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“A Figure of Speech, or a Figure of Thought?”¹ (Part 1)

by

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*Egō de technēn ou kalō, ho an ē alogon pragma.
Plato, Gorgias 465A²*

We are peculiar people. I say this with reference to the fact that whereas almost all other peoples have called their theory of art or expression a “rhetoric” and have thought of art as a kind of knowledge, we have invented an “aesthetic” and think of art as a kind of feeling.

The Greek original of the word “aesthetic” means perception by the senses, especially by feeling. Aesthetic experience is a faculty that we share with animals and vegetables, and is irrational. The “aesthetic soul” is that part of our psychic makeup that “senses” things and reacts to them: in other words, the “sentimental” part of us. To identify our approach to art with the pursuit of these reactions is not to make art “fine” but to apply it only to the life of pleasure and to disconnect it from the active and contemplative lives.

¹ Quintilian IX.4.117, “Figura? Quae? cum orationis, tum etiam sententiae?” Cf. Plato, *Republic* 601B.

² “I cannot fairly give the name of ‘art’ to anything irrational.” Cf. *Laws* 890D, “Law and art are children of the intellect (Gr. *nous*).” Sensation (Gr. *aisthēsis*) and pleasure (Gr. *hēdonē*) are irrational (Gr. *alogos*; see *Timaeus* 28A, 47D, 69D). In the *Gorgias*, the irrational is that which cannot give an account of itself, that which is unreasonable, has no *raison d’être*. See also Philo, *Legum Allegoriarum* I.48, “For as grass is the food of irrational beings, so has the sensibly-perceptible (Gr. *to aisthēton*) been assigned to the irrational part of the soul.” *Aisthēsis* is just what the biologist now calls “irritability.”

Our word “aesthetic,” then, takes for granted what is now commonly assumed, viz. that art is evoked by, and has for its end to express and again evoke, emotions. In this connection, Alfred North Whitehead has remarked that “it was a tremendous discovery, how to excite emotions for their own sake.”³ We have gone on to invent a science of our likes and dislikes, a “science of the soul,” psychology, and have substituted psychological explanations for the traditional conception of art as an intellectual virtue and of beauty as pertaining to knowledge.⁴ Our current resentment of meaning in art is as strong as the word “aesthetic” implies. When we speak of a work of art as “significant” we try to forget that this word can only be used with a following “of,” that expression can be significant only *of* some thesis that was to be expressed, and we overlook that whatever does not mean something is literally *in-significant*. If, indeed, the whole end of art were “to express emotion,” then the degree of our emotional reaction would be the measure of beauty and all judgment would be subjective, for there can be no disputing about tastes. It should be remembered that a reaction is an “affection,” and every affection a passion, that is, something passively suffered or undergone, and not—as in the operation of judgment—an activity on our part.⁵ To equate the love of art with a love of fine sensations is to make of works of art a kind of aphrodisiac. The words “disinterested aesthetic contemplation” are a contradiction in terms and a pure non-sense.

“Rhetoric,” of which the Greek original means skill in public speaking, implies, on the other hand, a theory of art as the effective expression of theses. There is a very wide difference between what is said for effect, and what is said or made to be *effective*, and must *work*, or would not have been worth saying or making. It is true that there is a so-called rhetoric of the production of “effects,” just as there is a so-called poetry that consists only of emotive words, and a sort of painting that is merely spectacular; but this kind of eloquence that makes use of figures for their own sake, or merely to display the artist, or to betray the truth in courts of law, is not properly a rhetoric, but a sophistic, or art of flattery. By “rhetoric” we mean, with Plato and Aristotle, “the art of giving effectiveness to truth.”⁶ My thesis will be, then, that if we propose to use or understand any works of art (with the possible exception of contemporary works, which may be “unintelligible”⁷), we ought to abandon the term “aesthetic” in its present application and return to “rhetoric,” Quintilian’s “bene dicendi scientia” [“art of speaking well” – Ed. trans.]

³ Quoted with approval by Herbert Read, *Art and Society* (New York, 1937), p. 84, from Alfred North Whitehead, *Religion in the Making* (New York, 1926).

⁴ *Sum. Theol.* I-II.57.3c (art is an intellectual virtue); I.5.4 *ad* 1 (beauty pertains to the cognitive, not the appetitive faculty).

⁵ “Pathology ... 2. The study of the passions or emotions” (*The Oxford English Dictionary*, 1933, VII, 554). The “psychology of art” is not a science of art but of the way in which we are affected by works of art. An affection (Gr. *pathēma*) is passive; making or doing (Gr. *poiēma, ergon*) is an activity.

⁶ See Charles Sears Baldwin, *Medieval Rhetoric and Poetic* (New York, 1928), p. 3. “A real art of speaking which does not lay hold upon the truth does not exist and never will” (*Phaedrus* 260E; cf. *Gorgias* 463-465, 513D, 517A, 527C, *Laws* 937E).

⁷ See E. F. Rothschild, *The Meaning of Unintelligibility in Modern Art* (Chicago, 1934), p. 98. “The course of artistic achievement was the change from the visual as a means of comprehending the non-visual to the visual as an end in itself and the abstract structure of physical forms as the purely artistic transcendence of the visual ... *a transcendence utterly alien and unintelligible to the average [sc. normal] man*” (F. de W. Bolman, criticizing E. Kahler’s *Man the Measure*, in *Journal of Philosophy*, XLI, 1944, 134-135; italics mine).

It may be objected by those for whom art is not a language but a spectacle that rhetoric has primarily to do with verbal eloquence and not with the life of work of art in general. I am not sure that even such objectors should really agree to describe their own works as dumb or ineloquent. But however this may be, we must affirm that the principles of art are not altered by the variety of the material in which the artist works—materials such as vibrant air in the case of music or poetry, human flesh on the stage, or stone, metal, clay in architecture, sculpture, and pottery. Nor can one material be called more beautiful than another; you cannot make a better sword of gold than of steel. Indeed, the material as such, being relatively formless, is relatively ugly. Art implies a transformation of the material, the impression of a new form on material that had been more or less formless; and it is precisely in this sense that the creation of the world from a completely formless matter is called a “work of adornment.”

There are good reasons for the fact that the theory of art has generally been stated in terms of the spoken (or secondarily, written) word. It is, in the first place, “by a word conceived in intellect” that the artist, whether human or divine, works.⁸ Again, those whose own art was, like mine, verbal, naturally discussed the art of verbal expression, while those who worked in other materials were not also necessarily expert in “logical” formulation. And finally, the art of speaking can be better understood by all than could the art of, let us say, the potter, because all men make use of speech (whether rhetorically, to communicate a meaning, or sophistically, to exhibit themselves), while relatively few are workers in clay.

