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The question of artistic truth: preparations for a critique of non-discursive reason

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THE QUESTION OF ARTISTIC TRUTH

Preparations for a Critique of Non-Discursive Reason

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Thesis to obtain the degree of Master of Arts at the University of Amsterdam

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ποιμένες ἄγραυλοι, κάκ' ἐλέγχεα, γαστέρες οἶον, ἴδμεν ψεύδεα πολλὰ λέγειν ἐτύμοισιν ὁμοῖα,
ἴδμεν δ' εὖτ' ἐθέλωμεν ἀληθέα γηρύσασθαι.

Hesiod

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INTRODUCTION

The Roundabout Way

On what lines will you look, Socrates, for a thing of whose nature you know nothing at all? Pray, what sort of thing, amongst those that you know not, will you treat us to as the object of your search? Or even supposing, at the best, that you hit upon it, how will you know it is the thing you did not know?

Plato, *Meno* (80d)

This thesis aims to raise a question. It does not pretend to answer it directly. However, as is well-known, one cannot raise a significant question without determining the horizon of its possible answer. For that matter, the rhetoric of *Meno* is convincing: how could one ever search for something that one does not know? As one can only answer a question by asking it first, it seems that one can also only ask a question by having answered it already. In a Socratic spirit, however, one might object to *Meno* that this quasi-modest objective of ‘merely raising a question’, although not altogether free of intellectual pretensions, might function as a non-dogmatic mode of answering the question at stake.

The present thesis certainly requires such a non-dogmatic method. For its subject matter is *artistic truth*; which, as I will explain below, is an intellectual value rooted in a non-discursive mode of thought. When searching for the truth about truth, thinking about thought, discursively reflecting upon the non-discursive, or speaking about the unspeakable – when involved in such paradoxical endeavours, philosophy is at odds with an all too linear approach. For such ambitions it might hold that, in the words of Walter Benjamin, ‘Methode ist Umweg’ (1963: 7); for as the *μετὰ ὁδός*, ‘the road to take’, cannot be a straight route, the only way is the roundabout way. Amongst the various non-dogmatic methods available in the history of philosophy, the present thesis takes the Socratic-dialectic detour: only the intellectual process

Introduction: The Roundabout Way

of posing the question, and by extension of criticising the question (cf. Adorno 1967: 7), can be an eligible way to answer the question.

The question I am about to raise is an ancient question. That means that, in a certain sense, the question belongs to the ancient world. Furthermore, it means there must be a reason for raising it anew. In this thesis, I therefore aim to demonstrate, first, that the question of artistic truth is raised rather than answered by Plato (part two); second, that this question is extended rather than solved by Aristotle's attempt to answer it (part three); and, third, that partly as a consequence of this Aristotelian heritage, the question is currently absent in contemporary aesthetics, yet needs to be emancipated again (part one). Especially the last claim of this narrative might sound rather dramatic, and it certainly does overlook some interesting exceptions. Yet I do assert that the systematic way I raise the question in the conclusion can help set out a new trajectory for contemporary issues in both aesthetics and epistemology. Before we arrive at this question, however, we need to make a roundabout route and try to answer it first.

1

PRELIMINARY REMARKS

The Emancipation of an Ancient Question

Since Meno was of course right in his scepticism, I want to begin by sketching the horizon of the answer to the question I am about to raise. In this section, therefore, I will first spell out what I precisely mean by ‘artistic truth’. By developing a minimal yet systematic vocabulary, first of ‘truth’ (§1.1.1) and subsequently ‘discourse’ (§1.1.2), I will be able to formulate a first formulation of the question of artistic truth. Second, I will argue that such an account of artistic truth is absent throughout contemporary discussions on aesthetic value (§1.2.1) but nevertheless much needed, especially in the emerging field of artistic research (§1.2.2). Third, I will dedicate a few words to why we need to address this question through a study of Plato and Aristotle (1.3).

These reflections may be too unconventionally substantial to be ‘preliminary remarks’ – for each of the following subsections would deserve a thesis of its own. Moreover, some of the following thoughts may only become fully clear toward the end of this thesis. Yet this preliminary sketch is necessary in order to make transparent with what expectations, presuppositions, purposes, discourse, in short, from which horizon we enter the ancient debate. Only in this way we can get ahead of Meno.

1.1 Definition of the Question of Artistic Truth

§1.1.1 Truth as a Value of Thought

How does one pose a sincere question? To be sure, one must neither pretend to start from nowhere nor presuppose a fully determined conclusion. Hence, in order to keep to the middle of both naïve self-forgetfulness and blind self-conceitedness, I will depart from an account of truth that is substantial yet as open as possible. Although particular decisions are unavoidable,

the following remarks provide only a minimal (and even incomplete) understanding of truth, mainly in order to collect some vocabulary and conceptual building blocks with which I can work in this thesis. For this reason, I will not engage with other scholars in this subsection. Instead, I aim to explicate something that we always already understand when we use the word 'truth', and which I seek to construe in a way that is consistent with as many theories of truth as possible.

In short, regarding truth in general, both within and outside of the arts, I assume that:

- (1) truth is a *value*; that is, an intensification of meaning;
- (2) truth is an *intellectual* value; that is, a value attributed to *thought* broadly construed;
- (3) truth is attributed to thought if *the form of the thought enhances one's understanding of the content of the thought*.

With the first assumption, I aim to clear up a certain confusion in our daily use of the term 'truth'. Consider that we say that 'six is the truth of three plus three', as well as 'it is true that three plus three equals six'. This shows that, on the one hand, truth may refer to that which we call true, i.e. the object of a truth judgement, the represented content of a true representation. And on the other, that 'truth' may refer to that which expresses the truth, i.e. the true representation. Apparently, the word truth has an ontological and a cognitive usage. For the ontological function, I shall use the singular noun with an article or the plural noun: 'a truth', 'the truth', '(the) truths'. For the cognitive function I shall use the adjective 'true' or, as an abstracted being-true, the singular noun without an article: 'truth'.

By understanding truth as a value, I primarily focus on its cognitive usage. After all, a value is more accurately described as something that *applies to* the world, rather than something that *exists in* the world. Next, I will understand this 'world' primarily in semantic terms, so that I assume that a value always applies to a meaning. This meaning, then, I understand to be representational – by which, at this point, I intend to say nothing more than that every meaning presupposes a *twoness*, namely of a representation and something represented.¹ So, in short, I primarily consider truth as a value ascribed to a representation (if the representation

¹ The relation between both, marked by the prefix 're', will be one the main concerns in the thesis following this part.

represents the represented in a true way), rather than considering the represented as *the* truth of the representation.

But, what kind of value is truth? To what sort of meaning does it apply? My second assumption is that truth is an *intellectual* value. In a certain sense, the value of truth must be distinguishable from, for instance, moral values (e.g. justice), religious values (e.g. piety) or hedonic values (e.g. pleasure). To be sure, as Nietzsche, Foucault and many others have shown, truth cannot be fully separated from a moral, religious and hedonic meaning. Yet suppose that moral values are generally about the world understood in deeds or dispositions; and hedonic values about the world understood through the gratification of the senses; and religious values about beliefs or rites. Then, the intellectual value of truth could be said to apply to *thought* broadly construed, for instance, to forms of knowledge – e.g. a belief, proposition, idea or theory – or to thought processes – such as a symbolic transformation or a phenomenological disclosure.

Then, for the representational meaning of every thought I distinguish:

- (1) its material, i.e. the *medium* that *bears* the thought,
- (2) its content, i.e. *what* the thought represents (what it is *about*),
- (3) and its form, i.e. *how* the thought's material represents the content.

Accordingly, with regard to truth, I distinguish a *truth bearer* – which is a thought contained in some material, such as a sentence, a theory or perhaps a work of art. This thought is then said to bear truth if it represents the represented in a true way. This 'way' or mode of representing I call *truth form*, and that which is represented I call *truth content*.² If one asks after the truth in a practical context, one often asks after the content – 'what is *the* truth?' If one asks the philosophical question about the nature of truth, however, one asks what *form* the material must have in order to make its content true. Thus, with regard to the truth conditions of the form of thought, philosophers have formulated their theories of identity, correspondence, coherence, etc.

Since a representation is not necessarily valued in any way, a thought is of course not necessarily true. When a representation is valued in general, we can say that its meaning is somehow 'intensified'. That is, when I call this rather than another representation 'beautiful',

² On the basis of the content, one could further divide, for instance, 'moral truths' and 'scientific truths', but these do not denote different truth forms, but only the different contents of value judgements.

'good' or 'true', I perceive it as having a higher meaning. In the particular case of the intellectual value of truth, I conceive of the specific form of this meaning intensification as an *enhancement of understanding*. That is, the minimal and general truth criterion that I assume is that the form of the truth material is true if it enhances our understanding of the truth content. I believe this condition is consistent with both canonical accounts of truth as the correctness of correspondence, coherence or convention, and with theories that conceptualise truth along the lines of pluralism, pragmatism or disclosure. In all these theories, truth's cognitive function can be characterised as an enhancement of understanding, and untruth as a deceit or concealment of understanding.

With this minimal condition, we still do not have a theory of truth. For when and how a representation enhances or deceives one's understanding is still unclear. However, the proposed vocabulary does allow us to reformulate the question of artistic truth in a more precise way. Namely, what intellectual form enables artistic thought material to enhance one's understanding of the represented meaning?

§1.1.2 Artistic Truth as a Value of Non-Discursive Thought

The articulation of the question of artistic truth above reveals the primary challenge at stake in this thesis. For, following our conceptual outset, it only makes sense to speak about truth in the arts if we can conceive of an artwork as (signifying) a process of *thought*. That is, similar to the way in which we may value an artwork for its function in religious rites or for the morality of the actions that created it, we may value an artwork for the intellectual thought, the process of understanding that occurs in and through its appearance.

Throughout the history of philosophy, however, artworks have mostly not been studied as modes of thought. On the one hand, this might be because the subject of art is traditionally studied as an isolated issue within the discipline of aesthetics, rather than approached through a comprehensive theory of epistemology, metaphysics or logic. Accordingly, philosophers mostly approach the value of art as a source or result of either (formal) beauty, (disinterested) pleasure, or (emotional) expression (cf. §1.2.1). To be sure, already since Alexander Baumgarten's *scientia cognitionis sensitivae*, aestheticians have studied artworks in terms of their cognitive potential as well. Yet such aesthetic analyses almost always explain artistic

cognition along the rather irrationalist lines of, for instance, immediate intuition, pure feeling or metaphysical revelation. With a few exceptions, a theory of artistic *reason* has generally not been the preserve of aestheticians (cf. Langer 1979: 92). Epistemology, on the other hand, has traditionally not been of much help either, because epistemological theories of truth almost exclusively focus on discursive truth (cf. Glanzberg 2011). As I will argue, such theories cannot account for the non-discursive significance that distinguishes the intellectual potential of works of art. What is needed for an account of artistic truth, then, is a theory of truth that applies to non-discursive thought.³

In order to explain ‘non-discursive thought’ in more detail, I need to make another systematic determination on ‘discourse’ here. Drawing inspiration from the work of Susanne K. Langer (1979, esp. sections III-V), I use the term discourse or discursivity to refer to the logical structure of language that enables one, first, to combine words successively into an *assertion* that has a literal meaning which is either correct or incorrect; and, second, to combine these assertions into a reasoning which is either legitimate or illegitimate. By virtue of a discursive mode of thought, we are thus able to organise and understand the world through general concepts and propositions that have an explicit or explicable significance.

We can now apply the term discourse to our tripartite explanation of truth. Accordingly, a discursive truth *bearer* consists mainly of linguistic material, as distinguished from aesthetic bearers such as colours, odours or sounds. The *content* of truth is discursive when it is explicated or explicable into assertions or propositions, such as the content of a newspaper article, employment contract or scientific theory. Non-discursive content, such as the meaning of a piece of instrumental music, is not verbalisable because its meaning is implicit in the form through which it appears (cf. 2.3). Lastly, with a discursive truth *form* I refer to the discursive

³ I need to make two justifications regarding my vocabulary and subject.

First, this thesis does not focus on one art discipline in particular, but addresses ‘art’ in general. Since Charles Batteux’s famous treatise on the unity of the arts, it has been a defining aim of philosophy of art to provide a theory of art (singular) that applies to all arts (plural). Here, my take on that question of unity involves a negative and a semantic approach. That is, I understand the unity of the arts in their non-discursive form of meaning. Art can contain discursive material, discursive content, but it must have at least a partially non-discursive form in order for us to speak of artistic significance.

Second, I prefer to speak of the ‘non-discursive’ rather than any positive equivalents, such as ‘intuition’, ‘aesthetic’ or ‘presentational form’. After all, my starting point in this thesis is necessarily discursive. For the content of this thesis is concerned with notions of truth, reason and knowledge that have been traditionally conceptualised as discursive. Furthermore, this thesis itself is of course written in a discursive form. Hence, I am delineating art from discourse, not the other way around. Working from this discursive point of view, I believe we are best equipped to criticize that point of view.

way in which the material is used in order to represent the content correctly; as for instance, a journalistic report mentions the reported events successively one after another in accordance with propositional narrative rules determining the factuality, relevance and noteworthiness of various details. In general, the conditions of discursive forms of truth are always variants of the value of *correctness*, which is construed ‘bivalently’ (i.e. either correct or incorrect) and explicitly. The non-discursive form of truth, which then might be incorrect and ambivalent, is the subject of the present thesis (Figure 1).⁴

	Material	Content	Form
Discursive	Linguistic	Explicit/literal assertions	Bivalent correctness
Non-discursive	Aesthetic	Implicit/figurative meaning	<i>Question of this thesis</i>

Figure 1

Philosophical theories of truth differ widely, but all commonly conceptualise truth in a discursive context (cf. Zuidervaart 2004: 6), assuming a discursive truth bearer (e.g. a sentence, proposition or belief), a discursive truth content (which is verbalisable in assertive propositions) or a discursive form of bivalent correctness. A theory of non-discursive truth should thus not only focus on non-discursive truth-bearers, for non-discursive material can still bear explicable truth content (e.g. a diagram) and discursive material can still be employed for a non-discursive truth form (e.g. a poem). Neither should it focus on non-discursive truth content, which is unverbalisable and hence probably impossible to study through a discursive philosophical account. The task for philosophy, then, is to study the non-discursive truth form: how can non-discursive material be employed in order to make a non-discursive content true? Through which non-discursive form can an artistic thought enhance our understanding of its implicit content?

⁴ Naturally, something can have both discursive and non-discursive meaning. A diagram, for instance, consists of non-discursive (visual) material, but its content is entirely explicable into propositions. With poetry it is the opposite, for a poem consists of discursive material (words), which partly conveys a discursive content (the used words have a dictionaried, literal meaning), yet this discursive material is used in a non-discursive form, so that it also acquires an non-discursive meaning. Figurative painting, to give a last example, consists partly of literal content, for it depicts nameable objects; but the painting represents these objects with non-discursive material (visual elements) and through a non-discursive form, by which it comes to represent the object in an artistic way. When we read a poem *literally* or only see what is literally depicted in a painting, we are said to miss the meaning of the poem or painting.

1.2 Artistic Truth in Contemporary Aesthetics

The question of artistic truth, understood as an intellectual value of non-discursive thought, relates discontinuously to the tendency in Western thinking to conceive the intellectual as necessarily discursive and the aesthetic as non-rational. In the following, I first demonstrate and specify this claim by arguing that, as an exemplification of this tendency, contemporary analytic discussions on aesthetic value have generally not been concerned with the truth value of art as construed above (§1.2.1). Subsequently, I argue that such an account of artistic truth is needed in the art world, especially with regard to the burgeoning field of artistic research (§1.2.2).

§1.2.1 Aesthetic Cognitivism

In contemporary analytic aesthetics, discussions on ‘aesthetic value’ centre on two questions (e.g. Lopes 2018: 41-43).⁵ Namely, the question of what makes aesthetic values distinctively aesthetic (often called ‘the aesthetic question’), and the question of what makes aesthetic values *valuable* (‘the normative question’). In this section I argue that the debate on aesthetic value may be characterised as follows:

- (1) When the aesthetic question is addressed through a non-discursive conception of artistic significance, the normative question is generally answered through a non-cognitivist account.
- (2) When the normative question is answered through a cognitivist approach, the aesthetic question is mostly answered through a discursive account of artistic significance.
- (3) When aesthetic value is conceived as both cognitivist and non-discursive, the work of art is generally explained as a source of non-propositional knowledge, bearing *a* truth (content), yet without explaining the underlying non-discursive truth *form* of the thought process that renders that content true.

⁵ There is of course a difference between the question of the value of art and that of aesthetic value. However, as most theories of aesthetic value deal solely with art, I will use the theories of aesthetic value here insofar as they are about art. When the difference becomes relevant, I will make an explicit distinction.

Correspondingly, by mapping out the academic field in this way, I aim to raise the question of

- (1) a cognitivist account
- (2) of a non-discursive
- (3) form of truth.

Let me begin with the first characterisation. The most dominant view throughout the discussions on artistic value is aesthetic hedonism (Van der Berg 2020), according to which artworks are valuable as a source of pleasure.⁶ Versions of the hedonist approach to artistic value vary widely, depending on their understanding of the nature of aesthetic pleasure. On one side of the spectrum, one finds theories that understand an artwork's power to please its audience simply as a gratification of the senses, a directly felt sensation or hedonic 'tone' (Dickie 1988). Through this so-called 'narrow hedonism' (Parfit 1984: 492) the 'aesthetic question' is rather difficult to answer, for it does not directly provide a distinctively aesthetic account of pleasure, which excludes non-aesthetic forms of pleasure and includes various aesthetic experiences that lack a positive hedonic tone (such as 'painful art', cf. Coleman 1971). For this reason, most aesthetic hedonists embrace a 'preference hedonism' (Parfit 1984: 492) or 'value empiricism' (Budd 2008: 45-47), both of which refer to pleasure as a feeling that accompanies the experience of evaluating, valuing or preferring something as 'worthwhile' (Levinson 1992: 296). However, as James Shelley points out (2011: 6-9), in a preference hedonist account the 'normative question' re-emerges, since a preference hedonist needs an (extra-hedonic) account of what it is in the pleasurable experience that explains why we consider the work 'worthwhile'.⁷

As an alternative or complement to hedonist theories, some authors have turned to 'expressivist' accounts that explain the value of artworks by referring to their capacity to either express or arouse emotions. This view originated in the often-criticized accounts of 'self-

⁶ Servaas van der Berg (2020) speaks of a 'hedonist consensus', James Shelly (2022) of a hedonist 'default setting' in the debate. Besides the canonical sources of David Hume and John Stuart Mill, leading contemporary publications are, among others, by Monroe Beardsley (1982), George Dickie (1988), Allan Goldman (1990), Jerrold Levinson (1992), Robert Stecker (2006), Malcolm Budd (2008), Nick Stang (2012) and Moran Matthen (2018).

⁷ A similar problem arises with non-hedonist theories that also advocate for a non-instrumental account of aesthetic value, such as theories that conceptualise aesthetic value as 'beauty' (e.g. Scruton 1974) or 'significant form' (Hanslick 1986, Bell 1914 and Fry 1925). For in order to explain why, for instance, pictorial forms are significant while natural forms are not, these theories need an additional extra-artistic explanation of why we value artistic creations in particular.

expression', mainly known from the writings of artists (e.g. Tolstoy 1930), according to which an artwork is a means of communicating the emotion of the artist to an audience. Yet throughout the twentieth century more sophisticated expressivist accounts of artistic expressiveness have been developed, in particular in the work of Benedetto Croce (1922) and Robin Collingwood (1938). Especially in the expressivist account of Collingwood, the value of art is not so much understood as the expression of a felt emotion, but rather as the artwork's cognitive potency of being *expressive of* those feelings (cf. Graham 2005: 33).⁸

Following Collingwood's influential work, a field of research known as 'aesthetic cognitivism' has emerged that spans a wide range of topics, including for instance aesthetic knowledge (e.g. Goodman 1976, Gorodeisky and Marcus 2022), musical significance (Kivy 2002, Robinson 2005), visual epistemology (Korsmeyer 1985, Klink 2014), figurative speech (Brouwer 2003, Hills 2022) and fiction (Walton 1990, Wildman 2019). According to cognitivist accounts of aesthetic value, works of art are valuable as a source of knowledge – in the words of Nelson Goodman: art should be taken 'no less seriously than the sciences as modes of discovery, creation, and enlargement of knowledge' (1976: 102).⁹

With regard to cognitivist accounts of aesthetic value, on the one hand I distinguish (corresponding to my second characterisation above), propositionally inflected theories, which explain the artwork as a potential bearer of discursive content that can be explicated in assertive statements; and on the other hand (corresponding to my third characterisation), non-propositional accounts artistic cognition.

The propositionally inflected view is arguably the most dominant throughout aesthetic cognitivism (cf. Zuidervaart 2004: 6). Moreover, it is generally the only account that explicitly addresses the topic of truth (especially the problem of truth in fiction). In the classical version

⁸ A modern follower of this cognitivist-expressivist view is Stephen Davies, who argues that music 'conveys knowledge of the nature of emotions (either by reflecting or, more directly, by arousing them)' (Davies 1994: 271).

