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Preface

The *Timaeus* presents a fascinating account of the cosmos. It includes a creation myth that introduces the figure known as the Demiurge who, despite the fact that he is the cause of the sensible world, is reverently attributed with reason, and whose creation – the cosmos – is actually beautiful and good. In this dialogue Plato offers his readers a panorama of the universe. But just what are his intentions for this? Is his approach a precursor to the methods of natural science,¹ or does the *Timaeus* fall under the category of theology? This thesis will discuss the outcome Plato wished to achieve by finally writing on cosmology and how the methods used to accomplish these ends reveal a more existential attitude towards aesthetics.

In the *Timaeus* Plato explores the complexities of *mimesis* and entertains the possibility that imitation could actually exhibit ideal qualities. These considerations have repercussions for the status of the material world in Plato's cosmology, but they may also be extended to rethink his theory of art. I wish to analyse a number of salient themes in the *Timaeus*, such as ontology, mythic symbols and the use of rhetoric. I will demonstrate how Plato's view towards these themes in the *Timaeus* can be extrapolated to reassess his aesthetics. My critical analysis will provoke the question – 'What evaluation of art would Plato have offered in accordance with the positions explicated in the *Timaeus*?'

¹ An alternative criticised by C. Osbourne, 'Space, Time, Shape, and Direction: Creative Discourse in the *Timaeus*', in C. Gill and M.M. McCabe (eds.), Form and Argument in Late Plato, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1996, p. 208.

Upon investigating a number of dialogues, searching specifically for references to art or representation, I realised that certain views I had thought to be exclusive to the *Timaeus*, or other late dialogues, also featured in works as early as the *Ion*. The more I continued to read in search of aesthetically relevant passages the more confident I became in holding the view that Plato never held a fixed metaphysical position at any one time that could be applied to every issue. I realised that any attempt to pin down Plato to one position in relation to a particular subject on the grounds of one dialogue was resisted by a revised presentation of that position when referring to the same topic elsewhere. In relation to art Partee makes this observation: "Infinitely responsive to nuances, Plato does not wish to formulate a tightly integrated philosophical system. He rejects false order even more forcefully than disorder and chaos".²

Unlike most scholarship that compares the *Timaeus* to earlier dialogues, my approach to the topic of Plato's aesthetics will not involve engaging in debate concerning chronology, and therefore will not be concerned with detailing a linear progression of Plato's aesthetic views. I have also avoided interpreting the Platonic corpus, and subsequently Platonic aesthetics, in the 'radical revisionist' sense of Ryle or Owen.³ The aim of this thesis will not be to explain any of Plato's theories as undergoing significant changes, shifts and modifications after the challenges encountered in the *Parmenides*.⁴ This does not mean that I will be taking

² M.H. Partee, *Plato's Poetics*, University of Utah Press, Salt Lake City, 1981, p. 7.

³ G.E.L. Owen, 'The Place of the *Timaeus* in Plato's Dialogues (1953)', in R.E. Allen, *Studies in Plato's Metaphysics*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1965, pp. 313-338.

⁴ W. J. Prior, *Unity and Development in Plato's Metaphysics*, Open Court Publishing Company, Illinois, 1985, p. 3.

Hans-Georg Gadamer also contends the theory of intellectual development, or what he refers to as "the genetic-historical account". Instead he shares the opinions of the Tübingen school of Gaiser and Kramer by drawing affinities between early dialogues such as the *Hippias* and Plato's later doctrine of ideal numbers. H. Gadamer, 'Idea and Reality in Plato's *Timaeus*', in *Dialogue and*

the opposing 'unitarian' stance propounded by Cherniss either.⁵ I will indicate why I do not believe Plato held a unified monolithic position consistently throughout his works that exhausted all subjects: particularly including the topic of aesthetics.⁶ It is more plausible to think of Plato as using varying metaphysical theories as foundations for dealing with different topics or for supporting and justifying different aims.⁷

Dialectic – Eight Hermeneutical Studies on Plato, translated by P. Christopher Smith, Yale University Press, New Haven, 1980, pp. 157-158.

⁵ H.F. Cherniss, 'The Relation of the *Timaeus* to Plato's Later Dialogues (1957)', in R.E. Allen, Studies in Plato's Metaphysics, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1965, pp. 339-378.

⁶ Prior, *op. cit.*, p. 4.

⁷ The method of using metaphysics as a basis for analysing an intended topic is a feature of Platonic thought.

Introduction

Trying out various approaches in different dialogues, Plato enters into a dialogue with himself; and the tensions and variations in his own thinking illuminate many aspects of the aesthetics of poetry.⁸

This thesis is a study of only one aspect of the vast ocean that is Platonic aesthetics. The aspect under consideration is aesthetics in the *Timaeus*. The contradictions and nuances that surface in Plato's analyses of aesthetic themes – which are directly or indirectly addressed in all of his dialogues – indicate his clear ambivalence towards art. Any final conclusion arrived at in relation to Platonic aesthetics runs the risk of failing to be exhaustive. To give a complete account of a Platonic theory of art one should avoid committing oneself entirely to one dialogue, and therefore explain only part of the story. By considering aesthetics within the *Timaeus*, we must recognise the fact that we are only elucidating one aspect of Plato's theory of art; more precisely we are addressing a diverse subject within the constraints of one particular text. By suggesting that we rethink Plato's theory of art in relation to the *Timaeus* I mean that we should ask questions about how Plato would have felt about art upon simply considering the differing philosophical perspective of the *Timaeus*.

Fourth century Athenians were accustomed to education in the form of poetic renditions. Traditional religious and cultural laws of conduct, and explanations of things divine and worldly, were commonly received through the presentation of a poet. These teachings pertained to the

⁸ E. Asmis, 'Plato on Poetic Creativity', in R. Kraut (ed), The Cambridge Companion to Plato, Cambridge University Press, U.S.A., 1999, p. 339.

individual and the state, or both in relation to each other. The dialogues of Plato are largely a challenge to all that was taught by Attic education in his time. But we will argue that while the *Timaeus* does attack some major tenets of Greek society, and the transmitters of those tenets, its ideas in relation to aesthetics do not necessarily oppose art and the artist the way that dialogues such as the *Republic* do.

For preliminary information, and because of its profound impact on many aspects of this paper, the first section of this essay will look at the religious influences that had made an impact on Plato, and their relationship with poetry. Therefore part one will highlight the major religious undercurrents of Platonic metaphysics (1a); point out the theological shift caused by the critical ideas of Xenophanes (1b); and reference these particular religious elements of Greek society and thought to Platonic aesthetics (1c).

In order to justify the reason for reconsidering Platonic aesthetics, it is necessary to contrast the philosophical perspective of the *Timaeus* with those of another dialogue with central metaphysical concerns: the *Republic*; two dialogues of different periods with metaphysical theories not in opposition to each other, but which vary in significant ways. The *Republic* also contains an explicit evaluation of art based on its metaphysics. Prior to rethinking aesthetics in the *Timaeus* the earlier, and significantly different, theory of art will need to be considered for comparative reasons. Therefore in section two we will discuss the metaphysics of the *Republic* and address a dominant modern perspective of Platonic philosophy: dualism (2a). After a critical review of dualism we will elucidate the way in which Plato's theory of art in the earlier books of the *Republic* are contingent upon the metaphysics in that work.

The critique of art will also be shown to be a rhetorical tool to support an argument for education (2b). Particular attention will then be directed to the stronger metaphysical stance and theory of art in book X (2c).

Part three will highlight the contrast between the metaphysics of the *Republic* with that of the *Timaeus*, a text that is explicitly ontological (3a). A mythological character, the Demiurge, will be introduced, along with a discussion of myth and its significance to human thought (3b and 3c). This will be followed by an explanation of the important metaphysical ideas concerning the phenomenal world and space addressed in the *Timaeus* (3d and 3e). Having distinguished the metaphysical basis of the *Timaeus* from the *Republic*, we will be in an adequate position to postulate a theory of art that evolves out of the ontological views of the *Timaeus*.

In section four, the views expressed in relation to myth and artistic expression, and their relevance to Plato's writings, will enable us to begin applying the ontological positions espoused in the *Timaeus* to aesthetics (4a). The importance of symbolism and art to human experience will be compared with themes expressed in the *Timaeus* and other dialogues (4b), along with an analysis of the interdependency of dialectic with rhetoric (4c), and concepts with symbols (4d). Throughout our analysis the aesthetically relevant themes in the texts will be investigated with the intention of suggesting ways of rethinking Plato's aesthetics. The aesthetic potential of these themes will always be interpreted with recourse to the *Timaeus*' metaphysical basis. The result will be a sympathetic theory of art that depends on responsibility, knowledge and reference to an ultimate concern i.e. a set of strict criteria that if adhered

to will render a beautiful and good work of art, and thus present an alternative aesthetic.

1. Plato's Religious Dimension

a. Religious Traditions Relevant to Plato

Prior to engaging in a re-evaluation of Plato's theory of art it is important to confirm the crucial impact that certain Greek religions had made on Platonic thought – this will be particularly helpful in relation to art when we address Plato's indispensable use of religious symbol in the form of myth.⁹ Plato was profoundly influenced by the distinguished and pivotal role that religion played in all facets of Greek life. Greek religion had no divinely revealed knowledge, no scriptures, and no professional, divinely anointed, priesthood. Validation for the religion came by way of tradition. The cults were founded by heroic figures that had descended from the gods. Because these cults had influenced the good fortune of the polis in the past, they were tacitly accepted as the guarantors of the happy and prosperous circumstances of the polis and its citizens.¹⁰ Thus, to understand the citizen of the polis, what view they had of their situation, and therefore of art, an understanding of the role of religion in the Greek psyche is indispensable.

An account of Platonic aesthetics entails addressing his appropriation of certain religious themes. In this paper we will examine how Plato's aesthetic views have a metaphysical contingency, i.e. the account given of the subject being dealt with depends on the metaphysical (as well as

⁹ This claim is made by J.A. Elias in his work, *Plato's Defence of Poetry*, State University of New York Press, Albany, 1984, p. 2 (support for this view follows throughout the book).

¹⁰ C. Sourvinou-Inwood, *Tragedy and Athenian Religion*, Lexington Books, U.S.A., 2003, pp. 20-21.

the epistemological) position that is being employed to analyse it.¹¹ The metaphysics that Plato deploys in addressing his topics have affinities with one or more of the diverse religious traditions prominent in Athens at the time. For example the strict Form and matter dualism, espoused in dialogues such as the *Phaedo* or the *Republic*, seems to be akin to the “polis tradition” or what Morgan calls the “Delphic theology”.¹² These dialogues also confirm the strong, fundamentally Platonic belief that the soul is divine and therefore immortal – a metaphysical position that is more clearly explicated in works such as the *Phaedrus* and *Phaedo*. This view has close parallels with Greece's alternative mystery cults that encompassed the Orphic, Bacchic, Pythagorean and Eleusinian traditions. In fact Morgan also makes the statement that Platonic epistemology and metaphysics actually developed out of Plato's acknowledgement of the cult belief in the soul's salvation through preordained purificatory practices.¹³ These influences were relevant to the style of approach in Plato's writings, in particular the language and imagery that is used to express the metaphysical themes. In terms of Plato's theological criticism one must look to the views of Xenophanes as a primary influence.

b. Xenophanes

Ancient Greek poetry had been subject to a long tradition of criticism. The sixth century peripatetic poet and philosopher, Xenophanes, is believed to be the initiator. While he used the style of epic meter implemented by Homer and Hesiod, he accused those two very poets of

¹¹ “The objections to these things [arts] are soundly grounded in Plato's metaphysics and epistemology”. “The fundamental objection [to art] is outlined in the methodology of the *Phaedo* and *Republic*”. Elias, op. cit., p. 4.

¹² M.L. Morgan, ‘Plato and Greek Religion’, in R. Kraut, (ed.), The Cambridge Companion to Plato, Cambridge University Press, U.S.A., 1999, p. 231.

¹³ Ibid. p. 232.

blasphemy.¹⁴ This attack refers to the licentious and corrupt activities ascribed to the gods of the pantheon; an approach continued by Heraclitus and then Plato.¹⁵ Xenophanes claimed that: "There is one god, greatest among men, similar to mortals neither in shape nor in thought."¹⁶ This is a clear departure from the earlier anthropomorphic accounts represented by traditional Greek poets, such as Homer and Hesiod, and the dramatists. Xenophanes believed that the impact of the poets on the social fabric of the city and personal virtue was detrimental and based on an ignorant conception of divinity.¹⁷

Xenophanes marks the beginning in ancient Greece of critical theology,¹⁸ or what can be referred to as 'rational theology'. For Xenophanes the first principle, or supreme god, was one and often referred to apophatically in statements such "neither finite nor infinite, neither changing nor changeless."¹⁹ The one god that he describes is also eternal, unique, and homogeneous.²⁰ According to the theology of Xenophanes god created and directs the universe with the power of his mind.²¹ He is also said to be rational, immutable, and good; he believed god to be the possessor of moral excellence.²²

Epistemology was also a concern for Xenophanes who emphasised the limits of human knowledge.²³ Since his god was explained as being

¹⁴ S. Empiricus, 'Against the Mathematicians IX 193', in J. Barnes, *Early Greek Philosophy*, Penguin Books, England, 1987, p. 95.

