From: Damien Freeman and Derek Matravers, eds. *Figuring Out Figurative Art,* Durham: Acumen, 2014

Thinking outside the frame: Plato, Quinn, and Artaud on representation and thought

M. M. McCabe

Ged Quinn, *The Fall*, 2006, oil on linen, 183 x 250 cm

The first visual impact of Ged Quinn's *The Fall* is of a gentle bucolic dilapidation. A ruined temple stands to the left in front of a bright landscape, feathery weeds growing out of its crevices. In the distance the sea shines with white light, mountains vaguely outlined on the right. The foreground is framed by a row of broken pillars and vegetation, and the upper middle of the painting is marked by a darker cloud drifting across the sky.

Within this apparently romantic framing, however, the central subject jars, both in its formal arrangement and in its figures. Emerging from the temple's ruined wall is a tattered shack, whose structural scaffolding shows through to what seems to be an abandoned artist's studio, drawings scattered and discarded. And in the midst of the dark cloud a grimacing figure, winged and burning, plunges towards the earth.

The effect of the whole is a grotesque rejection of sentiment. Even without knowing that the frame is a direct copy of Claude Lorrain's *Landscape with Abraham Expelling Hagar and Ishmael*,[1] the viewer is shocked by the sheer inconcinnity of the central action. But the shock has consequences for how we think about the painting, consequences which expand when we know more about its content and its context. As a result, I shall suggest, this is a thoroughly intellectual work, engaging in interesting ways with all sorts of other works and genres. But the price of that seems to be a thinness in its aesthetic content; and that, I shall suggest, is betrayed by its connections elsewhere.

In what follows, I shall offer some thoughts about the complex composition of the painting, in comparison with the challenges that Plato lays down when he is thinking about art and representation. For Plato's various critiques of art and its representational quality seem to be in tension with his own artistic practices. I make no apologies for returning to Plato in this context, both because he offers an interesting parallel to Quinn's intellectualism, and because he affords a developed account of how art may be representational, and of its consequent limitations and its provocation. His challenge to aesthetic representations has long been a thorn in the side of the history of aesthetics as well as a direct challenge to his own artistic practice. How he meets that challenge in his own work, I shall suggest, may help us here; and it shows, in the end, what the price of intellectualism may be.

Knowledge: the inside and the outside of a work of art

Should we be able to appreciate or understand art just by contemplating the work itself? Should our mind be a *tabula rasa* when we first encounter an aesthetic object? Of course in general terms this is impossible (we need to know that this is a ruin, or a

cloud, or a tattered hut); but how much extraneous and particular information do we need?

Begin with the title, *The Fall*. The subject seems to be the fall of Icarus; and the idealised dilapidation of the frame might suggest an old-fashioned mythological *topos*, to moralise about the limitations of humanity.[2] Icarus made the mistake of thinking he could emulate the gods and fly with waxen wings to the sky; human builders make the mistake of thinking that they can build something that will last forever; human artists are always deceived of the hope that they can construct what Thucydides called a ‘possession for ever’.[3] The brazen monument is bound to fall in the end, the book to be burned and the library demolished. All the paraphernalia of mythology remind us of human limitation, and warn us against emulating the gods.

This work, however, is not *The Fall of Icarus* (or even—a point to which I shall return—*The Fall of Artaud*), but just *The Fall*. The Icarus story might bring out a different point, about human ability, not human fragility. For Icarus was the beneficiary of the masterly skill of his father, Daedalus, who could build statues that could run away, or labyrinths to hide a Minotaur.[4] Icarus flew too high because his father had the skill to enable him to fly at all. Equally, in The Fall (*simpliciter*) of Adam and Eve, they are thrown out of Eden because they eat the fruit of knowledge and lose their previous innocence. Like Icarus, they too come to grief because of knowledge, not ignorance; the story of The Fall is a story not only about failure but also about knowledge or even genius. What does that have to do with Quinn’s work? More generally, what kind of difference to our view of an artwork does it make to know its title: how far is that, apparently extrinsic, feature of the art itself (as a naïve account might have it; there is nothing wrong with naiveté, of course) also a part of

the work? This painting may ask such questions with some vigour, if knowledge is thematic of a Fall.

