

PLATO AND THE PAINTERS

NANCY DEMAND

REMARKS ABOUT PAINTERS AND PAINTING are to be found throughout Plato's dialogues, from the early *Ion* to the *Laws*, occurring as examples, analogies, and figures of speech. They exist not in and for themselves, but as ancillary to other ends: the painter is seen in contrast to, or as similar to, the sophist; he is viewed as analogous to the poet; painting provides illustrations of the deception of the senses and of the origins of language. Moreover, in the course of his work, Plato expresses more than one attitude toward painting, ranging from simple commendation to strong attack. Some of his comments betray a fairly extensive knowledge of the techniques employed by the contemporary painter and seem to reflect the artistic controversies of his day.

A number of recent studies have considered Plato's references to painting in their historical context; however, these studies have failed to achieve agreement on fundamental points. In 1933 Schuhl suggested that Plato was motivated in his rejection of modern painting by his sympathy with an archaizing school of painters: Plato took sides in a battle between the ancients and the moderns.¹ However, the existence of such an archaizing school in the early fourth century has been called into question,² and Schuhl's thesis has not found support. Nevertheless, he restated it, with additional documentation, in a second edition in 1952.

A quite different explanation of Plato's relationship with contemporary painting also appeared in 1933, in an article by Steven.³ Steven suggested that Plato opposed illusionistic painting and favored the Peloponnesian (Sicyonian) school of painters, of which at least Eupompus and Pamphilus would have been active during Plato's lifetime. According to Pliny, Pamphilus was "the first painter highly educated in all branches of learning, especially arithmetic and geometry, without the aid of which he maintained art could not attain perfection."⁴ He introduced drawing into the curriculum,⁵ and was noted for his theoretical knowledge. His

¹Pierre-Maxime Schuhl, *Platon et l'art de son temps* (Paris 1933; second edition, revised and augmented, 1952).

²By both T. B. L. Webster (review of Schuhl, *CR* 48 [1934] 239) and R. K. Hack (review of Schuhl, *CP* 30 [1935] 273-275).

³R. G. Steven, "Plato and the Art of His Time," *CQ* 27 (1933) 149-155. A kinship of ideas between Plato and the Sicyonian school had earlier been suggested by E. Pfuhl, *Malerei und Zeichnung der Griechen* (Munich 1923) 2.729.

⁴Pliny *HN* 35.76 (tr. Rackham).

⁵*Ibid.* 35.77; Quint. 12.10.1-10.

work was known in Athens as early as 388 B.C.,⁶ and his influence has been seen in the line drawings of the Attic Kertch style of vase painting, which dates from about 370 onwards.⁷ Thus we have a school of painting which was based upon mathematics, stressed line drawing, and appears to have made its impact upon the Athenian scene during the early fourth century. Steven suggests that it found favor with Plato, and that it provided him with a basis for his attack on illusionistic painting.

Steven's thesis was favorably received by Webster.⁸ However, it has not gained universal acceptance, for in 1953 Schweitzer reopened the controversy by proposing that the illusionistic school against which Plato inveighed was one and the same with the Sicyonian school, and that the enemy of *Republic* 10 was the Sicyonian school.⁹ He thus completely reversed Steven's thesis that Plato favored and was positively influenced by this school. Schweitzer also suggested a new consideration of great importance: that Plato's attitude toward painting underwent a marked change from positive to negative, a change for which any theory of external influence must account.¹⁰ He himself believes that this change was triggered by the perspective painting of Pamphilus and his Sicyonian school. As we noted above, the work of Pamphilus was known in Athens at least by 388, and it is in the 380's that we first find evidence of an awareness of the illusionist technique of skiagraphia, or shadow painting, in Plato's work (*Phaedo* 69b). Although Webster has called attention to the fact that Plato's attacks on painting are aimed at least as much at the vagueness and "impressionism" of skiagraphia as they are at the use of linear perspective,¹¹ and the instance of Egyptian art shows that the use of mathematical canons in no way necessarily implies the use of perspective, Schweitzer's thesis has since been adopted by Byvanck.¹²

Two factors suggest that a renewed consideration of Plato's references to painting is in order. The first, and more obvious, is the lack of agreement in existing studies about the relationship between Plato's views and

⁶Aristophanes *Plutus* 385.

⁷See Karl Schefold, *Kertscher Vasen* (Berlin 1930) 8-9; Andreas Rumpf, *Malerei und Zeichnung der klassischen Antike* (Munich 1953) 131 f.

⁸Webster (above, note 2) 239; see also "Plato and Aristotle as Critics of Greek Art," *SymbOslo* 29 (1952) 8-23, esp. 17 ff.; *Art and Literature in Fourth Century Athens* (London 1956) 150; review of Schweitzer, *Gnomon* 26 (1954) 449.

⁹Bernhard Schweitzer, *Platon und die bildende Kunst der Griechen* (Tubingen 1953) 82-87. Hack also rejects Steven's position (above, note 2).

¹⁰Webster in particular has questioned Schweitzer on this point (*Gnomon* 26 [1954] 448-449), although in *SymbOslo* 29 (1952) 21 he admits a "limited change," confined to the *Philebus*, *Sophist*, and *Laws*.

¹¹*Gnomon* 26 (1954) 449.

¹²A. W. Byvanck, "Platon et l'art grec," *BABesch* 30 (1955) 35-39; "De Beeldende Kunst in den Tijd van Plato," *Meded. Kon. Nederl. Akad., Afd. Letterkunde* 18 (1955) 429-475.

contemporary schools of painting. The second is the fact that Schweitzer's hypothesis—that Plato's attitude toward painting underwent a clearly defined shift—has implications which have not yet been considered. The main purpose of the present paper will therefore be to examine these two points; the method used will be to review Plato's remarks on painting in their most likely temporal sequence, as well as in the context of contemporary painting in which they were written.

BEFORE THE *REPUBLIC*

Plato's earliest reference to painting occurs in the *Ion* (532e–533a), where painting is given as an example of a *techne*, and Polygnotus (fl. ca 475–447 B.C.) is mentioned as a representative painter.¹³ In the *Gorgias*, the painter is again taken as a representative possessor of *techne*, in contrast to the sophist. The painters mentioned are Aristophon,¹⁴ Aristophon's brother, Polygnotus (448b), and Zeuxis (453c–d),¹⁵ a "modern" painter who was active in the last third of the fifth century. At 430c, painting is classified as a *techne*: it is an art which effects its ends by action rather than words. At 503e, the painter is placed in the same category as the builder, the shipwright, the physical trainer, and the doctor, all of whom bring harmony and order to the materials with which they work.

