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Plato's attitude to poetry and the fine arts and the origins of æsthetics

Part I*

Walter G. Leszl

1. Introduction

Plato has much to say about poetry and about arts which can be called fine (or beautiful) such as music and painting, and deals with them in a variety of contexts. These contributions of his have attracted the attention of scholars, giving rise to a vast, and ever increasing, production of books and articles. Much of this production assumes that it is legitimate to talk of a Platonic philosophy (or philosophical theory) of art, often even adopting this as the title (or subtitle) of the scholar's presentation.[1] It is also admitted, though sometimes with reservations, that his contributions belong in some

* I started to deal with the issues treated in this, very long, article when I submitted a paper, entitled «The quarrel between philosophy and poetry», to the colloque in honour of Stanley Rosen, entitled «Métaphysique, Herméneutique, Platonisme» which was organized by Monique Dixsaut and Rémi Brague and took place in Paris in november 2001. I was then encouraged to come back to these issues by Jean-François Pradeau, and the result is (for the moment) this first instalment. [La seconde partie de cette étude paraîtra dans la prochaine livraison des *Études platoniciennes* (Volume II, 2005)].

1. E.g. Collingwood, «Plato's Philosophy of Art», *Mind* 34, 1925, pp. 154-72; R.C. Lodge, *Plato's Theory of Art*, London 1953; W.J. Oates, *Plato's View of Art*, New York 1972; ch. 8 in C. Janaway's *Images of Excellence. Plato's Critique of the Arts*, Oxford 1995, is entitled *Plato and the Philosophy of Art*, on the assumption, made explicit in his article on Plato in the *Encyclopaedia of Aesthetics*, vol. III, p. 518, that «it is appropriate to speak of his philosophy of art»; titles like the quoted one can also be found in general books on Plato or in the history of philosophy.

Études platoniciennes I, p. 113-197, Les Belles Lettres, Paris, 2004

way to the history of aesthetics. Yet, when these reservations come to the fore, it becomes evident that they are not so small, but make it difficult to talk of a Platonic philosophy of art.

It is often admitted (following, in the main, P.O. Kristeller's influential article on «The Modern System of the Arts»[2]) that only in modern times there has arisen the recognition that between the «fine arts» (*beaux arts*), which are represented, at least primarily, by painting, sculpture, architecture, music and poetry, there is an affinity such that they can be said to constitute a «system» and that this fact has to do with their being a source of aesthetic pleasure through the beauty realized in the works they produce. Ancient authors like Plato himself did not recognize this affinity, because they were not able or willing to talk of beauty in a recognizedly distinct aesthetic sense of the word and did not establish a privileged link between beauty (thus understood) and the arts. The way in which he classified the «arts» (*technai*), including under this heading artisanal crafts or skills and even mathematical disciplines, precluded in any case the identification of a sufficiently homogeneous group corresponding to the modern system of «fine arts». Beyond this one would have to register that, in Kristeller's words, «such dominating concepts of modern aesthetics as taste, sentiment, genius, originality, and creative imagination did not assume their definite modern meaning before the eighteenth century» (*Origins of Aesthetics*, cit., p. 416). In brief, aesthetics is to be regarded as a modern discipline to which Plato could not give a proper contribution.

Yet at this point it becomes rather paradoxical to admit that Plato had a particular interest in this field and gave significant and influential contributions to it while excluding, at least implicitly, that he could have recognized it as a distinct field. On the basis in fact of the assertions that have just been expounded one would have to claim not just that he looked at the object of aesthetics from a point of view which was different from that of modern aesthetics but that the very object of aesthetics did not exist for him.

This paradox comes less, but not all difficulties, if one adopts the alternative view that it makes sense to talk of an ancient aesthetics but that Plato had a negative attitude to it. Even if one attributes to Plato a conscious decision in this matter, as does Stephen Halliwell in his recent *The Aesthetics of Mimesis* (Princeton 2002), by talking of Plato's «anti-aestheticism», that is to say, of his tendency «to reject the idea of autonomous artistic criteria of value and, with it, the acceptability of appraising artistic styles or techniques from within a purely artistic

2. Appeared in *Journal of the History of Ideas* 12, 1951, pp. 496-527, and 13, 1952, pp. 17-46; see also his *Origins of Aesthetics: Historical and Conceptual Overview*, in the *Encyclopaedia of Aesthetics*, vol. III, pp. 416-428.

perspective rather than from a wider angle of ethicocultural judgement» (op. cit., p. 140), there is the risk of going against what looks like a big stumbling-block to the inclusion of Plato in a history of aesthetics. Unless in fact one admits that Plato was (at least tacitly) presupposing the applicability of aesthetic criteria, without making recourse to them it is hard to circumscribe the fine arts as a distinct domain of life. If for instance one considers them as a way to pass leisure time, how can they be distinguished from games? If one considers the influence they have in shaping our beliefs, how can they constitute a field distinct from that of rhetoric? Halliwell attempts to do so on the basis of the description that is given of them as *mimetic* arts. Yet, though this suggestion (as I shall try to show below) has some justification, as it stands it is open to the same objection, for there are other disciplines or arts that can be regarded as *mimetic* and are so regarded by Plato (e.g. sophistic in the *Sophist*).

Some scholars try to avoid this difficulty by concentrating on some specific discipline: there are articles or books concerning Plato's contributions to poetry or to the study of painting or to some other discipline[3]. Sometimes it is even explicitly claimed that, given the heterogeneity, in Plato's eyes, of the arts with which he occupies himself, there is only space for distinct consideration of the contributions he gives to those disciplines (cfr. e.g. J. Moravcsik, *Plato: Plato and Modern Aesthetics*, in *Encyclopaedia of Aesthetics*, cit., pp. 529-531). Now, there is no doubt that these disciplines received some recognition by Plato before Aristotle (notice, on poetry, that in *Symposium* 205b-c *poiesis* in the narrow sense of production which concerns music and verses is kept distinct from *poiesis* in the large sense of production from what is not to what is; Plato is clearly using it in the narrow sense when connecting it to *mimetiké* in *Republic* X, 603b8; similarly *poietai* are sometimes denominated by him specifically our «poets», e.g. in *Lysis* 214a1 and in *Ion*, 532c7-8, and *poetiké* is sometimes used in the specific sense of our «poetic», e.g. in *Gorgias* 502d1, in *Ion* 532c8, and in *Republic* X, 607b6, c4, and 608b7). Yet the approach that Plato adopts to them raises problems. Starting with the simpler case, that of painting, in most cases in which Plato deals with it does so with the purpose of illustrating something else (the typical case, which will attract our attention, is that of the

3. On Plato on poetry e.g. *Plato on Poetry* ed. by P. Murray, Cambridge 1996; G. F. Else, *Plato and Aristotle on poetry*, Chapel Hill and London 1986; G. Colin, «Platon et la poésie», *Rev. Et. Grecques* 31, 1928, pp. 1-72; W.C. Greene, «Plato's View of Poetry», *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology*, 29, 1918, pp. 1-75; G. R. F. Ferrari, «Plato and poetry» in G. Kennedy, ed., *The Cambridge History of Literary Criticism*. Vol. I, Cambridge 1989; on Plato on painting: M. Sartorius, «Plato und die Malerei», *Arch. Gesch. Philos*. IX, 1896, pp. 123-48; N. Demand, «Plato and the painters», *Phoenix* 29, 1975, pp. 1-20; E. Keuls, *Plato and Greek Painting*, Leiden 1978; further P.-M. Schuhl, *Platon et l'art des son temps (arts plastiques)*, Paris 1952, 2nd ed.

use of painting in *Republic* X to illustrate poetry). So it is difficult to treat this as a circumscribed field of inquiry. The other 'plastic arts' (or 'figurative arts') are not usually quoted to this purpose, but Plato says a good deal less about them than about painting. In the case of poetry it should be recalled that for Plato it concerns both music (*mousiké*) and verses (*metra*), for this is how *poiesis* is defined in the mentioned passage of the *Symposium*. This is probably in conformity with the normal use of these words in Plato's times, for it was usual, for a long time at least, that the poet would not just write down a poem but compose the music that accompanies its recitation, and this was true even of the tragedians. Aristotle, in his *Poetics*, tacitly excludes music from the field of poetry (he mentions the *melos* or the *melopoiia* as a 'part' of tragedy at the end of ch. 6, but, though recognizing there and in 26, 1462a15-17, that it is a great source of pleasure, makes nothing of it in the rest of the work, and admits that tragedy can be of interest - or exercise its effect - even when read, presumably aloud, but not represented, cfr. 26, 1462a10-18). Most scholars, when dealing with poetry in Plato, take for granted Aristotle's implicit redefinition of it, without wondering whether this reflects a substantially changed attitude to poetic experience. It is true that, as we shall see, Plato is sometimes willing to talk of stories or discourses (*logoi*) in both metre and prose, and does so especially in some passages of books II and III of the *Republic*. Yet the treatment of them in this part of the work is said to belong to an explanation of education in music (*mousiké*) in the large sense (not just our music) and is followed by a consideration of music (*mousiké*) in the narrow sense (roughly corresponding to our music). So probably in his eyes their treatment is not complete without consideration of music. Just as poems usually were not recited (or even sung) without the accompaniment of music, the practice of a purely instrumental music, which is habitual for us, was unusual. When talking about music (*mousiké*) what was often understood was the combination of words recited or sung, of sounds emitted by instruments and, often, of the movements of dance and/or of acting[4].

Further, some scholars are not satisfied with the restriction, still present in Aristotle, to poetry, and prefer to talk of literature in general or of literary criticism[5]. Yet, literature for us certainly includes the

4. On Plato's own understanding of what is *mousiké* see *Laws* II, 654e, where figure (*schema*), tune (*melos*), song (*odé*) and dance (*orchesis*) are clearly regarded as constitutive of music (see further 672e ff. and VIII, 835a-b); in 653d ff., esp. 655a (also 669d), it is said that figures (*schemata*) and tunes (*mele*) are present in music, since this is concerned with rhythm (*rhythmos*) and harmony (*harmonia*) (figure, one can see, is not a wholly indipendent category, for it can be found in dance but also in other forms of music and also in acting).

5. Cfr. e.g. J. Annas, «Plato on the Triviality of literature», in Moravcsik and Temko, 1982, pp. 1-28; P. Vicaire, *Platon: critique littéraire,* Paris 1960; chapters on Plato are included in J.W.H. Atkins, *Literary Criticism in Antiquity*, Cambridge 1934, and in D. Russell, *Criticism in Antiquity*, London 1981.

works in prose by historians like Herodotus and Thucydides, while there is no sign that Plato was interested in them, and even Aristotle shows a dismissive attitude towards them (in some well-known passages of his *Poetics* in which history is said to be less universal than poetry and is said to be episodic, cfr. ch. 9 and 23). It should also include more technical works like those of the Hippocratic physicians, but this would lead us very far from poetry, and in fact they do not receive attention in this connection by either Plato or Aristotle. On the other hand there are points of contact between poetry and rhetoric that could attract the attention of the ancient authors (e.g. for Aristotle they have a common interest in elocution, even if this is not treated in exactly the same way). As to «literary criticism», one cannot say that Plato contributed to it, if this etiquette is understood in the sense which is current for us, for he is not interested in discussing e.g. the comparative merits between Homer and Hesiod or between Aeschilus and Euripides from a literary point of view.

One can see, then, that the notion of poetry, if this is detached from music, and that of literature are of difficult application in trying to identify a Platonic philosophy of art that is restricted to this field. But its restriction to this field seems to be not quite appropriate also because Plato himself is not inclined to respect it. We have already seen that he admits some affinity between painting and poetry and a close association between poetry and music as both belonging to music (*mousiké*) in the large sense of the word. He has, as we shall see, a great interest in drama, and in tragedy in particular, but one reason for this is probably that he must have considered it as a sort of *Gesamtkunstwerk*, i.e. as the total or complete work of art, embracing in itself not only a plurality of genres of poetry (epic, lyric, in addition to drama in the narrow sense) but also a plurality of genres of art (in addition to poetry in the narrow sense recitation, music - including dance - and painting through the scenography). This attitude must have been not only his, for it seems that certain forms of poetry, such as lyric poetry, towards the end of the fifth century had lost in popularity in favour of drama (cfr. G. Nagy, «Early Greek views of poets and poetry», in Kennedy, *The Cambridge History of Literary Criticism*, vol. I, [pp. 1-77] pp. 69 ff.). Homeric Epos on the other hand preserved its importance to a large extent because of its role in education.

2. On the issue whether there was an aesthetics in antiquity: the beautiful arts

It is important to make it clear whether Plato was reacting in a negative way to an approach to the fine arts which can be classified as aesthetic or he had no such approach in mind. In the former

case it is conceivable that he took for granted that aesthetic criteria of evaluation were circulating in the culture of his times but could not accept them: so this becomes a further point that would have to be ascertained. In the latter case the conclusion is simple: he did not contribute to aesthetics because he could not do so.

As anticipated above, it is often claimed, by scholars, that aesthetics as a discipline is a modern invention. This is supposedly to be shown by the fact that the ancient authors, and particularly the ancient philosophers, did not possess the terminology, thus the conceptual apparatus, that is constitutive of this discipline. It is said that they were not able to identify, inside the ample field of arts and crafts (*technai*) recognized by them, a class or group of arts which corresponds to what for us are the fine arts (*beaux arts*); it is equally said that, when they talked of beauty, they were not able to keep distinct a sense of aesthetic beauty from the senses which reflect other forms of appreciation, and, primarily, moral appreciation. It is said that they missed such indispensable concepts as that of taste or that of imagination.

One clear negative statement (in addition to the one quoted above) is due to Kristeller, who, in his article entitled «The Modern System of the Arts», comes to the following negative conclusion about ancient aesthetics: «Thus classical antiquity left no systems or elaborate concepts of an aestetic nature, but merely a number of scattered notions and suggestions that exercised a lasting influence down to modern times but had to be carefully selected, taken out of their context, rearranged, reemphasized and reinterpreted or misinterpreted before they could be utilized as building materials for aesthetic systems. We have to admit the conclusion, distastful to many historians of aesthetics but grudgingly admitted by most of them, that ancient writers and thinkers, though confronted with excellent works of art and quite susceptible to their charm, were neither able nor eager to detach the aesthetic quality of these works of art from their intellectual, moral, religious and practical function or content, or to use such an aesthetic quality as a standard for grouping the fine arts together or for making them the subject of a comprehensive philosophical interpretation.» (art. cit., p. 506)

I concentrate for the moment on one aspect of this issue, namely the recognition of a class or group of arts which corresponds to what for us are the fine arts (*beaux arts*). Kristeller does not deny that there is *some* correspondence between these arts and what for the ancient were the «imitative arts», but thinks that this correspondence is not such as to justify the positive conclusion that they recognized the fine arts because (a) they did not conceive them as a *system*, and (b) the arts involved are not quite the same and present different interrelations (on this second point cfr. art. cit., p. 504). An example of the discrepancy concerning (b) is given by the fact that architecture is not included in the lists given by the

ancients. Kristeller's starting-point is clearly that the position of the 'moderns' is quite different on these two points[6]. But should one concede to Kristeller this starting-point?

The impressive erudition that Kristeller displays in his article seems to have prevented other scholars from noticing certain serious weakness in his argument concerning precisely the claims he makes. (I) He expressly talks of the modern *system* of the arts, meaning by them, as he explains towards the beginning of the article (at p. 497), the five arts of painting, sculpture, architecture, music and poetry, which constitute its «irreducible nucleus» to which some other arts are sometimes added. Yet most of the authors he quotes do not recognize such a system, for either (as Kristeller himself admits) they show to be interested only in some of the arts (for instance in painting and poetry and their relationship) or they adopt a larger list of arts, and this happens, at least in some cases, on the basis of criteria which *exclude* the adoption of such a system (cfr. e.g., in addition to the lists by Batteux, by Mendelssohn and by Kant quoted below, that by Montesquieu in his *Essai sur le goût*, quoted in n. 191, which includes dance and «les différentes sortes de jeux»). The main author who recognizes those five arts and asserts that they constitute a system is Hegel, in his *Vorlesungen über die Ästhetik*, section on *Einteilung* at the end of the introductory part (pp. 100 ff. in the *Theorie Werksausgabe*, vol. 13), but the reasons he gives for considering them that way can only convince Hegelians (e.g. that architecture is based on the temple as the house of God, this being the condition of exteriority with respect to which sculpture and painting are steps to interiority). Kristeller avoids discussing Hegel's position (he stops with Kant), but this must be somehow in the back of his mind.

(II) He quotes certain authors like Batteux for his «famous and influential treatise, *Les beaux arts réduits à un même principle* (1746)» and D'Alembert in his *Discours préliminaire* to the *Encyclopédie* as if they propounded some significant innovation, not realizing that their conception of the fine arts is that which is already to be found in the ancient authors, evidently better known to them than to Kristeller. Batteux in fact adopts a subdivision of the arts into three types, viz. (1) those which just aim at utility, which include the 'mechanical arts', (2) those which he says are called «les beaux arts par excellence» and which aim at pleasure (on this point I reproduce the quotation given by Kristeller, n. 190: «Les autres ont pour object le plaisir …on le appelle les beaux arts par excellence. Tels sont la musique, la poésie, la peinture, la sculpture

6. A position close to that adopted by Kristeller is to be found in W. Tatarkiewicz, «Classification of Arts in Antiquity», *Journal of the History of Ideas*, XXIV, 1963, pp. 231-240; cfr. also his *History of Aesthetics*. I: *Ancient Aesthetics*, Warszawa, 1970.

et l'art du geste ou la danse»), (3) those which aim at both utility and pleasure, which include architecture and eloquence. It can be noticed that his five fine arts include dance and exclude architecture, and (it should be added) that he takes the theatre as a combination of all the other arts. What, in addition to pleasure, keeps the fine arts together for Batteux is … imitation!. As to the position of D'Alembert, it has to be admitted that he talks of the (standard) five arts, called by him 'liberal arts', but his account of them remains on the same lines. (I reproduce the quotation given by Kristeller, n. 196: «Parmi les arts libéraux qu'on réduit à des principes, ceux qui se proposent *l'imitation* de la nature on été appelés beaux-arts, parce qu'ils on principalement *l'agrément* pour object» [my italics].)

(III) In the case at least of one author, Mendelssohn, he converts the expression of a wish («that the fine arts (painting, sculpture, music, the dance, and architecture) and belles lettres (poetry and eloquence) should be reduced to some common principle better than imitation») into a fact («thus was the first among the Germans to formulate a system of the fine arts») (art. cit., II, pp. 36-37).

(IV) One can see that Mendelssohn has not a system of the five arts, but recognizes a distinction between fine arts and belles lettres, including eloquence. Similarly Kant does not have a system of the five arts, for in § 51 of his *Kritik der Urteilskraft* he admits three types of beautiful arts: those connected with word (*die redende*), the figurative arts (*die bildende*) and the art of the play of sensations (*die Kunst des Spiels der Empfindungen*). The first group includes eloquence and poetry; the second group 'plastic' (*die Plastik*) and painting, with a subdivision of plastic into sculpture and architecture, while gardening is associated to painting; the third group includes music and colouring (*Farbenkunst*).

(V) Kristeller is obliged to leave out of consideration or to play down the positions of those authors, like Lessing, who expressed reservations about the possibility of detecting a system among the fine arts. The reservations expressed by Lessing in particular (in his *Laocoön*) are focussed on the traditional parallel between painting and poetry, but have more general consequences, whereas this is denied by Kristeller (cfr. art. cit., p. 36). He asserts the existence of a basic difference between the two arts, in that painting has to do with objects which are regarded as collocated in space and poetry with objects which are regarded as collocated in time, i.e. with actions, with the consequence that only poetry can represent what is in development, i.e. a succession of events, while a picture is restricted to a single event. In this way he makes obvious among other things that poetry, at least in certain forms (those which interest most Plato and Aristotle), offers a narrative (what is told is a *muthos*), while this cannot happen in the case of a (single) painting. (This sort of distinction, as we shall see Part II, in ch. 28, finds some anticipations in the ancient authors.)

One is not, then, in the position to oppose the moderns to the ancients because they had a system of the arts which was not recognized by the latter. In fact, in spite of the title given by Batteux to his treatise, it is not easy to conceive how such different activities as music, architecture, painting and poetry can be reduced to one principle. It would have to be asked how much credit this sort of view really enjoys, and if it is not happening that, on Kristeller's authority, a conclusion is accepted ('the ancient had no aesthetics') that is obtained by an argument ('they did not have it because they did not recognize a system of the arts') that is based on an assumption ('a system of the arts exists') which very few would accept. Anyhow, in so far as some unity can be found among the various fine arts, it can be said that it was recognized by the ancients in treating them as imitative arts, and that the moderns did not make much significant progress on this point (see above under (II)). But there is an unavoidable tension between the point of view of imitation, which makes sense of the work of art by putting it into some relationship to what it is supposed to reproduce, however freely, and the point of view of beauty in the formal sense, which makes sense of the work of art by setting requirements that it must satisfy independently of any such relationship. This tension emerges with clarity when it is recognized that there are works of arts, especially those belonging to architecture, which are susceptible to be judged only from the second point of view. Its existence, as I shall illustrate below (particularly in Part II, ch. 29), was not ignored by the ancient authors.

In what follows more immediately I shall first develop the point of view of imitation (starting with ch. 6), considering what unity among the various arts can be established adopting it. For the moment there are two provisos to be made. The first is that it is of importance to realize that 'imitative art' is not a purely classificatory concept or description. There are arts or genres inside the arts which are more imitative than others. For instance drama is regarded as more imitative than other forms of poetry. Certain forms are regarded as imitative in a paradigmatic way (this is true of painting, and, inside painting, of portraiture). Certain arts or certain genres can be rather little imitative, but are associated to others, that are fully imitative, by affinity, and thus included in the classification. Music is treated as imitative on its own grounds, which are questionable but accepted by important authors like Plato and Aristotle (see Part II, ch. 28). The only doubtful case seems to be constituted by architecture, for there are no clear grounds for treating it as imitative. It should be noticed however that the 'moderns' are not agreed in admitting it among the beautiful arts, and that Plato does seem to want to associate it to arts like painting in *Republic* IV 401b. The fact in any case that 'being imitative' does not apply to all the arts in the same way has the implication that the concept is used in a rather flexible manner,

and that in some contexts it can be more inclusive than in others. (We shall see for instance that Plato in *Republic* X talks of poetry 'in that it is imitative', and that this raises problems as to how much poetry he wants to include.)

The second proviso is that one cannot talk simply of 'imitative arts', but of imitative arts which produce pleasure in the viewers and/or hearers (it being understood that it is a pleasure of a certain type). Only in this way other arts that can be said to be imitative, such as sophistic, can be excluded. This is a point that is remarked, as we have seen, by some modern authors like D'Alembert, but that has received little recognition in recent scholarship. This leads of course to the issue whether the concept of pleasure (*hedoné*) adopted by the ancients has a distinct aesthetic meaning. In other words, one has to ascertain whether the ancient thinkers recognized that there are pleasures that can be regarded as properly aesthetic.

Surprisingly there is little discussion of this concept on the part of the scholars who have attempted to clarify what ancient aesthetics is. For instance the article dedicated to this topic in the *Encyclopaedia of Aesthetics* concerns exclusively modern authors. In the same work, in connection with the topic of the "origins of aesthetics", an article is dedicated to the "history of *Aisthesis*" (op. cit., vol. III, pp. 428-432, by D. Summers), but, though notice is given to the fact that the feeling of pleasure could be regarded as belonging to the field of *aisthesis*, this receives no development, but the main purpose is to explain Baumgarten's decision to refer to *aisthesis* when inventing "aesthetics". In the index to Halliwell's *Aesthetic of mimesis* there is no separate heading for "pleasure" (or *hedoné*), but this is mentioned exclusively in connection with mimesis. The same author gives attention to the topic of pleasure in ch. II of his *Aristotle's Poetics* (London, 1986), but he tends to minimize its role and limits his attention to this Aristotelian work. At least he does not completely ignore this issue, but this is unusual. Yet the relevance of this notion for aesthetics is not hard to grasp. For instance Kant is very explicit in admitting that the judgment of taste involves pleasure and displeasure (cfr. e.g. §§ 36 and 37 of his *Kritik der Urteilskraft*).

3. On the issue whether there was an aesthetics in antiquity: the concepts

Scholars like Kristeller maintain equally, as we have seen, that the ancient authors missed certain concepts that are indispensable for aesthetics. What is usually not made clear, by these scholars, is what precisely they suppose to be absent in the Greek culture. Is it just a certain type of philosophical theorization concerning the arts and

our reactions to them? Or is the very aesthetic experience which underlies this theorization supposed to be absent as well? Their intention is probably to claim that only the first object is missing. However the implication of what they assert seems to go in the sense of excluding the presence of an aesthetic experience in the Greek world. For if this experience were available, it would have found its expression in an appropriate terminology (not necessarily very technical, but sufficiently distinctive), but it is precisely this terminology which is said to be not available.