It may turn, I shall suggest, on three different questions. The first is about what visual representations have to do with knowledge: what does a painting such as this tell us, what do we learn from it? What does it represent to us? The second is a converse question: in order to understand a painting like this, how do we see it? What do we bring to it? How much do we need to know of the external context of the painting, of how it is framed in its extrinsic connections, to represent it to ourselves?[5] Both these questions, I shall suggest, may turn on what is going on in representation: is what happens in figurative art that some state of affairs (real or fictional) is represented directly to the viewer (just as, we might think, some phenomenal appearance, or even some descriptive item such as a sentence, represents some part of the world before us)? Or is seeing art a matter of what we see in it, how we represent what we see to ourselves? We might think about this in terms of action and passion: do we suffer art? Or do we act upon it to make it so? Or both? Or are such questions just misplaced? The third question is about those questions themselves: are they in the wrong register? Is it helpful to talk about artistic seeing in terms of knowledge? Or does an intellectualist approach damage our understanding of what it is to see art? I shall return to my third question towards the end.

Frames and framing

Where does a work of art begin and end? What are its edges? A traditional view of a painting hanging in a gallery might be that the artwork is what is inside the frame, and the frame merely its container. This is most obviously a feature of flat art; but sculpture, for example, might be equally framed either by what it stands on, or by the

context in which it is placed. The frame (one might think) is external to the 'art'; often the frame is derived, not so much from the content of the painting, but from extraneous pressures—a cultural pressure towards simple or baroque framing, for example—the frame is what the 'art' is *in*, not a part of the art itself.

On the other hand, there are some cases where the formal frame becomes part of the painting itself; or even where the artwork appears to be the frame alone.[6] Further, there are cases where the frame in fact occurs within what at first sight seems to be the piece as a whole. This happens across all sorts of artistic genres. Compare, for example, any play-within-a-play (*The Taming of the Shrew*, for example, or the play-within-a-play in *Hamlet* which precipitates the action), where we see not only the inner play, but in the outer the characters as spectators. In all such cases, that an artwork is *in* something does not disqualify *what it is in* from being a work of art too. The notion of the frame, that is to say, is a shifting one, dependent on a great deal else about the work and always relative to what is framed (even where that is nothing at all).

The framing structure of *The Fall*, I suggest, brings out this relativity. For the outer part of the painting, the idealized setting of the central action, ostentatiously encloses the centre in a frame radically different in style and tone. Notice, for example, the jarring effect of the intrusion of the strange hut into the very structure of the ruined temple. At first it seems merely to lean against the ruin; then to extend into it; and then somehow to be a part of it, as though the ruin is itself made of scaffolding and canvas. This has a provocative effect: the frame distances the viewer from what is framed, but still—because the frame is also notably part of the work—demands some kind of resolution of the relation between frame and framed. The sheer inconsistency

of tone and style between one and the other asks the viewer to consider how far what is depicted—in either—are mere simulacra, images superimposed or left as background; or whether what we have here is some kind of odd puzzle. Once the framing picture is seen to frame, it adds to the enigmatic construction of the piece and its images.

This leaves the viewer alienated both from the central scene and from the frame. That alienation is provoked by a bad fit between the one and the other, an inconsistency that demands rational solution. We see the fall *as a* representation, both in tension with its frame and formalised by it. But in seeing it thus, we become aware of the lacuna between the representation and what it might be a representation of; there are (we might think) no inconsistencies out here in the world.[7] That there is representation *of something* here is immediately puzzling.

Furthermore, the frame of *The Fall*, in enclosing the drama of the painting, dissociates itself from it. Then, in framing, it takes up a point of view outside the dismal hut or the grimaces of the falling figure. When we then see frame and framed, we become aware, not only of the representation, but also of the subject to whom it is represented. This provides, thus, the conscious distance to allow the viewer to see herself as the viewer; and even, in thinking about the frame, to think about how we think about representations at all.

At the same time, the intrusion of the hut into the ruin in *The Fall* subverts the easy assumption that the frame is itself detached from the action, since it seems, nonetheless, infected by the grimness of the central scene. The delicate pastoral imagery is turned into something formalized, something that may *merely* frame, instead of filling our eyes with meaning. The unstable relation, that is to say, between

the inner scene of the painting and the outer, generates a sequence of reflective moves in the viewer, rendering the painting as a whole an intellectual provocation, an encouragement to think.[8] If we recall Quinn's title, and its invitation to think about the connections between knowledge and failure, we may hardly be surprised.

