

Aesthetics and Ethics: Convergence and Divergence in Plato and Aristotle

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Abstract

To explore the dialectic between aesthetics and ethics and the point of convergence and divergence between the two is a fraught exercise. The difficulty is further complicated by the lack of consensus in the interpretation of the terms 'aesthetics' and 'ethics.' For instance, the distance between the antimony of Kant's view of morality as a series of imperatives dictated by practical reason which considerably narrowed the scope of morality by confining it to repeated actions and Wittgenstein's aphoristic dictum that "ethics and aesthetics are one," is considerable. However, historically the teleological argument regarding literature and aesthetic appreciation has been predicated on ethics from the time of Plato. This paper is an attempt to uncover the assumptions regarding the relationship between aesthetics and ethics in the classical period through a comparative study of the aesthetic theories associated with Plato and Aristotle.

Keywords: aesthetics, ethics, non-perspectival truth, artistic autonomy, ladder of love

To trace the origin of the word "aesthetic" is not difficult, but to excavate the origin of aesthetic thought or philosophy might prove much more challenging. Even an archaeological unearthing of the earliest surviving philosophical texts that deal with aesthetics will only prove that the consciousness of the aesthetic predates those texts. The philosophical discipline of aesthetics received its name only in 1735. Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten introduced the term in his Halle master's thesis to mean *epistêmê aïsthetikê*, or the science of what is sensed and imagined (Guyer 2016). He elaborated the term in *Meditations on Poetry*: "The Greek philosophers ... have always carefully distinguished between the *aïstheia* and the *noeta*," that is, between objects of sense and objects of thought, and while the latter, that is, "what can be cognized through the higher faculty" of mind, are "the object of logic, the *aïstheia* are the subject of the *episteme aïsthetike* or aesthetics," the science of perception (*Meditationes*, CXVI, p. 86) (Guyer 2016).

The history of aesthetics in Western thought, can be traced back to the Classical period in Greek antiquity. Aesthetic enquiry in Greece is as old as Greek poetry. In fact, even the English term "poetry" owes its origin to the Greek verb *poiein* "to make," and *poetes* "maker." Some of the early thought about literature in Greece can be drawn from the tales about mythical poets-musicians, such as Orpheus and Amphion. Both these semi-divine mythical characters occupy exalted positions and were considered teacher-poets, inspired beings – even victims of divine creative fury – which allows them to access a vision of cosmic harmony. The Greeks held Homer and Hesiod as belonging to that

lineage. To comprehend the exalted position occupied by the poets in ancient Greece one has to understand the position accorded to poetry by the Greeks. Poetry in the period predating Plato, occupied a space akin to a religious text. The Greeks held that their myths embodied universal truths and used them to educate, guide, regulate, and of course, to entertain. Poetry was considered a source of secular and non-secular knowledge and practice at the individual, social and cultural levels. However, over a period of time poetry lost its pre-eminence and by the classical period in Greece, philosophy was emerging as a strong contender and increasingly claiming exclusive access to Truth. It is this rivalry that Plato underscores when he refers to the “ancient quarrel of poetry and philosophy” (*Republic* 607b). Poetry was a formidable opponent to Philosophy, playing, as Catherine Everett remarks perceptively, “a part in Greek life comparable to the Bible in the Christian era,” (2). In Everett’s view, “It was against this combination of myth and poetry, embodying an ancient and reverend outlook on life and interpretation of the nature of things that the philosophers of the Greek Enlightenment, the Cosmologists and Sophists, had to assert their claims” (2). Seen from that vantage, it is obvious that poetry did not appear to philosophy as a work of art, to be subjected to critical scrutiny, but a rival that claimed equality.

