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Rhyme Against Reason: On the Platonic Theory of Art

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Abstract

In this essay, I trace the influence of Plato on the classical feud between rhyme and reason and investigate Socrates' notion of divinity to sketch out his theory of art. I also draw a general outline of the metaphysics of poetry enfolding artistic inspiration. Finally, I evaluate the unsettled scores between philosophy and poetry.

Keywords: art, metaphysics, ethics, divinity, passions, reason

Beyond Divinity: An Introduction

Poets and poetry were looked upon with suspicion by Plato. The reasons for such suspicion were many. This essay is an explication of the more important ones. To understand Plato's suspicion of poetry, we must come to grips with Socrates' conception of divinity. The notion of divinity fostered by Socrates weighs on his judgment of what constitutes knowledge and why it precludes art. Although his use of the term shifts in meaning across contexts, its implications remain unforgiving for the various art forms.

To fully grasp and analyse his dissatisfaction with poetry, we require an apprehension of the different modes in which the 'divine' element persists in Socrates' philosophy. The semantic bearings of the word recur in at least three distinct yet converging ways: I label these as 'the literal divine', 'the metaphorical divine' and 'the negative divine'.

The discussion on the nature of poetic inspiration in the first sense of the divine is steered by Plato's theistic leanings. For the philosopher, poetry here is a product of the Muses filtered through

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the chain of divine enchantment in a process that is entirely passionate and not in the least rational. I investigate this reason-passion dichotomy in Plato and concede to a variant of the solution that Hume provides against it. I also delve deeper into the seemingly mysterious nature of the skill that hones poetic composition to see whether the puritanical conception of the divine can account for the highs and lows of human creativity.

I further my concerns in the second sense, which, in explaining poetic inspiration, makes an appeal not to the gods but to human instincts and intuitions, and also once again not to reason. In an attempt to discover and explain away the skill that yields poetic results, one is forced to consider the possibility that genius in poetry depends more on certain internal dispositions than on some specific external training.

In the third sense of the divine, I deal with Plato's moral and ethical concerns regarding the power and use of poetry. I address his discontent with poetry's indifference to the pursuit of truth.

Finally, I attempt at making my contribution in bridging the age-old comparison between rhyme and reason.

The Literal Divine

"… it is God who is pre-eminently the measure of all things."[1] (*Plato, Laws*, 716) In one of the shortest dialogues of Plato, *Ion*, we find one of the greatest philosophical critiques of poetry. The act of composing a poetic piece, as observed by Socrates, is an act of divine possession - one that is influenced by the gods in general and the Muses in particular. Anyone invested in reading, interpreting and/or preaching poetry, much like the rhapsode, Ion, gets infected in turn by the poet's artistic frenzy to act as another link in the chain of divine enchantment. The role of reason in such an enterprise is not just deemed insignificant but necessarily viewed as an unnecessary impediment. "A poet, you see, is a light thing, and winged and holy, and cannot compose before he gets inspiration and loses control of his senses and his reason has deserted him. No man, as long as he keeps that, can prophesy or compose." (534b)

In *Phaedrus*, Socrates lists and explains four kinds of divine madness. The one that inspires life in poetry is the third kind –

> "A third kind of possession and madness comes from the Muses: taking a soft, virgin soul and arousing it to Bacchic frenzy of expression in lyric and other forms of poetry, it educates succeeding generations by glorifying myriad deeds of those of the past; while the man who arrives at the doors of poetry without madness from the Muses, convinced that all expertise will make him a good poet, both he and his poetry – the poetry of the sane – are eclipsed by that of the mad, remaining imperfect and unfulfilled" (245a).

In granting the poet madness and with it, perfection, Socrates takes away their claim to reason. Like most philosophers, he maintains the dichotomy between reason and passion.[2] Philosophy is rational while poetry is a passionate enterprise. He assumes that any attempt of reconciliation between the two would be as absurd as conjoining truth with falsity and appearance with reality. But did this supremacy of reason over passions forever hold?

