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GREEK AND ROMAN AESTHETICS

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Greek and Roman Aesthetics

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Preface

Although Anne Sheppard has had primary responsibility for the Greek texts in this volume, and Oleg Bychkov for the Latin, we have commented closely on each other's material and consulted on many issues, large and small. We worked together in preparing the Introduction and other preliminary material. Transatlantic collaboration was made much easier by a British Academy Small Research Grant which enabled Oleg Bychkov to spend some time in London in the summer of 2005. A number of people have helped us with advice of various kinds. Particular thanks are due to Carol Harrison, who gave advice about Augustine at a very early stage, to Brian Stock who kindly reviewed and commented on the translation of Augustine and to Daniel Delattre who generously allowed us to see his Greek text of Philodemus, *On Music* 4 in advance of publication and checked our translation of this difficult text. We should like to thank both Desmond Clarke and Hilary Gaskin for their patience with a project which has taken rather longer, and proved to be rather more complex, than was anticipated, and for their advice and comments. We are also grateful to Linda Woodward for her careful copy-editing.

Introduction

The title of this volume is *Greek and Roman Aesthetics*. However, aesthetics as a separate branch of philosophy with a distinctive subject matter (questions about beauty, the nature of fine art, forms of aesthetic judgement, etc.) which admits of a systematic but unitary treatment, is hardly older than the eighteenth century. Its origin is generally dated to Alexander Baumgarten (1714–62), who coined the term and devoted a specific treatise to the nascent discipline, and to Immanuel Kant, who investigated the issue of aesthetic judgement and its fundamental role in philosophy in more depth in the *Critique of Judgement* in 1790. What, then, is Greek and Roman aesthetics? How do ancient discussions relate to what we now call aesthetics and on what basis have we selected the particular texts included in this volume? This introduction will begin by briefly addressing these questions, before offering an account of the Greek and Roman precursors of aesthetics which should help to place the texts in this volume within their intellectual context.

Ancient texts and modern aesthetics

One way of approaching the connection between ancient texts and modern aesthetics is to examine the ancient texts that directly influenced what is now called aesthetic thought. A number of the texts in this volume, such as the selections from Plato's *Republic*, Aristotle's *Poetics* or the work *On Sublimity* attributed to Longinus, are frequently presented as forerunners of modern aesthetic thought and rightly so, since they

have clearly influenced its development from Baumgarten and Kant in the eighteenth century down to the present.[1]

Another approach is to formulate what are commonly held to be aesthetic concerns in modern thought and to see if they can already be found in ancient texts, without limiting the choice of texts to those which have demonstrably influenced modern aesthetics. Our volume also includes material, particularly from Latin sources, which is less commonly cited by historians of aesthetics but which raises what we regard as aesthetic issues. What sort of issues that would now be described as 'aesthetic' were discussed by ancient authors?

The most common description of the subject of modern aesthetics, arising out of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century theories, is that aesthetics is concerned with issues connected to natural and artistic beauty and with art, including all aspects of its appreciation and production. Interest in natural beauty, and the issue of beauty as such, faded for a while but is now reviving. If one assumes this understanding of 'aesthetics', discussions of what we would now call 'aesthetic' topics can certainly be found in antiquity, since it had its share of treatments of both beauty and art, although the meaning of both these terms was rather different in the ancient world.[2] Ancient authors do discuss in their own way a wide range of issues concerning the nature of beauty, the principles of art, and the questions of both the appreciation of art and its production by artists.

Most modern aesthetic theories focus on art – rather than, for instance, on questions about natural beauty – and in particular on the nature of art, or its common foundational principles such as imitation or expression, as well as on its formal principles. The institutional theory of art claims that works of art are simply those works which we choose to regard as such by placing them in galleries or collections while Marxist theories hold that art reflects social and economic reality in some way. Another type of theory claims that the interest we take in works of art and in natural beauty cannot be explained by particular characteristics of the objects, nor by social concerns; rather, there is a special aesthetic kind of interest, judgement or attitude. Here Kant's account of aesthetic judgement is of central importance. In Kant's view the objects of aesthetic judgement

[1] See, for example, Eva Schaper, *Prelude to Aesthetics* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1968) on Plato and Aristotle.

[2] See the discussion of some key terminology in our Note on the texts and the translations.

have 'purposiveness without purpose' and aesthetic experience can be described as revealing a reality that transcends our understanding.

The theory of art as imitation or expression has well-known ancient roots. So do some formalist theories of art. Others, such as the institutional theory of art, are absent from Greek and Roman texts. The institutional theory of art assumes modern habits of collecting and viewing art[3] and it is not surprising that we find no trace of it in antiquity. Similarly, theories which hold that art reflects social and economic reality, or promotes a particular ideology, have no counterpart in ancient thought. At the same time, the theories concerned with the nature of aesthetic judgement, and especially with its revelatory nature, do have ancient roots: this fact is not often acknowledged in the Anglo-American tradition but is commonly accepted in Continental philosophy.

Modern discussions of the arts, and modern aesthetics, tend to emphasize subjectivity and individual taste. Ancient thinkers on the other hand assumed that there are objective criteria of beauty and objective principles of art. The contrast comes out clearly if we consider theories of art as expression. Since the rise of the Romantic movement, the idea that artists express their feelings and personality through their art has not only formed the basis for some theories in philosophical aesthetics, such as the idealist theories of Croce and Collingwood, but has pervaded criticism of art, literature and music. Although Longinus, *On Sublimity*, foreshadows this modern interest in subjective expression, most ancient authors who regard art as expressive hold, either implicitly or explicitly, that what is expressed is not just individual feeling but some kind of objective reality. In consequence their ideas are best considered alongside theories of art as imitation or representation.