Plato does not focus on literature or poetry exclusively in his writings. Yet, one can claim that he is the first critic in Western intellectual tradition who examined it as an art form and interrogated the reasons behind its appeal. As such, he can be considered as the originator of aesthetic thought in Western tradition. Though Plato’s focus was not on poetry, he repeatedly returns to it in many ‘Dialogues’ while discussing his abiding concerns like education, morality, theology and metaphysics. The most extensive treatment of the arts occurs in Book II, III, and Book X in the *Republic*. Because his views on art are scattered throughout his works it is difficult to extract a coherent theory about his approach to literature. This paper proposes to examine Plato’s critique of poets and poetry and compare it with those of his immediate successor, Aristotle. It is also an attempt to uncover the assumptions regarding the relationship between aesthetics and ethics in these two philosophers.

The Greek conception of art was quite different from present day understanding of it. The word *techne*, which we translate as ‘craftsmanship,’ ‘craft’ or ‘art,’ was used to refer to all skilful production from poetry to carpentry, saddle-making to weaving. The Greeks did not possess a term that referred exclusively to fine arts. The Greek attitude to those who engaged in the arts was also complex. The artists or artisans were valued for the knowledge they possessed, but they were disdainful of the toil involved in the production of art, which in the eyes of the Greeks reduced the artist to the level of a skilled labourer. For the Greeks the most natural division of the arts was into those that were free and those that were servile, depending on the amount of physical exertion involved in its execution. ‘Free arts’ – like poetry were esteemed more than the playing of musical instruments like the lyre or singing.

When we look at the poetics that implicitly prevailed before Plato, we can see that poets like Homer had considered the question of ‘pleasure’ that poetry generates and Simonides made the insightful observation that painting is ‘silent poetry’ and poetry is ‘spoken painting.’ However, since the beginning of the classical period in Greece, aesthetic thought existed within the larger framework of philosophy. This yoking of aesthetics with philosophy brought within its ambit questions that are universally valid. Inflected with philosophical concerns, the discussion of art was subsumed under the discussion

of its ethical import. This does not mean that the philosophical approach to art was homogenous. There were as many approaches as there were different schools of thought in philosophy during that time. For instance, the Sophists, being relativists, regarded ethical norms and values contingently. Socrates, who challenged the Sophists, raised humanist problems similar to those presented by them, but his focus or emphasis was radically different. He (or what has been reported as Socrates's views) was strongly opposed to relativism. His student Plato, held absolute views on the question of ethics, and his approach to aesthetics is infused with this concern. Plato's writing is often akin to poetry in its supremely skilful use of metaphor, myth, and rhetoric. Yet he viewed poetry with suspicion and sought to devalue it. The reason is obvious. Plato (and Socrates) considered the role of philosophy as of much greater value than of poetry. His writings are a deliberate attempt to oust mimetic poetry from its central role in the culture of his day. The ultimate aim of Plato's dramatic portrayals and his poetic use of language is, however, not to bring pleasure or to engage the mind in emotional experiences. Rather, it is to prompt independent inquiry into the truth by means of rational inquiry and argument. Plato aims to supplant poetry in order to establish philosophy as a discipline. In so doing, he raises profound questions about the relationship between philosophy and art – questions that go into the nature and function of art itself.

Plato's critique of poetry reflect his reservation about the nature of influence of poetry. It could be observed that Plato views the ways of life guided by poets and poetry as the "way of *mýthos*," and the one guided by philosophy, the "way of *logos*." According to Plato, the way of the *mýthos* is the way of *doxa* or opinion, whereas, the way of *logos*, is the way of Knowledge or Truth (*epistemé*), and wisdom (*Sophia*). While the former is the way of the aesthetic, appealing to the imaginative and the emotional aspect of man, the latter is the search for the truth or the real, based on rational grounds. Plato's objection to the "way of mythos" is rooted in his attitude to morality and ethics. He finds poetry amoral, or indifferent to moral concerns.