We see in David Hume's '*Of the Influencing Motives of the Will*' that it did not. Hume argues that the faculty of reason has no 'original influence' i.e., it can never motivate one's will to perform any action, be it mortally futile or divinely inspired. Instead, this motivation arises solely out of our passions, particularly those related to pain and pleasure. The only role he assigns to reason is the identification of the various causes and their effects that aid our judgment of whether an action could prove pleasurable or painful. It can in no way excel from here and take the next step to 'oppose passion in the direction of the will'. Only one passion can oppose another passion, reason may only show, in an accurate or misleading way, how either may lead to or deviate us from the experience of exhilaration or affliction. Hume concluded that passions and reason never really contradict each other. This is because the moment we identify, by use of the latter, that the object which we seek cannot be a cause of pleasure, or only seems to be so under false pretence, we immediately become indifferent towards it and therefore no passion provokes any attempt in us for acquiring the same.

Whatever one's objections to Hume's theory may be, it bears the potential to resolve what Plato has called 'the old quarrel between philosophy and poetry' (Plato, *Republic*, 607b). Philosophy stretches the application of our rationality to discern and evaluate reality and existence. Poetry, on the other hand, is driven by the strongest passions to derive pleasure through emotional investment and recreation. The two do not run in opposing directions, as Plato sought to show, one towards the truth and other towards falsity, one towards the Sun and other towards the Shadows. They may run parallelly, but they progress ahead seeking the same goal: the attainment of intellectual and emotional pleasure, relinquishing the misery of intellectual and emotional ignorance.

However, since the key to all actions rests with passions and not reason, does it follow from the same that the key to navigating reality and existence, the philosophical dream, lies with art, in which the force of passions is perhaps the strongest? And does that make the role of philosophy subservient to that of the arts? Hume's famous assertion "Reason is, and ought, only to be the slave of passions, and can never pretend to any other office than to serve and obey them" (pp. 266) gives an upper hand to art and poetry. If reason really is a slave to the passions, wouldn't that make philosophy a slave to art?

Refraining from taking yet such a giant leap of poetic faith, we first investigate the metaphysics of poetry and try to answer Socrates' question to Ion: What is the skill involved in the art of poetry? A charioteer is a better judge of a horse than a doctor; an engineer, a better judge of a bridge than a dentist; a general, a better judge of war than a farmer. Clearly, a poet's skill, if there be one, is not as specific as the given examples. A poem assumes the skill, the essence of that which, what and who it speaks of. This led to Socrates' hypothesis that the poets compose not out of any skill at all. The application of a skill requires the use of reason. But the poets, devoid of reason, make no use of any skill to compose. Aristotle, too, considers poetry to be instinctive. In asserting so, these philosophers reduce poets to mere conduits of divinity whose contribution to their own pieces is merely mechanical.

I have been troubled by Socrates' using the divine element to explain away poetic inspiration, although I have been drawn to the distorted image of the art that Plato exhibits when using 'divinity' in

the third, negative sense. I have always felt that poetry is the most flawed of all art forms. It is impoverished, constantly struggling, hiding, twisting to entertain, falling short, defeated and always at a loss. Fiction, painting and the other creative forms can strive for perfection, but poetry has only ever strived to be simpler.

Like Plato, I see poetry as an art of manipulation, a tool of revolt for the intellectual rebel. There is nothing divine about poetry, not at least in this first sense of the divine under discussion. Would the gods ever want to possess a broken record to deliver the divine melody? So even if Socrates' gods are real, they would want nothing to do with the poets. If an AI does ever become successful in writing a better poem than Yeats, it would only mean that the AI is equipped with all the human flaws which goes against the purpose of inventing AI in the first place. Ideally, therefore, neither a God nor an AI should want to create poetry. It is strictly a human enterprise – something, I think, that could prove greatly beneficial for humanity in the longer run.