⁹ Of course, cognitivist traits can be found in hedonist, expressivist and formalist accounts as well. When cognitivism is combined with expressivist accounts (as in e.g. Collingwood 1938), an artwork is valued not because it expresses the feelings of its creator, nor because it excites these emotions in the appreciator, but because the work provides us with an insight into the feelings expressed – considering artworks as imaginations rather than as autobiographies. When combined with a hedonist account (e.g. Levinson 1990), a cognitivist perceives the pleasure we find in artworks not primarily as a gratification of the senses but rather as the effect of a feeling of understanding. Combined with formalism, cognitivism contends that artwork's beauty can only be explained as an *artistic* form of beauty under reference to the imagination in virtue of which the artist creates forms that do convey a certain significant and understandable import (cf. Langer 1953).

of this view, as found in e.g. Theodore Greene (1940), a work of art is assumed to express 'descriptive and evaluative propositions with a discoverable referendum' (Greene 1940: 444). Another advocate of this classical version is Peter Kivy (1997), who argues that literature presents us with 'hypotheses' that we test in 'the laboratories of our minds'. Other scholars explain the propositional content more as something that is implied by the work, as Jukka Mikkonen speaks of 'deliberately omitted conclusions' that an author suggests in his work (2010: 62). Even further from the classical version is Noël Carroll's idea that artworks are 'thought experiments', i.e. arguments 'designed to encourage the embrace of certain discoveries (...) that result in propositional knowledge concerning the concept under scrutiny' (2002: 22). Additionally, as these articulations of the proportionally inflected view are mostly applied to literature, other scholars have tried to extend it to other arts. Carolyn Korsmeyer (1985), for instance, developed the idea of 'pictorial assertion' for the visual art, and even more ambitiously, Jerrold Levinson (1990) claims that music can express assertive truth, as a musical transition from expressed emotional state to another can be psychologically plausible or not.

What defines the propositionally inflected approach to artistic cognition, then, is not the extent to which the truth content is explicitly stated – which is the main point of internal dispute – but rather the assumption that an artwork's content is *explicable* in assertive statements. That is, all mentioned authors assume that the work has a discursive form through which the elements of the material are combined in a way that makes them assert that something is or ought to be the case. Accordingly, the truth form is understood as the correctness of that discursively asserted content.

The propositionally inflected view of aesthetic cognition has received much critique. Remarkably, this critique mainly focuses on the 'normative question'. In short, most critics point to the possibility of a *valuable* work of art that has a cognitively *invaluable* propositional content, either because that content can be (1) incorrect, contradictory or obsolete (cf. Richards 1929: 271 ff., Morgan 1967: 17 ff., Budd 1983: 137 ff.), (2) insignificant or banal (Stolnitz 1992: 193 ff., Diffey 1995: 214 ff.), or (3) unreliable or unjustified (Beardsley 1958: 380 ff., Lamarque and Olsen 1994: 332 ff.). However, perhaps even more troubling is this view's inability to answer the 'aesthetic question'. After all, propositional truth is an aspect of the descriptive and assertive function of language. Works of art may contain such discursive truths, and especially narrative works of art certainly do. Yet as long as the artwork's meaning is

conceived as a collection of propositions, it remains unclear how an artwork can have a distinctively artistic (cognitive) value that cannot be replaced by discourse.

As an alternative to propositionally inflected views, various non-propositional accounts of artistic cognition have been proposed. These theories often draw upon the classical distinction, first made by Gilbert Ryle between *knowledge that* and *knowledge how* (1946: 212-225). Accordingly, instead of the propositional knowledge *that* a particular representation is or ought to be correct, art's cognitive potential is rather understood as a source of practical knowledge of *how* to do, recognise or imagine something. Through an account of practical knowledge, various philosophers have developed theories of artworks as bearers of moral knowledge. For instance, Martha Nussbaum has argued that literature provides a necessary complement to moral philosophy by extending philosophy's general outline to include the particular requirements of situations (1990: 3-53, 125-147). Building on Nussbaum's work, Jennifer Robinson has argued that reading literature provides an 'emotional education' by confronting us with experiences that re-orientate our focus of attention (2005: 154-5). Another influential line of argumentation has been proposed by Hilary Putnam, according to whom works of art provide 'knowledge by acquaintance' of what it is like to be in a particular position (1978: 83-94). On yet another trail, one finds theories that follow Herbert Spencer's suggestion that artworks 'make us share in the joys and sorrows of others' (1988: 418), and theories that stress the imaginative knowledge of artworks (Kieran 1996, Currie 1998, Schellekens 2007). A last track within the cognitivist debate, following the influential work by Ernst Gombrich (1959), Nelson Goodman (1976, 1978) and Catherine Elgin (1993), conceives of artistic cognition as a form of orientation, offering exemplifications (Goodman) or perspectives (Young 2001) on the world through which hidden phenomena become salient.

The objective of non-propositional accounts in aesthetic cognitivism comes close to the question that I will be raising through Plato and Aristotle, and probably some of these theories (especially the latter strain of non-propositional cognitivism) might eventually be employed to answer that question. However, the primary difference between the cognitivist approaches and the Platonic problem that I will be raising is that the authors mentioned above are all preoccupied with *knowledge* – and by extension with epistemology, cognition, learning, recognition, research – but not with the non-discursive form of *truth* that underlies such non-propositional knowledge. Some non-propositional theories have provided an alternative for

truth (e.g. Goodman reserves 'truth' for discursive contexts, and introduces 'aptness' for works of art, cf. 1978: 109 ff.), some explicitly adopt a discursive form of correctness (like some of the moral theories), but most remain silent about the form of truth that grounds their account of non-propositional cognition.

In this regard, it is telling that a prominent cognitivist like Noel Carroll begins an encyclopedia lemma on 'Truth in Art' (2006) by saying: 'Though this topic is usually referred to in terms of "artistic truth," it is more precisely a concern with knowledge'. With this thesis, I firmly deny this. For, in my view, it is particularly *less* precise to approach artistic truth as a problem of knowledge. On the contrary, I contend that, throughout contemporary aesthetics, the great confusion about the intellectual value of art, stems from the fact that analytic philosophers consistently conflate artistic truth with the content of knowledge. In other words, although cognitivists speak about *truth(s) in the arts*, they are not concerned about *artistic truth*. For if artistic truth is explicitly reduced to or tacitly assumed to be a cognisable content, conveyed by a work of art and transferable to the fortunate spectator, a distinctively non-discursive *form* of truth is only obscured. As a result, the intellectual value of art is reified as an attainable cognitive product of knowable content.

However, both within and outside of the arts, truth cannot be understood as merely provided content. An isolated fact cannot be arbitrarily true independently from a subject valuing it as such for a reason. For instance, when one values a philosophical proposition as being true, one passes that truth judgement not simply by passively registering its content but by understanding its significance, i.e. by grasping its arguments and recognising its ramifications, and so on – in a word, by valuing its content as true according to a specific *form* of truth. We do not value a meaning content *per se*; we call a thought true because it does something, because it directs the mind through a certain progression of thought that enhances our understanding. It is this process of thought that persuades us to value the content as true.

In the context of philosophy, thought is processed by discourse – as words and concepts, which in themselves are neither true nor false but are combined into assertions that can take a correct form that enhances our understanding. But since this form of correct discursive combination cannot be applied to the distinctively non-discursive significance of art, we must rethink not the content of artistic truth, but first and foremost the non-discursive *form* of truth. Instead of

being a predicate of knowledge content, non-discursive truth must be a value of an intellectual yet non-discursive thought process. Thus, in the context of art, we ask after the form of a non-discursive thought process that renders an artwork true. What form allows a work of art to contain truth if it is not discursive correctness?

§1.2.2 Artistic Research

Without a systematic theory of non-discursive reason, it is rather unlikely that the debate on aesthetic value will move beyond the state of confusion described above. This perplexity, moreover, is certainly not confined to scholarly debates. Throughout many segments of society, for instance in cultural policy and artistic practices, the question of how works of art can enhance our understanding of the world is a source of great bewilderment. For one thing, it is commonly believed that, for instance, works of literature can teach us something significant about life, that a painting can help one perceive the world differently, or that through music one can penetrate human feelings more deeply. Yet when confronted with the task of explaining exactly what we learn from those works of art, one is generally puzzled by the question. If an answer is somehow required, as for instance in government cultural policy or the mission statements of cultural institutions, one typically relies on rather vague generalities about the artwork's capacity to 'tell new stories', to 'capture the imagination' or to 'broaden our horizon'. These commonplaces testify to a profound aporia concerning the value of art – one that arguably emanates from, or is at least not solved by the bewildered state of philosophical inquiry into the subject matter.

Throughout the art world this perplexity about the cognitive potential of artworks becomes especially pressing with regard to the increasing intellectual ambitions of many artists, particularly in the context of the emerging field of 'artistic research'.¹⁰ For in order to conceive and to institutionalise art practices as a form of (academic) research, it must be explained, among other questions, what sort of knowledge is produced by works of art, how that knowledge (production) differs from scientific research, and how its claims can be legitimised. These questions turn out to be challenging for artistic researchers, because they generally take

¹⁰ Or 'practice-based research', 'künstlerische Forschung', 'recherche-cr ation', 'research by design', 'arts-based research', or any other term referring to current trend in the artworld to regard artistic practices as processes of research and works of art as the result of such research (cf. Borgdorff 2012).

their knowledge production to be embedded in a non-discursive thought process, while at the same time they aim to place this process in a discursive context of (institutionalised) research, involving conceptual material, discursive instruments, a duty of legitimisation and systematic dissemination (Borgdorff 2012: 140 ff.). Without a theory of a non-discursive form of truth that explains how works of artistic research can enhance our understanding, it will remain challenging to elucidate the respective roles of art and discourse, as well as their interdependence, in the intended practice of knowledge production.

Comparable to what I said above about the 'process' of artistic thought, artistic researchers generally aim to conceive artistic cognition as an intrinsically 'unfinished process' of 'performative practices (...) that do something to us, set us in motion, alter our understanding and view of the world' (Borgdorff 2012: 45). Stressing the 'work in the work' and the 'becoming of the processes', Dieter Mersch (2015) therefore substitutes 'knowledge' with 'knowing'. Sarat Maharaj even speaks of 'non-knowledge' and (after Beckett) of 'no-how' as the nature of artistic cognition (2009: 1-11). From the perspective of my discussion above, such an appeal to a process-oriented epistemology makes good sense.

However, what these authors precisely mean by this process is not systematically explained. The state of methodological reflection in artistic research is indeed leaves much to be desired (cf. Früchtel 2019). Most methodologists of artistic research are preoccupied with liberating arts-based research from all the confinements imposed by discursive reason. Typically, this results in passionate pleas advocating, for instance (Slager 2009: 2),

the undefined, the heterogeneous, the plural, the contingent, and the relative (...) knowledge production (...) of a research practice defined at all times by an absolutely open, non-disciplinary attitude and an insertion of multiple models of interpretation.

Yet this alleged liberation from discursive reason is generally not accompanied by a *critique* of the (alternative) conditions and boundaries of a non-discursive reason. As a result, sailing on the open sea, one generally has no clue as to how works of artistic research are supposed to enhance our understanding. In such a state of confusion, it is not surprising that even the editors of *Routledge Companion to Research in the Arts*, after summing up the developments of over two decades, somewhat disappointedly conclude: 'we both felt a certain frustration at

the lack of progress on the fundamental nature of research in the arts following about 20 years of international discussion' (Biggs and Karlsson 2011: XIV).

Here, I believe philosophy of art has a clear yet still unfulfilled task to provide foundational accounts of how intellectual notions such as knowledge, truth and reason apply to the arts. That is, even prior to questions about research and knowledge, one needs a critique of non-discursive reason, in particular an account of the truth form of the non-discursive thought processes, to enable meaningful reflection on how works of artistic research are able to enhance one's understanding.

1.3 A Detour Past Antiquity

While the problem of non-discursive truth, as explored above, is virtually absent in current debates on aesthetic cognition and artistic research, the question of truth is probably the oldest philosophical concern with art known in European thinking. Truth was not only the main occupation of Plato's discussion of art, but Plato himself refers to the topic of the competing truth values of philosophy and poetry as a quarrel already 'ancient' in *his* day (*παλαιᾶ*, *Rep.* 607b, cf. *Laws* 967c-d).¹¹ One could argue that in ancient Greek philosophy, the foremost question regarding the arts is not that of their nature, their definition or essential properties, but rather the broad and multifaceted question of art's legitimacy: its usefulness for society, its moral implications, its value for thought, etc. At least in Western philosophy, it was initially only in the course of answering this normative question of artistic value that the descriptive question of art's nature would arise.¹²

Regarding the philosophy of Plato in particular, the normative question of artistic truth is not a question addressed within a separate discipline of philosophy of art, let alone of aesthetics. Instead, especially throughout the *Republic*, the question of artistic truth emerges in the course

¹¹ For instance, one finds the subject mentioned in the above cited quote from Hesiod's *Theogony* (27-8): 'we know [*ἴδμεν*] how to say many false things [*ψεύδεα*] similar [*ὁμοῖα*] to genuine ones [*ἐτύμοισιν*], but we know, when we wish, how to proclaim true things [*ἀληθέα*]' . Note that, within this single sentence, Hesiod refers to at least three different truth forms here – a complexity that testifies to his sophisticated reflection on artistic truth around already circa 700 BC.

¹² Aristotle's *Poetics*, which will be discussed at length in the third part of this thesis, is of course the monumental exception to this. As we will discuss later, there are more ways in which Aristotle's modification of Plato's more traditional approach to art set the tone for the subsequent ages of philosophy of art.

of a political and metaphysical concern. This entanglement of metaphysics, politics and art might prove to be a more fertile ground for raising the question than the different ‘fields’ of scholarly specialisms, such as aesthetic cognitivism and artistic research. One could argue that, especially regarding artistic research, the reason why the intellectual yet non-discursive value of art is not studied thoroughly lies in the negligence of a systematic engagement with a comprehensive metaphysical and epistemological framework that could ground the ambitions of non-discursive knowledge.

Therefore, we might argue that the question of artistic truth is not addressed fruitfully when it is raised in a direct and segregated way, extracted from its philosophical ecosystem of metaphysics and politics. For instance, the clinical and isolated take on artistic truth that I presented above (1.1), although hopefully correct, does not captivate our intellectual imagination by revealing the potential ramifications and implications of the concept at stake. As a result, the straight question – in my words, ‘through which value form does artistic thought enhance our understanding of its content?’ – does not succeed in the proper function of a philosophical question, namely to provoke a conceptual and systematic development of thought. After all, only ideas that give rise to other ideas can properly be called ‘fundamental’. This ‘principle of fecundity’, to use Susanne Langer’s expression, holds a question responsible for the conceptual growth it provokes, the progression of thought it directs and the import that expands from it – in a word, a question ‘must be interesting as well as true’ (Langer 1953: 8).

It is my contention that the question of artistic truth is raised most fecundly not through the straight route presented above, but through a detour that passes Plato and Aristotle. Through a new interpretation of Plato’s scepticism regarding the arts in the *Republic*, I will reconstruct his thoughts as a question rather than a straightforward rejection of art’s truth potential. Subsequently, I will show how Aristotle’s *Poetics* can be read as a reply to this question. Yet it is not a reply that solves the metaphysical question, but rather dismantles it, by shifting our attention from the problem of artistic truth to the possibility of artistic knowledge – resulting in a methodological focus on knowledge which, as I have shown in this section, is still paramount today in philosophy of art. By excavating the ancient question of artistic truth and uncovering the constellation it had before the ‘knowledge’-paradigm entered into aesthetics, I hope to provide a fecund framework for asking the question anew.

To be sure, between antiquity and the contemporary debates on artistic cognition, between Aristotle and Nelson Goodman, several philosophers have addressed the question of artistic truth. Arguably, truth was the foremost concern in the aesthetics of Georg Hegel, Martin Heidegger, Hans-Georg Gadamer and Theodor Adorno. Their theories will certainly have leading roles to play at a more advanced stage of this research project, yet not in the propaedeutic stage with which this thesis is concerned. For, again, this thesis only aims to raise the question of artistic truth; it does not intend to answer it. And for the purpose of raising the question, the theories provided by Heidegger and others are less suitable. For whereas Plato's sceptical treatment of the art provokes a fecund question, these theories already provide a more or less determined account that answers that question. In a subsequent study, I will employ these accounts of artistic truth to develop several answers to the question that I pose here. My ultimate purpose, which the present thesis only prepares, is then to elucidate the different potentialities and limitations of these accounts of artistic truth to answer the Platonic problem described below and to fill the gap in contemporary art theory described above.

Hence, the *onus probandi* that rests with this thesis is to demonstrate that a study of Plato and Aristotle does yield a question of artistic truth that is *fecund* for the aforementioned contemporary concerns. More precisely, the contention that I will defend here is that an analysis of the ancient discussion of artistic truth provides a conceptual framework that can help us to employ, develop and compare various theories of artistic truth. In short, this conceptual framework, which I present at the conclusion, encompasses a transcendental scheme of three truth conceptions (i.e. metaphysical truth, discursive correctness and aesthetic plausibility) of which each corresponds to a distinct metaphysical modality (i.e. necessity, reality and possibility) and a specific form of representation (i.e. preceding, succeeding and simultaneous with the represented). With this differentiated account of truth, I present a systematic metaphysical framework in which truth is not identical with correctness, thinking not with discursive thinking, and the intellectual value of art not with the knowledge it bears. With this systematic conceptual framework, I aim to aid a more *critical* inquiry into the conditions and possibilities of non-discursive thought in general, and its value of truth in particular. Thus, with this method, we pursue a dialectical route that raises a question in order to think it through systematically – albeit in a roundabout way.

2

PLATO'S INVITATION

The Metaphysical Problem of Artistic Truth

2.1 Plato and the Finitude of Discursive Reason

The history of Western philosophy testifies to a remarkable inability to formulate an epistemology of non-discursive thought without appealing to pure feeling, anti-intellectual intuitionism, mysticism or other variants of theorised *unreason* (cf. Langer 1979: 92). Still, I would argue that the seeds of such an epistemology were, in fact, already present at that history's canonical conception, namely in the philosophy of Plato.

To be sure, what probably stands out most in Plato's dialogues is Socrates's indefatigability in demonstrating the need for discourse (*λόγος*) in truth-finding.¹³ Often overlooked, however, are the various passages in Plato's oeuvre where he resists all too formalistic usages of discursive thought. These arguments especially occur throughout Socrates's confrontation with the sophists. Here Plato demonstrates the insufficiency of *merely discursive* reasoning. For, according to Plato, even when sophistic reasoning is discursively incontestable, their hollow phrases are formalistic and empty and can therefore never lead to truth. In this respect, even a rationalist like Plato must conclude that arguments alone are not enough to distinguish sophistic from philosophical reasoning.

Stylistically, one can recognise this critique in the well-known *aporia*, with which many of Socrates's encounters with the sophists end. In my view, the significance of the *aporia* lies in the insufficiency of discursive arguments. For the *aporia* signals that something is missing in sophistry – and that shortcoming must lie outside the domain of discursive argumentation,

¹³ For good reasons *λόγος* is traditionally translated with various terms: speech, language, thought, assertion, proposition, reason, reasoning, argument. However, by using all these different translations in one and the same text, the unity behind these English terms, encompassed within the single word *λόγος*, escapes one's attention. After all, *λόγος* is one word. In order to rehabilitate that unity, I will translate *λόγος* consistently with my technical term 'discourse', which I defined in the previous section.

because discursively the sophist's argumentation is watertight. For the same reason, it is often only through the use of non-discursive means – by employing irony, dialogue, allegory, myth or metaphor – that Plato is able to break through the impasse of the *aporia*. For instance, Socrates replies to the discursively unanswerable question of Meno quoted above with the non-discursive metaphor of anamnesis (cf. Gadamer 1990: 351). And in the second book of the *Republic*, when Socrates acknowledges that his discursive arguments cannot take the edge of Thrasymachus's claims, he introduces the analogy of the state (368c-369a). Thus, the *aporia* marks the end of merely discursive reasoning and the beginning of a philosophical mode of thought that requires more than discourse alone.

To understand Plato's critique of discourse and to conceive of the nature of the relation between discourse and reason as non-identical, I propose to look at the well-known digression of the *Seventh Letter* (341b-345c).¹⁴ Here, Plato states that a discursive refutation of a belief does not necessarily rule out the truth of a belief. The truth, according to Plato, can never be taught because real insight can never be caught in the 'unmovable' words of written text (*ἀμετακίνητον*, 343a, cf. *Phaedrus* 277a ff.). Instead, Plato explains truth as something that, after a long preparation, is acquired rather suddenly (*ἐξαίφνης*), 'as light that is kindled by a leaping spark and thereafter nourishes itself' (341d). This means that to reach truth, on the one hand it is necessary to *actively* study the discursive aspects of reality thoroughly – Plato famously mentions four aspects: names, definitions, illustrative images and existing knowledge. Yet on the other hand this can never be sufficient (cf. also *Cratylus* 438de), for again, truth is ultimately acquired suddenly and, consequently, *passively*. In short, in the work of Plato, the relation of discourse to truth could be characterized as *pro tanto*, that is, discourse is a necessary yet not a sufficient condition of truth.

This insufficiency of discourse (*λόγων ἀσθενές*, 343a) is the finitude of human thought. That is, a human intellect is dependent on the discursive means of names, definitions, illustrations and knowledge in order to get a grip on an essentially pre-discursive being (*τὸ ὄν*).¹⁵ None of these

¹⁴ The authenticity of the *Seventh Letter* is a traditional issue of debate among philologists. However, my approach in this thesis is not historical; throughout this study, the name 'Plato' refers to all the works mentioned, independently of whether there is one or more than one author historically responsible for writing them.