In the *Protagoras*, the painter again appears (312d) as a representative of those who possess *techne*, in contrast to the sophist, who possesses not a *techne*, but only a knack (ἐμπειρία καὶ τριβή, *Gorgias* 463b). This same contrast between the painter as a possessor of *techne* and the sophist as a non-possessor appears again at *Protagoras* 318b–c, when Zeuxis is again mentioned as a representative painter.

These are the only references to specific painters by name in Plato's works. In each case, the painter is viewed as a desirable member of the community, and as the possessor of *techne*. At times he is considered on a par with the builder and the doctor. Plato's choice of a representative painter lights indifferently upon the "old-fashioned" Polygnotus and his

¹³Webster, *OCD*², s.v. "Polygnotus;" so also Lippold, "Polygnotus," *RE* 21/2 (1952) 1630. Pliny dates him before 420 B.C. (*HN* 35.58). For the ancient evidence on Polygnotus and other painters, see J. J. Pollitt, *The Art of Greece 1400–31 B.C.* (Engelwood Cliffs, N.J. 1965), and J. Overbeck, *Die antiken Schriftquellen zur bildenden Kunst bei den Griechen* (Leipzig 1868).

¹⁴Aristophon, brother of Polygnotus (schol. *Gorg.* 448b), was still living in the youth of Alcibiades (Plut. *Alc.* 16), who was born ca 450.

¹⁵Zeuxis of Heracles, a follower of Apollodorus the shadow painter, who carried his master's techniques to new heights (Pliny *HN* 35.62). Pliny dates him fl. 400–397, rejecting an earlier date of 424 (*HN* 35.61). In the *Protagoras* (dramatic date ca 430), he is pictured as young and a newcomer to Athens; his rose-wreathed Eros is mentioned in Aristophanes's *Acharnians* 991–992 (425 B.C.).

brother Aristophon, and upon the innovator Zeuxis, follower of Apollodorus, the creator of the revolutionary technique of skiagraphia, which Plato will soon condemn so vehemently.

In the *Cratylus*, Plato for the first time employs the painter in an extended analogy, in an account of the origins of language:

And when we have considered all these things well [the letters], we shall know how to apply each letter according to its likeness, whether it is fitting to apply one letter to one single thing, or many letters combined together, just as painters wishing to make likenesses sometimes apply purple only and sometimes some other color, and sometimes they mix together many colors, as when they prepare flesh-colored paint, or some other such thing, each figure seeming to require its own color. Thus we, too, shall apply letters to one thing, making what they call syllables, and again, putting together syllables, creating nouns and verbs. And from nouns and verbs we shall create language, great and fair and whole, just as the painter creates a figure. (*Cra.* 424d–425a)

The analogy is extended beyond the account of the origins of language to the nature of words: “For the name is an imitation in a way, just as a picture” (430e). Finally, the analogy is extended to provide a theory of truth:

If we can assign names as well as pictures to things, certain assignments we wish to call true, and others false. And if this is the case, and we can assign names falsely, and not give the proper one to each, but sometimes assign one that does not belong, it would also be possible to do the same with verbs. And if you assign names and verbs falsely, the statements made up of them must also be false . . . And if we liken primitive names to pictures, it is possible, just as in painting, to put in all the proper colors and shapes, and again not to put them in, but to leave out one, or to put in another. And he who puts them all in creates a beautiful picture and a likeness, while he who either adds or takes away, although he also makes a likeness and a picture, makes a bad one. (*Cra.* 431a–c)

These passages make no reference to skiagraphia, nor do they condemn painting, yet they bear an interesting relationship to Plato’s later remarks about painting in another respect: they suggest the possibility of what we may call true painting, painting which correctly represents its subject in color and shape and arrangement of the parts. This notion of true painting recurs in the *Sophist*, and we find it again in the *Philebus*, where Plato also compares pictures with words: the painter in the soul exists beside the writer in the soul and paints true pictures of true opinions and false pictures of false opinions about pleasures and pains (*Phlb.* 39b–e). In the *Laws*, this notion of true painting is defined: a painting must represent its subject correctly “with respect to the points (*ἀριθμοίς*) of a body, and have the arrangement of each of the parts as they really are, in their proper respective order;” the same accuracy in representation should be maintained in portraying color and shape (*Laws* 668d–e). A false painting may occur under two conditions: lack of ability on the part of the painter, and deliberate distortion by the painter. Of which is Plato thinking in

the *Cratylus*? There is no suggestion that he is thinking of deliberate distortion, and the calm, unemotional manner in which he treats the painter strongly suggests that he has not yet awakened to the dangers inherent in skiagraphia. In fact, the first clear reference to skiagraphia occurs in the *Phaedo*, and there we also find the first suggestion of the moralistic condemnation which soon becomes the predominant Platonic attitude toward painting:

That "virtue" which is based not on wisdom but on the balancing of pains and pleasures against each other is, I suspect, only a deceptive shadow painting, a servile thing with nothing sound or true in it. (*Phaedo* 69b)

What was this dangerous shadow painting, or skiagraphia? Shading by cross-hatching had been used occasionally by vase painters from a date early in the fifth century, but only for certain specific items, such as metal and clothing; by the turn of the century it was also used on the bodies of men and on animals.¹⁶ However, the method of shading by cross-hatching was merely a foreshadowing of the more complex techniques of rendering shadow and light which were invented by Apollodorus and called skiagraphia. The archaeological evidence for the technique is slight. The method did not lend itself easily to the form of painting which has survived most successfully, vase painting.¹⁷ Therefore, we are mainly dependent upon literary sources, and later Roman copies of Greek wall paintings.¹⁸ Plutarch tells us that what Apollodorus discovered was the mixture of colors and the creation of shadow through the use of color (*φθορὰν καὶ ἀπόχρωσιν σκιᾶς*).¹⁹ Another definition occurs in Hesychius (s.v. *σκία*): "Shading, an appearance which mimics form by the use of

¹⁶A. Rumpf, "Classical and Post Classical Greek Painting," *JHS* 67 (1947) 10-11.

¹⁷Mary H. Swindler, *Ancient Painting* (New Haven 1929) 265. However, there are examples; see for instance Furtwängler and Reichhold, *Griechische Vasenmalerei* (Munich 1909) 3.20 and fig. 99 (fragment of a krater, probably by Assteas, in the Museum at Bari) and 61, fig. 27 (krater by Python, British Museum). The work of both these vase painters shows connections with wall-paintings. Moreover, there is also evidence of interest in light and highlighting on vases using white and gold paint for necklaces, diadems, and other objects, for example, the fifth century vases of Meidias; see Beazley, *Attic Red-Figured Vase-Painters*² (Oxford 1963) 2.1312-1314; Martin Robertson, *Greek Painting* (Geneva 1959) 148 ff., 161 ff.; G. M. A. Richter, *Attic Red Figure Vases* (New Haven 1958, revised edition) 154-155.

