

# The Goodness of Beauty and the Beauty of Goodness

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# Table of Contents

Acknowledgements	2
Introduction	6
Chapter 1: Plato	7
What Beauty Is- <i>Hippias Major</i>	8
What Beauty Does- <i>Symposium</i>	10
What Beauty Does- <i>Phaedrus</i>	14
What Beauty Does- <i>Republic</i>	15
The Theory of the Forms	16
A Platonic Philosophy of the Arts?	19
Musical Training as Aesthetic Education?	20
The Problematic Effects of Poetry: Emotional Contagion	21
Is Poetry Part of Music?	24
<i>Mimesis</i> and the Puzzle of Poetry	27
Conclusion	31
Chapter 2: Scruton	32
Music as Movement	32
Music's Relation to Dance	34
A Counterargument to Scruton	38
Music's Effects	49
Conclusion	52
Chapter 3: Goodness and Beauty	54
Intensional Equivalence	54
Extensional Equivalence	55

Strategies for Handling Counterexamples: Mere Resemblance of Beauty	56
Strategies for Handling Counterexamples: Gradations of Beauty	61
Connections Between Moral Sense and Aesthetic Sense	63
What This View is Not: Aestheticism	70
Implications for Art	72
Conclusion	75
Works Cited	78
Works Consulted	81

“Beauty is truth, truth beauty, - that is all  
Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know.”  
-- John Keats, “Ode on a Grecian Urn”

“We no longer dare to believe in beauty and we make of it a mere appearance in order the more easily to dispose of it. Our situation today shows that beauty demands for itself at least as much courage and decision as do truth and goodness, and she will not allow herself to be separated and banned from her two sisters without taking them along with herself in an act of mysterious vengeance.”- Hans Urs von Balthasar

χαλεπὰ τὰ καλὰ / Beauty is harsh  
-- *Hippias Major* 304e/ *Republic* 435c

## Introduction

Beauty today is often seen as trite, bourgeois, or irrelevant. One need only consider the many examples of concrete block architecture or postmodernist shock art. But once upon a time, beauty was considered to be an ultimate value with an essential connection to other values like truth and goodness.

The second interpretation has a bit of an intuitive pull- the princess is beautiful and good, the witch is ugly and evil. If the second interpretation is closer to the truth than the first, then a disregard for beauty may be leading us to miss something important.

In this thesis, I take a position much closer to the second interpretation of beauty, arguing for the extensional equivalence of goodness and beauty. I begin by first examining two other philosophers' formulations of the value of beauty and of goodness, that of Plato, in the first chapter, and that of Roger Scruton, in the second.

In the third chapter, I argue for the extensional equivalence of beauty and goodness by first examining counterexamples, and second by laying out a set of examples designed to show how our moral and aesthetic senses in fact overlap, and are interwoven to a degree that suggests a convergence between aesthetic and moral value. I do not intend to explain the exact mechanics of how our moral and aesthetic sense might interact, nor am I committed to any particular definition of what it might mean for our moral and aesthetic sense to be "interwoven". The arguments I intend to give "roughly and in outline"<sup>1</sup> aim for consilience rather than deductive proofs, but will hopefully be "adequate if [they have] as much clearness as the subject-matter admits of"<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. W.D. Ross (New York: Random House, 2001), 936.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

## Chapter 1: Plato

Beauty is often seen as a purely aesthetic phenomenon, of only trivial or secondary significance. If a building is beautiful, that is merely superfluous- it might be lovely, but is it a good library (school, office building, etc.)? For many people, beauty and goodness are unconnected- something can be good, functional, true, etc. and be entirely ugly, while something can be beautiful and completely useless or even bad. If something is good and beautiful together, that is a happy accident. There is certainly no essential connection.

For Plato though, beauty was an ultimate value like goodness (and perhaps even synonymous with goodness). While Plato clearly establishes beauty's importance, significant disentangling is necessary in order to understand beauty's nature more specifically, as it appears in several dialogues under a multitude of guises. In order to begin to understand Plato's views on beauty, I intend to take two different lines of questioning- the first establishing what beauty is, and the second establishing what beauty does. To do this, I will draw on four different dialogues: *Hippias Major*, *Symposium*, *Phaedrus*, and *Republic* (with a brief glance at *Timaeus* when discussing the theory of the Forms). While each dialogue has its significant differences, not least of which the fact that they come from different chronological periods in Plato's philosophical career - early, middle, and late<sup>3</sup>-, reading them in conjunction allows a broader picture of Plato's conception and development of a theory of beauty to emerge, even if there are contradictions and interpretations that will be rejected. By becoming clear on these two questions, I hope to be able to examine beauty's role in art for Plato and to gain a better understanding of the "old quarrel between philosophy and poetry"<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>3</sup> While a standard grouping of Plato's dialogues, this grouping is not uncontested.

<sup>4</sup> Allan Bloom, trans., *The Republic* (Basic Books, 1968), 607c.



## What Beauty Is- *Hippias Major*

Perhaps the clearest attempt at a definition of beauty as such is offered in *Hippias Major*, in which Socrates leads Hippias to attempt several times to define what beauty is, though all of these proposed definitions ultimately prove unsuccessful. There is an immediate problem here, though, which is that the word being defined in Greek is *kalon*. While instances of *kalon* are very often dealing with what we could term beautiful, at some times it appears that they are not. In fact, in the Woodruff translation of *Hippias Major* *kalon* is translated as ‘fine’ throughout. Woodruff himself admits that this is so even “though some contexts taken alone would call for ‘beautiful’ or ‘good’”<sup>5</sup>. While it certainly makes sense at some points to translate *kalon* as beautiful, there is also another sense in which we are only approximating the way in which the word bridges aesthetic and moral dimensions. While Woodruff translates *kalon* as fine, I will use ‘beautiful’ in my discussion of all of Plato’s dialogues for consistency and clarity.

Hippias spends much of his time in this dialogue being confused as to how to answer- giving examples of beautiful things, rather than defining what the beautiful really *is*. His first response is that “a fine girl is a fine thing”<sup>6</sup>, which hardly seems to be what we are looking for, whether it is true or not. Socrates points out that this interpretation lends itself to anything really- a beautiful mare, a beautiful lyre, a beautiful pot. None of these things are being distinguished from the beautiful girl; all are being described by *kalon*. Hippias is driven to admit that in fact it is true that all these things can be beautiful “if finely made”<sup>7</sup>, but also admits the problem that Socrates will have as well- the incongruity of admitting these disparate things to be similar enough in their characteristics that the same word, ‘beautiful’, applies to each,

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<sup>5</sup> Paul Woodruff, trans., *Hippias Major* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1983), 49.

<sup>6</sup> Paul Woodruff, *Hippias Major* 287e.

<sup>7</sup> Woodruff, *Hippias Major*, 288e.

particularly when a beautiful pot pales in comparison to a beautiful girl and *a fortiori*, a beautiful girl pales in comparison to a goddess. But if an object previously thought to be beautiful no longer appears beautiful next to another object, then why could we consider the first object beautiful in the first place?

Hippias tries to solve this by suggesting that “whatever is appropriate to each thing makes that particular thing fine,”<sup>8</sup> and so while a goddess might be more beautiful than a girl, they are both beautiful in their own appropriate qualities. Socrates forces Hippias to admit that the appropriate doesn’t make things beautiful, but rather makes them appear to be so, for, as Hippias says, “when someone puts on clothes and shoes that suit him, *even if he’s ridiculous*, he is *seen* to be finer”<sup>9</sup> (emphasis mine). As Socrates claims, this is “a kind of deceit about the fine”<sup>10</sup> in that what is not actually beautiful is made to seem so, and Socrates points out many cases in which what is actually beautiful is concealed from appearing so in some way. And perhaps more troubling than cases where the beautiful is concealed from appearing so, are the cases in which the beautiful is *only* an appearance, where something appears beautiful but is actually not. Later in *Symposium*, things that are merely beautiful in appearance (beautiful bodies, for example) are shown to occupy the lowest levels of beauty. It is clear that merely appearing beautiful is not enough for the highest forms of beauty. At the very least, beauty must be more than appearance, if not something entirely distinct.

Socrates then suggests his own definition, that the beautiful is “whatever is useful”<sup>11</sup> and this in turn is refined to be “the useful-and-able for making some good”<sup>12</sup>. Socrates makes a

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<sup>8</sup> Woodruff, *Hippias Major*, 290d.

<sup>9</sup> Woodruff, *Hippias Major*, 294a.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Woodruff, *Hippias Major*, 295c.

<sup>12</sup> Woodruff, *Hippias Major*, 296d.

good attempt at trying to say that since “the fine [beautiful] is a cause of the good, the good should come to be from the fine [beautiful]. And apparently this is why we’re eager to have intelligence and all the other fine [beautiful] things: because their product, their child- the good- is worth being eager about”<sup>13</sup>. This then is rejected on grounds of being circular- the beautiful becomes “a cause of the good”<sup>14</sup> and is no longer distinct from what it causes, a somewhat obscure chain of reasoning but depending on essentially the distinction between being and becoming. There is yet another attempt to say that the beautiful is what causes joy through “hearing and sight”<sup>15</sup>, but there are far too many counterexamples and this is clearly becoming a tiresome exercise for everyone involved so Socrates sums it up with “what’s fine [beautiful] is hard”<sup>16</sup>. While the definitions advanced in *Hippias Major* ultimately end in *aporia*, the idea of the beautiful as a cause of the good foreshadows much of Plato’s later accounts and will be returned to in *Symposium* and *Phaedrus*.

### **What Beauty Does- *Symposium*, *Phaedrus*, and *Republic***

#### **--*Symposium***

The accounts of beauty in *Symposium*, *Phaedrus*, and *Republic* do not so much give clear definitions of beauty like *Hippias Major* attempts to, but instead give detailed accounts of what beauty does. All three of these accounts connect beauty to goodness or truth in some way. *Symposium* specifically begins with speeches on the nature of love, though many involve beauty somehow in explaining the nature of love. The speeches have yielded many conflicting accounts of love, particularly on the question of whether love is beautiful or not. So when it comes to

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<sup>13</sup> Woodruff, *Hippias Major*, 297b.

<sup>14</sup> Woodruff, *Hippias Major*, 296e.

<sup>15</sup> Woodruff, *Hippias Major*, 297e.

<sup>16</sup> Woodruff, *Hippias Major*, 304e.

Socrates' turn, he corrects the mistaken impressions of the others by offering the version he learned from Diotima at a time when he thought much along the same lines of the earlier speeches.

Diotima explains that young Socrates is confused by love's relation to beauty because he considered the issue in light of being loved, rather than being a lover, and goes on to give a complicated story of Love being born as a daemon of Resource and Poverty, but this is less essential to the task at hand. The significant part of Diotima's account comes when she begins to answer the question of to what end do people love beautiful things. Socrates answers that lovers of beautiful things want to possess them, which Diotima points out leads to another question: what happens when a person finally does possess those beautiful things?

Because of Socrates' difficulty in finding an answer to this question, there arises an important interpretative shift in the text in which Diotima suggests that Socrates replace 'beautiful' with 'good'. This is confusing and requires clarification. At first glance, it would appear that Diotima is suggesting that beautiful and good are equivalent, since one word is being exchanged for another. The rest of *Symposium*, however, does not give the impression that beautiful and good are synonymous. In addition, after Diotima questions Socrates this way, they return to speaking of the beautiful, suggesting that a change in subject has not occurred, and that briefly switching 'beautiful' with 'good' is purely to facilitate Socrates' answer and not to create any deeper connection, a strategy that is utilized in other dialogues where a harder case is first approached through an easier or more familiar one.

Another explanation of this shift is that swapping words is possible because 'beautiful' and 'good' function in a like manner or are equivalent in some way. Then the question becomes:

what is the point of switching ‘good’ in for ‘beautiful’? For one thing, it takes us beyond possession as the end goal of the beautiful. While Socrates is able to answer that the lover of beautiful things desires that the beautiful things be his, he is not able to answer what having these beautiful things does for the lover. When considering what the point of possessing the good is though, Socrates is able to claim that “when the good things he wants have become his own”<sup>17</sup>, the possessor will have “happiness”<sup>18</sup>. Following this line of thought, the lover of beautiful things does not desire the beautiful things then simply to possess them, but because their possession ultimately brings happiness. Socrates is then led to conclude that “love is wanting to possess the good forever”<sup>19</sup>, and Diotima further explains that the purpose of love “is giving birth in beauty”<sup>20</sup>. Another myth follows this as an explanation, but the upshot is that love does not actually seek beauty, rather it desires “reproduction and birth in beauty”<sup>21</sup> or, in less mystical terms, “immortality”<sup>22</sup>. Just as the most authentic kind of love is not possessive but is rather “giving birth in beauty”, beauty is not possessed, but rather eternal.

How this immortality is achieved is further explained, but the really interesting part for my purposes is the famous “ladder of love” analogy, by which a lover is first drawn to love of a particular beautiful body and from there led on to a general love of bodies, a love of souls, a love of laws and knowledge, and finally to a vision of and love for beauty itself. The particular instances of beauty are indeed important as they initiate a love of beauty and Diotima makes clear that one must behold beauty “in the right order and correctly”<sup>23</sup>, but then the lover

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<sup>17</sup> Alexander Nehamas and Paul Woodruff, trans., *Symposium* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1989), 204e.

<sup>18</sup> Nehamas and Woodruff, *Symposium*, 205a.

<sup>19</sup> Nehamas and Woodruff, *Symposium*, 206a.

<sup>20</sup> Nehamas and Woodruff, *Symposium*, 206b.

<sup>21</sup> Nehamas and Woodruff, *Symposium*, 206e.

<sup>22</sup> Nehamas and Woodruff, *Symposium*, 207a.

<sup>23</sup> Nehamas and Woodruff, *Symposium*, 210e.

continues on to admire the beauty of more general and abstract things until finally reaching beauty itself. This contemplation is being rather than becoming, and is pure beauty, as opposed to beautiful in comparison to x and ugly in comparison to y. It is like nothing on earth or in heaven, and is “itself by itself with itself”<sup>24</sup>, and yet the other beautiful things participate in it without causing it to increase or decrease. Only through the contemplation of this ultimate Beauty “will it become possible for him to give birth not to images of virtue (because he’s in touch with no images), but to true virtue (because he is in touch with the true Beauty)”<sup>25</sup>.