¹⁵ Asmis, op. cit., p. 340.

¹⁶ Clement, 'Miscellanies V xiv 109.1-3 [B 15]', Barnes, op. cit., p. 96.

¹⁷ J.H. Lesher, *Xenophanes of Colophon*, University of Toronto Press, Toronto, 1992, p. 81.

¹⁸ R. Waterfield, *The First Philosophers – The Presocratics and Sophists*, Oxford University Press, New York, 2000, p.22.

¹⁹ Simplicius, 'Commentary on the Physics 22.26-23.20 [B 25]', in Barnes, op. cit., p. 96.

²⁰ Hippolytus, 'Refutation of All Heresies I xiv 2-6', Ibid.p. 99.

²¹ Waterfield, op. cit., p. 22.

²² Lesher, op. cit., p. 83.

²³ Waterfield, op. cit., p. 24.

omniscient, and he strongly held the view that he is completely distinct from mankind, men were essentially inferior in knowledge and intelligence.²⁴ It is important to note that Xenophanes held the view that human knowledge originates in the senses and is therefore subject to inaccuracy. Although certainty was out of human reach, he did have a positivist concept of human endeavour, i.e. by diligently investigating things within the boundaries of our limited experience one can improve one's epistemic situation.²⁵ This was his opinion in relation to the world, but knowledge of god was inaccessible. For this reason he criticised the inspired utterances of the poets.

Echoes of Xenophanes can be heard throughout Plato's beliefs; these include his views concerning the 'Good', poetry and human knowledge.²⁶ Like Xenophanes, Plato criticised the anthropomorphism of Homer and Hesiod, and was totally opposed to the attribution of immoral acts to the gods. Xenophanes' attack on the poets – conveyors of corrupted images of divine qualities – was appropriated by Plato and delivered with greater force and sophistication. There are also clear parallels between Plato's concept of the 'Good' and Xenophanes' supreme first principle. And in respect to epistemology they share features such as the limits of human cognition, the uncertainty of knowledge acquired through the senses, and the progress that eventuates as a result of rational inquiry.

²⁴ Leshner, op. cit., p. 83.

²⁵ Waterfield, op. cit., p. 25.

²⁶ The underlying metaphysics supporting all aspects of the philosophy of Xenophanes had a degree of impact on Eleatic philosophy. The Eleatic tradition was also a huge influence on Plato's ideas and in the *Sophist* Plato has the Stranger from Elea state that the *mythos* of the Eleatic tradition can be traced back to Xenophanes. Cf. Plato, 'Sophist', in *The Dialogues of Plato*, translated by B. Jowett, Oxford at the Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1970, 242. All future references will be made from this edition.

c. Religion and Plato's Aesthetics

The poets of ancient Greece, like prophets, were traditionally believed to be divinely inspired. The oral presentation of their poems often occurred in a religious setting, such as a dramatic festival in honour of Dionysus.²⁷ By virtue of being the recipients of divine knowledge the poets could communicate the significance of past, present and future events. For ancient Greek audiences performances such as tragedies, with their portrayal of gods and other religious themes, were not a “purely theatrical” experience.²⁸ They are more accurately described as ritual performances in that the ideas and characters represented did not occur in isolation from the ultimate concerns of the audience.²⁹ Rather the tragedies were perceived as being profoundly connected with the realities of the viewers. The concerns or realities associated with the audience were of many kinds – from profoundly spiritual, in relation to the meaning of their existence, to pragmatically opportunistic in the sense described above regarding the prosperity and benefits of the polis under the auspices of the cult. The combination of live performance with a focus on topics pertaining to the peoples most deeply held beliefs resulted in the audience experiencing a profound immediate impact analogous to the feelings of ecstasy and annihilation associated with the rituals of mystery cults or practices of ascension among mystics. The persuasive effect of immediacy was one element of drama that Plato found he had to contend with in his dialogues – an issue we will return to when we discuss his use of myth.

²⁷ Asmis, *op. cit.*, p. 339.

²⁸ Sourvinou-Inwood, *op. cit.*, p. 1.

²⁹ *Ibid.* p. 16.

A number of the themes and concepts from the religious traditions of Ancient Greece permeate through the aesthetically relevant dialogues that we will discuss. We have referred to the metaphysical dichotomy and eschatology³⁰ that underlies the *Phaedo* and the *Republic*. The educational and the epistemological theories that Plato expresses in these works, which also strongly affect his theory of art, promote an inquisitive process along stages that eventually culminate in the procurement of divine wisdom; this in fact implies that individuals actually become divine themselves.³¹ The *Timaeus*, which is the central text in regard to this paper, introduces the mythical figure of the Demiurge – a creator God. It also provides an existentially religious account of the soul's embodiment in order to alleviate an estrangement associated with the human condition. The vocabulary used to describe the soul's vision of the Forms in the *Phaedo*, along with the *Phaedrus* and the *Symposium*, originates in the ecstatic rituals of mystery cults.³² The poetically potent themes of the *Phaedrus* combine the use of myth and the experiences of cult initiates to argue for the soul's immortality, and the *Symposium* explains the phenomenon of divine love (*eros*) and contains a reverential exposition of the teachings of a prophetess called Diotima.

The religious potency of Platonic philosophy pervades every aspect of our discussion of aesthetics. The religiously influenced metaphysical views of the *Republic* had been implemented to discredit and attack art and the poets, who had been the communicators of social and religious

³⁰ I am using the word 'eschatology' in the Judeo-Christian sense of the word i.e. not merely the 'end things', but rather a spiritual rebirth following a material end.

³¹ Morgan, op. cit., p. 235. One may also refer to Diotima's teaching on how to be loved by the gods and attain immortality. Plato, *The Symposium*, translated by C. Gill, Penguin Books, England, 1999, 212a. All future references will be made from this edition.

³² Morgan, op. cit., p. 239.

values to the citizens of the polis.³³ Many of the passages in the *Republic*, which relate to the attack on art, accuse the poets of offending the moral order of the universe when they misrepresent the gods by ascribing them with spiteful, venal and immoral acts.³⁴ Plato realised the detrimental effect that the poet's religious message had on the soul and on the state, and made this unfavourable aspect of the poets influence the crux of his argument in the *Republic*. Therefore Plato's criticism of art was a moral issue. His vision of a society guided by a philosopher king, and a system of philosophic education was a clean break from the poetically based Attic education prevalent at the time. One may therefore assert that Plato's critique of art in the *Republic* was an attempt of cultural reform.³⁵ But we will also see how the use of myth, and a particular form of metaphysics, that renders an understanding of the cosmos with the use of novel, as well as traditional, religious themes, has characterised a dialogue like the *Timaeus*. The religious dimension of Plato is a crucial factor in relation to this thesis because of the fact that the *Timaeus* is an explicitly religious and existential work rather than a scientific text, or a cosmological treatise in the Aristotelian sense;³⁶ we will show how this religious interpretation of the *Timaeus* is highly tenable. The religious themes of the *Timaeus* will assist the central purpose of this thesis, i.e. to explore Plato's ideas concerning the justification of art and the poets.

³³ Asmis, op. cit., p. 339.

³⁴ Elias, op. cit., p. 3.

³⁵ Gadamer, 'Plato and the Poets', in *Dialogue and Dialectic – Eight Hermeneutical Studies on Plato*, translated by P. Christopher Smith, Yale University Press, New Haven, 1980, pp. 47-48.

³⁶ J.A. Stewart, *The Myths of Plato*, Macmillan and Co. Limited, New York, 1905, pp. 206-207.

2. The Issue of Dualism and the Aesthetics of the *Republic*

a. The 'Two Worlds Theory' or Dualism

The theory of art explicated in book X of the *Republic* seems to rely heavily on the bifurcation of reality into two realms. This view is generally understood as the 'two worlds theory'.³⁷ It is important to address the issue of dualism here.

It seems highly likely that the philosophical stance taken by modern anthropology has contributed to some extent towards labelling Plato as a dualist. Their theory that man is a substantial unity is rendered in such a way as to eliminate any possibility for the existence of a soul either in the Aristotelian sense, which recognises man as a "composite" of soul and body, or as something totally distinct from the body in the Cartesian sense. They contrast their own view of man with what they believe to be Plato's. In fact both Plato and Descartes are often understood and criticised as positing a "ghost in the machine",³⁸ as though Descartes' theory is a reiteration or modernisation of Plato's doctrine.³⁹ The position held in opposition to Platonic dualism, not just in the discipline of anthropology but possibly in all of the human sciences today, states that there is no soul that could be distinguished from the body; this viewpoint is known as physicalism. It is this concept that many believe stands in polar opposition to Platonic dualism.

³⁷ C.J. De Vogel, *Rethinking Plato and Platonism*, E.J. Brill, Leiden, 1986, p. 159.

³⁸ This particular phrase was formed by Gilbert Ryle in his essay 'Descartes' Myth', in D. Rosenthal (ed.), *The Nature of Mind*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1991, pp. 51-57.

³⁹ De Vogel, *op. cit.*, p. 161.

Identifying a prevalent presupposition in modern Platonic scholarship, Gadamer states: “With a persistence bordering on the absurd, the prevailing form of interpretation in which Plato’s philosophy has been passed on to us has advocated the two-world theory, that is, the *complete separation* of the paradigmatic world of ideas from the ebb and flow of change in our experience of the sense perceived world (italics mine).”⁴⁰ Gadamer is not alone in challenging the trend that reduces Plato’s philosophy to dualism. Many scholars feel that it is narrow to assume that a dissention or gulf exists between idea and reality, which consequently complicates their relationship with each other.⁴¹

When I speak of dualism in relation to Plato I mean “two kinds of being”: the invisible and the visible; the never changing and the changing; the pure and eternal as opposed to the corruptible and temporal; the place of intelligibility and knowledge as against that of confusion and error; the mental and the physical; traditionally referred to as Being and becoming.⁴² “ We are in full metaphysics here: physical being is a kind of reality, but a kind of reality which can neither exist by itself nor be known or explained from itself. It is found to be dependent on that other, superior kind of being.”⁴³ This metaphysical dichotomy is incorporated and can be detected in many of the issues Plato discusses throughout his dialogues; issues such as epistemology, politics, anthropology and his theory of art.

⁴⁰ Gadamer, ‘Idea and Reality in Plato’s *Timaeus*’, p. 156.

⁴¹ Gadamer argues that historically the only significant resolution to the two-worlds dilemma was developed by the Neoplatonic tradition. Their radical interpretation of the two realms into hypostases, in a grand process of emanation, reconciled the two opposing realms presented in the dualist interpretation.

⁴² E.E. Benitez, *Forms in Plato’s Philebus*, Van Gorcum, The Netherlands, 1989, p. 92.

⁴³ De Vogel, op. cit., p. 162.

b. Dualism: The 'Phaedo' and the 'Republic'

The *Phaedo* deals with the issue of the soul and its relation to the body. In this work Plato seems to give his account of the topic in a way that commits him to dualism.⁴⁴ The life of the philosopher consists of turning away from visible things so as not to lead the mind into confusion. The philosopher must approach the “things-themselves” or “true Reality” by using the mind alone. Also the view of life that Socrates prescribes for the philosopher in this work gives no value to corporeal existence other than the fact that it gives one the opportunity to practice death. These particular views and others promoting a form of mind/body dualism are always supported by a cosmic or metaphysical dualism that has become the basis of the “two-worlds theory”.

In book VI of the *Republic* Plato expresses his tendencies towards an apparently dualist position.⁴⁵ At the beginning of book VI (484b), in which Plato is concerned with establishing the philosopher as the one who is best fit to be ruler of the state, he asks Glaucon: “If philosophers have the capacity to grasp the eternal and immutable, while those who have no such capacity are not philosophers and are lost in multiplicity and change, which of the two should be in charge of a state?” To help explain the distinction between the philosopher and those who are not philosophers (480), Plato draws an analogy using the distinction between clear sighted men and men who are blind. He states: “But surely “blind” is just how you would describe men who have no true knowledge of

⁴⁴ Plato, ‘Phaedo’, in *The Last Days of Socrates*, translated by H. Tredennick and H. Tarrant, Penguin Books, London, 1993, pp. 93-185. All future references will be made from this edition.