All our sources are conscious of the fundamental identity of all the arts. Plato, for example, remarks that “the expert, who is intent upon the best when he speaks, will surely not speak at random, but with an end in view; he is just like all those other artists, the painters, builders, shipwrights, etc.,”⁹ and again, “the production of all arts are kinds of poetry, and their craftsmen are all poets,”¹⁰ in the broad sense of the word. “Demiurge” (*dēmiourgos*) and “technician” (*technitnēs*) are the ordinary Greek words for “artist” (*artifex*) and under these headings Plato includes not only poets, painters, and musicians, but also archers, weavers, embroiderers, potters, carpenters, sculptors, farmers, doctors, hunters, and above all those whose art is government, only making a distinction between creation (*dēmiourgia*) and mere labor (*cheiourgia*), art (*technē*) and artless industry (*atechnos tribē*).¹¹ All these artists, insofar as they are really makers and not merely

⁸ *Sum. Theol.* 1.45.6c, “Artifex autem per verbum in intellectu conceptum et per amorem suae voluntatis ad aliquid relatum, operatur” [the artist works through a word conceived in the intellect and through the love of the will for something relative – Ed. trans.]; 1.14.8c, “Artifex operatur per suum intellectum” [The artist works through his intellect – Ed. trans.]; 1.45.7c “Forma artificiatu est ex conceptione artificis” [The form of a work of art is from the conception of the artist – Ed. trans.]. See also St. Bonaventura, *Il Sententiarum* I-I.II ad 3 and 4, “Agens per intellectum producit per formas” [Acting through the intellect (the artist) makes through forms – Ed. trans.]. Informality is ugliness.

⁹ *Gorgias* 503E.

¹⁰ *Symposium* 205C.

¹¹ See, for example, *Statesman* 259E, *Phaedrus* 260E, *Laws* 938A. The word *tribē* literally means “a rubbing,” and is an exact equivalent of our modern expression “a grind.” (Cf. Hippocrates, *Fractures* 772, “shameful and artless,” and Ruskin’s “industry without art is brutality.”) “For all well-governed peoples there is a work enjoined upon each man which he must perform” (*Republic* 405C). “Leisure” is the opportunity to do this work without interference (*Republic* 370C). A “work for leisure” is one requiring undivided attention (Euripides, *Andromache* 552). Plato’s view of work in no way differs from that of Hesiod, who says that work is no reproach but the best gift of the gods to men (*Works and Days* 295-296). Whenever Plato disparages the mechanical arts, it is with reference to the kinds of work that provide

industrious, insofar as they are musical and therefore wise and good, and insofar as they are in possession of their art (*evtechnos*, cf. *entheos*) and governed by it, are infallible.¹² The primary meaning of the word *sophia* “wisdom,” is that of “skill,” just as Sanskrit *kausalam* is “skill” of any kind, whether in making, doing, or knowing.

Now what are all these arts for? Always and only to supply a real or an imagined need or deficiency on the part of the human patron, for whom as the collective consumer the artist works.¹³ When he is working for himself, the artist as a human being is also a consumer. The necessities to be served by art may appear to be material *or* spiritual, but as Plato insists, it is one and the same art—or a combination of both arts, practical and philosophical—that must serve both body and soul if it is to be admitted in the ideal City.¹⁴ We shall see presently that to propose to serve the two ends separately is the peculiar symptom of our modern “heartlessness.” Our distinction of “fine” from “applied” art (ridiculous, because the fine art itself is applied to giving pleasure) is as though “not by bread alone”¹⁵ had meant “by cake” for the elite that go to exhibitions and “bread alone” for the majority and usually for all. Plato’s music and gymnastics, which correspond to what we seem to intend by “fine” and “applied” art (since one is for the soul and the other for the body), are never divorced in his theory of education; to follow one alone leads to effeminacy, to follow only the other, to brutality; the tender artist is no more a man than the tough athlete; music must be realized in bodily graces, and physical power should be exercised only in measured, not in violent motions.¹⁶

It would be superfluous to explain what are the material necessities to be served by art: we need only remember that a censorship of what ought or ought not to be made at all should correspond to our knowledge of what is good or bad for us. It is clear that a wise government, even a government of the free by the free, cannot permit the manufacture and sale of products that are necessarily injurious, however profitable such manufacture may be to those whose interest it is to sell, but must insist upon those standards of living to secure which was once the function of the guilds and of the individual artist “inclined by justice, which rectifies the will, to do his work faithfully.”¹⁷

for the well-being of the body only, and do not at the same time provide spiritual food; he does not connect culture with idleness.

¹² *Republic* 342BC. What is made by art is correctly made (*Alcibiades* I.108B). It will follow that those who are in possession of and governed by their art and not by their own irrational impulses, which yearn for innovations, will operate in the same way (*Republic* 349-350, *Laws* 660B). “Art has fixed ends and ascertained means of operation” (*Sum. Theol.* II-II.47.4 *ad* 2, 49.5 *ad* 2). It is in the same way that an oracle, speaking *ex cathedra*, is infallible, but not so the man when speaking for himself. This is similarly true in the case of a guru.

¹³ *Republic* 369BC, *Statesman* 279CD, *Epinomis* 975c.

¹⁴ *Republic* 398A, 401B, 605-607; *Laws* 656C.

¹⁵ Deut. 8:3, Luke 4:4

¹⁶ *Republic* 376E, 410A-412A, 521E-522A, *Laws* 673A. Plato always has in view an attainment of the “best” for both the body and the soul, “since for any single kind to be left by itself pure and isolated is not good, nor altogether possible” (*Philebus* 63B; cf. *Republic* 409-410). “The one means of salvation from these evils is neither to exercise the soul without the body nor the body without the soul” (*Timaeus* 88B).

¹⁷ *Sum. Theol.* I-II.57.3 *ad* 2 (based on Plato’s view of justice, which assigns to every man the work for which he is naturally fitted). None of the arts pursues its own good, but only the patron’s (*Republic* 342B, 347A), which lies in the excellence of the product.

As for the spiritual ends of the arts, what Plato says is that we are endowed by the gods with vision and hearing, and harmony “was given by the Muses to him that can use them intellectually (*meta noū*), not as an aid to irrational pleasure (*hēdonē alogos*), as is nowadays supposed, but to assist the soul’s interior revolution, to restore it to order and concord with itself. And because of the want of measure and lack of graces in most of us, rhythm was given us by the same gods for the same ends”;¹⁸ and that while the passion (*pathē*) evoked by a composition of sounds “furnishes a pleasure-of-the-senses (*hēdonē*) to the unintelligent, it (the composition) bestows on the intelligent that heartsease that is induced by the imitation of the divine harmony produced in mortal motions.”¹⁹ This last delight or gladness that is experienced when we partake of the feast of reason, which is also a communion, is not a passion but an ecstasy, a going out of ourselves and being in the spirit: a condition unsusceptible of analysis in terms of the pleasure or pain that can be felt by sensitive bodies or souls.