Although discussion of the objective principles of beauty and art has received comparatively little emphasis since the nineteenth century as a result of the subjective turn in aesthetics, it is again becoming increasingly popular as scholars and scientists alike realize how much in aesthetics is objective, i.e., dependent on human physiology, neurobiology and universal environmental and social experiences.[4] From this point of

[3] See especially G. Dickie, *Art and the Aesthetic: an Institutional Analysis* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1974).

[4] See, for example, I. Rentschler, B. Herzberger and D. Epstein, eds., *Beauty and the Brain: Biological Aspects of Aesthetics* (Basle, Boston and Berlin: Birkhäuser Verlag, 1988).

view, the observations of ancient authors such as Cicero and Philodemus become increasingly topical.

Another common point of discussion in modern aesthetics is emotion. The Romantics not only claimed that art expressed the emotions of the artist but also emphasized the power of both art and beauty to evoke emotions. Many ancient texts discuss the emotional effect of art: the theme is already present in Gorgias' *Encomium of Helen*, runs through all Plato's discussions of art and poetry and makes a notoriously puzzling appearance in Aristotle's claim that tragedy produces a *katharsis* ('purification') of pity and fear. In late antiquity the 'paradox of tragedy', that we enjoy the vicarious sufferings we experience as the members of a theatre audience, is highlighted by Augustine at the beginning of *Confessions* 3. The idea that our reaction to beauty involves the emotions also goes back to antiquity: it is already present in Plato's *Symposium* and *Phaedrus* and is particularly stressed by Plotinus, in *Ennead* 1.6 and elsewhere.

Greek and Roman aesthetics developed over a long period. The earliest text included in this volume (Gorgias' *Encomium of Helen*) was written before 400 BC, the latest in the sixth century AD. By AD 600 the Mediterranean world was a very different place, politically, socially and intellectually, from what it had been in 400 BC. Nevertheless the texts presented here have many themes in common and share a broadly similar approach to beauty and the arts, assuming that beauty can be objectively defined and that art is in some way imitative or representational. Some of our texts were written by philosophers, others by intellectuals interested in the arts and knowledgeable about philosophy. Many of them have directly influenced subsequent thinking about aesthetic issues in the European tradition. All of them, we believe, are worth reading and studying by anyone interested in philosophical aesthetics.

Classical Greek aesthetics: Gorgias, Plato, Xenophon, Aristotle

Early Greek poets, such as Homer, Hesiod and Pindar, include in their work some comments on their own craft of poetry; Gorgias, one of the first teachers of rhetoric, includes an interesting discussion of the power of speech in his *Encomium of Helen,* as mentioned above; the sophist Damon is said to have held that music had ethical effects; and comments about

poetry and beauty are attributed to the atomist philosopher, Democritus.[5] The comedy, *Frogs*, by the Athenian playwright Aristophanes includes a contrast between two tragic poets, Aeschylus and Euripides. The poets are presented as arguing both about the appropriate style for tragedy and about its moral significance. However, as in many other areas of philosophy, it is Plato who offers the first extended treatment of both beauty and the arts and who raises many of the questions considered by subsequent ancient thinkers. Notoriously, Plato expels the poets (or most of them) from the ideal state depicted in the *Republic* and criticizes both poets and painters as mere copyists of objects in the physical world which are themselves only copies of intelligible Forms. But Plato does not offer one unified theory in aesthetics, any more than he does in any other area of philosophy, and there is much more to his views of beauty and the arts than this. Plato discusses beauty and the arts in a variety of different contexts. Often we need to look at the context of a particular passage in order to understand the point of view expressed in it and to make sense of apparent contradictions with passages from other dialogues. Despite the variety, there are some constant themes which reappear in all Plato's discussions of aesthetic topics: he always stresses that poets, and other artists, lack knowledge, and he frequently draws attention to the emotional effects of poetry and music. For Plato poetry and music have a significant role to play in moral education because they have such a powerful effect on the emotions.

Most of Plato's dialogues depict Socrates in discussion with one or more interlocutors. It is impossible to know how far these discussions reflect the interests of the historical Socrates although it is tempting to speculate that dialogues such as the *Ion* and the *Hippias Major*, which are usually regarded as having been written early in Plato's career, do bear some relation to Socrates' own views about poetry and about 'the fine'.[6]

In the *Ion* Socrates argues that divine inspiration, not knowledge, is responsible both for the facility with which poets compose their work and for the power which those works can have over the emotions of an audience. Socrates tries to show Ion, a professional reciter and interpreter

[5] See, for example, Homer, *Iliad* 2.484–92, *Odyssey* 1.336–52, 8.479–98, 22.340–9; Hesiod, *Theogony* 21–34; Pindar, *Nemean* 7.11–24, fr. 137; Gorgias, *Encomium of Helen* 8–14, pp. 3–4 below; Democritus, frr. B18, B21DK. On Damon, see A. Barker, *Greek Musical Writings* I (Cambridge University Press, 1984) 168–9.