⁴⁵ Plato, *The Republic*, translated by D. Lee, Penguin Books, London, 1987. All future references will be made from this edition. For details of passages in the *Republic* that refer to the being and becoming distinction cf. Benitez, *Forms in Plato's Philebus*, pp. 97-98. Interestingly, Benitez indicates that some passages resist the strict dualist interpretation with which Plato has been attributed.

reality, and no clear standard (*Paradeigma*) of perfection in their mind to which they can turn, as a painter turns to his model, and which they can study closely before they start laying down rules in this world about what is admirable or right or good where such rules are needed, or maintaining, as Guardians, any that already exist" (484d).⁴⁶

It is in accordance with this metaphysical theory that Plato presents a subtle critique of art before he returns to the issue in book X. Since the Guardians of the state must turn to the eternal and immutable reality, and not to the realm of particulars, in order to lay down the rules for this world then it will be unacceptable to allow children who are being reared to be our rulers, or any children of the state for that matter, to learn their customs, habits and morals from anyone who does not have direct and accurate knowledge of a particular subject. The prime example that Plato gives for the avenue that one must avoid in their pursuit for the knowledge of reality is the representations of the poets and the presentations delivered by the dramatic artists.

In book III of the *Republic* Plato is concerned with the education of the potential Guardians of the state. He objects to the use of drama in education and especially the practice of imitating the characters' tone of

⁴⁶ One will note Plato's use of the example of the painter who looks to his model as a metaphor to describe the way in which the philosopher turns towards the 'Good' in order to observe a "clear standard of perfection". It is important to be aware of the way Plato uses the example of the artist as a rhetorical tool in order to support his argument. If one were to take the analogy literally or simply assume closer affinities between the artist and the philosopher we may infer that in some sense the artist, through close study of his model, has the potential to lay down rules that are "admirable", "right" or "good", and maintain any that already exist. In book II of the *Republic* Plato also uses the metaphor of the painter as a rhetorical device to back his views, but this time he refers to the artist in a derogatory sense. "... like a portrait painter whose portraits bear no resemblance to their originals" (377e). There are other instances where Plato uses a critique of an aesthetic activity as simply a rhetorical tool. In the *Gorgias* Plato attacks poetry for the sake of supporting his argument against Gorgias's theory that language is a great power. In this case Plato associates the use of poetry with the rhetoric of the sophists, and criticises poetry according to the abuses he believes it, like rhetoric, is open to. Cf. Asmis, op. cit., pp. 343-344.

speech and physical gestures. It is not only the representation of bad characters or the over-exaggeration of emotion that Plato finds problematic but also the fact that by imitating another personality the artist is attempting to fulfil a role other than his own. Plato explains this to be a division of effort and a practice that is opposed to his principle that "one man does only one job well". In other words if one is to attempt to take on the role of another as well as his own "he will fail to make his mark at any of them" (394e). Therefore "... a man cannot play many parts as well as he can one" (394e), and consequently any individual who seeks to gain knowledge from one who engages in a variety of representations will be learning from one who has no expert perspective, or no idea at all, of the matter being displayed.⁴⁷

It is important to note that within this section of the work Plato describes poetry as having some redeeming qualities. For instance Plato recognises the practical value of poetry when used to teach children. Also poetry is believed to have the ability to convey virtue and righteousness. The epic tales about the deeds of heroes are said to have the power to invoke respect for moral principles and conjure up noble feelings in the reader or spectator (390d).

c. *'Republic X'*

It is in book X of the *Republic* that Plato offers a more scathing criticism of art. In this critique one can also observe a dualistic metaphysical foundation supporting his argument.⁴⁸ Plato's critique of art in the

⁴⁷ Gadamer also makes the point that this form of imitation detrimentally results in "self-exteriorization, self-estrangement" and "self-alienation." Gadamer, 'Plato and the Poets', p. 64.

⁴⁸ I have avoided considering De Vogel's suggestion that the two realms have a relationship of dependent subordination rather than dichotomy because this will divert from my central focus.

Republic is based on two main premises; the first metaphysical and the second epistemological:⁴⁹

- 1) Objects receive their qualities from that to which they are directly subordinate. The consequence of this hierarchy is that the object below is inferior in quality.
- 2) Knowledge can only be acquired through that which is immutable. This implies that one can only truly know things exclusively through the intellect.

Every level of existence possesses its reality from that which is above or superior to it. The world of particulars obtains its being from the realm of Forms that have a higher level of reality than things residing in the world of appearance. In the same manner the works of artistic representation receive their ontological status from the world of particularity. To coincide with his dualist dichotomy explained above Plato stresses that since the world that is available to the senses is an inferior and abhorrent copy of the original Forms then artistic representation is merely a replica of an inferior copy: something that is thrice removed from reality.

Since the phenomena of artistic representations are thrice removed from the true reality of the Forms – in which intelligibility lies and through which real knowledge can be gained – then Plato asserts that art is not inherently intelligible and consequently no knowledge can be obtained from it (the thrice removed inferiority of art will be elaborated on later).

Although it is an interesting perspective I would prefer to approach the issue not by analysing the relationship between the two modes of being but rather by looking at the value that Plato attributes to each. Cf. De Vogel, op. cit., p. 165.

⁴⁹ “The epistemological distinction between knowledge and opinion is parallel to the ontological distinction between being and becoming.” Benitez, *Form's in Plato's Philebus*, p. 118. These premises are relevant to aesthetics; for art to convey knowledge it must be real.

Plato also holds the view that true knowledge lies only in that which is immutable and eternal. The world of appearance or change is only intelligible insofar as it participates in the eternal Forms, in other words no knowledge can be gained by studying the particulars in themselves. But more importantly since particulars are copies of Forms they share a common property with them but only to a limited degree, therefore artistic representation can be interpreted as sharing that property in an even less significant way. Thus, Plato's metaphysical dichotomy and his aesthetics share a relationship of epistemological dependency in book X.⁵⁰

It is important to keep in mind that Plato does not address the subject of art for its own sake. The motivation for describing a theory of art in the *Republic* was to indicate the flaws in non-philosophic forms of education and also to support his views regarding the poets of his time. Ancient Greek poets performed a didactic function within the state and Plato believed that this function was not being sufficiently fulfilled. We had earlier referred to the way in which Plato believed the poets had offended the moral order of the universe and how his attack on them was an attempt at cultural and moral reform. Further investigation will reveal that the religious ideas that the poets promoted entailed a deterministic position in regard to the fate of the individual. The destiny of man was seen to be dependant upon the "result of a random drawing by Zeus from two urns at his side, one filled with blessings, the other with evil gifts."⁵¹ Plato saw "the poet primarily as a maker of ethics".⁵² The moral imperatives that the poets were teaching fourth century Athenians were

⁵⁰ To speak of art as a 'thrice removed' level of reality does not contradict our previous discussion of Plato as a dualist. An analysis of art as a particular level of becoming subordinate to phenomena does not discount the more fundamental ontological distinction of being and becoming.

⁵¹ Elias, op. cit., p. 8.

⁵² Asmis, op. cit., p. 338.

ones that nullified individual merit and responsibility. Consequently punishment was interpreted as being distributed arbitrarily by blind and malevolent powers; powers whose rational judgement was apparently susceptible to human vices of excess emotion. It is essential to understand the critique of art in book X as occurring in the context of Plato establishing the conditions for a new state founded on philosophy. Only then does it become obvious why all the poets, as the representatives of education in the old state, were victimised.⁵³

Plato explains that the poets were not only neglecting their educational and moral role in the state but were essentially unable to teach truth and reality to their fellow citizens. In fact in book X Plato states that the aspect of imitation in poetry “harm[s] the minds of their audiences, unless they’re inoculated against them by knowing their real nature” (595b).⁵⁴ The *Republic* offers us an example of three levels of reality and, consequently, three levels of knowledge that refer to them. One will notice that this ontological ordering, paralleled by an epistemological ordering, remains consistent with the dualist position described earlier. The example of three levels of reality is used to enforce his critique of art in book X.

Plato draws an analogy with painting in order to describe the ontological and epistemological significance of representation. He begins with a comparison of three kinds of art and consequently three kinds of artist.

⁵³ Gadamer, ‘Plato and the Poets’, p. 48.

⁵⁴ Plato’s critic of the educational deficiency of verse as opposed to prose develops out of the tradition begun by the sophists. Like Protagoras (fl. c. 450 B.C.), who overtly claimed that he was the first in the tradition of Greek educators, Plato believed that the most important part of education was its criticism of poetry. Resembling his predecessor, Plato uses prose as a weapon against poetry, and just like Protagoras he ironically models this language in the style of poetry. The possibilities of prose combined with the power of verse ultimately led to dialectic, thus confirming the poetic heritage of Platonic argument. Cf. Asmis, *op. cit.*, p. 340. For Protagoras’ views on education see, Waterfield, *op. cit.*, pp. 210-211.

First there is 'one which uses'. This artist develops the concept of a thing in conjunction with his use for it. He has the most intimate insight into what the instrument is and can indicate the qualities that enhance the use of it. These original and authentic instructions are given to the actual craftsman who, after being instructed by him who really knows about the object at hand, can construct the actual thing with the right knowledge. Plato makes the criticism that the artist who draws or paints the actual thing has no real knowledge of the good or bad qualities of the object. So in artistic imitation we are left with a representation that only appears to be reality. Neither the spectators of such a representation nor the imitator himself has any real knowledge of what is being copied. Therefore the imitation is stated as being 'thrice removed from reality'; thrice removed from the truth of the Form. Because the poet has no true knowledge of the virtues and behaviour that he imitates he is in no position to instruct and guide the intellectual faculty of his spectators. So he is criticised by Plato as resorting to techniques that appeal to the inferior part of the soul (the emotions), and thus offering the audience a mere projected image of the world which results in ruining their understanding.

d. Summary

The aesthetics explained in book X are dependent on a dualistic metaphysical position. In summary, the ontological and epistemological inferiority of representation is due to the premise that levels of being obtain their value and significance from that which is one level above them and is represented in them. And if one accepts the view that what is represented in art is that which is obviously above it in rank – that is the detestable realm of appearances characterised in the 'two-worlds theory' – then Plato is justified in rejecting with scorn those who attempt to

replace true reality with a thrice-removed imitation. Consequently, no real knowledge can be extracted from art. True knowledge resides in the eternal and never-changing, thus contingent representations are not inherently intelligible. Plato's aesthetics in the *Republic* can be simply reduced to the equation: art is *mimesis*. The theory of art in the *Republic* also depends on the idea that both Form and particular share a common property, except that the particular embodies this property in a very limited form, and consequently artistic representation shares in this property even less.

It must also be mentioned that the impetus behind giving an account of art in the *Republic* is Plato's endeavour to purge the state of the poets and their bad influences. The theory of art in the *Republic* was also explicated with the intention of outlining a system of education worthy of rearing guardians for the state.⁵⁵ Plato's real agenda in book X can be reduced to morality and moral education. Since the traditional forms of morality, that had once been the cause of virtue and righteousness, were now defenceless against the abuses of ignorant poets, then the medium of communication as a whole had to be re-evaluated.⁵⁶ We will now attempt to consider a theory of art that is not explicitly connected with any political or pragmatic aims and can be developed in light of the unique metaphysical implications of the *Timaeus*.⁵⁷

⁵⁵ It seems as though Plato had used his criticism of art as a rhetorical device to support these two objectives. In fact Julius Elias has made the comment that Plato's argument against poetry "rests on a fairly simple-minded version of the imitation theory". Elias, op. cit., p. 1. Also cf. above, footnote 46. The aesthetics of the *Republic* may be considered as a 'general aesthetic' that indiscriminately aims to encompass the sensory realm as a whole within a theory of *mimesis*. Asmis, op. cit. p. 349.

⁵⁶ Gadamer, 'Plato and the Poets', p. 61. The spirit of sophism at the time of Plato had also contributed to the perversion of morality.

⁵⁷ It is important to note that the *Timaeus* may not be completely divorced from political concerns since the dialogue begins with the statements indicating that the characters are continuing their conversation about the ideal society outlined in the *Republic*. Plato does not relinquish his duty towards the political needs of the state. He returns to this topic explicitly in the *Laws* where he also re-examines the arts and their role in the community.