This point can be made more clear by drawing a parallel with ethics. It is out of question that ethics as a philosophical discipline was an innovation by the Greek philosophers. It can also be admitted that this innovation made some difference to the terminology used in the field of morals, for there were progresses not only in the consciousness and consistency with which it was used but also in its richness and sophistication. But it is equally out of question that certain moral criteria and rules were operating before the invention of ethics as a philosophical discipline, and that their existence was signalled by such words as «good and bad», «just and unjust», «right and wrong». (They were not purely moral words from the beginning, but without a basic moral meaning to be enucleated the task of philosophical ethics would have been impossible.) These words or some equivalents are probably to be found in any human language. It is hard to imagine what sense of what is good and bad and so forth may have been operating at a prelinguistic stage.

If we now consider the case of aesthetics, it is manifest that the parallel can only be partial, for not only does no question arise about the sense that could be had by men of what is beautiful and what is ugly at a prelinguistic stage, but clearly any community needs some moral criteria and rules to be a community at all. However the Greek belonged to a stage at which, as they themselves recognized, a number of objects, of activities and of skills had been introduced that were not in view of the 'necessities of life'. What is supposed is that they, though finding themselves in this condition and having at their disposal words like *kalós* and *aischrós* which could have served to convey aesthetic judgements, did not use them for this purpose. If this is so, what capacity could have they had to make those judgements?

One only has to reflect on this point, to realise that something must have gone wrong with the prevailing thesis of an absence of aesthetics in Greek culture. It cannot be doubted that an attitude that can only be classified as aesthetic played an important part in the life of the Greeks, for many of the products of their civilization, especially those belonging to the field of the fine arts, just as many of the practices pursued by them, such as the symposia, cannot be explained in other ways, for instance as expressing the wish to

celebrate the gods, however important these other aims may have been. And one cannot believe that this aesthetic attitude was not cultivated in a self-conscious way. It is hard to suppose, for instance, that they organized competitions for the best drama or the best song, without realizing that this judgment involved an aesthetic appreciation.

It is likely that the scholars who deny the existence of an aesthetics in the Greek world are impressed by the fact that, while there existed, at least starting with Plato and Aristotle, works which defined the main concepts of ethics and discussed the main issues involved in their use, there is no comparable work in the field of aesthetics. There is no work in fact in which the tasks and objectives of aesthetics receive some definition, in contradistinction (at least implicitly) with other disciplines such as ethics, psychology and criticism of art. A work of this sort should include (saying schematically and selectively): (1) a discussion of what is beautiful by determining, at the least, its definition and its main criteria, in general and with application to artworks; (2) a discussion of notions that are related to that of beauty, including those of the ugly, of the sublime, of the marvellous …; (3) a classification of those arts which can be called «beautiful» or which, in any case, give rise to an experience involving aesthetic pleasure, accompanied by some treatment of their nature, by distinguishing them from other types of arts or skills, in addition to explaining their interrelations; (4) a similar classification of types of artwork, e.g. of genera of poetry (epos, drama, lyric, etc.), accompanied by a definition of the nature of each type; (5) a clarification of the reaction (of pleasure and of emotional involvement, including participation or identification, but possibly also of acquisition of knowledge) which we have in observing (or hearing) the products of these arts and, at the same time, of the capacity of judgement or of taste which is exercised in doing so; (6) an analogous treatment of the capacity (imagination, inspiration, etc., but also skill) which is at the basis of artistic creativity. The closest thing we possess to a treatise of aesthetics, for a long period at least, is Aristotle's *Poetics*, but this, though containing some general reflections (especially on the notion of *mimesis*), on the whole does not satisfy the requirements now laid down. However, before coming to the conclusion that no general work on aesthetics was written by Aristotle or by any other author who would have had the capacity of writing one because no field that could somehow be circumscribed as aesthetics and no relative conceptual apparatus was available, we should look for an alternative explanation.

The first observation to be made is that Aristotle's *Poetics* is not a general work on aesthetics because it was written with different purposes. It can be conjectured that the Stagirite's original intention was to write an *ars poetica*, that is to say a handbook which was

meant to give instructions to poets, and especially to tragedians, on how to best compose poems (or tragedies). The prescriptive tone which is noticeable in various parts of the work (especially in chs. 13-15 and 17, where there are formulae of the type: «one must [*dei*] do so and so») and its evident purpose of propounding rules for writing a good tragedy suggests this. From this point of view the work is to be seen in parallel with Aristotle's *Rhetoric*, as a handbook of rhetoric, and with his *Topics*, as a handbook of dialectic. The fact that his approach is not very practical and concrete is not a disproof of this conclusion, for this is true of those other books as well. However, somewhat paradoxically, Aristotle believes that tragedy at its best belongs to the past, and to a past that is not very close to the present: it is the tragedy of Sophocles. He cannot have held a very strong faith that a new Sophocles would appear and write his tragedies following the directions given in the *Poetics*. So the original intention with which the work was written is to some extent supplanted by other intentions, so that his discourse in part becomes historical and in part becomes a sort of contribution to literary criticism (e.g. by giving general definitions of the literary genres studied by him).

A work like the *Poetics* that was written with the purposes now described manifestly cannot constitute a general work on aesthetics. But is it imaginable that a work like this could have been written, if there had not been a larger background of reflection about aesthetics? The same question can be raised about Plato's own contributions to questions which have to do with the sphere of aesthetics. And there are lost works, starting with Aristotle's lost dialogue *On poets*, which would render the picture we have more rich and complex. (I cannot agree with those scholars who assume that everything of significance that was written by Aristotle is preserved in the 'acroamatic' works which are preserved. In that dialogue he could have given that detailed account of *katharsis* which is promised in *Politics* VIII and which is not to be found in the *Poetics*, and he could made more explicit his reservations towards Plato's approach.) There are testimonies that an author like Democritus occupied himself of poetry in general and of Homer in particular, and one cannot presume that his contributions, just as those of other authors that are lost, would make no difference for the idea we have of ancient aesthetics. The existence of a reflection and discussion presenting a certain sophistication is made probable by the fact that both Plato and Aristotle seem to rely on some existing (relatively) technical terminology (for illustrations see Part II, ch. 19). Plato, in his *Phaedrus* (cfr. 266c ff.), testifies to the existence of a literature on rhetoric which made some use of technical language, and this language reappears, with developments, in Aristotle's *Rhetoric*. The same must have been true (at least to some extent in

writing, but to some extent orally) for the field of music and of the fine arts, and in the case of poetry there are some overlappings with rhetoric (especially for their common interest in *lexis*).

It is important to realise that both Plato and Aristotle have in mind the fact that tragedies, comedies, and other artworks were usually submitted to public competitions in cities like Athens. The citizens who went to the theatre, even when they could not vote themselves, were involved in the competition among the dramas represented, and certainly there were hot disputes about their merits. One can suspect that even the judgement of the appointed judges was not based on purely aesthetic criteria. Yet the existence of a popular public that is interested in the discussion of the relative merits of dramas, of poems and other artworks constitutes the natural background for a smaller public of connoisseurs who would take up the discussion at a higher level, by expressing judgement with greater consciousness of the aesthetic criteria to be applied. There must have been some awareness of the fact that divergence of judgement could reflect divergence in the criteria applied, and this must have led to some discussion about those criteria and about the general notions (starting with that of beauty) to which they are associated. The existence of this smaller public of connoisseurs who express their judgements and who dispute and discuss constitutes itself the background for the reflection and theorization done by philosophers like Plato and Aristotle and also for their more practical contributions. What they wrote was not meant to give a full picture of the reality (social, political, intellectual) which was before their eyes, but consisted largely in interventions that were intended to modify it and that are fully intelligible to a reader who is familiar with it in an independent way. This is not our position, or it is to a very limited extent, for not many sources of information are available to us beyond what Plato and Aristotle tell us.

Still, if it is plausible to maintain that there was, at the time of Plato and of Aristotle, an educated public which discussed matters concerning aesthetics at a certain level of sophistication, by making use of an appropriate terminology, why is it that we miss not only any general work on aesthetics but even work or works that give us a sufficiently complete idea of the range of the terms used, of the definitions proposed for them, and of the issues discussed by using them? If we want to refer to a work which offers a full treatment of the questions concerning ethics we are obliged to refer to Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, but already through a survey of Plato's Socratic dialogues we get a rather comprehensive idea of how those questions were discussed or could be discussed in Socrates' times. Why is the situation with aesthetics not comparable to this?

Any reply that one tries to give to this question is inevitably conjectural. I attempt to give two such replies. The first is that the issues concerning ethics and also concerning politics were felt to be much more important and urgent than those concerning aesthetics. To discuss about what is right or wrong, good or bad, just or unjust, seemed to have precedence, in order to take a decision about the main question that a man has to raise for himself: how to live. (We shall see that this question is very evident in certain Platonic dialogues.) These questions seemed to involve not only ethics but also politics because man, according to the well-known Aristotelian dictum, must be considered a political animal. If man is also an aesthetic animal (we shall see that some assertions by Aristotle go in this sense), he is so in his leisure time, by occupying it with a sophisticated pastime, and it may seem not so important to decide in what pastimes the leisure time is employed, for this does not make a great difference in how one lives, while being just or unjust makes all the difference. Further, it seemed to both Plato and Aristotle that, in so far as a good use of leisure time is of importance, it should be dedicated to philosophical contemplation. For them it is the great significance of this aim that has to be asserted against the preference given by the well-born to political life.

The second reply is that the need of giving a full account of the concepts which belong to the sphere of aesthetics, both from the point of view of the public and from the point of view of the artist or creator, was felt in modern times because the sphere of aesthetics was seen as the expression of the freedom and of the creativity of the individual. What happened is not an introduction of notions, such as those of taste and of creativity, that were wholly absent in antiquity, but that existing notions were considered in a changed perspective. Divergences in taste and in aesthetic judgment were not seen any more as a sign of imperfection and of contradiction in human nature but as an expression of the personalities of the different persons involved. Thus if the modern notion of taste finds an equivalent or a substitute (as I shall suggest below) in the ancient notion of a feeling of pleasure qualified in a certain way, the underlying perspective is different, for the ancient philosophers would not be interested in exploring it as an expression of the individual freedom of judgement and of choice. They assumed, rather, that what makes taste different from one person to another is an idiosyncratic defect that would have to be corrected. Similarly, creativity is recognized in postulating a form of divine inspiration, but this is not very much the creativity of the individual, since he is in some way an instrument of a divine entity (we shall find this point asserted explicitly in Plato's *Ion*). (Further, divine inspiration seems to have been admitted only in the case of poetry, not in the case of painting or of other arts. The idea

that the painter is inspired comes after Plato. And this helps to explain the failure to mention inspiration in *Republic* X) Creativity was not meant to exclude some recourse to skill, but skill was not supposed to give expression to the personality of its possessor or even of the inventor of new techniques. Thus there was little interest in discovering, in the works of art, the original creative touch of the singular artist.

One observation that is relevant in this connection is that, when ancient authors like Plinius talk of the development of certain arts, they are concerned with certain achievements of a relatively technical nature like the invention of illusory representation[7]. Similarly Aristotle, in his *Poetics*, offers certain characterizations of the works of poets, e.g. that some of them imitated men as they are and some of them imitated them as better than they are, which leave out the originality and uniqueness of the mentioned poet. Another relevant comment that can be quoted is one by Halliwell (*The Aesthetics of Mimesis*, cit., pp. 247-48), on the issue of expression as *self*-expression on the part of the composer: of this there is «very little trace at all in most ancient conceptions of mimesis, which are not for the most part preoccupied with a personal point of view, let alone the inner life, of the artist, but much more with the status of artistic works or performances and the kinds of experience they generate in their audiences».

It can be said, a bit schematically, that the issue is as follows. According to certain modern conceptions of aesthetics it is admitted either that a properly aesthetic experience concerns items or objects which are the products of human creativity or at least that there is a significant difference between the aesthetic experience which concerns these items or objects and the, still aesthetic, experience which concerns items or objects existing in nature. Of course, further differentiations may be admitted inside each field, for instance by giving a privileged place to theatrical experience, but these are less basic than this one. Human creativity as the origin of those items or objects seems to be only one reason for admitting that difference. Another reason is constituted by the conviction that not only what belongs to the realm of language in the proper sense but also what belongs to the realm of music and of the visual arts has the nature of a language, is charged with symbolic significance. This is a point of view that, at least in the realm of the visual arts, is absent in authors like Plato and Aristotle, with an exception to be mentioned below. However this limitation is not

7. In commenting on this fact L. Eldestein, in his *The Idea of Progress in Classical Antiquity*, Baltimore 1967, remarks that «a technological theory of art being still predominant, art was judged in technological terms. The day had not yet come for assuming that different art-forms represent different ways of seeing the world and that the genius of the artist is decisive for the greatness of his accomplishment, which itself is timeless» (p. 78).

an obstacle for them to admitting that the contemplation of paintings, statues, etc., is a source of a pleasure that is of an aesthetic nature, when they satisfy certain criteria of beauty.

The perspective of the ancient authors (with limitation to those considered here) is different from the modern perspective, because they admit that there is a type of aesthetic experience which is fundamentally the same in the case of the items or objects which are human products and the items or objects which are the products of nature or of some divinity, there being the inclination to admit that there is an affinity between human art and the more comprehensive art which operates at a cosmic level, so that also the products of nature will satisfy the same criteria of beauty. For them the main difference is not to be found in the experience which concerns these two fields, but between this experience as a whole and the experience which concerns those items or objects which not only are human products but which have to do with man in the sense that they are in some way 'imitative' of the human thoughts and emotions. These items or objects belong to the field of music and of poetry, especially drama, which for this reason have a privileged place in aesthetic experience, though they are not treated in the same way.

The exception to be mentioned is that it is admitted there are paintings or statues which portray persons in such a way as to let transpire the emotions and thoughts of the person portrayed. As we shall see (cfr. Part II, ch. 26), Aristotle talks in this connection of the fact that figures and colours (of the painting or statue) are signs (*semeia*) of the character of the person portrayed. As signs they clearly require some intellectual operation of conjecturing to be correctly interpreted by the onlooker. It would seem that, if a much later author, Dio Chrysostom, claims that the statue of Zeus made by Phidias reveals, through a tacit language, the main qualities and traits of character of the divinity such as his majesty, his severity and his benevolence, he develops the same approach (cfr. *Oratio* XII, §§ 74-77). The meaning that is to be found in the products of the visual arts depends not so much on the intention of their authors as on the objects they reproduce, there being no meaning if the object is not a human or divine being.[8]

8. It should be noticed that the view stated by Kristeller that there is no aesthetics in antiquity is not new with him, but is to be found in previous authors, for instance in certain publications by Bernhard Schweitzer. Precisely the claim that there cannot be an aesthetics in the absence of a «Vorstellung vom dem schöpferischen Anteil des Menschen an der Art and der Wirkung des Kunstwerk, das er hervorbringt» is formulated by this author in *Platon und die bildende Kunst der Griechen*, Tübingen 1953, p. 12. He thus associates what he regards as the modern invention of aesthetics with the recognition of a human creativity distinct from the creativity that God exercises towards the whole world. This sort of view about the history of aesthetics is to be found in various works on the topic, e.g. in the book by Marc Jimenez quoted below.

In ancient times the sphere of ethics started to be explored by philosophers, at least from Socrates, as an expression of the freedom of choice of the individual, for it depends on him whether to live as a good or as bad man, even if the choice he makes can be influenced by the education received, the environment in which he lives, and so forth. But only in modern times could the sphere of aesthetics be explored by philosophers with a similar attitude, and this is the reason why so much attention was given to it. An account of the capacities of an individual man, such as that given by Kant in his works, would not be complete if it did not consider his creativity as an artist (when he is one) and (as part of the public) his reaction to the sight (or the hearing) of beautiful things. The attitude by Plato and by Aristotle is profoundly different, because they took for granted that the sphere of aesthetics was something that concerned the community, the city (the *polis*), rather than the single individual. Hence part at least of their contributions are made from the point of view of the city and belong to works that are, to some extent at least, political.

4. Some peculiarities of ancient aesthetic experience

The sphere of aesthetics concerned the city in two ways: (I) the education (*paideia*) to be given to the individual from childhood was supposed to consist, to a large extent, in music (*mousiké*), with inclusion (we have seen) of literature, but what sort of music (or literature) should be imparted, in which way it should be imparted, and to what extent, is something that had to be decided by the authorities of the city having in mind the principle that 'each citizen belongs not to himself but to the city' (cfr. Aristotle, *Politics* VIII 1, 1337a27-29; a somewhat similar assertion by Plato is to be found in *Laws* VII 804d: the children «belong more to the *polis* than to their parents»). (II) The administration of the leisure-time of the citizens was left only to a limited extent to their personal choices, for the city assumed on itself the task of organizing their cultural activities, often by organizing festivals in which dramatic and other representations and competitions would take place. Of course the single citizen, at least in a democratic city like Athens, was not obliged to take part to these activities, but this meant not so much that he would pursue cultural activities in a private place as that he would cut himself out from cultural activities, for these belonged prevalently to the communal sphere.

It is also not to be overlooked that these activities had often a religious dimension. Plato asserts, in *Laws* II 653c9-d5, that «the gods took pity on the human race, born to suffer as it was, and gave it relief in the form of religious festivals to serve as periods of rest from

its labours. At the same time they gave us the Muses, with Apollo their leader, and Dionysus, to share these festivals with us and keep them right, with all the spiritual sustenance these gods bring to the feast.» Probably, in saying this, he expresses a widely shared view; certainly he expresses his own conviction that these activities should be prevalently communal and religious. We tend to see cultural activities, and especially those which have an aesthetic dimension, as either belonging to a purely private sphere or, when they have a communal character, as being organized, by the community or by privates, in order to satisfy a request by the individuals (if a sufficient number of people are interested in visiting a museum, this should be set up in a town which can afford it; idem if they want to go to a theatre, to a cinema, and so forth). When, on the other hand, cultural activities are associated to religious celebrations, the request by the individuals becomes less important, for the celebrations are to be kept in honour of the gods whether there are many people who attend them or not. (In fact the request by the individuals was acquiring importance under democracy, but this is precisely one of the developments that are condemned by Plato.) Their organization belonged to the *polis*, for anything that had to do with religion belonged to the *polis*.

The importance attributed to education, in the aspect of formation of character, goes beyond what the most optimistic of us moderns would be inclined to admit. Plato, in the *Laws*, insists on the fact that care should be given to the education of children from the beginning, indeed, in a way, from the time in which the child is not yet born (the mother should give attention to her behaviour, which must be such as to be favourable to the good growth of the embryo, cfr. VII 788c ff.). What sort of education a child receives from his earliest years, if not already from the womb, is supposed to make a very great difference, if not all the difference, to what sort of person he is likely to become. It is as with animals (tame and wild) and plants: what kind of environment they find themselves to live in the first stages of their growth makes the difference between a good and healthy growth in which they realize their excellence (their *areté*) and one that is the opposite of this (cfr. VI 765e, further *Republic* III 401b-d). In the case of man it can be said that he is to be classified as a tame animal, and if he has a good natural disposition and benefits from the right education, he is likely to become a most heavenly and gentle (*ad litteram*: tamest) creature; if, on the other hand, he is not educated in an adequate and proper way, he will become the wildest animal on the face of earth (cfr. VI 765e-766a). (A partly similar assertion is to be found in Aristotle, *Politics* I 2, 1253a29 ff., where he says that man left to himself is the wildest of animals while if he partakes of a community submitting himself to its laws becomes the best of animals.) The consequence that is drawn in the passage

of the *Laws* is that the legislator «should not treat the education of children cursorily or as a secondary matter». Another aspect concerns the sort of education that should be given, once the child become susceptible to literate instruction. As we shall see in some detail Part II (ch. 16), this consists to a very large extent in becoming familiar with music, in the large sense by which it includes poetry or literature. This central role of music in the formation of character is attributed to it both by Plato and Aristotle. Hence the main discussions of music given by them in their works belong to contexts in which the issue is education (cfr. below, ch. 15, for Plato's contributions, with allusions also to Aristotle's contributions, which notoriously are to be found in the main in book VIII of his *Politics*, especially chs. 3 and 5-7).[9]

It should also be realized that between the education (*paideia*) directed to young people, thus taken in the narrow sense, and the influence exercised on the citizens by the other cultural activities, such as those associated to religious celebrations, there was a continuity. Certainly there was a continuity if one admitted, as Plato no doubt admitted, that the influence was educative (either in the positive or in the negative sense), for they were not mere entertainment. Probably this conviction was widespread, for it is manifest for instance in some plays by Aristophanes. How strong the continuity should be supposed to be could certainly be a matter of controversy, and in fact we shall find there is some divergence on this point between Plato and Aristotle (cfr. below, ch. 16). Where the two philosophers are in agreement is in believing that there was a contradiction between leaving education in the narrow sense to the initiative of the privates (of the parents of the children and so forth), as it happened in cities like Athens, and admitting that the city had a responsibility in all other cultural activities, and propounded its elimination by extending public responsibility also to the formation of the young people.

Both philosophers took for granted that the responsibility of organizing such activities as the competitions in occasion of the festivals would still belong to the city. Thus Plato, at the beginning of book VIII of the *Laws*, expressly talks of the organization of the festivals, suggesting, among other things, that there should be a festival every month in honour of a certain god and thus that every month the citizens should sacrifice to each of these gods and arrange chorus performances and 'musical' and gymnastic contests (*agonas*) (cfr. 828c). Reference to these contests or competitions is also made in

9. As we shall see, music is supposed to form the character in at least two ways: through the emotive patterns (as one may call them) which music, in its more properly musical aspect (but including poetic metre and song), impresses on the soul of the hearers; through the contents of literature, which offers models to be imitated and convictions or attitudes towards values to be acquired.

book VI, when making a distinction between two classes of officials, those who are concerned with education and those who are concerned with competitions (cfr. 764c ff.)[10]. The second group is itself distinct in two groups: those who are in charge of 'musical' competitions and those who are in charge of gymnastic competitions. One of their functions is that of being the judges in these competitions. In his turn Aristotle takes for granted, in some passages of the *Poetics* and of the *Politics,* that dramas will be submitted to some competition, as was usual in Greek cities like Athens (cfr. e.g. *Poetics* 6, 1450b19-20, 7, 1451a6 ff., 13, 1453a23 ff.; 18, 1456a18; *Politics* VIII 7, 1342a21-22; it is true that in some of these passages he admits this can have a corrupting influence; but this is to suggest that the poet should not be influenced by the preoccupation of winning a competition in composing a tragedy, not that he should keep out of competitions).

Aristotle also admits, as Plato does, that art is not just a private affair of the single persons belonging to a certain community. It seems that in his view the politician (in the sense of the possessor of the art of politics) should be able to decide what place the fine arts should have in a well-ordered *polis*. This sort of decision is in fact implicitly attributed to him at the beginning of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, where politics is put at the head of the hierarchy of the arts and is said to decide of which of them there is use in the towns, and which of them must be learnt and up to what point by each group of citizens ('learning' probably is to be taken in a large sense, so as to include any sort of acquaintance)[11]. This presumably means deciding (a) what place they should have in the education of young people, (b) what place they should have in the life of adult citizens, in the sense of establishing how much time they can dedicate to activities such as going to the theatre etc. with respect to other activities which are of importance for the city. It is likely, further, that, as the references to competitions quoted above suggest, Aristotle takes for granted that the organization of certain spectacles belongs to the city (as happened in Athens), so that there is some political responsibility from this point of view. Also on this ground it is not surprising that his most extended treatment of music is to be found in book VIII of the *Politics*, where the topic is that of the education of young people, just as large part of Plato's contributions to the treatment of music and of the fine arts belong to the same context of discussion of the education that should be given to young people.

10. In this passage there is also a distinction between 'monodic' and 'choral' musical performance, for which see Nagy, art. cit., p. 39, who remarks: «Still, the essential fact remains that the medium of both monodic and choral composition is public *performance*.»

11. The hierarchy of the arts admitted by him goes back to Plato, cfr. Part II, ch. 27.

Some scholars have rightly pointed out that we cannot reach an understanding of Plato's attitude to poetry if we do not «bear in mind how poetry would typically reach the public in Plato's day». Ferrari, whom I have been quoting, makes a statement on this point which deserves to be quoted in full. «In a modern culture our most frequent direct contact with literature deemed important in our society (and in the West this would of course include the very poets on whom Plato targets his attack) comes either through private and (at least potentially) reflective reading, or in the context of the classroom; and is supplemented in the case of drama by visits to the theatre, to see actual performance. In Plato's culture, live performance was the norm. Private reading and study of literary texts, to the extent that it was practised at all, seems to have been confined to a tiny minority of enthusiasts and intellectuals. Most citizens experienced poetry - not drama merely, but also the Homeric epic and lyric poetry - as members of an audience (or, indeed, as performers themselves) in various well-defined social settings: seeing tragedy and comedy at the annual dramatic festivals, hearing their Homer performed by professional rhapsodes, taking their turn with a song or two at drinking-parties. And all would have felt these (rather than reading or study) to be the proper contexts for poetry - oral memorisation and recital dominating even the schoolchild's poetic training. So that in order to gauge Plato's critique we must first banish any image of the serious reader curled quietly in armchair with the *Iliad*, and think rather of the audience at a performance by the rhapsode (*Ion* 535b-e). For Plato, the typical experience of poetry is never anything like private contemplation; and our most appropriate context for comparison is the experience of the theatre-going or, it may be, film-going public.» (*Plato and Poetry*, cit., pp. 92-93)

There may be some exaggeration in giving so little importance to the interpretation of literary texts, for this is illustrated by Plato himself in some dialogues (in the *Protagoras* there is a dispute between Protagoras and Socrates on the interpretation of a lyric composition of Simonides, cfr. 339b ff.; and some sort of interpretation is implied in the dispute between Socrates and Hippias, in the *Hippias minor*, concerning the qualities of Achilles and Odysseus), but on the whole the picture seems to be right. However the importance given to performance is only in part to be associated (as done by Ferrari, who is influenced by Havelock) to the persistence of a prevalently oral culture, for this dimension must prevail also if cultural activities are organized by the city and are seen as a means for socialization or for reinforcing the unity of the community and, at the same time, as a means of religious celebration. I also think it is unilateral to suppose that Plato's attack on poetry concerns rather exclusively this aspect, for there is the ideological aspect that is of great importance and performance

itself tends to be seen as objectionable if it is meant to please the moltitude (but this is to anticipate on what follows)[12].