In *Symposium*, unlike in *Hippias Major*, we are not given a definition of beauty that refers to any changeable characteristics- the appropriate, the finely made, etc. While beautiful particulars may be more or less beautiful in comparison with something else, there is an ultimate beauty that these things have a share in. While particulars perhaps can increase or decrease in beauty in comparison to other objects, Beauty itself does not. Furthermore, Beauty has a purpose- it causes us to bring forth true virtue in our lives. Since finally “he’s in touch with no images”<sup>26</sup> but “with the true Beauty”<sup>27</sup>, only now is one able to inculcate true virtue in their life. Here the beautiful is very clearly the cause of goodness and virtue, though it is important to note that by ‘beautiful’ what is meant is not just beautiful objects, but the beautiful itself which is something beyond an image. There is a clear distinction here between images and the true object of which it is an image, and with it a clear parallel between beautiful particulars/images of virtue, and Beauty/true virtue. For now, the metaphysical machinery behind this will remain obscure, but the account is still illuminating in its connection of beauty to goodness.

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<sup>24</sup> Nehamas and Woodruff, *Symposium*, 211b.

<sup>25</sup> Nehamas and Woodruff, *Symposium*, 212a.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

-- *Phaedrus*

A similar account of the function of beauty appears in *Phaedrus*. There is again a rather strange mythological setup but the crucial point of it for this discussion is that souls are immortal and go through periods of reincarnation in which they take earthly forms after losing their wings. Wings then are part and parcel of the heavenly life of a soul. For example, “only a philosopher’s mind grows wings, since its memory always keeps it as close as possible to those realities by being close to which the gods are divine”<sup>28</sup>.

This analogy should be borne in mind when considering Socrates’ remarks about the fourth kind of madness. According to Socrates, this is what occurs when someone “sees the beauty we have down here and is reminded of true beauty; then he takes wing and flutters in his eagerness to rise up, but is unable to do so; and he gazes aloft, like a bird, paying no attention to what is down below”<sup>29</sup>. Like in *Symposium*, particular earthly beauties have a connection to heavenly, true beauty. Here they serve as a reminder of heavenly beauty, while in *Symposium* they lead the soul into knowledge of Beauty itself. Not everyone can have the same perception of these beauties- some souls saw less of the heavenly beauty or have fallen into “lives of injustice”<sup>30</sup>. For those that can experience beauty though, the experience causes their wings to begin to grow again, the wings that were the soul’s link to the heavenly realm.

At this point, the idea of beauty as mere appearance has been rejected. Significantly though, an explanation has also been offered as to why we can recognize and call certain appearances ‘beautiful’ anyway- they participate in the form of Beauty, while still being removed from Beauty itself by having only the beauty of appearance. *Symposium* had offered an

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<sup>28</sup> Alexander Nehamas and Paul Woodruff, trans., *Phaedrus*, (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1995), 249c.

<sup>29</sup> Nehamas and Woodruff, *Phaedrus*, 249d.

<sup>30</sup> Nehamas and Woodruff, *Phaedrus*, 250a.

account of beauty that leads from what is initially only beautiful appearance to an intellectual beauty and ultimately to Beauty itself. Additionally, *Phaedrus* has offered the idea that beauty causes us to remember the heavenly realities, and rise above earthly realities. These are both quite abstract accounts of the power and value of beauty, and while *Republic* will also extend these more conceptual ideas of beauty, it will also locate beauty and its significance within the concrete, political functions of a city as well.

### **-- *Republic***

In *Republic*, beauty is not just a heavenly ideal but an important factor in leading a virtuous life and creating a just society. This is particularly seen in the education of the guardians. It is essential that the ruling class of the city, the guardians, receive the appropriate musical training. The right musical training will dispose them to “recognize the forms of moderation, courage, liberality, magnificence, and all their kin, and again, their opposites, everywhere they turn up, and notice that they are in whatever they are in, both themselves and their images, despising them neither in little nor big things, but believing that they all belong to the same art and discipline”<sup>31</sup>. In this way, the right sort of musical training disposes one to be receptive to a sort of moral knowledge. And music is more efficacious than dry moral treatises Plato claims, as “rhythm and harmony most of all insinuate themselves into the inmost part of the soul and most vigorously lay hold of it in bringing grace with them”<sup>32</sup>.

This is not a trivial point for Plato. Plato does not think that the guardians should go to art museums in order to become more cultured, or read poetry in order to glean some aphorisms about human nature. Plato is so serious about this that he claims that the slippery slope from

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<sup>31</sup> Bloom, *Republic*, 402c.

<sup>32</sup> Bloom, *The Republic*, 401d.



aristocracy (the best form of government) to timocracy begins when the rulers have “less consideration than is required, first, for music<sup>33</sup>... and from there your young will become more unmusical”<sup>34</sup>. As the rulers’ musical sense declines, so too does the regime. For now, I leave unargued whether the importance of musical training for Plato derives from its aesthetic value or not, but this is a point that will be returned to later in this chapter.

### **The Theory of the Forms**

Plato’s theory of beauty seems to more or less hang together across three dialogues (*Symposium*, *Phaedrus*, and *Republic*), despite their somewhat different articulations. In these three dialogues examined so far (leaving aside the aporetic attempts in *Hippias Major*), beauty and goodness have been closely related, with at least suggestions of the idea that the beautiful is the cause or in some way brings forth the good, if not an outright statement of this idea. However, I have left something crucial hidden in the background in order not to complicate the initial exposition, and that is Plato’s theory of Forms, which appears most significantly and completely in *Republic* but is certainly implied in *Symposium*, *Phaedrus*, and other places as well. The Forms can no longer be left alone quietly to be the metaphysical machinery that was referred to earlier. I will begin by looking at the “precursors” and suggestions in *Symposium* and *Phaedrus*, as well as glancing at a later formulation in *Timaeus*, and but will focus the most on the theory as presented in the *Republic*.

*Symposium* presents one clear example of a Form- that of beauty, which above all, “is”<sup>35</sup>, in the sense that it “neither comes to be nor passes away”<sup>36</sup>. As stated before, unlike particular

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<sup>33</sup> Some translations even say “less consideration for music and poetry”, though this could be considered a stretch of the word ‘mousike’.

<sup>34</sup> Bloom, *The Republic*, 546d.

<sup>35</sup> Nehamas and Woodruff, *Symposium*, 211a.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

beautiful objects, Beauty does not appear more or less beautiful next to something else. It is also distinct from an appearance as it “is not anywhere in another thing.... but itself by itself with itself, it is always one in form”<sup>37</sup> and similarly all the particular beautiful things are only beautiful because of their participation in Beauty itself. These traits of being rather than becoming, complete in itself, singular, and the ability to recognize and identify sensible objects only through their participation in the Form, are the traits that continue to make up the Forms throughout Plato’s dialogues. While it is much less explicit in *Phaedrus*, there is still reference to “the place beyond heaven” where dwells the “being that really is what it is, the subject of all true knowledge, visible only to intelligence, the soul’s steersman”<sup>38</sup>.

*Timaeus* is interesting in that it also gives a short description of the beautiful, in line with Plato’s theory of Forms. In *Timaeus*, when the creator of an object models it on “that which is uniform”<sup>39</sup>, it will “of necessity be beautiful”<sup>40</sup>. When the creator focuses on something that “has come into existence”<sup>41</sup>, however, the created object cannot possibly be beautiful. It is clear from this description that “beautiful” created things<sup>42</sup> owe their beauty to what could be called the Form of Beauty. While these things may have beautiful appearances, this is due to their participation in/connection to the Form of Beauty which encompasses much more than just appearance.

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<sup>37</sup> Nehamas and Woodruff, *Symposium*, 211a-211b.

<sup>38</sup> Nehamas and Woodruff, *Phaedrus*, 247c.

<sup>39</sup> W.R.M. Lamb, trans., *Timaeus*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1925), 28a.

<sup>40</sup> Lamb, *Timaeus*, 28a-28b.

<sup>41</sup> Lamb, *Timaeus*, 28b.

<sup>42</sup> Even so-called natural things like rocks or trees would really still be created things within this example as they would have been created by the ultimate Creator and modeled on the “uniform”; see example of the creation of the Cosmos at 29a.

The Forms really come into their own in the *Republic*, and this is most easily seen through two of Plato's analogies- the Allegory of the Cave and the Divided Line. In the Allegory of the Cave, people are imprisoned in a cave, shackled down in such a way that they must look at and can only look at the back wall of the cave, onto which the puppetmasters project images. They cannot see "anything of themselves and one another other than the shadows cast by the fire on the side of the cave facing them"<sup>43</sup>. Should a prisoner be brought to the fire in the back of the cave that allows the images to be projected, he will only be confused and pained by what he sees and more willing to think that the former images were more real, and even more so when he experiences the real light of the sun outside the cave.

Gradually though, the prisoner's eyes would adjust and they would be able to "make out the shadows"<sup>44</sup>, then "the things themselves"<sup>45</sup>, and finally "the sun itself"<sup>46</sup>. The things themselves outside of the cave are "that which *is*"<sup>47</sup> and "the brightest part of that which *is*"<sup>48</sup>, the sun, "is the good"<sup>49</sup>. The Forms are the really real things outside the cave and they are all perfections. The Form of Chairness is the perfect, ultimate totality of Chairness, as opposed to the imperfect chairs in the real world, which as sensible objects cannot approach the fullness of Chairness, just as the most perfectly drawn circle can't be as perfect as the perfect Circle, which is not limited by its drawnness. The Forms are illuminated and made visible by the "sun", that is, the Good. Furthermore, they are related to each other in two distinct ways. While sensible objects are related to their Form through their participation in the Form (an individual physical

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<sup>43</sup> Bloom, *The Republic*, 515a.

<sup>44</sup> Bloom, *The Republic*, 516a.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Bloom, *The Republic*, 516b.

<sup>47</sup> Bloom, *The Republic*, 518c.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

chair participates in the Form of Chairness), the Forms themselves are also related to each other as transcendent ideals. The sun as the Good, becomes a sort of meta-Form- it illuminates all other Forms, including the Form of Beauty.

The Divided Line analogy explains this idea more as well, perhaps in a more straightforward manner, and is even

better encapsulated in a diagram<sup>50</sup>. It has four “rungs” and the bottom two belong to the visible world. At the very bottom are images which are apprehended by the imagination, such as the chair in my imagination

The intelligible (to <i>noēton</i> )	Forms ( <i>eidē</i> )	Intellection ( <i>noēsis</i> )
	The mathematical objects ( <i>ta mathēmatica</i> )	Thought ( <i>dianoia</i> )
The visible (to <i>horaton</i> )	Things	Trust ( <i>pistis</i> )
	Images ( <i>eikones</i> )	Imagination ( <i>eikasia</i> )

which has no existence in the sensible realm and may or may not correspond to any chair in reality. Up a level are sensible things, the “whole class of artifacts”<sup>51</sup> which mostly populate the world we know- chairs, tables, cups, cats- and which are apprehended by trust. The top two rungs belong to the intelligible realm and rather than being apprehended by sense perception, they are apprehended by the intellect. On the third rung are the mathematical objects which can be arrived at by thought, but the top level is reserved for the Forms themselves, which are grasped by intellection.

### A Platonic Philosophy of the Arts?

The Forms not only give the needed metaphysical backing to some of the earlier remarks about the nature of beauty but also help to articulate Plato’s theory of beauty. However, while

<sup>50</sup> Bloom, *The Republic*, 464.

<sup>51</sup> Bloom, *The Republic*, 510a.

Plato clearly thinks highly of beauty and that in some way contemplation of the beautiful leads to a virtuous life, Plato also thinks that many of the arts lead to the destruction of virtue. Plato's theory of Forms provides part of the explanation for the criticisms leveled against the arts by Plato. In particular, Plato is a harsh critic of poetry and so it makes sense to examine Plato's arguments against poetry in conjunction with his arguments for music, in order to understand what makes one harmful and one beneficial in Plato's mind.

Firstly then, Plato's stance on the arts cannot be confused or conflated with his views on beauty. The significance of beauty for Plato has been clearly established. This makes his remarks that poetry makes us "worse and more wretched"<sup>52</sup> and that "if you admit the sweetened muse in lyrics or epics, pleasure and pain will jointly be kings in your city instead of law and that argument which in each instance is best in the opinion of the community"<sup>53</sup> even more puzzling. In Books II and III of the *Republic*, at least some of what we might consider to be an art (music) was shown to be an essential part of the guardians' education. So the question remains why Plato would think so harshly of some things we would consider art and not so harshly of others. I intend first to examine Plato's reasons for allowing music as part of the guardians' education, in order to determine firstly why it is part of their education and secondly whether or not that is due to possible aesthetic nature of music or some other reason entirely. After this, I intend to compare the status of music to the status of poetry, in an attempt to determine why the status of poetry is so obviously different.

### **-- Musical Training as Aesthetic Education?**

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<sup>52</sup> Bloom, *The Republic*, 606d.

<sup>53</sup> Bloom, *The Republic*, 607a.

Plato claims that it is essential that the guardians be trained in music in order to prevent “savageness and hardness”<sup>54</sup>, just as gymnastics is essential in order to prevent “softness and tameness”<sup>55</sup>. The right kind of musical training will give the guardians the

sharpest sense for what’s been left out and what isn’t a fine product of craft or what isn’t a fine product of nature. And, due to his having the right kind of dislikes, he would praise the fine things; and, taking pleasure in them and receiving them into his soul, he would be reared on them and become a gentleman. He would blame and hate the ugly in the right way while he’s still young, before he’s able to grasp reasonable speech. And when reasonable speech comes, the man who’s reared in this way would take most delight in it, recognizing it on account of its being akin<sup>56</sup>.

Within this musical training though, certain modes of music, many different instruments, and certain rhythms are outlawed. Musical modes and instruments that simply promote “wailing and lamentations”<sup>57</sup> are barred as promoting the sort of unrestrained emotions that are inappropriate in the well-ordered soul. While there may be many tangential reasons music is important- for example it inspires soldiers to be brave in battle or helps them to march in orderly rows- the reason Plato gives for music being “most sovereign”<sup>58</sup> is for its “fine and graceful”<sup>59</sup> nature, its nature as *kalos* which unites the potential aesthetic and moral dimensions of music.

### **-- The Problematic Effects of Poetry: Emotional Contagion**

Music is perhaps a simpler case than poetry. There is a significant worry that the wrong kinds of poetry will have a detrimental impact, especially in the young as “each thing assimilates itself to the model whose stamp anyone wishes to give it”<sup>60</sup>. One model Plato uses in explaining how imitative arts come to have this effect on their audience is that of emotional contagion.

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<sup>54</sup> Bloom, *The Republic*, 410d.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> Bloom, *The Republic*, 401e- 402a.

<sup>57</sup> Bloom, *The Republic*, 398d.