3. The Ontology of the *Timaeus*

a. The '*Timaeus*' and Metaphysics

The metaphysics of the *Timaeus* is a modification of the metaphysics underlying the *Republic*. In the *Timaeus* Plato still maintains the two original categories featured in his dualist ontology. Aristotle makes the point in his *Metaphysics* (987a34-b1)⁵⁸ that Plato never discarded his doctrine of separation between the realm of Forms and the realm of particulars and the *Timaeus* confirms this by restating the position through a parallel distinction between knowledge and opinion.⁵⁹

Some more explanation must be given for why I have set the *Republic* and the *Timaeus* against each other as representatives of two different directions in Plato's thought. I have chosen the *Republic* obviously because it contains a whole book devoted to the topic of art. But more importantly because of the fact that many modern scholars insist on the centrality of the *Republic*. Scholars like Partee make strong statements in support of this view such as "The *Republic* provides the cornerstone for an evaluation of Plato's most representative thought". (*Plato's Poetics*, p.9)

The modern critical disposition towards the *Timaeus*, which has its origins in Aristotle's physics and consequently views Plato's "physics" as secondary, neglects the fact that the text was the work of ancient philosophy that attracted the most commentary and that most writers on the *Timaeus* agree that it contained Plato's mature metaphysical views. The *Timaeus* was also the only dialogue studied seriously in the Medieval period and the famous Neoplatonist, Plotinus, makes over one hundred references to it in the *Enneads* (Plotinus, *The Enneads*, translated by S. Mackenna, Penguin Books, England, 1991, Appendix II p. 553.) It was crucial for formulating the views of Jewish and Christian theologians and was revered as the most important dialogue of the Middle Platonic period (J. Dillon, *The Middle Platonists – 80 B.C. to A.D. 220*, Cornell University Press, New York, 1977, p. 8). It became the guide for mysticism particularly amongst Gnostic thinkers and important even in the Sufi tradition (P. Kingsley, *Ancient Philosophy, Mystery, and Magic*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1995, pp. 201-204). Even Aristotle refers to the *Timaeus* more than any other dialogue and believed it to be the source of Plato's mature views on physics, biology and cosmology (Prior, op. cit., p.173). On this evidence it may be safe to oppose some modern interpreters and state that the *Timaeus* is the cornerstone of Platonic thought. But my thesis will reveal that since Plato takes a different approach to different issues no one dialogue can be said to epitomise his final position – if he had a final position at all. (For a brief explanation of the relationship between the *Timaeus* and Judeo-Christian cosmogony, and its influence on modern physics, refer to Gadamer, 'Idea and Reality in Plato's *Timaeus*', pp. 158-159.)

For these reasons, and the fact that I feel that there is a distinction between the metaphysics of each text, I have used the two works as examples of varying Platonic views.

⁵⁸ Aristotle, 'Metaphysics', *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, edited by J. Barnes, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1984.

⁵⁹ Aristotle's account of, what he understood to be, Plato's doctrine is expressed in the context of his criticism of it. The positive and negative responses to Aristotle's critique have substantiated much of Platonic scholarship, even though the validity of his scathing attack on the theory of ideas continues to be argued. Cf. Gadamer, 'Idea and Reality in Plato's *Timaeus*', p. 156.

We must in my opinion begin by distinguishing between that which always is and never becomes from that which is always becoming but never is. The one is apprehensible by intelligence with the aid of reasoning, being eternally the same, the other is the object of opinion and irrational sensation, coming to be and ceasing to be, but never fully real. (27d-28a)⁶⁰

The above quote coincides with Plato's previous view explained in dialogues such as the *Republic* which explicate that since there are differing mental states, those of knowledge and opinion, then it necessarily follows that there are two different ontological categories that they refer to; the fundamental categories of Being and becoming (477b-478b).⁶¹ But there are a number of important distinctions between Plato's metaphysical position in the *Republic* and his theory in the *Timaeus* that must be elucidated. And these distinctions will be shown to be modifications of, or even challenges to, the basic premises stated to support the theory of art described in the *Republic*.

Unlike earlier dialogues the *Timaeus* does not posit the Forms as causes in the theory of causation and when Plato claims that phenomena resemble Forms he no longer means that they share a common property, in other words the Forms are not self-predicative. This is an important point to consider since the theory of art in the *Republic* makes the point that the actual particular things resemble, participate in, share a common property with and are caused by their Forms.

Plato uses the example of 'time' in the *Timaeus* to explain how Forms and phenomena relate. He shows how an eternal, unchanging and

⁶⁰ Plato, *Timaeus and Critias*, translated by D. Lee, Penguin Books, London, 1977. All future references will be made from this edition.

⁶¹ Gadamer, 'Idea and Reality in Plato's *Timaeus*', p. 161.

paradigmatic concept can relate to a copy or image of it without sharing a common property. When detailing the activities of the creator he states:

... he determined to make a moving image of eternity, and so when he ordered the heavens he made in that which we call time an eternal moving image of the eternity which remains forever at one. (37c)

In this particular case 'time', which is the image, is a replica of eternity: the paradigm. The phenomenon of 'time' does not manifest any quality that one may inductively attribute to eternity, even though eternity is the Form, or model, of 'time'. Therefore, we may say that the Form of bed cannot be described by, or attributed with, any quality whatsoever of the actual particular bed; the actual bed becomes a copy but remains unique because it physically exists. In any case whatever connects the Form with the particular in their relationship together cannot be comprehended conceptually by finite human cognition; any understanding of the Forms is now only available through the limited example of phenomena. Later in the paper we will elaborate on the failure of conceptual explanation in accounting for the mediation of particulars with Forms: The achievement of symbolism will be argued to be the solution; a point that will become clearer after we explicate the significance of the Demiurge. The non-participatory explanation of the relationship between Form and particular resists the third man argument that challenged Plato in the *Parmenides* but at the same time it has revolutionary consequences for the status of the physical world, as Plato later describes.

To confirm his view that phenomena share no knowable characteristics with the Forms Plato explains the false induction one may make when misrepresenting the relationship between the two:

For before the heavens came into being there were no days or nights or months or years, but he [the creator] devised and brought them into being at the same time that the heavens were put together; for they are all parts of time, just as past and future are also forms of it, which we wrongly attribute, without thinking, to the eternal Being. (37d)⁶²

b. Introducing the Demiurge

In the *Timaeus* we also encounter a new element in the theory of causation. It is an important factor for reconsidering Plato's theory of art because in the *Republic* art is the replica of something that is caused by the Forms and is described as being thrice removed from reality. In this particular view the Forms have a complete level of reality of which particular things only embody a limited degree. In other words they are the imperfect products of the originals. For example the *Phaedo* identifies the Forms as the sole explanation of how and why phenomena have the characteristics that they do. The *Timaeus* on the other hand renders a mythological figure known as the Demiurge who is the initiator, "maker and father" of the universe (28c). The use of the Forms by the Demiurge in its causal process is explained in the following passage:

... therefore the maker of anything keeps his eye on the eternally unchanging and uses it as his pattern for the form and function of his product... (28b)

In the eyes of scientific rationalists and those who equate Plato's cosmological intentions with those of Aristotle's, the tale of the Demiurge is interpreted as nothing but an empty metaphor.⁶³ Instead, as we will go on to explain in our discussion on myth, Plato is not engaging

⁶² Benitez argues that time does not apply to the Forms. Any time specification in respect to Forms is superfluous. Benitez, *Form's in Plato's Philebus*, p. 96.

⁶³ Gadamer, 'Idea and Reality in Plato's *Timaeus*', p. 158.

in what we would believe today to be objective science, and is in fact combining conceptual analysis with symbolism with the intention of giving an account of the cosmos that offers meaning and significance to individuals who must live in the cosmos. For this reason Plato does not address questions concerning the motives behind the production of the world. He simply states that by virtue of being “good” and non-possessive (knowing no *phthonos*) the Demiurge cannot stand to remain the only being worthy of the epithets “good” and “beautiful”.⁶⁴ He desires that everything be like him as much as possible and therefore creates all things beautiful and good, and brings beings into existence that have nous.⁶⁵

Prior to participating in an act of creation a rational being, such as the Demiurge, must have a notion of what will evolve as a result of his effort. The thing that the Demiurge creates becomes precisely the object he envisioned. Therefore the Demiurge is made the determining cause of becoming insofar as he can foresee the end for the object. Whether the creation is good depends on the function of foresight. The beauty of the object, its constancy, is contingent upon the direction of the vision: “It can aim at that which “always is” (the constant) as its paradigm, or at that

⁶⁴ It is interesting to note the similarities between the Demiurge and the Aristotelian teachings about the Supreme God expounded in the *Metaphysics* and the *De Anima*. The Demiurge is good and beautiful and therefore looks for the source of those qualities that he himself is. This is similar to the Aristotelian notion of a god that is self-directed in thought. Plato does not make this feature of the Demiurge explicit but evidence for interpreting the Demiurge as a self-directed god is found in Plotinus's concept of the Nous. Armstrong makes the observation that the “transcendent self-sufficing God, pure and self-directed Act, the supreme object of desire, but himself desiring nothing but himself, appears in philosophy before Plotinus only in Aristotle.” A.H. Armstrong, *The Architecture of the Intelligible Universe in the Philosophy of Plotinus*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1940, p. 3, and also see the *Enneads* VI.8, 16. But upon considering the moral and altruistic attributes Plato ascribes to the Demiurge, and the fact that these qualities must eternally reside in him, one may deduce that like the Aristotelian god, the Demiurge is in some sense a self-thinking, or self-reflecting, mind. But the point that distinguishes the Aristotelian god from the Platonic god is that the Demiurge is also self-willing and self-loving. (Armstrong also makes the point that a combination of the Aristotelian god and interpretations of the *Timaeus* were used to develop Plotinus's concept of the Nous. Cf. Armstrong, p. 65.)

⁶⁵ Gadamer, ‘Idea and Reality in Plato's *Timaeus*’, p. 163

which is formless and lacking in constancy.”⁶⁶ The ‘Beautiful’ is an absolute concept and therefore has constancy, and so that which becomes beautiful is the cause of a prior reference to the Beautiful. The beauty ascribed by Plato to the cosmos confirms the divine focus of the Demiurge. In the context of art – which we will deal with explicitly in section 4 – the implications associated with Plato’s reference to vision, and its object, becomes the cause of his ambivalency towards creation. The artist can aim to use a constant paradigm or a transient example; a projection towards the Beautiful as opposed to being guided by a bad projection.

The Demiurge acts as a symbolic link between Form and what Plato describes as pre-existent matter and creates the cosmos so that it exhibits the principles of order; the very characteristic of the Forms.⁶⁷ One would not be mistaken in recognising the activity of the Demiurge as analogous to that of the artist. He describes the creation of the cosmos as being comparable to the work of a craftsman who uses models, patterns, plans or a design to construct his work. It is interesting to note that Plato still believes the cosmos to be an organic, sensually perceived unit that belongs to the realm of becoming and because of this quality one can never gain certain knowledge about it. This is equally true when we attempt to account for the process by which it came about. Plato believes that any formulated cosmology is nothing but a “likely story” (29d) or *mythos* (but not necessarily a fiction) in the sense that it can only be a story and never absolutely ‘true’.⁶⁸ Plato’s account of myths and their function reveal his own artistic nature and it remains an open question

⁶⁶ Ibid. p. 161.

⁶⁷ Prior, op. cit., p. 96.

⁶⁸ Gadamer, ‘Idea and Reality in Plato’s *Timaeus*’, p. 158.

when the use of a “likely story” is acceptable.⁶⁹ In any case one must not take the symbols, such as the Demiurge, or the myth as descriptions of objective entities or events, but rather as things that draw us to comprehend, and thus participate in, a sphere that offers a truth about things on an existentially meaningful level. This means that they are not mere metaphor, but symbols that point to a higher reality. (The dispensability of the symbol and its relationship to its referent follows in 3d and also in 4b.)

*c. Myth*⁷⁰

The use of myth enabled Plato to evoke the immediacy and certainty of the eternal and unchanging; in the context of the *Timaeus* myth replaces cosmology with existentialism. Plato was writing predominantly for a Greek audience who were accustomed to having the truth about ultimate reality, and Man's relation to it, revealed to them through appealing oral performances. These were constructed and administered by poets who the public believed were like prophets – directly inspired by the gods. The advantage of the poets was their intimate interaction with the audience. As a consequence this connection enabled them to produce an immediate impact in the participant, an impact that stimulated their ultimate

⁶⁹ A reality produced with symbolic imagery that models itself on eternal Forms is more worthy than a representation that only replicates empirical facts. Osbourne, op. cit., p. 189.

⁷⁰ Some scholars have affirmed that Plato's myths constitute a defence of poetry in themselves (C. Janaway, *Images of Excellence*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1995, p. 159). Putting aside the fact that the creating of myths is an artistic activity itself, the fact that Plato used them, and attributes benefits to them, can be interpreted to be premises supporting an alternative aesthetic. Even though the force of the attack in book X of the *Republic* has convinced some commentators and readers of Plato's antipathy towards art and poetry, most commentators are actually more drawn by the fact that Plato was himself a master poet and have sought to explain the ostensible contradiction (Elias, op. cit., p. 1). Plato's concept and use of myth tends to be rather idiosyncratic. It cannot be conflated with what myth generally meant in his time, nor what it means in our own time (Elias, op. cit., p. 208). The explanation of myth and its significance detailed in this section is what I take to be closer to Plato's conception. Proof for this position will follow throughout.

concerns.⁷¹ To be able to compete with his contemporaries, and at the same time recognising the poet's rhetorical effectiveness, Plato implements the use of aesthetic symbolism in the form of myth.