One point to be stressed is that, in trying to ascertain whether a domain of aesthetics, of which aesthetic experience constitutes the subjective side, received some recognition in the time of Plato and of Aristotle, we should not expect it to coincide completely with what we would regard as such a domain. The constitution of this domain is an eminently cultural affair, so that (a) it is not likely to take place in exactly the same way in different cultures, (b) it is likely to undergo changes or show a certain development inside a given culture. A work of art is charged with symbolic meaning, but what meaning it can be regarded to have depends both on the (more or less conscious) intentions of the author and on the way in which the viewer looks at it or the hearer or reader interprets it. But both what the author wants to transmit with his work and the viewer or hearer or reader draws from it depends on the cultural experiences they have. It has to be added that this all is true not only of the single work but also of the type or genera of work, e.g. of the genera of literature.

In the last connection both points (a) and (b) can be illustrated by the case of drama. Borges dedicates a story (*La busca de Averroes*, included in his collection *El Aleph*) to the difficulties which Averroes met in his attempt to understand what Aristotle's *Poetics* was all about, since the Arabs had no experience of tragedy and of comedy, and to the mistaken way in which he overcome them (that they had no experience of them should not mean they had no aesthetic experience, but that the type of aesthetic experience which concerns drama was extraneous to them). But even in Greece drama was not available from the beginning, but was something new and still undergoing some development in fifth century Athens. It is well-known that there was an increase in the number of actors and a change in the part played by the chorus. The first process is connected with the increasing autonomy of actors with respect to the dramatist, for initially it was the dramatist who himself played some parts or even all the parts in the drama composed by him. Drama was initially an extension of epos, with the poet who both composed and recited his work, rather than a wholly distinct literary genre. It is not usually recognized that these developments were accompanied by changes in the way of seeing or understanding drama. As we shall see, Plato goes back to a somewhat archaic attitude to drama, which takes it precisely as an extension of epos in which the poet both composes

12. Ferrari's article, and other recent literature on the argument, cannot ignore of course that much of the discussion of poetry is conducted by Plato in connection with the topic of education, but does not sufficiently recognize that this influences his approach to poetry. The ideological aspect, and especially the fact that the trasmission of religious beliefs is involved, rarely receives much attention.

the work and plays the parts in the drama. Aristotle abandons this attitude, clearly because it was too far from contemporary experience of drama. There are also other important differences in their ways at looking at drama, which require other explanations.

More on the objective side, it has to be remarked that, if there was a group of arts that were regarded as constituting what we would call the fine arts, they have not to be quite the same as those that have been recognized in modern times, for what this group is supposed to include (or to exclude) depends on cultural interests that can change with time. For instance modern authors would often add other disciplines to the five major arts, such as decorative arts, the dance, the drama and the opera; in ancient times the drama, and tragedy in particular, had a particular importance, and, given the role played by music in it, corresponded to some extent to modern opera. (Only to some extent, as pointed out by R. Rehm, *Greek Tragic Theatre*, London 1992, p. 52, in the first place because «the power of speech is absent or extremely attenuated in opera».) This example also shows that the arts themselves could be conceived rather differently, and the same can be said of their interrelations. We have already seen that a close association was admitted between poetry and music. Music itself, when understood in the wide sense, so as to include poetry, did not only constitute the unity of all the arts accessible by the ear, but had a certain priority among all the arts. Among the figurative or plastic arts a priority tended to be attributed to painting (cfr. e.g. the passage of the *Epinomis* quoted below, ch. 6). Probably this priority was attributed to it in virtue of drawing (it should be noticed that in Greek *graphiké* can mean both painting and drawing), for a picture was first drawn and then coloured (it cannot be conceived, as a modern picture often can be, as the result of a combination of colour-patches)[13]. One could regard the products of sculpture and of architecture as being the result of a sort of three-dimensional drawing, colours being added (as in the case of pictures) in a second time.

Similarly, on the subjective side, we cannot expect aesthetic experience, being an eminently cultural affair, to be quite the same for the Greeks and for us, though there must be some common ground for it to be called aesthetic experience in either case. While we tend to regard as a typical occasion for having an aesthetic experience the visit to a museum, this is extraneous to the Greeks, who gave importance to experiences that had a convivial character, such as those that can be had in taking part to a symposium, or at

13. The distinction between the two processes, that of drawing the figure of e.g. an animal in outline and that of filling it with colours, is assumed for instance by Aristotle in the case of painting (cfr. *De generatione animalium* II 6, 743b18-25). For more technical details one may refer to H. Blümner, *Technologie und Terminologie der Gewerbe und Künste bei Griechen und Römern*, bd. IV, Leipzig 1887, pp. 414 ff.

least to experiences that had a collective character, such as attending to the performance of a drama in a theatre. This is a general point of difference which has already been remarked above.

For the sake of exemplification I mention three more specific points on which it is likely that there is some difference between their experience and ours: (a) there is an inclination by the Greeks to admit that the culmination of this experience lies in eroticism, or in the erotic attraction which is exercised by what is beautiful; and this is connected with the fact that certain typical occasions for having that experience, such as the symposia, were also occasions for eroticism (it may be significant that Plato, in *Republic* IV 402d-403c, sees the culmination of the appreciation of harmony in music in an erotic love of the beautiful; and it may also be significant that both he and Xenophon are willing to associate contemplation of what is beautiful in a manifestly aesthetic sense, but with limitation to human beings, to erotic love[14]); (b) there is also an inclination by them to give a place of some importance to the products of rhetoric in the domain of what gives rise to pleasure from an aesthetic point of view, while this is rare with us (in any case the sphere of *lexis* tends to be taken as common to poetic and to rhetoric, as is evident in Aristotle, though of course he does not think that the style to be used in an oration is wholly the same as that to be used in a poem); (c) Greek art, at least till the time of Plato, is interested in the representation of the human world, thus of men and of those entities which can make a difference to human life (especially gods and animals) and of the environment in which men live, while the interest in nature as such is scarce (it is not usual that pictures of landscapes were given and it is rare that the adjective 'beautiful' be applied to landscapes); in conformity with this attitude the philosophers most usually talk of imitation (*mimesis*) about the representation of men (and this is one reason why it is problematic to include architecture among the 'mimetic arts').

5. The hypothesis of an «aesthetics of mimesis»

Among the few scholars who reject the prevailing account of an absence of aesthetics in the Greek world there is Halliwell who, in his *Aesthetics of Mimesis*, cit., propounds as an alternative the suggestion that philosophers like Plato and Aristotle had an aesthetics that was concentrated on the idea of *mimesis*. He maintains that they were able to identify, among the arts, a class or group that had the characterization of being 'mimetic' and that their philosophy of art consisted to a large

14. Eroticism must not be confounded with sexual attraction, that was to be kept in check, see what Aristotle observes on this point in the passages of the *Ethics* quoted below, ch. 7

extent on a reflection on the idea of *mimesis*. This means that their aesthetics presents certain characteristics which make it different from that which is based on taking the earlier sections of Kant's third critique as paradigmatic, with the idea there expressed of a pure, disinterested judgment of beauty. He thinks that modern thinkers did not really succeed in disengaging the category of the aesthetic «from its previously accepted intersections with ethics, emotion and truth», for «this could only be done at the cost of making any resulting theory too narrow, too psychologically etiolated, to encompass and deal with the representational and expressive impulses that remained central to various forms of «fine art»» (op. cit., p. 10).

On the first point he says what follows: "By the fourth century B.C. it was already a widely shared judgment, as both Plato and Aristotle explicitly attest, that a certain range of artistic practices and their products - above all, poetry, painting, sculpture, dance, music, but also certain other activities too (including vocal mimicry and theatrical acting) - could be considered to share a representational-cum-expressive character that made it legitimate to regard them as a coherent group of mimetic arts." (op. cit., p. 7). (Some of the passages he refers to there, in n. 18, and in n. 19 to p. 44, will be examined below, ch. 6.) Yet, though this suggestion, as we shall see, is not without a justification, it cannot be said that Halliwell has succeeded in showing that the idea of *mimesis* has a definite aesthetic significance. He himself has to admit that the word *mimesis* has a much wider application than the field of aesthetic experience (e.g. in op. cit., p. 65, with reference to the treatment found in the *Sophist*, he says that this dialogue "does not offer a blanket condemnation of mimesis but something more like a philosophical "grid" on which many different kinds of human representation, including mimetic art, can be mapped"; see also his survey of the main uses of *mimesis* and cognate words in the Platonic dialogues given in his *Aristotle's Poetics*, London 1986, p. 121, which includes what are called "linguistic", "philosophical" and "cosmic" uses). A restriction is certainly obtained by talking of mimetic *arts*, but this, as the already quoted example of sophistic shows, remains too comprehensive.

In another way it is not sufficiently comprehensive, for it can be remarked that no mention is made of architecture among what according to Halliwell is to be regarded «as a coherent group of mimetic arts». In fact in his book no attention is given to this art, as against painting and, to a less extent, sculpture. It cannot be claimed that there was no realization of the fact that the works belonging to this field can be beautiful and that they realize certain criteria of formal perfection, for Vitruvius' *De architectura* testifies to the existence of an important theorization about those criteria (see below, ch. 29). Not to discuss this work constitutes a serious lacuna in a book dedicated to the main contributions to aesthetics in ancient thought.

Also the concept of *mimesis* which is adopted by Halliwell is very comprehensive, as shown by the formula he adopts (in the above quoted passage) of the «representational-cum-expressive character» which is shared by the mimetic arts. It is comprehensive on two counts: because he regards the traditional rendering of *mimesis* with «imitation» as too restrictive; and because he thinks that the term does not serve merely to identify a certain relationship between the object of aesthetic experience (a poem, a picture…) and some other object but concerns also the response which the first object obtains on his viewer or hearer. Concerning the first point, Halliwell says that the term is used «in relation to at least five categories of phenomena: first, visual resemblance (including figurative works of art); second, behavioral emulation/imitation; third, impersonation, including dramatic enactment; fourth, vocal or musical production of significant or expressive structures of sound; fifth, metaphysical conformity…» (p. 15). According to him there is a «common thread running through these otherwise various uses», namely «an idea of correspondence or equivalence», and this is explained as follows: «correspondence between mimetic works, activities and performances and their putative real-world equivalents, whether the latter are taken to be externally given and independent or only hypothetically projectable from the mimetic works themselves» (p. 15). One has however to ask whether those uses are so various, at least in the eyes' of authors like Plato and Aristotle, and whether we have to look for a conceptual minimum that is common to them all rather than for a notion suggested by the adoption of some paradigm. The idea of correspondence or equivalence in any case seems to be rather lax, leaving place to that of «representation», while I think that the rendering of *mimesis* with «imitation» is not improper (see discussion below, ch. 25). As to the suggestions that among the «putative real-world equivalents» there may be the «only hypothetically projectable from the mimetic works themselves», that is to say, there may be objects which do not belong at all to the real world but are fictions, Halliwell, though attempting to find some basis for this in Plato, depends in effect rather exclusively on Aristotle's *Poetics*, chs. 9 and 25. One can express the suspicion that, when Aristotle propounds an imitation (*mimesis*) which concerns not what is real but what is possible, he is streching this notion beyond its normal limits, for reasons connected with his perspective (see discussion below, chs. 19 and 25). Why talk of an imitation (in whatever wide sense one may take this term) of something possible, that is of something only imaginary, rather than simply admit that what is narrated etc. is to be said quite immediately the product of imagination, a fiction? It is of some significance that Philostrathus, in a often quoted passage of his *Life of Apollonius of Tyana*, stresses the limitation of *mimesis*

to what can be seen with the eyes, and opposes to it *phantasia* as being able to represent that which cannot (cfr. VI 19). Halliwell, in discussing this passage (in op. cit., pp. 308-310), warns us from giving too much importance to this (rather isolated) passage, for one must take into account the context to which it belongs (the representation of gods) and not generalize it into an aesthetics alternative to that of *mimesis*. This may be right, but it remains true that the passage points out a limitation of *mimesis* which on Halliwell's account does not exist and expresses dissatisfaction with it.

Concerning the second point, Halliwell maintains that an aesthetic of *mimesis* is one that gives particular attention to reception, because what is involved is "the use of an artistic medium (words, sounds, physical images) to signify and communicate certain hypothesized realities" (he offers this as a definition of representation). But, he says, "because hypothesized realities are imagined possibilities of experience, the Greek tradition, both before and after Plato, is greatly interested in the effects of mimetic artworks on their viewers or hearers, and repeatedly attempts to characterize the kinds of recognition, understanding, emotional response, and evalutation that such artworks can or should elicit in their audiences." (op. cit., p. 16; something to the same effect is said by him at pp. 21-22) This observation is certainly true about "the Greek tradition" of thinking about art. But the question is whether those authors were induced to give that attention to reception because they made recourse to the notion of *mimesis* or for some other reason. Halliwell makes this consequence descend on his talk of "signifying and communicating" and on having "imagined possibilities of experience", but this is to attribute "communicative" characteristics to the art-works which do not depend on their being mimetic. The discussion given below of pleasure as the typical response to an artwork which satisfies the requirement of being beautiful will render my objection more clear.

On the whole Halliwell is inclined to treat as an aesthetics of mimesis whatever aesthetics avoids to detach and isolate aesthetic experience "from engagement with the rest of experience" (op. cit., p. 12), and thus is induced to talk (in the passage quoted above) of the «representational-cum-expressive character» shared by certain artistic practices and their products because of their being mimetic. But this is to adopt a too comprehensive conception of what is mimetic, which is not justified by what the Greeks meant by *mimesis*, and runs the risk of leaving unclear what is proper to aesthetic experience: before saying what aesthetic experience should not be detached from we should say what it is, otherwise there is no specifically aesthetic experience left any more. No Greek philosopher could imagine, as Kierkegaard did, a purely aesthetic mode of existence for a man, but Plato did not just imagine there are people

who are passionate lovers of spectacles. Halliwell tends to oppose the aesthetics of mimesis thus understood to any position like that of Kant which asserts the autonomy of aesthetics. His position seems in fact to be an attempt to give a positive contents to the widely circulating view that ancient aesthetics was heteronomous, because depending on notions which are not properly aesthetic because ethical, political, educational, metaphysical, and so forth. However there is the risk of some serious equivocation, for an aesthetics which had no notions of its own but depended exclusively on notions coming from other fields would be no aesthetics any more. On the other hand asserting the autonomy of aesthetics needs not have the negative consequence of isolating the aesthetic experience (intending by this both the experience of the creator of an art-work and the experience of its viewer or hearer) from all other experience, for it can be a matter of recognizing both what is peculiar to it and how it is related to other types of experience. Excluding this autonomy altogether involves discognizing its peculiarity. (Another question, to which attention will be given later, is whether art itself is supposed to be autonomous.)

A decision can be reached in this matter, I think, by giving attention not only to the concept of *mimesis*, which applies to the object of aesthetic experience, but to the concept of pleasure (*hedoné*), which applies directly to the aesthetic experience, to ascertain whether the ancient thinkers recognized that there are pleasures that can be regarded as properly aesthetic.

6. Imitative arts as a distinct class of arts

In the following discussion our starting point is then the recognition that, if there is a class of arts (*technai*), recognized by Plato as a distinct class, under which what we call the fine arts can be brought, it is that of the arts that are said to be *mimetic*. This class is treated by him as a distinct species, inside the genus of productive arts, in *Sophist* 235d-e and 265a ff. These passages contain Plato's main attempt at a classification of these arts inside a genus-species division and will deserve some comments. For the moment they must be left out of consideration because they do not sufficiently clarify which are the arts that can be called mimetic and because their main purpose is to show that sophistic is in some sense a mimetic art. What should be noticed at once is that, when propounding a classification of the imitative arts like that given in the *Sophist*, Plato leaves open the question whether they are to be regarded as genuine arts or they are just mere skills (in fact the sophist's art is for him a mere skill, not a genuine art). The criteria that must be satisfied by a certain skill in order to be considered

an art or craft (*techne*) are formulated in the clearest way in another dialogue: the *Gorgias*. (For a brief account see Part II, ch. 27.) There however the question whether these criteria are satisfied or not by the skills that are said to be *mimetic* is not raised, at least in a direct and an explicit way. There are various indications to be found in the dialogues that suggest that these skills are *not* regarded as satisfying those criteria. For the moment this question can be left open, and art (*techne*) will be used, as done by Plato himself in various contexts (including the passages of the *Sophist* just mentioned), in the conventional and wide sense by which it covers all skills.

In this discussion, it is convenient to start with a passage of *Republic* II where certain of the arts that are called mimetic receive mention and where a criterion (beyond that of being mimetic) is offered for distinguishing them from the others (cfr. 372e ff.). In this passage the main speaker, Socrates, on solicitation by Glaucon, in describing the formation of the city, goes beyond the initial consideration of what is necessary to life (*ta anagkaia*, 373a5) saying that «we must set painting (*zographia*) to work and embroidery…». This implies admitting in the city certain classes of people such as huntsmen and, he adds, «the imitators (*hoi mimetai*), many of them occupied with figures and colours and many with music - the poets (*poietai*) and their assistants, rhapsodists, actors, chorus-dancers, contractors» (373b5-8). Leaving out for the moment the distinction here made between the poets and their assistants I remark that here too the activity of the poets is supposed to coincide with music (taken as including reciting and dancing) and not to be restricted to poetry in the narrow (or Aristotelian) sense. Beyond the poets as one class of imitators there are those imitators who are «occupied with figures and colours», and these clearly are represented by painters, sculptors and so forth. It should also be noticed that, in admitting not only a distinction but a temporal succession between the skills that are concerned with the necessities of life and those which aim at procuring us what is superfluous, Plato must be thinking of different stages in the development of civilization.

It seems to be significant that also elsewhere in the *Republic* he has in mind a distinction between two classes of people and of the relative arts or non-necessary activities to which they dedicate themselves. This happens in book III, where the question discussed is what sort of people should be admitted and under which supervision in the (by then) «purified» city. In this passage (from 401b onwards) these are treated as craftsmen who produce beautiful things and not (at least explicitly) as imitators. These beautiful things are said to exercise an influence on the young men who enter in contact with them by impressing either their sight (*pros opsin*) or their hearing (*pros akoén*) (cfr. 401c). In what follows particular attention is given to music, which clearly gives rise to the beautiful

things which are directed to hearing, but previously mention was made of painting (*graphiké*), of weaving, of embroidery, of architecture and so forth (cfr. 401a). In this same context a distinction is introduced between the poets, who presumably are concerned with all music, and the other craftsmen (*demiourgoi*), including those who produce pictures of living being (*eikones zoon*) and buildings (cfr. 401b).

Similarly, in *Republic*, book X, in drawing the parallel between painting (*graphiké*) and poetry (*poiesis*), some stress is made on the fact the former is concerned with vision (is *kata ten opsin*) and the latter is concerned with hearing (*katà ten akoén*) (cfr. 603b). And, towards the end of book V, in talking of the lovers of spectacles who are opposed to the philosophers (as the genuine lovers of spectacles), it is remarked of them that they are lovers of sounds (*philekoi*) and lovers of sights (*philotheamones*) who delight in beautiful tones (*kalas phonas*) and in beautiful colours and shapes (*chroas kai schemata*) (cfr. 476b and also 480a). In this connection it should be noticed that, when Plato talks, as in the passages now quoted, of persons or of arts that are concerned with beautiful tones and with beautiful colours and shapes, he is simplifying, for in 476b he associates tones etc. to 'all the artefacts that are produced out of them' (*panta ta ek toiouton demiourgoumena*, b6). ('Artefacts' must be understood in a wide sense, for what are composed of beautiful tones may be songs.) The lovers of spectacles, who manifestly cultivate an aesthetic attitude, do so in relation to the products of the arts and of music (and poetry), and are not interested in any sort of beautiful tones and beautiful colours and shapes.

Plato comes back to imitative art and to imitation in *Laws*, book II, in discussing the role of music in education and the pleasure of which it is the source. In that connection the remark is made that, in the case of music, everybody would agree (*pas an homologoi*) that all production which has to do with it is imitation and representation (*mimesis kai apeikasia*); and it is specified that all poets and hearers and actors would be agreed on this point (cfr. 668b-c). From this passage it is clear that taking music, including poetry, as a mimetic art did not simply express the point of view of some theoreticians but was something generally agreed upon. But, then, it is likely that also taking painting and the other figurative arts as imitative was something generally agreed upon, for their being imitative is a more obvious fact. The way in which Plato himself introduces certain categories of people as imitators in the passage of *Republic* II mentioned above favours this impression, for there calling them that way was not supposed to need any explanation.

This impression tends to be confirmed by Aristotle. In his *Rhetoric*, as is well known, he gives accounts of what is regarded as valuable adopting a point of view which has a general agreement. Thus in

book I, ch. 11, in considering what is pleasurable, he says that, since to learn and to admire is pleasurable, anything of this sort must be pleasurable, and of this sort is what is imitative (*to mimoumenon*), such as painting (or drawing: *graphiké*), sculpture and poetry (cfr. 1371b4 ff.). These then were generally regarded as typically imitative arts. If Aristotle himself, in the first chapters of his *Poetics*, can treat painting and poetry as imitative arts without giving any particular justification for this view of them it is because here (as elsewhere) he takes as his starting point a generally agreed point of view. (Poetry is associated by him to music in ch. 1, and music is regarded as imitative in the *Politics* as well. Poetic genres which are mentioned as imitative are: epic, tragedy and comedy, dithyrambe. He does not mention figurative or plastic arts beyond painting.)

Another passage of some importance is to be found in the *Epinomis*. This contains a survey of arts and disciplines the possession of which cannot be regarded as constituting wisdom (*sophia*). In addition to the arts or disciplines which are directed to the acquisition of what is necessary there is the mention of those which are, for the most part, imitative (*mimetiké*) and which are to regarded not as something serious but as a sort of play (*paidià*). Some of these arts are exercised by those who imitate by means of their bodies, some other are concerned with discourses (or words: *logous*) and with all music, further there are those which have their mother in painting (*graphikè*), in the case of which many and varied adornaments (*poikilmata*) are executed in many matters that are humid and dry (cfr. 975d). *Poikilmata* means works in various colours and even embroidery rather than 'figures' (as the word is usually translated); that figures or drawings are involved comes from admitting that the 'mother-art' is painting (thought of as involving drawing). The passage is presumably to be taken as indicating not only what is executed *in* but also what is executed *with*, thus including painting itself and vase-painting, which require the use of some humid substance, and sculpture, perhaps also architecture. The admission of the priority of painting is significant, and, if it was widely held, as is likely[15], implies that in certain passages in which only painting is explicitly mentioned the other plastic arts are involved (for instance only painting is mentioned, together with music, as imitative arts in *Cratylus* 423d). The judgment that these arts or disciplines are nothing

15. I was not able to find any parallel passage. The collections of texts edited by J.J. Pollitt, entitled *The Art of Ancient Greece: Sources and Documents*, Englewood Cliffs, N.J. 1965 [reprint Cambridge 1990], and by A. Reinach, entitled *La peinture ancienne. Textes grecs et latins* (2nd ed. with introd. and notes by A. Rouveret, Paris 1985), do not include passages concerning the relationship between different arts such as painting and the other plastic or figurative arts: they even ignore the passage from the *Epinomis*; the same can be said of Pollitt's book entitled *The ancient view of Greek Art. Criticism, History, and Terminology*, New Haven 1974 (useful mainly on terminology).

17. This passage of the *Politicus* is

but a sort of play reflects (as we shall see) Plato's attitude to the matter, but could not have application if they were regarded as useful arts; the classification of those that are in fact mentioned under the heading «imitative arts» must have been current. In either way this dismissive treatment of them involves a recognition of their peculiarity.