The soulful or sentimental self enjoys itself in the aesthetic surfaces of natural or artificial things, to which it is akin; the intellectual or spiritual self enjoys their order and is nourished by what in them is akin to it. The spirit is much rather a fastidious than a sensitive entity; it is not the physical qualities of things, but what is called their scent or flavor, for example “the picture not in the colors,” or “the unheard music,” not a sensible shape but an intelligible form, that it tastes. Plato’s “heartsease” is the same as that “intellectual beatitude” which Indian rhetoric sees in the “tasting of the flavor” of a work of art, an immediate experience, and congeneric with the tasting of God.²⁰

This is, then, by no means an aesthetic or psychological experience but implies what Plato and Aristotle call a *katharsis*, and a “defeat of the sensations of pleasure” or pain.²¹ *Katharsis* is a sacrificial purgation and purification “consisting in a separation, as far as that is possible, of the soul from the body”; it is, in other words, a kind of dying, that kind of dying to which the philosopher’s life is dedicated.²² The Platonic *katharsis* implies an ecstasy, or “standing aside” of the energetic, spiritual, and imperturbable self from the passive, aesthetic, and natural self, a “being out of oneself” that is a being “in one’s right mind” and real Self, that “in-sistence” that Plato has in mind when he “would be born again in beauty inwardly,” and calls this a sufficient prayer.²³

Plato rebukes his much-beloved Homer for attributing to the gods and heroes all-too-human passions, and for the skillful imitations of these passions that are so well calculated to arouse our own “sym-pathies.”²⁴ The *katharsis* of Plato’s City is to be

¹⁸ *Timaeus* 47DE; cf. *Laws* 659E, on the chant.

¹⁹ *Timaeus* 80B, echoed in Quintilian IX.117, “docti rationem componendi intelligunt, etiam indocti voluptatem” [the learned, employing reason, understand while the unlearned seek pleasure – Ed. trans.]. Cf. *Timaeus* 47, 90D.

²⁰ *Sāhitya Darpaṇa* III.2–3; cf. Coomaraswamy, *The Transformation of Nature in Art*, 1934, 48–51.

²¹ *Laws* 840C. On *katharsis*, see Plato, *Sophist* 226–227, *Phaedrus* 243AB, *Phaedrus* 66–67, 82B, *Republic* 399E; Aristotle, *Poetics* VI.2.1.1449b.

²² *Phaedo* 67DE.

²³ *Phaedrus* 279BC; so also Hermes, *Lib.* XIII.3, 4, “I have passed forth out of myself,” and Chuang-tzu, ch. 2, “Today I buried myself.” Cf. Coomaraswamy, “On Being in One’s Right Mind,” 1942.

²⁴ *Republic* 389–398.

effected not by such exhibitions as this, but by the banishment of artists who allow themselves to imitate all sorts of things, however shameful. Our own novelists and biographers would have been the first to go, while among modern poets it is not easy to think of any but William Morris of whom Plato could have heartily approved.

The *katharsis* of the City parallels that of the individual; the emotions are traditionally connected with the organs of evacuation, precisely because the emotions are waste products. It is difficult to be sure of the exact meaning of Aristotle's better-known definition, in which tragedy "by its imitation of pity and fear effects a *katharsis* from these and like passions,"²⁵ though it is clear that for him too the purification is *from* the passions (*pathēmata*); we must bear in mind that, for Aristotle, tragedy is still essentially a representation of actions, and not of character. It is certainly not a periodical "outlet" of—that is to say, indulgence in—our "pent-up" emotions that can bring about an emancipation from them; such an outlet, like a drunkard's bout, can be only a temporary satiation.²⁶ In what Plato calls with approval the "more austere" kind of poetry, we are presumed to be enjoying a feast of reason rather than a "break-fast" of sensations. His *katharsis* is an ecstasy or liberation of the "immortal soul" from the affections of the "mortal," a conception of emancipation that is closely paralleled in the Indian texts in which liberation is realized by a process of "shaking off one's bodies."²⁷ The reader or spectator of the imitation of a "myth" is to be rapt away from his habitual and passible personality and, just as in all other sacrificial rituals, becomes a god for the duration of the rite and only returns to himself when the rite is relinquished, when the epiphany is at an end and the curtain falls. We must remember that all artistic operations were originally rites, and that the purpose of the rite (as the word *teletē* implies) is to sacrifice the old and to bring into being a new and more perfect man.

We can well imagine, then, what Plato, stating a philosophy of art that is not "his own" but intrinsic to the *Philosophia Perennis*, would have thought of our aesthetic interpretations and of our contention that the last end of art is simply to please. For, as he says, "ornament, painting, and music made only to give pleasure" are just "toys."²⁸ The "lover of art," in other words, is a "playboy." It is admitted that a majority of men judge works of art by the pleasure they afford; but rather than sink to such a level, Socrates says no, "not even if all the oxen and horses and animals in the world, by their pursuit of

²⁵ Aristotle, *Poetics* VI.2.1449b.

²⁶ The aesthetic man is "one who is too weak to stand up against pleasure and pain" (*Republic* 556C). If we think of impassibility (Gr. *apatheia*, not what we mean by "apathy" but a being superior to the pulls of pleasure and pain; cf. BG II.56) with horror, it is because we should be "unwilling to live without hunger and thirst and the like, if we could not also suffer (Gr. *paschō*, Skr. *bādh*) the natural consequences of these passions," the pleasures of eating and drinking and enjoying fine colors and sounds (*Philebus* 54E, 55B.) Our attitude to pleasures and pains is always passive, if not, indeed, masochistic. Cf. Coomaraswamy, *Time and Eternity*, 1947, p. 73 and notes.

It is very clear from *Republic* 606 that the enjoyment of an emotional storm is just what Plato does not mean by a *katharsis*; such an indulgence merely fosters the very feelings that we are trying to suppress. A perfect parallel is found in the *Milinda Pañho* (Mil, p. 76); it is asked, of tears shed for the death of a mother or shed for love of the Truth, which can be called a "cure" (*bhesajjam*)—i.e. for man's mortality—and it is pointed out that the former are fevered, the latter cool, and that it is what cools that cures.

²⁷ JUB III.30.2 and 39.2; BU III.7.3-4; CU VIII.13; Śvet. Up. V.14. Cf. *Phaedo* 65-69.