Plato's challenge

Plato was worried about art. He was worried about how pictures represent what they depict, and that in so doing they would deceive the observer into thinking that what is depicted is in fact the real thing: all the more so when pictures persuade us to believe them just because they are beautiful.[9] So his worry is in particular about imitation: about how some depicted figure might stand between us and reality, and prevent us from ever seeing the truth.[10]

This might of course be a pragmatic problem—we might be fooled into thinking we have, for example, something for dinner, when this is merely a *Still Life with Dead Duck*. Or it might be an intellectual problem: that we might think that something really is what it is not (for this is not a dead duck at all, but only a picture of one). So not only does a representation appear to tell us an untruth; we are trapped by it, since as we look, we are deceived.

Suppose we seek to understand ourselves and our world, but all we see are our images and reflections (in a mirror, shadows cast on a wall). Can we ever penetrate beyond the appearance to get at the reality? Not—or so Plato seems to have said—through representations alone. Pictures, from the intellectual point of view, are worse than useless. We might think about it like this: as a matter of fact, pictures are representations of something else (however we might account for that—whether what they are of is an idea in the mind of the artist, or some state of affairs out there in the

world). But when they present themselves to us, they do so without reference to the idea or the state of affairs they are about; instead, they just present *themselves.* So a photograph just is the flat described shapes therein. We only think of it as a photograph *of* something because we have all sorts of other information (we know, for example, what a photograph is; we are given it as a picture of Auntie Maisie; we recognize the inimitable nose of our second cousin twice removed). But without that sort of context, we can do nothing with the photograph, or with any other representation, but take it at face value.

This is Plato's image of the prisoners in the Cave in *Republic* book 7. Socrates imagines that we are like people who have been tied in an underground cave all our lives, facing a wall. Behind these prisoners there is a fire, in front of which some people walk to and fro carrying all sorts of plastic images and statues (animals, furniture, three-dimensional copies of the ordinary objects of the phenomenal world). On the wall of the cave in front of the prisoners are cast both the shadows of these plastic copies and the shadows of the prisoners themselves. Because the prisoners are tied motionless facing forwards, their view is restricted to and exhausted by the representations before them (the shadows on the wall of the cave). Their lifelong imprisonment precludes their having any of the contextual information that would allow them to see the shadows as shadows *of something else.* The shadows they see cast on the wall before them exhaust their reality.[11]

As such, and without a frame to put them in context, representations obscure reality, rather than informing us about it. They point us away from what is real and self-standing, towards something which is derivative, in ways from which we shall never

be able to escape.[12] Representational art, on this account, both hides and supplants reality in ways the viewer will never be able to understand.

The Cave offers an even more paradoxical situation. When the prisoner faces the wall, and sees the shadows cast before him, he takes himself to be a part of what is represented to him—he has, Socrates insists, seen 'nothing of himself or the other prisoners' but his shadow on the wall.[13] In terms of how the representation works, this implies that the viewer (of the shadows in the cave; of the representations) never sees himself *as the viewer*—never takes a stance on what he sees from the outside. He has, that is to say, not only no sense of what he sees as a representation of something else but also he has no sense of himself as having a view of it, no sense that this representation is being presented *to him*. In the story of the Cave, all experience is somehow flattened into the image before one; and the complexities of the view from here or there are rendered invisible. This—on Plato's view—is what goes wrong when imitations constitute our world.

Platonic writing

Even although Plato was worried about art and about imitation, however, he was also a consummate artist himself. Without any apparent scruple about the dangers of imitation, he represents the characters of his written dialogues in conversation with each other, fully described and articulate, presented to us through the medium of his literary art.[14] Commentators have long struggled to reconcile Plato's practice with his theory; and long worried about whether the literary aspects of his work are merely gratuitous or exploitative—ways to gratify his readers and to inveigle them into philosophy, but lacking philosophy's direct appeal to rationality. The style of the dialogues betrays reason—so it is argued—by standing between the reader and the

hard philosophical truths which the dialogues advocate. Once in, the reader can never escape—as in Quine's fable, the assumptions are already made, and can never be scrutinized from outside. Moreover, the dialogue itself—on such an account — provides us with no view *that* we are outside, no direct engagement with the reader's perspective beyond following the words on the page and imagining what is depicted therein. The reader would thus be merely the passive recipient of what the dialogues actually say, engaged only in envisaging the scenes described.