[6] There is however some dispute over whether the *Hippias Major* is by Plato at all. See Paul Woodruff, *Plato. Hippias Major* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1982) 93–105.

of Homer, that his abilities, like those of the poets, are due to inspiration and in 535b–e he describes Ion as manipulating the emotions of his audience. In the *Ion* Socrates' praise of inspiration seems somewhat ironical, since he emphasizes the poets' lack of knowledge, whereas in the *Phaedrus* (245a) he appears more genuinely favourable to inspired poetry. In the *Hippias Major* Socrates is engaged in a lengthy discussion with the sophist Hippias about how to define beauty or 'the fine'.[7] The suggestion that the fine is the appropriate is rejected, and the fine is firmly distinguished from the useful and the beneficial. A final suggestion that 'the fine is what is pleasant through hearing and sight' (298a) is also rejected and the dialogue ends inconclusively.

In the *Symposium* and the *Phaedrus* Plato returns to discussion of beauty or 'the fine' in quite a different way. In these dialogues we find the idea that beauty in the physical world awakens in us the realization that true beauty is located in a higher, intelligible world. *Symposium* 209e–212a recounts how the soul can ascend from the physical world to the Platonic Form of Beauty, moving from admiration for physical beauty to appreciating beauty in souls, in practices and laws, and in types of knowledge and finally to a revelation of true beauty itself. *Phaedrus* 249d–251a portrays the vision of true beauty in mythical terms, describing it as 'shining brightly'. In both dialogues, love is presented as the force driving the soul towards a vision of ultimate beauty which transcends conceptual knowledge. Both dialogues are concerned with moral as well as aesthetic beauty: that is why 'beauty in practices and laws' is mentioned in the *Symposium* while in the *Phaedrus* the souls which have lost sight of true beauty are described not just as having 'forgotten holiness' but as 'turned towards injustice'. In both dialogues the ladder which the soul must climb starts in the physical world. The beauty of the physical world is recognized as essentially attractive, drawing us to the revelation of something beyond it. In the *Timaeus* we find a passage (28a–29b) praising the beauty of the world as a whole and arguing explicitly that if the world is so well arranged and beautiful it must have an intelligent creator, just as a work of art has an artist who created it.

In the *Republic* Plato's standpoint is in some ways rather different. Here, in the context of describing an ideally just state, ruled by

[7] The Greek adjective *kalos* can be translated as 'fine', 'beautiful', or even 'good': see Note on the texts and the translations.

philosophers who have knowledge of the Good, he is concerned with the role of poetry and music in education and with the relationship between works of art and what they represent. Yet here too, as elsewhere, he argues that poets and other artists do not have knowledge and draws attention to the effect of art on the emotions. In *Republic* 2 and 3 Socrates criticizes Homer and Greek tragedy on moral grounds: the future guardians of the ideal state are not to be taught any poetry which will give them mistaken ideas about the gods or encourage the development of strong emotions such as grief, upsetting the harmonious balance of the virtuous soul ruled by reason. At 392d he turns to the discussion of poetic imitation, distinguishing between 'narrative, narrative expressed through imitation and a combination of the two'. By narrative he means telling a story in the third person; tragedy, which presents a story in dramatic form, is 'narrative expressed through imitation' while Homeric poetry, which combines third-person storytelling with passages of direct speech by the character, is a combination of narrative and imitation. The main problem with imitation, in *Republic* 3, is that dramatic actors expose themselves to psychological damage, both by playing the parts of many different kinds of people and by playing villains. Music is criticized on similar grounds. Musical modes which encourage either excessive grief or indulgence in luxury are not to be permitted. Only modes which encourage brave, steadfast and wise behaviour will be allowed, played on simple instruments, with rhythms appropriate to 'a self-disciplined and courageous life'.

Much of the discussion of poetry and music in *Republic* 2 and 3 is harshly critical of these arts. However, there is also a positive side to Plato's treatment of the arts in these books. At 398a–b, we are told that the versatile poet who can imitate anything would be expelled from the ideal state but a 'simpler … poet and storyteller, who can imitate the decent man's way of speaking' remains acceptable. At 400d–402a, after the discussion of music, there are some important remarks on the educational value of aesthetic experience. Here Socrates expresses the idea that the aesthetic experience of sensible beauty leads directly to the beauty of speech and thought, just as healthy air in a healthy environment leads directly to health. He goes on to argue that being exposed to aesthetic experiences, which infuse the idea of harmony as a universal principle, leads directly to improved morals. Recognizing aesthetic harmony in things leads us to think of preserving such harmony in our

souls as well, even before we master conceptual arguments for moral behaviour.[8]

In *Republic* 10 Socrates returns to the topic of poetry and claims that all imitative poetry had earlier been excluded from the ideal state. This misleading claim signals clearly that the treatment of poetry in the final book of the *Republic* will be both wider ranging and harsher than the treatment in Books 2 and 3. The discussion focuses on imitation and both painters and poets are attacked on the grounds that they imitate objects in the physical world which are themselves only imitations of the Platonic Forms. At 596b–e the painter is compared to someone holding a mirror who creates things 'as they appear to be' but not 'as they truly are'. Art here is seen as pandering to illusion, giving its audience a false view of reality. These arguments about imitation are the prelude to a renewed attack on the poets as lacking in knowledge and as producing work which appeals only to the emotions, not to the rational part of the soul.[9] Once again most poets are expelled from the ideal state. This time the only poetry allowed in is 'hymns to the gods and verses in praise of good men' (607a). The view of imitation found in *Republic* 10 reappears in the *Sophist* where at 235c–236c the Eleatic Stranger argues that most sculptors and painters who practise the imitative art are concerned only with appearances.