¹⁵ I translate *τὸ ὄν* with 'being' instead of 'reality' (as it is mostly translated). Ancient Greek does not have a word for 'reality' or 'world'. Nowadays, 'reality' is mostly equated with the empirical world, that is, with being as it appears phenomenally. Plato's philosophy, of course, distinguishes between this empirical reality and *τὸ ὄν*. In my reading of Plato, reality would be a manifestation (appearance) of *τὸ ὄν* – one that is, in the eyes of Plato, necessarily contingent, false and unjust.

four discursive means can guarantee that being is truly revealed. Sophistic reason, then, differs from the philosophical in its attitude towards to the finitude of logos. To understand this fundamental difference between, on the one hand, a philosophical form of thought that is ultimately oriented to truth and, on the other, the sophistic mode of thinking that is *merely* discursive, I propose to focus on the following passage in the *Seventh Letter* (343b-c):

The main point is this: there are two separate modes, that which is [τοῦ τε ὄντος] and the particular qualities it has [τοῦ ποιοῦ τινός], and the soul seeks to know not what the quality is but the being. Each of the Four [discursive qualities: names, definitions, images and knowledge] proffers to the soul either in language [λόγῳ] or in concrete form [ἔργῳ] that which is not sought; and by thus causing everything that is described or exhibited to be always easy of refutation by the senses, it fills practically all men with all manner of perplexity and uncertainty.¹⁶

One could interpret this passage as follows. The sophists, according to Plato, are not oriented to being as such – τοῦ τε ὄντος – but only to empirical reality insofar as it consists of distinct entities with signified qualities – τοῦ ποιοῦ τινός. Hence, a merely discursive mode of thought presents reality only in *a* kind of way (τοῦ ποιοῦ τινός) and cannot possibly reveal reality in *the* way it truly is (τοῦ τε ὄντος). Earlier, Plato had launched the neologism ποιότης to clarify this mode of thought that analyses the world in terms of ‘quality’ (*Theaetetus* 182a). To preserve Plato’s idiosyncratic language I call the corresponding use of merely discursive reason a ‘poiological’ mode of thought, as opposed to an ‘ontological’ mode of thought.¹⁷ A poiological mode of thought, then, analyses the actual world through the nameable qualities, aspects, entities and events in which it is *already* been rubricated. Poiology operates at the level of a ‘qualified world’ that can accordingly be explained, demonstrated or defended through merely discursive argumentation. An ontological mode of thought, on the other hand, paradoxically uses discursive reason to be oriented to being insofar as it precedes contingent discursive significations. An ontological truth can only be seen or understood through insight for which

¹⁶ Translations of Plato and Aristotle are mine, but I take the translations from the Loeb Classical Library edition as a starting point. Where I diverge from the Loeb translation, I provide the Greek original between brackets. See bibliography for the editions used.

¹⁷ In the *Theaetetus*, Socrates apologizes for this newly invented noun ποιότης (‘what-sort-ness,’ from ποιος, ‘of what sort’), calling it a grotesque word (ἀλλόκοτον ὄνομα, 182a). Later, Cicero coined the equivalent noun *qualitas* (fabricating a noun of *qualis*, ‘of what sort’), apologizing for using a Greek calque. To this calque, the English language owes the concept ‘quality’. Accordingly, I may apologize as well for the calque ‘poiological reason,’ yet the word ‘quality’ has too much sedimented meaning nowadays in order to capture the specific meaning Plato wants to convey here.

discursive reason is necessary, yet not enough. Following this interpretation, the difference between *τοῦ ποιοῦ τινός* and *τοῦ τε ὄντος*, that is, between the aim of poiological and ontological thought, comes down to the difference between knowledge (i.e. qualified statements) and truth (i.e. a discursively prepared yet non-discursively appearing insight).

In a Platonic manner, one could argue that, since discursive reason is the only means finite humans have at their disposal, to a certain extent truth will necessarily remain out of reach. Hence, *onto-logy* – i.e. the *discursive* quest for *truth* – is bound to be a rather absurd endeavour. The sophists were probably very aware of this paradox and hence remained at the poiological level of qualified thoughts and knowable things, without being concerned with ontological truth. As a result of this uncommitted position, sophists can argue for and against practically anything. But this position in which the sophists can refuse every proposition without being rejected themselves, is in fact their actual weakness. For as long as they exclude the possibility of their falsehood, they will be excluded from the possibility of truth as well (for a similar argument cf. Gadamer 1980: 96). The difference between the sophist and the philosopher in Plato's dialogues, then, is that while the former uncaringly clings to a merely discursive reason, the latter feels rather restless with regard to the finitude of discursivity. Thinking ontologically, therefore, does not mean that one has an essentially different discourse or better discursive capacities at one's disposal; it must imply that one is endowed with something else besides discursive reason, which can lead one's discourse in the direction of *τὸ ὄν*.

This 'something else' is called *ξυγγενῆ* ('affinity' or 'kinship') in the *Seventh Letter* (344a); in *Symposium*, *Phaedrus* and *Ion*, one finds words such as *ἔρω*, *ἐνθουσιασμός* and *θεία μανία* to designate this non-discursive factor in Plato's epistemology. I propose to understand this affective factor, which is needed for an ontological pursuit of truth yet is not included in discursivity, as a *leading passion* – that is, not a fleeting emotion but rather an orientation to a profound yet indeterminate idea (e.g. truth, beauty, the good, justice) that is acquired passively (*ἐξάιφνης*) and gives a fundamental direction to one's thinking.¹⁸ Thus, one can distinguish a sophistic mode of thought from a *philosophical* mode of thought by the possession of this passion for *τὸ ὄν*. To be sure, this passion never guarantees that one comes to possess truth –

¹⁸ I derive this understanding of 'passion' from the works of Kierkegaard, especially his *Two Ages* (1978: 43, 49, 61-69, 90-96, 100-5); *Fear and Trembling, Repetition* (both in 1983: 78-9, 121-2, 214-5) and *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* (1992: 33, 132).

after all, the finite philosopher is still condemned to the discursive means of thought – yet at least the philosopher directs those discursive means towards truth.¹⁹ Thus, I contend that this cognitive potential of passion cannot lie in a contained truth content, as has often been assumed both in both medieval and romanticist strains of Neoplatonism, but instead in the epistemological *function* of directing or inspiring discursive reason.

Plato's allusions to *ξυγγενῆ*, *φίλος*, *ἔρως* and *μανία* – words one immediately and rightly associates with feeling – are generally either neglected for the purpose of a rationalist interpretation, or they are mystified, as if Plato advocates a kind of *irrationalism*. Again, this testifies to the general inability distinguish rationality from discursivity. For what makes these aforementioned passages so profound is that Plato considers this non-discursive passion as a condition of possibility for rational thought. Thus, in contrast to the traditional and somewhat caricatural view of an ascetic Plato, according to whom one ought to subjugate the passions to the dictatorial command of reason, the present reading aims to show how one can actually learn from his philosophy that, in the end, *passion is constitutive for reason*, since there must be a non-discursive factor to inform discursive thinking. Only when reason reaches its discursive endpoint, it acquires a direction to think – an orientation which discursivity alone can never provide. Accordingly, Plato does not disconnect truth from reason, he rather *dis-equates* reason from discursivity, and thus he acknowledges a non-discursive element of reason that is necessary for an orientation to truth. One must lose one's mind in order to properly think.

2.2 The *Republic*: Truth and Correctness

§2.2.1 *Logocentrism and Logoscepticism in Plato's Oeuvre*

Corresponding with the aforementioned *pro tanto*-relation between truth and discourse, in some of his works Plato addresses the necessity and in others the insufficiency of discursive reason in the pursuit of truth. Thus, his oeuvre encompasses what one may call both *logocentric* and *logosceptic* dialogues.²⁰ Together, both perform the paradoxical task of ontology: to use

¹⁹ Indeed, in these contexts, Plato always uses 'truth' or 'being' in the accusative after *προς*, meaning that the philosopher is *oriented to* the truth, but never *in (possession of)* the truth (dative).

²⁰ I use the term 'logocentrism' not in the (probably best-known) Derridean sense of preferring the spoken above the written word, but rather in the sense of preferring discursive thought to conceive of reality, as the term was originally devised by Ludwig Klages (cf. Josephsen 2017: 221).

discursive reason to seek pre-discursive truth. Cleverly, by accommodating both sides of the paradox in separate dialogues instead of articulating them both through one voice, Plato finds a way to realise his absurd ambition to speak about the unspeakable.

In the previous section I sought to demonstrate how Plato's philosophy offers a possibility to distinguish reason from discourse, and thus to conceive of reason's value, i.e. truth, as not solely dependent on discourse. In this section I question whether the necessity of this non-discursive element, addressed in Plato's logosceptic philosophy, provides a new point of entry to his logocentric philosophy, in order to develop a non-discursive truth form that applies to the arts. Could a work of art be a possible bearer of this non-discursive mode of thought, and could that thought process somehow reveal ontological truth in a distinctively artistic way?

Parallel to the dichotomy between logosceptic and logocentric dialogues runs a peculiar division in Plato's oeuvre concerning the value of art. On the one hand, reading *Phaedrus*, *Symposium* and *Ion* one finds exalted eulogies of the value of beauty and its indispensable guidance in the pursuit of truth in general and in philosophy in particular. Yet on the other hand, as is well-known, in the third and tenth book of the *Republic*, as well as in various passages in the *Laws*, Plato expresses a deep scepticism about the truth value of the arts and consequently argues for the strict censorship of artists' freedom of expression. Grosso modo, the impression arises that Plato's writings on beauty are rather appreciative and that his arguments about art proper are mostly sceptical. This has led most commentators to conclude that Plato saw value in a passion for non-discursive beauty, yet did not conceive of artworks as the right bearers of that beauty. However, in the *Republic* and in *Laws*, but also in *Ion* and *Phaedrus*, the subjects of beauty and art overlap to a certain extent (cf. Lear 2010: 361). Thus, since a division of the subjects cannot be generalised into distinct dialogues, in Plato's philosophy the work of art remains ambiguously split between profound scepticism and devote exaltation.²¹

Admittedly, after reading the *Republic* and the *Laws*, it would be hard to maintain that Plato saw works of art as possible bearers of ontological truth. Yet from a philosophical perspective, the question is still worth asking, precisely because art has a somewhat ambiguous status in Plato's oeuvre. Investigating this ambiguity could help us acquire a critical understanding of the

²¹ Cf. Nickolas Pappas (2020): 'If aesthetics is the philosophical inquiry into art and beauty (or "aesthetic value"), the striking feature of Plato's dialogues is that he devotes as much time as he does to both topics and yet treats them oppositely'.

possibility of artistic truth. For this purpose, I propose to look at Plato's most logocentric and art-challenging dialogue, the *Republic*, since its epistemic arguments pose an interesting challenge to the possibility that art non-discursively informs reason in its pursuit of truth. Therefore, the purpose of this section is not to reconcile Plato's contrasting theses into straightforward claims about art, but to illuminate the philosophical problem of the value of art that arises from his ambivalent position towards the arts.

To explain this ambiguous status of artistic truth, I will start with a brief and conventional summary of Plato's arguments against the autonomous arts (§2.2.2), after which I will problematise an all-too-simple interpretation of these arguments by demonstrating the ambivalence of Plato's treatment of the arts in the *Republic* (§2.2.3). Next, I will discuss two arguments; first, Plato's psychological remarks on the relation between music and discourse (§2.2.4), and second, the metaphysical reasons why he dismisses art's truth potential (§2.2.5 and §2.2.6). Finally, I will spell out the exact nature of the philosophical challenge that follows from Plato's ambivalent critique (2.3).

§2.2.2 Art and Censorship in the Republic

The arts considered in the *Republic* are mostly poetry, about which Socrates seems to be most sceptical, and music, about which he appears most optimistic. In addition to these disciplines, Socrates shifts to examples of figurative painting (377e, 598b, 602d) and sculpture (e.g. 420c) and even makes note of architecture, weaving and embroidery (373a, 401a). The ease with which he shifts between different artistic disciplines, and the absence of a sense of obligation to legitimise those shifts, suggest that Plato is developing a theory of the arts in general that is comparable with a modern understanding of the fine arts.²²

Socrates notoriously banishes the autonomous arts from the ideal state because they intervene with the ideal education of the guardians. Summarised briefly, Socrates provides three reasons for this pedagogical censorship. First, works of art can convey morally inappropriate or factually false stories about gods, demigods, heroes and virtues. Second, these false stories can incite

²² James Porter has pointed out that there has been a tradition of sensualist aesthetics prior to Plato that compared various art forms and thereby came to an understanding of the arts in general (Porter 2010: 188). See also Nickolas Papas (2020) who explains that both for Aristotle and Plato, 'painting and poetry belong together as fellow species within a larger artistic genus'.

various forms of unvirtuous behaviour (esp. 376c-383c and 386a-403c).²³ Third, and most interestingly, artworks are to be censored because they are thought to be able to intoxicate discursive thought and hence interfere with a necessary condition for the pursuit of truth (esp. 595a-608b).

Regarding the third reason, the epistemic critique on visual arts and poetry, Socrates provides both a psychological and a metaphysical argument. Psychologically explained, works of art encourage an affective and perceptual orientation to the sensible and material world because they represent and hence arouse either, in the visual arts, psychological beliefs about how the world appears, or, in literature, the desires that are generated by these appearances. Therefore, according to Socrates, both visual arts and poetry emancipate that part of man that is recalcitrant rather than obedient to a discursive orientation to 'being as it truly is'.

Second, in his metaphysical argument, Socrates criticises artworks for representing merely the appearances of the sensible world instead of (ontologically) penetrating 'being as it truly is' – for, in order to represent, the artist does not have to understand the things or virtues themselves, nor their function or value, but only how they appear and how are generally understood by others. Socrates therefore argues that while artists pretend to be able to bring us closer to the truth and to teach us something about being (598e-599b: *ἐπιστήμων εἶη τῆ ἀληθείᾳ*), in fact they only lead us away from being by solely showing how reality feels or appears instead of telling us how it is.

§2.2.3 Ambivalences and Ambiguities

Most modern readers of the *Republic* probably perceive these arguments as a direct attack on the arts and discard them as rather odd, awkward and irrelevant – comparable perhaps to the common reaction to Greek assumptions about the inferiority of women and enslaved people.²⁴ However, on closer inspection, I contend that throughout the whole *Republic*, the argumentation against the autonomous arts is expressed rather ambivalently. Rather than a

²³ These first two reasons are not clearly differentiated by Plato (cf. Halliwell 2002: 38-87).

²⁴ For instance, Richard Lewis Nettleship writes (1951: 353): 'Rightly or wrongly, Plato has here come to the conclusion that nearly all the imitative art of his time has degenerated into indiscriminate catering for common excitement. He treats art as being this and only this, and in consequence the whole passage remains rather an attack on certain developments of art than an adequate theoretical treatment of it'.

straightforward rejection of art's cognitive potential, the *Republic* poses the question of artistic truth and invites the reader to come up with an answer.

The ambivalence of Plato's argumentation can be found on multiple levels. First of all, looking at the whole *Republic*, it is noteworthy that Socrates and Glaucon address the question of the value of art three times (book II, III and X). Especially in the last repetition, a sudden addendum introduced only with the oddly casual connectives *καὶ μὴν* (595a) is a curious one, since it is not immediately clear why the seemingly uncomplicated argumentation requires such an iterative approach. What is more, Socrates's propositions in Book X seem to contradict some of his claims in Book II and III, since in the former he provides arguments to prohibit forms of art that he was planning to use in the guardian's education in book III.²⁵

Apart from these contradictions, the topic of the arts is also both introduced and completed with a peculiar reserve. When Socrates raises the subject of artistic education (*παιδεία*, 376d ff.) he stresses the importance of the subject, since they 'might find a discursive argument [*λόγον*] there' (376d). Subsequently, Socrates tells Glaucon that the question needs to be examined as if they had 'all the time [*σχολήν*] in the world' to arrange the ideal education, doing this purely by means of discursive thinking (*λόγῳ*), through abstract concepts, and as an ideal theory or thought experiment (*μύθῳ μυθολογοῦντές*, 376d-e). Glaucon is thus explicitly warned that the following digression on art takes place in the mode of discursive reason only. This warning recurs at the end of the *Republic*, when in book X Socrates and Glaucon have once more agreed upon the strict censorship of fine arts, music and poetry in the ideal state. In concluding their conversation, Socrates elaborates extensively and benevolently on the possibility and even the desirability of an unforeseen argument in favour of the truthfulness of the arts (607b-608b, my emphasis):

[F]or good reason [*ἀπολελογήσθω*] indeed we dismissed it [poetry] from our state earlier for being what it is. You see *our argument* [*λόγος*] demanded it. But let us add (...) that there's been an ancient quarrel between

²⁵ This is not the place to go into the debate of whether Plato's accounts of mimesis in book II-III and X are compatible and can be seen as one (e.g. Nehamas 1982, Urmson 1982, Belfiore 1984, Halliwell 1988, Lear 2011). In general, my strategy here is to approach the *Republic* as a whole, and see what inner ambiguities and inconsistencies arise from that natural approach to read the same word in the same book as having essentially the same meaning. However, to exercise some caution in this matter, I will refrain from developing interpretations that strongly integrate both usages of mimesis into one specific conception. Therefore, in the following, I will treat the mimesis conception of Book II-III (§2.2.4) separately from the mimesis critique in book X (§2.2.5-6).

Plato's Invitation: The Metaphysical Problem of Artistic Truth

philosophy and poetry (...) [and] that as far as we're concerned, if poetry (...) has any defence to put forward that she should exist in a well-run state, *we'd welcome her gladly*, as we're aware that we're beguiled [κηλουμένοις] by her ourselves. (...)

So it's right for her to return from exile when she has defended [ἀπολογησαμένη] herself (...)

And I'm sure we'd grant her champions, not those who are actual poets, but lovers of poetry [φιλοποιηται], *the right to make a defence on her behalf in language without meter* [ἄνευ μέτρου λόγον], on the grounds that she is not only pleasing [ἡδεῖα] but also beneficial [ώφελίμη] to political systems and human life, and we'll listen to her benevolently. You see, I think we shall profit from her if she appears to be not only pleasant but also useful [ώφελίμη]. (...)

Yet as long as she cannot defend herself, while we listen to her we will use the argument [τὸν λόγον] we are now making to charm ourselves against her spell.

In the *Republic*, as in Plato's oeuvre as a whole, one finds both a remarkable ambition to settle the quarrel between poetry and philosophy in favour of the latter, as well as a reluctance to pass a definitive judgement about that ancient dispute. Not only when introducing and concluding the topic, but throughout the discussions on art as well, Plato often invites the reader to rebut his philosophical accusations, for instance when he says 'we must follow the argument [λόγος] until such times as someone persuades us with a better one' (388e). Perhaps the implied warning here is that the articulated art-sceptic claims are derived from a merely discursive analysis; and since discursive reason is eventually finite, there may be unforeseen arguments or other perspectives that could be relevant as well.

To understand why Plato refrains from definite judgement, one must see that Plato's critique as such is rather ambiguous. The *Republic* testifies to this ambiguity on three levels: implicitly, explicitly and performatively. First, by banning the autonomous artist from the ideal state, Plato implicitly puts the artist on a pedestal. Apparently, the artist is able to exert a powerful anarchistic influence on the human soul that threatens the general order. Although Socrates says that one should not approach the arts as 'the truth [ἀληθεία] and as something serious [σπουδαία]' (608a, cf. 602b), Plato himself appears to take the function of art very seriously. In that regard, the *Republic* is not an attack on the arts, but an elaboration on the anarchistic potential of its free expression.

Second, on a more explicit level, art's potentiality is recognised by Plato since, albeit censored, the arts do fulfil a crucial role in the guardian's education in the ideal state. In the censored condition, works of art have a superior pedagogic value, as is explained in the eloquent passages

concerning the power of music (401d-402d), in which Socrates holds that 'education in the arts [is] most essential (...) [because] rhythm and melody above all penetrate to the innermost part of the soul and most powerfully affect it' (401d). There are, furthermore, several occasions on which Socrates genuinely praises the poet, saying that he 'would revere him as inspired, wonderful and delightful,' while nevertheless banishing him from the state (398a). Socrates repeatedly emphasises that the discursive inability of art goes together with an enchanting power (*κήλησιν, κηλῆ κηλουμένοις*, 601b, 607c-d, cf. Socrates's 'love and respect' for Homer, 595b) – culminating in his 'lover's farewell to poetry' in book X (607c-608a), where he stresses that his passion (*ἔρωτα*) for art can only be forcefully suppressed (*βίᾳ*) by discursive arguments (*τὸν λόγον*).²⁶

Last, there seems to be a performative contradiction in Plato's views on truth in the arts. In the *Republic*, as well as in the rest of his oeuvre, Plato employs many literary techniques, such as metaphors, myths and dialogue, to seek philosophical truth. More specifically, Plato's dialogues are written in exactly the 'imitative' form that he particularly condemns in book III (i.e., using direct speech in a dramatic context, 394d ff.). In addition, this performative contradiction applies especially to the *Republic* because, strictly speaking, the *political* theme of the book (i.e. the constitution of a just state) serves as an analogy employed to answer the actual question at stake, namely the nature of justice as an 'inherent condition inside the soul' (358b). In a crucial passage in Book II (368c-369a), Socrates introduces this analogy when his discursive inquiry into the just soul leaves him embarrassed (*ἀπορία*), proposing instead to 'imagine a state coming into being before our eyes'. If one takes this passage seriously, one could argue that almost the entire book represents an analogy for the just equilibrium of the human soul instead of a blueprint for the organisation of actual society.²⁷ In this regard, Plato bans literature from his imaginary state by the very use of literary techniques; he prohibits free artistic

²⁶ The expression 'lover's farewell to poetry' comes from Jessica Moss (2007: 443n).