The passage in the *Epinomis* contains a development of something that is stated by Plato himself in *Laws* X, though it is not clear how far he accepts it, for it belongs to an account of the origin of civilization that is influenced by sophistic and naturalistic thought. It is likely however that he sees here a point of contact between his own position and that adopted by the sophists and the (Presocratic) naturalists. In talking of the emergence of art (*techne*) it is said that «it has produced, at a late stage, various amusing trifles (plays: *paidias*) that are hardly real at all (not parteking in truth = reality) - mere unsubstantial images (*eidola*) of the same order as the arts themselves (I mean for instance the productions of the arts of painting (*graphikê*) and music, and all their ancillary skills).» (889c-d) It is not explicitly said that these arts are imitative, but the fact that they are said to produce images goes in this sense, and there is the same tendency to dismiss them as mere plays (since their products are such).There is a simplificatory mention of music and painting, but music will include poetry, and painting is mentioned probably on the same assumption of the *Epinomis* that it is the 'mother' of all the figurative or plastic arts, thus as representative of them all.

Of importance is also another passage by Plato, to be found in the *Politicus*, where a list is offered of the arts (or of their products) that are to be regarded as auxiliary to politics, which is the dominating art. The fifth class or group of these are the arts which are said to be 'concerned with adornment (*kosmos*) and painting and all those coloured objects and imitations (*mimemata*) which are brought to end by means of this (= of painting) and of music'. It is added that all these works are produced only in view of our pleasures (*pros tas hedonas*) and that they may justly be named collectively play or diversion (*paignion*), for they are produced not with a serious purpose but for play (*paidias heneka*) (288c). In this passage we find the same attitude towards the fine arts which is to be found in the above quoted passages from the *Epinomis* and the *Laws*: they are nothing serious, but just a sort of play. (This judgement implies, of course, that they are not genuine arts, and goes back, as we shall see, to *Republic*, book X. Notice that 'mimetic' in general is treated as a form of play also in *Sophist* 234b.) However here it is made clear that this status attributed to them involves their being a source of pleasure. In this way it is recognized that it is not sufficient to describe them as imitative arts, but that, to circumscribe them, one

must also state their external aim: pleasure. It is to be presumed that, if in other passages they are described only in the first way, this is a simplification, just as it is a simplification (to be found in a passage by Aristotle to be considered immediately) to regard them only as having pleasure as their aim[16]. The passage also introduces a distinction between two main types of art: painting, presumably is to include the arts subordinated to it, and music. Adornment (*kosmos*) is to be associated to music, for in *Politicus* 307a-b it is said that what concerns the whole field of music is to be regarded as realizing *kosmiotes* and not courage. In any case there is the adoption of the usual division of the arts in visual arts and music.

The same perspective of an account of the origin of civilization that we met in the passage of the *Laws* (and that probably constitutes the background of the passage of *Republic* II) is to be found in the final part of ch. 1 of Aristotle's *Metaphysics* (from 981b13 onwards). He there alludes to an initial stage of invention of the arts (*technai*) and to a second stage at which «more arts were invented», some of which were in view of the necessities of life (presumably in the initial stage they were all of this type) and some in view of recreation (*diagogé*). He then introduces a third stage at which sciences or arts (*epistemai*, but in some contexts *episteme* and *techne* are interchangeable) were introduced in view of knowledge, starting with the mathematical disciplines in Egypt, rendered possible by the leisure enjoyed by the priestly caste in that country. Of these last disciplines it is said that, being in view of knowledge, they were neither in view of the necessities of life (*anagkaia*) nor in view of giving pleasure (*pros hedonen*). It is clear that the formula 'arts which exist in view of giving pleasure' is an alternative description of the arts which were said to exist in view of recreation. (An allusion to the same threepartition of disciplines, referring now to disciplines which are in view of recreation and of comfort (*rastone*), is to be found in ch. 2, 982b22-24. A similar distinction of activities in general, again in the perspective of the development of civilization, is to be found in *Politics* VII 10, 1329b27-29.)

The sphere of recreation and comfort, evidently to be associated to leisure (for this association cannot apply only to the theoretical disciplines), is certainly wider than that of the fine arts, for it must include other activities, such as plays, and of these it can be said that they give pleasure. (On leisure and recreation cfr. *Politics* VIII 3. This point is stressed by Halliwell, *Aristotle's Poetics*, cit., pp. 50-51). However Aristotle is talking of arts (*technai*) and it is not evident that other activities such as forms of play would be included by him

sometimes mentioned in the dialogues, e.g. in *Gorgias*, 514b, in *Charmides*, 170c, and in *Republic* I, 346d; *architektones* are mentioned as the directors of works in a relatively large field, cfr. *Gorgias*, 455b and *Politicus*, 259e.

18. Cfr. SVF III 401, from Androni-

under this heading. (Plato is willing to regard a play of skill and intelligence such as the *petteia* or *petteutike* as a *techne*, cfr. *Gorgias* 450d and, at least by implication, *Republic* II 374c, but this is rather an exception and it is not sure that Aristotle would be willing to follow on him on this point. The only passage in which he mentions this play, together with other plays, is *Rhetoric* I 11, 1370b35 ff., and there is no sign there that he regards it as a *techne*; from this passage, as from the passage of the *Nicomachean Ethics* to be quoted, it is in any case clear that he regards plays as producing pleasure.) Further, one notices that he tends to be rather dismissive of plays as a way of passing time of leisure, regarding them as pure relaxation (cfr. *Politics* VIII 3, 1337b23 ff.; *Eth. Nic.* X 6, 1178b9 ff.), and he keeps music and certain fine arts at least distinct from plays because of their role in education (this is clear from *Politics* VIII 3 and following chapters) and at the same time because imitative arts are not just a source of pleasure but also of instruction (they are kept distinct from plays, apparently for this reason, in *Rhetoric* I 11, 1371b4 ff.). Aristotle does not seem to be willing, as Plato was, at least sometimes, to regard the imitative arts on the whole as a sort of play. Thus, if it can be shown that the fine or mimetic arts were regarded by Aristotle as having pleasure as their aim, there is little doubt that he is referring to them in the passage just discussed of the *Metaphysics*. It can be added that this way of describing them must have been rather current, for also Isocrates, in his fourth Oration (*Panegyricus*), § 40, mentions the arts that were invented in view of pleasure in addition to those that were invented in view of the necessities of life (*pros tanagkaia tou biou*).

The survey now offered has to be completed, in the first place, by referring to what Alcidamas, in his polemical writing entitled *On those who write written speeches* (or *On sophists*), perhaps to be dated about 390 BC, has to say about statues (*andriantes*) and pictures of animals (or simply pictures? *gegrammena zoa*) (cfr. §§ 27-29). He does not explicitly talk of the arts which produce them, but treats these objects as 'imitations of the real bodies' (*mimemata tôn alethinôn sômatôn*) in parallel to written discourses (*logoi*), which are said to be imitations (*mimemata*, but also *eidôla kai schemata*) of oral discourses. These objects are said to offer delight (*terpsis*) to their contemplation (or view: *theoria*), but no use (*chresis*) for human life. Real bodies, on the other hand, are said to be much inferior to the beautiful imitations concerning their appearance (*tas eumorphias*) but much superior to them in utility. One can see, then, that the pleasure or delight procured by the vision of statues and pictures is presented in alternative to usefulness, thus must be a pleasure of aesthetic nature.

In the second place, something must be said about architecture. This discipline is mentioned by Plato among the 'fine arts' only in

the passage of *Republic* III referred to above (i.e. 401a), thus in a context in which the point of view of imitation is not adopted, and through a generic mention of 'buildings' (*oikodemata*)[17]. It is mentioned in *Sophist* 266c, under the denomination *oikodomiké*, where it is opposed to painting (*graphiké*) for the fact that it produces the real house (the house itself, *aute oikia*) and not one like a dream. In this way it is implicitly excluded that this could be taken as an imitative *techne*. It is not included, either, in the list of imitative arts given by Plotinus in *Enneads* V 9, 11, which is limited to the couples: painting and sculpture, dance and pantomime, but it is still mentioned in that chapter among the arts which have to do with beauty, namely as a productive art (together with carpentry). In his *De architectura* Vitruvius never associates architecture to the imitative arts (he talks of imitation only in connection with wall-paintings, cfr. book VII, ch. 5). But he qualifies this discipline as ensuring at the same time *venustas*, i.e. beauty or grace, and *utilitas* (cfr. I 3, 2). Beauty, presented under that denomination and in alternative to utility, can only have an aesthetic meaning. (It can be seen that Batteux's collocation of architecture in his classification of the arts corresponds to this presentation by Vitruvius.)

In conclusion, the art of architecture has a peculiar collocation, because, though aiming at beauty and thus at producing aesthetic pleasure, is not an imitative art and differs from the other fine arts also for the fact that it is originated by the need to satisfy the necessities of life (houses serve as protections). If this exception is left out of consideration, we find that the criteria to be satisfied for a certain human activity to belong to the realm of the fine arts are mainly three: (1) to be an art (*techne*), that is to say a form of production according to certain rules, at the exclusion of games (which in most cases involve performance without production) but also at the exclusion of science (which does not involve any production); (2) to be an art that is not originated by the need to satisfy the necessities of life but aiming at pleasure (not however any sort of pleasure, as will be explained in the following chapters); (3) to be an art which is mimetic in its products and/or which aims at producing artifacts that satisfy certain criteria of formal beauty or perfection. (It will be seen, at some later stage of this treatment, that between these two requirements there is no full compatibility, and that this is one reason, not concerning just ancient aesthetics, why it is difficult to talk of a «*system* of the fine arts».) It should be remarked that this way of classifying the arts must be kept distinct from their division in vulgar and liberal arts, for this concerns the

ignored by Kristeller in his article; it is also ignored by Halliwell, when quoting passages on the mimetic arts, probably because he is reluctant to consider passages which attest the admission of pleasure as a distinct criterion for qualifying those arts.

16. A related *oikodomikè techne* is

issue whether or not the acquirement of a certain art should be part of the education of the *free* man. The ancients had no difficulty in admitting that the products of a certain art like sculpture possess high value but that the art itself, requiring the use of hands and instruments, is a dirty affair to be avoided by a free man (this double evaluation of sculpture is evident for instance in Lucian's Somnium sive Vita Luciani).

7. The recognition of aesthetic pleasure

In this way we are introduced to the second point to examine, namely that the arts we are considering, whether called imitative or identified in other ways, are supposed to give rise to feelings of pleasure in those who contemplate or otherwise enjoy their objects. Besides looking for confirmation of this point it will have to be clarified whether they are supposed to give rise to feelings of pleasure whatsoever or feelings of a certain type. That they give rise to feelings of pleasure is stated with some frequency by Plato in the dialogues (in addition to the already quoted passage of the *Politicus*, see e.g. *Gorgias* 501e ff.; *Republic* X 606b, 607a and d). In most of these passages he regards this pleasure in a negative way, as what is pursued by the mass of men who are not able to pursue anything but pleasure (on this point see below, ch. 10). In some passages however he gives a more differentiated account.

One of these passages is *Philebus* 51b ff. In what immediately precedes it the speaker, Socrates, had been arguing that not all pleasures involve some relationship with pain (since they are relieves from distress) but there are pleasures which, from this point of view, are pure, saying that it is to these that attention must be given. After another brief exchange, on the request of his interlocutor, Protarcos, to tell which pleasures are to be regarded as true, he replies as follows: «Those related to colours we call beautiful or to shapes, most pleasures of smell and those of hearing, and generally any where the deprivation is imperceptible and which supply perceptible replenishments which are pleasant and pure of pain.» (51b, Gosling's transl. modified) To Protarcos it is not clear how these cases can be considered that way, so Socrates, in giving a clarification, is obliged to introduce a restriction in saying that by beauty of shapes he does not understand, as 'the many' (*hoi polloi*) would do, the beauty of living beings and of certain pictures, but that of certain simple geometrical shapes, which are beautiful not in relation to somebody but in themselves and always; the same, he adds, applies to colours and to sounds, with the specification about the latter that they must be smooth clear ones, i.e. those that produce a single pure tune. The exact meaning of this passage is disputed by scholars, but it

seems to me that the most plausible interpretation is that Plato wants to introduce a restriction in the class of pure or non-mixed pleasures, saying that 'true' are only those which satisfy the further requirement of non-relativity. In fact, Plato himself, in *Republic* IX 584b-c, is willing to admit that there are some pleasures, those of smell among others (which there are not explicitly mentioned), that are 'pure' precisely in the sense that they are not accompanied by pain.

If this is right, the pleasures aroused by the contemplation of beautiful pictures and so forth are considered by Plato as pure but not as genuine (from some sort of metaphysical point of view), with the concession that they are admitted, without that reservation, by 'the many'. These 'many' need not be taken, in the present context, as vulgar people, but probably include everybody who does not share the Platonic view about what is really beautiful; in fact they may correspond, at least to some extent, to the admirers of beautiful colours, shapes and sounds which are kept distinct from the philosophers at the end of *Republic* V. And if we leave out, for the moment, the developments that are proper to the Platonic view of reality, the passage constitutes a testimony of the fact that, in the intellectual circles of a city like Athens, if not also among common people, the pleasures by the contemplation of beautiful pictures and so forth were kept distinct from other pleasures (e.g. those raised by the assimilation of food). Plato himself, in the *Philebus*, thinks that a higher standard of purity is desirable, but (as the passage of *Republic* IX shows) he cannot deny that those pleasures are pure. Some confirmation of this conclusion, as we shall see, is given by Aristotle.

A differentiated treatment of pleasure is to be found also in the *Laws*, where Plato treats education, in so far as it is education of character, as being very much a form of training our feelings of pleasure and of pain, so that one gets used to feel pleasure at what is morally good and pain at what is morally bad. But our feelings of pleasure can be trained or disciplined if they are not all directed, from the beginning, in the direction of carnal pleasure, but there are some of them which are different and which are open to development or refinement. Thus Plato, in one connection in which he talks about education, is induced to point out that, by the intervention of the gods, men resulted to be different from animals because they have a sense of order and disorder in movement, that is to say, they have the capacity to recognize 'rhythm' and 'harmony' and to enjoy them (this is there said to be a perception that is accompanied by pleasure [*aisthesis meth'hedones*] regarding what is provided with rhythm and with harmony, cfr. 653e-654a). This human constitution is to be put in relation to the fact that the gods wished that the human race, born to suffer as it was, should have a relief from its labours in celebrating religious festivals (cfr. 653d).

In another passage, in which he lays down the criteria by which to judge certain activities, which are distinguished by the fact of giving rise to a certain delight (or of encountering a certain favour: *charis*), this itself is treated as a criterion besides a certain rectitude (*orthotes*) and/or a certain usefulness (*ophelia*) (cfr. 667b ff.). For instance learning gives rise to a certain delight, but its rectitude and usefulness come from the truth it reaches. In the case of the mimetic arts (*hosai technai eikastikai*) there is a rectitude which lies in exact correspondence with the object reproduced, but it is conceivable that certain of them are pursued without regard to this rectitude or to truth and without regard to usefulness, just in view of that element which, when not accompanied by the others, deserves the name of 'pleasure' (*hedoné*). This is to be admitted only when the pleasure in question can be regarded as harmless, it being in fact the case of those activities which we call 'play' (*paidiá*) (cfr. 667d-e). From what follows one understands that they are not considered any more as imitative arts, for if they were the criterion of rectitude could not be abandoned. Anyhow the passage shows that Plato is willing to admit that activities belonging to this field give rise to nothing but pleasure and that this pleasure is not to be condemned since it is harmless. Plato himself, as we shall see, insists on the pleasure to which give rise such arts as that of the tragedian, but regards it as mistaken to judge this pleasure as harmless because tragedies and other poetic recitations are just plays (cfr. *Republic* IV, 424d). It is not unlikely that this judgement was expressed by other people who extended the concept of play beyond what for him are its legitimate limits. They were thus inclined to treat all imitative art as giving rise to a pleasure which is harmless (some further indications in this sense can be desumed from what Gorgias has to say on this point). But what is this harmless pleasure for them if not an aesthetic pleasure?

Aristotle takes up the doctrine which, as we have seen, is attributed to 'the many' in the *Philebus*. In *Nicomachean Ethics*, X 5, where the topic discussed is pleasure, he suggests that pleasures differ among themselves as the activities which they accompany. One application of this view is to the activities of the senses: «Sight is superior to touch, and hearing and smell to taste, in purity, so their pleasures differ similarly. Also intellectual pleasures are superior to sensuous ones, and both kinds differ among themselves.» (1176a1-3) The superiority in purity of certain pleasures on others is made depend on the superiority in purity of the activities of certain senses, presumably due to the fact that they do not require contact with the object, not on their being unmixed with pain, but one explanation need not exclude the other. In any case the peculiarity of these pleasures is underlined by Aristotle also in another connection, that of the discussion of temperance (*sophrosune*) as a virtue (cfr.

book III, ch. 13). He observes that temperance concerns bodily pleasures, not however all of them, but those which have to do with the senses of touch and of taste and which are shared by the other animals (cfr. 1118a23 ff.). Different is the case of the pleasures that come from the senses of sight, of hearing and of smell, for, though it is possible to pursue them in an excessive way, it is not proper to call intemperate or licentious (*akolastous*) those who fall into this excess and temperate those who are free of it (cfr. 1118a1 ff.). In exemplifying this point he talks of those who have enjoyment (*chairontes*) through sight of objects such as colours, figures and pictures (or designs), a list close to those given by Plato in the mentioned passages of *Republic* V and of the *Philebus*. He also talks of those who have enjoyment through hearing in listening to songs or an actor's voice. A similar treatment is given to the smell of roses or incense, while it is admitted that the smell of savoury dishes may have a different effect because of its association to food. That he has in mind the attitude of cultivated people is confirmed by the fact that in the case of taste he is willing to make an exception to his general rule by admitting that wine-tasters and experts in dishes cannot be regarded as intemperate (cfr. 1118a27 ff.).

It can be added that in this same work, book VII, ch. 7, the view is expressed that being a lover of plays or of amusements (*paidiodes*), clearly in the sense of pursuing them in an excessive way, is not an instance of intemperance (*akolasia*), but one of softness (*malakia*) (cfr. 1150a16-19). Plato in his turn associates the excessive and exclusive pursuit of music to *malakia*, though treating this more as a consequence than as a cause, but of course *malakia* reinforces itself (cfr. *Republic* III 411a-c). This is a recognition of the peculiarity of this phenomenon, that cannot be put on the same plan as vice or weakness of will (*akrasia*). One may recall that Pericles, as Thucydides reports his speech, said in praise of the Athenians that they loved and coltivated what is beautiful without softness (*philokaloumen … aneu malakias*), thus regarding softness as a danger inherent in pursuing aesthetic pleasures.

The parallel treatment of this topic in the *Eudemian Ethics* confirms that Aristotle has in mind a properly aesthetic pleasure. He there says in fact that a person would not be considered intemperate if, 'when looking at a beautiful statue or horse or man, or listening to someone singing, he did not wish for food or drink or sexual indulgence but only wished to look at the beautiful objects or listen to the music - any more than the persons held spell-bound in the abode of the Sirens' (III 2, 1230b31-35). In what follows he does not simply point out, as in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, that temperance and intemperance concern those feelings of pleasure and of pain which have to do with the senses of taste and of touch and which are shared by other animals, but suggests that the pleasures which

comes from contemplating a beautiful object or from listening to an harmonious sound are inaccessible to them. (What he says in *Nicomachean Ethics* III 13, 1118a16-23 has the same implication: animals do not get pleasure from the sensations as such, but only by the association of certain of them to objects of their appetite, for instance dogs are pleased at the smell of hares not because of the quality of their smell but because hares are perceived by them as something eatable, so their smell is a sign of this. The same point reappears in *Problemata* 27, § 7. On the other hand in *Politics* VIII 6, 1341a13-17, he admits that some animals show a response to the charm of beautiful music, but this concession is analogous to his concession that some superior animals are provided with some intelligence, thus does not exclude the general suggestions that these pleasures, though arising from the senses, are of a high level.) We can see that he generalizes the point made by Plato in the passage above discussed of *Laws* II, by extending it to all aesthetic pleasure, not just that arising from musical harmony. He also shows, in the passage of the *Nicomachean Ethics* concerning wine-tasters and so forth, not to have the reservations towards this attitude of cultivated people that Plato shows to have (the latter's hostility towards all refinement in food-tasting is particularly evident in the *Gorgias*). Both of them however recognize the existence of an attitude that can only be classified as aesthetic, because it concerns objects that are beautiful and is limited to human beings.

That the sort of definition of aesthetic pleasure that is adopted by the two philosophers had a rather wide circulation in antiquity is shown by the definition given of joy (*terpsis*) by the Stoics, namely, that is the pleasure that one gets through either sight or hearing (notice that *terpsis* is the word most frequently used by the poets in describing the pleasure to which their poems gives rise)[18]. It is also shown by the fact that the Cirenaics were supposed to have denied that pleasure comes from the pure sensation of sight or hearing, for also intelligence is required (cfr. Diogenes Laertius II 90 and Plutarchus, *Quaestiones convivales* V 1, 674A-B), thus evidently rejecting what they regarded as a widespread view.

8. Beauty defined as giving rise to (aesthetic) pleasure

A further step to be taken concerns the issue whether there was some recognition of the fact that beauty could be considered from the point of view of its giving rise to aesthetic pleasure. There

cus' *Perì pathôn*; for more details on their position cfr. M.-A. Zagdoun, *La philosophie stoicienne de l'art*, Paris 2000, pp. 206-207.

19. In antiquity this statue, together

is one dialogue by Plato in which various possible definitions that can be given of beauty and of beautiful are introduced and submitted to examination for their adequacy, viz. the *Greater Hippias*. One of these definitions, which is put forward by Socrates, is that which understands what is beautiful as that which gives us enjoyment (*chairein*), with the specification that not all pleasures are involved, «but only what gives us enjoyment through our senses of hearing and sight» (297e). It cannot be a chance that there is an explicit reference, and restriction, to the senses of hearing and of sight, for we have seen that the usual way of distinguishing the main groups of imitative arts is by the fact that their products or objects have to do with one of these two senses. But that he has in mind the products of these arts, even if not in an exclusive way, is shown by the exemplification with which Socrates illustrates what he has in mind: «surely beautiful human beings, and all decorative work, and pictures, and plastic art [sculpture? *Plasmata*], delight us when we see them if they are beautiful; and beautiful sounds, and music as a whole, and discourses, and tales (*muthologiai*), have the same effect.» (298a, Jowett's transl. modified) In what follows in the dialogue difficulties are raised against this definition, giving place to a tortuous discussion on which I cannot while, for on the whole it does not concern the topic which interests us. It should only be remarked that one difficulty concerns the possibility of admitting some differentiation among the various pleasures of which we have experience, beyond the mere fact they come from certain senses rather than others (cfr. 298d-299b), but that at some stage a positive (if not necessarily very adequate) suggestion is given by saying that they are 'the most harmless and the best' (cfr. 303e). Singularly this suggestion is then taken as equivalent to saying that beauty is to be defined as 'beneficial pleasure', and this other suggestion is shown to give rise to a new difficulty. This transition can only be justified by the dialectical purposes of the dialogue, and the specification that the pleasure is harmless could be regarded as a useful integration of the original definition (and one that, as we have seen, Plato himself, in the *Laws*, could not regard as mistaken).

This definition of what is beautiful, though not the examples with which it is illustrated, is often mentioned by scholars who discuss the concept of beauty in Greek philosophy and literature, but almost equally often the definition is put on the same plane as the other definitions which are rejected in the course of the discussion between Socrates and Hippias presented in the dialogue. However, before raising the question whether Plato himself could have accepted it one has to ask the question whether anybody else in his times would have accepted it. Can one suppose that this definition was just invented by Plato (or by Socrates as the interlocutor of the dialogue) in order to dismiss it? It seems more likely that it was a current

definition of what is beautiful that is propounded by Socrates for criticism. This impression is confirmed by the fact that the same definition ('what is pleasant to the sight or to the hearing') is mentioned by Aristotle in a passage of his *Topics*, i.e. in a work which contains much material that consisted in views that were commonly accepted or that were propound by well-known philosophers (cfr. VI 7, 146a21 ff.).

It can be added that the discussion in the previous part of the *Greater Hippias* introduced examples and notions which opened the way to a definition of beauty in an aesthetic sense. The first naive reply by Hippias to Socrates' question: «what is the beautiful (*to kalon*)?» (understood by him as concerning something beautiful and not beauty itself) is «a beautiful woman», intending manifestly a handsome one. Another example, introduced this time by Socrates, is that of the statue of Athena made by Phidias, which clearly was regarded as particularly beautiful in an aesthetic sense (cfr. 290a-b)[19]. In what follows the introduction of this example the discussion gets concentrated on the notion of the appropriate or the convenient (*to prepon*) as a definition of what is beautiful. This notion may not be regarded as an adequate definition of what is beautiful, but plays an important role in ancient aesthetics, for it tends to be regarded as indicating one of the characteristics which an object must possess in order to be beautiful (it is rendered in latin with *decorum*)[20].

