpretation, and selection of aspects, and is thus a means of organizing perception.

The second result is that realism depends on "how stereotyped the mode of representation is, upon how commonplace the labels and their uses have become."[6]

> That a picture looks like nature often means only that it looks the way nature is usually painted. Again, what will deceive me into supposing that an object of a given kind is before me depends on what I have noticed about such objects, and this in turn is affected by the way I am used to seeing them depicted.[7]

This argument applies equally to poetic depiction and dramatic representation, with little change in wording.

Since there is no essential criterion for realism, and since representation is a means for organizing perception, the artist must choose what aspects of his subject he wants to assert as significant. The true artist, far from trying to create a resemblance of appearances, farther still from slavish copying or an intention to deceive, has an interpretive and transforming function.

> The marking off of new elements or classes, or of familiar ones by labels of new kinds, or by new combinations of old labels, may provide new insight... In representation, the artist must make use of old habits when he wants to elicit novel objects and connections. If his picture is recognized as almost

> but not quite referring to the commonplace furniture of the everyday world, or if it calls for and yet resists assignment to a usual kind of picture, it may bring out neglected likenesses and differences, force unaccustomed associations, and in some measure remake our world. And if the point of the picture is not only successfully made but is also well taken, if the realignments it... effects are interesting and important, the picture - like a crucial experiment - makes a genuine contribution to knowledge. To a complaint that his portrait of Gertrude Stein did not look like her, Picasso is said to have answered, "No matter; it will."[8]

This last claim is in direct conflict with Plato's oft-repeated warning that art cannot form a basis for knowledge (e.g. Rep. 522a) and contains no "apprehension of truth." Goodman's account of art gives it the same ontological status as language, discourse, and thought; and since thought and dialectic lead to knowledge of the forms (Rep. 534), and 'are closer to truth than action" (473a), the implication would be for Plato that this is a very high ontological status. Art is not bound to an imitation of sensible reality. "That nature imitates art is too timid a dictum. Nature is a product of art and discourse."[9]

The Concept of Mimesis Broadened with respect to Music

Does Plato's theory of mimesis refer to a conception of art which is totally archaic, or is it really so badly constructed that it is susceptible to such easy and complete refutation? I think that if we further qualify that theory with references to mimesis in the rest

of Plato's work, we will see that neither possibility is correct.

Goodman has pointed out that a major problem for the theory of representation is the infrequency of imitation of or resemblance of external objects in music.[10] Yet Plato specifically states in the Cratylus that music is a form of mimesis as much as is drawing (423d). In the Laws, the Athenian states as an assumption that among the citizens of the ideal state

> it would be universally allowed of music that its productions are all of the nature of representation and portraiture. Composers, performers, audience, all of them would be in complete agreement so far?
> Beyond doubt. (668c)

Twentieth century musicians of the American State would find precious little agreement as to this statement or its meaning. Music, considered apart from a text, lacks the obvious denotative capabilities of poetry and painting. What could modes, melodies, harmonies, and rhythms possibly imitate? Plato gives three answers.

The first answer is that music can imitate by resembling the sounds and noises of real life. Plato reacts against "realistic" tendencies in music in which performers "imitate horses neighing and bulls bellowing or the noise of rivers and sea and thunder" (Rep. 396b). Modern examples lie easily at hand: the imitation of cricket sounds as early as Josquin, bird sounds in Beethoven's Sixth Symphony, cannon in Tchaikovsky's Overture 1812, a wind machine in certain tone poems of Strauss - the list could be greatly extended. This type of imitation Plato expressly forbids for the same reason that performers are forbidden to represent the ravings of insanity, grief, or drunkenness.

> If [the Guardians] act, they should, from childhood upwards, impersonate only the appropriate types of character, men who are brave, religious, self-controlled, generous. They are not to do anything mean or dishonorable; no more should they be practised in representing such behavior, for fear of becoming infected with the reality. (Rep. 395cd)

Nineteenth century writings on music are full of similar diatribes against musical resemblance to non-musical sounds in terms of the distinction between "program" music and "absolute" music.