Plato was not ignorant of the extraordinary appeal exercised by art. It was his recognition of its power over people that urges him to question the nature of that power and its desirability. Plato's contemporaries considered poetry as manuals, providing guidelines for right living, war, statecraft, even divinity. Plato questions the poet's qualification to represent things that he had very little knowledge of. In his works beginning from *Apology*, through *Ion* and his later work *Laws*, he constantly harps on the fact that poets presume to compose on subjects that they hardly know. He points out that when challenged on this aspect, the poet responds by claiming that he is divinely inspired: "... when they composed, they composed not by wisdom, but by nature and because they were inspired, like the prophets and givers of oracles, for these also say many fine things, but know none of the things they say" (22c). Plato finds this problematic, especially because the Greeks looked up to the poets for guidance. As Robert Stecker remarks, "In Plato's Athens, poetry was thought to be a repository of both knowledge and wisdom. Plato questions not only whether this reputation is deserved, but also whether poetry in particular, and art in general, might in fact create a barrier to the acquisition of these goods" (Stecker 9).

Plato also considers the desirability of poetic stories in education. He does not question whether, they should be a part of education, but deliberates on the kind of poetry that should be excluded. Plato's objection is on two counts. Firstly, poetry contains falsehood about the nature of gods and the behaviour of heroes. Secondly, stories can instil harmful attitudes and can encourage negative dispositions. Plato feels that the preeminent

literature of ancient Greece – the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* of Homer, the poetry of Hesiod, the tragedies of Aeschylus – all had passages that should be expunged. He also objected to death being portrayed as a great misfortune, evoking grief, expressed in wailings, loud lamentations, and through other excessive expressions. Plato insists that this was an entirely wrong approach to death and that if one lived courageously, one would place death in proper perspective. He wanted poetry to infuse the right perspective by representing role models such as heroes who possess such attitudes. Plato would prefer to exclude what he considers as negative portrayal, or, if included, to place such misguided attitudes in the mouths of characters who are not role models.

It is obvious that Plato is advancing a strict censorship of poetry. He does not want to do away with the use of poetry in educating the young but advocates a stringent method of selection of what is appropriate. Plato calls poetry, or all representational art as “*pseudeis logoi*,” which could be translated as “false discourses” [or even as “fictional stories,”]. He equivocally states that it can be a source of illusion and false belief and is capable of corrupting the psyche of the listener/viewer. To comprehend Plato’s antagonism to representational arts, one needs to have an understanding of the role of human life, as envisaged by him. “Plato pictures human life as a pilgrimage from appearance to reality. The intelligence, seeking satisfaction, moves from uncritical acceptance of sense experience and of conduct, to a more sophisticated and morally enlightened understanding,” (4) observes Murdoch. Murdoch locates Plato’s antagonism to art in his emphasis on true knowledge. “How is it that although *sensa* are in a flux we can have *knowledge*, as opposed to mere opinion or belief?” Plato questions urging people to discover an “understanding” which was beyond the fluctuating notions about beauty. Hence, his postulation of the Forms (Ideas) as changeless eternal non-sensible objects which are separate from the multifarious and shifting world of ‘becoming.’ These steady entities are guarantors equally of the unity and objectivity of morals and the reliability of knowledge (Murdoch 4). This aspiration appears to be the crux of Plato’s critique. Artists, Plato avers is more interested in appearances, and ignore reality. They exhibit the lowest and most irrational kind of awareness, *eikasia*, pursue entertainment and seek to entertain others. Artists are more interested in portraying “bad men” because they are “various, entertaining and extreme” while “good men” are “quiet and always the same”. Art both expresses and gratifies the lowest part of the soul, asserts Plato, and feeds and enlivens base emotions that ought to be left to wither.

Plato’s concept of beauty is intricately linked to what Diotima in a dialogue with Socrates, refers to as “*scala amoris*” or “ladder of love” in the *Symposium*. Envisaged as a metaphorical ladder leading to the Form of Beauty, this ladder has six rungs. Some scholars section the six steps into two groups of three. “Sectioning them out into two groups of three allows scholars to view the Ladder in terms of personhood vs. conceptual; the first three – body, bodies, and soul – point the lover to connect with personhood. On the other hand, the conceptual steps – laws, knowledge, and Beauty itself – direct attention to conceptual ideas,” observes Kyle J. Keesling Jr. Plato examines the realisation of a true understanding of Beauty through a dialogue between Socrates and Diotima in six steps. One initially becomes acquainted with Beauty by falling in love with a particular person (here the body). The second rung in Plato’s Ladder of Love finds a lover’s recognition of the fact that beauty exists not merely in the lover’s body but in similar bodies. His broadening vision is a movement from one to many. The third rung in the ladder leads lover from the body towards the individual’s soul. The lover recognises the lack of depth