¹⁸For instance, the *Odyssey* landscape at the Vatican (G. M. A. Richter, *A Handbook of Greek Art*⁴ [London 1965] fig. 392) and the wall painting of a garden from the Villa of Livia at Prima Porta (*ibid.*, fig. 394); however, see Eva Keuls, "Impressionism in Ancient Painting?" *AJA* 77 (1973) 216-217.

¹⁹Plut. *Moralia* 346a. Elsewhere Plutarch offers a definition of *φθορά*: τὰς μίξεις τῶν χρωμάτων οἱ ζωγράφοι φθορὰς ὀνομάζουσι (725c, cf. 393c). The word *ἀπόχρωσις* is found only here, but the related word *ἀποχρᾶνναι* is found at *Resp.* 586b in the passive sense, "to take a tone from a neighboring color." The same sense probably occurs at *Laws* 769a.

color" (σκίασις, ἐμφάνεια τοῦ χρώματος ἀντίμορφος). Such shading by color replaced outlining or cross-hatching as a means of distinguishing various areas. The contrast with earlier painting is described by Dionysius of Halicarnassus:

Ancient paintings were done with simple coloring, with no dappled mixtures (μίγμασιν ποικιλίαν) of pigments, and with precisely drawn lines, all of which made these works very pleasing. Later paintings were less well drawn, but more elaborately worked out with the dappled effects of light and shade (σκιᾷ τε καὶ φωτὶ ποικιλλόμεναι), and had their strength in the very preponderance of these methods. (*de Isaeo iudic.* 4)

Plato himself offers excellent clues to the nature of skiagraphia in the *Republic* and later dialogues. Perhaps the most revealing passage is found in the *Parmenides*:

It is just as in a shadow painting, in which the parts appear to be all one and the same and alike to someone standing far away, but, to someone approaching, these same parts appear to be many and varied, and, owing to the visual effects (φαντάσματι) of contrasting colors, the colors appear changed and unlike themselves. (*Prm.* 165c-d)

In several other passages Plato refers to the incomprehensibility of such paintings when viewed at close range,²⁰ suggesting the application of pigment in flecks and dabs. A dappling technique is also suggested by *Critias* 107b-d, which describes a landscape portrayed by vague and indistinct forms, as well as by Aristotle's remark about colors applied χύδην, confusedly or indiscriminately (*Poetics* 1450 b 2). Another aspect of skiagraphia is indicated by Plato's use of the word ἀποχραίνειν to denote the intensification and alteration of colors achieved by juxtaposition ("colors taking their tone from their placement beside each other so that each seems intense," ὑπὸ τῆς παρ' ἀλλήλας θέσεως ἀποχραϊνομέναις, ὥστε σφοδροὺς ἐκάτερας φαίνεσθαι, *Resp.* 586c). Still another aspect of skiagraphia, the interest of these painters in optical phenomena, is reflected in *Republic* 602c-d, where refraction and the effect of color on the perception of shape are mentioned, and in *Sophist* 236a, where Plato speaks of optical corrections.

The term "skiagraphia" itself suggests a predominant interest in the effects of light. This is confirmed by an account of the general development of painting given by Pliny:

At last art gave variety to itself and discovered light and shade, the various juxtapositions of colors enhancing each color by contrast. Next splendor was introduced, quite another effect from light. The transition from light to shade they called "tone," while the blending together and transition of colors was called "harmony." (*HN* 35.29)

Shirley Barlow has found indirect evidence of this interest in light in the literary sphere, where she has pointed out the special interest shown by Euripides in the effects of light and color, an interest which she believes

²⁰*Resp.* 523b, 598b-c; *Soph.* 234b-c; *Tht.* 208e; *Phlb.* 41e-42a.

reflects the interests of contemporary painters.²¹ She compares this fifth-century Greek attempt to depict the effects of light with Impressionistic painting of the nineteenth century.²² Several other scholars have also noted the similarity between nineteenth-century Impressionism and skiagraphic painting.²³ A number of parallels exist between the two. There is a common interest in observing and recording the effects of light, in eliminating lines as boundaries between objects, and in the juxtaposition and gradation of colors.²⁴ Perhaps most important for the layman, however, is the parallel in the overall effect of these paintings. Plato tells us that skiagraphic paintings are incomprehensible from close range, for the "parts" of the painting appear separate and unlike each other, whereas from a distance they appear fused and alike, and are comprehensible as objects.²⁵ Such optical fusion parallels that of nineteenth-century Impressionistic painting; it is closely related to the phenomenon of lustre (the "splendor" of Pliny's account). W. I. Homer says of Seurat's *Un Dimanche à la Grande Jatte*:²⁶

If one stands one foot from the painting . . . one can see all of the individual constituent colors in any given small area; but upon moving back gradually, these hues begin to fuse and coalesce until one reaches a point about twenty feet from the canvas, where fusion is complete and the individual colored strokes are no longer discernible. But before this point is reached . . . effects of partial fusion or "lustre" become evident.

The technique of skiagraphia continued an earlier trend toward greater representation of depth and three-dimensionality in Greek painting. The earlier manifestations of this trend were climaxed by the discovery of linear perspective,²⁷ which Vitruvius tells us was introduced by the painter Agatharchus in the scene painting for one of the plays of Aeschylus (*De Arch.* 7, pr. 11). This may have been in 458 B.C., during the production of the *Oresteia*,²⁸ or it may have been that the play involved

²¹Shirley Barlow, *The Imagery of Euripides* (London 1971) esp. 9–16; 147 n. 71.

²²*Ibid.*, 135 n. 37.

²³Schuhl² (above, note 1) 11 and n. 3. Pfuhl, "Skiagraphia," *JdI* 27 (1912) 230–231, sees a possible theoretical root of Greek impressionism in skiagraphia, yet rejects it. Eva Keuls discussed the parallels in a paper read at the AIA meeting, December 1972; see *AJA* 77 (1973) 216–217.

²⁴W. I. Homer, *Seurat and the Science of Painting* (Cambridge, Mass. 1970) 56–57, 76.

²⁵Euripides had noticed this as early as 423 B.C. (*Hecuba* 807).

²⁶Homer (above, note 24) 143.

²⁷But found also as early as the complex overlapping of the seventh-century Chigi Jug (Rome, Villa Giulia, *CVA* 1, pls. 1–4), and gaining momentum in the period 530–450 when there is definite acceleration of experimentation with the representation of three-dimensional space. On the "Kavalier perspective" of Polygnotus, see Furtwängler-Reichhold (above, note 17) 676, but see also Pfuhl, "Apollodoros ὁ σκιαγράφος," *JdI* 25 (1910) 12–28; *JdI* 27 (1912) 227–231; and R. Schöne, "ΣΚΙΑΓΡΑΦΙΑ," *JdI* 27 (1912) 19–23.