Both Socrates' question, "What is the skill of a poet?", and Aristotle's question, "What is the essence of a human being?", have probably the same answer. Empathy. The kind that goes beyond understanding. The kind that inhabits the very thing it seeks to understand. Only a human can empathize with an animal of another species; with a material object; with a star or a planet; with a god, a machine, another human and a devil. I am not sure whether the philosophers never arrived at this answer, or that they inevitably did but however somehow still, failed to recognize it. They, instead, mistook poetry to be about 'imitation' rather than 'empathy'. They saw poets as pretending to be what they are not, as if the one yearning of the human mind has not been to reach out in understanding of that which it is not.

The Metaphorical Divine

The metaphor is probably the most popular device of a poet. Socrates often used this very device against the poet, especially when calling the artist's inspired state 'divine'. The epistemic state of knowledge, the most reverent one in Socrates' rational philosophy, has a direct correlation to the acquisition of truth. The philosopher ardently denies this state to the poet because he believes the latter to be far

removed from reality, and with it, from that which is true.[3] But, as stressed before, the poets were once respected and celebrated individuals in the ancient Greek society, not madmen without a clue how to account for their art. And so, the question that remained for Socrates to settle was this: how did the poets, great in stature as Homer and Hesiod, compose at all without any access to the truth? His most polite answer that sought to preserve the dignity of the grand panjandrums came to this: they create not when in a state of knowledge, but when in a state of inspiration. The metaphorical word that he used to match the renown of these poets with this state he claimed them to be in was 'divine'.

The line between the literal divine and the metaphorical divine may often get blurry in Socrates' philosophy. After all, myths in religion are only metaphors for ethical dilemmas and dealings. A non-theistic interpretation can still be made that separates the literal from the metaphorical when the difference between the two is not too obvious. The divine state that does not appeal to god(s), must make one to instinct and intuition, since it cannot turn to reason. I have already argued that artistic creation cannot be mechanical since it requires the conscious effort of empathising. This may not immediately solve our problem of accounting for poetic inspiration. To see why this is so, we turn to Aristotle, who, as we mentioned earlier, seemingly shared Socrates' belief in the impulsive nature of poetic feats. In his Introduction to *Poetics*, Malcolm Heath writes,

> "Human beings produce, among other things, poems, and the production of poems too can be a *tekhnê*; it is an activity with its own intrinsic rationale, and it can be rendered intelligible. This does not mean that poets themselves necessarily understand what they are doing. In the *Poetics,* Aristotle does not treat it as a matter of any consequence whether a given poet has a reflective understanding of his craft … he leaves open the question whether Homer's grasp of correct plot-structure was due to *tekhnê* or to instinct (51a24) … In his discussion of *tekhnê* at the beginning of the *Metaphysics* Aristotle notes that unreflective experience may produce the same result as *tekhnê* (981a12-15). In general, the ability to do something well does not depend on understanding, nor

> does understanding necessarily imply an ability to do it well. A joiner taught to make a piece of furniture in a particular way may do it perfectly, even if he does not understand the reasons why that is the best way to do it; he may even do it better than a colleague who has more understanding but less manual dexterity.
>
> There are reasons why this principle might apply to poetry, especially. Poets must be able to project themselves into the emotions of others; natural talent, or even a touch of insanity, are necessary for this (55a30-4). Moreover, metaphor (which Aristotle regards as the most important feature of poetic language) depends on the ability to perceive similarities; this, he says, is a natural gift and cannot be taught. (59a4-8)"

The fact that the poet composes to possess an object of interest tells us *what* exactly a poet aims to do in and with her creations, and *why* she does it the way she does it, but unfortunately, it does not shed much light on *how* she does it. Sure, she does not do it mechanically like a machine producing an output, nor does she do it tied to the strings controlled by the whims of a god. I think that much we have established. She must do it out of a human desire rooted in the human instinct that Socrates believed could not be explained. The metaphorical 'divine' places the source of poetic inspiration in the poet's own natural dispositions. In order to fix a technical device, one needs to know how the device operates, but in order to write a good sonnet, the good poet need not even know what a sonnet is. She just needs to pick the pen up and write it. Once we know the details about the internal functioning of a technical device, we may take our chances fixing it. But knowing the structure and samples of the greatest sonnets ever written may never inspire us to write one ourselves. If a skill is something that can be taught and learnt, like a play of tricks, then the only true magic that the world has must be that which we experience in art.