The defence that is sometimes offered is the deplorable antiquarian riposte—that Plato was after all writing two and a half millennia ago, and surely cannot be expected to get things right, or consistent. But this seems to me to miss the point very badly; and I hope that the example of Quinn's painting may help us to see why. Conversely, I think that both Plato's self-defence, and his worry about imitation and representation and perspective, has a counterpart in the Quinn painting.

In the Platonic dialogues, there seem to be offered first-order discussions between various interlocutors (usually Socrates and some unfortunate friend, doomed to find himself reduced to incoherence) which are sometimes effective, sometimes not, and often irritatingly incomplete or obscure.[15] One might think that often the first-order arguments that are offered—the overt 'theme' of the discussion—are poor copies of what we might expect philosophical discussion to be like (some, for example, find the figure of Socrates intolerably smug, or the interlocutors shockingly inept). Further, one might think that the conversations in which those arguments are embedded are there to further the deception—they are part of making us believe in stories of philosophical heroes and martyrs, and thence of swallowing the arguments they offer with a less than critical approach. The arguments, that is, are framed in the dialogue

form; and it seems—especially to the eye of the philosopher who thinks of philosophy as first-order argument—that somehow these frames are either extraneous or positively duplicitous. The framing effect in these contexts—so critics suppose—is *not* a central part of the work itself.[16]

In fact, however, this supposition is a mistake. On the contrary, I claim, the framing feature of the Platonic dialogues is central to their philosophical content.[17] For it is in these passages that the characters—and thereafter, and by various devices, the reader too—are brought to reflect on the arguments that are being offered. That reflective stance is essential to thinking about philosophical questions. They are, that is to say, not only particular (What is virtue? What is knowledge?) but generic (What is it to follow an argument, or to be persuaded by one? What counts as an explanation? On what are the conditions for argument—consistency, for example—based?). For the generic questions, the terms of engagement for the particular questions are brought into reflective scrutiny.[18] But notice how this reflective stance comes about: it takes the arguments (the first-order arguments) as its object, and considers them as such. In so doing, reflection acknowledges its own relation to and distance from the arguments, and exploits its detachment as part of the frame in which the arguments appear. So, we might think, these frame devices both recognize their objects (the framed arguments) and recognize their own role as reflective frames. This second-order stance is an essential part of the structure of these dialogues; and it is central to the dialogues' philosophical content.

This in turn affects how we might think of the dialogues as 'representations'. The formal structuring of the dialogues allows us to see the direct conversational argument as the content of the reflective frame. So the first-order arguments are seen there *as*

represented, considered *as uttered* and endorsed or rejected. If the arguments are represented, they are seen *as representations*. Equally, the distancing effect of the dialogue's frame is iterative; often we see the framing discussion itself framed in a further outer frame; and within these baroque structures we see ourselves, the readers, framing the dialogue itself from without.[19] But this complex arrangement means that the dialogues are never simply offered to the reader as if they were records of what happened one day when Socrates was on his way to court, or languishing in prison.[20] They are never direct representations, imitations of the sort Plato finds so objectionable. Instead they are complex reflective compositions, where representations are seen to be representations, and envisaged as such. As a consequence, the dialogues do not fall to Plato's own objections, since they are not standing between the reader and reality, but implicating the reader in reflection on the tripartite relation between what is represented, what it represents and how the representation is seen.[21]

Quinn and Artaud

The framing effect of *The Fall*, and the sharp contrast between the central scene and the depicted frame, starts to set up the kind of reflective relations that Plato's dialogues invite. For the tension in the structure of the painting is directly provocative: it makes the viewer stand back, rethink, and attempt to resolve the incoherence. As I view the painting, I struggle with what this can be a representation of, and in thus trying to see *through* the painting, I realize how I am seeing it *from here*.

But once the viewer comes thus into view, two questions impose themselves. First, how does what I know about this subject matter explain what it represents? And what is it, second, that I bring to seeing the painting that informs my view from here?