in his attraction towards the body. He realises that his love is for the other's soul, not the body. The fourth step of the ladder, sees the lover gradually expanding his circle of love. He recognizes the value of the institutions and laws that created the beauty of the person's soul. The fifth rung guides the lover towards the idea of beauty. He comprehends Beauty as knowledge. This will ultimately lead him to a philosophical understanding of beauty. On the sixth and final rung, the lover reaches, the Form of Beauty, which is the final destination. Once he reaches the final rung, he can appreciate true Beauty, devoid of corporeal or conceptual representations (see Keesling).

Plato forwards a way of life located in philosophical understanding, the way of the *dialectic*, as a counter to the way of the *aesthetic*. The Dialectical method involves a close examination and interrogation of the constituent aspects of reality and the ideas associated with reality while the latter appeals to the imaginative and emotional aspects. Through the former, man is able to ascend to a higher level of perception and understanding, to a higher order of intelligence. The culmination of dialectical reasoning will lead man to the absolute – an apprehension of the oneness of goodness, intelligence and beauty.

Plato's metaphysical presupposition that unity is necessary and desirable in the individual as well as in the ideal state leads him to propose a rule of the Republic by 'guardians' specially nurtured and educated for the purpose. He takes some pains to elaborate the kind of education he envisages for the guardians. The Guardians after their initial study of music and gymnastics, must undertake the study of unity "as such" (VII 524e). They should also be trained in arithmetic, geometry and astronomy as these sciences foster the use of reason rather than the senses. The most fundamental strategy towards the political implementation of unity, Plato feels, is to unite the functions of ruler and philosopher. Plato held the current dissociation of these roles responsible to a large extent for the anarchic plurality and fragmentation that he could perceive in the Greek city states. M.A.R. Habib comments:

Plato here unwittingly reveals that, if the movement toward knowledge and justice is essentially a movement toward unity whether in individual or state, it is also a movement of coercion. The ruling faculty in the soul and the ruling body in the state do not unify any real differences: the unity Plato has in mind is achieved by suppressing all difference and imperiously positing itself as the constant inner structure of a given type of variety in the physical world. (Habib 35)

In the *Laws*, his last work, which describes a completely stable society, Plato is definite about the role of art. He expounds the didactic use of art and the manner by which it should be deployed. Music and song are to be sanctified and rendered changeless, as in Egypt, where "the paintings and sculptures of ten thousand years ago are no better and no worse than those of today". Even children's games are to be controlled with the larger purpose in mind (767 b). The citizenry will be 'compelled to sing willingly, as it were' (670 d). People will be trained from earliest years to enjoy only good pleasures, and poets will be forced to explain that the just man is always happy (695d, 660 e). The most important citizen in the state will be the Minister of Education (765 d). The best literary paradigm for the writer to look to, will be the book of the *Laws* (975 d).

Plato appears to have understood that hegemony is not an automatic process that can be taken for granted, but must be achieved through conscious and deliberate effort and planning. In this he foreshadows Gramsci, who advocated the moulding of subjectivity itself towards unconscious complicity with the aims of the rulers to pre-empt the need for excessive and dangerously provocative coercion by law at a later stage. If the Republic

was sanitized from its inception, one can preclude the possibility of a future rebellion or revolt. The meticulous system of censorship advocated by Plato in *Laws* and the *Republic* almost echoes the absolute censorship effectively deployed by the Stalinists in Russia and the Maoists in China. The enigmatic question why did one of the earliest experiments in democracy also throws up one of the most extensive system of censorship ever advocated by man is an interesting one and will have to be answered at some point.