<sup>58</sup> Bloom, *The Republic*, 401d.

<sup>59</sup> Bloom, *The Republic*, 401c.

<sup>60</sup> Bloom, *The Republic*, 377b.

Imitative poetry stirs up the emotions of the audience to not only feel some sort of detached sympathy with the person or event portrayed, but really to participate in the emotions of the character, with perhaps the further effect of being led to approve of the emotional state or reactions of the character and being led to have these same emotional reactions in one's own life. And due to the nature of poetry and drama, the emotions portrayed are often heightened and dramatic emotions.

One of the depictions of these heightened and dramatic emotions that Plato particularly disapproves of is that of Achilles who should not be “‘Now lying on his side, now again/On his belly, and now on his side,/Then standing upright, roaming distraught along the shore of the unharvested sea’ nor taking black ashes in both hands and pouring them over his head, nor crying and lamenting as much as, or in the ways, Homer made him do”<sup>61</sup>. Achilles should be a hero, and consequently his depiction in poetry should portray him as honorable and virtuous, and particularly in this example as someone enduring sufferings with emotional restraint. Part of the problem for Plato with the Homeric account is that not only is Achilles acting intemperately, but that this poetic depiction of a hero giving way to unrestrained emotions will make that sort of behavior seem acceptable to the audience. The educative role of poetry coupled with the heroic status of Achilles would encourage the audience to not “believe these things to be unworthy of himself, a human being”<sup>62</sup> and consequently they will meet sufferings with “neither shame nor endurance”<sup>63</sup>.

As an audience member, our experience of a work (in this case, poetry) is not merely filtered through the lenses of our best judgment and rationality, but through emotional lenses as

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<sup>61</sup> Bloom, *The Republic*, 388a-b.

<sup>62</sup> Bloom, *The Republic*, 388d.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

well; and, accordingly, the emotional content of a work, particularly depictions of a hero's emotional life, is in some way "contagious". M.F. Burnyeat describes the way in which "we can be affected emotionally in ways that bypass our established beliefs and the normal processes of judgment"<sup>64</sup> with the example of ghost stories. Informal polls of his lecture audience reveal that while audience members do not rationally believe in ghosts, they are still scared by ghost stories. Whatever we may believe both rationally and morally may be occasionally overridden by certain emotional responses- an effect Plato accounts for by his theory of the tripartite soul. The theorized divisions of soul give us opposing attitudes, judgments, and values. And the crucial point here is that in these oppositions, rationality does not always win. In the case of tragic poetry, the pleasure we feel in the intemperate emotions of the hero encourages us to suspend our better judgment about how we should govern our own emotions. Nor should the pleasure we feel as an audience member be taken for pleasure we feel simply for the *depiction* of the emotions, as this assumes that we can successfully cordon off our reactions to the depiction from reactions to the content, while in fact our emotional responses are not necessarily based in reason.

The possible corrosive effects of pleasure on the soul, derived from what we could consider immoral works, calls for a rigorous program of censorship. Heroes mustn't lie or gods be unjust, because people mustn't be misled into thinking that the wrong things are right because a hero does them, and mustn't lose respect for the gods. For poets who say the wrong sorts of

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<sup>64</sup> M.F. Burnyeat, "Culture and Society in Plato's Republic: Lecture I. Couches, Song, and Civic Tradition" (paper presented at the Tanner Lectures on Human Values, Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts, December 10-12, 1997).



things, “we’ll be harsh and not provide a chorus, and we’ll not let the teachers use them for the education of the young”<sup>65</sup>.

### **-- Is Poetry Part of Music?**

If Plato is only legislating about a strictly musical education for the guardians, and simply outlawing poetry, then there’s no reason to think that Plato believes in anything other than the harmful effects of poetry and its need to be completely banned. However, there is some evidence to suggest that poetry is also being considered under the category of music. This section then is a sort of sidenote of interpretative interest about whether poetry and music should be considered together in terms of aesthetic education or whether Plato considers them completely separate.

The Greek word ‘*mousike*’ could be narrowly interpreted in English to only mean music, or it could be more broadly translated to mean “the whole of the field of liberal studies presided over by the Muses”<sup>66</sup> and could mean “any performances that are accompanied by music, such as poetry, song, and dance”<sup>67</sup>. So Plato’s discussion of musical training as an important component of the guardians’ education could actually include poetry and related art forms.

Part of how to determine whether to translate more narrowly or broadly depends on context. In Plato’s claim that “rhythm and harmony most of all insinuate themselves into the inmost part of the soul and most vigorously lay hold of it in bringing grace with them”<sup>68</sup>, “rhythm” and “harmony” are explicitly referenced, which would point to the more strictly musical sense. At the same time, rhythm and harmony are not really foreign words to apply to

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<sup>65</sup> Bloom, *The Republic*, 383c.

<sup>66</sup> J.O. Urmson, *The Greek Philosophical Vocabulary* (London: Duckworth, 1990), 111.

<sup>67</sup> Marcia Homiak, “Virtue and the Skills of Ordinary Life”, in *Setting the Moral Compass: Essays by Women Philosophers*, ed. Cheshire Calhoun (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 41.

<sup>68</sup> Bloom, *The Republic*, 401d.

poetry either. Plato also goes on to talk about how this musical training would prepare the guardians to recognize “reasonable speech” by the time they are prepared to grasp it, and poetry would seem more relevant to that aim than music would.

More explicitly though, at the beginning of Plato’s discussion of music in Books II and III, Socrates asks Glaucon “you include speeches in music, don’t you?”<sup>69</sup>, who answers in the affirmative. Socrates goes on to establish that speeches can take true or false forms and that though children are commonly educated first in the false form (e.g., fairy tales), “we must supervise the makers of tales”<sup>70</sup> and only fine tales will be approved to be told to children in order to “shape their souls with tales more than their bodies with hands”<sup>71</sup>.

Of course it’s not so much the untruthfulness that Plato faults but that this untruthfulness is in the service of injustice, of making the gods and heroes appear weak or foolish or unjust. Socrates recognizes one last aspect of poetry that hasn’t been examined and that is its treatment of human beings. Since it is obvious that the promotion of injustice by and for human beings will be forbidden by poetry, Socrates decides to leave this aspect of the argument aside for now, saying that they will come to an agreement about it “when we find out what sort of a thing justice is and how it by nature profits the man who possesses it, whether he seems to be just or not”<sup>72</sup>. This is of interest to the *Republic*, insofar as it is clear from this remark that Socrates does not consider a definition of justice and its importance as settled in Book III. But of interest for this project is that Plato hasn’t quite finished with his discussion of poetry yet. For now, he leaves aside discussion of subject matter to turn to a discussion of style, where he legislates

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<sup>69</sup> Bloom, *The Republic*, 376e.

<sup>70</sup> Bloom, *The Republic*, 377b.

<sup>71</sup> Bloom, *The Republic*, 377c.

<sup>72</sup> Bloom, *The Republic*, 392c.

against imitation in poetry. It is only after this full discussion of poetry that “song and melody”<sup>73</sup> are brought up, and even then speech is included as one of the three elements of melody for “rhythm and harmonic mode follow speech, as we were just saying and not speech them”<sup>74</sup>. It is “good speech, good harmony, good grace, and good rhythm”<sup>75</sup> that “the young [must] pursue... everywhere if they are to do their own work”<sup>76</sup>. While Plato finds most to legislate about in the cases of poetry and music, he does also include craftsmen (such as painters) as people to be supervised as well (though of course it should be noted that a “productive” art like painting would not be included under the scope of *mousike*). So while Plato ends by expressing the importance of “rearing in music”, it is quite plausible from the full account that this rearing in music is not narrowly music, but rather a much broader music that certainly encompasses poetry, as seen by the fact that poetry was the original subject of discussion, was discussed alongside music, and has been carried through to this point.

After the discussion of speeches in Book II, Plato moves to a discussion of style in Book III, using the word *lexis*. Some may be disinclined to view *lexis* as poetry, and view it only as pertaining to speeches, more along the lines of political rhetoric. However, as Gérard Genette explains, “for Plato, the domain of what he calls *lexis* (or manner of speaking as opposed to *logos*, that which is said) can be theoretically divided into imitation properly speaking (*mimesis*) and simple narrative (*diegesis*)”<sup>77</sup>. As seen after the introduction of *lexis* in *Republic*, Plato does go on to distinguish “the two pure and heterogeneous modes of narrative and imitation within

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<sup>73</sup> Bloom, *The Republic*, 398c.

<sup>74</sup> Bloom, *The Republic*, 400d.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

<sup>76</sup> Bloom, *The Republic*, 400e.

<sup>77</sup> Gérard Genette and Ann Levenson, “Boundaries of Narrative”, *New Literary History* 8 (1976): 2.

poetic diction”<sup>78</sup>. Additionally, Gabriel Richardson Lear defines *lexis* as “refer[ring] to the poet’s composition of words, not their delivery”<sup>79</sup>. Both commentators see *lexis* in the context of Book III as (at least potentially) pertaining to poetry.

### **-- *Mimesis* and the Puzzle of Poetry**

One reason for Plato’s particular harshness towards poetry has already been explained- poetry’s ability to override rationality and better judgment. Poetry has this ability through its mimetic, or imitative, nature though, which has not been fully explained yet. On one hand, Plato castigates mimetic poetry because one can “hardly pursue any of the noteworthy activities while at the same time imitating many things and being a skilled imitator”<sup>80</sup>, but on the other he makes an exception in terms of the guardians’ education, saying that “if they do imitate, they must imitate what’s appropriate to them from childhood: men who are courageous, moderate, holy, free, and everything of the sort; and what is slavish, or anything else shameful, they must neither do nor be clever at imitating, so that they won’t get a taste for the being from its imitation”<sup>81</sup>. So while the harmful character of imitation is painted in rather broad strokes, even Plato permits imitation of the right sort of things. For while Plato holds that “imitations, if they are practiced continually from youth onwards, become established as habits and nature, in body and sounds and in thought”<sup>82</sup>, and hence imitating bad characters will make you bad, the converse would also hold- namely, that by imitating “men who are courageous, moderate, holy” etc., can make you good.

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<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

<sup>79</sup> Gabriel Richardson Lear, “Mimesis and Psychological Change in *Republic* III”, in *Plato and the Poets*, ed. Pierre Destree, Fritz-Gregor Herrman (Brill, 2011), 203.

<sup>80</sup> Bloom, *The Republic*, 395a.

<sup>81</sup> Bloom, *The Republic*, 395 c-d.

<sup>82</sup> Bloom, *The Republic*, 395d.

This distinction between permissible and impermissible imitation has seemed to call for some clarification to many commentators. One way to avoid conflict has been to propose a distinction between *eikastike* and *phantastike*- true imitation and false imitation<sup>83</sup>. However, if Plato distinguishes between good and bad imitation (or imitation with a good end and imitation with a bad end), I do not see him distinguishing between true and false imitation. Imitation of bad characters is just as imitative as anything else and that's the problem- it uses the same techniques and to the same effect as imitation of good characters. Alexander Nehamas in "Plato on Imitation and Poetry in Republic X" has argued against the interpretation that turns on a difference between *eikastike* and *phantastike* as well, saying that rather than true and false forms of *mimesis*, *mimesis* can simply have different objects. This seems much more plausible. In the imitation that Plato allows (grudgingly or not), the object of imitation is a good person, while in the imitation that Plato is most strenuously against, the imitation is of a bad person.

Of course, by Book X even this possible positive effect of imitation is not a strong enough rationale for keeping mimetic poetry in the city. The Divided Line has foreshadowed a bit of this problem that now comes to the forefront- images are apprehended by the imagination, and this is not knowledge. The creators of images, whether painters or poets, "don't lay hold of the truth; rather, as we were just now saying, the painter will make what seems to be a shoemaker to those who understand as little about shoemaking as he understands, but who observe only colors and shapes"<sup>84</sup>. Indeed "the maker of the phantom, the imitator, we say, understands nothing of what *is* but rather of what looks like it *is*"<sup>85</sup>. And it's not just that they

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<sup>83</sup> Albert Hofstadter, "Plato" in *Philosophies of Art and Beauty: Selected Readings in Aesthetics from Plato to Heidegger*, ed. Albert Hofstadter et al. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964), 4.

<sup>84</sup> Bloom, *The Republic*, 600e- 601a.

<sup>85</sup> Bloom, *The Republic*, 601b-601c.

are ignorant of the true nature of the things they create but that many of the people who will see their imitations are similarly ignorant and will be misled. Because “poetry mustn't be taken seriously as a serious thing laying hold of truth”<sup>86</sup>, it is “fitting for us to send it away from the city on account of its character”<sup>87</sup>. Again, a distinction is drawn between a beautiful appearance (poetry) and truth, just as in other dialogues.

One more thing must be explained though. Why is poetry sent away and none of the other mimetic arts? Plato was hardly beating the drum for painting or sculpture back in Book III, but by the time we get to Book X, he is only concerned with banishing the poets. It cannot just be on account of poetry's mimetic character; painting is mimetic too and it doesn't meet the same harsh fate (and to be really precise, it is also true that not even all poetry has been excluded- “only so much of poetry as is hymns to gods or celebration of good men should be admitted into a city”<sup>88</sup>). There are at least three reasons for poetry's particular exclusion, most dealing with the unique role it occupied in ancient Greek society.

Firstly, when we think of the poetry that Plato is banishing we think of the sorts of Greek dramas that are today studied in schools. To us, these are paradigmatic works of artistic greatness. So it seems not only mean to banish them, it seems anti-intellectual. However, in Plato's day these were hardly the standards of intellectual culture that they are today. The tragedies of Aeschylus and others were considered mass entertainment, more akin to television today than theatre, as performances were hardly accompanied by the gravitas associated with

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<sup>86</sup> Bloom, *The Republic*, 608a.

<sup>87</sup> Bloom, *The Republic*, 607b.

<sup>88</sup> Bloom, *The Republic*, 607a.

attending a play today. Most importantly, “the drama was considered a realistic representation of the world”<sup>89</sup>.

Along with its status as mass entertainment, the poetry of ancient Greece occupied an educative role. Not only should we see consider poetry as comparable with our television, we should see it as comparable with our children’s books. This can perhaps be seen as immediately problematic if we consider what it would be like for *CSI* both to be mass entertainment and a realistic representation of the world, as well as a picture book for children learning to read. Rather than children learning the truths of the world from a philosophical base, the images, often corrupting, of Homer and the poets become both the educational and moral foundations for children. Other arts such as painting and sculpture did not have the same entertainment or educative role as tragedy and poetry did.