²⁷ How to interpret this analogy has been a source of vital discussion, especially after Bernard Williams's well-known critique of the analogy of the city and soul (Williams 1973). In reaction to this, Jonathan Lear (1992) has argued that Plato is not simply relying on an analogy between psyche and polis, as Williams and others assumed, but on a structural isomorphism that is psychologically explained throughout the book. Lear thus explains that the political theme of the *Republic* contributes to the psychological investigation because it analyses how culture influences a person's inner life. I do not think Lear's convincing interpretation and mine necessarily contradict here. Lear's emphasis on the dynamic between soul and state could be said to show the depth of the analogy that I stress here.

imagination through an imaginary act. Hence, the actual relevance of the analogy's literal meaning remains, to say the least, an open question.

Taking all this into account, art's epistemic inferiority cannot be a foregone conclusion, even not for the logocentric Plato in the *Republic*. Plato's invitation to 'make a defence on poetry's behalf' – that is, to discursively (*ἄνευ μέτρου λόγον*, 607d) defend art's non-discursive cognitive potential against Socrates's sceptical argumentation – can be seen as a defining challenge to philosophical aesthetics. I will now provide a new interpretation of both his psychological argument concerning the dialectic relation between music and discourse (§2.2.4) and his metaphysical argument against the representational nature of poetry (§2.2.5-6), in order to eventually set out the philosophical task that follows from Plato's invitation to defend the truth potential of art (2.3).

§2.2.4 The Circle of Words and Tones

In the third book of the *Republic* (398b-403c) and, more extensively, in *Laws* (653a-655b; 664e-669d), Plato launches a paradoxical theory of musical pedagogy, in which he defines the intellectual relevance of the non-discursive nature of music, and explains this non-discursive nature in a thoroughly logocentric manner. Most literature on Plato's philosophy of music highlights one of these sides, using the passage on music either as another example of or as a possible escape from the logocentric theory of art, while the other side of the paradox is neglected. By contrast, I argue that analysing both aspects of Plato's musical pedagogy in their paradoxical relation to each other illuminates how discursive and non-discursive thought operate dialectically in a work of art.

On the one hand, there is probably no passage where Plato attaches as much importance to art proper as when it concerns the musical education of the guardians. According to Socrates in 400d-403c, music helps children to acquire a certain feeling for beauty *before* they can conceive of that beauty through a discursive account (*πρὶν λόγον δυνατὸς εἶναι λαβεῖν*, 401e). By learning to rejoice in what is gracious and to disparage what is shameful, one learns to distinguish beauty non-discursively through the sensations of pleasure and pain. Importantly, according to Socrates, when one has acquired such a musical disposition to beauty one is subsequently able to recognise beauty in other guises as well – most notably, the beauty of good character

(*εὐηθεία*, 400e). Works of art, therefore, aid the guardians in developing a pre-discursive sense (*πρὶν λόγον*, 401e) not only of beauty but also of the truth of the good.

The most interesting part of Socrates's appraisal of music in 400d-403c, however, is his subsequent claim. Namely, when the time is ripe for developing the guardian's discursive capabilities, the pre-discursive musical understanding of beauty also helps one to grasp the truth through a discursive account more easily (402a). The discursive conception and the non-discursive understanding share a certain 'familiarity' (*οἰκειότητα*), as a result of which one can recognise one's pre-discursive sense of beauty within a discursively articulated conception. Without musical education, Socrates says later, the guardians would come to hate discourse (*μισόλογος*, 411d). So, on closer inspection, contrary to most parts of the *Republic* but in line with what I argued earlier in the context of the *Seventh Letter*, Plato explains the *cognitive* value of a non-discursive artistic form as valuable *for the sake of discursive thought*. To take this argument one step further, it follows that discursive thinking is in need of something that transcends discourse – a need that apparently can be met through music, according to Plato. Therefore, as I take it, rather than for their often-cited explicit appreciation of music, these passages are rather significant for their implied critique of discourse.

In the light of this 'logosceptic' passage, it seems contradictory that, some pages earlier (398b-400a), Socrates explains that in good music – that is, the same music that can provide pre-discursive understanding – melody (*ἄρμονία*) and rhythm must never interfere with the intelligibility of the lyrics (*λόγοι*) and, what is more, must semantically 'follow' (*ἔπομαι*) the words instead of vice versa (398d). For, according to Plato, without text, the tonal structures of music do not have an independent meaning. Hence, in his view, tones must be subjected to words.

What I take to be the crucial assumption that leads Plato to this logocentric claim is his rather tacit premise that the melodies and rhythms of music represent (*μιμῆσμαι*) the same discursively settled 'models' (*τύποι*) that are represented by literature – expressing, for instance, idleness, softness, courage or 'the rhythms of an orderly and manly life' (400a). In other words, that which is signified in music consists of a fully verbalisable domain of *λόγος*, and thus it makes sense to subject the non-discursive materials (melody and rhythm) entirely to discourse. It is essentially the beauty of words (*τῷ καλῷ λόγῳ*, 400d) that resembles the good disposition of the soul (cf. *Laws* 669d-e). Musical works are thus supposed to *follow* the beauty of words and thereby (indirectly) follow the beauty of the good (401d). Hence, it should not come as a surprise – as it

does for many commentators such as Carleton Brownson (1920), Alexander Nehamas (1982) and Elizabeth Belfiore (1984) – that also musical works are criticised in Book X for being ‘three stages removed from the truth’ (*τρίτος ἀπὸ τῆς ἀληθείας*, 599d).

Taking both arguments on music into account, it follows that, according to Plato, music can teach us something true about the good before we are able to grasp that truth discursively, yet that this pre-discursive form has a content that must be subjected to discourse. As with the other examples of *aporia* discussed in the previous section, one may look for an analogy in Plato to clarify his theory. Towards the end of his discussion on music, Plato compares musical training with learning to read (402a-b). As one can only recognise the meaning of words, Socrates says, when one both knows all the letters of the alphabet and, while reading, does not let any of them escape one’s attention, so one can only understand music if one is already familiar with the nature of the virtues and all their possible manifestations. Similarly, one may reformulate the paradox of music as follows. Discursive knowledge of the signified in music, i.e. the truth of a good character, is necessary to understand music’s non-discursive signifiers; yet, as explained before, one is initially supposed to understand the truth of this virtuous knowledge non-discursively, through music. Hence, one could interpret this theory of musical pedagogy as a hermeneutical circle: you can only read when you know the letters of the alphabet first, yet can only learn these letters through the act of reading; in the same way, you can only understand a non-discursive musical piece when you are discursively aware of the expressed virtues (cf. 402a-c), yet you can only understand these virtues discursively by first familiarising yourself with them pre-discursively through music (cf. 401e-402a).

Acknowledging the inner conflict in Plato’s musical pedagogy, and interpreting these contrasting passages as a circular argument, allows one to grasp the absurd nature of ontology that I discussed before. Namely, one can now conceive of ontological understanding as an intrinsically circular thought process in which truth and discourse relate *pro tanto* to each other. That is, truth can neither be discovered through discursive argumentation only nor does it reveal itself by an immediate feeling, and thus, in an ontological directedness, discourse calls for something beyond itself. The paradoxical point is that discourse needs this in order to properly function *as discursive reason*. In other words, because discourse is in need *of* something other than itself *for* itself, it needs that other only by virtue of the fact that the other is in need of discourse. The most adequate name for this complex dynamic is, I believe, *dialectics*. Therefore, as long as one

conceives of the relation between words and tones as an intrinsically dialectical relation, the circularity of ontological understanding is not necessarily a problem. What is decisive, to quote Heidegger on a similar subject (1967: 153), is not how to get out of the circle but how to enter it properly.

§2.2.5 The Modal Logic of Truth and Correctness

Whereas the previous section was concerned with what I have called the 'psychological argument' of Plato's epistemic critique of art, in which I have shown how discourse and music dialectically interact in their pursuit of truth, the following subsections are about Plato's metaphysical concerns with artistic truth. Here, I will demonstrate how Plato's invitation can be conceived through a transcendental scheme of two distinct metaphysical modalities of being. First, I will set out this modal theory and show how it draws a distinction between knowledge and truth (§2.2.5). Subsequently, I will use this modal scheme to reinterpret Plato's critique of art (§2.2.6) in order to finally formulate what I believe is 'Plato's invitation' (2.3).

Throughout the discussions of art in the *Republic*, the word for truth is *ἀλήθεια*. Plato defines the form of *ἀλήθεια* as 'to believe what is so [τὰ ὄντα]' (413a). The truth of a story, one reads, comes down to the question of whether the story represents the gods or virtues 'as they truly are' (οἷος τυγχάνει (...) ὄν, ἀεὶ δήπου ἀποδοτέον, 379a). Accordingly, when Socrates is asked to define the nature of false stories (μύθους ψευδεῖς; or lies, ψεύδεται), he defines them as stories that evoke 'a bad image [κακῶς εἰκάζει] through discourse [τῷ λόγῳ] when dealing with *what sort of beings* the gods and heroes are: like an artist who paints nothing like those whose likenesses he wishes to paint' (377e, my emphasis).

Modern readers of Plato are inclined to associate a 'good' representation that depicts something 'as it truly is' immediately with a *correct* representation of reality, in which the representational content corresponds accurately with the state of affairs in the world. However, upon closer examination it appears that Plato does not use the term *ἀλήθεια* to refer to a form of factual or literal correctness. Several passages confirm this differentiation between truth and correctness. For example, Socrates says about fables (μύθοι) that, although they are literally incorrect (ψεῦδος), 'there can be truth [ἀληθῆ] in this too' (377a). Later on, he says that

the 'greatest lie' (μεγίστων ψευδος) should not be told 'even if they were true' (378A). Further on, Socrates uses the enigmatic expression τό ὡς ἀληθῶς ψευδος, 'the true lie' (382b-c):

to be the victim of deception in the soul about being [τὰ ὄντα] and to have been deceived and to be ignorant and to have and keep the false impression there (...) [is] what would be most rightly called a true falsehood [ὡς ἀληθῶς ψευδος] [namely:] the ignorance [ἄγνοια] in the soul of the one who has been deceived [τοῦ ἐψευσμένου]. Since the falsehood in our discourse [ἐν τοῖς λόγοις] is some representation [μίμημά] of the affection [παθήματος] in our soul, which is later turned into an image [εἶδωλον], the falsehood [ψευδος] is not entirely pure [πάνυ ἄκρατον].

This ignorance of the soul is called 'a real lie' (τῷ ὄντι ψευδος), to be distinguished from 'a discursive lie' (τοῖς λόγοις ψευδος, 382c). So being 'true' does not depend on having correct content but rather on having a form that is 'pure,' 'related to being' or 'located in the soul'. The discursive falsehood of words, on the other hand, is only a derivative form of the affection of ignorance in the soul – as, by comparison, Francis Bacon writes in *Of Truth* that 'it is not the lie that passes through the mind but the lie that sinketh in and settleth in it that doth the hurt' (2002: 12). Ironically, in the context of falsehood, Plato thus demonstrates the distinction between correctness and truth.

The claim I wish to defend is that factual or literal correctness, for which Plato sometimes uses the word ὀρθότης, refers to a discursive value that applies to (poiological) *knowledge*, that is, to qualified statements.²⁸ Truth as ἀλήθεια, on the contrary, is not an epistemic value as it does not primarily belong to knowledge, but rather a metaphysical value that is concerned with being (τὸ ὄν). For 'to believe what is so [τὰ ὄντα]' and representing 'what sort of being it truly is' points to an *ontological* concern. Truth as ἀλήθεια hence amounts to an intrinsically ontological concern whether the representation is *directed to being*, rather than to the concern whether the representational content corresponds with the represented, or whether it is coherent with all other correct representations. By being directed to being and not (solely) to other derivative

²⁸ Unfortunately, Plato does not use the words ἀλήθεια, ὀρθότης and ψευδος consistently throughout the *Republic*. On some rare occasions, ἀλήθεια does undoubtedly refer to literal truth (378a-b). Furthermore, ψευδος is sometimes antonym of ἀλήθεια, other times of ὀρθότης, and in many other occasions it seems to coincide with what is morally wrong, that is of exemplifying the wrong kind of behaviour (cf. 382a-d). The Greek distinction between literal correctness and metaphysical truth, famously spelled out by Heidegger, does exist conceptionally in Plato, yet both sides of the dichotomy do not categorically fit into strictly separated terms. The use of the ἀλήθεια/ὀρθότης hence does not represent Plato's use of the terms. Still, for the reasons set out in this section, I believe it represents the logical scheme of his philosophy.

representations of being – so by truly being a representation *of* being – the representation makes being *available*. Truth thus refers to the process through which being is revealed or disclosed ‘as it truly is’ – not because the representation resembles the represented, but because the represented becomes conceivable by the representation. Consequently, instead of (a value of) knowledge, one might interpret *ἀλήθεια* as an ontological insight that enhances one’s understanding of being.²⁹

In order to further understand this difference between correctness and truth, I contend that we must place Plato’s truth conception in a metaphysical theory. More precisely, I propose to understand Plato’s metaphysics in terms of two ‘modalities of being’ that are transcendently distinct: on the one hand, ‘being as such’ (*τὸ ὄν*), and on the other hand, ‘being as it appears’ (*φαινόμενον* or *εἰκόνα*, first in 392c, 402a-c, and esp. 595a-601c). In short, I will speak of this distinction as between ‘being’ and ‘reality’. In my interpretation of Plato, the attribution of value of *ἀλήθεια* depends not on correspondence or coherence, but on the *modality of being* towards which the potential truth-bearer is oriented. Whereas correct knowledge is (correctly) oriented to empirical reality (being as it appears), a representation is true only if it is oriented to being as such, i.e. to life as it is not yet symbolised in a conceivable form (*τὸ ὄν*).

As one can read in every philosophy schoolbook, Plato’s Ideas or Forms, which constitute ‘being as such’, transcend empirical reality. Yet contrary to what one finds in both these schoolbooks and in most academic scholarship on Plato, the first logical consequence of being transcendent to reality is that of not being not in reality, that is, being *inexistent*. Hence, it does not quite make sense to speak of a ‘world’ or ‘realm’ of the ideas. If one takes this transcendental distinction seriously, as I propose to do, ‘being as such’ does not exist as a phenomenal reality: it is in a different way, it belongs to a different modality. To put it bluntly, *being does not exist* – it ‘applies to,’ ‘holds for’ or ‘counts in’ reality, yet it does not take part in reality – and thus, contrary to what is normally thought, truth is directed towards something that is not real.

As I take it, Plato’s contention that the ideal is not real gives his philosophy its critical potential. For instead of a determined reality, the modality of *τὸ ὄν* must be a rather undetermined ideality that relates to reality *normatively*, i.e. as a standard or norm. Consequently, when one

²⁹ To be sure, discourse can be both correct and true. After all, ontology employs discourse (yet not merely discourse). Besides, knowledge can be true in the sense of *ἀλήθεια* as well, but, as I take it, this must be explained as the knowledge providing insight into being, not as being correct in the sense of correspondence or coherence.

is oriented to being, one relates to reality rather critically. In other words, when doing *ontology*, one is concerned with how reality *should be* rather than how it is *already* understood. We can also put this modal distinction in terms of temporality: from the moment that one is oriented to τὸ ὄν, an undetermined future has priority over an already determined past (i.e. future precedes past). To be sure, one should not interpret this as escapism, because one is only preoccupied with the promise of the undetermined future for the sake of determined reality – the philosopher exits the cave to subsequently re-enter with new insights. This dialectical relation between determined reality and undetermined ideality, the interdependence between the finite world and infinite values, is what I take to be the essential condition of *critical* philosophy.

What, then, is Plato's reason for assuming that truth cannot arise from an orientation to phenomenal reality, for instance from the *aesthetic* approach of an artist? Plato's answer lies in the inherent and inevitable *particularity* of sensory appearances. Take a simple example: a drawing of a circle. However easy it is to *speak* about circles in general, it is impossible to draw *the* circle, for one always ends up with a particular circle (cf. 'no craftsman makes the actual idea' 596b, cf. 597a). To a discursive mind, the drawing might *refer to* the discursive concept of circularity, but it does so only secondarily, as a representation of a discursive concept. Still, as an appearance, i.e. *as a drawing*, the drawing presents only a particular circle. The sensory appearance of an idea can never present the idea as such, as discursive language immediately does. It can only present the idea in a particular manifestation.

Therefore, according to Plato, the aesthetic domain of sensory appearance is necessarily contingent and infinite (one can make representations of everything, Socrates remarks at 598b-c). Truth, on the other hand, contains a promise of necessity and universality – which can only be achieved through the discursive function of abstraction. For, according to Plato, in order to know what being truly *is*, or what reality should be, it is not necessary to know what a particular example of that being looks like. Grasping being, instead, means conceiving it in its universality, which is not dependent on this or that contingent sensory manifestation. This universality and necessity, this freedom of contingency, is what Plato means by the phrase 'how it truly is'.

Thus, I propose to conceive of Plato's canonical dichotomy between the universal 'conceptual' versus the particular 'aesthetic' as an ontological difference of, on the one hand, being as such, τὸ ὄν, and on the other hand, the symbolic order of *beings* (φαινομένᾳ). Thereby, I hope, it

becomes clear how, in Plato's philosophy, truth may arise in the 'absurd' project of ontology. For, on the one hand, being is mediated through perceivable, nameable or in any other way *signified* beings (or, in platonic idiom, the *φαινομένᾳ* 'participate in' τὸ ὄν). Yet on the other hand, as explained before, human beings are not capable of having immediate access to being, for being is only to be conceived through particular symbolisations. So, in short, being is mediated by beings, yet being as such cannot be understood as *a* being.

The crucial question of ontology, then, is how it is possible to transcend the poiological realm of beings and get closest to being as such, by employing the very same beings that are to be transcended (cf. the absurd enterprise of seeking the pre-discursive through discourse, that is, of speaking about the unspeakable). Reading Plato's dialogues and following the logic of the ontological difference, the most obvious pitfall of ontology would be to confound *a* being with being as such, that is, a particular instance with a universal, for this would conceal rather than reveal the universal. Instead, in order to reveal something about being that was hidden in the symbolic order of reality, one needs to be critical of that contingent symbolic order of reality. And to be critical of reality, one needs a passionate point of orientation, an indeterminate ideality, that lies outside of that reality. According to Plato, that which combines both of these conditions – i.e. the criticised reality and the passionate ideality – is a discursive function, namely *abstraction*, which, in turn, needs to be directed by a non-discursive passion. Thus, through a dialectical endeavour of discursive abstraction and non-discursive passion (cf. §2.2.4), insight into being might be gained; not as a positive doctrine of what it is, but as a negative glimpse of its being – as one can only look into the sun when it is fully eclipsed.

§2.2.6 The Critique of the Lying Poet Revisited

Through the transcendental distinction between the two modalities of being, it becomes clear how all the dichotomies discussed so far – poiology and ontology, knowledge and insight, merely discursive and passionate reason, correctness and truth, etc. – fit in a twofold scheme:

Poiology (τοῦ ποιῶνός) is oriented to:	Ontology (τοῦ τε ὄντος) is oriented to:
being as it appears / reality (φαινομένον)	being as such (τὸ ὄν)
determined beings	undetermined being
in their particular manifestations	as it necessarily and universally is
reality as it <i>already</i> is (past)	reality as it <i>should</i> be (future)
discursive knowledge	critical insight
merely with λόγος	with λόγος plus passion
Value: ὁρθότης	Value: ἀλήθεια

Figure 2

With this scheme, it is possible to reinterpret the problem of the ποιητῆς ψευδῆς, the lying poet. In doing this, I hope to amend four common interpretations of Plato's critique of artistic representation (μίμησις). Namely, that Plato condemns the work of art for (a) being representative in the sense of mimesis; (b) being an appearance; (c) relating subversively or in any other way critically towards the polis; and (d) lacking knowledge (due to either the ignorance of the artist or an ignorance inherent in the work).³⁰ At first sight, these propositions seem to apply to obvious aspects of Plato's critique of poetry. On closer inspection, however, one might argue that they miss the essential point that is at stake in Plato's theory. Thus, reading Plato's scepticism of art against the background of the aforementioned theory of modalities sheds new light on the issue of artistic representation. It is only in this light, I believe, that one is able to recognise the penetrating challenge implied in Plato's concerns.

First of all, concerning common interpretation (a), I tend to disagree with the sympathetic theory of Bernard Bosanquet (2011: 29-30), Edith Schipper (1963: 199), Jessica Moss (2007: 415) and others that have tried to rescue works of art from Plato's critique by claiming that Plato disputed the value of art only *insofar* as art is representational in the sense of mimesis (thereby

³⁰ This is not the place to provide a detailed overview of all secondary literature in order to legitimise these rather general characterisations of the *Republic's* contemporary reception. Still, I would argue that most canonical contemporary Anglophone scholarship on the issue of artistic representation in the *Republic* – among others, I think of Iris Murdoch (1977), Alexander Nehamas (1982), James Urmson (1982), Elizabeth Belfiore (1984), Martha Nussbaum (1986), Stephen Halliwell (1988), John Ferrari (1989), Jonathan Lear (1992), Bernard Bosanquet (2011), Nickolas Pappas (2020) – testifies to at least one of these four assumptions. In the following, I will provide some more specific references.

preserving a place for non-mimetic art in the ideal state). As I take it, Plato's scepticism does apply to all works of art, because his critique is not that some art is mimetic per se, but rather that all art is mimetic of a specific metaphysical modality. The decisive point in Plato's argumentation (esp. at 597e-600a) pertains to *how* the arts represent, not *that* they represent.