Through his observations on the intersection of aesthetics and morality, Plato had deliberately set to impose a closure on the question on the role of art and its place in society. The history of aesthetics is in a sense an attempt to answer Plato. Aristotle was the first in a long line of thinkers who attempted to re-examine the issues foregrounded by Plato and to draw alternative conclusions from it. He endeavoured to pry open the closure and reveal the fissure glossed over by the compelling arguments raised by Plato using the very medium that he sought to warn people against – language.

“How does the objective validity of aesthetic judgments compare with the objective validity of moral judgments and scientific beliefs?” (26) asks Richard W. Miller in his article, “Three versions of objectivity: aesthetic, moral, and scientific”. He argues that “aesthetic and moral appraisals both utterly lack the cognitive authority of scientific inquiry,” since the appraiser cannot be free of her own judgement.” However, he also admits that there is a branch of philosophy that accords aesthetic and moral judgments “the same cognitive authority as well-formed scientific beliefs, because in all three realms the judgment maker is often in a position to assert a truth independent of her judgments” (26). Aristotle would have concurred with the view that aesthetic judgement can aspire to the cognitive authority of scientific laws. In fact, his approach to aesthetics was predicated on this belief in the possibility of independent, rational judgement of art.

Ideologically, Aristotle occupies a position similar to that of Plato – he does not concede even a provisional autonomy to art. (The question whether art can ever have autonomy considering the fact that it is ideologically compromised even before its inception should be temporarily suspended). Aristotle’s writings on art, *Poetics* has been called “the first and most important work of a philosophical account of an art form” (Curran 21) because it is the first text devoted to analysing art in western tradition. The Greek title, *Peri poietikês* “On the poetic [craft]” identifies it as a work devoted to analysing the craft. From the surviving text, it is clear that it was not conceived as an instructional manual aimed at advising playwrights but as a guide for the student of philosophy to study these works in order to uncover the knowledge that is implicit in the successful production of the poetic craft. As Curran notes, “Aristotle’s goal is not practical, but philosophical, and he draws on the views he has developed in other areas of his philosophy, especially metaphysics, psychology, and ethics” (22).

Aristotle wrote two treatises on ethics: the *Nicomachean Ethics* and the *Eudemian Ethics*¹. He approaches what he calls “*ta êthika*” with a discussion of *eudaimonia* (“happiness”), and the nature of *aretê* (“virtue”, “excellence”). Aristotle follows Socrates and Plato in emphasizing the centrality of virtue to a well-lived life. Like his contemporaries, Aristotle too was concerned with the socio-political implications of art and conceded that poetry was capable of influencing people. However, he argued that its impact need not be necessarily insidious. In fact, Aristotle’s *Poetics*, while it examines the ideas and issues raised by Plato, focuses mainly on what is good art and deductively draws rules for judging art from the existing texts. In his extant works, we can notice that he relies on categorization and logical differentiation. The *Poetics* demonstrate Aristotle’s analytical

method, which is homologous to his examinations of biology or zoology. In the *Poetics* Aristotle turns to the various categories of human artefacts, differentiating those made in language. His focus is on poetry, especially the “species-specific” (87) traits of epic and tragedy. Drawing on the rich and wide stock of existing literary examples, especially Sophocles’ celebrated tragedy *Oedipus Rex*, Aristotle adduces six salient parts of tragedy in order of their importance – plot, character, thought, diction, music and spectacle. He then forwards a definition of tragedy, which is formulated at the start of the *Poetics*: “Tragedy is the mimesis of a serious and complete action of some magnitude; in language embellished in various ways in its different parts; in dramatic, not narrative form; achieving, through pity and fear, the catharsis of such passions” (*Poetics* 1449b 24-28). The cornerstone on which Aristotle built his entire defence of tragedy was on catharsis, mimesis, action, and seriousness. These four concepts join together to produce the central argument of the *Poetics*. Later centuries layered these words with meaning they originally did not possess. Thus, catharsis, over time came to denote “purgation of excess emotions.” Critics like Nussbaum, Halliwell and Curran, argue that this interpretation involves a misreading of the original term and its meaning. They equate *catharsis* with ethical and intellectual clarification²