If poetry were a wonderful, virtuous thing, perhaps the previous two points would not be much of a problem. However, Plato believes that poetry only really appeals to the lowest parts of the soul, the appetitive part that is primarily concerned with money, food, sex, etc., as opposed to the wisdom loving or honor loving part. It is easier and more interesting to represent the bad things than the good things, so this is what will be imitated, and so the appeal of poetry will always be to the lowest part of the soul.

There is also the larger point about *mimesis* here that is specifically being applied to poetry. Thinking of *mimesis* as just “imitation” misses Plato’s main point. The real concern is over what imitation does to the imitator (and to anyone else caught up in the imitation, e.g. the audience). Imitation isn’t just the recitation of a poem, but rather the taking on of a whole

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<sup>89</sup> Alexander Nehamas, “Plato and the Mass Media”, in *Virtues of Authenticity*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), 288.

persona which engages our sympathies with the persona. Distinct from narration, in *mimesis* “the seeming presence to our senses of the imitated character can bypass the rational mind’s normal processes of judgment”<sup>90</sup>. For Plato, the effects of mimetic poetry and the requisite mimetic performance that goes with it, are subtle but all the more insidious for it.

## Conclusion

In this chapter, I have examined Plato’s theories of beauty, particularly as they emerge from *Hippias Major*, *Symposium*, *Phaedrus*, and *Republic*. Beauty is particularly important to Plato for its effects- for its ability to lead us ultimately to goodness as seen in *Symposium*, for its reminder of the heavenly realities as seen in *Phaedrus*, and for its ability to inculcate virtue in citizens as seen in *Republic*. However, there seems to be a major disconnect for Plato between beauty and art- while he certainly believes in the importance of beauty, he is critical of the arts, particularly poetry, for what he sees as their potential dangers. In the case of poetry, the potential dangers are mainly due to its mimetic nature. Applying the word ‘beautiful’, as we understand it today, to works of art would have been a non-standard application for Plato.

While we may wish to resist Plato’s conclusions about the role of art, we must at least take seriously his argument about its effect on us as audience members, and what moral implications art might have. One contemporary philosopher who takes these considerations seriously is Roger Scruton, whose theory of music will be examined in the next chapter.

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<sup>90</sup> M.F. Burnyeat, “Art and Mimesis in Plato’s Republic”, in *Plato on Art and Beauty*, ed. A.E. Denham (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 68.



## Chapter 2: Scruton

One contemporary philosopher who has taken up much of Plato's critique of the arts and given it a modern interpretation is Roger Scruton. The parallels are most easily seen in Scruton's theory of musical understanding, which is interested in showing the effect of both good and bad music on the audience. While music is a distinct genre from poetry, music is likely a more intuitive case today for making the same point Plato wants to make about poetry- music is mass entertainment that fills up much of people's daily lives, from car radios to iPods to the background of the grocery store. Television might be the even clearer contemporary successor of poetry, as Nehamas proposes, and as was briefly discussed in Chapter 1, but music certainly isn't very far away.

Plato banished the poets on account of poetry's status as mass entertainment, its educative role, and its appeal to the lowest part of the soul. Not all of these aspects are taken up by Scruton, but like Plato, he sees music's potential for harm (or benefit) coming from the listener's response to it, where the moral qualities of the music are arising from its musical qualities. For Scruton, as for Plato, listening to music is not a passive activity. There are many ways in which we might experience music- humming, clapping, singing along. However, Scruton sees our primary response to listening to music as dancing. In fact, even things like clapping are a sort of "truncated dance"<sup>91</sup>. This dancing is an "aesthetic response"<sup>92</sup>, as it is a response to what is being expressed in the music itself.

### **Music as Movement**

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<sup>91</sup> Roger Scruton, "The Decline of Musical Culture" in *Arguing About Art: Contemporary Philosophical Debates*, ed. Alex Neill et al. (London: Routledge, 2005), 121.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid.

Firstly, the idea of dancing as the primary response to music needs to be examined. If dancing is my primary response to music, then it does not appear on the surface that I really respond to most music at all. Very few people would dance to a Mozart sonata. However, Scruton is talking about a broader conception of the idea of dance that includes not solely concrete physical movement, but is characteristic of my imagination of the music. Within my experience of a Mozart sonata, there is a certain movement and there are certain emotions being expressed, that can be translated as "incipient gestures of imitation"<sup>93</sup> and this imitation is "life imagined in the form of music"<sup>94</sup>.

Perhaps this is still a little obscure. What does it mean to be able to understand music as movement? On the simplest level, I think we can understand music coming to a close/end/resolution, and more pertinently, we can understand music as in need of a close/end/resolution when it doesn't have one. If a piece is suddenly stopped in the middle or has no musical resolution, we recognize this and it feels uncomfortable or incomplete. Even if we don't hear the end or the resolution, we anticipate it and expect it. This is one part of musical movement, in that we understand music moving to completion. Another part of musical movement could be understanding fast or slow, understanding music as a "rise" or "fall", or understanding music as more directly imitating movement- falling snow, rushing water, and most obviously, music that sounds like dancing. Overall, "the melody moves from one place to another in a one-dimensional continuum"<sup>95</sup>.

The idea of musical movement as "incipient gestures of imitation" connects music to the characteristics that Plato took most issue with in regards to poetry, particularly when these

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<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

<sup>95</sup> Roger Scruton, *Understanding Music: Philosophy and Interpretation* (London: Continuum, 2009), 43.

“incipient gestures of imitation” become “life imagined in the form of music”<sup>96</sup>. There is not much distance between recognizing movement in music and recognizing this as imitation, as music doesn’t move in a strictly literal sense. For music to be considered as movement relies on a metaphorical hearing, though an intuitive one (and an unavoidable one, in my opinion). This then, is an imitation of movement, rather than objective movement. The “experience of the music involves the concept of movement, but it is a concept that is being metaphorically applied to what is literally a sequence”<sup>97</sup>. Just as a “melody doesn’t *literally* move”<sup>98</sup> since “it isn’t *literally* there”<sup>99</sup> we still “hear it all the same, by virtue of our capacity to hear metaphorically- in other words to organize our experience in terms of concepts that we do not literally apply”<sup>100</sup>. In essence, if you are able to discern a melody in music, then you must be able to discern the metaphorical movement as well. On this account of movement then, music doesn’t merely arouse inappropriate emotions or degrees of emotion as it does for Plato; it can inspire imitation as poetry does- “life imagined in the form of music”.

Scruton does not wish to take issue with general responsiveness to music, just as Plato takes advantage of musical qualities for inspiring bravery in the auxiliaries while prohibiting other musical qualities. Rather, the problem arises in the kind of response that some types of music inspire. Returning to the idea of our primary response to music as dancing, it is clear that a Strauss waltz and Kesha’s “Timber” are meant to inspire very different types of dancing.

### **Music’s Relation to Dance**

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<sup>96</sup> Scruton, “Decline of Musical Culture”, 121.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid.

<sup>98</sup> Scruton, *Understanding Music*, 46.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid.

Dance is perhaps even more closely entwined with society and culture than music, as it generally takes place within a social context with other people. As the Confucian philosopher Xunzi says, “when all the dancers are restrained and orderly, exerting to the utmost the strength of their bones and sinews to match the rhythm of drum and bell sounding together, and no one is out of step, then how easy it is to tell the meaning of this group gathering”<sup>101</sup>. Herein lies the problem with the progression from older social dances like the gavotte or the waltz to the “corybantic” dances of today, and by extension for Scruton, the problem with the progression from the sonata to Nirvana. If our response to music is a kind of “latent dancing”<sup>102</sup>, and dancing is an “imitation of life”, then how people dance should tell us about who they are, especially since Scruton believes that the type of dance we engage in actually changes our character in some measure. Assessing the dance-forms that Bach and Handel wrote for, Scruton explains that these dances were “elaborate rituals and courtesies, and required complicated steps and formations from the dancers”<sup>103</sup> where “partners were assigned by courtesy and exchanged by rule, with people of all ages participating without embarrassment in a dance which could at any moment place them side by side and hand in hand with a stranger. In a very real sense the dancers were generating the rhythm that controlled them, and generating it together, by attentive gestures governed by a ritual politeness”<sup>104</sup>.

The focus here is on an experience of “dancing *with*”<sup>105</sup> [emphasis added]. These dance forms are encapsulated in and come about by certain musical elements. Without going into detail about the musical forms themselves, the salient point about all of this is that these types of

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<sup>101</sup> Eric L. Hutton, trans., *Xunxi: The Complete Text* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014), 222.

<sup>102</sup> Neill and Ridley, *Arguing About Art*, 123.

<sup>103</sup> Scruton, *Understanding Music*, 68.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid.

dance are “emblematic of personality, freedom, and the civic community”<sup>106</sup>. By contrast, in dance to contemporary forms of music like heavy metal (insofar as it can be termed dance), “freedom is displaced by empirical causality, personality by nature, and will by desire”<sup>107</sup>. It is “crowd-forming, rather than society-forming”<sup>108</sup>. These effects are not limited to those that partake in this kind of dance- the music that this kind of dance arises from has become “the background of life and shapes the expectations of all of us, like it or not”<sup>109</sup>, according to Scruton.

How Scruton believes that popular music comes to shape the “background of life” follows Plato’s belief that “never are the ways of music moved without the greatest political laws being moved”<sup>110</sup> as “establishing itself bit by bit, it [music] flows gently beneath the surface into the dispositions and practices, and from there it emerges bigger in men’s contracts with one another; and it’s from the contracts, Socrates, that it attacks laws and regimes with much insolence until it finally subverts everything private and public”<sup>111</sup>. This proposes a fairly extreme relationship between popular music and law and politics; and the causal mechanism seems a bit weak. Scruton contends that this comes about because “our laws are made by people who have musical tastes”<sup>112</sup>, and accordingly music with shallow or corrupted values “rubs off” on public officials and society at large. For Scruton, there is a fundamental difference between people “who live with a metric pulse as a constant background to their thoughts and movements”

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<sup>106</sup> Scruton, *Understanding Music*, 69.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid.

<sup>110</sup> Bloom, *Republic*, 424c.

<sup>111</sup> Bloom, *Republic*, 424d.

<sup>112</sup> Roger Scruton, “Music and Morality”, *The American Spectator* (2010), accessed October 14, 2014.

<sup>113</sup> and people who “know music only from sitting down to listen to it, clearing their minds, meanwhile, of all other thoughts”<sup>114,115</sup>. This then is a psychological argument- that these two groups of people do not share the “same kind of attention and the same patterns of challenges and rewards”<sup>116</sup>. It should be noted then that this account of how bad music leads to a bad society may be a bit different from the argument that Plato proposes. Plato says that bad music will corrupt the guardians’ moral character when they are young, and as a result, they will be bad leaders. It is not necessarily far from Scruton’s account and they could be possibly be reconciled, but on the surface at least they diverge somewhat.

Another argument against popular music is that the forms of dance that it lends itself to are opposed to recognizing other people as subjects in their own right, and where your own freedom is subordinated to an “external and mechanized rhythm”<sup>117</sup>. Scruton claims that dancing to popular music inhibits the ability to dance in a way that “suggests a personal relation to a partner”<sup>118</sup> in a fundamentally “solipsistic”<sup>119</sup> way. Mechanical beats stripped of melody is something one submits to rather than moving with, instead of engaging with the music through dance, dance is “something that happens to you”<sup>120</sup> in which “your freedom is overridden”<sup>121</sup>.

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<sup>113</sup> Ibid.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid.

<sup>115</sup> This perhaps seems at odds with Scruton’s assertion that something like “latent dancing” is our response to music. However, in this quote Scruton is characterizing the listening experience rather than the listener’s response, where careful, intentional listening is contrasted with the experience of music as the scattered background to television commercials, the car, the grocery store, etc.

<sup>116</sup> Roger Scruton, “Music and Morality”, *The American Spectator* (2010), accessed October 14, 2014.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid.

The kind of dance that comes out of popular music makes you a mindless zombie, not a member of society with an awareness of your freedom and responsibility to others<sup>122</sup>.

All this turns on the idea of dance as a microcosm of how people relate to each other, and on dance as being an intrinsic response to music. Dance as our primary response to music does seem to come very naturally out of conceiving of music as movement and Scruton seems to think that history and the evolution of dance not only reflects but to some extent influences societal norms (in the most general sense that sexual norms have become more permissive as forms of dance have become more sexualized), showing that dance may be a suitable analogy for our broader relations with other people.

Scruton clearly has a certain type of music that he thinks of as promoting the right sort of response and while the bulk of his examples are drawn from classical music, there's no reason that music of other genres can't be admitted, given that they have what Scruton sees as the proper relationship between melody, rhythm, and harmony. While this might exclude some forms of music, like rap for instance, where the driving forces are lyrical and rhythmic rather than melodic, it would be a mistake to assume that Scruton means to exclude the entirety of popular music, something which he in fact explicitly denies. However that does leave everything without this "proper" relationship in the category of musically deficient to musically bad, and this equates to morally deficient to morally bad.

### **A Counterargument to Scruton**

Others have taken issue with this view, Theodore Gracyk among them. Gracyk disagrees that the kind of modern popular music that Scruton disapproves of should be considered as

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<sup>122</sup> Allan Bloom advances a similar argument in *The Closing of the American Mind*, but Scruton's argument is better explained.

aesthetically inferior and morally corrupting. He concurs with many of the features of Scruton's theory (most importantly that music exists not just as sound in a physical realm, but has to exist in an intentional realm in order for a listener to understand the music as music), but believes that Scruton has unfairly characterized the nature of the listening experience in regards to contemporary popular music. Gracyk describes a case where the music utilized is of a "crude, grinding, industrial"<sup>123</sup> nature and undoubtedly the type of music that Scruton believes is "a dehumanizing of the spirit of song"<sup>124</sup>. However, in this case, the listener is appreciative and understands what is being conveyed by the music, and furthermore is able to engage in a sort of "latent dancing" with another person who is sharing this musical experience. Gracyk holds this up as a clear case of why "mere philosophizing"<sup>125</sup> cannot differentiate between the expression of popular music and of Beethoven.

Gracyk's example utilizes listener response as an important feature of music. In his example, both listeners are able to respond to the piece of music, and furthermore are able to comprehend the other's response and share in an experience. Of course, there is no need for Scruton to deny that listeners can respond to a piece of popular music. In fact, it's necessary for Scruton's account that we *are* able to respond to music that isn't just the kind of music he considers to be musically and morally good. If we were not able to respond to rock music, then there would be no problem. The problem is not that we don't respond to popular music, it's that we do, and our responses can have positive or negative moral or social values.