The second conception of musical mimesis is that "the musical mode and the rhythm should fit the words" (Rep. 398d); in other words, the text and its meaning are the objects of representation. This is a much broader kind of representation than the rather trivial Renaissance practice of setting the word "resurrexit" to a rising scale and "in excelsis" on a high note; for in the Laws, we are assured that the Muses

> would never commit the grave mistake of setting masculine language to an effeminate scale, or tune, or wedding melody, or postures worthy of free men with rhythms fit only for slaves. (669c)

This conception of mimesis seems at times to include the idea of resemblance, up to a point; Socrates looks for a mode "which will fittingly represent the tones and accents of a brave man in warlike action" (Rep. 399a), and the rhythm and melodic inflection should conform to the accents and inflection of the text when spoken. However, the point of good text-setting is not to sound like speech, and here the determining criterion is not resemblance but appropriateness.

Appropriateness, in the Hippias Major, is the closest thing Socrates finds to a definition of the Beautiful (290ff). This appropriateness functions in two ways: as a relation between the work of art and the subject of its representation, and as a relation between the various parts of the work of art. The latter use is exemplified when Socrates says of the making of a statue that "the question is whether, by giving each its proper color, we make the whole beautiful" (Rep. 420d). Here, we are dealing with the former relation.

The basis of Greek thinking concerning their modal system was that certain modes were appropriate for certain states of mind, based on the relative pitch of each mode.[11] According to Ptolemy,

> the same melody has an activating effect in the higher keys, and a depressing one in the lower keys, because a high pitch stretches the soul, while a low pitch slackens it. Therefore the keys in the middle near the Dorian can be compared with well-ordered and stable states of the soul, the higher keys near the Mixolydian with the stirred and stimulated states, and the lower keys near the Hypodorian with the slack and feeble moods.[12]

For a given text, then, it was considered that there was a specific mode appropriate for that text, and an accurate rendering of the text, which is here the object of representation, requires the use of that mode. We are dealing now with the criteria of realism, which are culture-relative and change with time. The nineteenth century European version of the Greek concept of modal propriety was, crudely, that the major mode was appropriate for expressing joy and courage, and the minor one for sadness and despair. Heard through this filter,

some of the Baroque laments in major keys sound curiously "unrealistic." The musical criteria for appropriateness were changing in Plato's day. He laments the "good old days" when "it was not permissable to misuse one kind of melody for another" (Laws 700b).

The third application of mimesis to music given by Plato is that suggested by the statement that "grace and seemliness of form and movement go with good rhythm; ungracefulness and unseemliness with bad" (400c). In a slightly later passage Socrates draws attention to

> an analogy between this luxurious living and that style of music which uses every variation of mode and rhythm. Variety there engendered licence in the soul, and simplicity temperance. So in the body, variety breeds maladies and simplicity health. (404e)

The simple life and the simple rhythm both participate in the form of Simplicity; likewise graceful form and graceful rhythm both participate in the form of Gracefulness (euschemosune - good figure, elegance of bearing, good form[13]). Here is the second use of "appropriateness";- grace and simplicity depend on a relation between parts within a whole. All true works of art participate in the form of Beauty. In the words of Verdenius, "the true artist tries to trace the essence of beauty and gracefulness."[14] The relation between a form and a particular which partakes of it is not only one of ontological dependence, but one of an original to an image or reflection of it.[15] In the relation of levels of reality described by Verdenius, each level is an imitation of, or strives to imitate, the next higher

level.[15] A graceful rhythm or melody, therefore, is a sensible image of the form of gracefulness, and an imitation of it. Here the resemblance metaphor[16] is a far cry from the theory of mimesis suggested in Book X of the Republic, because the resemblance is between a sensible and a non-sensible being. While the second conception of mimesis had something to do with resemblance but more to do with appropriateness, this conception does not involve resemblance in Goodman's sense at all.