Aristotle held that tragedy, by rousing powerful emotions teaches man to feel pity and fear. That understanding forms part of the groundwork for ethical behaviour, since Aristotle’s ethics connects ethical behaviour to well-trained emotions. The emotions that Plato deplored are acknowledged as existing in tragedy, but they benefit ethical action instead of subverting it. Aristotle does not challenge Plato directly. However, he implicitly validates poetry by examining it as a legitimate branch of study. Plato’s assertion that poetry raises treacherous emotions, which is dangerous for society, is logically refuted. Aristotle sees poetry as a repository of universal knowledge of human behaviour. As Curran insightfully remarks:

What the audience takes away from tragedy, then, need not be an understanding akin to the study of essences that the philosopher examines, but some more modest insight about human behavior, one that nonetheless has practical implications for how everyone – ordinary people as well as virtuous persons – manages their emotions in real-life circumstances. (31)

Another aspect, which Aristotle brings under critical scrutiny, is the idea of “mimesis.” Aristotle states that mimesis is “natural to people from childhood” (*Poetics* 1448b 6). While Plato considered image-making as a movement away from the real, Aristotle sees it as a realisation of the natural propensities in man. He further argues that mimesis is natural and pleasant because it is a way of learning and human beings love to learn (*Metaphysics* I.1). Aristotle’s argument rests on a new conception of mimesis as an active process of selective presentation. For example, a line drawing can show a thing’s contours better than the thing itself. Plato conceptualized mimesis as something passive, as automatic mimicry, even comparing it to the act of holding a mirror up to objects (*Republic* 596 d). Aristotle brings the effort back into poetry, as in his remark about plot: “A poet must be a composer of plots rather than of verses, insofar as he is a poet according to representation, and represents actions” (*Poetics* 1451b 27–29).

Aristotle bases his criticism of Plato’s ideal state on the fact that it was confined to utilitarian ends. Aristotle’s own state, in contrast was directed towards the highest good, enabling men to live “the good life”. In his *Poetics* he suggests that an integral aspect of this good life is the leisure to engage in civilized pursuits as “unbecoming of those of a

broad vision." Aristotle insists on an organic connection between pleasure (for example, derived from music) and virtue. Virtue, says Aristotle, has to do with enjoying oneself in the right way: liking and hating the right things. Aristotle's psychological insight is evident when he concludes that ethical regard forms an important basis for the reader's reaction to dramatic characters. Curran notes how "Aristotle recommends plot patterns that are based on the likely ethical regard the audience will take toward the characters," and remarks that "Audiences feel pity and fear for good and decent characters who err, but are not morally vicious; they feel moral confusion when an exceptionally good person suffers due to no fault of her own; and they feel repulsed when a vicious person triumphs" (31-32). In *Poetics* Aristotle claims that this sentiment is equally applicable to poetry. Since music has the power to heighten certain positive characteristics, it must form a part of education. Music is all the more valuable in educating the young, says Aristotle because it is pleasant. Many critics including Horace and Sydney would later echo this sentiment.

Art according to Aristotle achieves its purpose when it gives pleasure. The pleasure that art gives varies according to the character of art and the taste and age of the audience. However, Aristotle is convinced that even the pleasure of rational enjoyment, which he considers is the highest form of enjoyment art can afford, cannot be an end in itself. In fact any 'good' that imitative art can furnish can be considered as an end in itself because they are instrumental arts. Aristotle believes that the most authoritative art, which he considers is truly the master art is the ethical and the political, which brings us back to Plato's "royal art of philosopher king" (Everett 80). Catherine Everett observes:

Aristotle thus emerges from his long consideration of the imitative arts, particularly music and poetry, near the place where Plato takes his stand. The royal art of the statesman is for both the ultimate authority in the disposing and regulating of the ministry to pleasure. [However] Aristotle is slower than Plato in passing adverse moral judgment on popular amusements. (81-82)