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<sup>123</sup> Theodore Gracyk, "Music's Worldly Uses, or How I Learned to Stop Worrying and to Love Led Zeppelin", in *Arguing About Art*, ed. Alex Neill and Aaron Ridley (London: Routledge, 2005), 144.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid.



In other examples Gracyk highlights different ways in which sympathetic listening experiences can build social order, in opposition to Scruton's view that certain types of popular music simply lead to narcissism or decadence. He uses one example of a group of people joining in a song through singing after one of the members of the group has basically betrayed the rest of the members to demonstrate one possible way in which popular music can provide an experience of unity, where a group of people joining in a song becomes a "gesture of reconciliation and mutual forgiveness"<sup>126</sup>. In this example, popular music does not destroy our relations with other people or lead us into some kind of solipsism; rather, it contributes to the building of social order.

I do not think that the potential for popular music to play this kind of role is something that Scruton would deny. I know lots of adolescent girls who had deep, meaningful bonding experiences to *High School Musical* songs (at the time; I assume these experiences have been colored by the actual experience of high school). These sorts of musical experiences are dependent in some way on musical features, but also on how the participants themselves respond to the music. I don't deny the reality of these experiences, but rather that these experiences are necessarily equivalent with the experiences provided by other music. It is possible that a Disney song can create community as articulated by Gracyk, as can a Mass setting. What Gracyk does not differentiate between though is what kind of community is being created by different songs or pieces of music.

Whether music can be objectively judged as better or worse is not at issue here. This general point is accepted by both Scruton and Gracyk. I think Scruton could agree that Gracyk's

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<sup>126</sup> Ibid.

example of how a song creates community succeeds. I also think that Scruton could go so far as to accept singing or joining in as a relevant response to songs (as opposed to absolute music) as proposed by Gracyk and agree that this expresses community. In fact, the idea of community that is expressed in music is arguably more important for Scruton than it is for Gracyk, as through my aesthetic judgments “I come to see myself as one member of an implied community, whose life is present and vindicated in the experience of contemplation”<sup>127</sup>. The problem then lies again in the quality of the response and the quality or type of community that is built by this response.

While Gracyk’s own example may not be particularly problematic for Scruton (he does accept that “there is plenty of tuneful popular music, and plenty of popular music with which one can sing along and to which one can dance in sociable ways”<sup>128</sup>), Scruton is concerned about the larger trend in popular music towards music that does not engage us with others in a community, but rather a world in which “people talk, shout, dance, and feel at each other, without ever doing those things *with* them”<sup>129</sup>. Because of this, I do not think Scruton should be characterized as simply dismissing all popular music, as Gracyk thinks, but insisting on a musical evaluation to determine how specific pieces of music relate to a given community and whether they build and express relationships *with* other people, or *at* other people.

Gracyk seems to position musical response within a given social context in order to explain some of the significance of our response to music. Although Gracyk does not explain his example as such, I think that he is intending to draw a parallel between our sympathetic response

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<sup>127</sup> Scruton, *The Aesthetics of Music*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 460.

<sup>128</sup> Roger Scruton, “Music and Morality”, *The American Spectator*, February 2010, <http://spectator.org/articles/40193/music-and-morality>.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid.

in a concert hall to Scruton's music, and the type of sympathetic response to popular music that can occur in contexts like the one described by Gracyk. The idea of an appropriate social context is meant to bolster Gracyk's example, I believe, but it does not really address the crux of Scruton's point about the moral quality of response to music. When I was a camp counselor, my campers woke up really fast when the White Stripes started playing at full volume at 6:30 in the morning. They shared a sympathetic response- if you wanted to shower first, you had better be out of your door before we make it to the next verse. And it occurred within a definite social context- counselors have similar wake-up playlists without having discussed them, because we understand and share in this context<sup>130</sup>. The sympathetic response of being violently woken up by loud music does not really seem to bear a great resemblance to the kinds of sympathetic response that Scruton discusses. This is a very different experience than when people engage in a social dance that is based in an understanding of musical form, where they are "learning an aspect of our embodiment as free beings"<sup>131</sup>.

So far I have considered the examples Gracyk uses to show that popular music can appropriately fit certain social contexts and build community. In addition to these examples though, Gracyk also attempts to show that popular music has as much aesthetic value as art music, albeit not in the same way. While the tradition of European art music values tonality, the rock music that Gracyk describes simply has different aesthetic values. One example Gracyk uses to show these different aesthetic values is the Led Zeppelin song "D'Yer Mak'Er", which is

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<sup>130</sup> The horror when we discovered one of our new counselors' response to our discussion of the merits of a full-volume harmonica section of "The Times They Are A-Changin'" and "Seven Nation Army" was "I've never heard of these songs". Accordingly, he was the worst counselor ever.

<sup>131</sup> Roger Scruton, "Music and Morality", *The American Spectator*, February 2010, <http://spectator.org/articles/40193/music-and-morality>.

significant because it “displays musical intelligence”<sup>132</sup>, particularly, Gracyk thinks, in the way that musical devices are employed humorously. The bulk of this comes from the fact that it is “rich in cross-reference and allusion”<sup>133</sup>, as opposed to harmony or tonality, and so in order to recognize the musical intelligence of the piece you have to understand the history and the community that the piece participates in.

I think we are fairly safe in saying “so what?” to this point. To address the first point, that what is aesthetically salient is “intelligence” as measured by the presence of certain musical or aesthetic devices, it seems plausible to say that cross-reference and allusion by themselves don’t have any particular special value. Value doesn’t inhere in any specific literary or musical device, but rather in how the device is used. Here the question would really be more a matter of what is being cross-referenced or alluded to, and whether *that* is of any value, and furthermore whether the cross-reference or allusion is skillfully deployed to any sort of valuable end.

Many works of art use devices like imagery or alliteration, but that hardly means that it contributes to any sort of meaningful or aesthetically valuable whole. The appeal of *Chicka Chicka Boom Boom*, a children’s picture book about the alphabet, is due in large part to its skillful use of rhythm and rhyme “which is reminiscent of the jazz vocal improvisation technique known as scat singing”<sup>134</sup>, seen in passages like “Chicka chicka boom boom, look there’s a full moon, A is out of bed and this is what he said, “Dare, double dare, you can’t catch me. I’ll beat you to the top of the coconut tree”<sup>135</sup>. Not only does *Chicka Chicka Boom Boom* utilize literary devices in service of the work as a whole, it requires the same sort of understanding of a history

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<sup>132</sup> Gracyk, “Music’s Worldly Uses”, 139.

<sup>133</sup> Gracyk, “Music’s Worldly Uses”, 146.

<sup>134</sup> “Chicka Chicka Boom Boom”, last modified January 29, 2015, [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chicka\\_Chicka\\_Boom\\_Boom](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chicka_Chicka_Boom_Boom).

<sup>135</sup> “Chicka Chicka Boom Boom”, [http://www.creativeteaching.com/ctp/140-cd\\_lyrics.pdf](http://www.creativeteaching.com/ctp/140-cd_lyrics.pdf)

and a community to recognize how the devices are being used. But how does this contribute to the overall aesthetic status of the work as a whole? One strategy is to argue that *Chicka Chicka Boom Boom* isn't going to approach the aesthetic value of a work like *Macbeth* or *Great Expectations*. At most, it may be good qua children's book, but not good qua art overall. Of course, this brings up questions of cross-genre comparisons, as well as broader questions about what kinds of things can be considered art and how they should be evaluated.

These questions are obviously beyond the scope of this paper, but to return to the original question in a different way, is *Chicka Chicka Boom Boom* good qua art because of its use of literary devices? I would argue no. Aesthetic devices can be used, and used well, without that being enough to make a work aesthetically significant. In the case of *Chicka Chicka Boom Boom*, literary devices are used in service of teaching children the alphabet, not in service of revealing profound truths about the human condition.

Just as Arnold Isenberg has argued that no set of aesthetic criteria like "elegant, fine, greenish-blue" could serve to prove in advance whether someone will like an artwork or not, or to determine whether it is good art or not, and that therefore no aesthetic quality could be sufficient to prove aesthetic value in advance, simply proving that rock music can be rich in cross-reference and allusion does nothing by itself to show whether or not it is aesthetically valuable. By contrast, tonality (the musical element Gracyk attempts to show is one possible musical element among many) should tell us something about the music itself because of its "role in the building of musical space"<sup>136</sup>.

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<sup>136</sup> Scruton, *The Aesthetics of Music*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 239.

Gracyk gives other examples of what might be considered alternative aesthetic values for rock music including rhythm and an acceptance of discord that becomes “audible acts of taming noise”<sup>137</sup>. Therefore, Nirvana’s “Smells Like Teen Spirit” sounds like noise only to the uninitiated. Furthermore, not only does “Smells Like Teen Spirit” have aesthetic value like art music does, these aesthetic values are meaningful. According to Gracyk, the noise in “Smells Like Teen Spirit” isn’t just noise for the sake of noise; rather this actually carries meaning and is for the sake of a greater message. The greater message that Gracyk pulls out of “Smells Like Teen Spirit” is vast in scope- not only does this song remind listeners that “music involves continuous discipline and suppression of noise”<sup>138</sup> and whose “refusal to let melody triumph can stand for a political refusal”, it is also an “illustration of the tensions of bourgeois life”, a “stand against the degree of repression that we often assume everyone must accept as the price of modern life”, and a representation of the “brutal struggle involved in the pursuit of a perfect order”. If nothing else, Gracyk has performed an impressive exegesis.

Can music really make these kinds of grand statements? If so, how? It needs to be able to say them through formal features, not through creator’s assertions of meaning or anything else. Gracyk first explains that “Smells Like Teen Spirit” is “graced with an aching, sweet melody”<sup>139</sup>. Interestingly though, this melody is actually very hard to hear in the song itself- “the arrangements seem designed to disguise”<sup>140</sup> it. In fact, the example Gracyk has for the melody of “Smells Like Teen Spirit” is a cover of the song by Tori Amos which emphasizes the melody. Certainly if a song has something to say melodically, it should be able to stand on its own

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<sup>137</sup> Gracyk, “Music’s Worldly Uses”, 146.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid.

<sup>139</sup> Gracyk, “Music’s Worldly Uses”, 145.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid.

without invoking different versions and arrangements to show features that aren't really apparent in the original.

According to Gracyk, we must interrogate “what we are to understand by Nirvana’s continuing decision to put melody and accompaniment into such sharp conflict”. For Gracyk, the real musical element, if it can be called such, that gives meaning to “Smells Like Teen Spirit” is noise. This is bizarre. While Gracyk believes Nirvana’s music comes out of their balancing melody and noise, and their refusal to let melody have the upper hand, certainly music stands in opposition to noise. Noise doesn’t have a place in music, which is primarily recognized as being “organized sound”<sup>141</sup> (though solely as organized sound it is too broad). Noise could be meaningful in a variety of ways, but that doesn’t mean it’s meaningful as music.

The other recourse available to Gracyk is lyrical content. However, while lyrics can be a part of music, they are not by themselves a musical feature, and should not be admissible in a discussion of musical merits. The formal features of “Smells Like Teen Spirit” do not appear to stand on their own.

What would help Gracyk make these claims is if there was more, musically speaking, for him to point to. A melody that’s there but can’t really be heard over the noise doesn’t provide very much supporting evidence as it’s not part of the experience of the work, and as such cannot be aesthetically relevant. Invoking the Tori Amos cover does not help us here either, as using a different performance to tell us about what our experience of the first performance was supposed to be like does not seem like a legitimate move. Compare this to an example of Scruton’s, Brahms’ Fourth Symphony in E minor, Op. 98-

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<sup>141</sup> “The Philosophy of Music”, last modified July 13th, 2012, <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/music/#1>

“In the course of the development the opening motif of the descending third is expanded from a group of two tones to a group of three, as in Ex. 13.32, harmonized in thirds. This little cell gives Brahms the climax of the development, which he prepares from the fanfare in the masterly way illustrated in Ex. 13.33. From this climax emerges a triplet figure (Ex. 13.34), which Brahms promptly uses to create a lyrical variation of the opening theme, with the original concealed in the off-beats which sound in the bass (Ex. 13.35).

This is but a glimpse into the astonishing order of this movement. But it also a glimpse into its meaning: it shows Brahms leading the listener to ‘hear in thirds’, and to respond to the logic of the musical line, as it exfoliates from that tiny cell of two notes. The effect is one of the most powerful in all romantic music, of tragic feeling that is nevertheless utterly controlled and utterly in control. And that *is* the meaning of the music: the aural presentation of a sincere and solemn gesture- a gesture which never betrays itself as a pretence, which never stumbles, as it unfolds with unanswerable authority the complete motive to action, and the justifying narrative which brought it into being.”<sup>142</sup>

Scruton goes on to connect more of what he thinks is being expressed in the piece to specific musical devices. The difference, though, between Gracyk’s example and Scruton’s is that in Scruton’s the expressive qualities of the music are tied much more firmly to musical qualities. We don’t need to guess at what the composer was trying to say or look to other versions, and this certainly seems to give more legitimacy to Scruton’s example. While it is true that Scruton extends his account of Brahms by somewhat discussing Brahms’ intentions or goals, what distinguishes Scruton’s account from Gracyk’s is that this discussion of artist intentions is not essential to Scruton’s account as it is in Gracyk’s. Removing claims about Brahms’ intentions from Scruton’s example would still leave the example intact. Of course, part of the reason Scruton can draw more out of the piece in his example is that he has more elements to work with- tonality and sophisticated melodic and harmonic structures being huge parts of that. Having more elements with which to develop expressive content is hardly trivial considering “the elaboration of the musical line is at the same time the elaboration of content. Expression

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<sup>142</sup> Scruton, *The Aesthetics of Music*, 435, 437.



does not reside in some passing resemblance or aspect: it is brought into being through the musical argument, and worked into the musical structure”<sup>143</sup>.

I think one important feature of Gracyk’s account is the idea of taking a critical distance from the music in order to interpret it and derive conclusions from it. I would venture to say that the message that Gracyk derives from “Smells Like Teen Spirit”, such as the idea that its “refusal to let melody triumph can stand for a political refusal”, is not a commonplace interpretation of the song. The lyrics stand, if not in contrast to, then certainly not in support of this interpretation. For Gracyk’s interpretation to emerge, the listener needs to stand at a critical distance from the work (and perhaps make some questionable connections to bourgeois life).