This conception could well be an answer, although perhaps not a complete one, to the question of what could be represented by purely instrumental music. This problem is raised in the Laws immediately after the previously quoted passage in which the imitation in music of the text is discussed:

> It is the hardest of tasks to discover what such wordless rhythm and tune signify, or what model worth considering they represent. (669e)

The objection here is to the tendency for instrumental music to degenerate into a "display of speed and virtuosity" when it is not "subordinated to the control of dance or song" (669e) (and examples of this degeneration in Western music over the last two centuries are certainly legion.) However, the mention of dance implies that the text is not necessary; and the answer to the above question may lie in the identification of good rhythm with grace in the Republic. Plato asserts that a graceful rhythm itself will help impart grace to the soul, and this is as possible in instrumental music as in vocal.

Music also exhibits mimesis in a broader sense by being a sensible

imitation of the form of Harmony. Harmony is an extremely pervasive and important concept in the Republic. Temperance is frequently described as a sort of harmony (e.g. 430e), and harmony and rhythm both are asserted as necessary for the proper regulation of a man's life.in the Protagoras (326b). Ernest G. McClain has advanced the notion of a very literal analogy between the harmony of the tones in a scale and the harmony of a state.[17] Harmony in the scale depends on the subjugation of the less important intervals, the seconds and thirds, to the more important intervals, the fourths and fifths which consist of simpler ratios. If all intervals claimed their "due", i.e. their expression in simplest ratios, the result would be internal contradiction and chaos. Similarly, internal strife in the state can only be avoided by a subjugation of the lesser elements to the better, and the result is likewise harmony. McClain further believes that the Dorian and Phrygian modes were the only modes allowed because of the fact that they are the only ones which Pythagorean number theory can establish without internal conflict.[18] However that may be, Plato makes it clear (Rep. 531c) that the inherent consonance and dissonance of harmony is a matter to be determined by reason, and not by the fallible and sense-bound method of the ear; and that music should be a reflection of the form of rational Harmony. It is by an accurate representation of this Harmony that music can help to introduce harmony into the soul. If the Dorian and Phrygian modes are the only ones that exhibit this Harmony, then the rest should be banned for their own sake as well as on grounds of inappropriateness to allowable texts.

The Ethical and Epistemological Value of Art

Our analysis of Plato's references to the representational character of music has shown that what Plato intends by *mimesis* is far less limited and pedestrian than appears in Book X of the *Republic*. Only the first of the senses of *mimesis* mentioned, that of naturalistic and accurate physical resemblance, corresponds to the accont given in Book X and criticized by Goodman; and the art that fits that conception is harshly criticized in the rest of the *Republic* and in the *Laws*. Representation can also connote the ideas of appropriate transformation and interpretation, and of reflection of the forms of Grace, Beauty, Simplicity, etc.

That these meanings of *mimesis* are applicable to all the arts is made clear by Verdenius. In his account, art "refers both to an ideal pattern and a phenomenal image."[19] With regard to the latter,

> the Muse wants [the artist] to express something more than the facts of everyday life in their causal succession. If this were the only aim of his art, imitation would never fail. That it does fail is an indication that it also refers to something not directly observable and describable, to a more general aspect of reality.... Imitating characters and actions, he must at the same time try to evoke an idea of their ultimate principles....Imitation implies transformation...[20]

At the same time, all true art has another aspect as an imitation of the form of Beauty.

> ...Plato attaches much value to the likeness of a work of art, but this idea should not be interpreted in modern terms. In true art likeness does not refer to commonplace reality, but to ideal beauty.[21]

Mimesis in these senses has nothing to do with the physical resemblance that Verdenius calls "slavish imitation."

