

of the prisoners who face the back wall and see only shadows cast by the fire. Plato does not actually say that the artist is in a state of *eikasia*, but he clearly implies it, and indeed his whole criticism of art extends and illuminates the conception of the shadow-bound consciousness.

I shall look first at Plato's view of art, and later at his theory of beauty. His view of art is most fully expounded in Books III and X of the *Republic*. The poets mislead us by portraying the gods as undignified and immoral. We must not let Aeschylus or Homer tell us that a god caused Niobe's sufferings, or that Achilles, whose mother after all was a goddess, dragged Hector's body behind his chariot or slaughtered the Trojan captives beside the funeral pyre of Patroclus. Neither should we be led to picture the gods as laughing. Poets, and also writers of children's stories, should help us to respect religion, to admire good people, and to see that crime does not pay. Music and the theatre should encourage stoical calmness, not boisterous uncontrolled emotion. We are infected by playing or enjoying a bad role. Art can do cumulative psychological harm in this way. Simple harmonious design, in architecture or in furniture, the products of wholesome craftsmanship enjoyed from childhood onward, can do us good by promoting harmony in our minds; but art is always bad for us in so far as it is mimetic or imitative. Take the case of the painter painting the bed. God creates the original Form or Idea of bed. (This is a picturesque argument: Plato nowhere else suggests that God makes the Forms, which are eternal.) The carpenter makes the bed we sleep upon. The painter copies this bed from one point of view. He is thus at three removes from reality. He does not understand the bed, he does not measure it, he could not make it. He evades the conflict between the apparent and the real which stirs the mind toward philosophy. Art naïvely or wilfully accepts appearances instead of questioning them. Similarly a writer who portrays a doctor does not possess a doctor's skill but simply 'imitates doctors' talk'. Nevertheless, because of the charm of their work such people are wrongly taken for authorities, and simple folk believe them. Surely any serious man would rather produce real things, such as beds or political activity, than unreal things which are mere reflections of reality. Art or imitation may be dismissed as 'play', but when artists imitate what is bad they are

adding to the sum of badness in the world; and it is easier to copy a bad man than a good man, because the bad man is various and entertaining and extreme, while the good man is quiet and always the same. Artists are interested in what is base and complex, not in what is simple and good. They induce the better part of the soul to 'relax its guard'. Thus images of wickedness and excess may lead even good people to indulge secretly through art feelings which they would be ashamed to entertain in real life. We enjoy cruel jokes and bad taste in the theatre, then behave boorishly at home. Art both expresses and gratifies the lowest part of the soul, and feeds and enlivens base emotions which ought to be left to wither.

The ferocity of the attack is startling, though of course it is urbanely uttered. One can scarcely regard it as 'naïve'. Nor is it surely (as Bosanquet suggested in *A History of Aesthetic*, Chapter III) intended as an ironic *reductio ad absurdum* ('if this is all art is, it's a failure'); though the deliberation is sometimes almost gleeful. Of course the Greeks lacked what Bosanquet calls the 'distinctively aesthetic standpoint', as presumably everyone did with apparent impunity until 1750, and this being so, their attitude to art tended to be rather more moralistic than formalistic, and this is also true of Aristotle. Tolstoy exaggerates only slightly when he says (in *What Is Art?*), 'the Greeks (just like everybody else always and everywhere) simply considered art (like everything else) good only when it served goodness'. Socrates offers it as obvious (*Republic*, 400 E) that good writing and good rhythm and good design depend on good character. We might just entertain this as a hypothesis. The notion that tales which glorify bad men or art which stirs unworthy emotions may do moral damage is certainly familiar to us today, nor are we unaware of the social role of children's stories. The point about 'imitating doctors' talk' is also a shrewd one. The pseudo-authority of the writer (for instance the novelist) may indeed mislead the unwary. However, one is dismayed to learn that the censor is to remove one's favourite bits of Homer; and it may seem odd that Plato is unwilling to admire a clever imitation even as craft, unlike Homer who marvels at the verisimilitude of Achilles's shield at *Iliad*, XVII, 584. (Bosanquet again, in search of Greek

[B. A. Bosanquet, *A History of Aesthetic* (London, 1892).]