Aristotle differs from Plato's view on other points as well. Malleability is a trait that is censored by Plato. For him steadfastness of purpose and singleness of function were desirable qualities and in his ideal state one man had only one function. For Aristotle, malleability was a characteristic of both the poet and philosopher. According to him a philosopher who is devoted to learning the truth of being can only do so by adapting himself with infinitely graduated responsiveness to the peculiar character of stimuli. Plato convincingly argued the differences between the philosopher and the imitative artist, while Aristotle refuses to concede any such differences. Plato's definition of the philosopher as a spectator of universal truth is held by Aristotle as encompassing the artist as well and while Plato castigates the poet for assuming a multitude of shapes and asserts that the philosophers' glory is his single minded nature Aristotle claims infinity plasticity for both.

In his later years, Plato also appears to concede the importance of pleasure in effecting change in human beings. In *The Laws* he dismisses his earlier stress on the pre-eminence accorded to reason in guiding human beings and emphasises the need to fuse it with pleasure:

As Plato grows older, he recognizes more and more that art is the specific for shaping emotion, and that pleasures and pains, thus moulded to good ends, are the indispensable allies of reason. In the *Phaedrus* Plato makes reason a charioteer who rules his steeds; later in the *Laws* he makes reason a weak cord which cannot draw the human puppet in the right way without the cooperating force of pleasure-cords (Everett 44)

It should be remembered that when Aristotle proposes to examine poetry 'in itself,' he is not proposing a twentieth century autonomy, wherein poetry could be looked at independent of other factors. Aristotle's universe is effectively a closed system where each entity is guided by an internalized purpose towards the fulfilment of its own nature, and ultimately towards realization of its harmony with the divine. The notion of poetic autonomy as developed in modern times, the notion of poetry as an end in itself would have been as meaningless to Aristotle as an individual's claim to complete psychological freedom. Therefore, if one asks whether Aristotle's account of poetry belongs within the purview of aesthetics, a formalist aesthetician might raise objections. His argument would be that Aristotle justifies poetry by appealing to its ethical and pedagogical effects. To a formalist aesthetician, such an argument would be unacceptable as Aristotle's grounds for artistic success are non-intrinsic and is a distraction from a work's aesthetic properties.

Aesthetics theories originated in the Classical period in Greece and its history has been determined to a large extent by Plato and Aristotle. One should also bear in mind that the even in antiquity the aesthetic theories were not uniformly accepted. Some concepts, like the theory that beauty depends upon the relation of parts, won common acceptance. Other ideas like the value of art, however, caused extensive disputes. Still others like the concept of autonomy of art underwent gradual changes. With the advent of Christianity aesthetic theories underwent further transformations. Justification of the arts, one can see was an abiding concern for both the theoreticians of antiquity and the Middle ages. Whether it was Plato's moralistic interpretation of art, or the Epicurean Judgement based purely on utilitarian principles, or the mystical elements in late antiquity or the spiritual element in the middle ages art was seen as a handmaiden to the larger cause. The doctrine of *orthotes*, that is, of rightness or the guarantee of the excellence of a work of art through its compatibility with universal laws, is one of the most enduring contribution of ancient aesthetics.

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Notes

- ¹ Aristotle does not himself use either of these titles. The words "Eudemian" and "Nicomachean" were added later, perhaps because the former was edited by his friend, Eudemus, and the latter by his son, Nicomachus. (Source: "Aristotle's Ethics" Richard Kraut *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* 2018)
- ² The philosophical discipline of aesthetics did not receive its name until 1735, when the twenty-one year old Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten introduced it in his Halle master's thesis to mean *epistêmê aisthetikê*, or the science of what is sensed and imagined (Baumgarten, *Meditationes* §CXVI, 86–7). Baumgarten's *Meditations on Poetry* conclude with his famous introduction of the term "aesthetics": "The Greek philosophers and the Church fathers have always carefully distinguished between the aistheta and the noeta," that is, between objects of sense and objects of thought, and while the latter, that is, "what can be cognized through the higher faculty" of mind, are "the object of logic, the aistheta are the subject of the episteme aisthetike or AESTHETICS," the science of perception (*Meditationes*, CXVI, 86).

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