> "The image must not by any means reproduce all the qualities of that which it imitates"...imitation can never be more than suggestion or evocation.[22]

How does this revised theory of representation fare now under Goodman's critique? In the first place, "denotation is the core of representation."[23] For Goodman, representation involves signification and symbolization. Verdenius calls mimesis suggestion and evocation. If these words are not synonymous, they are at least compatible, and evocation may even imply denotation. At any rate, in the imitation of a text by music, or of Gracefulness by rhythm, resemblance ceases to be a criterion, and hence a problem. The function of mimesis is to characterize and classify, "suggesting a deeper meaning...through clarifying [nature's] fundamental structure."[24]

If representation includes classification and characterization, it can be a means of organizing experience and perception. To repeat,

> that a picture looks like nature often means only that it looks the way nature is usually painted... what I have noticed about...objects...is affected by the way I am used to seeing them depicted.[25]

Compare this statement with one by Plato:

> a proper training [in rhythm and harmony] makes a man quick to perceive any defect or ugliness in art or in nature. (Rep. 401e)

If a person from youth is accustomed to seeing objects depicted with

grace and beauty, hearing graceful melodies and rhythms, and in general perceiving beautiful and harmonious forms in works of art, these experiences will cause that person to notice and be more aware of beauty and harmony and their opposites in art and nature. The perception-organizing character of art is one of the bases of the ethical mandates which Plato imposes on art. Art should help to organize our perception in such a way that we learn to distinguish beauty from ugliness, grace from bad form, harmony from a failure to subjugate the parts to the whole (cf. Rep. 420d). "Rhythm and harmony sink deep into the recesses of the soul and take the strongest hold there, bringing grace of body and mind" (Rep. 401e).

It has been stated that art "refers both to an ideal pattern and a phenomenal image." In the Laws, Plato posits a three-fold structure of art-interpretation:

> Then must not one who is to be an intelligent judge of any representation, whether in drawing, in music, or in any other branch of art, have three qualifications? He must understand, first, what the object reproduced is, next, how correctly, third and last, how well a given representation has been effected in point of language, melody, or rhythm. (669a)

The last two of these involve value judgments and carry ethical connotations for the artist. The correctness (or appropriateness) of the representation refers to the phenomenal image, and the "how well" refers to the ideal pattern. The ethical aspect of both values is stated in Book VII of the Republic. Poetry and music, it is said,

> educated our Guardians by the influence of habit, imparting no real knowledge, but only a kind of

> measure and harmony by means of melody and rhythm, and forming the character in similar ways through the content of literature...(522a)

The artist, then, has two ethical responsibilities. First, he must form the character through the accuracy and truth of his representation of the content - the phenomenal image - of literature and visual art. (For a similar suggestion about the content of music, see Appendix I.) For example, he must represent truly the nature of gods and heroes (Rep. 377e). "Nature is good and must be described as such" (Rep. 378b). Secondly, he must impart measure and harmony to the soul by imitating well the ideal patterns of beauty, grace, and harmony.

One last point in Goodman's theory of representation remains to be considered. Since art is concerned with organization of perception, since it can "bring out neglected likenesses and differences, force unaccustomed associations, and in some measure remake our world," it has the possibility of making a "genuine contribution to knowledge."[26] According to Plato, however, poetry and music "educate by influence of habit, imparting no real knowledge." But that Plato and Goodman differ on whether or not art can be a path to knowledge does not indicate a divergence in their respective theories of representation, but in their epistemologies. Goodman argues

> that the world is as many ways as it can be truly described, seen, pictured,etc., and that there is no such thing as the way the world is.[27]

This view of reality is clearly antithetical to Plato's concept of infallible knowledge (Rep. 477e) and the intelligible first principle,

the unhypotheton (Rep. 510b). The classification and characterization accomplished by art lead to knowledge in Goodman's scheme; this "knowledge" Plato would consider merely right opinion, but the artistic process is the same. This right opinion must await confirmation by reason before it can be called knowledge (for a fuller discussion with examples, see Appendix II.) For a person to hold it qua knowledge, it must be reached by the path of dialectic, as well as, or perhaps instead of, that of artistic intuition. Plato accords each of these paths some validity, although they are mutually exclusive, leading to different ends; for in the Phaedrus he admits that poetry serves "for the instruction of posterity," but