[In the *Timaeus*] Plato seems to be contrasting two kinds of authoritative discourse. One kind seeks to picture faithfully something from the past, offering a correct account of the way things actually happened. The other seeks to bring a living model into being here and now, an image of the ideal that is as *immediate* as any experience to which it might correspond (emphasis mine).⁷²

If we are to apply this observation to cosmology, we recognise the role of the Demiurge as symbolizing “nothing more than the conversion of a condition of disordered movement into a condition of order”.⁷³ To support this view we must show how symbols, in contrast to the concepts used in philosophical reasoning, are able to express and communicate a more phenomenological account of things. We must disclose the immediate certainty and existentially meaningful knowledge procured through myth.

Plato's philosophy is essentially committed to issues pertaining to the structure of being or ultimate reality.⁷⁴ It forms concepts that logically correlate to argue for a particular position. Plato certainly deploys this method in his depiction of the dialectical exchanges of Socrates with his contemporaries. But in his presentation of myth, Plato involves himself with the systematic arrangement of symbols rather than concepts.

⁷¹ Asmis, op. cit., p. 339.

⁷² Osbourne, op. cit., p. 184.

⁷³ Gadamer, 'Idea and Reality in Plato's *Timaeus*', p. 163.

⁷⁴ G. Fine, 'Knowledge and Belief in *Republic V-VII*', in S. Everson (ed.), *Epistemology*, Cambridge, 1991, p. 97.

Human cognition is guided and organised by the use of signs (modern linguistics acknowledges the fact that thinking is conducted by human beings through the medium of signs).⁷⁵ Creative activity is conducted when an individual develops symbols to point to, and evoke an emotion or experience alien to the direct context of another who encounters the symbol. The development and application of concepts is contingent on the initial creation of signs that one attributes to one's primary experience of the world. Prior to conceptual explanation though, the first move to abstraction in human thought occurs in symbolic representation. This is confirmed if one considers the creative expression and communication that follows the signification of encountered objects. This process precedes the bifurcation of sense and thought involved in conceptualisation. According to this account the significance of symbols, as opposed to concepts, is that they express more closely one's primal encounter with the world; symbols are the language through which Man can make known, to himself and to others, the phenomenological aspect of his confrontation with the world.

What is narrated in myth, and that which is conceptualised in philosophy, is a common subject matter: ultimate reality. Philosophical truth is truth about the structure of reality, while forms of artistic expression are truths about what that structure means to one's existence. Ultimate reality is expressed conceptually in the former and symbolically in the later. Philosophy abstracts concepts from appearances and renders a rational

⁷⁵ This influential 'Romantic' theory of language was initially devised in some form by the French Enlightenment philosopher E.B.D. Condillac in the eighteenth century (*Essay on the Origin of Human Knowledge*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2001), and was developed into its more sophisticated form by J.G. Herder in his work, 'Treatise on the Origin of Language (1772)', in M.N. Forster, *Philosophical Writings*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2002, and W.V. Humboldt, see *On Language*, translated by P. Heath, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1988. Also see L. Wittgenstein, *Preliminary Studies for the "Philosophical Investigations"*, Generally Known as *The Blue and Brown Books*, Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1960.

account of the ultimate structure of phenomena. Myth presents a symbolic explanation of the world that initially demands belief in the ability of the symbols to elucidate a reality beyond the concrete artistic representation; the transparency of myth must be acknowledged for ultimate truth to be conveyed. One must not misinterpret belief to mean the acceptance of the literal interpretation of the symbols in myth. The mode of belief implied here is more like acknowledging that the symbols contain conceptual potency and have the possibility to communicate something about ultimate reality. In relation to the issue at hand, "... one should not forget that in principle such an artful literary composition as the *Timaeus* must have a certain immanent logic to it."⁷⁶ Myths are true only if they represent an immediate existential truth about the situation of the individual; a meaning that transcends the symbols contained in the myth.

While rational accounts are in principle a detached description of the basic structure of reality, myth is an involved concern into the meaning that reality has to Man. The immediate experience produced by myth is a self-evident truth in that the knowledge acquired through it confirms a certainty about our very being. Yet myth is only ever an objectification of this aspect of our being, and is therefore an appearance or particular. Since, for Plato, truth resides exclusively in the Forms, belief in the myth is required if it is to disclose meaning and truth. Belief, of the mode described above, combines the certainty of immediacy with the probability and contingency apparent in art forms such as myth. In this regard the contents of myth cannot be refuted by philosophical, scientific

⁷⁶ Gadamer, 'Idea and Reality in Plato's *Timaeus*', p. 165.

or historical scrutiny.⁷⁷ Aesthetic symbols do not make any factual claims that can be validated by the criteria of other categories.⁷⁸ Artistic productions such as myths are aimed at communicating meaning and fulfilment in our lives – their criteria for truth is an existential satisfaction.

Myth is an unfalsifiable discourse because its referent is located either at a level of reality inaccessible both to the intellect and to the senses, or at the level of sensible things, but in a past of which the author of this discourse can have no experience, whether directly or indirectly.⁷⁹

A sophisticated interpretation of myth, or any form of religious symbolism, can enhance and add to an individual's encounter with the world. Religious symbols, such as those used in myth, like all symbols when they are contrasted with mere signs, do not simply stand for something else but also participate in it in some way. For example, a people who live within a culture of a particular nation recognise their flag as participating in qualities of the nation that the flag represents. This is unlike letters of the alphabet that are merely signs that do not share anything with the sounds that they stand for. Words are also mere signs until a culture collectively elevates it into a symbol, meaning that the mere word now symbolises something beyond it like a flag or an emblem does. This is also the case for poetic language where words have connotations in situations, and participate in the power of a reality, in

⁷⁷ Osbourne, op. cit., p. 180. One of the concerns held by Socrates and his friends in the opening section of the *Timaeus* is whether the discourse can accurately tell of any historical facts and if language is able to express a particular level of reality. Socrates' own description of the ideal state is compared to a picture, not of how things actually are, based on a prior experience of historical facts, but rather, created by virtue of a general skill in philosophy and politics. Cf. Ibid. p. 184.

⁷⁸ Osbourne indicates that *Timaeus'* tale is not a candidate for truth, but an example or icon that has partial likeness to reality. The degree to which it exemplifies the ideal determines its significance, rather than the probability that it is true or false. Ibid. p. 186.

⁷⁹ L. Brisson, *Plato the Myth Maker*, translated and edited by G. Naddaf, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1998, p. 102.

such a way that no other word can sufficiently replace it.⁸⁰ The religious symbol therefore opens up levels of reality that are hidden and cannot be realised other than through the symbol. We encounter this in art where poetry, visual art and music express modes of being that can only be communicated symbolically.⁸¹ Expressions of religious symbolism say something to us about the way we have understood ourselves in our very nature.

The use of myth is of utmost importance to the expression of Plato's philosophical theories for they communicated a dimension of immediacy that discursive argument is incapable of teaching. There are interesting co-relations between myth and poetry that will be further explored. Julius Elias has indicated an important criterion that applies to the phenomenon of myth; that is "that it be capable of being all things to all men."⁸² Myth offers one the possibility to interpret it in many different ways depending on the particular philosophy that one desires the symbols to represent. Throughout all epochs and within every ethos the multifarious manifestations of myths have offered cultures a multiplicity of symbolic meanings. But it has always been the more sophisticated exegesis of the myth, that which transcends interpreting superficial meanings of ritual as directly influencing the course of nature, and supersedes the naïve anthropomorphic understanding of the reality and deeds of the gods, that has had the more profound existential impact for the individual of whatever historical context.

⁸⁰ P. Tillich, 'The Nature of Religious Language', in *Theology of Culture*, Oxford University Press, U.S.A., 1964, p. 56.

⁸¹ *Ibid.* p. 57.

⁸² Elias, *op. cit.*, p. 17.

d. The New View of the Phenomenal World

We now come to Plato's evaluation of the status or value of the phenomenal world. His theory of art in the *Republic* was dependent on the view that the material world was an inferior copy and that no real knowledge of objects could be gained from the study of the actual thing. In fact, in other passages and dialogues one is advised to turn away from the physical world and deplore it. In these writings Plato acknowledges that the physical objects participate (*metechein*) in the Forms, which are the source of their essential characteristics; this being the necessary relationship that allowed one to know something. But since the theory of participation and the causal function of the Forms was reconsidered and modified in the *Timaeus* (see 3a and 3b above) so too his view of phenomena. The status of the physical world is altered to compensate for the non-committal function of the Forms.

The world of appearance seems to have been elevated from its otherwise detested and worthless status⁸³ to what Plato describes in the *Timaeus*, "by nature highest and best" (30c). The empirical world that was previously described as a realm of inferiority and decay in the previous dialogues has become, in the *Timaeus*, a world that is styled after and embodies eternal principles of order. The unit of the cosmos has now been elevated to a unique copy of a unique, perfect and eternal model, a "loving being with soul and intelligence" (30b). For Plato appearance is now structured on mathematics and rational knowledge – due to the method and virtues of the Demiurge – and is worthy of philosophical

⁸³ For an explicit example of Plato's repudiation of the physical world cf. Plato, 'Phaedo', 66-67.

investigation.⁸⁴ A human's initial and most common form of empirical observation is through the sense of sight, and Plato, who had in some instances instructed us to avert from our sensual faculties and rely on reason alone, is here acknowledging the function of sight as the cause of knowledge.⁸⁵ In section 47 of the *Timaeus*, Timaeus himself – who many believe is a mouthpiece for Plato – is described as praising the senses by stating that they are “god's invention and gift” that aids the greatest gift: philosophy. This view of the senses is a radical change from that expressed in the *Phaedo*,⁸⁶ and consequently that of the *Republic*, and coincides with Plato's new position regarding the object of the senses.

In the *Timaeus* Plato renders an account of the cosmos that gives one the impression that it is something with integrity and dignity: the impression one also has of the Forms. Even though the cosmos remains an image in Plato's description, it is an image that is “so complete that every inquiry or claim directed to or dependent upon it, must be called verisimilar, [but] not false.”⁸⁷ The method proposed by Plato for investigating the cosmos is probable. He maintains that every account of the cosmos can never be absolutely accurate, but is at best a likely story or *mythos*. Plato advises that one exercise a degree of scepticism towards any account that boasts certainty because all images that the human mind gives an account for have subsequently been shaped by the conditions of the inquiring mind.

⁸⁴ Prior, op. cit., p. 93.

⁸⁵ Gadamer, 'Idea and Reality in Plato's *Timaeus*', p. 170.

⁸⁶ De Vogel, op. cit., p. 174.

⁸⁷ A.F., Ashbaugh, Plato's Theory of Explanation – A Study of the Cosmological Account of the *Timaeus*, State University of New York Press, Albany, 1988, p. 2.

e. The Receptacle

In the *Timaeus* Plato also makes important use of a third ontological entity: the receptacle, *chora*, or space.⁸⁸ We previously considered the analogy that Plato draws between the creation of the cosmos and the work of the craftsman who uses models, patterns, plans or a design to construct his work.⁸⁹ But the cooperation between the paradigms and a pre-existent recalcitrant 'stuff', which is the prerequisite for the creation of the sensible world, occurs within a medium: space, "...the nurse of all becoming and change." (49a)

The receptacle is a kind of 'mixing bowl' where the four elements that constitute material things are fashioned into particular entities – "the matrix that underlies the entire material world, and hence, has no special spatial location at any one point in that world."⁹⁰ Space has no definite character of its own and is changeless – being in and of itself. Plato uses a number of analogies in describing its role in the cosmic picture:

Suppose a man modelling geometrical shapes of every kind in gold, and constantly remoulding each shape into another. If any one were to point to one of them and ask what it was it would be much the safest, if we wanted to tell the truth, to say that it was gold and not to speak of the triangles and other figures as being real things, because they would be changing as we spoke; we should be content if they even admit of a qualitative description of any certainty. The same argument applies to the natural receptacle of all bodies. (50c)

⁸⁸ Gadamer, 'Idea and Reality in Plato's *Timaeus*', p. 175.

⁸⁹ Prior, op. cit., p. 97.

⁹⁰ Osbourne, op. cit., p. 200.

The receptacle is analogous to gold in this particular example, being transformed into a different shape that is patterned from ideal geometrical Forms into contingent and tangible copies, while always retaining its original substance as gold. If the things in the empirical world are like imprints on the receptacle, then this new entity must be devoid of any kind of characteristic to allow for the Form to accurately duplicate itself onto the material.

The following examples will clearly distinguish the receptacle as having a separate existence from the elements, pre-existent matter or the Forms. At the same time these examples will disclose the inter-dependency between the Forms and the receptacle involved when accounting for the ontology of the apparent world.

