Plato on Art and Beauty

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Plato on Art and Beauty

Edited by

A. E. Denham
St Anne's College, University of Oxford
and
The School of Liberal Arts, Tulane University

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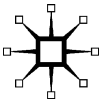

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To Solomon Denham

ἀυτῷ τοι μετόπισθ’ ἄχος ἔσσεται, ἤι κεν ἀοιδὸν
πέφνῃς, ὅς τε θεοῖσι καὶ ἀνθρώποισιν ἀείδῃ.

Homer *Od.* 22.345-6

Contents

Abbreviations

I Plato's works

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

II Aristotle's works

Met.	*Metaphysics*
N. E.	*Nicomachean Ethics*
Poet.	*Poetics*
Polit.	*Politics*
Rhet.	*Rhetoric*

III Plutarch's works

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

Pyrr. Hyp.	*Outlines of Pyrrhonism*
Pyth. Orac.	*De Pythiaeoraculis*
Qu. Conv.	*Quaestiones Convivales*
Quomodo Adul.	*Quomodo adulescens*
Sto.	*De Stoicorum repugnantiis*

IV Pindar's work

Nem.	*Nemeans*

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Preface

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

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

A.E.D.
Oxford, July 2011

Contributors

Dorit Barchana-Lorand specializes in the aesthetics and the philosophy of art. She holds a D.Phil. in Philosophy from the University of Oxford and a Master's in Philosophy and Literature from Tel Aviv University. Barchana-Lorand has lectured in Israel, Great Britain and the US. Her research and publications range over classical and modern historical texts from Plato to Kant.

M. F. Burnyeat is an Emeritus Fellow of All Souls College, Oxford and Honorary Fellow of Robinson College, Cambridge, where he was the University's fifth Laurence Professor of Ancient Philosophy. His edited volumes include (with Ted Honderich) *Philosophy As It Is* (1979) and *The Sceptical Tradition* (1983). He is the author of *The Theaetetus of Plato* (1990) (with Michael Frede) *The Original Sceptics: A Controversy* (1997), *A Map of* Metaphysics *Zeta* (2001) and *Aristotle's Divine Intellect* (2008). His collected papers up to 1996 are being published in two volumes under the title *Explorations in Ancient and Modern Philosophy* (2012).

Pierre Destrée is Research Associate at the Fonds Belge de la Recherche Scientifique and Associate Professor of Philosophy at the University of Louvain. His publications include numerous articles on Greek ethics and aesthetics. He has recently co-edited (with Chris Bobonich) *Akrasia in Greek Philosophy* (2007), (with F. G. Herrmann) *Plato and the Poets* (2011) and (with C. Collobert and F. Gonzalez) *Plato and the Myths* (2012). He is preparing (with Penelope Murray) the edition of the *Blackwell Companion to Ancient Aesthetics* and is currently editing *Aristotle on Aesthetics*.

G. R. F. ('John') Ferrari is Professor of Classics at the University of California, Berkeley. He is editor of the *Cambridge Companion to Plato's* Republic (2007), and has also edited a translation of the *Republic* by Tom Griffith in the series *Cambridge Texts in the History of Political Thought* (2000). He is the author of *Listening to the Cicadas: A Study of Plato's* Phaedrus (1987) and *City and Soul in Plato's* Republic (2003; reissued in 2005). Ferrari is an internationally established Plato scholar, who has lectured in many countries (and languages) on Plato. He maintains an interest in literary theory and in aesthetics, as seen most recently in his article 'The Meaninglessness of Gardens', *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* (2010), a product of Ferrari's Guggenheim Fellowship (2008–9).

Stephen Halliwell is Professor in the School of Classics at St Andrew's University. His research focuses on Greek literature and philosophy. He is the author of more than ninety articles on various topics in these fields. His books include *Aristotle's* Poetics (1986, reissued in 1998), *Plato* Republic

10 (1988), *Plato* Republic *5* (1993), *The Aesthetics of Mimesis: Ancient Texts and Modern Problems* (2002) and *Greek Laughter: A Study of Cultural Psychology from Homer to Early Christianity* (2008).

Jessica Moss is Tutorial Fellow in Ancient Philosophy at Balliol College, Oxford. Her articles on psychology and ethics in Plato and Aristotle have appeared in publications such as *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* and *The Cambridge Companion to Plato's* Republic. She has recently completed a book titled *Aristotle on the Apparent Good* (2011).

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

Alexander Nehamas is the Edmund N. Carpenter II Class of 1943 Professor in the Humanities, Professor of Philosophy, and Professor of Comparative Literature at Princeton University. He has published more than eighty articles on various topics in philosophy. Nehamas is the author of *Nietzsche: Life As Literature* (1985), *The Art of Living: Socratic Reflections from Plato to Foucault* (1998), *Virtues of Authenticity: Essays on Plato and Socrates* (1998) and *Only a Promise of Happiness: The Place of Beauty in a World of Art* (2007); and he has translated (with Paul Woodruff) editions of Plato's *Symposium* (1989) and *Phaedrus* (1995).

C. D. C. Reeve is Delta Kappa Epsilon Distinguished Professor of Philosophy at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. His books include *Philosopher-Kings: The Argument of Plato's* Republic (1988, reissued in 2006), *Socrates in the* Apology*: An Essay on Plato's* Apology of Socrates (1989), *Practices of Reason: Aristotle's* Nicomachean Ethics (1995), *Aristotle:* Politics (1998), *Plato:* Cratylus (1998), *The Trials of Socrates: Six Classic Texts* (2002), *Substantial Knowledge: Aristotle's* Metaphysics (2003), *Plato:* Republic (2005), *Love's Confusions* (2005), *Plato on Love* (2006) and *Immortal Life: Action, Contemplation, and Happiness in Aristotle* (2011).

David Sider is Professor of Classics at New York University and is the author of numerous articles on ancient Greek philosophy and poetry. His books include *The Fragments of Anaxagoras,* edited with an Introduction and Commentary (1981, revised second edition in 2005), *The Epigrams of Philodemos: Introduction, Text, and Commentary* (1997), *The Library of the Villa dei Papiri at Herculaneum* (2005) and (with C. W. Brunschön) *Theophrastus of Eresus: On Weather Signs* (2007).

Editor's Introduction

A. E. Denham

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

* * *

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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