> if any man come to the gates of poetry without the madness of the muses [could we substitute artistic intuition?], persuaded that skill [techne] alone shall make him a good poet, then shall he and his works of sanity with him be brought to nought by the poetry of madness. (245a)[28]

Conclusion

We stated at the beginning that in Books III and X of the Republic, Plato must be considering two different conceptions of art, one which is not worth serious consideration, and another which is of supreme importance for education. He may have been aware of this dichotomy when he wrote the Laws, because he there postulates and contrasts these same two types of art:

> when a man tells us that in music pleasure is the standard of judgment, we must refuse to accept his statement. It is not this type of music, if indeed there could be such a type, which we should make our serious object, but that other which retains its likeness to the model of the noble. (668ab)

Let us consider these two types of art. The first kind aims at copying naturalistically objects in real life. Imitation here is of appearances; no attempt is made to go past these to the reality. Such painting seeks to deceive the viewer, such music imitates the sounds of animals, such poetry gives voice to the most superficial opinions of the multitude, and plays upon the basest emotions of its audience. This art is "realistic", and Goodman's defenition of realism is perfectly suited to it:

> Just here, I think, lies the touchstone of realism: not in quantity of information, but in how easily it issues. And this depends on how stereotyped the mode of representation is, upon how commonplace the labels and their uses have become.[29]

Such art is at the level of eikasia, which Cornford defines as the "wholly unenlightened state of mind which takes sensible appearances and current moral notions at their face value."[30] In the analogy of the line in Book VI of the Republic, eikasia is concerned with images, which have the lowest ontological status. Visible things are one step higher, and the forms are higher yet. This artist is indeed "at the third remove from the essential nature of things" (Rep. 597e). Pleasure is said to be the standard of judgment in this art, and that pleasure depends, in Goodman's words, on how easily the information issues. The artist must use an extremely

stereotyped mode of representation if he is going to "win the approval of the ignorant multitude" (Rep. 601a). This art will not stand the test of time because its means of representation are not based on truth, but on the culture-relative criteria of realism, and as soon as these criteria change, its pleasure-giving effect will be greatly diminished.

One needs not look far afield to find such art today. The Robert Wood paintings of mountain scenes that one can buy in grocery stores, and popular songs of the "If you're not with the one you love, love the one you're with" variety, certainly use very stereotypical means of expression, take sensible appearances and current moral notions at face value, win the multitude's appoval, are judged by the standard of pleasure, and are not worth serious consideration, although they garner the lion's share of money and media exposure. Now, just as in Plato's time, "the 'sovereignty of the best' ...has given way to an evil 'sovereignty of the audience'" (Laws 701a).

The other type of art represents the "model of the noble." The standard of judgment here is not pleasure, but how correctly and how well the representation has been effected, which are matters of the reason. This type forms character by the truth of its content, and imparts grace and harmony by the beauty of its expression. The artist of this type has two ethical responsibilities and must ignore the "approval of the ignorant multitude;" and in a decadent society he can hardly win it. This type of art falls under the judgment of ethical standards. But the art created solely for its pleasure giving effect

must be submitted to the same standards, and this is why Plato qualifies his statement with "as if there could be such a type." To pander to the crowd by representing its truths is still to assert those truths, and it is not the crowd that will be judged therein, but the artist. Perhaps that "spoken falsehood is only the embodiment or image of a previous condition of the soul" (Rep. 382b) also applies to false art.

The aesthetic expressed in Plato's writing is very simple. Every work of art has three aspects - an object which is represented, the accuracy of the representation (although this does not mean resemblance), and the quality of the execution. The artist has an ethical commitment to truth in the sincerity of his work's content, and a commitment to beauty in the perfecting of his artistic technique. This aesthetic is at least as relevant today as it was 2400 years ago.