Manufacturers of scent contrive the same initial conditions [the conditions of being devoid of any character] when they make liquids which are to receive the scent as odourless as possible: and those who set about making impressions in some soft substance, make its surface as smooth as possible... (50d)

In the same way that which is going to receive properly and uniformly all the likenesses of the intelligible and eternal things must itself be devoid of all character. (51a)

Therefore the receptacle must be essentially stable, impassive, receptive and characterless if it is to insert itself properly into Plato's cosmological schema. Only in this state can it provide a substance for the Forms to imprint themselves on and subsequently affect the characteristics of the world of becoming. In this version of Plato's metaphysics the Forms exist as the independent and intelligible essences of things, and the receptacle

is the independent substance functioning as an ultimate substratum or subject of predication. Therefore the phenomenal particulars are images reflected in the receptacle and are not substances in themselves.⁹¹

⁹¹ Prior, *op. cit.*, p. 114.

4. Aesthetics and the *Timaeus*

a. An Aesthetics Based on Metaphysics

By elucidating the fundamental ontological features of the *Timaeus* we have shown that Platonic metaphysics is not essentially committed to a strict dualism, in which the intelligible realm holds exclusive right over knowledge, and the world available to the senses need not necessarily be despised and rejected. Asmis suggests that after the *Symposium* Plato uses a new theory of Forms that allows him to portray poetry, and therefore art, in a more favourable way than any earlier dialogue.⁹² We will now extrapolate an alternative aesthetic position using the metaphysics of the *Timaeus*, as opposed to that of the *Republic*. This will involve referring to certain sections and quotes from other dialogues which are relevant to our endeavour to justify the validity of our interpretation. We will also return to Plato's prominent and effectual use of myth and highlight the implications of that for the proposed theory of art.

In light of the ontology of the *Timaeus* there are a number of consequences for Plato's metaphysics and his theory of art. There is no longer the insistence that the philosopher must have a 'continual quarrel with the body', or that there exists a natural 'state of enmity between soul and body'. In fact Devogel makes the point that the *Timaeus* spends a great deal of time discussing the problem of how man must cope with the condition of having to live in a body.⁹³ This particular quality of the *Timaeus*, Plato hoped, would achieve the same result that the divinely

⁹² Asmis, op. cit., p. 344.

⁹³ De Vogel, op. cit., p. 169.

inspired oral presentations of the poets did.⁹⁴ The poets believed that they could transmit wisdom about the human and divine condition directly from the gods. A meaningful grasp of one's physical position in the cosmic order was combined with a persuasive blend of poetry, music and celebration.⁹⁵ It is likely that Plato felt a need to fill the existential chasm left vacant by cold dialectic and pure intellectual inquiry he needed to establish a theory of the body that would crown Man's predicament with dignity.

In the *Timaeus* the notion of a beautiful man does not consist of just an enlightened soul, but includes a healthy and exercised body even though the body is subservient to the soul.⁹⁶ This theory is consistent on a macrocosmic level as well. The concept of beauty includes the Form or intelligible essence as well as its material embodiment. As long as phenomena are governed by rational and eternal principles they qualify as 'good' creations and can be regarded as aesthetic. The same may now be said about artistic representations. According to this particular perspective the intelligent and insightful artist can offer an audience a production that embodies eternal principles of order and beauty: a creation that has the potential to enhance instead of ruin the understanding and knowledge of the spectator. One must not neglect the fact that the monologue of *Timaeus* is predominantly a newly created story; it is a myth that is delivered by a philosopher, statesman, and scientist who is aided by the gods to communicate his thoughts.⁹⁷

⁹⁴ In 19d of the *Timaeus* Socrates states that he does not have a low opinion of the poets in general. But in the same passage he stipulates a criterion for accurate representation: that it be of something that lies within one's own experience. But a task such as creating a lifelike representation of the ideal state is beyond the reach of uninformed poets, of the type contemporary to Plato, due to the fact that the object that is to be represented is beyond the reach of imitation. Cf. Osbourne, op. cit., p. 183.

⁹⁵ Asmis, op. cit., p. 33.

⁹⁶ De Vogel, op. cit., p. 172.

⁹⁷ Osbourne, op. cit., pp. 185-186.

The construction of philosophical argument and the creation of aesthetic symbols may both be understood as forms of representation; the poets and the philosophers are both “makers” of images.⁹⁸ In his final work, the *Laws*, Plato stipulates conditions for poets to adhere to if they wish to be granted entry into the city to perform their dramas. The conditions are that their productions must comply with the creation produced by the lawmakers i.e. the philosophers (817).⁹⁹ What is interesting about this passage is that Plato has the lawmakers reply that they too are “poets”, who in competition with the dramatists make the “most beautiful drama.” The drama presented by the lawmakers is an “imitation of the most beautiful and best life.” De Vogel makes the point that the *Timaeus* offers possibilities for understanding the human situation i.e. coping with the fact that one is subject to living in a body.¹⁰⁰ This aspect of the *Timaeus* became a feature of his later dialogues. The philosopher must affect a disposition, or create an environment that helps alleviate the uncertainty that is associated with worldly existence. In the *Laws* Plato seems to imply that, in governing the state, the philosophers can only hope to imitate the best life. Like lawgivers the poets are also in search of moral goodness and the best life; by giving voice to their aspirations, poets attempt to transcend their own mortal existence.¹⁰¹ Like poets, Plato admits that the philosophers must perform a form of *mimesis* if their conceptual accounts are to apply to the realm of becoming.

⁹⁸ “Makers” is the etymological meaning of *poietai*, poets. Cf. Asmis, op. cit., p. 338.

⁹⁹ Plato, ‘Laws’, in *The Dialogues of Plato*, translated by B. Jowett, Oxford at the Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1970.

¹⁰⁰ De Vogel, op. cit., p. 169.

¹⁰¹ Asmis, op. cit., p. 346.

b. Symbolism, Art and the Receptacle

The art of symbolism, in its religious or mythological and especially its poetic manifestations, is not a straightforward, 'black and white', affair for Plato but rather an issue of ambiguity. Like *Eros* "in Diotima's account in the *Symposium* [art]¹⁰² is midway between heaven and earth, between reason and emotion, between mind and sense."¹⁰³ And since one's creative thought is orchestrated by the symbols that one constructs and encounters, Plato realised that a compromise was needed between rational dialectic and emotive rhetoric. It is true that the arts evolve out of the senses, but it is the higher senses that they appeal to, which in turn touch the soul. And if art is conducted appropriately it will be the nobler emotions, rather than the base ones, that will be stirred and encouraged to progress to the higher aspects of the soul.

The concept of Love in the *Symposium*; the receptacle in the *Timaeus*; and we will argue, the phenomenon of art in Plato, all function as an intermediary between Form and particular – "god and human." (202e) According to the theory of language explicated above, all cognition first occurs as a result of signification. Expression and communication develops through a subsequent appropriation of signs into symbols. In relation to Forms it is true to say that knowledge of them is acquired by first recognising that which participates in it – an embodiment or manifestation of the Form. But we must clarify that symbols of divine entities, such as Forms, are only beneficial if they themselves are 'anti-divine', meaning that they must necessarily negate themselves in order to

¹⁰² In the *Symposium* Plato categorises poetic activity under the Form of beauty, thus making love its concomitant impetus. Cf. *Ibid.* p. 344.

¹⁰³ Elias, *op. cit.*, p. 20.

be a genuine symbol of the eternal Form. A government whose laws are recognised by citizens to be a symbol, or representatives, of the ideal of Justice must not look at itself or its constitution as being inherently just. In certain situations its pre-established laws and systems must be abrogated if the result of their implementation excludes the rights of another individual. All objects in the world have the power of becoming a symbol or intermediary for Forms, all that is required by humans to enable them to occupy this role is belief in a transcendent reality that the symbol points to. In other words, perfection or full actuality must never be considered to be inherent in a symbol. Instead symbols, if they are to genuinely represent the absolute, must always allude to that which is beyond themselves. In light of these comments one can interpret a new meaning of Plato's utterances about aspiring to a "vision of the Forms"; through one's faculties of sense, in particular sight, one can intuit an intellectual image of the Beautiful.¹⁰⁴

The position stated above, in relation to the mediatory nature of art, has a significant metaphysical basis that is central to the cosmology of the *Timaeus*. The receptacle, or space, is the field where Form and matter unite to create an image of the eternal. "In space, sensible things are the images of intelligible forms".¹⁰⁵ The entity of space is also the domain where thinking and sensation are forced to work in unison. Therefore in order to explicate adequately what occupies that space both a true and a verisimilar account is needed; that is the explication must simultaneously instruct and rationally persuade.

¹⁰⁴ I am alluding to Diotima's teachings on how to attain to the "final vision of the mysteries" (*Sym.* 210a).

¹⁰⁵ Ashbaugh, op. cit., p. 3-4.

The most efficacious symbolic medium that unifies the soul's phenomenal experience with knowledge of the Forms is art, in particular poetry. In the same way that the Demiurge required space to combine matter and Form, man needs a manner of expression, or a style of language, to symbolise what his consciousness confronts.¹⁰⁶ The cognitive powers of the soul do not simply consist of rational deliberation but also involve the collection of data through sense. Therefore the soul is not only confronted by intelligible Forms but also encounters sensible objects. In its attempt to give an explanation for what it has experienced, the soul recognises that two accounts apply: a true account (*alethes logos*)¹⁰⁷ and a verisimilar account (*eikos logos*).¹⁰⁸ The former is the discursive, rational description that one recollects, and can in turn instruct others with, whereas the latter may be described as the rationally persuasive explanation complementing the former. These two aspects apply to every exposition and are epistemologically justified if we consider how we learn from explanatory accounts. Although the logically true features of an account instruct us, it is usually through the rationally verisimilar aspect of the explication that we are guided to discovering the purely intelligible structure of the thing being explained. Verisimilar accounts can consist of rhetoric, visual art or music. But if these tools of explanation are to accompany the true account, and therefore be rational, the one who administers their use, whether in instances of philosophical argument, theatre, poetry or other forms of literature (e.g. epic), is required to have knowledge of the thing being explained (a point that we will elaborate on later). Thus in this respect art may be considered to be

¹⁰⁶ For a discussion that equates the receptacle with the alphabet and the conventional meaning of words cf. Osbourne, op. cit., p. 204.

¹⁰⁷ According to Gadamer, Plato indicates that the true logic (*alethes logos*) of the cosmos is always available to the thinking observer. The ordering of the heavens and the illumination of the sun, in connection to their correlation with time, teach man numbers and instils in him the desire to know the physis of the universe. Gadamer, 'Idea and Reality in Plato's *Timaeus*', p. 169.

¹⁰⁸ Ashbaugh, op. cit., p. 3.

the intermediary between eternal Forms and the objects of sensation, just as the informed, rational artist is one who gives intelligible form to matter. In light of these considerations the equating of the artist with the symbol of the Demiurge is inextricable.

In the process of cognition a necessary dialogue occurs between intelligibility and sense, and our understanding of the universe unfolds as a result. In the *Timaeus* the phenomenal world is described symbolically as being created by the Demiurge. But the story may be interpreted as an explanation of the process by which reason and sense construct a picture of the world that the conscious individual simultaneously encounters in experience. The world is rationally ordered and made available to the senses because it manifests the principles of intelligible things. In other words, Forms allow the mind to guide and structure one's sense experiences. Plato's myth of the Demiurge tells how a divine rational being looks to paradigms, and configures matter, in order to construct the cosmos. One may interpret the myth as a symbolic description of how human reason and sense cooperate with each other in a process that results in cognising a meaningful portrait of the world. Plato's myth reconciles the estrangement caused by a dichotomy of mind and sense that is inevitable in a conceptual and objective approach to the cosmos. He avoids presenting the world as alien, obscure and difficult to access by evoking an immediate and meaningful account using aesthetic symbols and rhetoric.

As a text itself, the *Timaeus* can be understood as a unique production of literature analogous to a uniquely created world of becoming. This interpretation gives weight to the view that symbolic language can reproduce ideas by representing them in literary form; in this case the aim

of the words is to communicate the significance of a world that is the instantiation of reality. Therefore like the product of the Demiurge the text itself – a form of symbolic literature – has the likeness of eternal Forms; thus both the cosmos and the dialogue share the same absolute paradigm.¹⁰⁹

The possibilities for knowledge available to sentient and rational beings rest on a two-tiered structure of becoming. This structure consists of the appearances on display for the senses and a constant noetic order behind the surface.¹¹⁰ Access to the cosmos is facilitated by the experience acquired through the sense of sight, and thus has the characteristic of becoming. The cosmos, unlike true Being, must derive from something that causes it. The beauty of the world is a testament to the fixed and determinate paradigm necessary for such a creation; becoming by definition cannot be eternal, or the cause of its own logical structure. The symbol of the Demiurge represents the causal activity that leads to creation. Its presentation in a *mythos* aims to clarify the interconnectedness of Being and becoming in a meaningful way to finite human understanding. According to the theory of the *Timaeus* the possibility of really knowing something about the realm of becoming depends on recognising the copy structure in things.¹¹¹ And to remain commensurate with human nature any display of knowledge gained through this process can only ever be portrayed in a “story”. In light of this explanation Plato is justified in constructing a myth to account for the beginning of becoming. It is the fact that creation exists in accordance with ultimate principles that provokes a rational explanation.