Another Platonic passage which should be considered in this connection belongs to the *Gorgias*. In an exchange between him and Polos Socrates offers an argument which goes against his interlocutor's attempt to draw a distinction between good (*agathon*) and fine (*kalon*) taken as properties of actions (the main issue there being whether doing just actions is in the interest of the agent). In doing so he tries to clarify what is meant by fine (*kalon*), offering a sort of definition of it (cfr. 474d ff.; that a sort of definition is in question is suggested by Polos' comment, in 475a, that Socrates has made a good proposal in thus defining the fine (*horizomenos to kalon*)). The definition given is in fact a disjunction, and is made with reference to things normally regarded as fine (or beautiful): bodies, colours, figures, sounds, and institutions (*epitedeumata*, e.g. laws). Of these things we can say that they are fine either according to some utility, because they are useful for something, or according to some pleasure (*kata hedonen tina*), because of the enjoyment

with that of Zeus by the same Phidias, tended to be regarded as the highest achievement in the field of the visual arts (cfr. the quotations given by A. Rouveret, *Histoire et imaginaire de la peinture ancienne*, B.E.F.A.R., Rome, 1989, pp. 405-411).

20. Aristotle for instance makes use of this notion in his *Poetics*, cfr. 6, 1450b5; 15, 1454a22 and 30; 17, 1455a25; 18, 1456a14; 22, 1458b14 and 59a4, 9 and 12; 24, 1459b32 and 60a4. Plato himself makes recourse to this notion, without apparent reservations, in *Gorgias*, 503e and in *Phaedrus*, 264c. See also Part II, ch. 29.

21. References to this passage are

(*chairein*) which they produce by contemplating them to those who contemplate them, or for both reasons (cfr. 474d-e). In what follows Socrates shows that the definition of the fine as what produces pleasure is not relevant to actions that are to be judged for their being just or unjust, and thus concludes that there is a convergence between what is good and what is fine, with a refutation of Polos' position.

It should be noticed that the coincidence between what is good and what is useful could itself be questioned (it is questioned for instance in *Alcibiades* I 113d ff., even if talking of what is just rather than of what is good), but that here it is taken for granted. Socrates' purpose in this dialogue is simply to adduce some plausible reason why his interlocutor is induced to resist the postulation of an immediate coincidence between what is good and what is fine, and this reason is that «fine» has application to what is called so independently of any evaluation of moral goodness or of utility, because it is called so as giving rise to pleasure in the observer (or hearer). In this passage of the *Gorgias* there is no mention of the specification to be found in the passage above discussed of the *Greater Hippias*, namely that the pleasantness involved concerns exclusively the senses of sight and of hearing. But it is sufficiently clear that it is the same type of experience that is considered, for it is said that the pleasure comes from the contemplation of bodies, colours, figures and sounds (contemplation suggests sight, with a simplificative omission of hearing). The reason why that specification is omitted is probably that the disjunction is meant to be quite general, and to extend to the case of institutions, for which it is not really possible to say that the pleasantness, if any, to which they give rise is obtained either through sight or through hearing. (That *epitedeumata* constitute a problematic case, because we have awareness of them through sight or hearing, but do not give rise to pleasure, is pointed out in *Greater Hippias* 298b-d.) The passage, then, offers a confirmation of the fact that a definition of the fine (or the beautiful) in terms of the aesthetic pleasure to which what possesses it gives rise circulated in Socrates' and Plato's times, for mention of it in the course of a discussion of ethical questions would not have been required if its omission had not been particularly noticeable. But the passage is of importance also because it shows that, contrary to what is assumed by most interpreters who discussed this question, there was awareness of the ambiguity of 'the fine' (*to kalon*) between its aesthetical and its non-aesthetical (mainly, but not exclusively, ethical) meaning.[21]

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usually missing in articles concerning the topic of beauty in ancient philosophy, e.g. the articles *Beauty: Conceptual and Historical Overview* by S.D. Ross and *Classical Concepts* by N. Pappas, in *Encyclopaedia of Aesthetics*, vol. I, pp. 237 ff. and pp. 244 ff. and (das) *Schöne: 1. Antike*, by G. Most, in

That this ambiguity was felt, at least in intellectual circles, is confirmed to some extent by the comic episode of the «beauty-contest» between Socrates and the young Critobulos which is told by Xenophon in his *Symposium*, ch. 5. There the only definition of 'the fine' which is expressly given is a Socratic one in terms of usefulness or efficiency, thus corresponds to one of the members of the disjunction propounded in the *Gorgias*, but the way in which that beauty-contest ends, with all the votes in favour of Critobulos, shows that the definition was not felt to be adequate, for, from the point of view of efficiency, the superiority of Socrates on him (a greater mouth to eat, a greater nose to inspire air, etc.) was irrefutably demonstrated by Socrates himself. It was instead regarded as obvious that Critobulos was a beautiful person and Socrates an ugly one, for the same reason for which we would regard this as obvious: their looks (in Greek: their *schema* or their *morphé*). Critobolus had in fact already made clear that his being beautiful was different from being strong or brave or wise and, he added, more convenient, for he could obtain what he wanted without effort (of course by inducing others to do things for him because exercising on them an erotic attraction, cfr. 4, 13). It can be added that the reasons adduced by the same Xenophon, in *Cyropaedia* V 1, 5 and 7, for regarding a certain woman as beautiful are clearly aesthetic ones (there is talk of the appearance of her face and of her hands and of her *euschemosune*), though there is also mention of the danger of feeling an erotic attraction.

Aristotle offers a definition of beauty in relation to the pleasure to which it gives rise only in the passage of *Topics* VI 7 quoted above, and without taking position with respect to it. In his account of tragedy, of epos, and other genera of poetry he admits that each of them is a source of a pleasure proper to that genus, and it seems natural to admit that this pleasure depends on the beauty that is realized by a particular tragedy and so forth (for this account cfr. below, ch. 13). In *Politics* VIII 5, 1340a25-28, he talks of a contemplation that is a source of pleasure when the contemplation of the object, namely a person, is done for no other reason than its form or shape (*morphé*), apparently intending to keep this distinct

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Hist. Wörterbuch der Philosophie, edd. J. Ritter & K. Gründer, vol. 8, coll. 1343-1351. C. Janaway, *Images of Excellence*, cit., ch. 3 entitled *The Fine and the Beautiful*, discusses this passage together with those of the *Greater Hippias*, recognizing that they are of importance from the point of view of the history of aesthetics, though leaving the question open how far they reflect Plato's own position; in any case he cannot find in them a sufficient basis for talking of an ancient aeshetics. The importance of the main passage of the *Greater Hippias* was recognized already by Bernard Bosanquet, *A History of Aesthetics* (London 1904; reprinted as vol. 4 of *The collected Works of Bernard Bosanquet*, vol. 4, Thoemmes Press, Bristol 1999, from which edition I quote), p. 52.

26. For the interpretation of this § cfr.

from the reasons considered elsewhere (i.e. in *De partibus animalium* I 5, 645a10 ff., *Poetics* 4, 1448b9 ff. [22], and *Rhet.* I 11, 1371b6-10). There must be some complementarity between this passage and a suggestion that is contained in the passage of *Poetics* 4, namely that one may appreciate a work of art such as a painting independently from its being an imitation of something, e.g. for its fine execution and colour (cfr. 1448b17-19, quoted below, ch. 10). He talks of 'the fine' (*to kalón*) as the end of action in various passages of his *Ethics*, without making any attempt to clarify its difference from what is beautiful in an aesthetic sense, but in a passage of the *Metaphysics*, concerning however the beauty in mathematics, he makes it clear that what qualifies the moral end must be kept distinct from what satisfies requirements of perfection in an aesthetic sense[23].

There is an obvious connection between this account of what is beautiful because satistisfying certain formal requirements and the account considered above of the pleasures coming from the senses that are unmixed or pure, but there is also a difference, for those pleasures were extended to the sense of smell and even (by Aristotle and not without a severe restriction) to that of taste. The difference however need not be of great importance, because the restriction to the senses of sight and hearing is probably suggested (as I have said) by a reference to the two main classes in which imitative arts are subdivided, but the aesthetic attitude, though most typically exemplified in their case, has a wider scope. We ourselves would admit that it can be exercised in the case of beautiful bodies of men and of women, when sexual attraction is excluded or at least kept in check (we have seen that Aristotle points out this fact in the passage quoted above of the *Eudemian Ethics*; see also Ps.-Aristotle, *Problemata* 10, 896b10 ff.). We would also admit that it can be exercised in the case of landscapes, but the Greeks of Plato's time showed little interest in this sort of beauty.

9. Pleasure as discriminatory taste

One can see that, if the interpretation I am propounding is on the right track, the feeling of pleasure which is said to be raised by certain objects which fall primarily under the senses of sight and of hearing is the ancient equivalent of our idea of taste. It certainly possesses certain characteristics of taste, for it is admitted (by both Plato and Aristotle) that it can be educated and it is also admitted that it is capable of discrimination. This is admitted in a sufficiently clear way by Aristotle in the passage of the *Nicomachean Ethics* in which

22. For a discussion of these two passages see part II, ch. 29

23. See part II, ch. 29

he considers the case of wine-tasters and other experts, for he there says (recalling something admitted by him, but in a more general form, in the *De anima*) that the sense of taste involves discrimination (*krisis*). (There are various passages in the *De anima* where it is said that the senses discriminate (using *krinein*, *kritikos*, etc.), cfr. e.g. II 6, 418a14-16; 11, 425a5-10; III 2, 426b8-14. But the discrimination there lies in the capacity e.g. to distinguish one colour from another. Presumably in the *Ethics* he assumes that the senses can be trained to become more discriminating. Further, it is also said, in the *De anima* (cfr. II 2, 413b23; 3, 414b3; III 9, beginning), that their exercise is accompanied by the feelings of pleasure and pain. That these can be trained is a basic doctrine of his *Ethics*.) It may be relevant to remark, in this connection, that sometimes the Greek word for pleasure, *hedoné*, can also take the meaning of flavour or (sort of) smell[24] or even, more directly, the meaning of (good) taste, in connection with the use of the tongue[25] Our metaphorical use of the word 'taste' is thus not wholly without a parallel in Greek in the case of the very word *hedoné*.A different suggestion, somewhat closer to the expertise attributed to wine-tasters and other such experts in the passage of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, is to be found in *Politics* VIII 6. Here the general topic is education in music and the question discussed is whether young people should be encouraged and instructed to learn music by singing themselves and playing instruments with their own hands, or not. Aristotle's reply to this question is positive, with the proviso that they should not pursue these activities so as to become professional specialists in one or more than one of them, but only as part of a 'liberal' education. The reason for pursuing these activities is that through some direct involvement one can become a good judge (*krités*) in this field, this being a matter of being able to discriminate beautiful works (*ta kalà krinein*) and to enjoy them in a correct way (*chairein orthos*) (cfr. 1340b23-25 and b35-39). That music is a source of pleasure had been said already in ch. 5, 1340a14-18. Here it is a matter of becoming a good judge of music, through a proper enjoyment acquired by education, thus it is a matter of educated taste.

Plato makes a similar admission when he suggests, in the *Laws*, that it would be legitimate to use pleasure as a criterion for deciding which works of art are good and which are not (the formulation used in 658e7 is *dein ten mousiken hedonê krinesthai*) if this power

24. Cfr. Heraclitus, fr. 67 (cfr. discussion by G.S. Kirk, *Heraclitus: The Cosmic Fragments*, Cambridge 1954, pp. 196-97, who also refers to the other passages), Anaxagoras, fr. 4 ("∑ seeds of all things, with all kinds of shapes and colours and *hedonas*"), Diogenes of Apollonia, fr. 5).

25. This happens in the Hippocratic treatise On Regimen, I 23, where tongue is said to be of the good or pleasant taste (*hedoné*) and of the bad or unpleasant taste (*aedie*). (On all these passages see also J.C.B. Gosling and C.C.W. Taylor, *The Greeks on Pleasure*, Oxford 1982, § 1.2.3, p. 18.)

were exercised not by everybody but by the appropriate people, who are provided with virtue and education (cfr. II 658e ff.). The implication is precisely that pleasure can function as a criterion, hence involves some form of discrimination, but that what makes the difference is the kind of training this capacity has received. Aristotle seems to be wanting to correct Plato in *Politics* III 11, when he says that collective judgment may be superior to the judgment of the single person, hence that 'the many are better judges of works of music and poetry' (1281b7-8), but from the context it seems sufficiently clear that even for him these 'many' must be educated people (for his attitude on this matter cfr. below, ch. 13). Otherwise the issue now touched upon has political implications that cannot be discussed here.

It is significant that Plato feels obliged to make this sort of concession, for it shows that pleasure in his eyes could not be rejected altogether as a criterion, but that he tried to find some way of regulating it. His attitude is not that of denying the existence of a sphere of aesthetic experience, which has pleasure as both its main criterion and its main aim, by assimilating it to other spheres of human experience, such as the religious and the ethical ones. This sphere corresponds to what for instance the poets would do if left to themselves, but the poets cannot be left to themselves. Thus he implictily admits in a passage of the *Laws* that the poets, left to themselves, have their own way of dealing with their field and their own judgements based on their taste, for, in suggesting that existing works of poetry, when not satisfactory on the basis of the criteria set up by the lawgiver, should be 'revised and rearranged, taking as advisors men who are both poets and musicians, thus exploiting their powers in composing {poems}', he adds: 'but not relying, with a few exceptions, on their tastes (*hedonais*) and inclinations' (cfr. 802b5-c2). However, as this very passage shows, he does not think that the poets should be left to themselves, that their irresponsibility should be tolerated. Their influence can be harmful and must be kept in check. But it must be kept in check mainly from the outside, by the intervention of the lawgiver. Little earlier he had said, in fact, that the poets in general are not at all able to know what is good and what is not good (cfr. 801b10-c1), hence, it is implied, it belongs to other people, namely the authorities of the city, to decide for them what is good and what is not by imposing certain restrictions on them and on their works. Regulations of this type are in fact laid down in the context of this passage. (For some more details on this position in the *Laws* see below.) Judgement of taste and ethico-political judgement do not coincide, and may not be found in the same persons.

Coming back to the main issue, it is important to realize that both Plato and Aristotle have in mind the fact that tragedies, comedies,

and other artworks were usually submitted to public competitions in cities like Athens. The citizens who went to the theatre, even when they could not vote themselves, were involved in the competition among the dramas represented, and certainly there were hot disputes about their merits. One can suspect that even the judgment of the appointed judges was not based on purely aesthetic criteria. Yet the existence of a popular public that is interested in the discussion of the relative merits of dramas, of poems and other artworks constitutes the natural background for a smaller public of connoisseurs who would take up the discussion at a higher level, by expressing judgment with greater consciousness of the aesthetic criteria to be applied. The existence of this smaller public of connoisseurs constitutes itself the background for the reflection and theorization done by philosophers like Plato and Aristotle. To limit the attention to their theorization, which has as its main purpose not that of legitimating existing social reality but that of introducing and justifying norms which are meant to transform it, can lead to some serious misunderstanding. Because Plato, and to some extent also Aristotle, reject pure aestheticism, it is supposed that no aesthetics could be present in their times. There is a failure to keep sufficiently distinct what Plato and Aristotle have to say in a descriptive way about what were the prevailing attitudes towards aesthetic pleasure among cultivated people in the society of their times and what Plato and sometimes Aristotle have to say about the proper attitude that one should have towards those pleasures.

Connected with this failure there is that due to an insufficient awareness of the fact that Plato and Aristotle ascribe to the feelings of pleasure and of displeasure characteristics such as being cognitive and as involving some form of discrimination. This insufficient awareness depends itself in part on the fact that the importance of this account of pleasure from the point of view of the history of aesthetics has not been appreciated because scholars have too easily assumed that the topic of pleasure is of exclusive interest for ethical psychology (it is typical of this attitude that Halliwell, while giving attention to the treatment of pleasure in the *Poetics*, would not discuss the relevant passages in the *Ethics*, evidently thinking that nothing of use for aesthetics can be found in those works).

10. Poetry regarded as a source of pleasure

It is not at all surprising that Plato and Aristotle should have mentioned the feelings of pleasure in this connection. The view that poems sung (with the accompaniment of music, not just recited) to an audience are a source of pleasure for the hearers is an old one, that goes back to Homer. When Plato himself, in *Republic* X,

introduces the figure of the honeyed Muse (*hedusmene Mousa*, 607a5), thinking of the poetry of Homer and of those poets whose poems are a source of pleasure, he is in fact giving an imaginative version of what was a common-place. And what pleasure can they provoke if not an aesthetic one? And it is not a chance if Aristotle, in the passage quoted above of the *Eudemian Ethics*, recalls the spell exercised by the song of the Sirens, for it is sufficiently clear from Homer's description of the effect of their song that he regards it as an intensification of the spell exercised and the pleasure produced by the songs sung by a singer (*aoidos*) (cfr. *Odyssey* XII, vv. 37 ff., where there is mention of the enchanting effect (*thelgein*) and of the joy (*terpsis*) produced by their song, further vv. 183 ff. on the honey-sweetness of their song; on the similar effects attributed to the song sung by a singer see e.g. *Odyssey* I, vv. 337-38 and 346-47; VIII, vv. 43-45 and 62-64; XVII, vv. 518-21). Similar assertions about the effects of poetry or of singing are to be found in other poets as well (e.g. in Hesiod, *Theogony* vv. 36-38, vv. 80-104; Alcman, fr. 1; Pindarus, *Paean* VI, vv. 58-59; *Nemean* VII, v. 11; *Isthm.* V, vv. 53-54, and VI, v. 9; Euripides, *Medea* vv. 190-203; *Supplices* vv. 180-183).

Gorgias went beyond what was claimed by the poets as an effect of their songs, by admitting, apparently in connection with tragedy, that the art-work is a source of deception (*apate*), but that for the tragedian it is more 'right' (*dikaios*) to be successful in exercising this deception, because he is fulfilling his promise (presumably this implies that he does what is expected from him), and for the members of the audience it is wise to accept this deception, because each of them shows himself sensitive to the pleasure provided by the words which exercise this deception (cfr. B 23 from Plutarch, *de gloria Ath.* 5, 348C). On the effects of poetry in general, but probably having mainly tragedy in mind, he says something in § 9 of his *Encomium of Helena*, where he suggests (as Aristotle will do later) that it gives rise to emotions such as those of fear and compassion. He does not here suggest that involvment in these emotions can leave place to the feeling of pleasure, but this passage, according to the statement in the § which immediately precedes it, was meant to illustrate how the word (*logos*) eliminates pain and produces joy (*chara*) and even, somewhat paradoxically, stops fear. In the § 10 there is the further suggestion that the word exercises a sort of magic, with the effect of leading to pleasure and bringing away from pain. In this connection there is the mention of two arts of magic, evidently by means of words, meaning presumably poetry and rhetoric, which are 'errings' (*hamartemata*) of the soul and deceptions of opinion (*doxes apatemata*), thus introducing the motif of deception, which is developed (talking explicitly of falsity, but probably without intending to distinguish it from fiction) in the next §. Mention of deception in this connection serves to give an excuse

to Helena, according to the declared purpose of the *Encomium*, but clearly Gorgias has in mind the deception exercised by poetry. Of discourses, presumably rhetorical ones, to be delivered in contests (*agonas*), which are written in an artful way e not in conformity with truth, it is said in § 13 that they are pleasing (produce *terpsis*) and persuasive for a large mass of people. In § 14 Gorgias appears to admit that the effect that discourses have of emotional involvement, in giving sorrow or pleasure (*terpsis*) and in producing sensations of fear or of boldness (or confidence: *tharsos*), is not always positive, because there can be a malevolent persuasiveness that poisons and bewitches the soul: discourses are like drugs (*pharmaka*) that can bring away illness but also life. It is likely, finally, that Gorgias assumes a parallel between poetry and painting, for in § 18 he comes to talk of painting and of sculpture and says about the pictures that they give enjoyment to sight (*terpousi ten opsin*) and about statues that they produce a sort of sweet illness (*noson hedeian*) in the eyes.

It can be presumed that what Gorgias says in the *Encomium* at § 13, though applying to rhetoric, is to be extended to poetry, for he seems to be admitting a parallel between the two in § 10[26] and, in general, does not seem to want to distinguish the effects of rhetoric from those of poetry (a form of poetry is considered in B 23, and in § 18 he probably assumes a parallel between painting and poetry). This means that also in the case of poetry he admits an alternative between giving pleasure and transmitting the truth. The same alternative, we shall see, is formulated explicitly for poetry by the author of the *Dissoi logoi*. Giving up the pursuit of truth leaves space to deception, but this deception must be different from that obtained by telling a lie, since presumably it is understood as not excluding some consciousness of it, for there is wisdom in accepting it. (Notice that, in the Hippocratic *On Regimen*, which is an eclectic work by an author who must be familiar with Gorgia's views, the actor's art is kept distinct from e.g. commercial activities because 'it deceives those who know', cfr. I 24.) In short, it is not the deception of the one who takes as real what takes place on the scene in a theatre or what is painted. Everything is done in view of pleasure, which is natural to regard as aesthetic pleasure. Gorgias assumes that this pleasure is regarded as desirable even if he does not exclude that it can be harmful, and this confirms that in itself this is an extramoral pleasure. On the whole we cannot expect, from a writing such as the *Encomium of Helena* and from a brief passage paraphrased by Plutarch, the formulation of a well-developed aesthetic theory on Gorgias' part, but it is sufficiently clear that he gave a contribution

my article *Il potere della parola in Gorgia e in Platone*, in *Gorgia e la Sofistica*, «Siculorum Gymnasium» 38, 1985, pp. 65-80.

27. Cfr. *Aristotle's Poetics*, p. 64,

to aesthetics and that he regarded pleasure (*hedoné* or *terpsis*) as the main effect of an art-work.

(Similar motives are also to be found in the sophistical writing, of uncertain chronology, entitled *Dissoi logoi*. In III § 10 the author says, with explicit reference to the arts and the works of the poets, that in producing a tragedy or a painting, the one who deceives most by making them similar to what is true, i.e. to the originals, is the best poet or painter. (He does not explicitly talk of imitation, but similarity to what is true must suggest this notion.) Elsewhere, in III § 17 (and in II § 28) he makes an explicit reference to the arts what is just and what is unjust are not to be found (i.e. moral criteria are not operative) and says of the poets (evidently taken as possessor of an art of this type) that they produce their works in view of pleasure, not in view of the truth. The author thus seems to assume the existence of a field constituted by arts like poetry and painting which operate in an imitative way having pleasure in view, by exclusion of any reference to the truth and to moral criteria)

Leaving out Plato's position for the moment, some consideration must be given to Aristotle's position in his *Poetics*. It is not often remarked that in this work he tends to regard pleasure as the result or accomplishment of each of the forms of art or of literary genres which are discussed there. It is a result that, though external (thus different from the internal end [*telos*] which, in the case of tragedy, is its *muthos*, cfr. 6, 1450a22-23), is not extrinsic (just as producing a catharsis is not extrinsic), but apparently is regarded as the work (*ergon*) of the tragedy or other poetic work (cfr. ch. 13, beginning, and ch. 26, 1462b12-15). In the introductory part of the *Poetics* he treats all those genres as involving imitation (*mimesis*), but imitation itself is regarded as being a source of pleasure (see the beginning of ch. 4, where there are five occurrences of *hedoné* and cognate words: 48b8, 11, 13, 15, 18). When he gives his famous definition of tragedy at the beginning of ch. 6 he does not, admittedly, point out that pleasure is its accomplishment, but at least he mentions the fact that the language used must be 'pleasurably garnished' (cfr. 49b25-31) and (at the end of ch.) the same is said with reference to some parts of tragedy, namely singing and spectacle (of the latter it is said that it exercises seduction, but this was regarded as a source of pleasure by other authors, e.g. Gorgias); that music contributes to the pleasure raised by tragedy is also pointed out in ch. 26, 1462a16f. However, when later on, at the beginning of ch. 14, he comes back to the suggestion made in defining tragedy in ch. 6, namely that it gives rise to a 'purification' of the passions (mainly fear and compassion) which are put in movement by the tragedy, Aristotle explicitly points out that this is a source of pleasure (cfr. 1453b11 and 12). Tragedy is kept distinct both from comedy and from the epic poem because each of them gives rise to a pleasure

that is proper to it (cfr. end of ch. 13, and 26, implicitly in 1462a10-11, explicitly in 1462b1-3); this idea that each genre produces its proper pleasure is reaffirmed in a general way towards the end of ch. 26 (cfr. 1462b13f.). (The idea of producing the proper pleasure is introduced, in the case of tragedy, also in the passage already mentioned at the beginning of ch. 14; from this passage one desumes that bringing about this pleasure involves some restriction in the means used.) The comparison between tragedy and epic poem from this point of view is developed in ch. 24, 1460a11 ff. (cfr. 60a17). In this connection he mentions the marvellous (or the surprising: *thaumastón*) as what is realized by tragedy (he seems to have it in mind also in 18, 1456a19 ff.), and this is regarded as being pleasant also in the *Rhetoric* (cfr. I 11, 1371a31-34 and III 2, 1404b11-12). Also in discussing the composition of a tragedy, with the parallel of painting in ch. 6, 50a39-b3, and touching upon it for another reason in ch. 9, 51b19-26, there is the suggestion that it is a source of pleasure. Finally, he says something on the way in which a tragedy, because it has a form like a living being, gives raise to pleasure at the beginning of ch. 23. The centrality of the notion of pleasure comes out clearly from these passages.