A very much done indeed.

Appendices

I

It should be pointed out, that in this age of symphonic form and "non-representational" art, many aestheticians would assert that all art, including music and abstract painting, have the kind of content ascribed to literature on page 17. In music, the foremost proponent of this view has been Theodor Adorno (see, for example, his Introduction to the Sociology of Music). In the visual arts, Harold Rosenberg (The De-Definition of Art) and E. H. Gombrich (Art and Illusion) are only two of the more prominent art-theorists who have attributed content to art through analysis of its form. As a brief example, Adorno, in analyzing the late works of Beethoven, finds that they "signify...the irreversible bypassing of individual freedom as a possibility in concrete historical reality."[31] This analysis is based on the assumption of a "dialectical relationship between form and freedom."[32]

The great majority of the music of Plato's time (and no doubt the best of it) was vocal, and the visual art, or at least the "fine art", was concerned with subjects drawn from life. For these reasons, Plato did not have to confront nor account for the phenomena of so-called representationless art. Considerations of this kind of

immanent content fill out Plato's aesthetic to give it greater relevance to Western art as a whole, without, I believe, doing violence to his intent. At the same time, they provide a framework for a more unified aesthetic among the arts, and give the composer of absolute music and the painter of abstract art as much of a commitment to truth of content as the poet.

II

While the artistic organization of perception could never lead to knowledge in Plato's sense, it has often led to perceptual truths that have later been supported and confirmed by the sciences. The Impressionists, painting what their eyes saw rather than what their minds knew to exist, revolted against an atomistic view of visual perception and depicted reality in terms of gestalt-qualities before von Ehrenfels produced his paper on the subject in 1890.[33] In a way, the Impressionists intuited true opinions about perception, but the psychology of perception could not have advanced to any real knowledge simply by taking their paintings as a basis. Similarly, psychoacousticians have recently been working with the conception of "perceptual streams," a phenomenon recognized by composers and musicians since at least the time of Bach, although they certainly did not understand it in the same terms.[34] No psychoacoustician would ever use the solo cello suites of Bach as evidence to support a theory, but the experiments and reasoning of psychoacousticians

have confirmed the soundness of Bach's intuitive grasp of aural perception. It is even remotely possible that the underlying idea of perceptual streams could have first occurred to an acoustician listening to a Bach cello suite. The Greek composer, mathematician, and architect Iannis Xenakis believes that it is an important function of art to suggest new ideas and means of organization for the sciences to work with.[35]

Verdenius admits that Plato thinks that art can lead to right opinion. However, Verdenius claims that art cannot lead to knowledge because the artist "necessarily confuses the Muse's inspiration,"[36] that because of his ecstasy he is not allowed "fully to realize the purport of his own words,"[37] and "can only register images without deliberately arranging them into a well considered whole."[38] However, his quotation from the laws only states that the poet <u>often</u> contradicts himself, not always,[39] and nowhere does Plato consider it logically impossible that a work of art could represent exclusively right opinion. Indeed, this possibility must be assumed, or there could be no art allowed into the Republic at all. Art is not a path to knowledge, not because the artist lacks control and has no idea of what he is doing, quite the contrary; but apprehension of a truth by intuition holds a different justification than the apprehension of dialectic, and dialectic is the only justification Plato allows. Sikes' view grants more dignity to art than does Verdenius':

> Why, it may be asked, did Plato fail to make it plainer that Art, being concerned with beauty, might at least be a valuable means to knowledge? His

answer would have been that Art cannot be the means, which is the sphere of philosophy. Art could not be an end in itself, because the artist's vision is emotional, and the emotions, if not actually suppressed, must be subordinated to Reason. But he does, in effect, allow that art may be a means to knowledge, as a training for the soul not yet prepared for the more rigorous treatment of philosophy... [40]

Footnotes

[1] Plato, Republic, Paul Shorey trans., Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns, Plato: The Collected Dialogues Including the Letters, (Princeton, Princeton Univ. Press, 1961), p. 646.