¹⁰⁹ Osbourne, op. cit., p. 179.

¹¹⁰ Gadamer, 'Idea and Reality in Plato's *Timaeus*', pp. 161-162.

¹¹¹ Ibid. p. 162.

Don't therefore be surprised, Socrates, if on many matters concerning the gods and the whole world of change we are unable in every respect and on every occasion to render consistent and accurate account. You must be satisfied if our account is as likely as any, remembering that both I and you who are sitting in judgement on it are merely human, and should not look for anything more than a likely story in such matters. (*Tim*, 29d)

The only form of poetry that withstands the critique of book X is “hymns to the gods and songs in praise of good individuals.”¹¹² If the danger of alienating oneself from one's true character, by taking on the role of another through imitation, is avoided then redeemable forms of poetry can be produced. Poetry, in the forms of hymns and epics, differs significantly from any other because they do not seek to imitate with the intention of deceiving the audience; the poet does not try to give the impression that he is someone else. The imitation is implemented only with the intention to praise a worthy role model. In the performance of the poem all participating parties have complete knowledge of their relation to the individual being praised, and mutually recognise the virtues and obligations being taught. Therefore they share a common language collectively understood to be the ethos of the state.¹¹³ This is opposed to the poet who fools the public into believing that he accurately represents, or actually is, the character in the poem, thus dictating or imposing an ideal onto his fellow citizens that he knows nothing about. To avoid this danger poets must abide by the rule that individuals must never pretend, or be imagined, to be that which they are mimicking; the same must apply to aesthetic symbols. Both the performance of the poets and symbols must be transcended in aspiration of a more profound ultimate reality.

¹¹² Gadamer, 'Plato and the Poets', p. 65.

¹¹³ Ibid. p. 66.

Aesthetic symbols pose a danger similar to the example of the deceptive poet. We previously discussed how objects become available for cognition through the transcendental process of signification, and then made communicable, and tools for creative expression, through symbolism. We explicated that a Form must be symbolically concretised if one wishes to comprehend it, yet this comprehension must involve using the symbol as a dispensable, mediatory complement of the absolute nature of the Form. These details also expose the precarious aspect of Man's confrontation with ultimate reality. It is not uncommon for symbols that are concerned with the absolute to be misunderstood as being the absolute. Many cultures decline into idolatry when the collective conscious of the people promotes the representation of the divine to the status of divinity itself. In the context of fourth century Athens this had occurred on a number of levels, one of the most obvious being the literal understanding of the Pantheon. This perversion of the absolute was also evident in another of Plato's enemy's, the Sophists. The Sophists believed that their teachings were the result of their own wisdom – a virtue that was the result of mere human development.¹¹⁴ The Sophists can be considered as idolatrous in the sense that they did not acknowledge the ultimate and unconditional aspect of their concerns, and thus committed the error of ascribing this quality to the teachings that manifested the cause of their concern.¹¹⁵

The field of aesthetics was subject to a form of idolatry itself: the cult of texts, oral or written. Plato's case against the poets was an attack directed at the assumption that creation itself was of value and that the mere

¹¹⁴ Asmis, op. cit., p. 340.

¹¹⁵ Consider Protagoras' saying that "Man is the measure of all things" which became the motto of the anti-metaphysical thinkers in the Vienna Circle. Cf. Waterfield, op. cit., p. 206.

construction of words or materials into an audio or visual presentation was the result of true skill (*techne*).¹¹⁶ The poets that Plato criticised were those who felt that to merely create an appealing work of art, which brought emotive pleasure, was worthy of praise and reverence. Plato's issue with the poets was vanity, i.e. indulgence in the symbols one constructs, and attribution of truth to appearance rather than to ultimate reality. One might interpret Plato's attack on the poets as really an attack against creating false gods, and the subsequent promotion of idolatry. This is in contrast to Plato's use of rhetoric or myth. Plato accepts artistic representation when its symbols point to or draw the understanding closer to grasping ultimate reality: that which is explained conceptually in dialectic.¹¹⁷ Poets of this persuasion are in fact philosophers whose aesthetic creation is worthless in-itself.¹¹⁸ Unconstrained by laws, they would understand their compositions as a disposable vehicle leading towards the same goal expressed conceptually by the philosophers, i.e. ultimate reality.¹¹⁹ The *Symposium* implies this idea of the transient nature of the preliminary steps leading towards a vision of beauty it-self (211-212a). The particular beautiful things are to be considered as a "staircase" reaching for the Form of beauty 'pure' and 'unmixed'. Once one attains the vision of the Beautiful one can dispense with the

¹¹⁶ Despite being inspired by divine madness and possession, qualities that Socrates had given a praiseworthy account of, the poetry that Plato criticised did not involve a *techne* that accounted for, or justified, *knowing*. Gadamer, 'Plato and the Poets', p. 42.

¹¹⁷ In relation to Plato's theory of representation as a pointer to the Forms, consider Ferrari's work on the *Phaedrus*, in which he states: "it points him, in its immediacy, towards what is not immediately appreciable." G.R.F. Ferrari, Listening to the Cicadas – A Study of Plato's *Phaedrus*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1987, p.149.

Moravcsik also holds the view that Plato's understanding of instances are that they are "useful only if they are presented and interpreted in such a way that they point beyond themselves; not only to something general, rather than particular, but also to a quality that can be seen as pervading the wide variety of manifestations". J. Moravcsik, Plato and Platonism – Plato's Conception of Appearance and Reality in Ontology, Epistemology, and Ethics, and its Modern Echoes, Blackwell, Oxford, 1992, p. 44.

¹¹⁸ Asmis, op. cit., p. 360.

¹¹⁹ According to Gadamer, Plato believes that only those poets who do not take their writing to be ultimate are to be taken seriously. Gadamer, 'Plato and the Poets', p. 60.

staircase.¹²⁰ Only in this state could one subsequently give birth not only to images of virtue but true virtue. In his discourse, Timaeus describes a world meaningfully connected with a paradigm. The words also express the paradigm, but not because of any inherent or stable connection. The structure of the account has a likeness to the Form due to the order applied by the writer. This is analogous to the way the Demiurge rationally arranges the elements within the receptacle to achieve the desired result.¹²¹

So long as poetry is viewed as mediating something that is beyond it, like for instance the immediacy of an experience, an emotion, or in Plato's case the actuality of the Forms, it remains a genuine and righteous form of expression. Scholars have argued that between Plato's theory of imitation, developed in the *Republic*, and his association with the tradition of divine inspiration, he does not come close to expounding a theory of art as self-expression, such as the view championed by the Romantics.¹²² But in the *Symposium*, Plato has Diotima refer to poetic creativity as "an inner spring that wells forth from the poet's soul and is continually replenished by communion with another."¹²³ In fact one may propose that an aesthetic intermediary such as poetry offers a more intimately appealing form of explanation than philosophy for it consists of symbols rather than detached philosophical concepts. 'Real' art or poetry – that aims to communicate another level of reality – is not a copy of a particular; a 'thrice removed' imitation of reality explained in the *Republic*. It is a symbol that participates in, and communicates qualities

¹²⁰ Moravcsik, op. cit., p. 44.

¹²¹ Osbourne, op. cit., p. 207.

¹²² The paradigm of art and poetry for the Germans of the classical and romantic periods was that of classical antiquity. The epitome of that era was thought to be Plato despite his hostile critique of art. The German Romantics situated Plato in the history of the development of poetry by reconciling his apparently conflicting views on the subject. Cf. Gadamer, 'Plato and the Poets', p. 39-40.

¹²³ Asmis, op. cit., p. 346.

of, a reality created by the immediate experience of the artist. In the phenomenon of the artistic symbol, be it sculpture, music, poetry or other forms of literature, the artist's experience becomes a message that can educate the recipient by giving him knowledge of something beyond the appearance that can only be acquired in an actual lived experience – an insight that only participation in the meaning of symbols can transmit. In relation to Plato's dialogues Gadamer states that they "...say something only to him who finds meanings beyond what is expressly stated in them and allows these meanings to take effect in him."¹²⁴

c. Dialectic and Rhetoric

Plato's prime consideration in respect to the analysis of all topics is primarily a moral one. The fulfilment of the highest good would then justify whatever methods were employed to serve this end. It is the procurement of this end, the realisation of the highest good, that motivated Plato's interest in dialectic. But it also encouraged his fascination with rhetoric, and it is this element in his methodology that confirms Plato's sympathy towards art. The ability to persuade and convince does not necessarily imply knowledge of the subject being discussed. This was the situation of the poets who convinced the public that they spoke of all things divine, yet could not articulate the meaning of their utterances.¹²⁵ But equally the knowledge of a thing does not necessarily equip one with the skill of communicating knowledge as 456B, C of the *Phaedrus* points out.¹²⁶ The *Phaedrus* testifies that the

¹²⁴ Gadamer, 'Plato and the Poets', p. 71.

¹²⁵ Asmis, op. cit., p. 342.

¹²⁶ Elias, op. cit., p. 26. Plato, *The Phaedrus and Letters VII and VIII*, translated by Walter Hamilton, Penguin Books, England, 1973. All future references will be made from this edition.

prerequisite of an art of rhetoric is knowledge of Men's souls,¹²⁷ i.e. an understanding of what constitutes the good life. Unlike the sophist's method of self-interested manipulation of language,¹²⁸ Plato aimed at transforming society as a whole through persuasive argument. The form of rhetoric favoured by Plato was myth. Therefore Plato considered myth to be infinitely suggestive of righteous models for living if it was interpreted with rational or philosophical sophistication.¹²⁹

Plato wanted poets to produce myths to help educate young guardians. These myths are of course not fictions but tales that can assist one to grasp a desired meaning once reason has failed to lead one to such a discovery. For example in the *Phaedo* Socrates presents a myth about the afterlife. He mentions that it would be a mistake to insist on its truth but it is worth running the risk of having faith in it because of the fact that its charm preserves us against corruption and error.¹³⁰ The phenomenon of art serves as a "tool interchangeable with argument in that it shares the same goal: to attach us more securely to what we ought to believe in".¹³¹ In accordance with this understanding of art, poetry may be interpreted as a method of education and expression that inspires one's deepest subjective concerns towards a love – as distinct from a knowledge – of the Forms; "an act of communication between a lover and his beloved"¹³² being more closely united than thought and object of thought. The mature theory of the *Timaeus* and other late dialogues are concerned with giving advice on how to cope and advance in our human condition,¹³³ and our preoccupation and attraction to art is a vital concomitant of that human

¹²⁷ Elias, op. cit., p. 25.

¹²⁸ Asmis, op. cit., p. 342.

¹²⁹ Brisson, op. cit., p. 137.

¹³⁰ Janaway, op. cit., p. 159.

¹³¹ Ibid. p. 160.

¹³² Asmis, op. cit., p. 344.

¹³³ De Vogel, op. cit., p. 177.

condition. Therefore poetry need not necessarily be created with a disregard of truth but can be designed to invoke an image that complements the truth established by argument. More importantly creative literature such as poetry has the ability to teach and portray attractive and worthy ideals in ways that argument cannot.

Dialectic is a necessary, but not a sufficient condition of Plato's philosophical approach. On the other hand art, or more specifically rhetoric, by itself, does not fulfil those sufficient conditions either. But in aiming to make comprehensible what constitutes the good life Plato had realised that a responsible and philosophically potent style of rhetoric was indispensable. More must be said about the responsibility that Plato uncompromisingly attaches to the individual who wishes to use any form of rhetoric. In the *Phaedrus* (268) Plato makes the distinction that the rhetorician is one who has the ability to transform a person's state into one of ecstatic passion, and return them back to their former disposition. This skill is analogous with the physician's ability to prescribe and administer drugs that induce sensations of heat or cold in a patient. This analogy implies that like the physician the rhetorician must have some knowledge regarding the requirements of his patient. If the rhetorician shows to be oblivious to this responsibility, leaving it up to his audience to judge, he would be laughed at. Socrates makes the point that a man who renders a recipe for tragedy that consists of the composition of "lengthy speeches about trifles and very concise ones about matters of importance," and who turns out at will "passages of deep pathos or at the other extreme tirades full of fury and menace," shows his ignorance of the combination of knowledge and art required to present an acceptable tragedy. In 270 the example of Pericles is given as the exemplar of the good rhetorician: "All the great arts need to be supplemented by

philosophical chatter and daring speculation about the nature of things... Pericles added these qualities to his own natural gifts... [he] steeped himself in speculation [and] arrived at a knowledge of the nature of reason and unreason... and applied to the art of speaking whatever was relevant to it." Rhetoric is the art of persuading others. It appeals to the soul and therefore a correct account of it must necessarily involve an examination of the soul so that the orator can make an accurate evaluation of his effect on the audience.¹³⁴ Therefore, an acceptable poet must have foreknowledge of the types of souls he will encounter, and in conjunction must also be aware of the appropriate kinds of language that are applicable to each listener.¹³⁵

The interdependency between Plato's preferred style of rhetorical address, i.e. myth, and dialectic is confirmed in the *Phaedrus*. After presenting us with a myth concerning the afterlife Plato offers the reader with another myth. Instead of a dialectical demonstration displaying the principles and structure of philosophical rhetoric, the discursive portion of the argument ends and the myth begins. "To the demonstrable but negative certainty of dialectic is added the indemonstrable truths of myth."¹³⁶ The *Phaedrus* also states that those who are possessed by the Muses, the poets, can actually educationally instruct posterity (245a).