Plato's discussions of the arts focus mainly on poetry, occasionally including music and the visual arts. There are striking parallels between his attitude to poetry and his attitude to rhetoric, that is, the techniques of persuasion and the skills required to compose speeches in prose. In the *Gorgias* Plato is harshly critical of rhetoric, contrasting its persuasive power, which aims only at pleasing the audience, with philosophy which aims for knowledge of the truth. In the *Phaedrus*, although Socrates criticizes severely a speech said to be by the orator Lysias, he also raises the possibility that there could be an ideal kind of rhetoric, based on knowledge. Our selection contains a passage from the *Phaedrus*, 264c, expressing the requirement that a speech should have organic unity, which influenced later views about the organic unity of works of literature.

[8] The role of the arts in education is also discussed in *Laws* 2 (653c–660d, 667b–670e), 3 (700a–701b) and 7 (798d–802e, 810b–817e), passages not included in this volume.

[9] The mixture of emotions experienced by the audience for both tragedy and comedy is further discussed in *Philebus* 48a–50d, a passage not included in this volume.

Xenophon's *Memoirs of Socrates*, like Plato's dialogues, offer us fictional conversations which attempt to recreate what talking to Socrates was like. A passage from these *Memoirs*, included in our selection, presents Socrates discussing painting and sculpture with practitioners of those arts. Xenophon presents both Socrates and his interlocutors as assuming that painting is concerned 'to produce a likeness' and that sculptors aim to make their work 'look like the figures of living people'. The discussion focuses on whether it is possible to imitate moral character and emotion as well as physical appearance.

A reader turning from the dialogues of Plato or Xenophon to the work of Aristotle will immediately be struck by the very different way in which Aristotle's philosophy is presented. The surviving works of Aristotle probably derive from lectures delivered in his philosophical school, the Lyceum, and can seem both dense and elliptical to a modern reader. Aristotle's *Poetics*, as we have it, focuses on the nature of tragic drama (a lost second book dealt with comedy) but opens with reflections on poetry in general and includes some discussion of epic. Like Plato and Xenophon Aristotle assumes that both painters and poets are engaged in imitation and defines tragedy as 'an imitation of an action' in *Poetics* 6.1449b. However unlike Plato in *Republic* 10 he does not regard the art of the dramatist as simply copying: in *Poetics* 9.1451a–b he argues that the poet, unlike the historian, imitates 'not what happened but the sort of thing that would happen' and so 'tends to make universal statements'. This suggests that art can convey truth and can be, in its own way, a source of knowledge.

Aristotle recognizes that a good tragedy will contain a number of different components, such as striking characterization, attractive diction, and spectacle, all of which will contribute to its overall effect (1449b ff.). However in his view plot is by far the most important component: the best tragedy is one which is well constructed and he devotes considerable space to setting out what makes for a good plot. However he is not concerned only with the formal characteristics of tragic drama, or of epic. His moral concerns become clear when he discusses what kinds of character should be portrayed in tragedy in *Poetics* 13.1452b–1453a and again in 15.1454a–b: tragedy should present characters who, while 'better than we are', are not perfect and who fall into misfortune through some kind of error or failing. Exactly what kind of error or failing this is has been a continuing topic of discussion in later aesthetics, and no consensus has ever been reached. In his discussion of tragic error, Aristotle is not simply

concerned with what kinds of characters make for a successful tragic plot; he is assuming that tragedy has a role to play in moral education.

Aristotle's view of the effect of art on the emotions is more complex than Plato's but is expressed with tantalizing brevity. In *Poetics* 4.1448b he recognizes that human beings naturally take pleasure in viewing imitations while in 6.1449b he makes the puzzling claim that tragedy somehow purifies our emotions of pity and fear. Exactly what Aristotle means by his claim that a good tragedy will effect a 'purification' (*katharsis*) of emotions is another issue of recurring debate in later philosophy, and one on which no general agreement has ever been reached. Talk of purification or *katharsis*, however, appears again in Aristotle's discussion of music in *Politics* 8 where, like Plato, he takes it for granted that music arouses emotion and discusses its use in education.

Parts of the *Poetics* discuss matters such as language (19.1456a–b) and the use of metaphor (21.1457b). At 19.1456a Aristotle refers the reader to the *Rhetoric* for discussion of 'the effects to be produced by speech'. The *Rhetoric* deals with a range of philosophical issues raised by rhetorical practice: rhetorical reasoning, prose style and the emotions which an orator will need to understand in order to persuade his audience effectively. We have not included any Aristotelian material on rhetoric, partly because there simply is not room in one volume for all the texts that might be included. Nevertheless, his views on rhetoric, like Plato's, deserve mention in any discussion of the development of Greek and Roman aesthetics since rhetoric, including both rhetorical theory and the literary criticism of prose style, played an important role in Greek and Roman education and influenced the way in which both poets and prose authors wrote as well as the way in which ancient readers responded to their work. Many of the later thinkers included in our selection will have learned rhetoric before they learned philosophy, and rhetorical theory and criticism affect both their views on aesthetics and the way in which they present those views.

The influence of Plato and Aristotle can be found almost everywhere in later Greek and Roman aesthetics. As in other areas of philosophy, they raised fundamental questions and set the terms of subsequent debate.