²⁸T. B. L. Webster, *Greek Art and Literature 530–400 B.C.* (Oxford 1939) 74.

was a posthumous revival, perhaps during the 430's.²⁹ At any rate, it is clear that experimentation in painting was well under way in the last quarter of the fifth century. Plato grew up in the midst of this experimentation. He mentions Zeuxis, a painter of the skiagraphic school, by name, and yet we see no signs in dialogues before the *Phaedo* that he had any real awareness of the specific techniques with which these painters experimented, although, as we have seen, in later dialogues he demonstrates a considerable knowledge of these techniques. Nor do we see in these earlier dialogues any suggestion of the scorn and condemnation which he will soon heap upon the painter. The painter, even Zeuxis the innovator and shadow painter, is still a craftsman worthy of respect in Plato's eyes, able to stand beside the builder and the doctor. Yet, by the time we reach *Republic* 10, we find the attack against the painter in full swing.

THE PAINTER IN THE *REPUBLIC*

There are a number of references to painting in the *Republic*. In the order of their occurrence in the dialogue we find:

(1) 2.365c: "I must draw about myself a shadow painting of virtue, a stage setting, a mere appearance."

(2) 2.377e: The poets should be subject to censorship. They should not be permitted to retell traditional stories which are detrimental to the gods, such as Hesiod's account of Uranus's treatment of Cronos, and the revenge of Cronos (377e), and other stories of enmity, falsehood, or deception among the gods (378c-d). Plato resorts to an analogy with the painter: when the poet tells such stories, he is "like a painter who paints something which is not a likeness of what he wishes it to resemble" (377e).

(3) 3.400d-401a: Painting is numbered among the crafts (*δημιουργίαι*) which foster good speech, good accord, good grace, and good rhythm (compare *Gorgias* 503e).

(4) 5.472d: Socrates argues that it is the legislator's job to discern the models or ideals, not to demonstrate the possibility of their realization. The case is seen as analogous to that of the painter:

Do you think that he would be any the less a good painter who, painting an ideal representation of say, the most handsome man, and rendering all parts of the painting properly, should not also be able to prove that such a man can actually exist?

(5) 6.484c-d: Philosophers should rule. After all, Socrates argues, no one would appoint a blind watchman:

²⁹Rumpf (above, note 16) 10-21. Pfuhl also dates the discovery to the last third of the fifth century, although he would give credit for the discovery to Apollodorus (above, note 3) 676, but see also Pfuhl and Schöne (above, note 27).

Do those who are truly deprived of the knowledge of the truth of things differ at all from the blind—those who have no clear pattern in their souls, and cannot, as a painter does, look to the truest things, and always go back to them for reference and see them as exactly as possible, so that they can establish laws here concerning the noble and just and good, when it is necessary to establish laws, and preserve those laws already established?

(6) 6.488a: Socrates says, of his own use of imagery, “it is necessary to combine many things . . . as painters do when they paint goat-stags and such creatures.”

(7) 6.500e–501c: The legislator’s work is likened to the work of the painter:

No city could ever prosper unless painters using a divine pattern drew its lines Taking the city and the habits of men like a tablet, first they will wipe it clean And then, after this, wouldn’t they sketch out (ὑπογράφασθαι) the outline (σχῆμα) of the constitution? . . . And then, in completing their work they would look frequently in both directions, towards the just and noble and wise in nature (φύσει), and again towards what they were creating in men, mixing and blending the image of man (τὸ ἀνδρείκελον) from customs and usages And they would wipe away portions, and paint them again, until they had rendered human ways as pleasing to the gods as possible And that would be the noblest painting.

(8) 7.523b: A remark about perceptions which “call the mind to reflection because the perception makes nothing clear,” draws the response, “It’s clear that you mean things seen from a distance, and shadow painting.”

(9) 7.529b: It is absurd to expect to find truth in diagrams drawn by a Daedalus or by some other painter.

(10) 9.583b: “The pleasure of things other than intelligence is not completely real or pure, but is a kind of shadow painting.”

(11) 9.586b: Such pleasures (those other than intelligence) are “phantoms of true pleasure and shadow paintings, their colors taking their tone (ἀποχραίνειν) from their placement beside each other so that each seems intense.”

(12) 10.596e–602d: The painter is a deliberate deceiver, a wizard (602d). He only imitates what the craftsmen create: the carpenter’s bed is a copy of the true bed, but the painter’s bed is a copy of a copy, an imitation of a phantasm, and thus three steps removed from reality. Unlike the painter of the *Ion*, *Gorgias*, and *Protagoras*, the painter of *Republic* 10 has no useful knowledge, but by his mimetic abilities he is able to deceive others into believing that he has. The painter’s work is described with a flourish which might have been borrowed from the hated sophist: “worthless, cohabiting with worthless things, producing worthless offspring (φαῦλη ἄρα φαῦλῳ συγγιγνομένη φαῦλα γεννᾷ, 603b).

Some of these passages contain clear and unambiguous references to skiagraphia or skiagraphic techniques: 1, 8, 10, 11, 12. Negative attitudes

toward painting are expressed in 1, 9, 10, 11, 12; in fact, 12 is perhaps Plato's strongest and most emotional attack on the painter. In contrast, in 4, 5, and 7 we find some of the most positive of Plato's references to the painter, for he is compared with the good legislator, while 3 speaks of painting as a craft which fosters goodness in men, and in 6 Socrates compares the fantastic creatures created by painters with his own use of imagery. One can hardly escape the conclusion that Plato's attitude toward painting in the *Republic* lacks consistency. Some passages condemn the painter while others exalt him; some display knowledge of *skiagraphia* while others seem devoid of such knowledge, resembling the pre-*Phaedo* dialogues which treated all painters, *skiagraphic* (Zeuxis) or conventional (Polygnotus), in the same terms and considered them all morally acceptable.

Two other points are worthy of mention. The first is the parallel between the poet/painter analogy in Book 2 and that in Book 10. Both of these passages deal with the censorship of the poets; both liken the poet to the painter. However, the passage in Book 2 is much more moderate than that in Book 10. In Book 2, only the harmful products of the poets are to be banned (stories which attribute undesirable actions to the gods), and the bad poet is likened to the bad (incompetent) painter, the painter who fails to attain the likeness at which he aims. Book 10, on the other hand, condemns the poet outright, and compares him to the painter *per se*, rather than to the bad or incompetent painter. In fact, in Book 10 it is the painter's very success in achieving his ends which condemns him: it is the *good* (capable) painter who is able to deceive. Although the treatment of the poet in Book 10 has been defended as a necessary supplement to that in Book 2, and one which was anticipated at the time when Book 2 was composed,³⁰ it is difficult not to see these two passages as earlier and later versions of the same material.³¹

³⁰Paul Friedlander, *Plato* (Princeton 1969) 3. 132-133; E. Havelock, *Preface to Plato* (New York 1967) 14-31.