Halliwell does not ignore the topic of pleasure in the *Poetics*, while giving little attention to the contributions by Aristotle in other works, but he is inclined to regard it as an obvious consequence of the mimetic character of tragedies and other types of poetry and of artwork. However it should be recalled that Aristotle, in *Poetics* 4, does admit that the contemplation of pictures, drawings and so forth is a source of pleasure, thus produces a certain effect on its viewer, but regards this, in some cases, where reference to the original is involved, as a pleasure coming from the fact that one is learning something, thus not as an aesthetic pleasure. And in his account there are other cases in which this is not so but what happens is that, "if by any chance the thing depicted has not been seen before, it will not be in so far as it is an imitation that it produces the pleasure, but in virtue of its execution or its colouring or some other such cause" (1448b17-19). Here the pleasure talked about is clearly of an aesthetic type, but is explicitly said not to depend on the mimetic nature of the art-work, while pleasure which is not of an aesthetic type is said to depend on such mimetic nature. Halliwell is not unaware of the difficulty raised by this passage, but does not seem to face it directly, for he only gives importance to the concession that something can 'give the pleasure' as an imitation[27]. He shows a similar attitude in discussing the pleasure of music, for he lies weight on the fact that Aristotle admits that music is a source of pleasure

under (b), and p. 72; see also his discussion of the topic in his contribution, entitled *Aristotle's Poetics*, to *The Cambridge History of Literary Criticism*, [pp. 149-183] pp. 162-63.

28. The passage is as follows: «Let pity

also in its imitative dimension, rather than on the fact that for him all music is pleasant (cfr. *Aristotle's Poetics*, cit., p. 68, n. 29 and Aristotle's main treatment of the matter in *Politics* VIII 5: it is clear that Aristotle agrees with Plato in regarding modes and rhythms as imitative, but music has other aspects, such a form and chromaticism, which cannot be regarded in this way; further, Aristotle associates what he regards as the 'natural pleasure' or the 'harmless pleasure' of music to the appreciation of recreation and relaxation, and this is independent of its imitative dimension). Further, he has to concede that Plato, in *Philebus* 51d, talks of pleasures which follows musical sounds that are said to be 'beautiful in themselves' (because of their smoothness and clearness etc.), thus independently of the imitative dimension of music. It can be added that Gorgias insists, as we have seen, on the pleasures procured by poetry and so forth, but does not suggest in any way that they particularly depend on their imitative character, for this is not even mentioned by him (it is not a chance that Gorgias' contributions are not given any independent place in Halliwell's account of the 'aesthetic of mimesis').

A final point to be touched upon, but which also serves to introduce a topic to be dealt with in what follows, is raised by the alternative which, we have seen, is to be found both in Gorgias and in the author of the *Dissoi logoi* concerning poetry, viz. the alternative between giving pleasure and transmitting the truth. It would seem that, in excluding the second horn of the alternative, they are also excluding that poetry is to be taken as giving instruction, admitting instead that it is to be judged on other criteria (such as the efficacy of the deception to which it gives rise). On the negative point that poetry does not give instruction there is an agreement by Plato, but he supposes that it *claims* to give instruction, and thus is to be judged on this basis. On examination this claim turns out to be ungrounded it, precisely because poetry does not transmit the truth (it does not transmit the truth about the gods and so forth). Hence poetry is to be admitted as a positive influence in human life only in so far as it exercises some other valuable function such as being edifying and as contributing to the formation of an harmonic personality. Otherwise poetry, in that it advances a claim that is ungrounded, it is to be condemned as a source of deception. Aristotle, in his *Poetics*, disagrees with Gorgias in that he admits that poetry gives instruction, and is not only a source of pleasure, but he does not directly oppose Plato, since the sort of instruction which poetry is supposed by him to provide is not that which Plato has in mind and which has to do with traditional *paideia*. Poetry addresses an audience of adult educated people, and they are not in need of instruction because *paideia* is behind them. What they learn from works of poetry is rather like what they would learn from works of history, if they could learn something from those other works, what is excluded by Aristotle.

11. The place of aesthetic pleasures and their variety

The recognition that certain pleasures are of the aesthetic type requires a differentiated treatment of pleasure. It can be doubted that Plato, in the dialogues of the first period of his activity, was willing to envisage such a treatment. An explanation that can be given of the fact that in the *Greater Hippias* the definition of beauty in terms of what is pleasant to the eye and to the ear is not developed, but ends by being rejected, is that it cannot be admitted that this be a type of pleasure that can be distinguished from other types, since (it is argued) anything pleasant in so far as it is pleasant is not different from anything else that is pleasant (cfr. 299d). At some stage, however, Plato recognized that one cannot treat all forms or types of pleasure in the same way.

The clearest recognition of this fact is to be found in the *Philebus*, where the assertion is made that pleasure is 'variagated' (*poikilon*), for, in spite of being called with one name, it presents a variety of forms (*morphas*) which are not all similar one to the other (cfr. 12c). In the *Republic* there is no general formulation like this one, but the recognition of this fact is operative, for more than one typology of forms of pleasure is introduced in the dialogue. One of these typologies has to do with the distinction of necessary and non necessary desires and anticipates the well-known Epicurean threepartition of pleasures (cfr. VIII 558d ff. and IX 571a-b). The typology which interests us most is the one we have already met, and it is developed in the *Philebus*. He adopts a double distinction: that between pleasures that are pure and pleasures that are not pure, because they are associated with pain; and that between pleasures that are true or genuine and pleasures that are not so. The first distinction is not difficult to understand: a pleasure that arises from the satisfaction of some need, e.g. of the appetite of hunger, cannot be regarded as pure, because the condition of need is painful. But this pleasure could also be regarded as illusory, since one feels as pleasant the elimination of the pain, but this is in fact only a condition of not feeling pain, not one of positively feeling pleasure (on this point there is an obvious disagreement between Plato and Epicurus). As one can see, a pleasure that is not pure may also be illusory, though this coincidence is not necessary. Plato anyhow does not make recourse to the distinction between genuine and illusory pleasure in the case that is of interest for us, that of the impure or mixed pleasures that are provoked by tragedy. As we shall see, he maintains that the representation of a tragedy, if efficacious, gives rise in the public to certain emotions, such as those of pity and fear, that are painful in themselves, but which are accompanied by a feeling of pleasure. This feeling of pleasure must be regarded as impure, in view of its connection with those painful emotions, while it is not clear

if it has to be regarded as illusory as well. It should be regarded as illusory if it is the result of the relieving of a sort of need, that of giving vent to the feelings of fear and pity. Plato is not sufficiently explicit on this point. But in any case he seems to regard the impurity of these pleasures as a sufficient reason for condemning them.

This approach to pleasure, as one can see, is ethical and, to some extent, metaphysical (in the distinction between true and illusory pleasures), but of a metaphysics which is not to be separated from ethics. Plato's question always remains what pleasure, in its various forms, contributes to the good life of a person. When the request is advanced, in the discussion of art in *Republic* X, that poetry shows itself not only pleasant but also useful (cfr. 607e), it is sufficiently clear that this usefulness lies in a positive contribution to the goodness of the good life of a person. It is true that he admits, most explicitly (as we shall see) in the *Laws*, that relaxation and play must have a part in the life of a person, as a relief from its labours, so that a positive contribution is not always required, and the request may become *de facto* that the pleasure results in being harmless. But he is not willing to treat the impure pleasures procured by tragedy as harmless. (Further restrictions, discussed below, in admitting the poets in the well-governed city, concern the contents of their works.) In the *Laws*, as we have seen above (in ch. 9), he admits that pleasure can operate as a discriminatory taste when exercised by a virtuous and educated person, but education is understood there as a training of the feelings of pleasure and of pain so that one likes what is good (and not simply beautiful in an aesthetic sense) and dislikes what is bad (see my discussion Part II, ch. 16). Thus there is freedom in the exercise of taste only in so far as what is beautiful coincides or is in accordance with what is good. Beyond prospecting this situation Plato does not show any interest in illustrating how this freedom is exercised.

Aristotle's approach is to a large extent similar to that of Plato, though he does not make recourse to the metaphysical distinction between true and illusory pleasures. His main treatment of pleasure (in fact, two distinct treatments) is to be found in the *Nicomachean Ethics* and is conducted from the point of view of a discussion of the question as to what pleasure, in its various forms, contributes to the good life of a person. (There is a clear recognition of the fact that pleasure presents various forms. There is also a discussion of the related questions whether pleasure is itself to be regarded as the good for man, or whether pleasure is to be regarded as intrinsically bad, these two being extreme positions which are excluded by him.) Aesthetic pleasures however are not considered from this point of view in that work. But he freely admits (in IV [11] 14, 1127b34 ff.) that relaxation is one part of life and that one form of relaxation consists in amusement in a playful way, for instance in conversation.

That the (evidently: harmless) pleasures coming from attending the performance of certain comedies (with reservations however towards the Aristophanic ones) belongs to this sphere is suggested by an allusion contained in that chapter (cfr. 1128a20-25). One gets the impression, from certain passages of the *Politics* which cannot be discussed here, that he admits a higher form of relaxation, consisting in entertainment that cannot be associated with play since it involves learning, to which music can contribute in a significant way.

Anyway, he has something to say on the place to be given to aesthetic pleasures when discussing education in music in *Politics* VIII ∑. He has something to say on this point when discussing education in music in *Politics* VIII, for he there raises the question what functions music has in human life, beyond the educative one which is the main concern of his treatment in this book. His position is (said very briefly) that music has a part in the leisure that is indispensable for happiness, and that it has such a part as being a source of pleasure (cfr. 3, 1338a1 ff. and 5, 1339b17 ff.). This point can easily be extended to other arts, for he for instance recommends drawing as being useful for a better judging of the products of craftsmen, but this is a judgement that concerns their beauty (cfr. 3, 1338a17-19 and b1-2). However this point has not unrestricted validity, because Aristotle expects that one aims at the best pleasures and these are those which come from the finest things (cfr. 1338a7-9 [not just «noblest things», as Kraut translates, but also not just «most beautiful» in a purely aesthetic sense]).

Further pleasure, as we have seen, has some place in the *Poetics*, especially a propos the admission that there is a proper pleasure for each literary genus: for tragedy, for comedy, and so forth. Notoriously in the case of tragedy this pleasure is to be put in relation to its cathartic function. There is no attempt, on the other hand, to introduce differentiations inside each literary genus, when these of course would most directly concern pleasure as a discriminatory taste. But it seems to be assumed that the works which are the best examples of tragedy and so forth are also those which procure the finest pleasures.

Plato sometimes adopts the view that either poetry in particular or the mimetic arts in general can only be a source of pleasure, and this becomes a reason to either condemn them (as happens in the *Gorgias*) or to devalue them (as happens in the *Politicus*). Sometimes however he admits that certain at least of these arts, and especially music, though being a source of pleasure, have a positive value (this happens in *Republic* III 398c ff. and in some passages of the *Laws*), evidently because the pleasure they procure cannot be regarded as harmful. Thus, in two passages of the *Timaeus* in which he talks of the effect of music (i.e. 47c-e and 80b, to be quoted in

part II, ch. 28), he makes a distinction between the pleasure which is said to be irrational and to be experienced by silly people, and the good cheer which is experience by intelligent people. People of the first sort must be supposed to be most people, for the view that this is the only benefit procured by music is said to be the prevailing one. Further, of a tale (*muthos*) that is told by Socrates at the end of the conversation he is represented to have had before his death, and of a tale that is supposed to have been heard by the young Critias, it is suggested that they are a source of pleasure for the hearers (cfr. *Phaedo* 110b, and *Timaeus* 26b-c). Since these are tales that are actually told in the Platonic dialogues (the first at the end of the *Phaedo*, the second in the incomplete *Critias*) with a manifest edifying purpose, there cannot be any doubt that the pleasure such tales procure cannot be judged in a negative way.

What he constantly denounces is the finalization of the arts to give pleasure to the moltitude (to 'the many', *hoi polloi*) or to the mass (*ochlos*). This is evident for instance in the *Gorgias* (cfr. 501e11-502a1 and 502c9), in *Republic* X (cfr. 599a4, 604e4-6, 605a4, 608a4-5, though these are not all passages in which the pleasure procured to 'the many' is explicitly mentioned), and in the *Laws*. Here, in III 700a ff. (discussed below, ch. 17), there is an opposition between a situation in which educated people, belonging to those who are 'better' (cfr. 700c5 and e3), imposed their judgement on the mass [*pleistos ochlos*, 700c7] or moltitude of citizens [*tôn politôn to plethos*, d1-2], and the situation in which it is this mass [in addition to the just mentioned passages it is referred to in 700c3 and in e5] which prevails with its judgement, with the consequence that it is the pleasure it looks for that constitutes the aim of the poets (cfr. 700d6 and e2-4); rather similar is II 658e ff., also discussed below, where pleasure is accepted as a criterion of judgement, if it is the pleasure of a person who emerges in education and virtue; the judgement of this person should prevail on that of the multitude, who is deprived of education (cfr. 659a5-6), in leaving no place to pleasure which 'has been aroused improperly and not rightly' (659b3-5). In what consists this bad pleasure (to which reference is made also talking of non educated judges, in 959c1-2) is not explained, but, in saying that with the opposite situation there is a corruption in the pleasures felt by the spectators, he adds, to make it clear to what this situation is opposed: «they ought to come to experience more elevated pleasures (*beltio ten hedonen*) from listening to the portrayal of characters invariably better (*beltio*) than their own» (659c3-4). The negative situation was also presented, a little earlier, as being that in which one pleases most (*malista*) most people (*pleistous*) (658e5).

In Plato's dialogues 'the many' or the mass are almost always opposed to the educated or virtuous or expert person, as in these

passages of the *Laws*, and declared to be uneducated or ignorant (for that opposition cfr. e.g. *Crito* 46b-d; *Greater Hippias* 284d-e; *Gorgias* 459a; for their ignorance cfr. e.g. *Alcibiades I* 111e; *Republic* X 602b3; *Gorgias* 459a; *Laws* VIII 831b7). But there is also the tendency to admit an equivalence between 'the many' and the people (*demos*) in the sense of the people who are the prevailing part in an assembly under a democratic regime like that adopted in Athens. (The equivalence of *ochlos* and *demos* is adopted in *Gorgias* 502c9 and in the context, where he starts with *ochlos* [in 502a1] and passes to *demos* [in 502d5, d10]; also in a prior part of the dialogue he starts with *ochlos* [in 458e7 and 459a3-4], then passes to 'the many' [in 459e ff.], and at some point talks of *demos* [481d ff.], manifestly alluding always to the same people. The same equivalence between *hoi polloi* and *demos* is implied in *Euthyphron* 3b and in *Laws* VIII 831b.) This tendency is noticeable also in other authors, like Thucydides and Lisias, when one considers that democracy, as the regime in which 'the many' are those who prevail, is opposed to oligarchy, where it is 'the few' who prevail. (In the *Republic* one also notices a tendency to admit an affinity between 'the many' and the inferior part of the soul, cfr. e.g. IV 431a8.)

Now, of the multitude considered in this way it is said by Plato that they are not able to pursue any other objective than pleasure, sometimes with the added qualification that this objective consists in the pleasures of the lowest or animal sort. Thus in the *Protagoras*, where Socrates submits 'the many' to a fictitious interrogation, it is maintained that they are not able to prospect any other aim than getting pleasure and avoiding pain (cfr. 354b5-c2, d1-3, d7-e2, 355a1-5). In a more indirect way this same position is to be found in the *Gorgias* as well, for there the hedonism which is defended by Callicles and which consists in giving satisfaction to one's desires without limitation, is presented as the position which 'the many' approve in their hearts and disapprove in their words only because they are unable to realize it (cfr. 491e ff.). In *Republic* VI, when introducing the Idea of good, it is asserted that 'the many' believe that the good is nothing but pleasure (*hoti tois men pollois hedonè dokei einai to agathon*, 505b5-6). In book IX there is talk of the condition of those who, not being able to contemplate the superior reality of what is bodiless, cannot do anything but pursue bodily pleasures, especially those connected with feeding and sex, in a way similar to that of animals, and the comment that is made (by the interlocutor of Socrates) is that this is quite an appropriate description for the life of 'the many' (cfr. 586a-c). Similarly, at the conclusion of the *Philebus* it is asserted that 'the many' give credit to animals like oxen and horses in believing that the only end to be pursued is that of pleasure (cfr. 67b). Finally, in *Phaedrus* 256c the view is attributed to them that the most happy life is that which contains sexual enjoyment.

It can be added that Aristotle shares this low opinion of the majority of people. For instance he claims, in *Nicomachean Ethics* I 3 [5], 1095b14-17 and 19-22 that most men, being of the vulgar type, identify the good with pleasure: their slavish tastes induce them to prefer a life suitable to beasts. The same error of identifying the good with pleasure is attributed to them in III 6, 1113a33-b2. Further in X 1, 1172a31-32 he says of 'the many' that they are slaves of their pleasures. This looks then like a prejudice widespread among philosophers.

Whatever one thinks of this prejudice, it gives rise to some trouble in the case of aesthetic pleasures, for a number of these passages (in both Plato and Aristotle) suggest that the pleasures which are pursued by the mass of men are not those restricted to sight and hearing that distinguish a man from a beast but precisely those of the other senses that are common to men and animals. What then about the pleasures restricted to sight and hearing which also should be pursued by them, if the aim of poets (either in general or by a perversion) is that of coming encounter the desire of pleasure held by the many? For instance a tragedy, being destined to a representation that has its immediate effect on sight and hearing, cannot directly satisfy the appetites connected with the other senses. Perhaps it can be admitted that there are ways in which a taste can be met that has been corrupted by giving priority in one's life to the pleasures of the lowest type. Still, this corruption is something limited, for it concerns the imagination. On this point, then, there is an inconsistency in Plato's and Aristotle's attitude towards the multitude, for an appreciation of tragedies and other artworks by 'the many', however corrupted it may be, is different from pursuing animal pleasures and thus requires a different characterization of their personality.

In fact it would seem that Plato does offer this other characterization of their personality when describing the typically democratic attitude to life in *Republic* VIII. The suggestion there is that the democratic constitution is not one constitution but a sort of bazaar of constitutions in which each citizen chooses the one which suits him in any given time. This means, from his own point of view, that he will adopt the way of life that pleases him at that time (constitution, *politeia* in Greek, being not just a certain political regime but a way of life, both for the single person and for the collectivity). For instance, he will live in peace when he wants to do so, even if the rest of the city is at war, or, contrariwise, he will be at war when the rest lives in peace, and he will avoid assuming governing functions even if he has the capacity, if this is not his wish, or assume them when he wishes, and he will equally avoid being governed unless he wishes (cfr. 557b and d-558a).

Beyond the satirical excess in this description, which regards life in the public dimension, there is the conviction that the democratic

man has an attitude to life which is in neat contrast with the requirement of specialization formulated for the well-governed city of the *Republic* and which is that of the polymorphous dilettante who pursues a certain activity till this gives him pleasure and, when tired with it, passes to some other activity, without taking anything very seriously. This is stated rather explicitly in a successive passage, where a more plausible description is given of his private pursuits: he lives from day to day indulging the appetite which prevails that day, sometimes drinking wine and sometimes drinking water, trying to get thin; sometimes he takes a turn at gymnastics, and sometimes is idling and neglecting everything; sometimes he plays the flute and sometimes gives himself to doing philosophy. It is a life where order and necessity are absent but which he regards as free and pleasant and blissful (cfr. 561c-d). Underlying this attitude is a psychological condition, described in the intermediate passage, which consists in giving satisfaction to non necessary desires and pleasures, that is desires oriented to what is superfluous in life, without admitting the existence of any hierarchy among them (cfr. 559d-e, 560d, 561a).

In this description of the psychology and of the way of life of the democratic man and in this presentation of the democratic constitution as the one which favours the whimsical choices of that man one can view the intention to show not only that it is under that regime that the most favourable conditions are to be found for the pursuit of the activities which give rise to aesthetic pleasure but also that the regime itself is characterized by some sort of aestheticism. This is in fact suggested in indirect ways more than by the frequent mention of those activities (only playing the flute is actually mentioned). One indirect way in which it is suggested is by the description given of the democratic constitution as being the most beautiful one, for it is «like an embroidered robe which is spangled with every sort of flower», thus being particularly appreciated by 'the many', as variety of colours is particularly appreciated by women and children (cfr. 557c). This description is later extended to the life of the democratic man, which is said to be manifold and varied like the fair and spangled constitution to which he belongs (cfr. 561e).

It must be recognized that not everything that Plato says about the democratic regime and the democratic man can be seen in this light. There are parts, in this same part of *Republic* VIII, in which democracy is seen for instance as a perversion of all values and virtues, for in it sense of honour is called silliness, temperance unmanliness, moderation vulgarity, or, on the contrary, insolence is called breeding, anarchy liberty, and so forth (cfr. 560d-e, a passage which recalls Thucydides, III 82.4 ff.), and also the process of leaving free reins to the desires is described as leading to an excess that cannot be stopped (cfr. 560a-d). In fact, there is, I think, a strong

ambivalence in this treatment of democracy and of the democratic man. Sometimes there is a prevalence of the intention to give an account of them which makes it evident that all the conditions are present in it for its conversion in the worse regime, that of tyranny, for excess of liberty leads to the contrary excess, just as the excess of heath in the summer season leads to the excess of cold in the winter season (cfr. 563e-564a). Sometimes however he is willing to admit that the democratic man can find, at least in favourable circumstances, some sort of equilibrium in his life, by giving some place to the virtues and by cultivating the pleasures in such a way as keep them on an equal footing, thus avoiding (it is implied) the risk of an excess that cannot be stopped (cfr. 561a-b). This account can easily be extended to the democratic regime, and both this regime and the democratic man can be seen as those who typically favour the cultivation of those useless pleasures which come from the activities connected with the fine arts.

12. The issue of the 'mixed' pleasures produced by tragic representations according to Gorgias and to Plato as indicative of their attitudes to aesthetics

Gorgias' contribution to aesthetics is not without influence on the reflection by Plato and by Aristotle. It is not only the issue of deception that becomes burning but also that of the pleasure that is produced by tragedy or, in general, by the representation of some misfortune happening to somebody who does not (fully) deserve it. This representation gives rise to feelings of pity (or compassion: *eleos*) and fear (*phobos*), but experiencing these feelings is itself a source of pleasure. This rather paradoxical fact is simply accepted by Gorgias, for he shows no concern for the moral effect of the condition in which the members of the audience find themselves. The pleasure involved is however different from the 'pure' pleasure one feels in enjoying for instance an harmonious piece of music or in seeing a beautiful statue.

That the pleasure involved is different is recognized by Plato, who keeps the pleasure that is provoked by assisting to a tragedy or to a comedy distinct from the 'pure' pleasures he talks about in the above mentioned passage of *Philebus* 51b ff. This other pleasure cannot be regarded as pure precisely because the person who feels it experiences at the same time a painful feeling (that consisting in pity and fear in the case of tragedy), thus finds himself in a condition which is a mixture of pleasure and pain (this is stated in a previous part of that dialogue: 48a ff.). It is sufficiently clear that also in the *Republic* there is a difference, in his eyes, from the moral point of view, because the 'pure' or harmless pleasures (such as those that

one feels in enjoying for instance an harmonious piece of music) and the 'impure' pleasures that are produced by tragedy. The former are to be approved and their creators to be admitted (as is sufficiently clear from *Republic* IV 401b ff., with references to pleasure and displeasure in 401e-402a and 402d ff.), the latter are to be condemned and their creators are to be excluded (as is sufficiently clear from *Republic* X). Aristotle comes back to this issue and provides a way out to Plato's condemnation of tragedy with his well-known suggestion that the feelings of pity and fear have a cathartic effect on the soul of the person who assists to its representation. Thus the consequent pleasures cannot be harmful. (Aristotle does not question the fact that these pleasures are different from the 'pure' ones that, as we have seen, are recognized by him.)

To have a closer look at Plato's position, the importance that this issue has for him come out from the fact that in *Republic* X he calls what he has to say on it «the gravest charge against poetry» (cfr. 605c). His point of departure is the admission (that results from the previous account of imitation, clearly given having tragedy primarily in mind, cfr. 603c ff.) that the effect that poetry obtains is through the representation of the misfortunes of some person who appears not to deserve them and thus is supposed to deserve pity or compassion. (That the person appears not to deserve them is not said explicitly, but is implicit in the admission that he is an object of pity, cfr. the definition of *eleos* given by Aristotle that I quote below.) The spectator, who is looking at sufferings that are not his own, is thus induced to pity a person who (evidently on the scene) claims to be good and immoderately laments (*scil.* his misfortune) (cfr. 606b1-3). Poetry gives satisfaction to our appetite for giving vent to feelings of sorrow and of pitying, and in this way it is also a source of pleasure. This pleasure is regarded as a gain by those who feel it, so this (it is implied) is what makes poetry so appreciated. Plato himself views this process in a negative way, because he believes that these passions, when strengthened in this way, cannot be kept under control, but pleasure and pain, together with the other passions, will become the dominating forces in our soul (cfr. 606d, also 607a6, with extension to the whole community).