The ancient philosopher and the modern poet at least seem to have this much in common – they both agree that poets are born, not made. Thus, the source of poetic inspiration can probably never be accounted for. But that is not necessarily a limit of the art, but a limit of explanation. All explanations can only go so far and have to stop

somewhere. This is the case in both why-cases and how-cases. Two people who have acquired the same skill from the same source may, as a matter of fact, often still differ in their application of it. Following all the instructions for a recipe from a website, in the exact same chronology and manner, I may still end up with something that tastes in some way, if not drastically, different from what the actual cook could produce using the same method and combination of ingredients that they posted online. One could explain this difference by saying which of the ingredients I used in the excess or in the deficit or which step did I miss or overdo. But if one were to ask why I used or did it so, I may have no answer except that I just did. This could hardly mean that my meal is not a result of my conscious effort but my 'inspired state', a stroke of genuine luck or a typical case of 'divinity' at work. If one may grant that luck is involved in this case, then one can hardly do much to prevent the presence of this luck from extending to every case.

How do kids learn a language? The answer cannot be by consciously employing a sophisticated use of their rationality, the way a philosopher claims that all knowledge is acquired. Linguists as well as language philosophers battle over the theories that seek to explain this linguistic phenomenon, but simply because no explanation fits too well in illustrating how it is that kids learn their languages does not mean that they don't 'know' what they are talking about when speaking in one. Again, it would be comical to say that they do so in an 'inspired state', out of sheer dumb luck or under the influence of the divine.

How does a philosopher philosophise? Let's assume the rationalist in Plato answers that he does so by making use of reason. How does he make this use of reason? I believe that the answer cannot be furthered than that he does. To ask how it is that a poet can compose is asking too much from the poet. How does the Demiurge create, from pre-existing matter, this world in the image of the Forms? Plato answers that through erôs, or desire. It would be stretching too much to further ask of him how is it that the Demiurge can make use of this desire to create the world. He just can. Similarly, it should be enough to say that a poet composes out of her desire to empathetically understand an object. Asking how this empathy

works in such understanding is unnecessary and begging the question.

Artists have earned themselves the reputation of the crazed, which has put them on the same list as other minds of the genius kind who have left their timeless impact on various fields, including science, mathematics and astronomy. It has always been difficult for mankind to account for a genius. This is why most remain misunderstood, in misery and even in oblivion. Only rarely has anyone sailed through life without encountering some resistance from their immediate surroundings, whether it is from within one's own circle or one's own self. Socrates himself was executed because the society he lived in felt threatened by his brilliance. Sylvia Plath, perhaps consumed by her own ingenuity, had to take her own life.

If I had to answer which human instinct or what intuition compels a poet to compose; to possess another object, seek it in such thorough understanding at the cost of abandoning herself, then I would say it is this: pain. This goes with what I said earlier about passions in art being guided by intellectual and emotional pleasure, avoiding the misery of intellectual and emotional ignorance. We often hear the common phrase that calls art an escape. The escape is indeed made, or sought to be made – speaking in Humean terms - from the original passion of pain to the contradicting passion of pleasure. Let us look into the nature of this artistic pain and poetic pleasure to better understand the workings of the passions in art.

The artistic pain stems from a craving for connection; from the solitude that multiplies when one mixes in with a crowd but that doesn't shrink back when one is alone; from having too much to say but no way to say it and no patient ear that volunteers to hear through it all as one struggles to articulate the right words or the right emotion or both. The destructive self-awareness was not absent in the poets and artists of Socrates' time. Tragedy, one may be reminded, was the soul or essence of Greek drama that poured well into the poems of Homer, whom Plato himself has called 'the first tragedian'. While Greek tragedy differs greatly from modern tragedy, human suffering being separated from the suffering of the celestials, agony and anguish continue to play a dominant role in art and poetry.