Of course, is this any different from what Scruton does in his examination of the Brahms’ piece cited earlier? It’s true that he breaks down a section of the piece to draw out the implications he finds for the listener. However, I would argue that the difference between Gracyk’s and Scruton’s analyses is that they work from different directions- Gracyk shows that what you heard actually *means* this; Scruton shows that what you heard *came* from this. A Brahms listener hears the piece as tragic, and Scruton points to the opening motif of the descending third as a reason. Conversely, Gracyk pulls apart “Smells Like Teen Spirit” to show how what you heard- noise- wasn’t quite what you thought it was, but rather a “political refusal”<sup>144</sup>. While I think that Gracyk’s interpretation is on rather thinner ice, the crucial point is that his interpretation doesn’t simply explain why or how you heard what you did, but that it requires a critical distance to explain the *meaning* of what you heard.

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<sup>143</sup> Scruton, *The Aesthetics of Music*, 345.

<sup>144</sup> Gracyk, “Music’s Worldly Uses”, 146.

The problem here is that in Gracyk's example the critical distance he assumes and the interpretation he derives from taking that critical distance is what keeps a song like "Smells Like Teen Spirit" from being just "deficient in melody" where "'amplified overtones' drown out its inept harmonies"<sup>145</sup>. Listened to uncritically without any search for these deeper meanings that Gracyk draws out, I doubt you would find them. And what Plato very much questions, and Scruton implicitly as well I believe, is if it is even possible to take that sort of critical distance to music and popular forms of culture. We can try, but we will ultimately fail, because these forms of art "most of all insinuate themselves into the inmost part of the soul and most vigorously lay hold of it"<sup>146</sup>. It's not simply the unenlightened *hoi polloi*, without the benefit of knowledge about postmodernism or tonality or whatever, who fall prey to the charms of popular music, but anyone who listens to it, even if they can deconstruct it.

If this is true, then not even ironic hipsters or cultural studies majors are immune to Taylor Swift's "We Are Never Ever Getting Back Together". There's a very simple level on which this is true- if you hear "Call Me Maybe" one time in whatever unfortunate scenario that occurs in, you will hear it again in your head for at least the next ten days. It becomes the "metric pulse" that Scruton claims is the "constant background to their thoughts and movements"

<sup>147</sup> .

## **Music's Effects**

Up until now, most of what has been examined is Scruton's theory of the effects of music, why we might want to be concerned about the effects music has on us, and an opposing view as elaborated by Gracyk. However, there are other reasons to examine the effect music has

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<sup>145</sup> Gracyk, "Music's Worldly Uses", 147.

<sup>146</sup> Allan Bloom, trans., *The Republic* (Basic Books, 1968), 401d.

<sup>147</sup> Roger Scruton, "Music and Morality", *The American Spectator* (2010), accessed October 14, 2014.

on us. Scruton argues that music affects us in physiological ways, but Jenefer Robinson draws on neuroscience to make these connections even more explicit, and strengthens the idea that a complete “critical distance” might not be achievable. Robinson points out that research does show that music can be “stimulative” or “sedative”, with corresponding increases or decreases in pulse<sup>148</sup>. Other studies have measured features as diverse as respiration rate to blood pressure to stomach contractions. These physiological effects often occur on a subconscious level. One study found that “happy music induced subliminal smiles and sad music induced subliminal frowns”<sup>149</sup>. And while listening to music is often considered a subjective activity, there is evidence to suggest that listeners “feel something” at the same points in a piece of music, though they may label the “something” differently<sup>150</sup>.

Robinson’s account shows how we often arrive at emotional states in reaction to music in a subconscious manner. This would seem important for both Plato’s and Scruton’s account, as it could show that music has effects that we are not always aware of and so can affect us in ways that perhaps we shouldn’t be. If we have emotional responses to and emotional experiences of music, then both Plato and Scruton want our emotions to be aroused by the right things in the right ways. Robinson explains that “in listening to a long and complex piece in which the emotional landscape is itself shifting and ambiguous, our own reactions are likely to be shifting and ambiguous too”<sup>151</sup>, as opposed to “Jingle Bells”, which simply makes us feel jolly. But it seems like the kind of emotional responses we would want to cultivate would be the ones proper to works with a more sophisticated emotional palette, rather than the trite, quick, sentimental

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<sup>148</sup> Jenefer Robinson, *Deeper Than Reason: Emotion and its Role in Literature, Music, and Art* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 395.

<sup>149</sup> Robinson, *Deeper Than Reason*, 396.

<sup>150</sup> Robinson, *Deeper Than Reason*, 403.

<sup>151</sup> Robinson, *Deeper Than Reason*, 411.

reactions to “Jingle Bells”. Not that the emotions generated by music must necessarily be complex, rather that they are authentic emotional responses rather than cliched sentimentality. Certain pop songs would be rather like Hallmark cards then, short circuiting an authentic emotional response and substituting sentimentality instead. If “we respond emotionally to its structural and expressive development”<sup>152</sup>, then a better quality of structural and expressive development should lead to a more genuine emotional response.

Scruton isn’t merely rejecting certain forms of popular music because they’re bad musically, and not solely because of the effect they would have on the individual. There is also the wider concern about society, that was previously mentioned, though this was not discussed in depth outside of the idea of government and society leaders having musical tastes that are also being formed in an environment full of influences that Scruton would consider harmful. However, Scruton also thinks that aesthetic relativism of that kind opens the door to all sorts of other relativisms as well. For Scruton, the view that “any type of music is just as good as any other” is a step or two away from “any type of morals are just as good as any other”. The musical tastes of the society are not the only thing at stake, but that a society that permits any type of music is also going to have to let go of notions of better or worse, and not only in music.

Certainly we should not assume *a priori* that all popular music is musically and morally corrupting. But it is worthwhile to closely examine formal features as expressive content will come from musical content, and particularly in virtue of their physiological effects. The point remains that much popular music is a “dehumanizing of the spirit of song”<sup>153</sup>. For Scruton, this is a degradation of beauty, a throwing over of an ultimate value for just anything, no less than a

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<sup>152</sup> Ibid.

<sup>153</sup> Gracyk, “Music’s Worldly Uses”, 144.

“betrayal of a sacred calling”<sup>154</sup>. Even without recognizing any moral implications in rejecting beauty though, it still seems that Scruton’s more general point about music’s ability to shape society is significant, a general point that obviously tracks well with Plato’s concerns as well.

For Scruton, music is not only pleasing to us, it has moral implications in how it forms the listener and the listener’s relationships to others. Like Plato, Scruton thinks that the pleasure of some music is a lower sort of pleasure; he also argues that listening to good music is a sustained listening experience that requires attention and focus, and not immediate sensory gratification, a claim that could be supported by Robinson’s account as well. In the second case, the music has appeal not only to the lowest level of the soul as Plato would say, but can help develop the higher parts of the soul and subordinate the lowest.

## **Conclusion**

While Scruton doesn’t propose banning certain modes or instruments like Plato does, he does argue that we should be concerned about how the formal features of our music will affect us as listeners, particularly in the ways it can shape how we relate to others in society.

Starting with an account of how we implicitly hear music as movement, Scruton turns to showing how our automatic response to music is as dance, and from there builds an account of dance as a microcosm of society that structures our social relations and ultimately our society. Following this, Scruton is committed to some music being beneficial and some being harmful. Because most of what he sees as beneficial is Western art music, Gracyk has argued that Scruton misses the value of much popular music. However, Gracyk’s critique doesn’t completely address the crux of Scruton’s argument- there are qualitative differences in the type of

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<sup>154</sup> Roger Scruton, “On Defending Beauty”, *The American Spectator*, May 2010, <http://spectator.org/articles/39655/defending-beauty>.

community that can be formed by different kinds of music, and much of the meaning that Gracyk draws out of popular music depends on taking a critical distance. I have argued that taking this critical distance is actually impossible, and we do have some empirical reasons for thinking that music affects us in ways we cannot control.

Scruton's points are important for understanding what non-obvious ways art (in this case, music) can affect us and why we might wish to be concerned. Both Plato and Scruton have offered considerations about beauty and goodness and the connection between the two, and in my third chapter I will offer my own account of their relationship.

## Chapter 3: Goodness and Beauty

Both Plato and Scruton have suggested some sort of relationship between beauty and goodness, and in this chapter I intend to examine more fully what kind of relationship there might be between goodness and beauty. The strongest possible relationship would be some form of equivalence, whether extensional or intensional. If they are extensionally equivalent, the traits beauty and goodness would pick out the same objects, even while beauty and goodness would continue to refer to two different properties. If they are intensionally equivalent though, not only would the traits of beauty and goodness name and pick out the same sort of objects, the meaning of beauty and goodness would also be equivalent. In extensional equivalence, the properties would overlap while in intensional equivalence the meanings of the words ‘beauty’ and ‘goodness’ would actually overlap as well.

There is also the possibility that while beauty and goodness have extensional or intensional equivalence in a case of something like “true beauty” it would still be possible for some things to be either just beautiful or just good, and not participate in both qualities. For example, if beautiful and good were two circles of a Venn diagram, the middle overlapping section would be “true beauty” or “true goodness”, while it would still be possible for some things to fall into just one of the circles.

While there are many possible ways for goodness and beauty to be related, I intend to examine the ways in which they may be equivalent- rejecting a relationship of intensional equivalence first, and arguing for a relationship of extensional equivalence second.

### **Intensional Equivalence**

One way to test for intensional equivalence is to see if the two concepts under examination can be replaced in sentences with intensional contexts (contexts involving mental states) and the same truth value can be retained. For example, Hesperus and Phosphorus both refer to the same celestial object- the planet Venus. However, before this was known, it was thought that Hesperus and Phosphorus were two different celestial objects- the evening star and the morning star, respectively. While Hesperus and Phosphorus refer to the same shiny object in the sky and are therefore extensionally equivalent, they are not intensionally equivalent as evidenced by the sentences “X believes that Hesperus is the evening star” and “X believes that Phosphorus is the evening star”. Hesperus and Phosphorus cannot be replaced in these sentences and retain the same meaning- X doesn’t *believe* that Hesperus and Phosphorus are both the evening star, even though they are.

We could test for the intensional equivalence of goodness and beauty in the same way by exchanging the words ‘beautiful’ and ‘morally good’ in intensional contexts to see if it changes the meaning of the sentence. If “X believes that Y is beautiful” does that also mean that “X believes that Y is morally good”? This seems plainly false. There’s no reason for someone who is physically beautiful to necessarily be morally good and vice versa. Furthermore, cases of beautiful people who are morally reprehensible and unattractive people who are virtuous are in abundance. It appears that ‘beautiful’ and ‘morally good’ cannot always be exchanged in sentences and retain the same meaning, so intensional equivalence would be a dead end.

### **Extensional Equivalence**

Extensional equivalence would be the next step down from intensional equivalence. In a case of extensional equivalence, ‘beautiful’ and ‘morally good’ would refer to the same objects,



but they wouldn't have the same meaning. Extensional equivalence of beauty and goodness is the strongest claim that I intend to argue for, in particular that true beauty is extensionally equivalent with true moral goodness, meaning that what it is for an object to be *truly* beautiful is for it to be truly morally good as well, and vice versa. In arguing for this, I will first deal with common counterarguments, before offering a set of interconnected arguments for an overlap between our aesthetic sense and our moral sense. In my examination of counterarguments, I will evaluate two different strategies for reconciling our intuitions about beauty and goodness (following in some way two different interpretations of how Plato thinks sensible objects are related to their Forms) - the first strategy being that potential counterexamples may only bear a resemblance to beauty, and the second strategy being that potential counterexamples do actually partake in beauty but to various degrees.

### **Strategies for Handling Counterexamples: Mere Resemblance of Beauty**

It is easy to think of many examples of beautiful appearances that nevertheless do not seem to represent beautiful things. People can be beautiful and vicious, or ugly and virtuous, and these kinds of ordinary language counterexamples are in abundance<sup>155</sup>. There are seemingly many ordinary counterexamples that show a divergence between beauty and goodness at the level of appearance. One possible strategy for dealing with these counterarguments is to claim that the sort of examples that seem to break the relationship between goodness and beauty are not actually beautiful as such, but rather only resemble beauty, a resemblance that is in fact false. In

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<sup>155</sup> For a different approach to this problem, see John Neil Martin's article "The Lover of the Beautiful and the Good: Platonic Foundations of Aesthetic and Moral Value" for a demonstration of how to "interpret value terms Platonically over privative Boolean algebras, so that *beautiful* and *good* diverge while at higher levels other value terms are coextensional."

examining this approach to counterarguments, I will first set out common counterexamples in order to consider more fully the problems raised by them.

One of the textbook cases of a disconnect between goodness and beauty is Leni Riefenstahl's Nazi propaganda film *Triumph of the Will*. Here, the problem seems twofold- the ability for beauty to conceal evil not only conceals the truth of a subject, but it can also arouse sympathies in us for people and things that we shouldn't have, to the extent that evil appears beautiful. *Triumph of the Will* is considered by many to be an aesthetically great film. And certainly the various stylistic devices used throughout the film are meant to contribute to the visual beauty of the film.

The two problems described before can be seen in the controversy surrounding *Triumph of the Will*- firstly, that the aesthetic beauty of *Triumph of the Will* conceals the morally objectionable truth of its subject matter (the glorification of Nazism), and secondly that while the aesthetic beauty of the film may not go so far as to draw viewers into a sympathetic response to Nazism, viewers are at least led to find beauty in the depiction of Nazism. The question in enjoying *Triumph of the Will* or any other work of art from the morally questionable to the morally repugnant is, as Mary Devereaux puts it, “What kind of person am I to enjoy or be moved by this film?”<sup>156</sup>.

So there may be a moral reason to question our aesthetic experiences of morally problematic works. But since our experience seems primarily aesthetic, is there an aesthetic reason to question our aesthetic experiences of morally problematic works? One possible reason might be that our aesthetic experience of a work will be better and fuller in response to works

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<sup>156</sup> Mary Devereaux, “Beauty and evil: the case of Leni Riefenstahl's *Triumph of the Will*”, in *Aesthetics and Ethics: Essays at the Intersection*, ed. Jerrold Levinson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 241.

that don't raise these sorts of moral objections for us. Works that we morally object to often occasion a feeling of moral disgust in us which can affect our overall impressions of the work, especially considering disgust as an aesthetic phenomenon in the broad sense of questions of taste. When moral disgust isn't a part of our aesthetic experience, we're able to have fuller aesthetic experiences without contradictions in feelings and judgments. In the case of *Triumph of the Will*, even when viewers find beauty in the film, it's reasonable to assume that this hardly translates to unalloyed approval and pleasure, because of their continuing moral disapproval of the subject matter and this "cognitive dissonance" takes away from our overall impressions. When we don't have to disengage with one part of the work and compartmentalize our reactions and judgments, our aesthetic experiences can be more holistic as well.