²⁸ *Statesman* 288C.

pleasure, proclaim that such is the criterion.”²⁹ The kind of music of which he approves is not a multifarious and changeable but a canonical music,³⁰ not the sound of “poly-harmonic” instruments, but the simple music (*haplotēs*) of the lyre accompanied by chanting “deliberately designed to produce in the soul that symphony of which we have been speaking”;³¹ not the music of Marsyas the Satyr, but that of Apollo.³²

All the arts, without exception, are imitative. The work of art can only be judged as such (and independently of its “value”) by the degree to which the model has been correctly represented. The beauty of the work is proportionate to its accuracy (Gr. *orthotēs* = *integritas sive perfectio* [integrity or perfection – Ed. trans.]), or truth (Gr. *alētheia* = *veritas*). In other words, the artist’s judgment of his own work by the criterion of art is a criticism based upon the proportion of essential to actual form, paradigm to image. “Imitation” (Gr. *mimēsis*), a word that can be as easily misunderstood as St. Thomas Aquinas’s “Art is the imitation of Nature in her manner of operation,”³³ can be mistaken to mean that that is the best art that is “truest to nature,” as we now use the word in its most limited sense, with reference not to “Mother Nature,” *Natura naturans*, *Creatrix Universalis*, *Deus* [creative Nature, Creatress of All, God – Ed. trans.] but to whatever is presented by our own immediate and natural environment whether visually or otherwise accessible to observation (Gr. *aisthēsis*). In this connection it is important not to overlook that the delineation of character (Gr. *ēthos*) in literature and painting is, just as much as the representation of the looking-glass image of a physiognomy, an empirical and realistic procedure, dependent on observation. St. Thomas’s “Nature,” on the other hand, is that Nature “to find which,” as Meister Eckhart says, “all her forms must be shattered.”

The imitation or “re-presentation” of a model (even a “presented” model) involves, indeed, a likeness (Gr. *homoia*, Latin *similitudo*, Skr. *sādrśya*), but hardly what we usually mean by “verisimilitude” (Gr. *homoiotēs*). What is traditionally meant by “likeness” is not a copy but an image akin (Gr. *sungenēs*) and “equal” (Gr. *isos*) to its model; in other words, a natural and “adequate” symbol of its referent. The representation of a man, for example, must really correspond to the idea of the man, but must not look so like him as to deceive the eye; for the work of art, as regards its form, is a mind-made thing and aims at the mind, but an illusion is no more intelligible than the natural object it mimics. The plaster cast of a man will not be a work of art, but the representation of a man on wheels where verisimilitude would have required feet may be an entirely adequate “imitation” well and *truly* made.³⁴

²⁹ *Philebus* 67B.

³⁰ *Republic* 399-404; cf. *Laws* 656E, 660, 797-799.

³¹ *Laws* 659E; see also note 86, below.

³² *Republic* 399E; cf. Dante, *Paradiso* 1.13-21.

³³ Aristotle, *Physics* II.2.194a 20, *hē technē mimeitai tēn physin* [art imitates nature –Ed. trans.] -- both employing suitable means toward a known end.

³⁴ Art is iconography, the making of images or copies of some model (Gr. *paradeigma*), whether visible (presented) or invisible (contemplated); see Plato, *Republic* 373B, 377E, 392-397, 402, *Laws* 667-669, *Statesman* 306D, *Cratylus* 439A, *Timaeus* 28AB, 52BC, *Sophist* 234C, 236C; Aristotle, *Poetics* I.1-2. In the same way, Indian works of art are called counterfeits or commensurations (*anukṛti*, *tadākārātā*, *pratīkṛti*, *pratibimba*, *pratimāna*), and likeness (*sārūpya*, *sādrśya*) is demanded. This does not mean that it is a likeness in all respects that is needed to evoke the original, but an

It is with perfect right that the mathematician speaks of a “beautiful equation” and feels for it what we feel about “art.”³⁵ The beauty of the admirable equation is the attractive aspect of its simplicity. It is a single form that is the form of many different things. In the same way Beauty absolutely is the equation that is the single form of all things, which are themselves beautiful to the extent that they participate in the simplicity of their source. “The beauty of the straight line and the circle, and the plane and solid figures formed from these ... is not, like that of other things, relative, but always absolutely beautiful.”³⁶ Now we know that Plato, who says this, is always praising what is ancient and deprecating innovations (of which the causes are, in the strictest and worst sense of the word, aesthetic), and that he ranks the formal and canonical arts of Egypt far above the humanistic Greek art that he saw coming into fashion.³⁷ The kind of art that Plato endorsed was, then, precisely what we know as Greek Geometric art. We must not think that it would have been primarily for its decorative values that Plato must have admired this kind of “primitive” art, but for its truth or accuracy, *because* of which it has the kind of beauty that is universal and invariable, its equations being “akin” to the First Principles of which the myths and mysteries, related or enacted, are imitations in other kinds of material. The forms of the simplest and severest kinds of art, the synoptic kind of art that we call “primitive,” are the natural language of all traditional philosophy; and it is for this very reason that Plato’s dialectic makes continual use of *figures* of speech, which are really figures of thought.

Plato knew as well as the Scholastic philosophers that the artist as such has no moral responsibilities, and can sin as an artist only if he fails to consider the sole good of the work to be done, whatever it may be.³⁸ But, like Cicero, Plato also knows that “though he is an artist, he is nevertheless a man”³⁹ and, if a free man, responsible as such for whatever it may be that he undertakes to make; a man who, if he represents what ought not to be represented and brings into being things unworthy of free men, should be punished, or at the least restrained or exiled like any other criminal or madman. It is precisely those poets or other artists who imitate anything and everything, and are not ashamed to represent or even “idealize” things essentially base, that Plato, without respect for their abilities, however great, would banish from the society of rational men,

equality as to the whichness (Gr. *tosouton, hoson*) and whatness (Gr. *toiouton, hoion*) -- or form (Gr. *idea*) and force (Gr. *dynamis*) -- of the archetype. It is this “real equality” or “adequacy” (Gr. *auto to ison*) that is the truth and the beauty of the work (*Laws* 667-664, *Timaeus* 28AB, *Phaedo* 74-75). We have shown elsewhere that the Indian *sādrśya* does not imply an illusion but only a real equivalence. It is clear from *Timaeus* 28-29 that by “equality” and “likeness” Plato also means a real kinship (Gr. *sungeneia*) and analogy (Gr. *analogia*) and that it is these qualities that make it possible for an image to “interpret” or “deduce” (Gr. *exēgeomai*, cf. Skr. *ānī*) its archetype. For example, words are *eidola* [images] of things (*Sophist* 234C), “true names” are not correct by accident (*Cratylus* 387D, 439A), the body is an *eidolon* [image] of the soul (*Laws* 959B), and these images are at the same time like and yet unlike their referents. In other words, what Plato means by “imitation” and by “art” is an “adequate symbolism” (cf. distinction of image from duplicate, *Cratylus* 432).

³⁵ “The mathematician’s patterns, like the painter’s or the poet’s, must be *beautiful*” (G. H. Hardy, *A Mathematician’s Apology*, Cambridge, 1940, p. 85); cf. Coomaraswamy, *Why Exhibit Works of Art?*, 1943, ch. 9.

³⁶ *Philebus* 51C. For beauty by participation, see *Phaedo* 100D; cf. *Republic* 476; St. Augustine, *Confessions* X.34; Dionysius, *De divinis nominibus* IV.5.