The odd thing about the role that the passion of pain plays in art is that while it is usually viewed as a deterrent in every other human endeavour, it is favoured as a desideratum in the artistic world. It is the fuel that the artist draws from. We receive pleasure from art when and because it caters to our said craving for connection, when it relates to our own suffering. Moving from pain to pleasure in art is not the same as moving from something undesirable to desirable, but from a process to the end result. Without the process, the result will be naught. The artistic pain is mixed with artistic pleasure, a combination that I find to be very poetic, unlike Socrates, who regarded any pleasure that is mixed with pain to be 'impure'. Aldous Huxley remarkably quotes, "Perhaps it's good for one to suffer. Can an artist do anything if he's happy? Would he ever want to do anything? What is art, after all, but a protest against the horrible inclemency of life?" Some philosophers object to art blurring the distinction between pain and pleasure, Plato being one of them, a moral concern which I will address soon.

The madness ascribed to the artist in the face of sanity is reversible and can be turned into sanity in the face of madness. Vincent van Gogh, in his room at Saint-Paul de Mausole asylum, could come to grips with mental stability only when his fingers simultaneously gripped a paintbrush. Art can keep you alive when everything, including philosophy, drives you into meaninglessness. In a way then, artistic madness in not a step away from sane reason as Socrates thought the case to be, but, on the contrary, a return to it. This realisation of art being therapeutic is now widely recognised.

The Negative Divine

Plato's grievance with poetry, one may justly claim, lay not in its nature so much but in its apparent claim to the truth. Passion, emotion and empathy are infamous obscurers of truth. To make matters worse for the ancient thinker, they are also bullies of moral values. All art is damaging because it can show that Good and its dovetail, Beauty, can belong to the Bad just the same. Art glorifies the human flaws that would otherwise be condemned. In *The Fire and The Sun: Why Plato Banished the Artists*, Murdoch explicates this view as follows –

> "Art or imitation may be dismissed as 'play', but when artists imitate what is bad they are adding to the sum of badness in the world; and it is easier to copy a bad man than a good man, because the bad man is various and entertaining and extreme, while the good man is quiet and always the same. Artists are interested in what is base and complex, not in what is simple and good. They induce the better part of the soul to 'relax its guard'. Thus images of wickedness and excess may lead even good people to indulge secretly through art feelings which they would be ashamed to entertain in real life… Art both expresses and gratifies the lowest part of the soul, and feeds and enlivens base emotions which ought to be left to wither."

This 'lowest part of the soul' is provided with the analogy of the dark horse by Socrates, and its counterpart with the white. The first symbolises our passions, brute and wild; the second represents intelligent reason, the more controlled, hence superior of the two. The human soul, being the charioteer in charge of both, is expected to prevent the passions from taking control over reason, but not vice versa. Failing to do this could lead to dire, fatal consequences, including corruption of the soul as well as the society and ultimately, to lives wasted. Art, much to Plato's alarm, aided these consequences and also barred their prevention.

I, on one hand, have accepted Hume's critique of the reason-passion dichotomy and, relatedly, the ascendancy of reason over passions. On the other hand, I also agree with Plato that human flaws are the playfield of art, and the one aim of free art is to show the prospect of morality to be a sham. The nature of the passions at work in art have been already discussed, the passion of pain said to play a significant role in it. We now take a look at the nature of passions in Socrates' system, see why he trusted truth with reason and not the passions; why with the rigorous discipline of philosophy and not the vehement art of poetry.