The ontology of the *Timaeus* had given a new understanding of the phenomenal world and stipulated in clearer detail the methods by which one could acquire knowledge (initially through the senses and subsequently leading to the intellect). Plato's approach in accounting for phenomena in the *Timaeus* entails that he shares the aforementioned

¹³⁴ Elias, op. cit., p. 31.

¹³⁵ Asmis, op. cit., p. 359.

¹³⁶ Elias, op. cit., p. 32.

theory regarding the insufficiency of rational dialectic; in other words the notion of certainty and the concept of an absolute explanation is considered dubious. The dialogue does not present an objective account of the cosmos, but rather it aims to explain how the external world comes to be known by the soul.¹³⁷ In the *Phaedrus* Plato does for poetry what the *Timaeus* had done for the world of appearance: he did not debunk poetry outright, instead he constrained its use with a strict criteria of self-consciousness and critical examination of what is said.

Divine inspiration is permissible, acknowledged as a gift to the poets, only if it is complemented with rational insight and philosophical investigation. And conversely art becomes the avenue by which philosophical explanations are transmitted and made appealing and convincing. In the *Symposium* Diotima is portrayed as going so far as equating art with morality. In fact she draws no distinction between the production of poetry and instances of moral virtue. In what seems to be a show of respect for tradition the prophetess describes the poet as “a creator of moral goodness and the poem serves only as a means of conveying this goodness.”¹³⁸ Clearly the kind of poet referred to in this dialogue is in sharp distinction to the hostile way poets such as Homer were depicted in book X of the *Republic*.

d. Philosophical concepts as Aesthetic Symbols

There is not a sharp distinction between analytic philosophy and art: philosophical concepts are not altogether free of symbolic content, and aesthetic symbols contain potential conceptual elements. Philosophy and

¹³⁷ Ashbaugh, op. cit., p. 1.

¹³⁸ Asmis, op. cit., p. 345.

art each function within different spheres, yet the truth reached in each sphere has no authority over the other.¹³⁹ Plato's religious antecedents and the dramatic presentation of his arguments indicate that symbolism plays a significant role in dialectic. The fact that concepts underlie myth is supported by the existence of, and possibility for, philosophical exegesis of myths, or theology.

The cosmogonical account in the *Timaeus* involving the Demiurge can be interpreted analogously as a symbolic description of the human process of self-expression. The activities of the Demiurge are best described as an ordering of the unordered in accordance with a paradigm; a coherent configuration of recalcitrant stuff that replicates a Form. This enterprise necessarily requires reason for the result is said to be good and beautiful. The world is made comprehensible to Mankind by identifying objects with a distinguishing mark or sign. Once language is applied, the blur that is the ebb and flow of phenomena become self-contained subjects of conscious curiosity and rational investigation. Symbols are subsequently abstracted to represent a particular subjective experience of the signifier; simultaneously an ontological status is given to subjective experience, thus objectifying it.¹⁴⁰ Signs distinguish the objects in the world from each other and render them objects of experience for humans. Symbols represent the qualitative correlate to those signs. The qualitative aspect of experience can be transmitted from one individual to another if the corresponding symbol is believed to point to the existence of another

¹³⁹ For a discussion on different value spheres see M. Weber, 'Science as a Vocation', in From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology, translated and edited by H. Gerth and C.W. Miller, Kegan Paul, Trench Trubner and Co., London, 1948, pp. 147-148.

¹⁴⁰ For a discussion of the value of the objectification of the human spirit and its relation to the work of the artist cf. G. Simmel, 'On the Concept and the Tragedy of Culture', in The Conflict in Modern Culture and Other Essays, translated by P. Etkorn, Teachers College Press, Columbia University, New York, 1968, pp. 31-33. Simmel describes the need for the spirit, particularly that of the artist, to transcend itself, and therefore be able to apperceive itself, through objectification.

level of reality, and an attempt is made by the other to consciously and emotionally participate in it. Therefore symbolism such as works of art can be considered as objectification of the quality of human encounters with the world. This account of human expression can be interpreted as a Demiurgic activity in that humans look to their good and beautiful environment and first create signs and then, more importantly, develop symbols that express a particular quality about the human condition; a quality that one has experienced as certainty.

This is the express point of the whole narrative. The constitution of the world is meant as the foundation for the possible constituting of human life and human society or, stated more accurately, for the possible realisation of an ideal human constitution of the soul and of the state.¹⁴¹

Although the tale of the Demiurge can be interpreted as a description of human creative processes it is more precisely a prescription for what Man must do with his creative ability. Humans should strive to order their understanding and representations of the world – “the motions of their own soul” – in alignment with the order of the cosmos.¹⁴² What is good for a god is appropriate for Man. Like humans, the limits constraining the creative activity of the Demiurge are pre-determined, yet it can produce unlimited possibilities. The possibilities that are actualised in the creation myth are good and beautiful, and of course Plato expects philosophers and poets alike to aspire to achieve such results. The Demiurge is a symbol for what the philosopher and the artist are conceptually explained to be.

¹⁴¹ Gadamer, 'Idea and Reality in Plato's *Timaeus*', p. 192.

¹⁴² Ibid. p. 193.

Conclusion

The aim of this paper was to disclose a theory of art out of the philosophical ideas expressed in the *Timaeus*. In section two we explored Plato's theory of art in the *Republic* and explained how it was predominantly rhetorical in that he criticised art, and particularly poetry, in order to support his argument for a utopian state run on the foundations of philosophy. In this context the dramatic poets were obstacles to a new form of education and must be banished from the state. In order to avoid contradiction, or to leave the theory liable to counter-argument, all poetry was indiscriminately subjected to satirical criticism.¹⁴³ We also clarified how the metaphysical dualism of the same dialogue influenced the derogatory way that Plato evaluated art.

Upon recognising dualism as only one of the many devices in Plato's arsenal, we proceeded in part three by analysing the *Timaeus*, a dialogue with a modified metaphysical basis. This enabled me to represent Plato as presenting a sympathetic and existential account of art in the fourth component. This thesis was intended to encourage a rethinking of Plato's theory of art. But more importantly it urges us to rethink many of the other widely held positions that have been attributed to Plato. If aesthetics can be shown to be a dynamic and contextual issue for Plato, then all other topics may also be open to a wide range of diverse interpretations.

The rethinking of Plato's theory of art in the context of the *Timaeus* is in no sense an exhaustive account of Plato's aesthetic views, nor does it imply in any way that it represents Plato's final or mature views

¹⁴³ Gadamer, 'Plato and the Poets', p. 53.

concerning art. I believe the issues raised in this thesis are core issues for understanding Plato's philosophy even though they are not explicitly expressed in all of his dialogues. Extrapolating a theory of art out of the ontology of the *Timaeus* gave me the pretext to address some themes otherwise unexplored in the majority of Platonic scholarship, and often only alluded to by Plato himself.

Plato's indebtedness to the religious traditions of his time is made apparent in his attempt to give a mythological account of the cosmos in the *Timaeus*; an account that Plato admits is merely a likely story or *mythos*. Certain aspects of Plato's thought surfaced for consideration in light of the current thesis topic: themes pertaining to symbolism, particularly of the religious sort; the indispensability and vivacity of rhetoric when using dialectic; the semantic affinities between concepts and symbols; and the mythological nature of explanations concerning things that are subject to change.

If there is anything that can be asserted with certainty about Plato it is that he was always concerned with moral perfection. In many of his dialogues Plato contrasts things based on ignorance, which are therefore detrimental to humans, with things based on knowledge, which facilitate the good life. In his discussion on the true state he renders an account of what is truly worthy of praise: Justice. The dialogues never lose sight of the central Platonic concern: "the cultivation of the political human being and of justice in him."¹⁴⁴ As a result his dialogues are poems of praise, imitations of the ideal state and life. I will quote Christopher Janaway who reminds us that beneath the arguments, myths, irony, and metaphors "[Plato's] ends are the discovery of truth and an insight into how to live a

¹⁴⁴ Gadamer, 'Plato and the Poets', p. 67.

good life". And he also observes correctly that "[Plato] does not object to pursuing these goals using *mimesis* and poetic diction, but rather [objects] to those who either neglect these goals in favour of 'artistic' aims, or mistakenly think that to produce fine poetry is already to have reached them".¹⁴⁵ It is not necessarily art that Plato is aiming to attack and censure but rather vanity.

¹⁴⁵ Janaway, *op. cit.*, p. 161.

Appendix

Two Platonic dialogues, the *Phaedrus* and the *Sophist*, stand out as representatives of alternative aesthetic positions in relation to the *Republic*. The *Phaedrus* is particularly significant because of its literary power, and the *Sophist* is aesthetically relevant due to the fact that it presents a reinterpretation of the nature of *mimesis*. Both texts deserve an analysis far beyond the scope of this thesis. This appendix merely addresses some of the salient themes that the two dialogues offer in terms of aesthetics. Therefore, the following study is only intended to introduce the reader to the possibilities available within the *Phaedrus* and the *Sophist*.

The *Phaedrus* has been described by Janaway as a dialogue that is “peculiarly alive” to the possibilities of poetry.¹⁴⁶ The following passage is indicative of this statement:

The third type of possession and madness is possession by the Muses. When this seizes upon a gentle and virgin soul it rouses it to inspired expression in lyric and other sorts of poetry, and glorifies countless deeds of the heroes of old for the instruction of posterity. But if a man comes to the door of poetry untouched by the madness of the Muses, believing that technique alone will make him a good poet, he and his sane compositions will never reach perfection, but are utterly eclipsed by the performances of the inspired madman (245).

The text is artistic throughout especially the wonderful myth of the philosophical lover's soul (257). Certain sections in the work seem to be

¹⁴⁶ Ibid. 161.

implying that the artistic method of rhetoric requires philosophical dialectic and conversely that philosophical dialectic needs creativity: for example the myth speech gives the only possible account of the soul that a human being is capable of explaining. The most obvious clash with the stern words of the *Republic* is the view that good poetry is an unequivocally fine thing for mankind and that the poet's glorification of ancient times actually educates us. Also in speaking the myth Socrates acknowledges that he has risen to a station of poetic height while in a state of divine inspiration.

The *Sophist* presents us with a very interesting analysis of the complexities of *mimesis*. In this text the Stranger from Elea discriminates between craftsmen who make images (*eidolopoiike*) and those who make originals or real things. The making of images is then divided into two kinds; they are productions of likenesses (*eikastike*) and those of phantasms (*phantastike*). The point that Plato is trying to make by drawing this distinction is that to create a likeness is to create an exact replica and not a product that just appears to be exactly the same, like for instance colossal sculptures and paintings that are deliberately out of proportion so that they look fine from a particular viewpoint. Therefore *mimesis* has the opportunity to have actual affinities with that which it imitates. Under this definition of *mimesis* an artist who imitates with genuine knowledge of that which he is copying has the potential to render a successful *mimesis*;¹⁴⁷ what Plato calls a "scientific or learned imitation" (267). Gadamer acknowledges this possibility for he states that a poet who had knowledge of education and human virtue (*arête*) would

¹⁴⁷ Ibid. p. 171.

be compelled to completely devote himself to the pursuit and proliferation of them.¹⁴⁸

There are some who imitate, knowing what they imitate, and some who do not know. And what line of distinction can there possibly be greater than that which divides ignorance from knowledge? (*Soph.* 267)

Those who are adamant about the fact that Plato is a dualist in the sense that we had explained in the thesis will find it puzzling how he could designate knowledge to any form of imitation. On the other hand those who use the ideas of the *Timaeus* as their foundation will be able to easily equate the imitator or artist who has knowledge with the Demiurge; both of which produce a result that is beautiful and good.

¹⁴⁸ Gadamer, 'Plato and the Poets', p. 60.

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