³⁷ *Laws* 657AB, 665C, 700C.

³⁸ *Laws* 670E; *Sum. Theol.* I.91.3, I-II-57.3 *ad* 2.

³⁹ Cicero, *Pro quinctio* xxv.78.

“lest from the imitation of shameful things men should imbibe their actuality,”⁴⁰ that is to say, for the same reasons that we in moments of sanity (Gr. *sōphrosynē*) see fit to condemn the exhibition of gangster films in which the villain is made a hero, or agree to forbid the manufacture of even the most skillfully adulterated foods.

If we dare not ask with Plato “imitations of what sort of life?” and “whether of the appearance or the reality, the phantasm or the truth?”⁴¹ it is because we are no longer sure what kind of life it is that we ought for our own good and happiness to imitate, and are for the most part convinced that no one knows or can know the final truth about anything: we only know what we “approve” of, i.e., what we *like* to do or think, and we desire a freedom to do and think what we like more than we desire a freedom from error. Our educational systems are chaotic because we are not agreed for what to educate, if not for self-expression. But all tradition is agreed as to what kind of models are to be imitated: “The city can never otherwise be happy unless it is designed by those painters who follow a divine original”;⁴² “The crafts such as building and carpentry ... take their principles from that realm and from the thinking there”;⁴³ “Lo, make all things in accordance with the pattern that was shown thee upon the mount”;⁴⁴ “It is in imitation (*anukṛti*) of the divine forms that any human form (*śilpa*) is invented here”;⁴⁵ “There is this divine harp, to be sure; this human harp comes into being in its likeness” (*tad anukṛti*);⁴⁶ “We must do what the Gods did first.”⁴⁷ This is the “imitation of Nature in her manner of operation,” and, like the first creation, the imitation of an intelligible, not a perceptible model.

But such in imitation of the divine principles is only possible if we have known them “as they are,” for if we have not ourselves seen them, our mimetic iconography, based upon opinion, will be at fault; we cannot know the reflection of anything unless we know itself.⁴⁸ It is the basis of Plato’s criticism of naturalistic poets and painters that they know nothing of the reality but only the appearances of things, for which their vision is overkeen; their imitations are not of the divine originals, but are only copies of copies.⁴⁹

⁴⁰ *Republic* 395C; cf. 395—401, esp. 401BC, 605—607, and *Laws* 656C.

⁴¹ *Republic* 400A, 598B; cf. *Timaeus* 29C.

⁴² *Republic* 500E.

⁴³ Plotinus, *Enneads* V.9.II, like Plato, *Timaeus* 29AB.

⁴⁴ Exod. 25:40.

⁴⁵ AB VI.27.

⁴⁶ ŚA VIII.9.

⁴⁷ ŚB VII.2.1.4; cf. III.3.3.16, XIV.I.2.26, and TS V.5.4.4. Whenever the Sacrificers are at a loss, they are required to contemplate (*cetayadhvam*) and the required form thus seen becomes their model. Cf. Philo, *Moses* 11.74-76.

⁴⁸ *Republic* 377, 402, *Laws* 667-668, *Timaeus* 28AB, *Phaedrus* 243AB (on *hamartia peri mythologlan* [error concerning mythology —Ed. trans.]), *Republic* 382BC (misuse of words is a symptom of sickness in the soul).

⁴⁹ See *Republic* 601, for example. Porphyry tells us that Plotinus refused to have his portrait painted, objecting, “Must I consent to leave, as a desirable spectacle for posterity, an image of an image?” Cf. Asterius, bishop of Amasea, ca. A.D. 340: “Paint not Christ: for the one humility of his incarnation suffices him” (Migne, *Patrologia graeca* XI.167). The real basis of the Semitic objection to graven images, and of all other iconoclasm, is not an objection to art (adequate symbolism), but an objection to a realism that implies an essentially idolatrous worship of nature. The figuration of the Ark according to the pattern that was seen upon the mount (Exod. 25:40) is not “that kind of imagery with reference to which the prohibition was given” (Tertullien, *Contra Marcionem* II.22).

And seeing that God alone is truly beautiful, and all other beauty is by participation, it is only a work of art that has been wrought, in its kind (Gr. *idea*) and its significance (Gr. *dynamis*), after an eternal model, that can be called beautiful.⁵⁰ And since the eternal and intelligible models are supersensual and invisible, it is evidently “not by observation” but in contemplation that they must be known.⁵¹ Two acts, then, one of contemplation and one of operation, are necessary to the production of any work of art.⁵²

And now as to the judgment of the work of art, first by the criterion of art, and second with respect to its human value. As we have already seen, it is not by our reactions, pleasurable or otherwise, but by its perfect accuracy, beauty, or perfection, or truth—in other words, by the equality or proportion of the image to its model—that a work of art can be judged as such. That is to consider only the good of the work to be done, the business of the artist. But we have also to consider the good of the man for whom the work is done, whether this “consumer” (Gr. *chrōmenos*) be the artist himself or some other patron.⁵³ This man judges in another way, not, or not only, by this truth or accuracy, but by the artifact’s utility or aptitude (Gr. *ōphēleia*) to serve the purpose of its original intention (Gr. *boulēsis*), viz. the need (*endeia*) that was the first and is also the last cause of the work. Accuracy and aptitude together make the “wholesomeness” (Gr. *hygienon*) of the work that is its ultimate-rightness (Gr. *orthotēs*).⁵⁴ The distinction of beauty from

⁵⁰ *Timaeus* 28AB; cf. note 34, above. The symbols that are rightly sanctioned by a hieratic art are not conventionally but naturally correct (*orthotēta physei parechomena*, *Laws* 657A). One distinguishes, accordingly, between *le symbolisme qui sait* and *le symbolisme qui cherche* [the symbolism which knows and the symbolism which searches – Ed. trans.]. It is the former that the iconographer can and must understand, but he will hardly be able to do so unless he is himself accustomed to thinking in these precise terms.

⁵¹ The realities are seen “by the eye of the soul” (*Republic* 533D), “the soul alone and by itself” (*Theatetus* 186A, 187A), “gazing ever on what is authentic” (*pros to kata tauta echon blepōn aei*, *Timaeus* 28A; cf. *pros ton theon blepein* [looking towards God – Ed. trans.], *Phaedrus* 253A), and thus “by inwit (intuition) of what really is” (*peri to on ontōs ennoūis*, *Philebus* 59D). Just so in India, it is only when the senses have been withdrawn from their objects, only when the eye has been turned round (*āvṛtta cakṣus*), and with the eye of Gnosis (*jñāna cakṣus*), that the reality can be apprehended.

⁵² The contemplative *actus primus* (Gr. *theōria*, Skr. *dhī*, *dhyāna*) and operative *actus secundus* (Gr. *apergasia*, Skr. *karma*) of the Scholastic philosophers.