Aesthetics in Republican Rome: Philodemus, Cicero

A glance at the Chronology at the end of this Introduction will immediately reveal that our selection jumps some 300 years from Plato, Xenophon

and Aristotle to Philodemus and Cicero. Why is this, and what happened to Greek philosophy, and to aesthetics in those 300 years? A great deal happened in Greek philosophy: while the intellectual heirs of Plato and Aristotle continued to discuss problems and develop ideas along the lines laid down in Plato's Academy and in the Lyceum, new schools of philosophy developed in the Hellenistic period, especially Stoicism and Epicureanism. Whereas Stoics put great emphasis on the rational nature of the universe as a whole and on the need for humans to cultivate a form of 'virtue' which was associated with insight into that rationality, Epicureans claimed that the goal or end of human life was pleasure, by which they meant not so much sensual pleasure as tranquillity and freedom from pain. Vigorous debates took place within these schools and between philosophers of different schools. Within the Academy, debate over what was most important in the tradition inherited from Socrates and Plato contributed to the development of Scepticism. Sadly, most of the philosophical texts written during this period do not survive in their entirety. In reconstructing the history of philosophy in the Hellenistic period we have to rely largely on quotations and paraphrases by later authors and on fragmentary papyri.

However, once we reach the first century BC, there is much more evidence available. By this time Rome was the dominant power in the Mediterranean world, although Greek continued to be the language of philosophical culture and education. Philodemus and Cicero, the two authors of the first century BC included in our selection, offer two different perspectives on Hellenistic aesthetics.

Philodemus was both a teacher of Epicurean philosophy and a poet. Born in Gadara in Syria, he studied philosophy in Athens before arriving in Rome in the mid-70s BC. He enjoyed the patronage of powerful Roman aristocrats and taught philosophy at Naples and at Herculaneum, on the Bay of Naples, to a group of students which included the poet Virgil. His works were preserved on papyrus rolls in a philosophical library at Herculaneum which was buried in the eruption of Vesuvius in AD 79 that destroyed Pompeii and was only rediscovered in the eighteenth century. In recent years new techniques have made it possible to read the papyri of Philodemus much more fully and accurately than before and his work on aesthetics has aroused great interest, both because it opens a window on the lost world of aesthetic theory between the time of Aristotle and the first century BC

and because it informs us about Philodemus' own distinctive aesthetic views.

Philodemus writes as a philosopher working within a school tradition of controversy and debate. He proceeds by first expounding the views of earlier thinkers and then criticizing those views. His own positive theories emerge only through his criticism of others but he does put forward some radical views which differ sharply from the mainstream of Greek and Roman aesthetics. As an Epicurean, his prime targets for attack are philosophers from the rival school of Stoicism. In *On Poems* 5 he attacks not only Stoic views of what makes poetry good but also the views of Heraclides Ponticus, who studied with both Plato and Aristotle, and of Neoptolemus of Parium, who belonged to the Aristotelian school. (The discussion of Neoptolemus has aroused particular interest among scholars because Neoptolemus is probably the main source for the views on poetry found in Horace's *Art of Poetry*.[10]) *On Music* 4 is largely devoted to criticizing the views of Diogenes of Babylon, a Stoic. Epicurus himself expressed considerable hostility to poetry and opposed its use in education; nevertheless he was prepared to accept poetry as a means to pleasure. It is in keeping with this that Philodemus objects to any view which values poetry simply because its content is morally improving. Philodemus insists that form and content in poetry are not separable and in other parts of *On Poems*, particularly the rather technical Book 1, he criticizes theorists, such as the Stoic Crates of Mallos, who studied the sound of poetry in detail and attached great importance to euphony. In *On Poems* 5.XVI.28–XVII.31 Philodemus argues that poems whose content conforms to the lofty Stoic ideals of virtue have never been written, and never will be written. As an Epicurean, he believes that both poetry and music are simply sources of pleasure. The pleasure we take in hearing certain types of music, for instance, is an automatic reaction, produced by the impression of atoms on our sense-organ. In *On Music* 4, cols.115.44–117.35 he describes such impressions as 'not subject to reason' and firmly distinguishes between our initial reactions of pleasure and our subsequent rationalization of those reactions. The moral qualities which Stoics like Diogenes of Babylon attribute to music are the result of subjective interpretation, with no basis in the atomic structure of reality.

[10] See C. O. Brink, *Horace on Poetry, I. Prolegomena to the Literary Epistles* (Cambridge University Press, 1963).

That is why he attacks Diogenes for talking of the parts of the soul as 'in proportion with each other' (col. *78*.3–45) and for claiming that music imitates the emotions in a way which brings moral benefit (cols. *91*.3–*92*.5) and that music displays moral qualities (col. 117.28–35).

Cicero was not a professional philosopher but a lawyer and a politician. However, he too, like Philodemus, studied philosophy in Athens. As a young man he wrote the theoretical work *On Rhetorical Invention*, and made some translations from Greek writers such as Xenophon. At two later times in his life, in 55–51 BC and again in 45–44 BC, he turned from the frustration of politics in the final years of the Roman Republic to the composition of philosophical works. His aim in these works was to present Greek philosophy in Latin, for Roman readers. What he presented was Greek philosophy as it looked in the first century BC: some Platonism, a little Aristotle, a good deal of Stoicism and Epicureanism, and various viewpoints deriving from the philosophical battles taking place within the Academy. By the first century BC the philosophers in the Academy were Sceptics rather than Platonists. Their views came under attack from Antiochus of Ascalon who claimed to be returning to the views of Plato – but to us Antiochus' philosophy appears to be a combination of Platonism, Stoicism and some Aristotelian views. In works such as *On the Nature of the Gods* and *On Moral Ends* Cicero pits the views of the different philosophical schools of his own time against one another. In the *Tusculan Disputations* he discusses death, pain, the passions and the happy life from a largely Stoic point of view while *On Duties* draws heavily on the ideas of the second-century BC Stoic Panaetius. His mature philosophical output included further theoretical works on oratory such as *On the Ideal Orator* and *Orator*; in these as in *On Rhetorical Invention* he draws on earlier philosophical discussions of rhetoric, on contemporary theorizing and on his own experience as a highly successful advocate in the Roman lawcourts.