These two questions are associated with something rather more banal: what are the 'rules' for looking at figurative painting? How much do I need to know in advance? How far is what I see there determined by minute particularities of culture and knowledge, which are inaccessible to others elsewhere, at other times? My reading of the painting so far merely considers its surface appearance, arguing that its structural complexity gives it reflective content. However, there are three pieces of information that may change and enrich how we come to think about it. The first is the source of the framing picture: Claude's *Landscape with Abraham expelling Hagar and Ishmael*; the second is the identification of the falling man as Antonin Artaud, whose theatre of cruelty is symbolised, perhaps by the grimace on the face of the falling man; the third is the original of the hut in the foreground, apparently Thomas Edison's studio, the 'Black Maria'.[22]

Begin with the highly specific references to Artaud and Edison. They are not given in the painting itself. How far does it matter that we know they are depicted here? I have suggested that the structure of the painting is designed to challenge the easy assumption that pictures merely represent; instead it makes the viewer think explicitly about *how* they represent, so that the content of the thought includes the condition that it is a representation, and that we see it as such. As a consequence, the picture does not seek to stand in front of reality, but rather to engage with what it is to represent it. In this spirit, the two icons to whom reference is made—Artaud, the actor and advocate of the theatre of cruelty, portrayed in his anguished fall, and Edison, the

pioneer of the dream factory in collapse—represent representation. They may indeed do so without the distance of the framing features. But here, they are seen as such; and that knowledge dismantles the illusion that they create and undoes the deception.

But it is a stark irruption of these images into the pastoral scene of the frame. The harsh juxtapositions, the anguish on Artaud's face, the collapse of the hut, and the pictures strewn on the ground serve to enhance the cognitive dissonance of the piece; and in doing so they promote what Artaud himself recommends. For, Artaud argues, culture obscures reality, and it is the task of art to shatter cultural representation and to reach the reality behind it.

> The contemporary theater is decadent because it has lost the feeling on the one hand for seriousness and on the other for laughter; because it has broken away from gravity, from effects that are immediate and painful—in a word, from Danger. Because it has lost a sense of real humor, a sense of laughter's power of physical and anarchic dissociation. Because it has broken away from the spirit of profound anarchy which is at the root of all poetry… The best way, it seems to me, to realize this idea of danger on the stage is by the objective unforeseen, the unforeseen not in situations but in things, the abrupt, untimely transition from an intellectual image to a true image; for example, a man who is blaspheming sees suddenly and realistically materialized before him the image of his blasphemy (always on condition, I would add, that such an image is not entirely gratuitous but engenders in its turn other images in the same spiritual vein, etc.). [23]

Plato might be to some degree in agreement. The cave exhausts the world of the prisoners; they are trapped in its images, with neither any sense of their relations to

their originals, nor any sense of their own detached stance from what they see. For Plato, somehow the world we inhabit—whether by virtue of its intrinsically derivative nature, or by virtue of the manipulations of politicians, or by virtue of our inability to locate ourselves within it—just fails to provide us with a direct view of reality. To reach that, our chains must be shattered, our eyes blinded, and our perspective completely changed.[24] We need to shift both what we see and how we see it; only then will we be able to understand the way things are.

But Plato notices—as Artaud does—the trap. For, in escaping the world of the shadows, either we rely on the shadows to help us (but the shadows are entirely limited to their own domain); or we somehow already have access to the other world (which begs the question); or our escape must be forced upon us somehow. In the *Republic*, Plato is evasive in his response to this problem. Artaud's response is cruelty—the violence of iconoclasm, of harsh juxtaposition, of imagistic dissonance. The shock of the cruel forces us away from the images of culture to the reality behind. So too, I think, Quinn: the incongruence of the collected images, the grim nature of the central construction set against the romance of the frame, is designed to force an active and thoughtful role on us, the viewers, and to resist the passivity of merely looking at art.

Shock, cruelty, and paradox

But Artaud (knowingly shocking) says: "The library at Alexandria can be burned down".[25] For him, and perhaps for Quinn too, their role is just to shock rather than to engage in discussion: the viewer is left alone to process the cruelty and to take what she can from it. Plato, by contrast, saw the dangers of the written word; but he devised less chaotic ways to avoid them, and still to render engagement with writing a

way to think actively. For he supposes that thinking is discursive; and that active engagement is participation in discursive, collaborative thought. Like Artaud, he exploits the idea of shock, in exploiting paradox. Unlike Artaud, he supposes that what follows the shock can be a genuine philosophical collaboration.