⁵³ “One man is able to beget the productions of art, but the ability to judge of their utility (Gr. *ōphelia*) or harmfulness to their users belongs to another” (*Phaedrus* 274E). The two men are united in the whole man and complete connoisseur, as they are in the Divine Architect whose “judgments” are recorded in Gen. I:25 and 31.

⁵⁴ *Laws* 667; for a need as first and last cause, see *Republic* 369BC. As to “wholesomeness,” cf. Richard Bernheimer, in *Art: A Bryn Mawr Symposium* (Bryn Mawr, 1940), pp. 28-29: “There should be a deep ethical purpose in all of art, of which the classical aesthetic was fully aware... To have forgotten this purpose before the mirage of absolute patterns and designs is perhaps the fundamental fallacy of the abstract movement in art.” The modern abstractionist forgets that the Neolithic formalist was not an interior decorator but a metaphysical man who had to live by his wits.

The indivisibility of beauty and use is affirmed in Xenophon, *Memorabilia* III.8.8, “that the same house is both beautiful and useful was a lesson in the art of building houses as they ought to be” (cf. IV.6.9). “Omnis enim artifex intendit producere opus pulcrum et utile et stabile... Scientia reddit opus pulcrum, voluntas reddit utile, perseverantia reddit stabile” (St. Bonaventura, *De reductione artium ad theologian* 13; tr. by J. de Vinck: “Every maker intends to produce a beautiful, useful, and enduring object... Knowledge makes a work beautiful, the will makes it useful, and perseverance makes it enduring.”) So for St. Augustine, the stylus is “et in suo genere pulcher, et ad usum nostrum accommodatus” (*De vera religione* 39) [both beautiful in its kind and suited to our use – Ed. trans.]. Philo defines art as “a system of concepts coordinated towards some useful end” (*Congr.* 141). Only those whose notion of utility is solely with reference to bodily needs, or on the other hand, the pseudomystics who despise the body rather than use it, vaunt the “uselessness” of art: so Gautier, “Il n’y a de vraiment beau que ce qui ne peut servir à rien; tout ce qui est utile est laid” (quoted by Dorothy Richardson, “Saintsbury and Art for Art’s Sake in England,” *PMLA*, XLIX, 1944, p. 245), and Paul Valéry (see Coomaraswamy, *Why Exhibit Works of Art?*, 1943, p. 95). Gautier’s cynical “tout ce qui est utile est laid” [everything useful is ugly – Ed. trans.] adequately illustrates Ruskin’s “industry without art is brutality”; a more scathing judgment of the modern world in which utilities are really ugly could hardly be imagined. As H. T. Massingham

utility is logical, not real (*in re*).

So when taste has been rejected as a criterion in art, Plato's Stranger sums up thus, "The judge of anything that has been made (Gr. *poiēma*) must know its essence—what its intention (Gr. *boulēsis*) is and what the real thing of which it is an image—or else will hardly be able to diagnose whether it hits or misses the mark of its intention." And again, "The expert critic of any image, whether in painting, music, or any other art, must know three things, what was the archetype, and in each case whether it was correctly and whether well made ... whether the representation was good (Gr. *kalon*) or not."⁵⁵ The complete judgment, made by the whole man, is as to whether the thing under consideration has been both truly *and* well made. It is only "by the mob that the beautiful and the just are rent apart,"⁵⁶ by the mob, shall we say, of "aesthetes," the men who "know what they like"?

Of the two judgments, respectively by art and by value, the first only establishes the existence of the object as a true work of art and not a falsification (Gr. *pseudos*) of its archetype: it is a judgment normally made by the artist before he can allow the work to leave his shop, and so a judgment that is really presupposed when we as patrons or consumers propose to evaluate the work. It is only under certain conditions, and typically those of modern manufacture and salesmanship, that it becomes necessary for the patron or consumer to ask whether the object he has commissioned or proposes to buy is really a true work of art. Under normal conditions, where making is a vocation and the artist is disposed *and free* to consider nothing but the good of the work to be done, it is superfluous to ask, Is this a "true" work of art? When, however, the question must be asked, or if we wish to ask it in order to understand completely the genesis of the work, then the grounds of our judgment in this respect will be the same as for the original artist; we must know of what the work is intended to remind us, and whether it is equal to (is an "adequate symbol" of) this content, or by want of truth betrays its paradigm. In any case, when this judgment has been made, or is taken for granted, we can proceed to ask whether or not the work has a value for us, to ask whether it will serve our needs. If we are whole men, not such as live by bread alone, the question will be asked with respect to spiritual and physical needs to be satisfied together; we shall ask whether the model has been well chosen, and whether it has been applied to the material in such a way as to serve our immediate need; in other words, What does it say? and Will it work? If we have asked for a bread that will support the whole man and receive however fine a stone, we are not morally, though we may be legally, bound to "pay the piper." All our efforts to obey the Devil and "command this stone that it be made bread" are doomed to failure.

It is one of Plato's virtues, and that of all traditional doctrine about art, that "value" is

said, "The combination of use and beauty is part of what used to be called 'the natural law' and is indispensable for self-preservation," and it is because of the neglect of this principle that civilization "is perishing" (*This Plot of Earth*, London, 1944, p. 176). The modern world is dying of its own squalor just because *its* concept of practical utility is limited to that which "can be used directly for the destruction of human life or for accentuating the present inequalities in the distribution of wealth" (Hardy, *A Mathematician's Apology*, p. 120, note), and it is only under these unprecedented conditions that it could have been propounded by the escapists that the useful and the beautiful are opposites.

⁵⁵ *Laws* 668C, 669AB, 670E.

⁵⁶ *Laws* 860C.

never taken to mean an exclusively spiritual or exclusively physical value. It is neither advantageous, nor altogether possible, to separate these values, making some things sacred and other profane: the highest wisdom must be “mixed”⁵⁷ with practical knowledge, the contemplative life combined with the active. The pleasures that pertain to these lives are altogether legitimate, and it is only those pleasures that are irrational, bestial, and in the worst sense of the word seductive and distracting that are to be excluded. Plato’s music and gymnastics, which correspond to our culture and physical training, are not alternative curricula, but essential parts of one and the same education.⁵⁸ Philosophy is the highest form of music (culture), but the philosopher who has escaped from the cave must return to it to participate in the everyday life of the world and, quite literally, play the game.⁵⁹ Plato’s criterion of “wholesomeness” implies that nothing ought to be made, nothing can be really worth having, that is not at the same time correct or true or formal or beautiful (whichever word you prefer) *and* adapted to good use.