In Plato's dialogue, *Philebus*, we see Socrates measure the good life against the limits of reason instead of the 'indeterminate' passion of pleasure that is described as having no 'definite beginning, middle or end' and hence limitless. Pleasure, for him, can be good only so

far as it is controlled rationally by 'beauty, proportion and truth'. Pain, on the other hand, is a mere pollutant which, when mixed with pleasure, makes it 'impure'. Pain is the 'dissolution of the natural state' while pleasure is its restoration. Both pleasure and pain, in the excessive, are the worst diseases of the mind (*Timaeus*, 86).

Even between the two passions, pleasure and pain, one weighs out the other. Socrates gives to pleasure, in Hume's discourse, the position to have an 'original influence' while pain is the 'contradicting' passion. The natural harmonious state is what is pleasurable, it is only when a disruption occurs in this natural state that we experience pain. When the disruptive element is removed and harmony restored, we go back to our pleasurable selves. In art, I have proposed that the reverse is the case. The artist is in a constant state of disruption and a mood of chaos. The artist creates and the poet composes to make an attempt at restoring some semblance of harmony to their fragmented experiences.

Socrates does not view beauty as something extravagant, but as that which is simple and pure. This is so because beauty represents the truth, and truth represents the reality, and the reality is again simple and pure. "Those which have to do with the colours we call beautiful, with figures, with most scents, with musical sounds: in short, with anything which, since it involves imperceptible, painless lack, provides perceptible, pleasant replenishment which is uncontaminated by pain." (51b, *Philebus*)

The good and the beautiful, and the simple and the pure and the true, cannot dawn upon us through any divine possession or inspiration; our ethical sense cannot be delivered to us by divine madness, but by reason alone. I call this 'the negative divine'. Art is incapable and unworthy of the prize of truth, not despite its divine origin but because of it. Socrates' aesthetic sense draws heavily from his moral sense. Since the passions that operate in art are extreme and therefore uncontrolled, he forbids their association with the truth.

Many philosophers defending art and poetry with the hope of finding a place for the same within the domain of philosophy try to display a forced connection between art and truth. The popular view is that art is a reflection of ourselves, best articulated by Murdoch:

"Art, especially literature, is a great hall of reflection where we can all meet and where everything under the sun can be examined and considered." The best way to learn about humanity, they say, is through a closer inspection of art.

These attempts, though tempting, fail to convince me. Plato's idea that art is indifferent to the truth (he would rather say that truth is indifferent to art) seems to be the correct view, though not the final. Art is not a reflection, art is a mirror – more specifically, it is the Mirror of Erised.[4] It reflects not us as we are, but as living our deepest, most desperate desires at the very surface. It exaggerates what is bad as the worst and what is good as the best, with the power to shade the worst as the best and the best as the worst; the good as the bad and the bad as the good. Art's modality consists in multiplying innumerable impossible worlds. The quest of creating art can only begin when one's obsession with truth is forsaken.

A possible answer to the still hanging question – is philosophy subservient to art? – could be this: when it concerns the acquisition of truth, no, it most certainly is not. The esteemed pursuit of the actual reality can only be undertaken in philosophy. Art, if anything, only leads us astray from this chase. Therefore, for all its merits and divine inheritance, art, especially the art of poetry, is still censored and outcast.

The 18th century poet and philosopher, Friedrich Nietzsche, did not think this answer to be good enough. Being the 'self-styled first honest philosopher', as Rosen calls him, Nietzsche made a radical move against the precious bounty of truth that the philosophers before him were after. He assigned no meaning or purpose to existence and creation. He refuted morality, recognizing it as a mirage in the desert of life's chaos. The reign of truth is reduced to redundancy. For Nietzsche, art is paramount, art is 'worth more than the truth', we need art to save us 'lest we perish of the truth' (KSA 16 [40] 13:500).

Though he does not refer to Hume, Nietzsche also expresses his deep discontent over the reason-passion dichotomy. In *The Birth of Tragedy*, he compares the creation of art with the reproduction process. Just as it requires two partners to procreate, the conceiving of art requires both reason, which he calls 'the Apollonian', and the

passions that he groups under 'the Dionysian'. Socrates' view of art is thus shown to be partial and incomplete since he ignores its rational element and undermines the power of its passionate aspect.