What is at issue seems not only to be about enjoying or being moved by a work, but also simply finding a work beautiful. I would argue that we do not even have to go so far as to enjoy the work in order for the work to become problematic. As Plato recognized, one of the most fundamental qualities of beauty is that it's attractive. While many viewers of *Triumph of the Will* may be sophisticated enough to recognize the film as propaganda and intellectually reject its principles, that doesn't preclude the possibility of viewers being attracted by the beauty of the work itself. To return to a point made in the previous chapter, we cannot rely on assuming a critical distance in order to avoid being affected by less than edifying aspects of a work, or in order to reconcile morally controversial aspects of a work with our aesthetic judgments. And importantly this is not just a normative point that we *shouldn't* rely on a critical distance in evaluating aesthetic works, but that we *can't*. Beauty is attractive at a fundamental level, and what we are attracted to informs our tastes and attitudes in ways that may not be fully perceptible

to us. While we may not be morally culpable for what we are unintentionally attracted to, we can imagine the ideally virtuous agent as one who is attracted only in the right ways to the right sort of things, and so we should at least have cause to be wary of how our tastes and attitudes might be unconsciously formed.

Along with this idea of taking a critical distance to a work is a related idea about evaluating formal features and content separately. It seems a bit strange to divorce formal features from subject matter though. Form is generally seen as being in service to content- consider the film adaptations of books. Leaving aside whether the films are better or worse than the books, the films are always different, due in large part to the constraints and conventions of different genres. Reading the words on a page and seeing the images on a screen are fundamentally different aesthetic experiences, and there are different criteria for success for a novel or a film (not necessarily entirely so, but at least some criteria will be genre-specific). It also doesn't avoid the fundamental problem that Devereaux brought up- that of taking pleasure in art we find immoral. Finding beauty in the formal features of a work while condemning or holding ourselves apart from the subject matter seems tricky at best and willingly allowing oneself to suffer under a crazy delusion at worst. In the next section, I give an example of the ways in which form and content, and aesthetic and moral judgments, interact in our evaluations of art.

Even if we think that we morally ought not find pleasure in immoral works of art, that doesn't change the fact that we might. This then would be the motivation for the resemblance strategy- perhaps works like *Triumph of the Will* only resemble beauty but actually aren't beautiful. This strategy lets us keep our intuitions about the work's beautiful appearance intact

and sidestep messy moral conclusions. We don't have to propose any sort of divide between beauty and moral goodness or try to appreciate the aesthetic features while withholding approval of the content, because the work isn't *really* beautiful, just apparently so.

The beauty of mere resemblance would seemingly be a false and deceptive appearance. This interpretation of resemblance presupposes some sort of disconnect between being and appearance. And our willingness to at least try to separate out beautiful appearances from the nature of the subject, or to separate our moral and aesthetic judgments assumes that we are naturally inclined to be skeptical of appearances. However, it is worthwhile to investigate the source of this skepticism about appearances.

There are other ways to think of the relationship between being and appearance. One possibility is the way in which Plato conceived of their relationship. As Aryeh Kosman explains “for Plato, appearance is not something separate from being, but simply the presentation of what is to a subject: being, as we say, making its appearance”<sup>157</sup>. Much of our discomfort with beauty as a criterion for goodness comes from an underlying skepticism that appearances do indeed only go skin-deep. But as Kosman points out, in an ideal case, an appearance would really be the representation of being. It should actually be more unusual for an appearance to be deceptive since “the phenomenological is not standardly the illusion of being. It becomes illusory only in the context of something going wrong, a failure of uptake”<sup>158</sup>.

One possible conclusion to draw from the possible feelings of “cognitive dissonance” engendered by beautiful works of art with morally problematic content is that true beauty

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<sup>157</sup> Aryeh Kosman, “Beauty and the Good: Situating the Kalon”, *Classical Philology* 105 (2010): 354.

<sup>158</sup> *Ibid.*

requires an alignment of aesthetic and moral qualities. Something can't just be beautiful in virtue of its appearance, but instead requires a beautiful appearance and a beautiful nature.

Following this, beauty would not be solely an aesthetic property. Here it seems useful to return to Plato's ladder of love analogy in *Symposium*. As first proposed by Plato, we first come to recognize beauty in sensible things, namely physical bodies. There is some kind of real beauty here, even if it's just the beauty of appearance and therefore a lower form of beauty. As one moves up the "ladder", they experience higher and higher forms of beauty- from laws and knowledge, to eventually beauty itself- and these forms of beauty move away from being solely appearances.

### **Strategies for Handling Counterexamples: Gradations of Beauty**

The problem with classifying some things as only resembling beauty and not actually being beautiful, is that they still continue to *appear* beautiful on some level, even if this appearance is corrupted in some way. Objects with beautiful appearances really are beautiful, just perhaps not fully, or in all the ways that we might wish. I would argue that it makes more sense then, to speak of gradations or levels of beauty: where different beautiful things partake in beauty to different degrees, rather than in terms of false or veridical resemblances of beauty. While people or artworks with beautiful appearances and morally objectionable natures might have a lower level of beauty, this is still some level of beauty, or some form of participation in the beautiful as Plato would say. While a chair with chipped paint and a broken leg might have some defects as a chair, it is still recognizably a chair, though perhaps not as much of a chair as a chair without any defects.

Of course the chair example isn't exactly analogous, as "chairness" is only a physical trait, while I have proposed that beauty is both a physical and non-physical trait. However, I would argue that beauty can be seen in the same way- a beautifully written novel with morally objectionable content might still have some recognizable beauty without being as beautiful as a beautifully written novel with morally good content.

Gradations of beauty would certainly help to clarify not only why we can find certain things more beautiful than others, but also why we can find some things to have some sort of beauty even while they are not morally good. In fact, the fear that beauty can be deceptive and mislead us presupposes that we are naturally inclined to understand beauty as goodness.

While I have examined a potential counterexample to this view (*Triumph of the Will*), I would also like to set out an example of beautiful appearance and beautiful nature coinciding. One example where this can be seen is in the novels of Jane Austen. While they are recognized for their literary and artistic value (the "power and vitality of her language"<sup>159</sup>), they are also important for their themes or the nature of their content. As Cornel West explains, her novels investigate "the challenge of trying to be a decent person in the world"<sup>160</sup> with the "central focus on personal growth... their education of the self in authentic humanitarian values"<sup>161</sup>. To fully experience Austen's work is to be convinced of "the need for integrity, honesty, decency, and virtue"<sup>162</sup>. Here there is an interaction between aesthetic merits and moral ones- her aesthetic merits, in the sense of a well-written novel with all that that entails from prose to characterization to plot, keep her novels from degenerating into sermonizing or mere statement of abstract moral

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<sup>159</sup> Kathleen Anderson, "Why Cornel West Loves Jane Austen", *Huffington Post*, November 12th, 2014, [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/kathleen-anderson/why-cornel-west-loves-jan\\_b\\_6140744.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/kathleen-anderson/why-cornel-west-loves-jan_b_6140744.html).

<sup>160</sup> Ibid.

<sup>161</sup> Ibid.

<sup>162</sup> Ibid.

axioms. At the same time, her moral merits in the sense of her portrayal of virtuous conduct and emphasis of broadly humanistic themes keep her novels from being groundless reflections on human nature or idle jabs at social conventions. The aesthetic and moral merits of Austen's novels are mutually enriching and are woven together to such a degree that one informs the other, and our aesthetic experience of the work as a whole is in response to both of these elements- so much so, that what we term "aesthetic experience" is perhaps more properly termed an aesthetic/moral experience or a moral/aesthetic experience. This suggestion that our moral and aesthetic experiences are interwoven in interesting and inextricable ways will be returned to.

### **Connections Between Moral Sense and Aesthetic Sense**

I have suggested that counterexamples to the idea of extensional equivalence of goodness and beauty are better handled by thinking of gradations of beauty as opposed to assuming counterexamples to be only resemblances of beauty and not really beautiful at all. However, reasons must still be offered as to why beauty and goodness should be considered extensionally equivalent beyond the fact that the theory could deal with some potential counterexamples like the ones examined above. In this section, I intend to lay out a set of interlocking arguments that would give us reasons to think that our aesthetic and moral sense overlap and affect each other to a degree that suggests we are not justified in thinking that the aesthetic and moral domains are entirely separate.

One consideration for this argument has already been gone through- our intuitions about the alignment of beauty and goodness because we naturally expect a sort of concordance between being and appearance in the way that Kosman articulates in his explanation of *kalon*. Another way in which we might see our aesthetic and moral sense being affected by each other is



in how our perceptions of someone's beauty can change when our perceptions of their moral nature change, as articulated by Nehamas. Beautiful people who turn out to be vicious often end up being perceived as less beautiful than they were before anything was known about their character. The converse seems to hold as well- a virtuous person may first be perceived as unattractive, but seems more beautiful over time, after their character has been revealed through association. As Nehamas explains, "it is impossible for us to find our friends ugly"<sup>163</sup> because "whether we find someone attractive actually *depends* on whether we like or respect them"<sup>164</sup>. This phenomenon suggests that our perceptions of appearance are linked to our perceptions of being and vice versa- another reason to think that we won't be successful in separating our aesthetic and moral judgments of a work.

Roger Scruton proposes another way in which we might have a sense of beauty as more than merely aesthetic and that is in a sense of desecration. Scruton proposes this idea of desecration as support for the idea that a sense of the sacred is something universal to human beings, but this idea can be specifically applied to feelings about beauty (and the destruction of it). This theory of desecration proposes that when beautiful things are destroyed, our feelings about their destruction is beyond what we feel for the destruction for something more mundane<sup>165</sup>, like a car crash (assuming no one was hurt) or a school burning down (also assuming no one was hurt). Desecration, or the destruction of something with aesthetic significance, seems positively wrong, rather than just merely unfortunate.

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<sup>163</sup> Alexander Nehamas, *Only a Promise of Happiness: The Place of Beauty in a World of Art* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), 59.

<sup>164</sup> Nehamas, *Only a Promise of Happiness*, 68.

<sup>165</sup> Roger Scruton, "Beauty and Desecration", *City Journal*, Spring 2009.

However, there may be other explanations for these feelings in relation to beautiful things, rather than hypothesizing a phenomenon of desecration. For one thing, beautiful things- whether landscapes, buildings, paintings, or otherwise- are often unique and often have cultural significance. While there may be many *Starry Night* reproductions of variable quality, there is only one actual *Starry Night*. If it was destroyed, a unique artifact with a specific cultural heritage would be gone, whereas the majority of cars, pieces of furniture, and grocery stores can be replaced. We might be worried about other aspects of these objects' destruction, such as the expense of replacing them or perhaps their sentimental value. But desecration is more than a feeling of loss, profound or otherwise, but of wrongness. If someone destroyed my car, that would be wrong, as destroying someone else's property is wrong. I feel wronged as the owner of the car. But if someone slashed *Starry Night*, really only the MoMA has any right to feel wronged, and yet I think it likely that many more people besides MoMA curators are going to feel wronged, even though they're not the owners and the wrongness of the property destruction doesn't apply to them. And the wrongness felt by the general public would be significantly different than mere sympathy for someone else's misfortune.

One real life example of this is the 2001 destruction of the Bamian Buddhas by the Taliban<sup>166</sup>, which sparked outrage around the world. And while there are many possible sources of this outrage- religious, political, cultural- this outrage was specifically in reaction to the destruction of their aesthetic value. It was not only opposed by Buddhists, and if an organization with very different values, say Greenpeace, had destroyed the Buddhas, it is unlikely that the outrage would have been lessened in any significant way.

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<sup>166</sup> Barbara Crossette, "Taliban Explains Buddha Demolition", *The New York Times*, March, 19, 2001, <http://www.nytimes.com/2001/03/19/world/19TALI.html>

This is true of things that are not just unique objects though. Consider an opera or a ballet. Scruton cites a 2004 production of the Mozart opera, *The Abduction from the Seraglio*, which for some reason included prostitution and torture among other things, elements entirely missing from the original. Technically nothing is being harmed here besides good taste- there is no original to be destroyed like *Starry Night*. However, to many it still felt wrong, verging on sacrilegious. Audience members wrote letters to the opera house saying things like “How could you do this to Mozart?”<sup>167</sup>, regardless of the fact that Mozart is dead, so really nothing is being done to him. Something is being done to the work though, which for audiences goes beyond just a performance that was bad or incompetent. Instead, to many this particular production set out to destroy Mozart’s work, and it’s for this reason that I think the anger and disgust it generated was directed at more than just the production’s depictions of violence, but at how those depictions had ruined the original beauty of the work.

The point of examining the feeling of desecration in regards to beautiful things (a category that includes non-art objects, for example a landscape) is not just to argue that there’s a specific feeling of “badness” that goes along with the destruction of beautiful things, but that there is a specifically moral feeling of badness. A feeling of desecration is a feeling of wrongness, a specifically moral quality, which in this case extends beyond just purely moral judgments (like those of the wrongness of property destruction). The aesthetic judgments and accompanying feelings involved in a case that could be considered desecration become linked to moral ones, suggesting that beauty has a moral dimension.

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<sup>167</sup> Alan Riding, “Definitely Not Your Mother’s Mozart Opera”, *The New York Times*, July 10, 2004, <http://www.nytimes.com/2004/07/10/arts/definitely-not-your-mother-s-mozart-opera.html>.

Marcia Eaton gives another reason for thinking that our aesthetic and moral sense are intertwined by arguing that we have an “aesthetic approach to morality”<sup>168</sup>. Eaton argues, with an example drawn from Mark Packer, that even if we can eliminate the moral objections to a morally controversial issue, we can still be left with objections that are aesthetic in nature (aesthetic being used here in the broad sense of qualities of taste). Ordinarily, human cannibalism is considered quite morally wrong. However, we can imagine a case, as Eaton does, where human meat is produced by extracting muscle cells and growing them in a lab. Here, it seems we have eliminated our moral qualms- no human being was harmed, and the meat does not actually come from a person as such so “no issues of pain or rights are involved”<sup>169</sup>. However, this hardly seems to make it unproblematic. Synthetically produced human meat with no actual harm occurring to a human is unlikely to actually appeal to anyone and furthermore, seems completely repulsive.