Passages such as the ones we have selected from *On Moral Ends* and *On Duties* make it clear that, following Stoic usage, Cicero understands the notions of 'excellence' and 'the fitting' in aesthetic, as well as moral, terms – or rather, that he makes no distinction between the moral and the aesthetic. So, for example, in *Tusculan Disputations* 4.13.30–1 and *On Duties* 1.27.93–9 he uses a Stoic comparison between the harmonious arrangement of powers in the soul and the analogous arrangement of elements in the body, which results in health and beauty. Similarly

he reflects Stoic views when he claims in *On Duties* 1.4.14 and *On Moral Ends* 2.14.47 that beauty serves as a sure guide in moral life, indicating clearly what must be preferred in morals by analogy with what is preferred among visual forms on the basis of their beauty and noble appearance.

The admiration for the ordered beauty of the world expressed in Plato's *Timaeus* 28a–29b influenced much later thought. Many ancient authors believed that a universal law of patterns and proportions underlies all reality, governing both physical things and human souls and minds. In several of our Cicero texts (*On the Ideal Orator* 3.25.96–26.101; 3.45.178; 3.50.195–51; *Orator* 51.173; 53.177–8) we find the observation that humans have an innate capacity to perceive metrical patterns in speech, rhythms and harmonies in music, and proportions in the visual arts, such as painting and architecture, as well as in natural bodies. In *Orator* 55.183–4 Cicero notes that such patterns cannot be explained unless one assumes that they depend on the innate qualities of our sensory powers alone.

These observations about the human perception of order are probably of Stoic origin but the story Cicero tells in *On Rhetorical Invention* 2.1.1–3, according to which Zeuxis drew on a number of different models in order to paint a picture of Helen of Troy, is a traditional one, probably first told by the fourth-century BC historian Duris of Samos[11] while the suggestion in *Orator* 2.8–9 that the sculptor Phidias imitated 'some exquisite form of beauty present in his own mind' introduces an element of Platonism, perhaps due to Antiochus of Ascalon. The shift from the idea which we find in Plato's *Republic*, that the artist 'imitates' some particular object in the sensory world, to the suggestion that art is an 'imitation' of something ideal present in the artist's mind, is a historically momentous one.

Aesthetics under the Roman Empire: Seneca, Longinus, Philostratus, Philostratus the Younger, Aristides Quintilianus

The student of philosophy between the time of Cicero and the time of Plotinus encounters similar problems to the student of Hellenistic

[11] For the origins of this story and its popularity in the Renaissance, see K. Jex-Blake and E. Sellers, *The Elder Pliny's Chapters on the History of Art* (London: Macmillan, 1896, revised edition by R. V. Schoder, Chicago: Argonaut, 1968) lxi–lxii, and E. Panofsky, *Idea. A Concept in Art Theory* (trans. J. J. S. Peake, Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1968) 15, 49, 58, 157.

philosophy. Although philosophical teaching flourished during this period, very few works survive by authors whom we would now regard as 'professional philosophers'. Instead there is a wealth of material by philosophically educated writers such as Philo of Alexandria or Plutarch who used philosophical ideas in other kinds of writing, assuming a high level of philosophical culture and understanding in their readers. The material in our selection that dates from this period all comes from writers of this kind. Seneca, tutor and adviser to the Emperor Nero, writes about philosophy primarily from a Stoic viewpoint but the account of five kinds of cause in *Letter* 65.2–10 explicitly draws on Plato and Aristotle as well as on 'our own Stoics'. The suggestion that rather than merely imitating objects in the physical world the artist looks to ideas in his own mind which are themselves reflections of the Platonic Forms, already made in Cicero, *Orator* 2.8–9, reappears here. Meanwhile, in the passages we have selected from *On the Award and Reception of Favours*, Seneca follows Stoic thought in describing 'the noble' as beautiful and in expressing admiration for the beauty and order of the world.

The work *On Sublimity* attributed to Longinus was probably written at around the same time, in the first century AD, though we know nothing of its author. Written in response to a lost work by Caecilius of Caleacte, with the expressed intention of teaching budding orators how to achieve sublimity in their writing, this text combines ideas drawn from the rhetorical tradition of literary criticism with ideas drawn from philosophy, particularly from Platonism.

Longinus tries to define and illustrate the peculiar quality which makes certain literary works great, a quality which he calls 'the sublime'. 'Sublime' seems originally to have referred to a type of style: the 'high' or elevated style as opposed to a more colloquial mode of expression. It then comes to be used as a moral and psychological property, and finally as what we would call an 'aesthetic' category, which is a potential alternative to 'beauty'. Thus Longinus (in 9.2) illustrates the point that ideas can be grand, or sublime, in themselves 'without verbal expression' by referring to Homer's account of the silence of Ajax in the Underworld (in *Odyssey* 11.541–67). Ajax had been defeated by Odysseus in a contest for a prize of honour – the armour of the dead Achilles – and had thereupon killed himself. When Odysseus sees him in the Underworld and tries to make peace with him, Ajax does not respond, but simply goes off in silence.