If we were to summarise this decisive point in a one-liner, it would be the question posed on 598a: *ἀρα οἷα ἔστιν ἢ οἷα φαίνεται*. That is, translated to the language of this thesis: are the arts representative of the left or the right side of the transcendental scheme? Plato's answer, of course, would be that the artist's field of operation is the modality of phenomenal reality. Artworks represent how being appears instead of how it truly is. So, comparable to some of the cave-dwellers in book VII, who are highly skilled in comparing, measuring and predicting the movements of the shadows (516c-d), good artists are talented experts of poiological knowledge, i.e. of reality as it is already qualified. They know very well how reality appears, how it is generally known, how people speak about it, etc. However, because they are only directed to determined reality, without an orientation to an undetermined ideality, they are not able to provide a critical ontological understanding of how that reality should be (*τοῦ μὲν ὄντος οὐδὲν ἐπαίει, τοῦ δὲ φαινομένου*, 601c). Similarly to the sophist, the lying poet is thus not accused of literally lying but rather of *concealing being*, that is, of hindering one's ontological orientation to being with uncritical imitations of contingent appearances of that being.

As is well-known, Plato argues that works of art are less true than the artefacts produced by a craftsman. However, this is essentially not, as is often assumed (common interpretation (b), cf. e.g. Nehamas 1982, Halliwell 1988) because artworks are themselves appearances – so are the artefacts – but rather because they are oriented to reality as it already appears instead of to being as such. Although the artefacts do not constitute a form of abstraction either, they are at least *created* (cf. 596b); that is, they are mediated attempts to make sense of being. Artworks, on the contrary, are not only appearances, but also appearances *of* appearances, and it is this orientation to appearance rather than their apparent nature – their signification rather than their signifier, their form rather than their material – that makes them eventually 'three stages removed from the truth' (*τρίτος ἀπὸ τῆς ἀληθείας*, 599d) and consequently not 'serious' (*σπουδαία*, 608a, cf. 602b).

The third common interpretation (c) – which can be found in many introductory texts on the *Republic*, but also in the outstanding work of Iris Murdoch (1977) and Jonathan Lear (1992) –

claims that Plato bans poetry from the ideal state because it has a subversive potential that threatens to undermine the harmonious order of the polis. Though not faulty, this is a rather cursory reading that conceals the philosophical point at stake. My argument goes as follows. From the transcendental scheme above, it follows that *if* a poem is directed to phenomenal reality, it can be, at best, correct. Since works of art, according to Plato (376c-383c, 386a-403c), mostly fail in both moral and epistemic correctness they must be either censored or abandoned altogether. Philosophically speaking, however, this concern regarding art's (morally or factually) incorrect content only becomes relevant *if* one accepts that an artwork cannot have a form that is *ἀληθές*. So, in a word, the impossibility of artistic truth logically precedes the improbability of artistic correctness. Then, the reason why works of art can never be true, according to Plato, is because they represent something that is already an 'image' (*εἰκόνα*) or a 'model' (*τύπος*). I take this to mean that an artwork represents particular beings that are *already known* either discursively or sensorially.³¹ The crucial point, in my view, is that for Plato works of art only uncritically reproduce existing discursive knowledge without revealing anything new to one's understanding. This means, essentially, that an artwork inherently *lacks* any genuinely critical potential. Then, I would conclude that, since the impossibility of artistic truth logically precedes the improbability of artistic correctness, artworks are first and foremost banned not for their subversive incorrect content, but for their inability to relate to phenomenal reality in a genuinely critical or non-conformist way. Therefore, it is essentially not art's potential subversion of the public order but rather a fundamental lack thereof for which Plato bans the poets.

Put differently, I believe that Plato is essentially sceptical of the possibility of *creativity* in the arts. Strictly speaking, artworks are not *creations* in Plato's view, not original symbolisations mediating being anew, but mere copies of other discursive or sensorial acts of symbolisation. Since the artist does not relate to being, but to reality as it is already formed and symbolised by others, the artist is not able to genuinely *create* but only to reproduce (*εἰδώλου δημιουργός*, 599d). Consequently, a work of art is not a re-presentation of reality – i.e. a new constellation in which life is disclosed and understood anew – but rather a copy of a way in which it is already

³¹ James Urmson writes that, according to Plato, the artist 'does not attempt to paint beds as they are known to be *but* the way they look' (Urmson 1982, my emphasis). As I take it, painting the bed as it is known (by the masses) and painting it the way it looks are for Plato essentially the same, because both existing knowledge and sensuous qualities amount to the modality of reality as it is already symbolised.

known, an existing manner in which life is already apparent or 'qualified'. Since this reproduced poiological knowledge of an artwork *distracts* one from an ontological orientation, concealing rather than revealing being, Plato judges artworks to be false rather than true in the sense of *ἀλήθεια*. Hence, it is not knowledge that the artist or artwork is lacking, as many commentators such as James Urmson (1982) and Nickolas Pappas (2020) assume (d).³² Instead, I claim it is the other way around: when the work of art is deprived of its creativity and doomed to a poiological reproduction of what is already *known*, it is eventually art's knowledge that neutralises its truth potential. Therefore, in essence, it is not the absence of knowledge but the presence of knowledge that renders a work of art untrue.

Overall, my analysis reveals that regarding all these aspects, Plato's fundamental metaphysical concerns result in opposing practical measures. In translating metaphysics into politics, a remarkable dialectical inversion occurs. Namely, the concern for the represented in the arts results in a critique of artistic representations; the concern for the absence of art's critical potential results in censorship of its free expression; and the concern for the possible concealment of knowledge results in a critique of the lack thereof. Both opposites, metaphysics and politics, align with one side of the *pro tanto*-relation between truth and discourse: the metaphysical concern aligns with the insufficiency of discourse (logoscepticism), the political measures with the necessity of discourse (logocentrism). Since this dialectic is hidden in the logocentric outset of the *Republic*, it is hardly surprising that common lines of interpretation focus on the inverted practical conclusions instead of its antonymous metaphysical origins. However, by reconceiving both the political claims and the underlying metaphysical concerns as two parts of the same hypothetical imperative – i.e. a form of reasoning consisting of conditional propositions (if-then statements) – I hope to show what is at stake in Plato's aesthetics: the decisive distinction between a poiological reproduction of knowledge and a genuinely creative representation.

To conclude, therefore, I propose to reformulate this fundamental distinction – i.e. the 'one-liner' *ἀρα οἷα ἔστιν ἢ οἷα φαίνεται* – into a question that I take to be Plato's fundamental concern with the arts. That is, in the context of the arts, the transcendental distinction poses the question

³² Again, this lack of knowledge is a part of Plato's critique, as he often claims that the poets 'know nothing of that of which they speak' (*Apology*, 21d). Still, I contend that a sole focus on this aspect of knowledge conceals the actual point at stake.

of whether *that which is represented in the work can also be understood outside of its representation in the work*. If that is the case – i.e. if one takes a work of art to be a representation of a nameable being or a perceivable entity – then the artwork is indeed merely a representation of something that is already a representation of being. And such an ‘imitation of an imitation’ indeed seems epistemically redundant, for it adds no meaning to being and hence it does not enhance one’s understanding of being (*ὄντος οὐδὲν ἐπαίει*, 601c). If the represented in art is a qualified appearance, Plato seems to be right in saying that art is epistemically not more than a second-rate duplicate, a mere illustration, uncritically repeating what is already known without revealing a new understanding of life.

2.3 Plato’s Tacit Plea for Artistic Autonomy

Now that I have reformulated Plato’s arguments in conditional propositions, I will try to reframe them into a task for philosophy of art, which, to my knowledge, has not been extrapolated from his work before. For if one recalls Plato’s ambivalence on the subject of art (§2.2.3), especially his invitation to ‘make a defence of her behalf’ (607d), I think one should refrain from interpreting his scepticism as a definitive judgement about the possibility of artistic truth. Rather than an end-point, one could interpret this scepticism as a starting point for philosophy. Thus, I propose to put Plato’s critique into the perspective of the distinctively logocentric approach of the *Republic*, which is primarily aimed at addressing discourse’s necessity for truth-finding rather than its insufficiency. And indeed, if only this side of the *pro-tanto*-relation between truth and discourse is addressed, it makes sense to subject artistic significance to a discursive pursuit of truth. From a logocentric perspective, the only roles left for the non-discursive arts are that of either copying discourse’s ontological dimension (as in the case of poetry) or supporting a discursive-ontological quest (as in the case of music). Either way, discourse is leading and art is following.

However, what if we convert the antecedent of the conditional propositions of Plato’s logocentric critique into a task for a logosceptic philosophy? Then, Plato’s invitation ‘to make a defence on art’s behalf’ could be made explicit. Thus, following the last section, Plato’s critique of art is that *if the artwork’s represented content can be understood outside of the form of its representation, the artwork hinders one’s ontological orientation to being (with uncritical*

imitations of known appearances of being) instead of revealing an original constellation in which being is understood anew. The philosophical task that arises from this critique is thus to explain how works of art can have a representational meaning that is implicit in a distinctively non-discursive form through which it appears. Such an implicit meaning is true in a way that cannot be made 'explicit' – a semantic content that cannot be extricated from its non-discursive form and thus cannot be understood without the work. In other words, the challenge Plato poses is to explain how an artwork is not a representation of some *thing* – i.e. of this or that discursively nameable, perceivable or in any other way signified being within the world – but rather a direct re-presentation of the pre-discursive 'raw material' of the already signified entities.

Since human beings can never grasp being as such, but only comprehend being through symbolisations of being, a new ('re') presentation of being could enhance one's understanding of being if it reveals something that was hidden or concealed in the actual symbolic order.³³ Hence, the task that we have inherited from Plato is not to defend art's moral or epistemic correctness, but rather art's *critical* relation to these discursive structures. The question is how a work of art can be true *in spite of* the knowable content it represents. For an artwork cannot be a potential bearer of truth as long as it uncritically copies an existing symbolic order, representing the rubrics through which reality is already understood. What must be explained, therefore, is how a work of art can relate critically to that discursive order. How are works of music, poetry and painting able to create a new non-discursive arrangement of sensorial material that enhances one's understanding of being – a momentary constellation that is able to reveal that which was obscured through a merely discursive reason? Only then a work of art is able to attain a truthful or revealing relation to being – still in a mediated way, still particular and sensory, yet oriented towards being, that is representative *of* being, and hence disclosing reality in a new modification. This would attribute to the arts an ability to create new forms, neither entirely independent from discourse nor parasitic on discourse, but in a critical relation

³³ Next one could ask after another differentiation: *when* does an orientation to being enhance one's understanding of being? Is every symbolisation of being that shows being anew automatically true? Plato does not ask this question in the passages under consideration here, because his theory of artistic truth is, on an explicit level, about untruth in the arts. From these passages, one can infer the fundamentals of a theory of truth – namely, in short, that a representation is true if it is a representation *of* being, for a representation of being makes being available, and by revealing being in a new way, the representation enhances one's understanding of being – yet the question of possible critical differentiations within this reasoning is left for those who accept Plato's invitation to develop a substantial theory of artistic truth. This thesis does not attempt to develop such a theory but only to show the need for such a theory.

towards it, that is (as described in the case of musical works) in a dialectical interaction with discourse.³⁴

Thus, a serious consideration of artistic signification could genuinely challenge fundamental ideas about human cognition. In the works of Plato, the problem of art urges one to acknowledge that other ways than discursive abstraction may lead to truth. Speaking generally, I see four possible strategies to answer this challenge. First, one could try to show how a distinctive non-discursive form of abstraction is possible. Second, one could point to an irreducibly non-discursive element in discursive abstraction and prove that it is indispensable for the operation of that function, yet not, as is the case in Plato's musical pedagogy, in a way in which discourse is dominant. Third, one could demonstrate how a distinctively non-discursive function different from abstraction can be representative of being as well, namely either as a process of particularisation, or, fourthly, as a disruption of the abstractive function.

As I take it, this substantial task follows *via negativa* from Plato's philosophy. The seemingly odd warning of art being an 'imitation of an imitation' might thus be seen as a modernistic plea for art's autonomy, preventing art from becoming a slave to other symbolic forms. That is, to prevent art from merely illustrating what is already known through discourse; to prevent it from being reduced to a mere practical utility or emotional release, or from being employed for commercial purposes or some moralistic agenda. In short, in the *Republic*, one finds fundamental reasons to argue that art must have a significant form that is able to explain a possible autonomous relation to being. When a work of art lacks such a distinct artistic significance, it would be merely a replica, an imitation of an imitation, a poor analogy of something for which there are, in fact, better media.

³⁴ In order to stand in a dialectical relation to discourse, art must be non-discursive. Hence I disagree with Josef Früchtl's suggestion that one may better understand artworks *trans-discursively* instead of non-discursively (2010: 201). After all, in order to collaborate in a dialectical trans-dialectical manner, the artistic form itself must first be understood in its non-discursive opposition to discourse.

3

ARISTOTLE'S UNIVERSALS

The Epistemic Dissolution of Artistic Truth

The following part is dedicated to one 'defence on art's behalf' in particular, namely Aristotle's reaction to Plato, as can be reconstructed from the *Poetics*. I propose to look at the *Poetics*, not so much because Aristotle was historically the first to accept Plato's invitation, but rather because his arguments express a natural first reaction to the Platonic invitation. Perhaps the most obvious way to take the sting out of Plato's scepticism would be by demonstrating that artworks represent universals instead of particulars.

It has become commonplace to frame the diverging views of Aristotle and Plato as a dispute on truth in the arts, in which Plato's scepticism of art's particularity is 'solved' by Aristotle's explanation of poetry's ability to represent universal truths (e.g. Taylor 1998, Carroll 2006). In the following sections, however, I will reconstruct and reinterpret this debate to show that Aristotle does not and cannot conclude that poetry accommodates the kind of truth Plato denied to artworks of having. Since Aristotle's reply to Plato is so common-sensical yet unaccomplished, I consider it an essential part of the Platonic invitation: Plato's challenge is truly challenging by virtue of the impossibility of Aristotle's 'easy way out'. By using the *Poetics* to deepen the problem of truth in the arts, I will be able to extend the twofold scheme of Plato into a transcendental triptych of three metaphysical modalities, with three corresponding truth conceptions.

In the following, I will first briefly explain the arguments made by Aristotle in chapters 1, 4, 9 and 25 of the *Poetics* about the epistemic value of art (3.1). After that, I will take a close look at the truth conception that is at work throughout these epistemic arguments, namely that of 'plausibility' (3.2). First, I distinguish the modality of plausibility (§3.2.1), partly by applying it to various works of art (§3.2.2). Subsequently, I will discuss the possibilities of a cognitivist interpretation of Aristotle's arguments concerning plausibility and the general temptation

among commentators to infer a conception of artistic truth from these interpretations (§3.2.3). This allows me, ultimately, to show why this cognitivist interpretation cannot be used to reply to Plato's invitation (3.3). Thus, working again *via negativa*, showing that this Aristotelian escape from Platonic scepticism ultimately remains insufficient, I hope to elucidate how one might be able to respond convincingly to Plato's invitation.

3.1 The Question of Poetic Art

Aristotle's *Poetics* deals with the demarcation of the so-called 'poetic art' (*ποιητική τέχνη*, 1447a ff.). Different from Plato's broader treatment of the fine arts in general, the arts under consideration in the *Poetics* concern the literary forms of storytelling of Aristotle's day, including dithyrambic poetry, satire, epic poetry and, most exemplarily, comedy and tragedy. In demarcating these poetic forms of language from other usages, Aristotle rejects the idea that poetic language can be distinguished by its metric medium of verse. Poetic art, after all, includes instances that are not written in verse, like dialogues (1447b), and excludes various examples that are written in verse, such as the scientific works of Empedocles (1447b) or that hypothetically could be written in verse, such as Herodotus's historiographies (1451a). Aligning with Plato, Aristotle holds that it is not poetry's medium or subject matter but its manner of representation that unites all poetic arts and sets them apart from other uses of language (1447a, cf. 1451b). One could thus argue that Aristotle explains the distinctiveness of poetic significance – i.e. that which makes the poem a poem – not by its material or content but by the distinct artistic form. This form, then, is called *μίμησις* (1447a).

Since the nature of this mimetic form is not explicitly defined by Aristotle, it can only be inferred from the two examples he gives of non-mimetic language, namely natural science and history (1447b, 1451a). One could argue that both examples involve, to say the very least, a discursive function of language. That is, both are descriptive usages of language through which literal and explicit assertions are made about how reality factually is. Mimetic language, then, must be distinct in that it concerns a non-discursive or fictional use of language, the purpose of which is not to assert or describe what is actually the case but to imagine what could possibly be. This does not mean that the events and characters of a story cannot refer to any actual event and character; they may well do so. Aristotle's point is rather that the actuality of the poem's

reference is irrelevant to its artistic nature. After all, the mimetic arts are not distinguished by *what* they represent but by *how* they represent; namely, not discursively but fictionally.

Suppose that the poet's task is not to assert or describe what is the case but to imagine what could be the case. Then, one could argue that the object of the poem's representation cannot be a particular and nameable ('qualified') being within reality, as Plato assumed it was. Instead, the poet must draw upon a whole *realm of being* for artistic representations – a 'field of operation for representation', as Norman Gulley accurately describes it (1979: 168). Accordingly, Aristotle argues that the poet's field of operation for representation is the realm of possible human behaviour, especially the aspects of human actions and attitudes that evoke moral feelings of sympathy or antipathy in the spectator (1448a). Since this field of human behaviour involves, as Aristotle states at the beginning of *Nicomachean Ethics*, 'much difference of opinion and uncertainty' (1094b), this field of operation can very well nourish the non-discursive, imaginative artistic purpose. For the fact that it contains no settled laws and consistent patterns of behaviour gives artists the freedom to invent their own patterns of behaviour.

By assuming a different field of artistic representation, Aristotle is able to break through Plato's scepticism without abandoning the representative conception of art. Since poetic art does not simply record particular things and events but draws on the realm of possible human behaviour in general, the literary work can represent not only the particular but the universal (1451a). That is, poetry is not so much about individual things and actual events (*τὰ γενόμενα λέγειν*, 1451b), as Plato argued, but it is about the *kinds of things* people do and the *sorts of events* that might occur (*οἷα ἂν γένοιτο*, 1451b) regarding what is possible in terms of probability or necessity (*τὸ εἰκὸς ἢ τὸ ἀναγκαῖον*). Hence, Aristotle famously concludes that 'poetry is more philosophical and more serious [*σπουδαιότερον*] than history since poetry relates more of the universal [*τὰ καθόλου*], while history relates particulars [*τὰ καθ' ἕκαστον*]' (1451b). Although Aristotle is not explicitly referring to Plato, it speaks volumes that the wording of Aristotle's statement resembles the idiosyncratic vocabulary of the *Republic*, in which art is criticised for representing particulars and for being the opposite of philosophy and thus not 'serious' (*σπουδαία*, *Rep.* 608a, 602b).

What I take to be the decisive step that enables Aristotle to formulate this reply to Plato is the tacit introduction of another modality of being. While Plato's theory of art develops from the

distinction between two modalities of being, namely true being ($\tau\acute{o} \acute{o}\nu$) and phenomenal reality, holding that art cannot be oriented to the former because it necessarily relates to the latter, Aristotle attempts to save poetry from this poiological destiny by introducing a new modality of being into the discussion, namely that of *possibility* ($\tau\acute{\alpha} \delta\upsilon\nu\alpha\tau\acute{\alpha}$, cf. 1451a). The modal logic underlying his argument implies that, in principle, the possible is more universal than the actual, because the actual is already given (either discursively or sensorily) and thereby semantically determined as a being that is known as a particular being. The possible, by contrast, is not yet given, and hence needs to be conceptually created by orienting to a realm of being and the universals pertaining to that field.

Consequently, one could argue that Aristotle provides a more differentiated view of artistic mimesis than Plato does. Following Aristotle, artists could be said to present material that would have literal and known meaning if it were used discursively to describe reality. However, as they employ it in an artistic form, these discursive signifiers come to represent something other than what they literally describe (i.e. they come to designate a possibility). In other words, by *presenting* particular people, actions and events through the literal meaning of words, the poet tries to non-discursively *represent* the kind of actions people could perform in certain sorts of situations. So Aristotle discovers that even when art's material or content is (partly) discursive (i.e. consisting of words that have a literal meaning), its form can be non-discursive. And through this form, poetry acquires its distinctively artistic meaning.

This is how the *Poetics* can be read as responding to Plato's invitation. Whereas Plato in the *Republic* sees the mimetic arts as repetitively and redundantly copying already known representations, Aristotle grants poetry a distinct representative function through which it is able to show something that was not yet apparent through discursive description. Therefore, the prefix 're' in 'representation' designates not a repetition or replica in Aristotle's philosophy but rather a reconfiguration or revision that adds meaning to what is literally represented. In this way, Aristotle could be said to rescue the idea of artistic creativity.