³¹R. E. Nettleship, *Lectures on the Republic of Plato* (London 1901) 340-341; see also F. M. Cornford, *The Republic of Plato* (New York 1945) 321. Plato's purposes may have differed in Books 3 and 10 (for instance, in Book 3 he may be discussing primary education and in Book 10 higher education, as Havelock suggests ([above, note 30] 17 n. 29), or he may be operating on different "metaphysical levels," as Friedländer suggests ([above, note 30] 132-133). However, despite the fact that his primary interest in the analogies with painting is not painting itself, I believe that his actual handling of the topic shows a degree of interest which precludes the supposition that he reversed his judgment arbitrarily as the occasion required (painter as good and possessor of *techné*, to painter as vicious impostor). It seems preferable to assume that he was sincere, and that he was expressing his convictions as they were at the time of composition. That he did not carefully revise his work to eliminate what we consider to be inner contradictions is clear not only from his handling of painting, but also from his handling of poetry, where I am convinced that contradictions and signs of two versions exist, despite many well-intentioned scholarly efforts to explain them away.

The second point to be remarked is the distribution within the *Republic* of the skiagraphic and non-skiagraphic material. The former is confined to Books 7–10 and the early part of Book 2, while the latter is confined to Books 2.377e–6. Since the early part of Book 2 (354a–367e) is considered by some to be a later linking section between Book 1 and the rest of the dialogue,³² it is tempting to see these passages which demonstrate awareness of the dangers of skiagraphic painting as being later than the passages which do not demonstrate such awareness, especially when we compare them with the references to painting in the post-*Republic* dialogues, as we shall see below.³³ A major difficulty is, of course, the existence of a reference to skiagraphia in the *Phaedo*. If we postulate that a change in Plato's attitude and awareness occurred during the course of his writing of the *Republic*, we shall be forced to date the composition of the *Phaedo* to a point during the composition of the *Republic*. Interestingly enough, just such an hypothesis has been proposed, on entirely different grounds. In 1961, Alberto Díaz Tejera analysed the dialogues in accordance with the frequency of their use of terms which were components of an incipient *koine* (Ionic and Ionic-poetic),³⁴ basing his work on the assumption that Plato's vocabulary would reflect the changing linguistic climate in which he lived.³⁵ Díaz found that this indeed seemed to be the case. The dialogues fell into definite groups in accordance with their increasing use of such words. The chronological order of the dialogues which he derived from his evidence was basically the orthodox chronological order,³⁶ with an important exception being the *Republic*. Here he found a marked statistical difference between Books 2–6.502 and Books 6.505–10. The section 502–504, with its many cross references, he saw as an attempt to connect the two parts.

Between the two segments, Books 2–6 and 7–10, Díaz placed another

³²Nettleship (above, note 31) 47–66; Max Pohlenz, *Aus Platos Werdezeit* (Berlin 1913) 209; H. von Arnim, *Platos Jugenddialoge* (Leipzig 1914) 73 ff.

³³It has been suggested that the variety in attitude reflects the art scene current at the dramatic date of the dialogue, rather than the situation current at the time of composition (Webster, "Greek Theories of Art and Literature Down to 400 B.C.," *CQ* 33 [1939] 166). However, the dialogue with the earliest dramatic date (the *Parmenides*) clearly (and anachronistically) mentions skiagraphia, which seems to refute this suggestion.

³⁴Alberto Díaz Tejera, "Ensayo de un método lingüístico para la cronología de Platón," *Emerita* 29 (1961) 241–286; "Die Chronologie der Dialoge Platons," *Altertum* 11 (1965) 79–83.

³⁵The same method was used by U. Fleischer, *Untersuchungen zu den pseudo-hippokratischen Schriften* (Berlin 1939) and by R. Andrados Francisco, *Estudios sobre el léxico de las fábulas esópicas* (Salamanca 1948).

³⁶Díaz's ordering of the dialogues is as follows (each group is also arranged in chronological order): Group 1: *Meno*, *Protagoras*, *Gorgias*, *Republic* 1; Group 2: *Republic* 2–6, *Cratylus*, *Symposium*, *Phaedo*, *Republic* 7–10, *Phaedrus*, *Theaetetus*, *Parmenides*; Group 3: *Philebus*, *Sophist*, *Politicus*, *Timaeus*, *Critias*, *Laws*.

group of dialogues which was statistically intermediate. This group consists of the *Cratylus*, *Symposium*, and *Phaedo*, in that order. Díaz suggests that Plato began his work on the *Republic* with Books 2–6 (Book 1 being even earlier), after his return from Sicily in 388 B.C., interrupting his work to write the *Cratylus*, *Symposium*, and *Phaedo* around 384, and returning to complete the *Republic* before 367.³⁷ Such a sequence agrees with that derived from a consideration of the passages which deal with painting.

The results of other methods of stylistic analysis are also of interest on this point. Lutoslawski argues against a break in the *Republic*; he places the *Phaedo* next before the *Republic*, and his statistics mark it as earlier than Books 2–10.³⁸ Yet he also says that “there is ample reason to suppose that some work preparatory to the *Republic* had already been done at the time of writing the *Symposium*,” and he dates the *Symposium* before the *Phaedo*.³⁹ Similarly, von Arnim places the *Phaedo* next to, but before, *Republic* 2–10, finding that it has affinities with the earlier dialogues, but also many peculiarities which are first found in the *Republic*.⁴⁰ Finally, there is great similarity between Díaz’s suggestion and Pohlenz’s theory of two editions.⁴¹ However, Díaz rejects the early dating (before 388) for the earlier parts of the *Republic* which this theory involves, arguing that linguistic differences between *Republic* 2–6 and early dialogues such as the *Lysis* and the *Euthyphro* preclude placing them in the same time span. On the other hand, he argues that *Republic* 2–6 fits well into the period after the Sicilian trip, since the trip provides a break in time and experience which could help to account for the evident linguistic differences between it and earlier dialogues.

THE PAINTER AFTER THE *REPUBLIC*

Both the *Parmenides* and the *Theaetetus* contain a single reference to painting. However, as we have seen, these passages are very important for the information which they offer us about the nature of skiagraphia. In the *Theaetetus*, Socrates says:

³⁷It is interesting to note the often-suggested reference to the *Phaedo* at *Republic* 611b (ὁ ἀπρὶ λόγος which proves that the soul is immortal), which might lend a small amount of support to the suggestion that the *Phaedo* had been written shortly before this, in the interval between Books 2–6 and 7–10.

³⁸W. Lutoslawski, *Origin and Growth of Plato's Logic* (London 1905) 264, 323–325.