When Longinus defines what he means by the sublime in literature, he appeals to the test of time, claiming in 7.4 that we should 'reckon those things which please everybody all the time as genuinely and finely sublime'. In 8.1 he lists five sources of sublimity, including strong emotion. In fact emotion does not receive separate discussion but it is clear throughout the work that Longinus regards the successful expression of emotion as a very important mark of sublimity and also assumes that sublime works have a powerful effect on the emotions of their audience. He admires the genius of great writers, going so far as to describe this genius as divine in passages such as 33.5 and 34.4. Longinus' main way of arguing for his views is to discuss particular passages of poetry and prose in some detail, drawing attention to their good and bad qualities. He presents these passages as models to be followed by those who aim at sublimity in their own writing. Some parts of his text, omitted from our selection, discuss matters such as figures of speech and word-order which were regularly studied in the rhetorical schools.

Longinus focuses on literature, both poetry and prose, but we can see from the probably somewhat later works by the two Philostrati and by Aristides Quintilianus that the aesthetic interests of intellectuals in this period included painting, sculpture and music. The *Life of Apollonius of Tyana* is a long work in eight books commissioned from the elder Philostratus, the Athenian, by the wife of the Emperor Septimius Severus. Apollonius is represented as a holy man with philosophical interests and the work includes reports of many conversations which Apollonius is alleged to have held with a variety of people. Our selection includes two passages in which he is presented as discussing the visual arts. In 2.22 he is discussing painting with Damis, his disciple and companion, while in 6.19, in conversation with Thespesion, an Egyptian, he is contrasting the animal images used to represent the Egyptian gods with the ways in which Greek sculptors portrayed the divine. Here he makes the striking claim that it was imagination, rather than imitation, which made sculptors like Phidias able to reproduce the appearance of the gods.

Two works entitled *Pictures* which contain literary descriptions of pictures and whose prefaces include interesting general comments about painting are attributed to authors called Philostratus. It is probable that one of them was written by the author of the *Life of Apollonius of Tyana* and the other by his younger relative, Philostratus the Lemnian. In the first we find praise of the painter as a more skilful imitator than

the sculptor. The second develops the point already found in Xenophon that the painter can portray character and emotion, not just physical appearance.

The work *On Music* by Aristides Quintilianus probably dates from the third century AD. Book 1 deals with technical aspects of music – harmonics, rhythmics and metrics – while Book 2 deals with music's use in education and as therapy. Book 3 uses numerology, mathematics and natural science to connect the phenomena of music with the structure of reality overall. Although Aristides draws on a variety of earlier writings about music, his philosophical viewpoint is that of a Platonist. We have included in our selection the opening chapters of Book 1, which introduce the work as a whole, and material from Book 2 on the role of music in education. Aristides sees music as playing an important role in moral education through its effect on the emotions. He refers explicitly to Plato and develops the positive side of Plato's discussion of music.

Aesthetics in late antiquity: Plotinus, Augustine, Proclus, Anonymous Prolegomena

The latest texts in our selection bear witness to the two most significant intellectual currents in late antiquity: pagan Neoplatonism and Christian thought. The *Enneads* of Plotinus reflect teaching and discussion in his philosophical school in Rome. By the time of Plotinus Platonism had become the dominant philosophy, absorbing and transposing many Aristotelian and Stoic ideas. The teaching of philosophy consisted of the study and exposition of the texts of both Aristotle and Plato, interpreting these authorities with the aim of showing that, rightly understood, they offered a unified doctrine. Plotinus' approach to beauty clearly owes a good deal to Plato's *Symposium*, *Phaedrus* and *Timaeus* but he develops Plato's suggestions into something more systematic. He emphasizes not only that the Platonic Forms are the source of all beauty in this world but also that ultimately intelligible beauty derives from the Good, or the One, the highest entity in his metaphysical system. The suggestion found in Cicero and Seneca that the artist has access to the Platonic Forms now becomes a claim that the best art is not representational at all but rather symbolic of higher realities. In *Ennead* 5.8.1 Plotinus claims that 'Phidias … made his statue of Zeus not from any perceptible model but grasping what Zeus would look like if he chose to appear before our eyes.'

As Christianity spread and developed, Christian intellectuals adopted and transformed many aspects of pagan Greek philosophy. Augustine, the only Christian writer included in our selection, offers a particularly interesting and influential synthesis of Platonist philosophy with Christian theology and spirituality. His extensive output includes considerable discussion of aesthetic issues. In his earlier works Augustine was trying to provide a stable foundation for the Christian faith through means that would appeal to the general public, not only to the circle of believers, i.e., through philosophy and common experience. Accordingly, in works such as *On Order*, *On Music* and *On Free Choice of the Will*, based on the model of Platonic dialogues, as well as in *On True Religion* Augustine makes the 'transcendental' nature of aesthetic experience the key point in his demonstration of the existence of the divine. Such experience seems to point beyond the limitations of the human mind and beyond immediately experienced reality. In *On True Religion* 40.76 Augustine makes a distinction between judgements of truth and judgements of beauty. In this passage he argues that in judging whether something is beautiful we should consider it not in isolation but as part of an ordered whole whereas 'the truth of our judgement does not depend on whether it is about the whole or a part'.