3.2 The *Poetics*: Truth and Plausibility

§3.2.1 *The Modal Autonomy of Plausibility*

The reconstructed ancient debate on artistic truth has often been presented as being settled by Aristotle's 'solution' of the artistic universals (e.g. Taylor 1998, Carroll 2006). However, one may wonder whether the 'added meaning', which Aristotle expects works of poetry to provide, can properly be called new and hence true (in the metaphysical sense of revealing something that was hidden before). In other words, is a literary reconfiguration of reality able to enhance one's understanding through the representation of artistic universals?

As I will demonstrate, Aristotle's study of poetry deals with a different form of truth than the two forms that Plato discussed in the *Republic*. Modern interpreters of the *Poetics* – both the 'cognitivists' (e.g. Gallop 1990, Halliwell 2002, 2011, and González 2019) who read it partly as a reply to Plato's concerns about aletheian truth, and the 'minimalists' (e.g. Gulley 1979, Ferrari 1999 and Destrée 2021) who reject such a reconstruction by pointing to Aristotle's insistence on poetry's independence of orthodox truth – glance over the fact that the form of truth that Aristotle grants to works of poetry is neither that of *ἀλήθεια* nor that of factual correctness, but rather what Aristotle calls *πιθανότης*, i.e. the affective value of plausibility or persuasiveness (1451b, 1455a, 1459b, 1461b).

Unlike the Platonic difference between truth and correctness, famously spelled out by Martin Heidegger (1927, 1960, 1997) and others (e.g. Gadamer 1960), remarkably little has been written about Aristotle's *πιθανότης* as a form of artistic truth (instead of a merely rhetoric category) distinct from correctness and aletheian truth. In fact, to me it seems that many misunderstandings about the ancient debate on artistic truth arise from the tendency to apply the modern undifferentiated concept of 'truth' to the philosophy of Plato and Aristotle. Studying *πιθανότης* as a third form of truth, and hence grasping the differentiation of artistic truth forms again, allows us refine to our interpretation of Aristotle's text, and, more importantly, helps us understand the potentiality and limitations of Aristotle's philosophy of art as an answer to Plato's scepticism.

How, then, can *πιθανότης* be interpreted as a form of truth? In order to understand what truth-as-plausibility is, one must first grasp its fundamental (i.e. modal) difference from truth-as-correctness. According to Aristotle, the cognitive value of a poem does not lie in its correctness,

because 'poetry does not have the same standard of correctness [ὀρθότης] as politics or as any other craft [τέχνης]' (1460b). For if poetic significance consists of a non-discursive form, the purpose of poetic art cannot be to describe, assert or explain what is the case in reality. Accordingly, judging or (dis)valuing poetry for the (in)correctness of its representations of reality would be a methodological mistake. According to Aristotle, poetry is neither correct nor incorrect; we might call it *acorrect*.

On several occasions in the *Poetics*, Aristotle makes clear that a plausible story can be factually incorrect, just as an implausible story might turn out to be the case in real life. In fact, the poet can invent any character or event as long as they are plausible, even 'things plausible though [factually] impossible should be preferred to the [factually] possible but implausible' (1460a). If the distinction between factuality and plausibility is indeed as fundamental as Aristotle claims here, I propose to view the difference between correctness and plausibility as a metaphysical difference. That is to say, the two values belong to different modalities of being, namely reality and possibility. Whereas correctness is a value that applies to the discursive description of factual reality, Aristotle's category of plausibility must be conceived as a non-discursive value of his newly introduced modality of possibility.

Acknowledging a modal distinction between reality and possibility sounds easier than it might turn out to be. In more than one way, we are inclined to interpret a possibility in terms of reality. To begin with, attentive readers of the previous paragraph might have wondered whether the claim that Aristotle's *πιθανότης* belongs to the modality of possibility does not contradict the cited sentence from the *Poetics* about 'things plausible though impossible'. However, as I take it, the term 'impossibility' in the quote above refers to a solely factual statement ('x is impossible' means 'it is a fact that x cannot be in reality') and hence such a statement about possibility belongs to the modality of reality. The modality of possibility, on the other hand, does not express the mode of 'factually being a possibility' but rather of 'possibly being fact'. The challenge of a modal metaphysics is to conceive of possibility not as a reality, i.e. as a factual possibility, but rather as a possible fact.

Another reason why the modal difference between correctness and plausibility is difficult to comprehend is that modern languages generally tempt interpreters to translate and to understand *πιθανότης* as 'probability' (cf. Taylor 1998, Halliwell 2002, Carroll 2006). I believe it

is of philosophical importance, however, to draw a distinction between plausibility (*πιθανότης*) and probability (*τὸ εἰκὸς*). For if one conceives of *πιθανότης* as a form of probability, *πιθανότης* is again reduced to a form of factual correctness. Judging something as *probably true* – which amounts either actually or ideally to a statistical assessment – amounts to judging it as *probably correct*. Then, probability would be just a deficient mode of correctness ('probably correct'). Probability and correctness operate essentially in the same modality, that of phenomenal reality, which belongs to the discursive use of language and not to the 'poetic art'. The philosophical consequence of confounding plausibility with probability, and thus of not acknowledging the modal autonomy of *πιθανότης*, is that Aristotle's argument against Plato would immediately lose all its potency. For if one does not acknowledge the poem's independency of correctness (its 'acorrectness'), the poet cannot be understood as drawing upon the independent modality of possibility to invent fictional events and characters that represent universals instead of particulars. That is, without the modal autonomy of *πιθανότης*, poetry would lose its cognitive potential once more.

If plausibility does not have factual value, how then must one consider its normativity? What kind of respect (what kind of Kantian *Achtung*) does one feel for this value, if it is not for the reality of facts, nor for the ideality of being? The word *πιθανότης* stems from the verb *πείθω*, which means either actively 'to persuade, convince, mislead' or passively 'to obey, believe, trust'. Accordingly, I propose to understand plausibility not as factual value but as an *aesthetic value of affective persuasiveness that makes the artwork worth one's trust or belief*. The philosophical depth of Aristotle's concept, in my view, lies in the fact that an artwork does not acquire this trustworthiness by being probably true (i.e. probably correct in factual reality), but by appearing to be true – that is, by being 'true to nature', faithful to the original, the veridical. A work of art is not plausible because the appearance is a correct representation of reality, but because it appears to be convincing. Aristotle's value of *πιθανότης* is primarily an aesthetic category, not an epistemic value. It is a *Wahrscheinlichkeit*, not in the everyday sense of something probable, but in the literal sense of something that is not necessarily true (*wahr*) but *appears (scheint)* to be so. To phrase it in slightly Kantian fashion, plausibility is a truthfulness without truth.

According to Plato, such an aesthetic category of truth-appearance would be the outright opposite of his metaphysical truth conception (*ἀλήθεια*). After all, something that appears is

always something that also potentially deceives – and it not only deceives one's correct judgement of the world but also distracts one from an orientation to being. Aristotle, however, uses the term in a much more optimistic way; namely, as that which is not necessarily true in either a metaphysical *aletheian* manner or in a discursive *orthodox* manner, but as something which is wedded to truth in the perception and faithful to reality on the level of appearance. Operating in the mode of possibility, without pretending to be a correct representation of the actual reality, a plausible work of poetry is thus able to show convincingly what that reality could look like if it were not the current contingencies of actuality, but another configuration that had established itself in reality.

§3.2.2 Naturalism and the Riddle of Plausible Representation

In order to analyse whether the concept of *πιθανότης* can be used to respond to Plato's scepticism, it is crucial to understand its evaluative autonomy as a truth value. As I have shown, however, it is rather difficult to grasp the distinction between correctness and plausibility without conceiving the latter's value in terms of the former. Since there is, to the best of my knowledge, hardly any literature, academic or essayistic, about *πιθανότης* as an artistic truth form, one can only fill this gap by dedicating a section to the plausibility of some actual artworks. Thus, in the following, I will further develop Aristotle's notion of *πιθανότης* as a truth concept by applying it to various works of art, in order to analyse whether this truth conception can serve to answer Plato's invitation.

With respect to the modal difference between correctness and plausibility, it is particularly interesting to consider artworks that deliberately deviate from correctness in order to appear more true in the sense of *πιθανότης*. As I will show, the paradoxical status of such 'incorrect plausibility' is especially poignant in the naturalistic ambition to work 'true to nature', for instance as found in Italian Renaissance painting. By analysing the representational ideal of 'truth to nature', which I explain as a strand of plausibility instead of correctness, I will argue that representational truthfulness always presupposes a representational alteration. And this representational or symbolic transformation is, I believe, the most promising aspect of *πιθανότης* to answer Plato's scepticism. In addition to analysing the visual quality of 'truth to

nature' as a form of plausibility, I demonstrate how to conceive of Aristotle's literary category of *πιθανότης* as a general aesthetic value that applies to more art forms than poetry alone.

Naturalism is an artistic ambition far more complex than is often assumed. Its aim can easily be defined as working 'true to nature'. However, it is far from clear what 'truth' means in this context, or what 'nature' is to be represented by it. Whereas the latter issue has been addressed by Ernst Gombrich in his key publication *Art and Illusion* (1956), I propose to focus on the nature of 'truth' in the ideal of working 'true to nature'. Regarding truth in naturalism, then, one might be inclined to use a discursive conception of truth, namely of correctness or, more specifically, of correspondence between representation and represented. Indeed, classical sources like Giorgio Vasari's *Lives of the Artists* or the notebooks of Leonardo da Vinci seem to testify to the assumption that a work is 'true to nature' if it correctly represents what the artist sees in nature. Although one probably would not believe that an artwork could actually coincide with what it depicts – as Zeuxis's paintings of grapes were said to be ruined by birds that tried to eat them. Yet, *ideally*, as a regulative idea, naïve naturalism is often still conceived as the ambition to achieve as best as possible such an indistinguishability between the representation and the represented. Thus, the value of being true to nature is often understood as a (deficient) mode of correctness – that is, as probability instead of plausibility.

However, a brief look at the artworks produced in the naturalistic tradition proves that a correct representation could not have been the ultimate ambition of many artists who diligently strived to be 'true to nature' – even not of those who explicitly articulated their own aspiration in terms of such a correct representation. In fact, many of the most defining works of the Italian Renaissance testify to the fact that in order to make a work *appear* true to nature (i.e. to make it plausible), artists often felt compelled to deviate from correctness.

Take, for instance, Masaccio's famous *Holy Trinity* (c. 1426-1428, Figure 3), which is celebrated for being the first artwork to perfectly employ linear perspective. As the art-historian Horst Janson has shown in his landmark article on the fresco (1967), Masaccio managed to perfectly render three-dimensional space on a two-dimensional surface by making the first as *measurable* as the latter. Janson thereby shows how carefully calculated and well-considered Masaccio's fresco actually is. For that reason, it is remarkable that within this flawlessly rendered virtual space, Masaccio chose to depict the three figures of the Trinity (i.e. Father, Christ and the holy spirit symbolised by the dove) incorrectly. As can be seen by comparing the

view on the capitals of the columns with the view on God the Father, which both stand at approximately the same height, the perspectival structure demands that the trinity should be viewed from below (i.e. from the eye level of the step on which the commissioners are kneeling). Instead, however, the figures of the Trinity are pictured from the front.

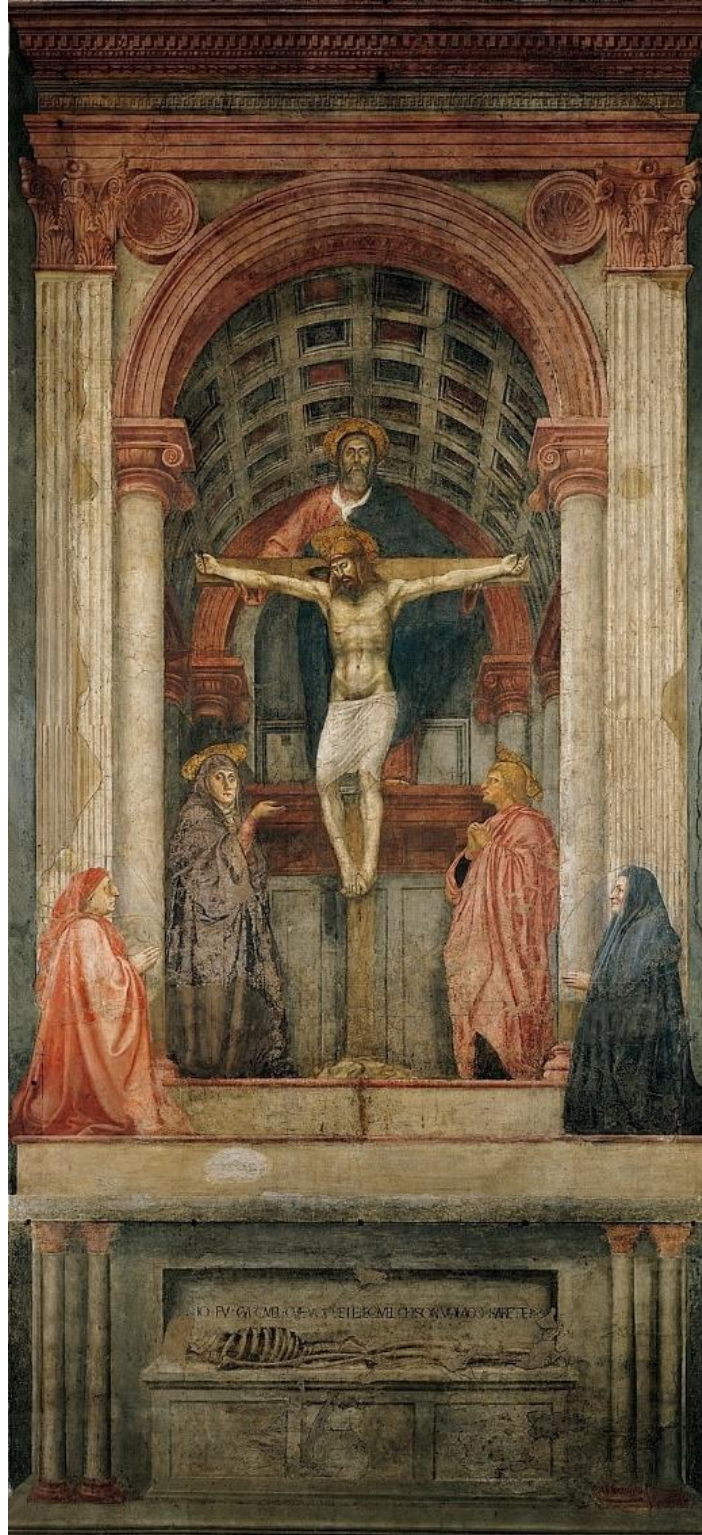


Figure 3

Given the profound complexity of the executed geometrical space, it is not likely that Masaccio made a simple mistake here. Instead, one could even argue that it is exactly this incongruity that makes the artistic idea of the piece (its 'universal') highly convincing (*πιθανόν*). For by extracting the divine Trinity from the geometrical laws of the represented empirical world, the figures of the Trinity appear to stand out in the fresco, as if they are approaching the viewer through an unknown yet plausible movement. Although it is impossible to discursively describe the precise affective consequence of this incorrectness, it seems fair to say that the incorrectness enhances the persuasiveness of the work in the sense of *πιθανότης*. One could argue that the effect of the incorrectness is persuasive in the sense that it convinces the spectator to *trust* the work, to suspend one's disbelief, in the same way as one may believe a plausible tragedy in the theatre. In the case of Masaccio's *Holy Trinity*, this means to trust that the particular arrangement of the fresco has something significant or universal to say; it means to have faith in the non-discursive meaning of its visual interplay, to believe the ineffable sacrality represented through the mere use of pigment on a plaster wall.

For a different kind of incorrect plausibility, we can turn to Leonardo da Vinci. Even Leonardo, whose well-documented scrupulous study of empirical reality was explicitly aimed at painting true to nature, makes deliberate use of incorrectness to tell 'finzione che significherà cose grande' (Leonardo 2001: 33). According to the renowned Leonardo-expert Martin Kemp, his efforts were 'directed toward the production of a kind of naturalism that is not *literally* like nature as we see it but rather achieves a special level of *conviction* on its own terms' (Kemp 2004, my emphasis). Take for instance Leonardo's last painting, *John the Baptist* (c. 1513-1516, Figure 4), considered one of the best examples of how Leonardo applied his discursive scientific knowledge to correctly represent anatomical and optical phenomena (Kemp 1997: 148). Remarkable, therefore, are the rather chubby shoulders and arms. These are *probably* not those of a man who spent much of his life in the Sinai desert. Were it not for some unambiguous iconographic symbols (i.e. the crossed staff and the fur tunic), one would probably never associate the portrayed figure with specifically John the Baptist.

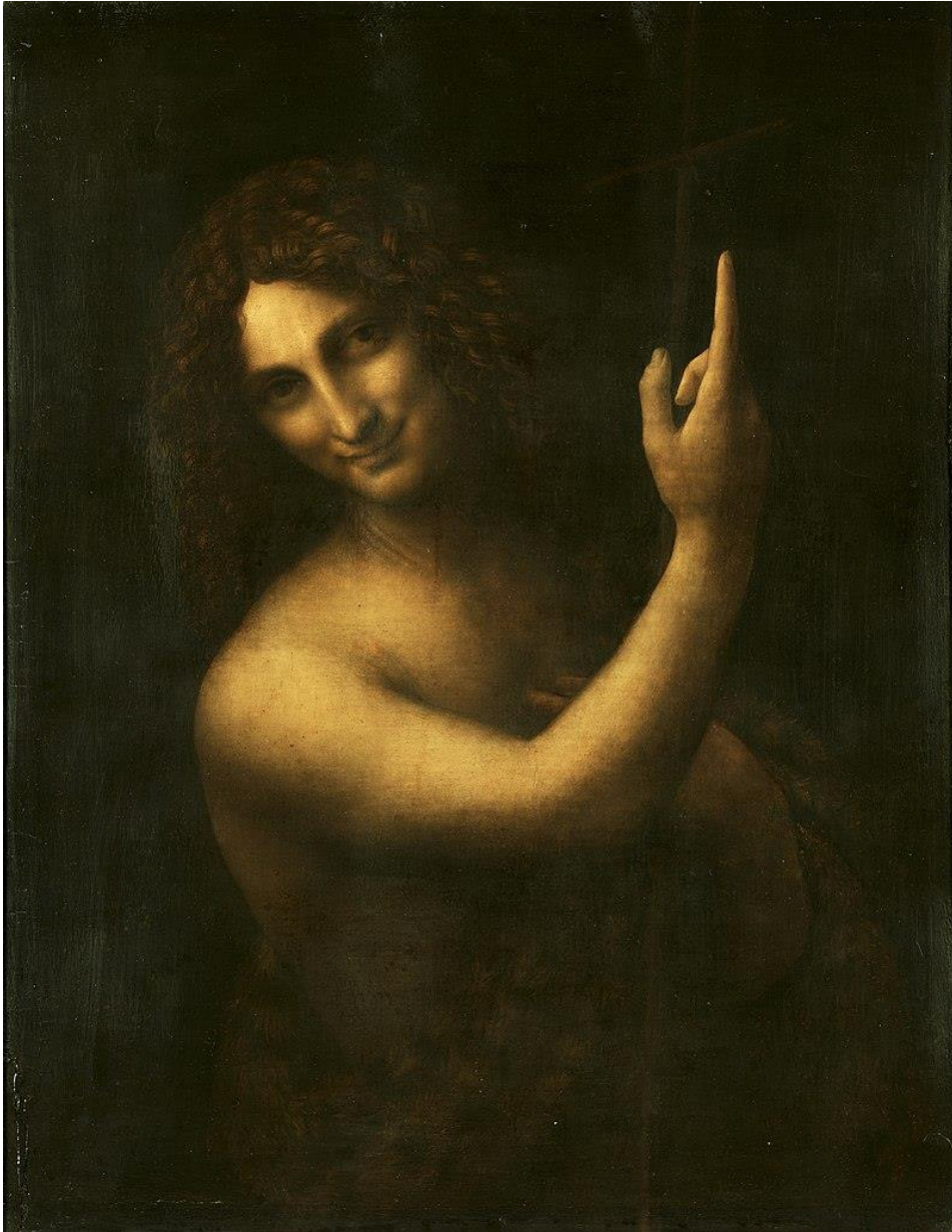


Figure 4

Obviously, Leonardo did not simply forget or ignore the fact that John the Baptist was an ascetic figure. I suppose that Leonardo wanted to portray the person of John the Baptist as true to nature as possible and that the 'incorrectness' of his posture should be understood in the light of his aim to give the biblical figure a convincing appearance (*πιθανόν*). Along these lines, one could argue that John's rather curvaceous figure contributes to the androgynous appearance of an apparition (for a similar interpretation cf. Zwijnenberg 2008) – as if, after his tragic death, he now re-emerges as an angel from the dark to tell us something important. At the same time, the plump body makes the angelified John appear more approachable. Unlike, for instance, the scrawny

John in Verrocchio's *Baptism of Christ* (1472-1475), Leonardo's John convincingly appears as a trusted friend that is about to share something intimate. Thus, one may argue that the artistic idea or 'universal' of the conflation of opposites – divinity and profanity, masculinity and femininity, distance and closeness – appears more convincing, more natural and arguably more plausible than if John had been portrayed in a more correct fashion.