Now, concerning this passage, it can be noticed that Plato admits that those who listen (including 'the best of us') to Homer or to one of the tragedians who imitates a hero who gives expression to his sorrows in a situation (evidently) of misfortune delight in giving way to sympathy (*sumpaschontes*) (cfr. 605c10-d5). What happens is that, contrary to what one would do in the case of one's own misfortune, one relaxes one's control (*phylaké*) over the 'lamentative' part (*threnodes touto*) of our soul and thus participates 'sympathetically' in the weeping and lamentation of the hero imitated, and at the same time pities him (cfr. 606a3-b3). That there

is involvement in the representation of something pitiful is reasserted in what follows (cfr. 606b7-8). Of the sentiments or passions that were mentioned before Plato by Gorgias and that will be mentioned by Aristotle fear (*phobos*) is missing (the insistence on the couple pity and fear in Aristotle seems rather conventional and should not be taken to exclude other passions, referred to generically as *toiauta pathemata* in *Poet*. 6, 1449b27-28). However this omission does not seem to be of any significance, for in the *Ion* there is explicit reference to the fact that a rhapsode like Ion will feel pity when telling something that is pitiful (*eleinon ti*) and will prove fear when telling something that is fearful (*phoberon e deinon*) (cfr. 535c), thus manifestly recalling the conventional couple of pity and fear. And, according to the view expounded in that dialogue (on which more Part II, ch. 25), also the audience will find itself in the same emotional condition. Similarly in *Phaedrus*, 268c5-d2, in remarking that composing a tragedy requires more than making single discourses of a certain kind, among the examples given of such discourses that are those which are pitiful (*reseis oiktrai*) and those which, on the contrary, are frightning (*phoberai*) or threatening.

Now, it is said that the sentiments or passions of pity, sorrow and so forth that one proves arise from the contemplation of extraneous sufferings (*allotria pathe theoroun*, 606b1). It is sufficiently clear that an opposition is adopted in the passage between these 'extraneous' sufferings and misfortune and the sufferings and disgraces of one's own (*oikeion kedos*, 605d6, *oikeiai xumphorai*, 606a3, *apo tôn allotriôn eis ta oikeia*, 606b6), for it is asserted that in the case of the latter shame and other such considerations induce us to keep in check the expression of the sentiments one has. In this context it is not made clear whether the latter sufferings and disgraces concern only one's person. However in 603e reference is made to such disgraces as the loss of one's son (the same sort of example is given in III 387e), and this certainly shows that the suffering can concern what happens to another person, though the closeness of one's son to oneself makes the situation different from the attitude one may have towards a person with whom one has no close relationship.

The passage recalls Gorgias, *Encomium of Helen* § 9, but there the point is that one has a proper feeling [*idion ti pathema*], i.e. a feeling of one's own, concerning persons and events that are extraneous, thus there is a sort of reversal of that position. Yet it is likely that Plato does not want to reject what had been asserted by Gorgias, but believes that, in contemplating extraneous sufferings, one has also feelings of one's own, for this is precisely the point of saying that one has 'sympathy' for the sufferings of the hero represented on the stage.

The question that arises at this point is whether, according to Plato, only 'sympathy' or 'com-passion' is involved as a reaction on the part of the public or something more, namely some sort of identification with the personage represented. If only the sentiment of pity were taken in consideration, it could seem that the first reaction would be the only one to be expected. But the mention of the feelings of sorrow and of fear appear to suggest that there is the assumption that some identification with the personage is accomplished, for these feelings are justified only if one imagines oneself to be in his place. It is likely however that pity (*eleos*) is not treated as substantially different from these other feelings, in spite of the admission of some sort of opposition between this and that of fear in the passage of the *Phaedrus*. Plato himself does not say anything about how he conceived this feeling. Aristotle however, in *Rhetoric* II 8, gives a definition of pity which shows that he thinks that some identification is involved, because the suffering that one proves for an undeserved evil that happens to another person is said to be such that one can expect it to happen to oneself or to a person that is close to oneself (this extension coincides with the one admitted by Plato, with the example of the loss of one's son, so that the coincidence may touch also the rest; Aristotle in any case is giving a definition which is generally agreed upon, and Plato, on the issue that interests us, does not seem to want to reject conventional wisdom)[28].

Plato does not restrict this account to tragedy, for he thinks the same effect is obtained by epic poems, tough certainly this is intensified in the case of tragedy. The case of comedy cannot be identical to that of tragedy, and Plato refers to it in talking of the ridiculous (cfr. 606c). He suggests there is a parallel between the two cases, in that one gives satisfaction to one's propensity (due to the inferior part of our soul) to ridiculing others and to buffoonery through an interposed person (the one on the scene), without realizing that, in this way, this negative propensity will get the overhand in our soul. The parallel, one can see, is only partial. A more developed account of what is involved in ridiculing others is given by him in the *Philebus*, where the suggestion is that the malicious feelings (due to envy, jealousy, etc.) that one experiences towards one's friends or neighbours are given satisfaction when ills befall to them, this satisfaction being a source of pleasure (cfr. 48a-b, 49a-

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be {defined as} a certain pain {felt} at the manifestation of destructive or painful evil happening to one who does not deserve it and which a person might expect himself or one of his own to suffer, and this when it manifestates itself close at hand.» (1385b13-16) In what follows Aristotle remarks that people feel pity if they think that certain persons are among the good ones, for those who think that none are such will think all worthy of their suffering (cfr. 1385b34-86a1).

29. 'Noble' is manifestly ironical.

50b). On this account there is a mixture of pleasure and pain even in the case of comedy, for the pain consists in experiencing those malicious feelings, the pleasure in the reaction just described.

The consequence that is drawn in *Republic* X, on the basis of this but also of other 'charges against poetry' (on these more below), is that the poetry of Homer and of other great poets must be left out from the well-governed city, in order to avoid that, instead of law (*nomos*) and reason (*logos*), pleasure and pain be the rulers (cfr. 607a). In the treatment of the education of the guardians in books II and III of this work the more moderate solution was proposed of excluding from the poems the passages which for instance illustrated the depreciable behaviour of some hero like Achilles. But of course it would have been difficult to preserve a poem like the *Ilias* after the big cuts to which it would have to be submitted. (It is true that in the *Laws*, as we shall see, he contemplates the possibility of revisions through rewriting of parts by another poet.) Anyhow, from this other treatment, it is manifest that there are other, similar ways, in which the poets are able to obtain an emotional involvement in their audience. One example is that given at the beginning of book III, where what is to be excluded is the depiction of the Hades done in a fearful manner in a number of Homeric passages, for this would encourage the fear of death in the guardians. A similar censure will have to concern songs and music, for those melodies and rhythms which express excessive lamentation and encourage sorrow (cfr. III 398d-e, further *Laws* VII 800d-e) and those which are soft and morbid (cfr. III 398e) must be excluded.

Plato does not deny that much of the fascination exercised by poetry and by music depends precisely on the use of the techniques he condemns. Thus, in *Republic* III, when propounding the exclusion of the passages depicting Hades, he says that they are to be excluded not because 'not poetical and not sweet to the ears of the many', but because, 'the more poetical they are', the less apt they are for the ears of boys and men who are meant to be free and should fear slavery more than death (cfr. 387b). Later in this book he admits that one of the styles to be avoided is not only pleasant, but by far the most pleasant for children and their attendants and for 'the many' (cfr. 397d). In book X, when coming to «the gravest charge against poetry», he remarks that even «the best of us» are induced to give way to sympathy at the depiction of the suffering hero and to praise as good the poet who most succeeds in stirring our feelings (cfr. 605c-d); that this praise is motivated by a feeling of pleasure is suggested by what follows (esp. 605e6). Towards the conclusion of the discussion it is conceded that poetry, especially that of Homer, exercises a spell on the speakers themselves, so that they would be happy if a defence could be found for her against the charges (cfr. 607c4-d1). But, it is added, if the defence fails, for it has not been

shown that poetry is not just pleasant but also useful, we have to give up our love for her, just as one has to give up a love for a person when recognizing it is not beneficial. This is a childhood love (this motif, introduced in 608a5, qualifies 'the love from childhood' of 595b9-10), prevalent in 'the many', which has been implanted in us by the education that is imparted in cities with a noble constitution (this allusion, in 607e6-608a1, is clearly ironical). Thus, in listening what poetry has to say in her favour, 'we shall repeat to ourselves like an incantation the argument we now put forward and be careful not to fall' into that love (608a2-5) - a suggestion that recalls what had been said initially (in 595b6-7) of the need of an antidote (*pharmakon*) against the effects of mimetic poetry through knowledge of the truth (presumably the truth about *mimesis*) : 'We shall chant, therefore, that this sort of poetry (namely, *imitative* poetry) is not to be taken seriously as if it had any contact with truth and were a serious matter, but that the man who hears it must be careful, fearing for his own constitution (*politeia*) [i.e. that of his soul], and what we have said about poetry must be taken as normative' (608a6-b2).

These passages show an awareness on Plato's part that aesthetic values cannot be reduced to ethical values, only that he is not willing to regard them as «values» at all, if they cannot be shown to be completely in harmony with the ethical values. This possibility is excluded, sometimes in a radical way, as in the treatment of *Republic* X, when the effect of what is (admittedly) highly poetical, thus highly satisfying from an aesthetic point of view, are pleasures that are not pure. It is not excluded when the effect of what is beautiful and/or harmonious consists in pleasures that are pure (on this point see more below). The difference however between these two types of artworks is not such that one can say that only one type of them are genuine artworks, which are the only source of aesthetic values. The recognition of this fact constitutes inevitably a serious problem for Plato's approach, and must have been one of the reasons why his approach was abandoned by Aristotle.

Both in the case of Gorgias and in the case of Aristotle we can say they contributed to aesthetics, even if their approaches are different. But can one say that Plato contributed to aesthetics? One way of giving a positive reply to this question is admitting that he contributed unwittingly to it. In trying to convince his readers to fight what for him is the devil, he is obliged to give a description of it. In other words, in condemning a certain kind of aesthetic pleasure as harmful, he has to explain how this harm works, and in this sense he is contributing to aesthetics. (A reply of this type is given by Marc Jemenez in his *Qu'est-ce que l'esthétique*, Paris 1997, pp. 228-29. I quote: «Demandons-nous s'il n'est pas l'un des premiers à dire la vérité de l'art. Il décrit dans le détail toutes les perversions auxquelles

donne lieu l'activité artistique. Il recense le formes de séduction qu'elle suscite et les vices qu'elle engendre, en montrant par quel moyen elle agit sur l'âme. Pour condamner le mal, il faut en décrire les symptômes et les effects. C'est bien ce que fait Platon. Il diagnostique l'énergie érotique corrosive, subversive, dérangeante contenue en puissance dans l'art, dans la *poïesis*, comme disent les Grecs. Il croit nous mettre en garde; en fait, il attire notre attention sur l'essentiel, à savoir sur la capacité de rupture de la création. Mieux que quiconque, et déjà a son époque, il sait la où l'art fait mal et ce que blesse: l'absence d'harmonie, les dissonances, les sons nouveaux, les chorégraphies lascives, la poésie voluptueuse, la gymnastique trop sensuelle ou trop acrobatique, la peinture virtuose, colorée et chatoyante, les sculptures aux formes mouvantes… Non seulement il dresse le catalogue des poètes et artistes interdits: Homère, Aristophane, tous les musiciens disciples du satyre Marsyas, etc., mais il établit soigneusement la liste de plaisirs qu'on peut tirer de leur fréquentation. Pour parler de façon anachronique, on pourrait dire que Plato développe, parallèlement à une esthétique idéaliste, une esthétique de la réception, de l'effet, e que sa réflexion sur l'art tient à la fois de la sociologie et de la psychologie de l'art.») On the whole I think this reply is correct, but in need of certain restrictions. In the first place it is probable that we are induced to overrate the originality of Plato's contribution to aesthetics from this point of view, for the little we know of Gorgias' work makes one think that on various points he developed what had already received a formulation by the sophist. In the second place, Plato pursues this objective up to a point, for it remains a secondary objective in his eyes, and his other (primarily moral) preoccupations remain dominating. One could add, on the other hand, that there are other ways in which Plato shows concern with the fine arts. One of this ways is the postulation of a sort of divine inspiration at the origin of their works. Even this however is largely influenced by the negative objective of showing that the poets do not possess genuine knowledge. Another way is given by his thoughts about beauty, which are not negative in purpose. Anyhow, it is one thing to say that Plato, in dealing with the fine arts, gives contributions that are of interest for the history of aesthetics, it is another thing to say that all or most of his contributions are of such interest and were meant to enhance our understanding of those arts from the aesthetician's point of view. We cannot ignore the context to which those contributions belong and, as we shall see going on, in various cases it has little or nothing to do with aesthetics. So there are reasons to question their traditional collocation in the history of aesthetics.

Plato's point of departure is the simple, basic question as to how we should live, if in a just or an unjust way, as a good man or not (cfr. *Gorgias* 487e-488a, 492d, 500b-d, *Republic* I 344d-e). The

alternative between the just and the unjust life is at the centre of whole treatment in the *Republic*. And this is recalled at the end of the discussion of poetry in book X, where he expresses himself as follows: «Great is the issue at stake (*megas ho agon*), greater than appears, whether a man is to be good or bad. And what will any one be profited if under the influence of honour or money or power, aye, or under the excitement of poetry, he neglect justice and virtue?» (608b4-8, Jowett's transl.) The question about poetry is itself simple, then: either it is not only pleasant but also useful (607d8), in the sense of contributing to the goodness of the good life, or it just should be excluded from one life. The same must be true of any other art which has products which procure pleasure (notice that poetry is associated to imitation in general in 607c5).

Less simple may however be the question of the way in which either poetry or any other such art contribute, with their products, to the goodness of the good life. This can in fact happen in an indirect way. It would seem that Plato is willing to admit this in the passage of the *Laws* (i.e. II 653c9-d5, quoted above, ch. 4) in which it is said that the gods conceded to us men relief from labour or relaxation ensured by the cultivation of the Muses in the occasion of events such as religious festivals. Similarly, in another passage of the *Laws* (i.e. VII 803d-e), it is said that the activities which have priority in human life are those which take place in a condition of peace and which have to do with play (or leisure: *paidià*) and with education (*paideia*). Thus «a man should spend his whole life at 'play' - sacrificing, singing, dancing - so that he can win the favour of the gods and protect himself from his enemies and conquer them in battle» (803e1-4, transl. Saunders). Welcoming, as a type of poetry which is to be admitted, hymns to the gods is clearly in the spirit of dedicating to the gods the time that is left free from labours (including those of war). Still, the pleasure that comes from cultivating certain forms of music on such occasions is not condemned, even if it is not immediately a part of moral goodness.

Further, pursuing activities of this sort is not just a matter of making a personal choice, for one is a member of a collectivity, of a city, and must be concerned with what happens to the souls of the other members of the collectivity. This itself is not without consequences even for one's own choices, for the education one receives and the environment in which one lives can make a great difference. It is not a chance if Plato, towards the end of the discussion in book X, in the passage quoted above, refers polemically to the fact that love for poetry is due to the education that is imparted in cities with a noble[29] constitution (*politeia*) and, at the same time, invites us to be careful about the constitution (*politeia*) of one's own soul.

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32. Cfr. Baldry, *I greci a teatro* [ital. transl.], Bari 1975, pp. 98-99, who later tou-

13. Aristotle's attitude to aesthetics in the Poetics *and in other works*

Before considering Plato's attitude to aesthetics into some more detail, I say something about Aristotle's attitude, for this can offer a useful term of comparison. On the whole Aristotle (following Gorgias on this point) recognizes the peculiarity of the domain of the fine arts and of aesthetic experience. What he says in *Poetics* ch. 25 and elsewhere shows that he admits the existence of rules proper to any given art and criteria of judgment concerning the products of that art, and that he expects these to be respected by the persons concerned. This is a situation that, in itself, should not lead to conflicts with the requirements of morals. What is satisfactory or valuable from an aesthetic point of view is also good for ethics, not because (as Plato claimed) there is no value outside ethics but because what has a genuine value from an aesthetic point of view cannot have negative consequences from an ethical point of view. (It could certainly be argued that the account that Aristotle gives of what is in accordance to the rules of poetry and produces an aesthetic pleasure is such as to require from the beginning some conformity to what is ethically right; but it is important to point out that he sees this conformity as required by those very rules of poetry, and not as a consequence of the adoption of rules extraneous to the field.) The practice of *mimesis*, as he points out at the beginning of his *Poetics*, is proper to man's nature just as his rationality, and one cannot admit that a conflict arises between the two, for this would imply that there are contrasting tendencies present in human nature. Thus what belongs to this practice, i.e. the production of art-works and their contemplation, cannot be morally harmful. Further, the practice of *mimesis*, in its various forms, is a source of pleasure, but pleasure, if harmless, is constitutive of happiness. Aesthetic pleasure which is pure is harmless, as we have seen, for it is neutral with respect to the virtue of temperance and, with greater reason (it is implied), with respect to the other virtues. Even 'impure' pleasure is harmless if it has a cathartic effect, as in the case of tragedy. (On this as on other points Aristotle is reacting to Plato's position rather than continuing Gorgias, without that this should mean that he ignores the latter's contribution.)

Aristotle admits that the wish to come encounter the desires of a non cultivated public can involve some perversion in the art. This is to be noticed in his comment towards the end of *Poetics* ch. 13, where he says that a certain type of composition is given priority to another because of «the weakness of the audiences, for the poets follow along, catering to their wishes» (1453a33-35). He also remarks that even good poets may be induced to compose tragedies in an unsatisfactory way, making them «episodic», because

they yield to the pressing requirements of their actors (cfr. 9, 1451b33 ff.), but clearly these actors themselves are motivated by the wish to do what ensures their greatest success with the public. (The evolution by which actors count more than the tragedians or other poets is signaled in the passage of *Rhetoric* III 1 considered below.) Similarly in *Politics* VIII 6, 1341b8 ff., he considers it as a danger of professionalism in the field of music that one plays an instrument in view of a low end, which is the pleasure of the audience and a pleasure which is vulgar. What happens is that «the listener is a common person (*phortikos*) and usually influences the music accordingly, so that it has an effect both on the personality of the professionals themselves who perform for him, and because of the motions which they make, on their bodies too» (1341b15-18). That also rhetoric can be perverted, for the same sort of reason, is suggested, with a parallel with poetry, in *Rhetoric* III 1. Here Aristotle, in discussing the role of delivery in rhetoric, points out that there had been an evolution by which this part of rhetoric had acquired prevalence on the others. Of the persons who are particularly able in the use of the techniques of delivery he says that they are the ones who win the contests, adding that "just as actors are more important now than poets in the poetic contests, so it is in political contests because of the sad state of governments" (1403b31-35). The reference to "the sad state of governments" shows that the prevalence of delivery is regarded as a perversion of rhetoric, so that the same must be true of poetry, for here winning competitions is seen as a sign of success with the general public, but to do poetry with the purpose of winning them perverts it.

It is also clear, from *Politics* VIII 7, 1342a19-20, where he introduces a distinction of two types of spectator, «the one a free and educated man, the other vulgar …», and also from the observations contained at the beginning of ch. 26 of the *Poetics*, that he recognizes the existence of two types of audience, that constituted by educated persons and that constituted by vulgar ones. In what follows, in *Politics* VIII 7, he says rather dismissively that «for the relaxation of this latter class also competitions and spectacles must be provided». That also the anthropomorphic representation of the gods contained in traditional myths, though of course not true, is to be regarded as good for the moltitude, in that belief in their reality may induce them to respect the laws, thus as a useful expedient, is something that is explicitly said by Aristotle in *Metaphysics* book XII 8, 1074b3-7. That he shares with Plato a low opinion of the majority of people was already remarked above (ch. 11). But the multitude is opposed to a minority of educated people, of which the philosophers are a part, even if a particularly significant part, and not just to the very few philosophers, as it

happens with Plato. And these educated persons are those who exercise the right appreciation towards the works of art.

This attitude by Aristotle is not indifferent for his actual treatment of tragedies in his *Poetics*, for he tends to present Sophocles as superior to Euripides not only for reasons connected with the composition of tragedies (e.g. the role attributed to the choir, cfr. ch. 18, 1456b25 ff.; recourse to the *deus ex machina*, cfr. 15, 1454b1 ff.; a more general but unspecified reproach against Euripides is to be found in 13, 1453a29) but also because the characters represented in them are noble, not those of ordinary persons (cfr. ch. 25, 1460b32 ff., also ch. 4, 1448b24 ff., and ch. 15), because 'irrational' acts (such as the killing of a person) are left out of the drama (cfr. ch. 15, 1454b6-8), and for other similar reasons which, it can be presumed, are noticed by an educated public.

Concerning his general approach in the *Poetics*, it can be said, rather synthetically, that is to be associated to what sometimes has been called genre criticism, with a concern with formal aspects like composition and structure of the works he considers. It is indicative of this perspective that he should talk of the function or work (*ergon*) of tragedy (cfr. 6, 1459a30-31 and 13, 1452b29-30), evidently supposing it to be different from other genres like comedy, just as he talks, as we have seen above (ch. 10), of the pleasure that is proper to each genre. (He also talks more generally of the *ergon* of the art of poetry, cfr. 26, 1426b12-15.) The idea is that each genre has its own characteristics and its internal needs that must be respected by the poet and which are taken into account in expressing judgements about the value of each work. Also indicative of this perspective is the subordination of the character to the plot and also, implicitly, to the genre, for what matters is not so much how it is to be valued from a moral point of view as how it fits in the sort of story in which the personage which has it plays a part (thus noble characters will be found typically in tragedies and ignoble ones will be found typically in comedies).[30] Similarly he thinks that the various episodes in which a drama can be divided and the sort of crucial events that can be identified in it (such as recognition and reversal) must contribute to the work as a whole, which is to be regarded as having a unitary plot. All these are aspects, in tragedies and other poetic works, that can only be appreciated by connoisseurs.

From all this it can be inferred that the poetics Aristotle is propounding (as part of an aesthetics) is addressed to the public of educated people. His attitude to pleasure is connected with this position, for he tends to admit that educated people will prove pleasure at learning, so that the pleasure provided by a good tragedy will not just be a purely aesthetic pleasure, but a combination of

30. On this classificatory use of character cfr. also part II, ch. 19.

aesthetic pleasure and the pleasure of learning. (It is not a chance that he insists on this sort of pleasure in *Poetics* ch. 4. An intellectualist attitude is evident in his *Rhetoric* as well, and has an application to the pleasure procured by the imitative arts in I 11, 1371b4 ff. There anyhow he seems to admit that the pleasure provoked by what is admirable or surprising (*thaumaston*) is not reducible to that of learning; that the plots of dramas have or ought to have this character is suggested there and in *Poetics* 24, 1460a12 ff., further 18, 1456a19 ff.) Contrary to Plato, however, he believes that this sort of pleasure can be obtained by the works of Homer and of the Attic tragedians, with Sophocles mainly in mind, for Euripides, though called the 'most tragic' of them (cfr. 13, 1453a29-30), seems to be thought of as having produced a work that reflected a corruption of taste.

Aristotle's devaluation of scenery and even of music in the case of tragedy as elements which have influence on the mass but should not be much considered by connoisseurs, who are able to appreciate a tragedy even if read, probably reflects this same attitude (cfr. ch. 6, end; 14, 1453b7 ff; 26, 1462a11 ff.). Yet there seems to be some ambivalence on his part on this matter. One reason for devaluating those elements seems to be that they can have a strong effect on our emotions. But in the case of the story or plot he expects that the main events represented be put by the poet «under our eyes», that is to say rendered particularly concrete and lifelike, so as to obtain the maximum of involvement of our emotions (cfr. ch. 17, beginning, and also ch. 14, beginning).

Finally, it is of importance to stress that Aristotle appears to be convinced that poetry offers instruction and not only pleasure, because he generally admits of imitation that it satisfies the need to learn, adding that by acquiring knowledge it also becomes a source of pleasure (cfr. *Poet.* 4, 1448b12 ff., also *Rhet.* I 11, 1371b4 ff. [see also above, ch. 6]). Further, he propounds (in *Poetics* 9) a comparison between poetry and history which makes the former 'more philosophical' than the latter, and this must mean that it offers more instruction than the latter, for philosophy is by him normally associated with learning and teaching (*didakê*). It has thus to be presumed that both tragedy and epos (given that the latter is associated to the former) are genres of poetry which offer instruction, i.e. are such that e.g. assisting to the representation of a tragedy makes one learn something. Unfortunately Aristotle never tries to explain where this instruction does lay. He certainly has not in mind the instruction which is traditionally claimed for poetry and which is rejected by Plato, that is to say, concerning matters like religious ones, for he shows no interest for them. It can however be conjectured that the instruction lays where history would provide it, given the comparison between poetry and history.

One would expect history to be instructive (beyond the information that is given by a work of history) in the sense in which it is traditionally said to be *magistra vitae*. In the first place, it teaches that the fortunes of men can change for the worse, or that there is some alternation in the fortunes of men (this idea is expressed by Herodotus I 5). This sort of teaching, concerning the fortunes of other people, makes one both prepared to any turning of fortune in one's life and moderate in enjoying one's good fortune when one benefits from it (this point, implicit in Herodotus, is developed by Polybius, I 1, 2). It also teaches what men are like in their nature, for men of all sorts play a role in the scene of history. (It is this sort of instruction that Thucydides appears to have in mind in I 22, 4, where he suggests that the future will be like the past because evidently he assumes an immutability of human nature.) Aristotle himself seems to think of this second explanation in so far as he insists on the causal or quasi-causal character of the concatenation of events that is illustrated by a tragedy (on this point cfr. Part II, ch. 29). In any case it is sufficiently clear that these claims can be made in the case of tragedy.