³⁹*Ibid.* 270.

⁴⁰Von Arnim, “Sprachliche Forschungen zur Chronologie der platonischen Dialoge,” *SBWien* 169 (1911) 232.

⁴¹Pohlenz (above, note 32) chapter 9; the theory was restated and defended more recently by L. A. Post, “An Attempt to Reconstruct the First Edition of Plato's *Republic*,” *CW* 21 (1927) 41–44, but it is not generally accepted; see Auguste Diès, *La République I–III* (Paris 1932) cxxiv ff.; Paul Shorey, *The Republic* (London 1930) 2. xvi, xxv; W. C. Greene, “The Paradoxes of the *Republic*,” *HSCP* 63 (1958) 199–216.

Now really, Theaetetus, when I am near the statement, just as when I am near a shadow painting, I can't understand it at all, although when I stood away from it at a distance, it seemed to make some sense to me. (*Tht.* 208e)

The passage in the *Parmenides* is similar:

It is just as in a shadow painting, in which the parts appear to be all one and the same and alike to someone standing far away, but, to someone approaching, these same parts appear to be many and varied, and, owing to the visual effects of contrasting colors, the colors appear changed and unlike themselves. (*Prm.* 165c-d)

Painting appears in the *Phaedrus* in the passage in which Plato denounces the written word, calling it an expedient (*φάρμακον*) not for memory but for reminder; a semblance (*δόξα*) of wisdom, not true wisdom; producing the conceit of wisdom (*δοξόσοφος*) rather than true wisdom (275a-b); creating only an image (*εἶδωλον*, 276a). He compares writing to painting in that both are mute (275d), and while he makes no specific reference to *skiagraphia*, the context is clearly the *skiagraphic* world of appearance and deception.

In the *Sophist*, Plato returns to the relation between the painter and the sophist; however, the difference between this treatment and the earlier treatment of the subject is striking. While in the *Protagoras* and *Gorgias* the painter stood in contrast to the sophist and was considered to be a person who possessed *techne*, he now serves as a representative of the impostor and stands with the sophist instead of in contrast to him:⁴²

Well, we know this about the man who claims to be able to create all things by a single *techne*, that by producing imitations (*μιμήματα*) and likenesses (*ὁμώνυμα*) of real things by the painter's art, and by showing them from a distance to unthinking children, he is able to persuade them that he is able to create anything he chooses. Mustn't we then expect that there will be another *techne*, involving words, by which a person would be able to bewitch the ears of the young, who are still far removed from the truth about things, displaying verbal phantoms (*εἰδωλα*) of real things, so that he seems to speak the truth and everything he says seems to be very wise? (*Sophist* 234b-c)

In the sequel to this passage, Plato uses painting in an analysis of *mimesis*. This is not his first analysis of this term, however: we find another analysis in *Republic* 10 which also makes use of the painter, and the two passages are interesting to compare. In the *Republic*, *mimesis* is divided into that which produces copies at two and that which produces copies at three removes from reality. Copies that are at two removes are the products of craftsmen such as the carpenter, while those that are at three removes are the works of the painter who copies the copies of the craftsmen. The former category has a higher status by reason of its

⁴²Webster sees a commendation of the painter in *Sophist* 234b where Plato says that imitation is the most skilled and pleasing of all forms of play (*Gnomon* 26 [1954] 449); however, when these words are taken in context, they are difficult to interpret as commendatory: such imitation deceives the innocent and cheats those who hear it.

closer relationship to reality. In the *Sophist*, *mimesis* is also divided into two parts: one part (*εἰκαστική*) creates a copy which conforms to the proportions of the original in all three dimensions and gives the proper color to each part; the other (*φανταστική*) puts into the images it makes, not the real proportions, but those proportions which will *appear* correct. This is the type of *mimesis* used by sculptors and painters who create works of colossal size:

For if they reproduced the true proportions of beautiful figures, you know that the upper parts would look smaller than they should, and the lower parts larger, because the one is seen from a distance and the other at close range. And so artists, abandoning the truth, incorporate into their works not the true proportions but those which appear beautiful. (*Sophist* 235e–236a)

The first type of *mimesis* is the art of creating likenesses (*εἰκόνες*), the second type can create only appearances (*φαντάσματα*).⁴³

Later in the *Sophist*, as the division is completed, the relationship between the analyses of the *Republic* and the *Sophist* is made clear. The *Sophist* makes a further division of the copies at three removes from reality—some of these are true copies (likenesses) while others are incorrect copies (appearances). The analysis in the *Sophist* is thus a further refinement upon the analysis of the *Republic*. The emphasis in the *Sophist* is on the right side of the division (appearances), and for the time being no real interest is taken in the possibilities latent on the left side, the category “likenesses.” Nevertheless, the way seems to be opened to a return of at least certain painters to favor, as a concept implicit in the *Cratylus* (true painting) begins to be developed.

The *Statesman* contains two references to painting. The first is an incidental analogy which nonetheless clearly expresses Plato’s opinion of painting. It is obvious that he does not subscribe to the saying that a picture is worth a thousand words:

Our definition is rudimentary, like an outline sketch of a figure, which is sufficient to be a likeness but has not yet received its full brilliance through the application of pigments and the blending together of colors (*τῇ συγκράσει τῶν χρωμάτων*). But a description of a figure in words and discussion is more suitable, for those able to follow it, than a completed painting—although for those unable to follow such discussions, a drawing will suffice. (*Statesman* 277c–d)

The second reference to painting in the *Statesman* occurs as part of a

⁴³Quintilian (*Inst.* 12.10.6) reports that Theon of Samos was noted for his depiction of imaginary scenes, known as *φαντασίαι*. Pollitt interprets *φαντασία* here as “a very lifelike appearance” ([above, note 13] 220 n. 2). Theon cannot be dated closely; Pollitt considers him early Hellenistic, and he is associated by Quintilian with Pamphilus, who may have influenced Plato as Steven suggests (above, note 3). Thus there is a possibility that Plato’s term *φανταστική* was borrowed from actual usage (as against G. Sörbom, *Mimesis and Art* [Stockholm 1966] 158–159).

complex, sevenfold classification of the arts. In this classification, the painter is seen as a producer of objects whose sole purpose is to give pleasure:

And then we would put in fifth place decoration and painting and whatever things are used by them, and imitations produced by music, things created only for our pleasure and rightly called by one name—playthings (*παίγνια*). This one name will suit them all, for nothing serious can be attributed to them, but everything they involve is done for the sake of play (*παιδιά*). (*Statesman* 288c-d)