Nietzsche's take on art is particularly interesting because it is not burdened with the unnecessary concern for truth, search for meaning or struggle for purpose. He recognised art to be an illusion, but at the same time, indispensable. It is a fancy wrap for an ugly gift, a shiny casket for the resting dead, a silk sheet for a straw mattress. The philosophers have been gravely mistaken to shed it as a layer of dust on the diamond of truth.

There is a way for us to avoid the extreme Nietzschean stance without abandoning it. Forbearing getting into the nature of truth, which Nietzsche believed is not designed to fit the human intellect perfectly and therefore can never be wholly grasped, we can still maintain that art precedes truth, whatever this truth may be. My reason for this assertion is simple. Truth is avoidable, art is not.

It is not the abundance of art that makes it inescapable. It is the inescapability of art that makes it abundant. We perceive art not when we begin to read a story. It is already there in the stretch of the cloth that wraps around and binds the book, the smell of old or new in the pages crisp or damp, in the perfection of printed letters, in all the spaces of all the borders and those between the words, in the permanent stain of the blank ink poured on the parchment's smooth feel. There is art in the way that one holds a pencil, the way in which one strolls, or stands or chases after their pet dog. Art is in the way that the food is arranged on our plate, in the bite of an apple and in the grip around a tinted glass of wine. The presupposition of space is central to most major philosophies, including Plato's theory of creation. It is the presupposition of art that is central to mine and is arguably so even for Nietzsche. Behind the veil of art, nothing remains. The truth is inextricably embedded in art. Copernicus preferred his own theory over Ptolemy's because he considered the latter's to be clumsy, lacking symmetry and beauty. Plato, despite his hard attempts, could not do away with art or kill the artist in himself. Even the primitive man, limited in every aspect, could not be stopped from turning his cave into a canvas.

The line that thus separates pain from pleasure, good from bad and true from false is made ambiguous in art. This is accurate and hardly a complaint. What we consider pleasurable, good and true is widely debated upon and subject to constant change. But these battles are fought on the uncertain grounds of art, not against it. Plato himself set no clear and defined limits to beauty, proportion and truth. He does not answer for when exactly does something stop being beautiful and start being ugly, how precise an addition do we need to make to something proportionate for it to blow out of proportion, and how many contradicting evidences does a theory need to finally stop being true and start being false?

Conclusion

Does it now follow from the above account that art subsumes philosophy? Though this seems to be unmistakably apparent, it is however not the direct conclusion that I would like to draw.

Poetry and philosophy, hitherto viewed as irreconcilable parties in contention, are not so independent of each other as one may otherwise judge them to be. Both are different in important respects, but neither is superior to the other. Just as we need our senses as well as our reason to acquire knowledge, we need both philosophy and poetry to get a complete experience of life. There is no such thing as philosophy without art because every philosopher has to make use of literary tools to argue their case; nor can there be art without any creative contemplation and philosophical musing. F.M. Cornford acknowledges this in *The Unwritten Philosophy* where he states that the best commentary on Plato's Symposium is to be found in Dante's Divine Comedy.

The high pedestal standing on which the philosopher looks down on poetry has a false foundation. The neat grids into which he divides the world and whose squares he fills with opposing entities can never cover everything entirely. Art is less arbitrary but all inclusive. Reality is not really so simple and pure. It is utterly complex, twisted and intense. There are no grids but rough patches, the edges of which the human intellect tries its best to even, but to do so without leaving something out is too difficult a task at hand

for philosophy and the other sciences. But art can lend a helping hand, not just a consoling shoulder.

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Endnotes

[1] Against Protagoras who maintained that man is the measure of all things.

[2] I use 'madness' and 'passion' interchangeably because I believe Socrates did not distinguish between the two.

[3] I hint here at Plato's Forms.

[4] From the popular stories of J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* series.

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