In the *Phaedrus,* for example, Plato describes (represents) an odd meeting between Socrates and Phaedrus, who have a long discussion of philosophy and rhetoric. Late in the discussion, Socrates tells the tale of the Egyptian Theuth, who invents writing, and goes excitedly to his king Thamus to report his discovery, his charm for memory. Thamus is damning:

> You have found no panacea for memory, but for forgetting. You provide the belief in wisdom for your pupils, not its truth, for becoming conversant with many things without teaching, they will seem to be knowledgeable about much, while they are for the most part ignorant and hard to be with, having become apparent-wise instead of wise.[26]

Within the context of the dialogue—where Socrates and Phaedrus are having an amiable discussion—Thamus's remarks are provocative but not otherwise very puzzling (indeed, we might find them plausible in some contexts and to some degree). But the context itself is highly self-conscious; as we read, we recognize that these words are in fact said in writing: how far do they apply to themselves? The paradox that ensues is a part of the Platonic armoury to force his readers into active reflection on the nature of discursive thought, the nature of reality and the value of anything. For paradox—like the ostentatious shock of the frame—forces our attention to particular topics and ideas, and in the best cases provokes an ordered, argued resolution.[27] Plato's way of getting us to think through the medium of writing has some of the

violent effect that Artaud advocates (paradox and puzzles are uncomfortable); but its outcome is directly and carefully ordered, structuring the responsive thought into a reflective view of knowledge, truth, and value.[28] Plato's purpose, after all, is to write philosophy.

Intellect and emotion

The Fall may, then, be cruel in Artaud's sense; and perhaps this is why Artaud himself is the figure who falls, failing to know his limitations, perhaps (as Icarus), or knowing far too much (as Adam). But the violation works because these figures are set against the bucolic background of Claude's original. As a result, the cruelty provokes an intellectual response, rather than allowing us to understand it with any depth of emotion. Does a painting like this, thoroughly intellectualized as it may be, have aesthetic value beyond its intellectual appeal? Perhaps there is no such thing; or perhaps the very emotional austerity of Quinn's painting shows that there is.

Artaud makes expansive claims for how anarchic poetry will expose its true tragedy, or its true comedy. His thought appears to be that we would understand, through and through, the human condition by seeing the violence of these images, experiencing the intellectual cruelty of the shattering words.[29] (Plato's response would be a different one: that we harness our wayward emotions by training and education, of which poetry of the right kind may be an element.)[30] This, it seems to me, is thoroughly questionable as an account of paintings like *The Fall*. The risk in the intellectualist approach is that the images are reduced to mere cyphers in a puzzling structure; they tell us nothing of joy or pain, and nothing of beauty or ugliness, because they are divorced from their human content.

Compare and contrast the rather different violence of Claude's painting. Against the looming background of ruins and mountains, we see the small figures, the patriarchal Abraham expelling Hagar and her son Ishmael. The portrait of Hagar's distress and that of her child is set against the hugeness of natural and manmade objects; and that in turn serves to emphasise the affective features of the human scene within. It is one of the tragedies of the human condition to be thus insignificant and tiny in the natural world; and to be insignificant and tiny against the background of our own creations, even when they are crumbling to dust. It is still about the tension between the human content and the grand scale: but here it is about pain and grief and loss, Hagar's downcast look, the isolation of Ishmael. Auden has it right:

> About suffering they were never wrong,
>
> The old Masters: how well they understood
>
> Its human position: how it takes place
>
> While someone else is eating or opening a window or just walking dully along...[31]

Abraham's absolute rejection of the woman and (his own) child does not merely affect us intellectually. Instead, we feel pity, indignation, fear: and the moral emotions that are provoked are not—as both Plato in the *Republic* and Artaud seem to think—somehow subordinate to reason, but instead integral to it. Claude's painting makes us understand the human condition with full emotional engagement; and that, in itself, matters. So the structure of Claude's painting, by contrast with the careful framing of Quinn's, does not provoke, or directly encourage higher-order reflection. Instead, it provokes first-order deep thought and feeling about the particular exigencies and tragedies that are central to what it is to be human. This kind of understanding is, I

think, rejected by Quinn's view; just because that relies on something intellectually far more complex, but emotionally etiolated. The danger here is to think—as Plato invited us to wonder—that the intellect is apart from the emotions and superior to them; and that we can understand our world—whether through art or otherwise—by letting emotion—and its appeal to aesthetic value—pass us by. This may give us cruelty; but it will not give us pity and fear, and will leave the human condition untouched.

---

[1] Claude Lorrain, *Landscape with Abraham Expelling Hagar and Ishmael*, c.1665-68, oil on canvas. Collection Alte Pinakothek, Munich; a drawing (in which the subject is reversed) is held in the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge.