In *Republic* 3 there is a similar classification of painting as one of the luxurious arts (those which go beyond the needs of mere survival); yet there Plato saw a useful purpose in painting: it imbues the soul with the grace and harmony necessary for a good disposition (400e-401a). In the *Statesman*, in contrast, painting is said to accomplish nothing useful. Oddly, the classification of painting put into the mouths of Plato's enemies, the materialists, at *Laws* 889d is almost the same as the classification of the *Statesman*:

And finally art, last born of these, mortal offspring of mortal parents, bears certain pastimes possessing little of truth, phantoms resembling the arts themselves, such as those which painting produces, and music and all the arts which are fellow-workers with these. Those of the arts which create something serious are those which join their power with that of nature, such as medicine, and farming, and gymnastic. (*Laws* 889d)

In the *Philebus* there is a return to the hint given in the *Sophist* that there may be a respectable form of painting. There is said to be a painter in the soul who paints true pictures of true opinions and false pictures of false opinions about pleasures and pains (39b-e). The powers of pleasure to deceive are explained through a continuation of the analogy with painting:

In the case of sight, looking at magnitudes from a distance or at very close range obscures the truth and falsifies their appearance; wouldn't, then, the same thing happen in the case of pains and pleasures? (*Phlb.* 41e-42a)

This recalls the earlier passages in the *Republic* in which Plato likened the pleasures of the senses to shadow paintings (*Resp.* 583b, 586b), but there is a difference between the two dialogues in this respect, for the *Philebus* calls some pictures in the soul true pictures, allowing for the possibility that some of the pictures painted by human painters might also be "true" pictures, while this possibility is not mentioned in the *Republic*.

The *Critias* contains an interesting reference to skiagraphia which suggests possible areas in which its use was especially marked:

We observe that in the case of earth, mountains, rivers, and woods, the whole sky and the bodies revolving in it, we would be pleased if anyone were able to copy them with some slight likeness; and, moreover, since we know nothing definite about such things, we neither question nor find fault with the painting, but accept a vague and deceptive shadow

painting (σκιαγραφία δὲ ἀσαφὲς καὶ ἀπατηλῶ χρώμεθα). But whenever someone attempts to make a copy of our bodies, we immediately perceive the things that are missing, because of constant observation and familiarity, and we are harsh critics of anyone who does not achieve a complete likeness. (*Critias* 107c–d)

This description calls to mind certain Roman wall paintings which combine realistically portrayed figures in the foreground with a vague, impressionistic background.⁴⁴ Considering this in conjunction with the story that Alcibiades commissioned the painter Agatharchus, the discoverer of skenographia, to paint his house (Plut. *Alc.* 16), suggests that such techniques may have been used in wall paintings in at least some of the more elaborate private homes in Athens, just as they were later used in wall paintings in Roman homes.⁴⁵

There are several references to painting in the *Laws*.⁴⁶ Some of these are introduced in order to clarify the work of the legislator. In one such passage, it is almost with embarrassment that the Athenian compares the legislator's unending work with the endless embellishments of the painter. It is only a chance reference, he apologizes, and Clinias's lack of familiarity with the methods of the painter is no cause for blame:

Athenian: You know that, for the painter, there seems to be no limit to the busy-work involved in each figure—he is always painting a stroke or shading it off (χρφαίνειν ἢ ἀποχρφαίνειν), or whatever the painters call such things, and he never seems to stop his embellishments, or to reach a point at which the painting no longer seems capable of becoming clearer or more beautiful.

Clinias: I've heard something or other about it, and I understand what you're saying, but I'm not really acquainted with the subject.

Athenian: You're just as well off! But still, we can use this chance reference to painting to clarify a point. Suppose that someone had the intention of painting the most beautiful picture possible, and, moreover, one that would never deteriorate but would maintain its excellence for all time. Do you think that his work would endure for long if he failed to leave behind him some successor to restore his work when it suffered from the effects of time—and a successor who was able to correct his own shortcomings in the work as well? (*Laws* 769a–d)

In another passage, the painter, rather than being compared with the

⁴⁴See note 17 above.

⁴⁵A. M. G. Little, *Roman Perspective Painting and the Ancient Stage* (Kennebunk, Maine 1971) 1–2. Steven also suggests that a connection may exist between the use of the term σκιαγραφία in *Republic* 356c and wall paintings, resting his conjecture upon the words πρόθυρα καὶ σχῆμα which he thinks suggest illusionistic architecture (above, note 3) 150. See also note 17 above.

⁴⁶I have not discussed the color theory of the *Timaeus* (67c–68d), because its links are with earlier color theories, going back to Empedocles, rather than with the actual activities of painters, as Plato makes clear when he warns that anyone who tries to test his statements by putting them into practice is forgetting the difference between human and divine nature: God alone has the power to combine different things into one. On color theory, see Walter Kranz, "Die ältesten Farbenlehren der Griechen," *Hermes* 47 (1912) 126–140.

legislator, even in details, provides an analogy to the wrong opinions which the legislator must correct:

For most of us, distant prospects confuse our vision and make us dizzy. So it will be if the legislator fails to establish an opinion opposite to this one [the opinion which holds that pleasure and justice are unrelated], and take away the darkness, and persuade us somehow, by institutions and addresses and conversations, that justice and injustice are like shadow paintings: to the unjust man, the unjust appears to be pleasant because of his own injustice and iniquity, while the just appears to be unpleasant, while, for the just man, because of his own justice, the opposite is true—the just appears pleasant and the unjust unpleasant. (*Laws* 663b-c).

Both of these passages display an awareness of skiagraphia and its techniques which is absent from the passages embodying the analogy between painter and legislator in Books 5 and 6 of the *Republic*. The painter of the *Republic* who sought to copy an ideal reality was the ally of the legislator, while the shadow painter in the *Laws* provides at best an uneasy analogy, at worst, an enemy who exploits men's weaknesses to deceive them.

One reference to painting remains in the *Laws* (668b-669c). As one of Plato's last statements upon the subject, it is appropriate that this passage seems to offer a set of criteria which makes explicit what Plato has hinted at a number of times in the later dialogues: that there is a sort of painting which is morally acceptable, and which stands in opposition to the techniques of the shadow painter. These criteria apply to all types of *mimesis*, but they are defined in terms of painting. They cover only the first step in judgment, the stage in which the correctness of the representation is to be evaluated. (This stage is to be followed by a purely aesthetic judgment, but Plato does not go on to offer criteria for this later judgment.) The criteria of correctness require that "all the members of the body in their true and natural numbers and real situations" be represented, "so disposed relatively to one another as to reproduce the natural grouping." The same accuracy in representation must be maintained in portraying color and shape. All confusion is to be avoided (*Laws* 668d-e). These criteria are framed in terms of Plato's rejection of skiagraphia. When we look back, we see that they were implicit in previous allusions to good or true pictures: the *εἰκὼν* of the *Sophist* is a copy which conforms to the proportions of the original in all three dimensions and gives the proper color to each part; the true painting in the soul in the *Philebus* gives a correct representation of pleasure and pain, as opposed to a distorted and deceptive picture.