For, to state the Platonic doctrine in more familiar words, “It is written that man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word of God, . . . that bread which came down from heaven,”⁶⁰ that is, not by mere utilities but also by those “divine realities” and “causal beauty” with which the wholesome works of art are informed, so that they also live and speak. It is just to the extent that we try to live by bread alone and by all the other insignificant utilities that “bread alone” includes—good as utilities, but bad as *mere* utilities—that our contemporary civilization can be rightly called inhuman and must be unfavorably compared with the “primitive” cultures in which, as the anthropologists assure us, “the needs of the body and soul are satisfied together.”⁶¹ Manufacture for the needs of the body alone is the curse of modern civilization.

Should we propose to raise our standard of living to the savage level, on which there is no distinction of fine from applied or sacred from profane art, it need not imply the sacrifice of any of the necessities or even conveniences of life, but only of luxuries, only of such utilities as are not at the same time useful *and* significant. If such a proposal to return to primitive levels of culture should seem to be utopian and impracticable, it is only because a manufacture of significant utilities would have to be a manufacture for use, the use of the whole man, and not for the salesman’s profit. The price to be paid for putting back into the market place, where they belong, such things as are now to be seen only in museums would be that of economic revolution. It may be doubted whether our boasted love of art extends so far.

It has sometimes been asked whether the “artist” can survive under modern conditions. In the sense in which the word is used by those who ask the question, one does not see how he can or why he should survive. For, just as the modern artist is neither

⁵⁷ *Philebus* 61B-D.

⁵⁸ *Republic* 376E, 410-412, 521E-522A.

⁵⁹ *Republic* 519-520, 539E, *Laws* 644, and 803 in conjunction with 807. Cf. BG III.I-25; also Coomaraswamy, “Līlā,” 1941, and “Play and Seriousness,” 1942.

⁶⁰ Deut. 8:3, Luke 4:4, John 6:58.

⁶¹ R. R. Schmidt, *Dawn of the Human Mind (Der Geist der Vorzeit)*, tr. by R.A.S. Macalister (London, 1936), p. 167.

a useful or significant, but only an ornamental member of society, so the modern workman is nothing but a useful member and is neither significant nor ornamental. It is certain we shall have to go on working, but not so certain that we could not live, and handsomely, without the exhibitionists of our studios, galleries, and playing fields. We cannot do without art, because art is the knowledge of how things ought to be made, art is the principle of manufacture (*recta ratio factibilium*), and while an artless play may be innocent, an artless manufacture is merely brutish labor and a sin against the wholesomeness of human nature; we *can* do without “fine” artists, whose art does not “apply” to anything, and whose organized manufacture of art in studios is the inverse of the laborer’s artless manufacture in factories; and we *ought* to be able to do without the base mechanics “whose souls are bowed and mutilated by their vulgar occupations even as their bodies are marred by their mechanical arts.”⁶²

Plato himself discusses, in connection with all the arts, whether of potter, painter, poet, or “craftsman of civic liberty,” the relation between the practice of an art and the earning of a livelihood.⁶³ He points out that the practice of an art and the wage-earning capacity are two different things; that the artist (in Plato’s sense and that of the Christian and Oriental social philosophies) does not earn wages by his art. He *works by* his art, and is only accidentally a trader if he sells what he makes. Being a vocation, his art is most intimately his own and pertains to his own nature, and the pleasure that he takes in it perfects the operation. There is nothing he would rather work (or “play”) at than his making; to him the leisure state would be an abomination of boredom. This situation, in which each man does what is naturally (Gr. *kata physin* = Skr. *svabhāvatas*) his to do (Gr. *to heautou prattein* = Skr. *svadharma, svakarma*), not only is the type of Justice,⁶⁴ but furthermore, under these conditions (i.e., when the maker loves to work), “more is done, and better done, and with more ease, than in any other way.”⁶⁵ Artists are not tradesmen. “They know how to make, but not how to hoard.”⁶⁶ Under these conditions the worker and maker is not a hireling, but one whose salary enables him to go on doing and making. He is just like any other member of a feudal society, in which none are “hired” men, but all enfeoffed and all possessed of a hereditary standing, that of a

⁶² *Republic* 495E; cf. 522B, 611D, *Theaetetus* 173AB. That “industry without art is brutality” is hardly flattering to those whose admiration of the industrial system is equal to their interest in it. Aristotle defines as “slaves” those who have nothing but their bodies to offer (*Politics* I.5.1254b 18). It is on the work of such “slaves,” or literally “prostitutes,” that the industrial system of production for profit ultimately rests. Their political freedom does not make of assembly-line workers and other “base mechanics” what Plato means by “free men.”

⁶³ *Republic* 395B, 500D. Cf. Philo, *De opificio mundi* 78.

⁶⁴ *Republic* 433B, 443C.

⁶⁵ *Republic* 370C; cf. 347E, 374BC 406C. Paul Shorey had the naïveté to see in Plato’s conception of a vocational society an anticipation of Adam Smith’s division of labor; see *The Republic*, tr. and ed. P. Shorey (LCL, 1935), I, 150-151, note b. Actually, no two conceptions could be more contrary. In Plato’s division of labor it is taken for granted not that the artist is a special kind of man but that every man is a special kind of artist; his specialization is for the good of all concerned, producer and consumer alike. Adam Smith’s division benefits no one but the manufacturer and salesman. Plato, who detested any “fractioning of human faculty” (*Republic* 395B), could hardly have seen in *our* division of labor a type of justice. Modern research has rediscovered that “workers are *not* governed primarily by economic motives” (see Stuart Chase, “What Makes the Worker Like to Work?” *Reader’s Digest*, February 1941, p. 19).

⁶⁶ Chuang-tzu, as quoted by Arthur Waley, *Three Ways of Thought in Ancient China* (London, 1939), p. 62. It is not true to say that “the artist is a mercenary living by the sale of his own works” (F. J. Mather, *Concerning Beauty*, Princeton, 1935, p. 240). He is not working in order to make money but accepts money (or its equivalent) in order to be able to go on working at his living—and I say “working at his *living*” because the man *is* what he does.

professional whose reward is by gift or endowment and not “at so much an hour.”

The separation of the creative from the profit motive not only leaves the artist free to put the good of the work above his own good, but at the same time abstracts from manufacture the stain of simony, or “traffic in things sacred”; and this conclusion, which rings strangely in our ears, for whom work and play are alike secular activities, is actually in complete agreement with the traditional order, in which the artist’s operation is not a meaningless labor, but quite literally a significant and sacred rite, and quite as much as the product itself an adequate symbol of a spiritual reality. It is therefore a way, or rather *the way*, by which the artist, whether potter or painter, poet or king, can best erect or edify (Gr. *eksorthoō*) *himself* at the same time that he “trues” or cor-rects (Gr. *orthoō*) his work.⁶⁷ It is, indeed, only by the “true” workman that “true” work can be done; like engenders like.