If one calls an artistic incorrectness *πιθανόν*, it means that one would expect a 'corrected' version of the work (e.g. John with a more emaciated body, the Trinity viewed from below) to be less convincing. Just as unconvincing works tempt the spectator to imagine adjustments that would make the work more plausible, an artwork that is *πιθανόν* evokes the peculiar sensation of appearing to be the most convincing way to depict the particular subject of the work. Perhaps this expectation is not correct – perhaps one day, a new version of the painting will be discovered with a rather lean John that turns out to be even more convincing than the current one. The value judgement of *πιθανότης*, however, applies only to the appearance, its quality of evoking the peculiar sensation that 'it should not have been different', without knowing whether that is actually the case.

Last, another famous incorrect plausibility can be found in the works of Michelangelo, who must have known very well that a degree of incorrectness could enhance his sculptures to appear more true to nature. Take, for instance, Michelangelo's *David* (1504, Figure 5). Obviously the age of the grown-up figure does not seem to correspond to both the young boy described in the first book of Samuel, or to its traditional depiction by Donatello, Verrocchio and others. Furthermore, as is apparent to every visitor of the Galleria dell'Accademia, David's hands are disproportionately large. Again, instead of assuming that Michelangelo simply ignored David's age or mistook the size of his hands, one may wonder if and how the incorrect elements render the work more true to nature. Then, one could argue that Michelangelo deviated from a correct representation in order to create a figure with a persuasive universal kind of heroic character, with hands that more plausibly could have killed Goliath – especially when seen from far below, as the statue was initially made for the roofline of Florence's cathedral.

Similar to the hands of *David*, the left arm of the figure of Christ in the *Bandini Pietà* (1547-1555, Figure 6) is remarkably incorrect in size: as one can see, it is almost as large as the figure's right leg. However, it is arguably the left arm that gives the work its naturalistic merit. For the striking plausibility of the Florentine *Pietà* lies especially in Michelangelo's accomplishment of

the old naturalistic ambition of the Renaissance to convincingly represent the dead body of Christ (i.e. the universal of death). Ever since the great crucifix paintings by Cimabue and Giotto, it had been a captivating challenge to Florentine artists to represent the weighty mass and lifeless flesh of Christ's body with the very same materials through which they tried to evoke the illusion of life. There are not many works in Florence that represent the dead body as convincingly as the *Bandini Pietà*. Arguably Michelangelo's most important 'proof' for the deadness of the body of Christ is the unnaturally positioned arm – i.e. the absolute compliance with which the twisted arm follows the external support of Maria's hand reveals the absolute absence of any internal motion. Therefore, one could argue that by enlarging the arm beyond correct proportions, Michelangelo emphasises the proof of the truth he wishes to convey. Again, it is an incorrectness that gives the work its power of persuasion.



Figure 5



Figure 6

With these examples, I hope to have demonstrated that the truth form implied in the ideal of 'truth to nature' should not be understood as a correct correspondence to nature, but rather as truth in the sense of plausibility or *πιθανότης*. For a plausible work of art persuades the beholder to believe in the presented possibility – not as a probable representation of a particular reality, but as a convincing representation of certain universals or general ideas (e.g. sacrality, femininity, masculinity, heroism, death).

Hence, naturalism confronts one with a riddle, which I take to be at the core of Plato's scepticism. Apparently, the most plausible representation of a particular being is not an exact copy of the represented being, nor does a plausible representation represent what the represented being *probably* is. The most plausible representation, then, does not coincide with the represented, as a naïve explanation of naturalism goes. Instead, there seems to be a necessary discrepancy between the represented and the ideal representation. And, what is more, it is not only *despite* the gap between the representation and the represented, but also *by virtue of* that gap that the representation becomes plausible. That is, it is by virtue of its transformation in the representation that the represented is convincingly shown in the representation – just as the Trinity, John the Baptists, David and the dead Christ undergo a change in their representation through which they appear convincing. After all, representation and the represented are two different entities, belonging to different modalities of being, and hence a convincing or *πιθανόν* relation between them cannot be one of simply transferring the one into the other, but must be one of transforming the one into the other.

The seemingly simple idea of plausible representation thus turns out to contain a kind of conundrum that reiterates Plato's invitation. For, apparently, a truthful representation of the represented is not the represented. There is a necessary representational alteration that is a condition for representational truth. One could try to use this insight to respond to Plato's concern about works of art merely reproducing the symbolic order. For even if a work represents a being, that being must undergo an alteration in the representation; and for this alteration, one must draw upon something more than the being alone, namely the universals of the 'field of being'. Hence, one may argue that representational or symbolic transformation points to a form of artistic creativity, namely the ability to create a new significance of the represented universals through the representation of particulars. Aristotle's concept of *πιθανότης* could thus be understood as a way to sidestep Plato's scepticism by pointing to a

necessary creative transformation through which the represented appears in a truthful representation.

§3.2.3 Cognitivist Readings and Metaphysical Temptations

Now that I have employed Aristotle's concept of *πιθανότης* to develop a third form of artistic truth and have demonstrated its potential to reply to Plato's scepticism, I will now continue with the critical question whether this aesthetic value of plausibility or truth-appearance has the cognitive potency that Plato sought for in *ἀλήθεια*. In other words, does a plausible representation of the universals, through which reality is reconfigured in a new possibility, constitute a new understanding that cannot exist without that representation? Is the representational transformation of a plausible artwork implicit in the artwork's non-discursive form, so that its meaning content cannot be made explicit, detached from that non-discursive form? In this section, I propose a starting point for a possible cognitivist reading of the *Poetics* and consider the various ways in which commentators have developed this cognitive potential. In the next section, I will show why Aristotle's theory ultimately cannot dispel Plato's concerns about the metaphysical truth of artworks. Instead, I argue that we must understand Aristotle's response as an integral part of the challenge that Plato poses.

As is well known, in the *Poetics* Aristotle emphasises the importance of the plot (*μῦθος*) as the unified course of events that make up a story. Aristotle calls the plot 'the goal (...) and the most important thing' of a tragedy (1450b). Now that I have shown why plausibility is so important in Aristotle's philosophy of art, it also becomes clear why Aristotle puts so much emphasis on the plot. Since it is not correctness but plausibility – not being true but appearing true – that counts in a good tragedy, the internal coherence rather than the actuality of its content turns out to be most decisive for the truthfulness of a story.

What unites the particular events into a coherent plot is not a correct form (truth-as-correct-coherence), as those who interpret the *Poetics* as a kind of self-help book for tragedy writers seem to suppose. Rather, it is a sense of recognition in the beholder by virtue of which the particular events are grasped as being part of a nonaccidental course of events. Hence, the art of writing a *μῦθον πιθανόν*, a plausible story, consists not in the recording of particular facts, as the historian does, but in creating a recognisable plot that transcends the accidental and

represents how different types of people plausibly behave in sorts of situations. An implausible story contains either a random arrangement of incidents or too many accidental actions, which are not motivated by familiar impulses or caused by knowable circumstances. Such a story is unrecognisable as a unity of human events. Plausibility, *πιθανότης*, must hence be understood as the objective equivalent of the subjective intellectual activity of recognising a plot.

If it is the tacit approval of the spectator's recognition that connects the plausible sequence of events into a unified plot, one may argue that the spectator can also recognise the universals represented through these connected particular events. This could be a way to link my elaboration on *πιθανότης* to the cognitivist interpretation by several commentators who claim that the Aristotelian tragedy constitutes a form of *understanding*. The primary textual evidence for such a cognitivist reading of the *Poetics* can be found in the fourth chapter, where Aristotle writes (1448b) that:

understanding [*μανθάνειν*] gives great pleasure [*ἡδιστον*] not only to philosophers but likewise to others too, though the latter have a smaller share in it. This is why people enjoy looking at images, because through contemplating them [*θεωροῦντας*] it comes about that they understand and infer [*μανθάνειν καὶ συλλογίζεσθαι*] what each element means, for instance, that "this person is so-and-so." For, if one happens not to have seen the subject before [*προεωρακώς*], the image will not give pleasure qua mimesis but because of its execution or colour, or for some other reason.

A cognitivist reading of this passage, as one finds in Stephen Halliwell (2002: 178 ff.) and José González (2019: 175 ff.) for example, holds that the pleasure of the aesthetic experience consists in understanding the represented universals and possibly in learning something about reality through these representations offered by the work of art. Some scholars, like David Gallop (1990: 145 ff.), even hold that with the phrase 'this person is so-and-so,' Aristotle refers to recognising the nature or essence of the represented. However, other interpreters, such as Gabriel Lear (1988: 308 ff.), John Ferrari (1999: 183 ff.) and Pierre Destrée (2021), object that a cognitivist interpretation of the first two sentences of the quote would be incompatible with the last sentence, which seems to imply that the recognition Aristotle writes about here is as trivial as recognising someone you have seen before.

Leaving aside a detailed textual exegesis – which, I think, depends on whether 'the subject' is considered to designate a particular person or a universal kind of person – the question at stake

here is what the pleasure of mimetic recognition amounts to. Is it only a means by which one can understand a fictional plot that is plausible enough to evoke an emotional effect or catharsis through the 'pleasure which comes from pity and fear' (1453b)? Or does this pleasure constitute an intrinsic experience of understanding through which one could acquire new insights into the universals represented in the play – that is, an experience of knowledge acquisition?

However, one may question the rigid opposition between emotional pleasure and intellectual understanding that features heavily in the scholarly controversy about Aristotle's poetic universals (see how e.g. Gulley 1979 and Destrée 2021 frame the debate). For instance, Martha Nussbaum (1986: 378-394; 1992: 261-290) suggests that the emotional catharsis acquired through the mimetic experience of pity and fear amounts to an 'intellectual clarification', as Aristotle indeed uses the word *καθαρός* in *Prior Analytics* (50a40). Seen like this, the tragedy can fulfil a cognitive function *in and through* its emotional or evocative working, which aligns more with the affective rather than factual value of *πιθανότης* as described above.

Building on that foundation, another line of cognitivist interpretation has been developed, by e.g. Elizabeth Belfiore (1992), Dorothea Frede (1992), Stephen Halliwell (2011) and Elizabeth Jones (2012), which is grounded in an ethical consideration of Aristotle's philosophy of art. Based on the *Poetics*, as well as Aristotle's writings on music in *Politics* where he wonders whether music contributes to 'intellectual [*φρόνησις*] entertainment' and 'tends in some degree to virtue' (*Politics* 1339a ff.), these authors defend tragedy's epistemic potential as either an 'emotional understanding' (Halliwell 2002) or a form of 'ethical imagination' (e.g. Belfiore 1992) that is necessary for the practical wisdom (*φρόνησις*) with which one concretises general moral virtues.

These cognitivist readings may seem quite legitimate, yet one may wonder whether they provide an answer to Plato's challenge about metaphysical truth (*ἀλήθεια*) in the arts. For sure, it is tempting to infer such a notion of artistic truth from these cognitivist readings of the *Poetics*. From the sixteenth century onwards, it has indeed been a custom among many philosophers and artists to idealise Aristotle's ethical and epistemological views on literature and transform them into a metaphysical theory of artistic truth (see for various examples Gulley 1979). Overall, I think there are three metaphysical temptations in Aristotle's *Poetics*. All of these, however, have tempted commentators to form certain idealised theses that, strictly speaking, do not correspond to Aristotle's theory of poetry.

First of all, Aristotle's remark that poetry is more 'philosophical' (*φιλοσοφώτερον*) than history readily lends itself to being idealised by transferring it into the metaphysical claim that poetry has a greater propensity (*φιλέω*) towards truth. However, strictly speaking, *σοφία* cannot be equated with truth. Following Aristotle in *Metaphysics*, the quality of *σοφία* refers to the possession of a discursive theory (*λόγος*) of the principles (*ἀρχαί*) and causes of universals (*Metaphysics* 981b-982a). Hence, the philosophical inclination of the poet amounts to the universals represented in the poet's work, regardless of whether the representations are true. Second, the fact that the poet constructs a story representing universal patterns of behaviour rather than particular beings might be a necessary condition of truth (if one were to follow the Platonic scheme). It is not, however, sufficient to properly call these universals also universal truths. The purpose of the universals is, namely, not to represent what *is* true in the field of representation (i.e. moral behaviour) – which is the task of the moral philosopher – but to construct a persuasive or plausible plot that *appears* true and accordingly evokes a certain emotional effect through which the spectator might understand the field of moral behaviour anew. It is again tempting, thirdly, to infer from this moral relevance a didactic vision of the artwork as providing moral instructions through the representation of moral truths. However, Aristotle's analysis of a good tragedy concerns neither the discursive, nor the metaphysical truth value of the poem. The *Poetics* is about the most effective ways to arouse and regulate certain emotions in order to achieve a form of emotional understanding or moral imagination. Although it is tempting to interpret the *Poetics* as a defence for the kind of truth that Plato denied art as having, Aristotle does not make such a metaphysical claim in the surviving parts of the work. However, the cognitivists are not the only ones who should be careful with their conclusions about artistic truth in the *Poetics*. Their scholarly opponents – minimalist interpreters such as Gulley, Destrée and Ferrari – eagerly seize upon the passages in which Aristotle explains the incorrectness of poetry (1460b ff.) to defend poetry's independence from truth altogether. It is important, however, to bear in mind that Aristotle is only writing about truth as *ὀρθότης* and *πιθανότης* in this artistic context. Truth as *ἀλήθεια*, as Plato uses it in the *Republic*, hardly appears in the surviving parts of the *Poetics*. Strictly speaking, Aristotle neither includes nor explicitly excludes *ἀλήθεια* as a value of poetry. Minimalist commentators who exclude the possibility of artistic truth from Aristotelian aesthetics thus fall into the same fallacy they criticise the cognitivist for, namely of ascribing claims to Aristotle that he does not make in his texts.

3.3 An Unfulfilled Task

Above, I have shown that plausibility is a fundamentally different truth category than both discursive correctness (§3.2.1 and §3.2.2) and metaphysical truth (§3.2.3), belonging to a different modality of being. Furthermore, first in general (3.1) and subsequently through analysing the modal autonomy of plausibility (§3.2.1 and §3.2.2), I have reconstructed how Aristotle's *Poetics* could potentially be used to free poetry from the poiological realm to which Plato had condemned the arts. In the present section I will finalise my reconstruction of Aristotle's answer to Plato's invitation, arguing that this solution is ultimately not sufficient to fully solve the Platonic scepticism. A thorough understanding of this insufficiency, however, provides direction on how to carry out the philosophical task of explaining artistic truth.

Throughout my interpretation of Aristotle's theory of poetry, I have argued that a plausible work of art represents not a particular reality but a possibility. Although still representing a particular being, the work of art must also be representative of the corresponding universals which determine what is possible. Accordingly, as I discovered through the analysis of naturalism, the representational form of the plausible artwork (for instance, Michelangelo's *Bandini Pietà*) demands that the represented particular possibility (the dead body of Christ in a particular condition at a particular moment in time) is transformed (enlarging the arm) so that the work comes to represent the universal (e.g. death) which is exemplified by the represented particular.

If we would assert that the particular characters and events of a poem are representative of universal characters and events, as most commentators explain Aristotle's theory, it is not clear how Aristotle provides an exit from Plato's view of the artwork as a representation of a representation. In fact, Aristotle adopts Plato's outlook, for he sees the poem as a representation of a particular possibility, which is, in turn, an exemplification of certain universals (see the blue lines in Figure 7).

As I see it, the most convincing Aristotelian reply to Plato's invitation must involve an elaboration on the truth category of plausibility. As I have shown, a plausible representation deviates from a correct representation because it is *by virtue of this alteration* that a work of art comes to represent the universals that are exemplified by the represented particular being (see the yellow line Figure 7). So it is through the artistic transformation that the plausible work

of art comes to represent the universal, instead of merely something that exemplifies the universal. Therefore, by placing the autonomous category of plausibility at the centre of Aristotle's theory of artistic cognition, one is able to conceive a work of art not as a particular representation of a particular representation, but as a particular representation *through* which certain universals or general ideas are disclosed. Indeed, such a view seems to be more in line with the commonsensical idea we have of artistic representation.

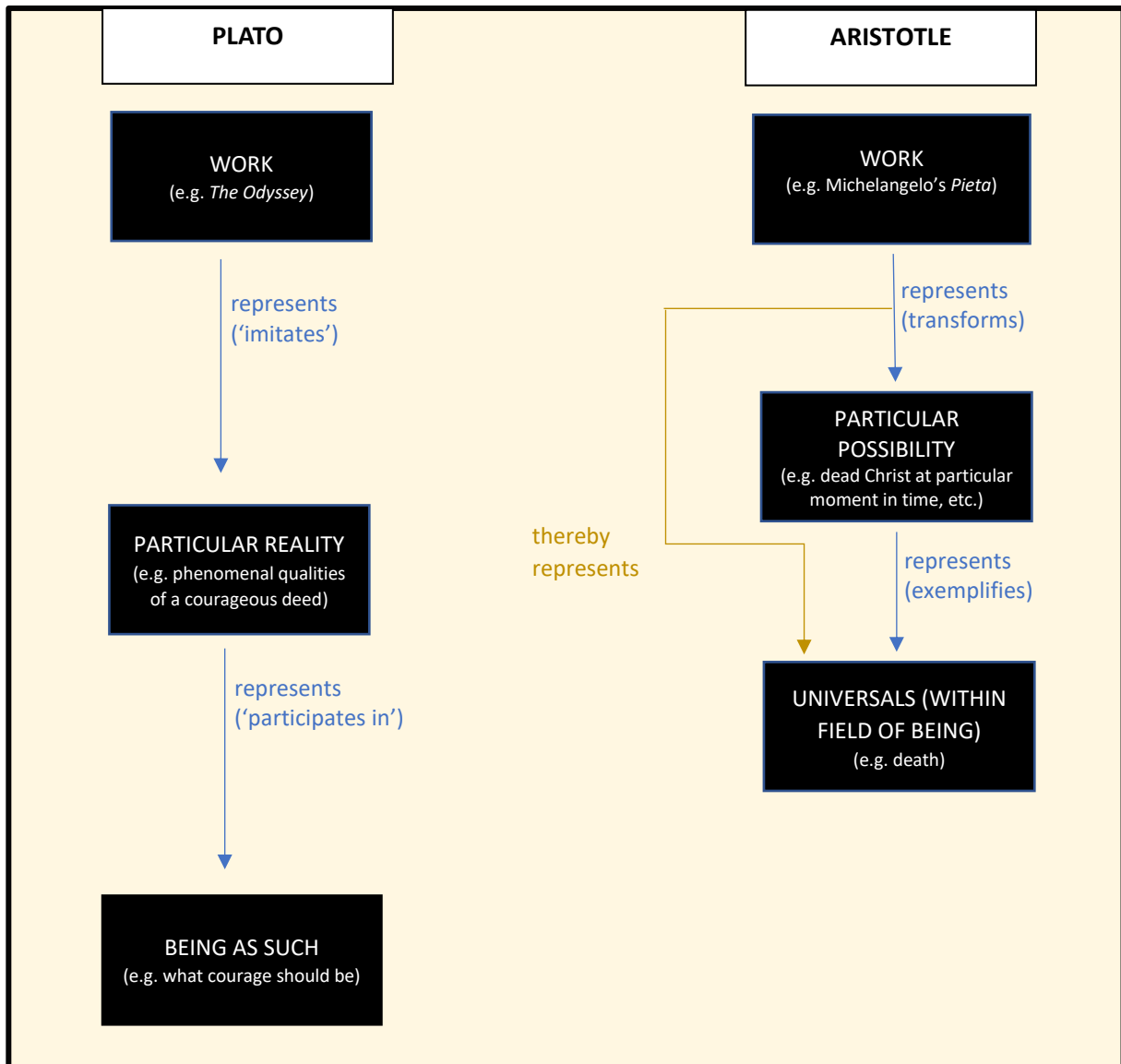


Figure 7

By drawing upon universals that determine what is possible rather than what is real, art's non-discursive form is thus able to re-present life in a reconfiguring way instead of copying its actual constellation. Throughout this imaginative reconfiguration, something more is represented than the explicit meaning of its discursive material or literal imagery, showing a possibility that was not apparent through discursive description before. If this is done 'plausibly', one

affectively recognises the universals and apprehends the added meaning through the presented particulars. This aesthetic truthfulness, *πιθανότης*, is thus the objective equivalent of an affective understanding that is not bound to particular appearances, yet is able to recognise universals.

However, is this a full rebuttal of Plato's scepticism? As I explained, one literary reconfiguration is more *πιθανόν* than others when it successfully draws upon the universals that structure the field of being it represents. But what is the metaphysical modality of these universals? How does one acquire them? To be sure, they are not to be found in the modality of *τὸ ὄν*. Aristotle's universals are not Plato's indeterminate and inexistent ideas, for the universals do not relate critically to reality but rather spring from it. The laws and ideas on which possibility depends, the universals that an artwork comes to represent, consist of knowledge that ultimately stems from reality (cf. *Metaphysics* 1013a). Accordingly, in the context of this question, Aristotle does use the term 'probability', as he repeatedly asserts that the plot's possibility relies on 'what is possible in terms of probability or necessity' (*τὸ εἰκὸς ἢ τὸ ἀναγκαῖον*, 1451a-b, 1452a, 1454a). As I see it, a possibility is not plausible because it relies on what is probable – i.e. something can be plausible in a story yet highly improbable in real life – but the plausibility of the possibility is based on universals that are, ultimately, abstracted patterns of probability and laws of empirical necessity in real life. This means that the poet may invent improbable events through the employment of universals, yet the universals themselves are ultimately based on knowledge of probable reality. After all, although plausibility belongs to the modality of possibility and is hence independent of both actual and probable correctness, to accomplish this function the poet must rely on knowledge of existing patterns and facts about phenomenal reality. Plausibility can be independent of correctness but not entirely from reality.