[2] Nelson Goodman, Languages of Art, (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Co., 1976), p. 4. The discussion that follows is a summary of the pertinent points of the first chapter, "Reality Remade."

[3] Ibid., p. 5.

[4] Ibid., p. 16.

[5] Ibid., p. 14.

[6] Ibid., p. 36.

[7] Ibid., p. 39.

[8] Ibid., p. 33.

[9] Ibid., p. 33.

[10] Ibid., p. 3.

[11] Curt Sachs, The Rise of Music in the Ancient World, (N. Y.: W. W. Norton and Co., 1943), p. 248.

[12] Ibid., pp. 248-9.

[13] Alban Dewes Winspear, TheGenesis of Plato's Thought, (Montreal, Harvest House, 1974), p. 219.

[14] W. J. Verdenius, Mimesis, (Leiden, E. J. Brill, 1962), p. 14.

[15] R. E. Allen, "Participation and Predication in Plato's Middle Dialogues", in Gregory Vlastos, Ed., Plato, (Garden City, N. Y.: Doubleday and Co., 1971), p. 179.

[15] Verdenius, p. 16.

[16] Allen, p. 179.

[17] Ernest McClain, The Pythagorean Plato, (Stony Brook, N. Y.: Nicholas Hays, Ltd. 1978), p. 130.

[18] Ibid., pp. 128-9.

[19] Verdenius, p. 15.

[20] Ibid., pp. 12-13.

[21] Ibid., p. 18.

[22] Ibid., p. 17.

[23] Goodman, p. 5.

[24] Verdenius, p. 20.

[25] Goodman, p. 39.

[26] Ibid., p. 33.

[27] Ibid,, p. 6, note.

[28] Plato, Phaedrus, R, Hackforth trans., in Hamilton and Cairns, op. cit.

[29] Goodman, p.36.

[30] F. M. Cornford, The Republic of Plato, (London, Oxford Univ. Press, 1941), p. 222.

[31] Rose Rosengard Subotnik, "Theodor Adorno's Analysis of Beethoven's Late Style", Journal of the American Musicological Society, XXXI 1972, p. 121.

[32] Ibid., p. 117.

[33] Aron Gurwitsch, The Field of Consciousness, (Pittsburgh; Duquesne Univ. Press, 1964), p. 57ff.

[34] Steve MacAdams, in a lecture presented at Northwestern Univ. in March of 1980.

[35] Iannis Xenakis, Formalized Music, (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1971), p. viii.

[36] Verdenius, p. 12.

[37] Ibid., p. 6.

[38] Ibid., p. 7.

[39] Ibid., p. 3.

[40] E. E, Sikes, The Greek View of Poetry, (N. Y.: E. P. Dutton and Co., 1931), p. 86.

Bibliography

Cairns, Huntington and Hamilton, Edith, Eds. Plato: the Collected Dialogues Including the Letters. Princeton:Princeton Univ. Press, 1961

Cornford, Francis MacDonald. The Republic of Plato. London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1941

Goodman, Nelson. Languages of Art: An Approach to a Theory of Symbols. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Co. 1976

McClain, Ernest. The Pythagorean Plato: Prelude to the Song Itself. Stony Brook, N. Y.: Nicholas Hays, Ltd., 1978

Sachs, Curt. The Rise of Music in the Ancient World, East and West. N. Y.: W. W. Norton and Co., 1943

Sikes, E. E. The Greek View of Poetry. N. Y.: E. P. Dutton and Co., Inc., 1931

Verdenius, W. J. Mimesis: Plato's Doctrine of Artistic Imitation and Its Meaning to Us. Leiden: E. J. Brill 1962

Vlastos, Gregory. Plato I: Metaphysics and Epistemology. Garden City N. Y.: Doubleday and Co., 1971

Winspear, Alban Dewes. The Genesis of Plato's Thought. Montreal: Harvest House, 1974