When Plato lays it down that the arts shall “care for the bodies and souls of your citizens,” and that only things that are sane and free and not any shameful things unbecoming free men (Gr. *aneleuthera*)⁶⁸ are to be represented, it is as much as to say that the true artist in whatever material must be a free man, meaning by this not an “emancipated artist” in the vulgar sense of one having no obligation or commitment of any kind, but a man emancipated from the despotism of the salesman. Whoever is to “imitate the actions of gods and heroes, the intellections and revolutions of the All,” the very selves and divine paradigms or ideas of our useful inventions, must have known these realities “themselves (Gr. *auta*) and as they really are (Gr. *hoia estin*)”: for “what we have not and know not we can neither give to another nor teach our neighbor.”⁶⁹

In other words, an act of “imagination,” in which the idea to be represented is first clothed in the imitable form or image of the thing to be made, must precede the operation in which this form is impressed upon the actual material. The first of these acts, in the terms of Scholastic philosophy, is free, the second servile. It is only if the first be omitted that the word “servile” acquires a dishonorable connotation; then we can speak only of labor, and not of art. It need hardly be argued that our methods of manufacture are, in this shameful sense, servile, nor be denied that the industrial system, for which these methods are needed is an abomination “unfit for free men.” A system of manufacture governed by money values presupposes that there shall be two different kinds of makers, privileged artists who may be “inspired,” and underprivileged laborers, unimaginative by hypothesis, since they are required only to make what other men have imagined, or more often only to copy what other men have already made. It has often been claimed that the productions of “fine” art are useless; it would seem to be a mockery to speak of a society as “free” where it is only the makers of useless things who are supposedly free.

Inspiration is defined in Webster as “a supernatural influence which qualifies men to receive and communicate divine truth.” This is stated in the word itself, which implies the presence of a guiding “spirit” distinguished from but nevertheless “within” the agent who

⁶⁷ “A man attains perfection by devotion to his own work ... by his own work praising Him who wove this all... Whoever does the work appointed by his own nature incurs no sin” (BG XVIII.45-46).

⁶⁸ *Republic* 395C. See Aristotle on “leisure,” *Nicomachean Ethics* X.7.5-7.1177b.

⁶⁹ *Republic* 377E, *Symposium* 196E.

is in-spired, but is certainly not inspired if “expressing himself.” Before continuing we must clear the air by showing how the word “inspire” has been scabrously abused by modern authors. We have found it said that “a poet or other artist may let the rain inspire him.”⁷⁰ Such misuse of words debar the student from ever learning what the ancient writers may have really meant. We say “misuse” because neither is the rain, or anything perceptible to sense, *in* us; nor is the rain a kind of *spirit*. The rationalist has a right to disbelieve in inspiration and to leave it out of his account, as he very easily can if he is considering art only from the aesthetic (sensational) point of view, but he has no right to pretend that one can be “inspired” by a sense perception, by which, in fact, one can only be “affected,” and to which one can only “react.” On the other hand, Meister Eckhart’s phrase “inspired by his art” is quite correct, since art is a kind of knowledge, not anything that can be seen, but akin to the soul and prior to the body and the world.⁷¹ We can properly say that not only “Love” but “Art” and “Law” are names of the Spirit.

Here we are concerned not with the rationalist’s point of view, but only with the sources from which we can learn how the artist’s operation is explained in a tradition that we must understand if we are to understand its products. Here it is always by the Spirit that a man is thought of as inspired (Gr. *entheos*, sc. *hypo tou erōtos* [under love’s power – Ed. trans.]). “The Genius breathed into my heart (Gr. *enepneuse phresi daimōn*) to weave,” Penelope says.⁷² Hesiod tells us that the Muses “breathed into me a divine voice (Gr. *enepneusan de moi audēn thespin*)... and bade me sing the race of the blessed Gods.”⁷³ Christ, “through whom all things were made,” does not bear witness of (express) himself, but says “I do nothing of myself, but as my Father taught me, I speak.”⁷⁴ Dante writes, I am “one who when Love (Amor, Eros) inspires me (*mi spira*), attend, and go setting it forth in such wise as He dictates within me.”⁷⁵ For “there is no real speaking that does not lay hold upon the Truth.”⁷⁶ And who is it (“What self?”) that speaks the “Truth that cannot be refuted”? Not this man, So-and-so, Dante, or Socrates, or “I,” but the Synteresis, the Immanent Spirit, Socrates’ and Plato’s Daimon, he “who lives in every one of us”⁷⁷ and “cares for nothing, but the Truth.”⁷⁸ It is the “God himself that speaks” when we are not thinking our own thoughts but are His exponents, or priests.

And so as Plato, the father of European wisdom, asks, “Do we not know that as

⁷⁰ H. J. Rose, *A Handbook of Greek Mythology* (2d ed., London, 1933), p. 11. Clement Greenberg (in *The Nation*, April 19, 1941, p. 481) tells us that the “modern painter derives his inspiration from the very physical materials he works with.” Both critics forget the customary distinction of spirit from matter. What their statements actually mean is that the modern artist may be excited, but is not inspired.

⁷¹ Eckhart, Evans ed., II, 211; cf. *Laws* 892BC.

⁷² Homer, *Odyssey* XIX.138.

⁷³ *Theogony* 31-32.

⁷⁴ John 8:28; cf. 5:19 and 30, 7:16 and 18 (“He that speaketh from himself seeketh his own glory”). A column in *Parnassus*, XIII (May 1941), p. 189, comments on the female nude as Maillol’s “exclusive inspiration.” That is mere hot air; Renoir was not afraid to call a spade a spade when he said with what brush he painted.

⁷⁵ *Purgatorio* XXIV.52-54.

⁷⁶ *Phaedrus* 260E; *Symposium* 201C (on the irrefutable truth).

⁷⁷ *Timaeus* 69C, 90A.

⁷⁸ *Hippias Major* 288D.

regards the practice of the arts (Gr. *tēn tōn technōn dēmiourgian*) the man who has this God for his teacher will be renowned and as it were a beacon light, but one whom Love has not possessed will be obscure?”⁷⁹ This is with particular reference to the divine originator of archery, medicine, and oracles, music, metalwork, weaving, and piloting, each of whom was “Love’s disciple.” He means, of course, the “cosmic Love” that harmonizes opposite forces, the Love that acts for the sake of what it has and to beget itself, not the profane love that lacks and desires. So the maker of anything, if he is to be called a creator, is at his best the servant of an immanent Genius; he must not be called “a genius,” but “ingenious”; he is not working of or for himself, but by and for another energy, that of the Immanent Eros, Sanctus Spiritus, the source of all “gifts.” “All that is true, by whomsoever it has been said, has its origin in the Spirit.”⁸⁰

(To be continued)

⁷⁹ *Symposium* 197A.

⁸⁰ Ambrose on I Cor. 12:3, cited in *Sum. Theol.* I-II.109.1. Note that “a quocum-que dicatur” [by whomever it is said – Ed. trans.] contradicts the claim that it is only Christian truth that is “revealed.”