What is surprising, on the other hand, is that Aristotle does not take position in any direct way on these claims as made by historians in favour of history. He appears to be of the conviction (expressed in ch. 23), that in history no causal or other connections can be established among events, but this is manifestly a very reductive way of considering it. No word is dedicated to Thucydides' claim to the contrary, on the basis of an approach that is oriented in finding those connections among events. Polybius on this point shows himself polemical towards Aristotle when he declares that the aim (*telos*) of tragedy and that of history are not the same but, rather, the contrary, for tragedy with its persuasive discourses aims at startling and seducing (*psychagogein*) the spectators by means of the deception (*hapate*) it uses, while history is instructive and convincing for the lovers of learning (cfr. II 56, 11-12[31]). Of course this is as reductive a conception of tragedy as that held by Aristotle about history. A more equilibrated position is adopted by Strabo, who, in his *Geography*, admits that poetry's capacity to exercise seduction (*psychagogia*) does not exclude its offering instruction (*didaskalia*) (cfr. I 2, 3-5), while also asserting the usefulness of history for its formative character in ethics and in politics (cfr. I 1, 22-23).

In conclusion, from what Aristotle says in *Poetics* ch. 25 it can be inferred that to express judgements about the value of those works is not the competence of the politician (this tends to involve the exclusion of ethics which is for him is subordinated to politics).

31. Quoted by Hartog and Casevitz, *L'histoire d'Homère à Augustin*, Paris 1999, p. 121

On this point there clearly is a divergence between his position and that adopted by Plato, for, even if it would be a simplification to say that for the latter the only sort of judgement that can be given of the works of a fine art is that by the politician, his decision has precedence. Yet the very fact that, as we have seen above (ch. 3), Aristotle himself attributes to the politician another sort of competence, which is of particular importance for the organization of the education in a well-ordered *polis* (it is not a chance that he gives much attention to this topic in *Politics* book VIII), shows that he is not unconcerned with the ethical consequences of our reactions to the works of art.

14. An alternative approach to Plato's «philosophy of art»

An alternative to traditional interpretations lies in the suggestion by some scholars (esp. by Nehamas, «Plato on the Mass Media», *Monist* 71, 1988, pp. 214-234, reprinted in his *Virtues of Authenticity. Essays on Plato and Socrates*, Princeton 1999, ch. 13, from which I quote) that Plato's critique of imitative poetry should be taken as substantially equivalent to the critique of the mass media, and in particular of television, which is given by certain intellectuals nowadays. It concerns the influence which these mass media exercise on people, both in creating and/or propagating certain opinions and in producing certain emotional attitudes. Nehamas thinks we are prevented from having a right understanding of Plato's position because of the importance that such figures as Homer and Aeschylus possess in our literary tradition and because «Plato's argument with poetry concerns a practice that is today paradigmatically a fine art» (art. cit., p. 287). But in his times «poetry was popular entertainment» and was considered as such by the philosopher. This applies particularly to Plato's main target, drama, for the audience could amount to 17.000 people who were not well-behaved and were representative of the great mass of the Athenian people. According to Nehamas, «nothing in Plato's time answered to our concept of the fine arts, especially to the idea that the arts are a province of a small and enlightened part of the population (which may or may not be interested in attracting the rest of the people to them), and Plato holds no views about them» (art. cit., p. 289). What the philosopher is concerned with is a widespread attitude similar to that which, nowadays, is held by people towards television. For them «what is presented on television is a duplicate of what occurs in the world. No interpretation seems to be needed in order to reveal and to understand the complex relations that actually obtain between them. By contrast, no one believes that the fine arts produce such

duplications. (…) The fine arts, we believe, bear an indirect, interpretative relationship to the world, and further interpretation on the part of the audience and critics is necessary in order to understand it. It is precisely for this sort of interpretation that the popular arts do not seem to call.» (art. cit., p. 290).

The parallel thus propounded by Nehamas is to some extent illuminating, but also, to some extent, misleading and unsatisfactory. Tragedy and other forms of poetry or of art did constitute a kind of popular entertainment in a city like Athens, but this fact does not exclude their being appreciated by educated people with refined judgement. As already remarked, a distinction of two types of spectator, «the one a free and educated man, the other vulgar…», is made in a general form, but with (likely) application to tragedy, by Aristotle in *Politics* VIII 7, 1342a19-20. From this point of view more helpful than the parallel with television is that with the cinema, for this undoubtedly is a popular art, but one which attracts a minority of connoisseurs. The problems raised by drama and by epic must have been discussed by these experts, for this practice of discussion was giving rise to some forms of written literary criticism, as is evident from Aristotle's *Poetics* (e.g. ch. 25 of this work is dedicated to the *problemata* raised by epic, especially Homeric epic, and is probably based on Aristotle's lost work on *Homeric problems*.) Nehamas argues that Plato was not concerned with art as such, as is shown by the fact that he did not treat the artists in the same way, banishing them all from his model city: «neither painting nor sculpture is outlawed by Plato» (art. cit., p. 281). This all, I think, reflects some misunderstanding of Plato's position, for not all poetry is outlawed and not all painting or other imitative art is admitted (see Part II, esp. ch. 16), but even if it were right it would not show that the point of difference lies in the fact that these are not forms of «popular entertainment». In asserting, in the passage quoted above, that «nothing in Plato's time answered to our concept of the fine arts», he is influenced by Kristeller's approach, but this, we have seen, is not adequate.

Further, to treat forms of poetry as «entertainment» is not satisfactory, for they also constituted the basis of the education given to young people. By the way in which they exploited traditional myths, tragedies and other works had an important part in the transmission of religious beliefs. Further, the enactment of tragedies just as other forms of recitation or performance (playing music etc.) belonged, at least to some extent, to the religious ceremonies which had an important part in the life of the typical Athenian. This is certainly not to say that his main attitude must always have been of religious awe rather than of amusement, but it was not quite the same attitude as a contemporary who watches television. Rather than stressing that these arts were «popular» one should remark that

their presence was pervasive, for, on the whole, there was no form of culture that was not invested by their influence, nor part of the population, however small, that was exempt from it.

Apart from all this, it is difficult to evaluate the capacity of the Athenian public at large to appreciate dramas and other works from an aesthetic point of view. However the suggestion by Nehamas that there was involvement without distance and without any sufficient consciousness that fiction was at issue seems to be extreme. He maintains that «popular entertainment, in theory and practice, is generally taken to be inherently realistic. To be inherently realistic is to seem to represent reality without artifice, without mediation and convention. Realistic art is, just in the sense in which Plato thought of imitation, transparent.» (art. cit., p. 288). From the last assertion it can be desumed that (as is stated by Nehamas more explicitly in his companion article «Plato on imitation and poetry in *Republic* X») Plato's account of imitation is fitted to account for this sort of realism. For the moment I limit myself to remarking that the suggestion about realism is not so plausible in the case of ancient Greek drama. The authors of tragedies were rielaborating existing myth, so that the effect of surprise and of novelty was reduced (see Aristotle's observations in *Poetics* ch. 13, 1453a17 ff., and ch. 14, 1453b22 ff.), even if of course the variations with respect to those myths were not insignificant. Realism on the scene was rather limited, because of technical limitations (*skenographia* was seen as a significant development), because the scene was in the open air, and because the presence of the choir was an obstacle from this point of view[32]. Further, drama was more told than acted (as Beye notices there, pp. 128-129).

An approach partly similar to that of Nehamas is that adopted by M. Burnyeat in his «Culture and Society in Plato's *Republic», Tanner Lectures on Human Values* 20, 1999, pp. 217-324. He is admittedly close to Nehamas in pointing out that the role of poetry and drama in the Greek world is different from that which they have in our world, where they «have become minority, often élite pursuits», and that «the things Plato would focus on if he were asking his questions today (…) would be recorded music (both popular and classical) with which we are surrounded at home and in public places; popular magazines; radio, film and TV; and the images in advertisements», for «these are the universal media of cultural transmission today» (art. cit., pp. 249-50). However, while he tends too easily to assume that Plato has little interest in art and in aesthetic experience as such, to some extent he avoids the narrowness of

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ches upon the former point; also C.R. Beye, *Ancient Greek Literature and Society*, Ithaca 1987, 2nd ed., p. 128 , 130-31 and 150 on the former point.

33. *Logos* clearly is taken in this sense, as confirmed by the opposition in

Nehamas' approach by talking, as we can see, of «cultural transmission» rather than of «popular entertainment» (he does talk of «popular forms of entertainment» at p. 255). He insists, rightly in my view, that Plato is much concerned with «gradual, unnoticed influence» (p. 252) that is exercised by the forms of music to which one gets used from an early age, just as it is exercised by the material environment (symbolically represented in the *Republic* by couches and tables as furniture which is produced by arts like painting and architecture).

One fruitful notion that is introduced by Burnyeat in his article is that of the «total culture». He rightly remarks, at the beginning, that «if you are designing an ideal society, as Plato does in the *Republic*, and contrasting it with the corruptions of existing societies, as he also does in the *Republic*, then you need to think about much more than political institutions in a narrow sense. You need to think about all the influences, all the ideas, images, and practices, that make up the culture of a society» (art. cit., p. 217). In what follows he specifies that he intends «culture» in the widest and anthropological sense, as (following a dictionary's definition) «the total of inherited ideas, beliefs, values, and knowledge, which constitute the shared basis of social action». Plato's concern with the arts is a part of his more inclusive concern with the culture of his ideal society. This is illustrated by his concern with music, which is not understood in the narrow sense of rhythm and attunement. «Those rhythms and attunements convey verbal messages to the soul, and Plato is concerned about their content as about their musical form. In an ideal city, the whole culture must be as ideal as possible, because all of it influences the character of the citizens.» (art. cit., p. 222) Later on he remarks that the norms that are formulated for literature in *Republic* II and III have the consequence that «very little of the Greek literature we know would remain intact, and much of the art would disappear», and that from them it is clear that «the whole culture» will be reshaped in the ideal city (art. cit., pp. 259-60 and 261).

Burnyeat is less explicit on the issue whether what Plato is criticizing and rejecting is itself considered by him as a «total culture», which would have to be considered as the culture proper to democracy. This point is of importance, not only because one must be clear about whether Plato is only rejecting some features of existing societies, those that make them corrupt, or something more. There is also the issue whether Plato, in conceiving the culture he is rejecting as the total culture of democratic society, is operating in such a way, by selection, by drawing certain connections, and so forth, as to make it more consistent than it ever was. And there is the further issue that he may be ignoring the fact that propounding a radically reformed society is possible in a context of discussion

and criticism which can be found only in democracies. In any case Burnyeat shows awareness of the political implications of Plato's attitude to art. In talking about Plato's «ban on dramaturgy» he remarks that «contemporary readers would be sensitive to the political dimension of Plato's decision. Athenian tragedy and comedy were intensely democratic institutions, both in the ways they were organized and in their physical presence.» (art. cit., p. 274) Plato himself, he adds, draws attention to «the link between theatre and democracy» (p. 275), making reference to some passages which will be quoted by me later on. He also points out that «the Athenian democracy, audience for much of the poetry Plato objected to, accepted that it was their responsibility to ensure the quality of the poetry funded by the state. In modern terms, they thought that democracy should care about whether the mass media encourage the right sorts of values.» (art. cit., p. 255) Some opportune references to actuality serve him to make it evident that Plato's questions are not obsolete.

I quote two particularly significant passages and also quote the final lines from his conclusion: «It is not surprising (…) that advertisements, film, and TV provoke in us the very same concern as Plato has in the *Republic*. Are their effects on the souls of the citizen body, especially when young, harmful or beneficial? Plato's question «Shall we banish Homer, tragedy, and comedy? is an ancient version of the question we would be asking if we stopped to wonder whether, if we had known or suspected at the outset what we now know or suspect about TV and its influence, we should have let it go ahead. Would life without TV, or without advertising, be spiritually better? But Plato's focus is interestingly different from ours. First, sex and violence are less important than moral and religious values more generally.» (p. 250) «Most of us do not share Plato's confidence that objectively correct answers to these questions exist, and that, given the right education, men and women of talent can come to know what the answers are. Even if we did have that confidence, we would not think it right to impose our answers on everybody else. Democracy, both ancient and modern, puts a high value on individual choice and autonomy. That complicates the task. A further complication is that our culture values innovation and originality: after the initial shock, we welcome the new ways of seeing and hearing brought to us by Picasso or Stravinsky; we enjoy the sparkle of sophisticated advertisements. But none of this relieves us of responsability for thinking about what we can do to improve the world in which our children grow up.» (p. 286) «If we agree with Plato about the power of mimesis (ancient or modern, epic and drama or advertising, film, and TV), but reject his authoritarian solution, then democratic politics has to take responsibility for the general ethos of society. Plato's problem is still with us. It needs a modern solution» (p. 324.)

The adoption of this approach by Burnyeat makes it disappointing that he should restrict his attention to the *Republic*, only exceptionally referring to other dialogues. It is surprising for instance that he should maintain that Plato in this dialogue is much concerned with the conviviality of the symposium as a typically Greek institution, and make no reference to the *Laws*, where this topic is discussed in a much more explicit way. And there are various other points of contact between these two dialogues which suggest that the later one contains developments that throw light on various views expressed in the *Republic*. There are other limitations of his approach, such as that he does not give a survey of the whole range of critiques which Plato addresses to the arts, and that he does not consider tragedy as such. Inside the total culture art maintains its specificity, which is not ignored by Plato himself but is not always sufficiently stressed by Burnyeat in the account he gives of his position. Even the title he adopts, "culture and society", can give rise to misgivings, for the arts do not exhaust the sphere of culture. But there are of course quite a number of points on which his discussion is illuminating, and I shall sometimes refer to these contributions as completing certain I intend to give.

15. A survey of Plato's contributions in the light of his intentions

The point of departure of an account of Plato's contributions to the treatment of the fine arts should precisely be that of clarifying his intentions in dealing with them, instead of starting with the preconception that, given his topic, his approach can only belong to aesthetics. His intentions are particularly explicit in the treatment he gives of the fine arts in *Laws*, book II, so it is convenient to have a look at this first of all. The pretext of the discussion in that book is that of the educative effect of the drinking parties or symposia, and the topic that is actually introduced (at the beginning of the book) is education (*paideia*), on the ground that, if one wants to give a proper regulation to the parties, one has to reach clarity about the correctness in music (*mousikes orthotes*), and this itself cannot be obtained without consideration of education (*paideia*) as a whole (cfr. 642a-b). A relatively restrictive definition of education is given there, regarding it as «the initial acquisition of virtue by the child, when the feelings of pleasure and affection, pain and hatred, that well up in his soul are channeled in the right courses before he can understand the reason why» (653b-c). In what follows however the concern is not exclusively with education in this narrow sense, either because the conception of education is enlarged or because a continuity is admitted between education and the care of the soul

which (at the very end of of book I) is presented as the task proper of political art (*techne politiké*, 650b). In any case it is admitted that the fine arts, either through direct performance or through attendance to performances (adopting the role of the spectator is said to be prevalent with old men, cfr. 657d), continue to have the effects on adults which they had on young people. In this way the attention is directed on the fine arts, which explicitly include music. That it is the legislator or politician who has the task of overseeing the pedagogical effects which are had by the arts is clear from a number of passages. Egypt is taken as a model for the way in which certain rhythms, styles and so forth are prescribed by law as the only right or correct ones, saying that this prescription is the task of the legislator or politician (cfr. 657a). In what follows it is suggested more than once that the legislator or politician must tell (by persuasion but, failing this, by compulsion) the authors or composers what sort of works or compositions can be admitted as having an educative value (cfr. 660a ff., 660e, 661c, further 671c in connection with the drinking parties; this point is recalled later, in book IV 719b).

The topic of education is taken up again in book VII, giving attention first to children's games, then also to music. The insistence here (as in some earlier parts, including that concerning what is done in Egypt) is on the harmful effects of any change in what is being practised, suggesting that the legislator or other authority should intervene to prevent it (cfr. 798b, 799a ff., 800a-b). Further, this surveillance must be extended to contents, and is one of the tasks of the legislator or guardian of the laws (cfr. 801c-d, and what follows, also 810-11; it is admitted, in the first passage and in 811d and 812e-813a, that there are guardians of the laws or officials in charge of education). On the high importance attributed to education cfr. also 803d (notice that education is said *not* to be the responsibility of the fathers, for the children «belong more to the *polis* than to their parents», 804d).

In books II and III of the *Republic* Plato's concern is declaredly with music (*mousiké*), but at the first stage he does not consider music in our sense of the word, for he does not say anything about tunes and rhythms, but his concern is with what we would call literature, though not with it in all its forms. It is sufficiently clear from the transition he makes at some point from consideration of discourses (*logoi*) to consideration of diction (*lexis*), i.e. of the mode of verbal expression (especially in recitation), that his concern up to that point (i.e. 392c) is with contents. (A discussion of «diction» will be given below, chs. 19 and 22) In fact Plato's concern is, to a large extent, with story-telling not only in poetry but also in prose (he talks generally of story-makers in 377c, and, in that same context, mentions stories or myths told by nurses and mothers [see also *Laws* X 887d], further he talks of the first stories heard by young people, but it is not likely these are all put in verse; he also mentions those

who speak or tell stories in addition to the 'poets' in 380c, and he talks of speech and of poetry in 383a, of prose[33] and verse in 390a, of poets and writers in prose [*logopoioi*] in 392b, of discourse in general rather than of poems in 392c, of poet and story-teller in III, 392d, 398b, while in 396e he talks generally of a *rhetor*; on the other hand he talks of forms of poetry in 379a), though it is clear that poets like Hesiod and Homer (explicitly mentioned in 377d and *passim*) have a particularly important role in their composition and transmission. In fact most of the passages that are quoted and submitted to criticism come from Homer's poems and from the tragedians.The interest thus is in the sort of literature which consists in story-telling or in telling myths, but poetry is put at the center in view of the authority recognized to some poets (starting with Homer) in the transmission of myths and of religious beliefs, mainly because of the representation they offer of the gods and of the heroes (for the importance of Homer and of Hesiod in this field see the well-known assertion of Herodot II 53; their concern with the representation of the gods is evident in the very discussion conducted by Plato in this part, which is said to be aimed at a definition of the *typoi tes theologias*, cfr. 379a - though it also concerns the representation of the heroes -, and is asserted by him in book X 598e, as an opinion generally held about them). In III 398b, the speaker (Socrates) says they exhausted the part of *mousiké* which concerns speeches (*logoi*) and tales (*mythoi*); the attention in what follows is given to music in the strict sense, since the concern is with harmonies and rhythms (from 398c onwards), with extension, at some stage (from 400e onwards) to the other fine arts (apparently always from the point of view of what can be called ethical mimesis [on this cfr. below, ch. 28]).As already remarked, this whole account is said to belong to *mousiké*, for it is introduced in this way in 377e, there is mention of *mousiké* concerning tales in the passage already mentioned, and in 403c it is said that the discourse about *mousiké* has come to an end. But *mousiké* is presented as the part of education (*paideia*) which, in contradistinction with gymnastics, is directed to the soul (cfr. 376e). The starting point is in fact the question as to what education is to be given to the guardians (cfr. 376e), and in various passages it is made clear that he is answering this question (cfr. II 378c; 383c, III 394e; 398b, 401c; 402c).

Thus also in this part of the *Republic*, as in the parts of the *Laws* considered above, Plato's treatment of poetry and of the fine arts is given in the context of a discussion of education, and not for its own sake. But it has to be admitted, to complete this survey, that not all his main treatments of poetry and of the fine arts arts are given in the context of a discussion of education. At least, he does not say, in

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392b.

the account given in *Republic* book X, that he is concerned with education (*paideia*). On the other hand, one cannot regard this treatment as wholly independent from that given in books II and III. At its beginning he takes up the question that was raised in III 394d and 398a-b, whether certain poets should be admitted in the city, and there the concern was clearly with education (this is explicit in the second passage). And this is the question to which he gives a negative reply at the end of the discussion (cfr. 607a). That he keeps the issue of education in his mind is shown by the fact that, immediately before that negative conclusion, he recalls the reputation which Homer had as the educator of Hellas (cfr. 606e), implying that there no good justification for it. This point had been developed earlier, where some grounds had been offered to exclude that Homer had been able to educate men and make them better (cfr. 600a-c, where there is an unfavourable comparison not only with Pythagoras but also with sophists like Protagoras, which certainly cannot be taken wholly seriously). No doubt it is not only his inability as an educator but also that in other things (e.g. in administrating cities) which is pointed out, but it is the former to which more importance is given. Further, if we take education in the largest sense of the word, as the provision of that care of the soul that makes men better, this is at issue in the whole discussion, for poetry is criticized in the main for the fact that it has the effect of introducing in the souls of the public a bad order or constitution (a *kakè politeia*) (cfr. 605b, and cfr. 608a, where this motif is recalled). The question which is explicitly raised is whether poetry is not only a source of pleasure but also is beneficial to orderly government and all the life of man (*ophelime pros tas politeias kai ton bion ton anthropinon*) (cfr. 607d).

On the whole it would seem that the treatment of poetry and of painting in book X cannot be regarded as wholly independent with respect to the treatment of books II and III. Now, what he says of Homer and other poets in *Resp*. II-III has rather disastrous consequences for their poetry, since Plato cannot have been unaware that the works of these poets present some unity, so that one cannot leave out much of what is said about the gods and the heroes and still claim that what remains after all this censure is e.g. a tragedy that can be played in a theatre. (The issue of the unity of these works is well present in his mind, as shown by his insistence on the unity of any well done work in the *Phaedrus* and in the *Politicus*) Certainly the conclusion that is drawn in *Resp*. III 401b, that the poets should either 'embody in their poems the semblance of the good character or else not write poetry among us', has negative implications for Homer and the other poets. And this explains why at the beginning of book X he can regard as something already established that it should be refused 'to admit at all as much of it (poetry) as is imitative'.

In book X Plato offers a justification of the censures to which he had submitted the works of poets like Homer by showing, in the main, that (a) their authors do not possess genuine knowledge about the objects they are reproducing, (b) the works themselves have a negative effect on the condition (or constitution) of the soul of their hearers or viewers. On point (a) there is an opposition between the poet's lack of *sophia* and its possession by the philosopher (this goes back to the *Apology*). On point (b) his concern seems to extend to adult hearers and viewers, but the point of view of education (*paideia*) declaredly adopted in book II and III is not in fact abandoned. No doubt the treatment of imitation (*mimesis*) on which these conclusions are based goes somewhat beyond these limits and has some interest in itself, as we shall see.

The view expressed by various scholars that the first half of book X (if not the whole book) is extraneous to the rest of the work, or, using Julia Annas' outspoken assertion, «an excrescence» (cfr. her *Introduction to Plato's Republic*, Oxford 1981, p. 335) does not seem to be right, without denying that this treatment of poetry presents some puzzling aspects and that its connection with the treatment given in books II and III is not unproblematic. Points (a) and (b) just touched upon constitute some of the reasons for coming back to this topic. In the case of (b) the treatment given in book X draws benefit not only (as is declared at the very beginning of the book) from the treatment of the soul, with its internal divisions, in book IV, but also from the treatment of pleasure given in some passages of books VIII and IX and from other developments to be found in these books (concerning both soul and city). There is also a point which, according to Plato's express declaration, was not discussed in books II and III, namely the rules that should be laid down about how to treat men. After having laid down the rules about how to treat gods and demons and heroes, there are these other rules that are to be laid down, but this cannot be done before having discovered what justice is and how advantageous it is to the possessor (cfr. 392a-c). Indeed, it cannot be said that what Plato does in book X is to lay down those rules in the way in which he laid down those other rules. But the question that is touched upon in this part, namely that «about men poets and story-tellers are guilty of making the gravest misstatements when they tell us that wicked men are often happy and the good miserable…», receives some treatment in book X, as we shall see.

A peculiar position in Plato's production is taken by the short dialogue *Ion*, in which Socrates conduces a discussion with the rhapsode Ion, with the purpose of ascertaining what kind of capacity is involved in both his rhapsodic skill and in that of the poets whose works he recites and interprets. The concern is with performance in the case of the rhapsode, but also with the source of the poets'

capacity to invent and compose, and with the reaction of the public to performance by the rhapsode of inspired poetry. The conclusion reached is the negative one that both the rhapsode and the poet do not possess a genuine art (*techne*), for they work under a divine inspiration, in a manner comparable to that of diviners or of other «possessed» people. There is a convergence in this negative result between what we find in this dialogue and what we find in *Republic* X, for there too it is excluded that the poet possesses a genuine art (*techne*) or that he can be a wise person, only that this result is obtained in a different way, by pointing out the limitations involved in imitation (*mimesis*). It would have to be clarified how far these treatments are complementary to one another.