In some passages of Augustine, such as *Confessions* 7.17.23 and *On the Trinity* 9.6.11, we find a Platonist account of the love of beauty very similar to what we find in Plotinus. In other passages, such as *On True Religion* 30.56–32.60 and 39.72 or *On Free Choice of the Will* 2.12.34 and 16.41–3, Augustine combines this with a version of the argument from design found in Stoic aesthetics. In passages such as *On Free Choice of the Will* 2.16.42, *On Order* 2.11.32–4 and *On Music* 6.4.5 he follows the Stoics in appealing, like Cicero before him, to a universal law of patterns and proportions underlying all reality. In *On Music* he regards art as a combination of natural principles, that can always be 'consulted' in our minds and restored, with purely learned rules, such as the length of syllables, that must be retained by memory.

In *Confessions* 3.2.2 Augustine deplores the effect of drama on the emotions in a manner which is strongly reminiscent of Plato. At the same time he follows both Plato and the Stoics in making a close connection between aesthetic and moral harmony. In *On Order* 2.19.50–1 he asks how, when we perceive a harmoniously sounding cithara, we can tolerate 'discordant sounds' in our soul.

Despite the spread of Christianity, pagan philosophy in the Platonic tradition continued well into the sixth century AD. In the fifth century Proclus wrote commentaries on Plato based on the lectures he gave at the revived Platonic Academy in Athens.[12] Proclus believed that the poetic and religious texts of the Greek tradition contained the same essential truths as the philosophy of Plato. In his *Commentary on the Timaeus* 1.265.18–26 he makes a similar point about Phidias' statue of Zeus to that made by Plotinus in *Ennead* 5.8.1 but claims that Phidias represented the Homeric Zeus rather than 'the intellectual god himself'. In his *Commentary on the Republic* he develops Plotinus' claim that the best art is symbolic of higher realities with reference to poetry rather than sculpture, trying to show that Plato's criticisms of poetry do not apply to most of Homer's work. In 1.177.7–179.32 he offers an account of three types of poetry, contrasting the highest, inspired type with the lowest, 'simply imitative' type. It is clear from the wider context of Proclus' account that inspired poetry is symbolic and that when Proclus claims most of Homer is inspired what he means is that it must be interpreted allegorically. A similar approach to mythical stories as symbolic can be found in *Commentary on the Republic* 2.107.14–108.16, in a context where Proclus is about to comment on the myth of Er told by Plato at the very end of the *Republic*. In Proclus' account of the three types of poetry there is also a middle type, 'full of admonition and excellent advice', between the highest, inspired poetry and the lowest, imitative type. This type of poetry affects morals in a straightforward way and would have been quite acceptable in Plato's ideal state.

The *Anonymous Prolegomena to the Philosophy of Plato* was probably written at Alexandria, the other great centre of philosophy in late antiquity, some time in the sixth century. This work reflects many of the ideas about literature found in Proclus and his contemporaries and successors.[13] Its author returns to the effect of literature on morals and defends Plato's own use of the dialogue form by claiming that Plato shows us bad characters 'being changed by the good and instructed and purified' and that he uses the characters in his dialogues to exemplify moral qualities such as friendship and ambition.

[12] Plato's original foundation disintegrated in the first century BC. The institution at which Proclus taught was a re-foundation, probably dating only from the fourth century AD.

[13] Cf., for example, the opening pages of Olympiodorus, *Commentary on Plato's Gorgias*, trans. R. Jackson, K. Lycos and H. Tarrant (Leiden: Brill, 1998).

Medieval aesthetics, both in the Byzantine world and in the Latin West, was heavily influenced by the Platonism of late antiquity, both pagan and Christian. In every subsequent period, from the Renaissance onwards, some ancient writers on aesthetics have been 'rediscovered' and regarded as of central importance: for example, Aristotle's *Poetics* was enormously influential on the theory and practice of Renaissance drama while Longinus strongly influenced the development of aesthetic thought in the Romantic period.[14] We have tried in our selection to reflect the range and variety of Greek and Roman aesthetic thought over its long period of development.

[14] On Longinus, see M. H. Abrams, *The Mirror and the Lamp* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1953) esp. ch. 4.

Chronology

Note that some dates are approximate.

Dates	Authors	Historical events
c. 484–*c.* 380 BC	Gorgias	
427 BC		Gorgias visits Athens as an ambassador from Leontini and displays his rhetorical skill
c. 429–347 BC	Plato	
c. 428–*c.* 354 BC	Xenophon	
404 BC		End of the Peloponnesian War
399 BC		Death of Socrates
384–322 BC	Aristotle	
323 BC		Death of Alexander the Great
146 BC		Roman defeat of the Achaean Confederacy – Greece becomes a Roman province
c. 110–*c.* 40/35 BC	Philodemus	

106–43 BC	Cicero	
86 BC		Sack of Athens by the Roman general, Sulla
44 BC		Murder of Julius Caesar
31 BC		Battle of Actium
AD 14		Death of Augustus
c. AD 1–65	Seneca	
AD 54–68		Reign of Nero
?1st century AD	Longinus	
AD 161–80		Reign of Marcus Aurelius
c. AD 172–244/9	Philostratus	
AD 193–211		Reign of Septimius Severus
3rd century AD	Philostratus the Younger	
?3rd century AD	Aristides Quintilianus	
AD 205–269/70	Plotinus	
AD 242–3		Expedition against Persia by Gordian III, accompanied by Plotinus
AD 253–68		Reign of Gallienus, Plotinus' patron
AD 312–337		Reign of Constantine
AD 354–430	Augustine	
AD 378–95		Reign of Theodosius. Christianity becomes the official religion of the Roman Empire.
AD 395		The Roman Empire is divided into eastern and western parts on the death of Theodosius.