What follows from this, coming back to Plato's invitation, is that Aristotle's theory explains very well how a work of art contains knowledge. However, precisely the fact that art relies on knowledge for its intellectual potential makes it difficult to explain how it can be true in the sense of disclosing something that is unknowable. To be precise, with the category of plausibility one may be able to explain how a work of art represents and conveys knowledge that was not known by a particular spectator, and perhaps it could demonstrate how the imaginative form of art provides a special access to that knowledge. But it does not explain how an artwork represents something that could not have been known before. The reconstructed knowledge-

centred approach to artistic cognition may give an account of how works of art represent something that was not expressed before through discourse, but not of how they represent something that cannot be represented through discourse. Paradoxically, the more one explains artistic cognition as a knowable content, the more obscure it becomes how it can have an autonomous non-discursive form of understanding. Therefore, one may wonder to what extent Aristotle provides an account of how artworks can have a representational content of their own, a representative relation to being as such, which is implicit in a distinctively non-discursive form.

Does this insufficiency render the reconstruction of Aristotle's answer to Plato's invitation worthless? On the contrary, the reconstruction makes the Platonic issue of artistic truth all the more pressing, for it demonstrates how the problem continues to apply to a more common-sensical or familiar account of artistic representation. Moreover, Aristotle's differentiated account of artistic representation can be used to specify both Plato's question of artistic truth, and, consequently, also the domain of its possible solution. For, looking at the scheme again, and adding Plato's modality of $\tau\acute{o} \delta\acute{\nu}$ to Aristotle's logic of representation, the latter can be seen as an extension of the former (Figure 8). Combining both in this way, I conclude that although the artistic transformation in Aristotle's scheme shows that the representational truth of art can be something other than correct representation (cf. the blue lines), this transformation must not only be illustrative of knowledge (yellow line), but also expressive of being as such (red line). Consequently, the specified question arises whether the artistic transformation of the imagined possibility is able to represent not only knowledge of reality, but also life itself before it is conceptualised or signified through any symbolic form.

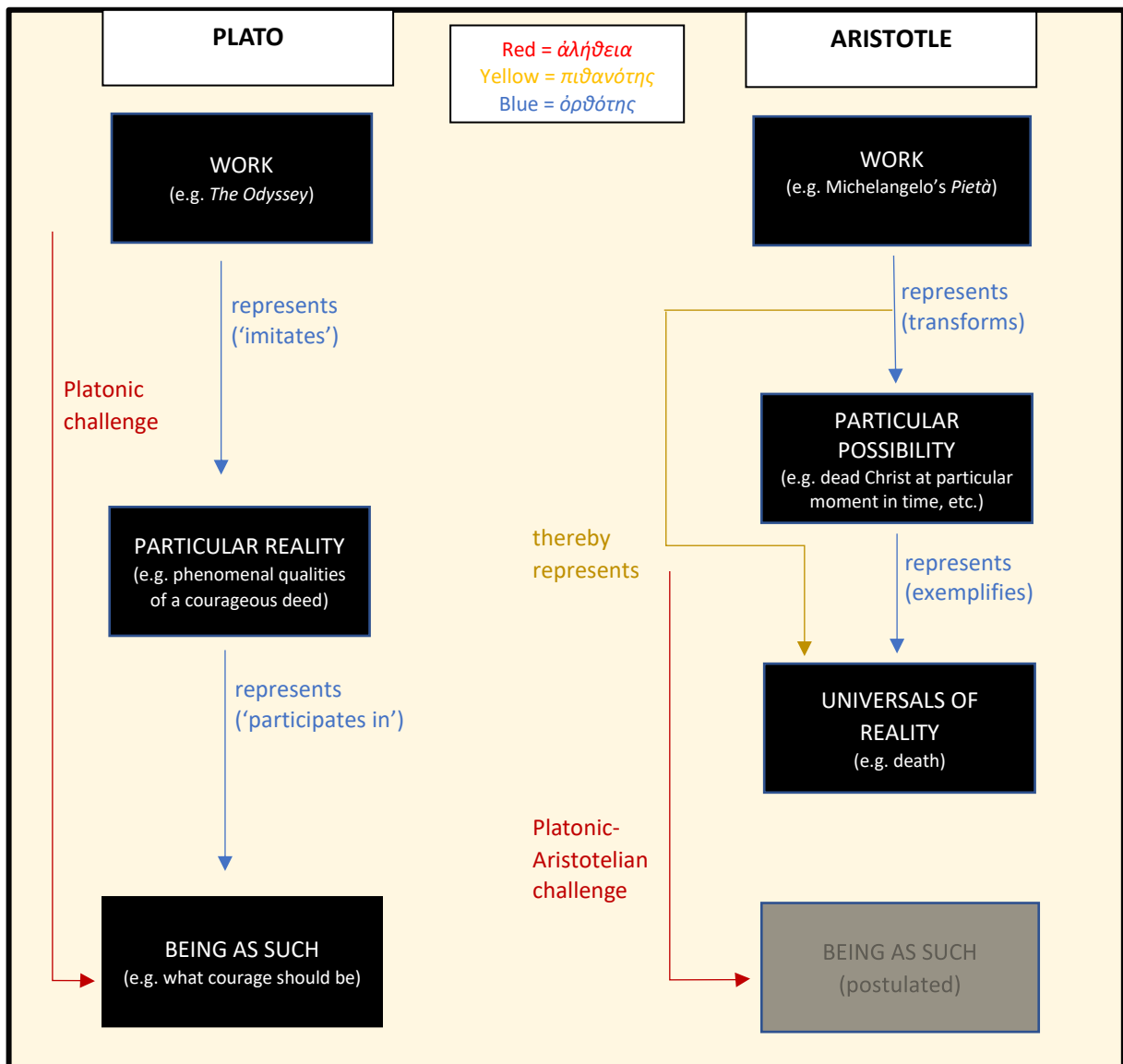


Figure 8

But why would one add this modality to Aristotle's theory of poetry? Why would one be dissatisfied with an artwork as a plausible representation of knowledge? If one follows the Aristotelian theory, an artwork is an exemplification of certain universals – as, for instance, Michelangelo enlarges the arm of Christ in order to make it a plausible exemplification of the idea of death. But, one may ask, could the significance of an artwork as rich as the *Bandini Pietà* be reduced to that of an exemplification of death? Without a doubt, the work has much more to tell. In defence of Aristotle, one could urge that the work represents plenty of universals – ideas of piety, suffering, mourning, etc. However, does an accumulation of universals really cover the singular significance of a particular work of art? Similarly, one may wonder whether the author

of a novel creates merely a kind of character or also *a* character. Would it be possible to exhaustively describe a represented possible being by naming enough general terms? Or does the work have a surplus of meaning that is irreducible to general knowledge – significance that is representative of life itself rather than only the general signified qualities, traits or aspects in which life is already understood?

What is more, if one praises the critical ability of artistic imagination to free us from the strict bonds of reality, to persuasively reject actual reality by imagining how it could be different, one might wonder whether the imagination is not obeying pre-set rules, ideological universals and fixed perceptions of how being is. Put differently, can art criticise not only actual reality but also the ideological structures that determine it? If so, it seems to me that an artwork must relate in some way to that which precedes or inter-cedes those structures. Then, indeed, Plato's ancient question echoes even more resoundingly: how is art able to autonomously orient to being as such without reproducing the existing rubrics through which reality is already understood?

Of course, the *material* of art stems from reality and from nothing more than reality. Yet suppose one cherishes the belief that an artwork is a genuine creation; that is, something which is not the entirely formalizable result of fixed rules and patterns, but instead, at least to some extent, the fruit of an unalgorithmisable natality. Suppose, furthermore, that one cherishes the belief that an artwork is able to radically criticise reality – that is, to undermine not only reality's actual state of affairs but also the structures that determine that status quo. Suppose, in a word, that one does believe that a work of art can be expressive of something that cannot be known differently. Then, one is confronted with the task of explaining an autonomous non-discursive form through which the arts employ the material of reality in order to represent that which is not reality already. Art can only fulfil its promise of creativity, critique and truth if it can be representative of something that does not exist.

TO CONCLUDE

Beyond Plato and Aristotle

Studying Greek philosophy shows that truth is a much richer value than only correctness. Still, most canonical conceptions of truth presuppose a discursive truth bearer, a propositional content and hence the bivalent value of correctness. Perhaps more than with any other question concerning truth, its application to the arts urges us to rehabilitate the many-faceted understanding of truth that was once present in Greek philosophy. For how could one explain that, for instance, Uccello's *Battle of San Romano*, the *Alexander Mosaic* of the House of the Faun in Pompeii, or Picasso's *Guernica* can reveal something about the horrors of war that a regular newspaper photograph cannot tell? The latter probably depicts its subject more accurately than medieval frescoes, ancient mosaics or Picasso's cubist figures represent theirs. Yet for some reason, photographic accuracy is not identical to representational truth. For some reason, the exquisite yet still 'primitive' works of Giotto or Jan van Eyck, or the profound yet distorted forms in Lucian Freud or Francis Bacon, are of much greater intellectual interest to people than a contemporary work of sterile kitsch that depicts reality with utmost photographic exactitude. With the concept of correctness one can neither account for the truth of the former, nor explain the deceit of the latter.

In modern analytical discussions on the value of art and throughout the contemporary field of artistic research on the European continent, philosophers and artists react to the problem of art's intellectual value in several ways. Some aestheticians continue to explain artistic truth as a form of correctness. This results in a semantic reduction of art's distinctively non-discursive significance to utterable propositions with an explicit meaning. But many philosophers seem to ignore the problem of artistic truth altogether – either by explaining aesthetic value solely through non-cognitivist strains of hedonism, expressivism and formalism, or by replacing truth with other epistemic values that generally presuppose some form of correctness (of a knowable

non-propositional content) or plausibility (of imaginative knowledge). Overall, artistic truth is either rejected or solely identified with knowledge.

On the basis of the present study, we can draw a systematic distinction between three fundamental forms of representational truth: the epistemic value of correctness (*ὀρθότης*), the aesthetic value of plausibility (*πιθανότης*) and the metaphysical value of truth proper (*ἀλήθεια*). With this in mind, looking at the debates on artistic cognition and research, it appears that most of the discussed theories presuppose a truth form of correctness and some theories a form of plausibility. As regards the latter, the Aristotelian truth form of *πιθανότης* developed above may help to ground the non-propositional theories that appeal to imagination. That way, one can also see that cognitivist theories of imagination can very well exist side-by-side with their rival theories of the propositionally inflected view; they simply describe different modal forms of truth. Finally, looking at the contemporary debates through the ancient lens that have I sought to polish throughout this thesis, it becomes evident once more that something is lacking in current analyses of the intellectual value of art: a comprehensive theory of the non-discursive truth form of metaphysical truth – that is, an answer to Plato's invitation.

As a result of working with ancient Greek philosophy, the three truth values that I extracted from Plato and Aristotle are construed as three modes of representation. Of course, many philosophers have criticised the Greek representationalist paradigm that we inherited in aesthetics (e.g. Hanslick 1986, Goodman 1976). However, most of the critique on representation tacitly identifies representational truth with correct correspondence. Yet if one dis-equates representation from correspondence, representation appears to be a concept much more diverse than such critiques assume. With the more differentiated understanding of representation that I have been using in this thesis, one could formulate a philosophical question that aims to bridge the well-known controversy between formalism and (propositional or expressivist) representationalism. For as we have seen, the Platonic invitation amounts to explaining how a work of art can represent a certain content that is entirely implicit in the form through which it appears. In other words, contrary to formalism, a work of art represents a content, yet contrary to a propositional representationalism, this content is not explicable.

Most importantly, the notion of representation allows one to systematically reflect on the twoness that is inherent in every form of meaning, namely the semantic interaction between the representation and the represented. I will now use this notion of representation to

explicate in a systematic way what we have learned from the reconstructed ancient debate above.

A representational understanding of art starts from the assumption that an artwork refers to something that is not the work itself, yet receives form through the work of art. That is, the point of departure is always that the represented cannot coincide with the representation. Hence, representational truth refers to the process of understanding that occurs in the semantic 'way' passing from the representation to the represented.

The three truth forms that I distinguished each designate a different 'way' to pass from the representation to the represented – that is, three different understandings of the prefix 're':

- (1) a *correct* representation corresponds to the represented;
- (2) a *true* representation creates the represented;
- (3) a *plausible* representation makes the represented apparent.

Then, the most striking semantic difference between these three forms lies in the successive order between representation and represented.

- (1) a correct representation *succeeds* the represented;
- (2) a true representation *precedes* the represented (making the represented available in the first place);
- (3) a plausible representation stands in a *simultaneous* relation to the represented (imagining a new exemplification of an already existent universal).³⁵

Hence, we can express each truth form in terms of temporality:

- (1) a correct representation *refers back* to reality (i.e. it is oriented to the past);
- (2) a true representation *refers forward* to a 'necessity'; that is, it demands the represented as something that *has to be* (i.e. oriented to the future);
- (3) a plausible representation imagines a possibility and thus creates a *presence* through which the past appears in a new instance.

As we can see clearly now, it appears that the form of representation changes according to the metaphysical locus of the represented. In my view, the only way to properly account for this is

³⁵ The represented does not come into being through the plausible representation; neither has it already manifested itself in the current plausible form.

by referring to a theory of transcendental modalities of being. This means that *the mode of artistic representation, and hence its corresponding truth form, is determined by the metaphysical modality of the represented.*

For these modalities, I used the classic transcendental distinction, made first by Kant, between phenomenal reality, noumenal necessity and possibility. Accordingly,

- (1) a correct representation represents phenomenal *reality* (being as it already *is*);
- (2) a true representation represents noumenal *necessity* (being as it *should* be);
- (3) a plausible representation represents imaginative *possibility* (being as it *could* be).

What I have been trying to show is that these modalities are metaphysically distinct. On the one hand, I have argued at length that possibility must not be understood as factual possibility, and its truth value (plausibility) not as probability. On the other hand, necessity must not be understood as a factual necessity. That is, the modality of necessity is not a necessity *in* reality (e.g. a natural law), but necessity *for* reality. Comparable to what I referred to as ‘passion’ in the context of Plato’s philosophy of ideas, a necessity is an indeterminate idea that precedes phenomenal reality and accordingly gives meaning to reality. As discussed above, these transcendental ideas do not exist in an empirical reality. The mode in which they exist is normative: they *must* be. According to Plato, the only way to be oriented towards being as such is through this normative mode of critical ideas. For contrary to a description of what being *is*, which particularises being to a contingent order, the passionate ideas express a necessity and universality that is still undetermined.

Finally, we could then use the modalities to elucidate the three different forms of reason we found in works of art:

- (1) correctness is ascribed to the descriptive use of discursive reason, resulting in *poiological knowledge*;
- (2) metaphysical truth is ascribed to the critical use of a discursive yet passionate reason, resulting in a process of *ontological insight*;
- (3) and plausibility is ascribed to the imaginative use of non-discursive reason, resulting in *epistemic recognition*.

Thus, the harvest of this research can be modelled in the following threefold scheme

Modality	Reality (φαινομένον)	Necessity (τὸ ὄν)	Possibility
Value	Correctness (ὀρθότης)	Truth (ἀλήθεια)	Plausibility (πιθανότης)
	Epistemic value	Metaphysical value	Aesthetic value
Cognition	Knowledge	Insight	Recognition
Use of reason	Discursive (i.e. merely with λόγος)	Necessarily but not sufficiently discursive (i.e. λόγος plus passion)	Non-discursive (possibly an imaginative use of λόγος)
	Poiology (τοῦ ποιῶ τινός)	Ontology (τοῦ τε ὄντος)	Epistemology
	Descriptive	Critical	Imaginative
Oriented to	Determined beings	Undetermined being	Existing universals in a field of being
	In their particular manifestations	As it necessarily and universally is	As they are possible in terms of probability or necessity (τὸ εἰκὸς ἢ τὸ ἀναγκαῖον).
Time modality	Past (reality as it <i>already</i> is)	Future (reality as it <i>should</i> be)	Present (reality as it <i>could</i> be)
	Represented <i>precedes</i> representation	Represented <i>succeeds</i> representation	Represented simultaneous with representation

Figure 9

So far, we have made a detour past Plato and Aristotle in order to systematically build the conceptual framework above. Now, what question is there left?

As I hope to have demonstrated, Aristotle replies to Plato's challenge by shifting attention from the sensory appearance of an artwork, which is particular, towards the possible knowledge it contains, which is universal. However, this epistemic shift means that Plato's question of metaphysical truth is dissolved, rather than solved. For the intellectual value of art is now solely understood in terms of knowledge rather than through a conception of truth – an approach still dominant in contemporary debates. Such an epistemic theory of art may prove that an artist needs certain general knowledge in order to create a correct or plausible work of art; but it does not comprehensively explain how a work of art can have an autonomous value that is both non-discursive and intellectual. To conclude, I will put this concern more precisely.

At the beginning of this thesis, I defined the problem of artistic truth as the question of the form through which artistic material enhances our understanding of the represented content.

Following the scheme above, we can now conceive this form as a mode of representation that may enhance our understanding in three different ways, depending on the modality of the represented. Thus, a work of art can be called correct if we consider the represented to be a reality; it can be called plausible if we consider the represented to be a possibility. Then, in order to call a work of art true in the metaphysical sense, it must be understood as representing a meaning that is implicit in the form. For by being implicit in the form, such a meaning is made available through the form – i.e. it is created – instead of being reproductive of reality in the way that correctness and plausibility demand.

In order to understand this implicit meaning, we might think of a piece of instrumental music. Suppose we call the piece true in the metaphysical sense. What does that mean? In the discursive form of correctness, understanding arises from a conventional relation between a word and its meaning – we come to understand words because we *know* what they mean. Yet whereas a word has an explicable dictionary definition, the actual significance of a certain tone interval in music is fully implicit in the form of the work through which it appears. How, then, does understanding arise from non-discursive material if it is not through convention or any other rule that *precedes* the work of art? In a Platonic fashion we might ask more sceptically: is it possible at all that understanding arises through a meaning that is fully implicit in the form through which it arises?

The artistic material of a metaphysically true representation is true if it is employed in a way that creates a meaning that did not exist before. This meaning did not exist before, because it is implicit in the form of the artwork. Through a true work of art, then, one comes to understand something that *is* in the work, but did not *exist* in any signified or represented way independently of the work. So when I hear the music, the material interplay of harmony, rhythm and melody does not (only) represent certain knowledge, but the musical material *demand*s a meaning that was not possible through the discursive rubrics in which we normally perceive and understand the world. Consequently, my understanding is enhanced, not of a cognisable fact, or by recognising universals, but by experiencing the actual process of representing; by hearing how life is brought into existence anew.

Yet, the Platonic scepticism still lingers. For how is metaphysical truth in the arts possible? At the end of the detour we made with this thesis, I would like to formulate the ancient question in a more contemporary manner. For, the enormous potentiality of mimesis is in fact much

more visible today than it was in Plato's time. With the development of artificial intelligence, and in particular with its latest applications in text and image generators, the Platonic scepticism towards artworks as being 'a representation of a representation' is probably more relevant than ever. In a world where people dance to fully artificially produced music, and prestigious art awards are won with AI-generated images; in a world where it only seems a matter of time before a *correct* master's thesis or a *plausible* image can be produced with a single mouse-click – in such a world it is more visible than ever what *mimesis* is capable of. For the representative 'way' through which the AI-generator comes to produce the unique image or poem is fully explicable in discourse.

It is of course astonishing to see what we can ask artificial intelligence to do for us. Yet as philosophers, we might be more interested in the question that artificial intelligence poses to us. I would argue that this is essentially an ancient question: namely the Platonic challenge that I have explored in this thesis. For in the context of advanced forms of artificial intelligence, the question that immediately arises is how we can distinguish these AI-generated images or texts from a 'true' work of artistic creation. Again, it is certainly not by their correctness, and arguably not by their plausibility either, that we can distinguish a work of art from an artificially produced image or song.

If we believe that there are artistic creations that could in no way be produced through algorithms and existing data, then we must assume that such artworks, at least to a certain extent, are representative of something that does not exist. That is, in order to escape the domain of artificially formalisable imitation, art must have some truth potential in the metaphysical sense – it must be representative of being as such, in order to be created in a way that cannot be formalised in discourse. So, again, the question is how artworks can have an autonomous relation to being, how they can show being anew without merely reproducing the existing poiological rubrics through which reality is already understood.

Of course, we do not have the answer to this question – in that sense, Plato's challenge remains intact. Yet the more AI-applications come to dominate our lives, the more it will seem as if there is no positive answer. Yet if we happen to be 'passionate' about the necessity of artistic creativity, then it becomes all the more urgent to develop a theory of metaphysical truth that can at least help us reflect on the problem.

To Conclude: Beyond Plato and Aristotle

This thesis did not yield such a theory. It only raised the question. For it is still unclear both how a work of art can be representative of being as such and when such a representation of being is true instead of arbitrary. Plato only provides us with a negative criterion, namely of an intentionality towards a specific modality of being. Yet we still don't know what it is that renders a specific representation of being a *true* representation of being. At this point, my analysis flounders. Most has been said, the ancient question reverberates and from now on one would need to go beyond Plato and Aristotle in order to develop answers to the question I have been raising. Still, with this roundabout route, I hope to have paved various paths through which both new accounts of artistic truth can be developed and old ones can be employed anew. In the end, it was only a preparation.

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