CONCLUSIONS

Plato's references to painting do seem to fall into distinct groups, with a major split between the pre-skiagraphic and the skiagraphic passages,

as Schweitzer suggests. The former belong to an early period in which Plato looked upon the painter, regardless of his choice of technique, as a respectable member of the community and as a craftsman possessing *techne* (*Ion*, *Gorgias*, *Cratylus*, *Republic* 2-6). The latter, skiagraphic, passages reflect both a time of awakening to the methods and dangers of illusionistic painting, expressed in strongly emotional attacks upon the painter (*Phaedo*, *Republic* 7-10, *Theaetetus*, *Parmenides*, *Phaedrus*), and a period in which this negative attitude towards the illusionist painter persists, but in which it is tempered by the development of the notion of true painting which was latent in the *Cratylus* (*Philebus*, *Sophist*, *Laws*). However, if one recognizes a definite point of change from pre-skiagraphic to skiagraphic references, and from a positive to a negative attitude, it seems that one is led to the postulation of a temporal split in the *Republic*. Despite the strong feelings against such a position which undoubtedly exist, this does not seem to me to be a wholly unacceptable consequence: no one would maintain that the *Republic* was composed in a timeless instant, and it seems reasonable to assume that during the course of time which the composition of a work of such length would require, Plato may have had experiences which affected him strongly and which were reflected in his work. It also seems plausible that he might have paused in his composition of the longer work to write other, shorter pieces.

Can anything be determined about the identity of any external influence which may have brought about the change in Plato's awareness and attitude? In other words, can one choose among the theories of Schuhl, Steven, and Schweitzer in this regard? In considering this question, two aspects of Plato's treatment of painting should be distinguished: the negative aspect (the attack on illusionism) and the positive aspect (Plato's allusions to good painting). In regard to the former, it seems likely that this attack was triggered by some external factor. If this is not the case, how are we to explain the fact that Plato, who had formerly co-existed peacefully with the illusionists, suddenly turned upon them with such vehemence? The sort of influence for which we should probably look would be some great leap forward in illusionistic technique, or some new voice raised in opposition to the illusionists or in support of non-illusionistic painting, a voice which might have opened Plato's eyes to the dangerous nature of skiagraphia. Schuhl, Schweitzer, and Steven all offer candidates: Schweitzer postulates a great leap forward as a result of the introduction of Sicyonian perspective techniques in Athens, while Steven suggests that the Sicyonians appeared as exponents of non-illusionistic painting and as potential allies of Plato's own views, and Schuhl offers us the archaizing painters for this same role.

As far as Schuhl's thesis is concerned, even apart from the question of the actual existence of such a school, the suggestion seems weak for the

simple reason that Plato himself does not seem to have been an archaizer. He did look with favor on the *stability* of Egyptian art, as he saw it, but the art for which he hoped to attain a similar stability in Greece was not the art of the Greek past (or of the Egyptian past or present), but a new art of his own definition (similarly, he did not want to consecrate the poetry of the archaic age—Homer and Hesiod). He admired the Egyptian laws which enabled the rulers to maintain the canons of art unchanged over millennia, rather than the content or technique of Egyptian art itself. And *Laws* 656d–657b certainly does not suggest that he was in any way aware that Egyptian painting had changed so as to require deliberate efforts at archaizing.

This leaves us with the diametrically opposed views of Steven and Schweitzer, and the choice is reduced to the question of the real nature of the Sicyonian school. Were the Sicyonians a school of perspective painters, as Schweitzer maintains, deducing this from the mathematical orientation of the school as reported by Pliny, or were they a school of anti-illusionists who stressed line drawing, as Steven suggests, basing his conclusion on the Sicyonians' reported stress on drawing in Pliny's account? I suggest that the answer to this question does lie in Pliny, but not in the direction in which Steven and Schweitzer look. Since the content of Pliny's account cannot determine the question directly, we should look to Pliny's source in his accounts of the Sicyonian school. This source has been identified by Sellars, in his commentary on Pliny's chapters on the history of art, as Xenocrates, a painter of the Sicyonian school and himself a partisan of the skiagraphic style.⁴⁷ Xenocrates framed the criteria for artistic achievement in terms of the values espoused by the skiagraphic painters, and it was he who was responsible for the fact that the school of critics which valued pre-Apollodorean, non-skiagraphic, painting (and this includes Plato) is practically unrepresented in Pliny. Stories told about individual Sicyonian painters confirm their interest in the problems of light and shadow: Apelles used a thin black glaze carefully calculated to modulate the effects of colors, especially when the picture was viewed at a distance (Pliny, *HN* 35.97), and Pausias introduced other skiagraphic innovations, such as portraying distinctions between light and shade by variations in black rather than by the use of white for highlights (Pliny, *HN* 35.127). From all this, it seems most probable that the Sicyonians were not simply perspective painters, but that they utilized the full range of illusionistic techniques. If, then, we are to look to them as providing the impetus for Plato's attacks upon illusionism, as Schweitzer does, it must be because they introduced a

⁴⁷In K. Jex-Blake and E. Sellars, *The Elder Pliny's Chapters on the History of Art* (London 1896) xxxi–xxxv, and commentary on 35.67.

new and extreme form of illusionism into the Athenian scene, and not simply because they stressed the use of perspective.

What, then, of Plato's positive ideas on painting? Can we attribute these too to some influence from the contemporary art scene? This seems less likely. Plato's positive views do not really alter throughout the dialogues, at least from the *Cratylus* on, although the thread is very nearly submerged by his traumatic response to illusionism in mid-career. In essence, what Plato demanded of art was a "true" copy. This demand was a philosophical, or, to be more precise, an epistemological, demand, and not an aesthetic one (he says as much in *Laws* 669a–b). And just because the demand which he made upon painting was primarily epistemological rather than aesthetic or painterly, it seems unlikely that it reflected the ideas or practices of any particular school of painting, or that any existent school had Plato's unqualified approval.

In summary, I believe that Plato's positive views on painting were determined primarily by his own epistemological and metaphysical position, rather than by current artistic tendencies. However, his negative response, his attack on illusionism, does seem to owe something to external influence, and this influence very likely had something to do with the illusionist extremes of the Sicyonians. Either Plato himself "saw the light" when confronted with the works of this school, or some Athenian critic, with his own polemic against the school, awakened Plato to the dangers of "modern" art and even provided some of the material for the Platonic polemic against the illusionists.⁴⁸

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⁴⁸I should like to express my appreciation to Philip Ambrose, Jean Davison, Robin Schlunk, and George Bryan for helpful comments and suggestions on an earlier version of this paper.