If this is true, then there are objections to eating humans that are not purely moral in nature. In this case, both our moral reaction of wrongness and our aesthetic reaction of disgust are responses to the same action. Eaton’s explanation of this phenomenon is that the revulsion generated by synthetic human meat is aesthetic in nature. We are offended and repulsed by the idea but we have no moral reason to be so. Because our revulsion is primarily an aesthetic response to the grotesque, once we have eliminated the moral objections we may have, we are left only with the aesthetic ones. The example of the offense generated by synthetic human meat suggests that what we consider to be our moral sense actually bridges those two responses, and is really made up of both moral and aesthetic senses.

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<sup>168</sup> Marcia Muelder Eaton, “Aesthetics: The Mother of Ethics?”, *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 55 (1997): 356.

<sup>169</sup> Ibid.

There could be two worries here- one, that these responses are just responses to social conditioning, and two, that aesthetic reactions could lead us morally astray (people may feel disgust in response to something that is not morally wrong). Both these objections can be partially conceded to- there is certainly a possibility that some of our moral and aesthetic responses are socially conditioned, and there is also a possibility that our moral and aesthetic intuitions can lead us astray. That some responses may be socially conditioned, and that sometimes our moral or aesthetic intuitions are less than 100% truth-tracking doesn't prove that there's no right or wrong ever to be had in terms of our moral and aesthetic responses though.

Another way we might see our moral and aesthetic sense as interwoven is in how our degree of moral sophistication might interact with our aesthetic sense. Martha Nussbaum gives an account of how what we would typically think of as our aesthetic experiences within the context of novel reading are morally relevant as well- how much we can take away from our reading of literature depends in some way on how well-formed our moral life is, while literary experience is also able to develop our capacity for moral attention and empathy.

For Nussbaum, living a virtuous or moral life is at least in part about correctly interpreting the context of actions and situations and having the ability to recognize and balance nuance and complexity. Acting ethically requires “not simply [an] intellectual grasp of propositions; it is not even simply intellectual grasp of particular facts; it is perception. It is seeing a complex, concrete reality in a highly lucid and richly responsive way”<sup>170</sup>. In fact, this kind of perception is so necessary to Nussbaum that she even argues that “the moral role of rules themselves... can only be shown inside a story that situates rules in their appropriate place

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<sup>170</sup> Martha Nussbaum, *Love's Knowledge: Essays on Philosophy and Literature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 152.

vis-a-vis perceptions”<sup>171</sup> to the extent that an ethical theory will be lacking without the experiences we get from literature. The literary novel, then, is a paradigmatic case of this, with densely textured plots and characters.

Therefore, the attention and evaluation we need to bring to our moral lives and to our reading is roughly equivalent, and the better we are at one, the better we are at the other. Someone insensitive to the moral dimensions of life is likely to be insensitive to many of the literary dimensions of a novel and Nussbaum agrees that “our moral abilities must be developed to a certain degree, certainly, before we can approach this novel at all and see anything in it”<sup>172</sup>. But she also argues that novels can help to develop this capacity for moral attentiveness in the reader. Detached from our personal lives to contemplate a character’s life, we are able to take a “moral position that is favorable for perception”<sup>173</sup>. This is similar to the antecedent discussion of Austen’s novels. While I first argued that the aesthetic and moral merits of Austen’s novels were mutually enriching in terms of the aesthetic experience of her novels, Nussbaum would take this analysis a step further to say that we bring our moral experience to our aesthetic experience and our aesthetic experience to our moral experience. Developing one can help us to develop the other, because both domains draw on a roughly equivalent set of skills. Considering their roughly equivalent set of skills as well as the ways in which experience in one domain has the possibility to enrich or develop our experience in the other domain suggests another way in which our moral and aesthetic sense are intertwined.

One worry about this sort of view, particularly from a Platonic perspective, is that novel reading will give us the wrong kind of sympathies and that our sympathy will overpower our

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<sup>171</sup> Nussbaum, *Love’s Knowledge*, 160.

<sup>172</sup> Nussbaum, *Love’s Knowledge*, 162.

<sup>173</sup> Ibid.

more coolly rational instincts. However, Nussbaum isn't promoting a sort of general, wide-ranging sympathy to be applied to anything and everything; rather, a more narrow form of sympathy that teaches us how to apply our moral principles in actual (or close to actual) contexts.

### **-- What This View Is Not: Aestheticism**

However, the view that our moral and aesthetic senses overlap to the point where true goodness and true beauty converge should not simply collapse into a sort of aestheticism where we do not “commit mass murder because doing so would be tacky”<sup>174</sup> or attempt to become more moral by going to art museums and the symphony. In the first case, of characterizing moral actions purely in aesthetic terms, it becomes easy to miss the ways in which morally good actions seemingly lack a beautiful appearance or morally bad actions may have a beautiful appearance. In the second case, beauty is only being recognized for its immediate sensory experience.

Characterizing moral actions in purely aesthetic terms runs into a number of problems. On one hand, many morally good actions don't seem beautiful at all, in fact they seem the opposite. Consider someone who pushes someone else out of the way of a car, but is then hit by the car themselves and ends up with their internal organs splattered all across the pavement- this seems to be a superlatively good action and yet rather gruesome in place of beautiful. Yet it doesn't seem like we should refrain from these kinds of morally good actions because they do not have a beautiful appearance. On the other hand, one can imagine someone gracefully slitting

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<sup>174</sup> Kosman, “Beauty and the Good: Situating the Kalon”, 344.

someone else's throat, but again this appearance doesn't seem like enough to make the action morally good.

However, on the extensional equivalence view, morally good actions should have a corresponding beautiful appearance if they are truly morally good, which is problematic for the example of having one's blood and guts spilled across the street in a self-sacrificial act, or in the example of a well-executed knife crime. In the first case, though, while the immediate result appears horrific, a full understanding of the moral goodness of the action should lead us to have a sort of transformative perspective, where we do view the action as beautiful. Compare the action of self-sacrifice to vehicular manslaughter. The result and its appearance might be the same (car striking person, blood everywhere) but no transformative perspective is possible in the second case. While the action of pushing someone out of the path of a car appears beautiful, a driver recklessly running someone over with their car does not.

On the other hand, it also does not seem like simply being exposed to beauty is enough to make you morally good. While the experience of beauty should give us some access to goodness or at least be a potential stepping stone to lead us along to higher beauties, it is not essential that experiences of beautiful things will lead us to moral goodness. Plato is again instructive in pointing out that the "lovers of sights and sounds"<sup>175</sup> are those that profess to love beauty but "run around to every chorus"<sup>176</sup>. In doing so, they are concerned only with the immediate sensual manifestations of beauty and miss the substance of beauty. They are not interested in the nature of beautiful things, or how they could be led to higher forms of beauty (because they are concerned only with appearances which they only find manifested in the lower forms of beauty),

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<sup>175</sup> Bloom, *The Republic*, 475d.

<sup>176</sup> Ibid.



or in actually contemplating and experiencing the particular beautiful things. For the “lovers of sights and sounds”, beauty provides immediate gratification and nothing more, and will yield no lasting moral effect. While a painting or a symphony has the possibility to be a transformative experience of beauty and goodness, merely looking without seeing or attempting to accumulate experiences unreflectively will not lead one to become morally good on its own.

For beauty to give us any sort of access to goodness, it seems three things must be present<sup>177</sup>. Firstly, a beautiful appearance; secondly, a beautiful nature; and thirdly, the appropriate sort of experience. This third component is what explains why the mere experience of beautiful things is not enough. Much like the transformative perspective mentioned before in relation to morally good actions that may appear ugly on the surface, beautiful things have to be approached with an attentiveness to their nature and not only to their appearance. To relate back to an example used by Nussbaum, reading *Hard Times* won’t automatically teach us about “compassion”<sup>178</sup> and/or “develop moral capacities without which citizens will not succeed in making reality out of the normative conclusions of any moral or political theory, however excellent”<sup>179</sup>. For the reader to be affected in these certain ways requires a certain level of understanding and engagement with the text. Beautiful appearances have the possibility to lead us on to engage with objects that have a beautiful appearance and a beautiful nature, and ultimately lead to an experience of goodness, but only if they are experienced in the right way.

### **Implications for Art**

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<sup>177</sup> Maybe only two depending on how you count- a beautiful appearance lacking a beautiful nature might have still have the ability to lead the viewer into more beautiful things- those with a beautiful appearance and a beautiful nature.

<sup>178</sup> Martha Nussbaum, *Poetic Justice: The Literary Imagination and Public Life* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995), 11.

<sup>179</sup> Nussbaum, *Poetic Justice*, 12.

This has implications for art as well. From Fra Angelico's *Annunciation* to Mozart's *Requiem*, great works of art are often considered to be paradigmatic examples of beauty. But the temptation with any work of art is to reduce it only to its beautiful appearance. This is a problem that was certainly recognized by Plato, evidenced by his disparaging name for people who reduce art to only its beautiful appearances as "lovers of sights and sounds"<sup>180</sup>.

This is a twofold problem- not only can people be taken in by deceptively beautiful appearances, a focus on beautiful appearances can also lead to a shallow appreciation of beauty that is not concerned with the nature or content of a work. Returning to the ladder of love analogy in *Symposium*, while true beauty combines beauty and goodness, an exclusive focus on appearances leads to an impoverished understanding of beauty which can affect our understanding of goodness as well.

Because things with only a beautiful appearance and without a beautiful nature represent the lowest level of beauty, mistaking beautiful appearances for beauty itself can lead one to simultaneously mistake the appearance of goodness for goodness itself, while in the case of a beautiful nature without a beautiful appearance, an exclusive focus on appearances can cause one to miss the deeper, non-physical beauty that is necessary to bring forth a life of virtue. While we can agree that it would be best for appearances and nature to coincide, it is necessary for a viewer to be able to discern between a beautiful appearance and a beautiful nature, particularly since the most beautiful things are those that may not even have what we would usually consider an "appearance" (considering the higher rungs of the ladder of love).

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<sup>180</sup> Bloom, *The Republic*, 475d.

If the highest levels of beauty are not necessarily physical and not necessarily even appearances, then taking artworks as our primary examples of beauty can cut us off from higher beauties, and lead us astray to the point where the higher levels of beauty aren't recognized as beauty, and neither are the higher levels of goodness.

Similarly, works of art that are not even beautiful on the level of appearance risk being thought of as beautiful when they're not, due to their membership in the class of artworks, but in fact do not even represent a lower level of beauty. Whereas artworks with only a beautiful appearance can at least set people on a path to higher beauties, non-beautiful artworks do nothing of the kind while also potentially misinforming a viewer's sense of beauty because the artwork is supposed to be beautiful by association due to its membership in the class of artworks.

This is not to say that it doesn't matter whether works of art are beautiful or not. Artworks have a significant opportunity to manifest beauty, and even if they only represent a lower level of beauty, the lower levels are still important for drawing people towards higher levels. While we shouldn't place undue emphasis on artworks as exemplars of beauty, that doesn't mean we should neglect their potential to be beautiful either.

## Conclusion

In investigating the relationship between goodness and beauty, I began first by examining two different theories of beauty and aesthetic value, the first being Plato's and the second being Roger Scruton's. While the significance of beauty for Plato is explored throughout several dialogues, and articulated in somewhat different ways, beauty clearly holds great importance overall for Plato. However, Plato is highly critical of many of the arts, particularly poetry, which is particularly confusing to contemporary readers who are accustomed to thinking of the arts as paradigmatic examples of beauty.

Continuing with many of Plato's concerns, and focusing on the role of music is Roger Scruton. Scruton examines how the formal features of musical works have an effect on individuals and society as a whole, arguing that we implicitly hear music as movement, and because of this, our primary response to music is dance. Music and their associated forms of dance shape our culture, and as a result, shape how we relate to one another. His conclusions are not uncontroversial, and philosophers like Ted Gracyk have argued that Scruton neglects or misunderstands musical forms and traditions outside of those of Western art music. However, Gracyk's account of the values of popular music depends too much on the listener taking a critical distance to the music and neglects the ways in which music affects us unconsciously.

Both Plato and Scruton give some sort of theory of beauty or aesthetic value that is in some way connected to moral values but neither Plato nor Scruton exactly spell out what they think of as the relationship between goodness and beauty (or in Plato's case, at least not entirely consistently). In Chapter 3, I argue that the relationship between beauty and goodness is best understood as one of extensional equivalence. This of course raises the problem of what to do with things that seem to break that relationship, and do not fit in both categories. One strategy is

to classify these troubling things as merely things that bear a certain resemblance to beauty, but in fact are not actually beautiful. This could be an attractive option in the case of a work like *Triumph of the Will*, where it appears aesthetically beautiful but where the content is morally objectionable. This way, we could reconcile the work's appearance with our discomfort about its content.

However, claiming that these troubling cases only bear a resemblance to beauty, but aren't really beautiful, seems a bit strange, since these troubling cases do indeed appear beautiful. I have proposed that it instead makes more sense to think along the lines of Plato's "ladder of love" analogy in *Symposium*. Things that are apparently beautiful to the senses, that look or sound beautiful, *are* beautiful in fact; that's why they appear so. However, for many things this may just be a lower level of beauty or the beauty of appearance.

Proposing gradations of beauty allows us to recognize beauty in a wide variety of things, and also allows us to reconcile beautiful appearances in something with morally objectionable content. A morally objectionable work with a beautiful appearance is simply an example of a far lower level of beauty than a work whose moral nature and beautiful appearance coincide.

It also explains how 'beautiful' can be used in a more conceptual way, for instance when 'beautiful' is applied to a person's conduct, and helps to bridge the moral and aesthetic domains as the Greek *kalon* does. Beauty should not just be considered on the level of physical appearances, as this ignores the possibility for things (such as laws or knowledge, as Plato would say) to have a beautiful nature. In the truly beautiful object, a beautiful appearance is aligned with a beautiful nature. While this alignment can break down- beautiful appearances can be had without a beautiful nature, and a beautiful nature may not necessarily have a beautiful

appearance- the truest expression of beauty would combine a beautiful appearance with a beautiful nature. Likewise, a truly morally good action would have a beautiful appearance- even if a “transformative perspective” were necessary to see it as beautiful.

In addition to just being a helpful approach to handling counterarguments, examples drawn from Scruton, Eaton, and Nussbaum give us reasons to think that our aesthetic and moral sense are interwoven to a degree that would suggest ‘beautiful’ and ‘good’ do indeed pick out the same sort of objects in their truest sense. From feelings of moral wrongness associated with aesthetic desecration, to aesthetic objections to what we generally only see as moral issues, and the way in which our moral experience can interact with our aesthetic experience, the ways in which our moral and aesthetic sense are connected suggest that the beautiful and the good are really two aspects that converge at the highest moral or aesthetic levels.

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