[2] Compare [Pieter Brueghel]'s *Fall of Icarus* (Koninklijke Musea voor Schone Kunsten van België), apparently a copy of a Brueghel original. One of the most ancient versions of the story can be found in Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 8.183-259: here the moralizing comes from Daedalus, who urges his foolish son to 'take the middle way'.

[3] Thucydides, *Histories* 1.22.

[4] Plato, *Meno* 97d, *Euthyphro* 11b, makes much of the contrast between Daedalus' skill and the waywardness of his creations. For a good translation of all the dialogues see *Plato: Complete works*, eds. J.M. Cooper and D.S. Hutchinson (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1997); the page and section references are standard across editions and translations.

[5] The language of representation, both in discussions of perception and of aesthetic representation, tends to shift between these two versions of representation: on the one hand, how an image represents what it is of; and on the other how we, in seeing an image, represent to ourselves what we see there. In what follows I shall argue that this contrast—between the representation's object and the subject to whom it appears—is exploited in the Platonic account, and possibly also in Quinn and Artaud.

[6] Compare the complex framings in Magritte—for example, *The human condition* (National Gallery of Art, Washington DC).

[7] Some might disagree, of course; I leave this worrying issue on one side here; but compare Priest, G., *Beyond the limits of thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995) with Sainsbury, R. M., *Paradoxes* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

[8] There is a complex question here about where seeing ends and thought begins. Briefly, I take it that in cases such as this (and perhaps in all cases), there is no first-impression brute 'seeing' of the painting, which is then overlain by a whole series of more or less metaphorical 'seeings', infused with more and more judgmental content. Instead, I think that all of these seeings and seeings-as, both at first and later on, are cognitively complex; none of them is brute.

[9] *Republic* 598-602 seems to complain that images seen in a mirror or represented by a painter fail to show themselves *as representations*. The same thought is central to the image of the Cave at 514-518. The point about persuasion is central to Socrates's complaints about rhetoric in the *Gorgias*.

[10] He is not, in quite the same way, worried about the sort of representation that is given in language, although, as I shall suggest, he finds some aspect of language pretty tricky as well. On this see Harte, V., "Language in the Cave" in D. Scott (ed), *Maieusis* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), pp. 195-215.

[11] For Plato's celebrated image of the Cave, see *Republic* 515-8. There are as many interpretations of this image as there are interpreters; here I offer some aspects of my own.

[12] Recall Quine's thought-experiment to establish the indeterminacy of translation in Chapter 2 of *Word and Object* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1960).

[13] *Republic* 515a. I argue for the significance of this point in "From the cradle to the cave" in McCabe, M. M., *Platonic Conversations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

[14] There is comic genius (the opening of the *Charmides*, the last pages of the *Symposium*) and tragic genius (the end of the *Phaedo*, the last pages of the *Symposium*, in which there is a debate about the coincidence of tragic and comic expertise); and yet there is an attack on comedy at *Philebus* 48-50 and on tragedy e.g. at *Republic* 380.

[15] Think for example, of Socrates's arguments against Thrasymachus in *Republic* 1; or the much-maligned affinity argument at *Phaedo* 78b ff.; or the notorious Third Man arguments of *Parmenides* 132-3.

[16] An obvious example would be the elaborate settings of some dialogues, e.g. *Symposium* or *Parmenides*. Even these, I argue elsewhere, have a philosophical contribution to make ("Unity in the *Parmenides:* the unity of the *Parmenides*", in my *Philosophical Conversations*).

[17] McCabe, M. M., *Plato and his predecessors: the dramatization of reason* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

[18] Notice the way in which the frame dialogue interrupts e.g. at *Euthydemus* 290e, to comment on what has been going on in the framed discussion.

[19] The elaborate frame of the *Parmenides* is strikingly dropped by the end.

[20] They are not, as Lindsay Judson notably said once in oral discussion, Hansard reports of Socrates's day-to-day exchanges. On the contrary, the dialogues are philosophical fiction.

[21] To repeat: I take the seeing here to be richly informed, not brute.

[22] The second and third pieces of information are given in the Saatchi Gallery artistic biography of Quinn; so indirectly by the painter himself: <http://www.saatchigallery.com/artists/ged_quinn.htm>. Retrieved 31 January, 2014.

[23] Artaud, A., *The Theatre and its Double*, transl. M. C. Richards (New York: Grove Press, 1958), ch. 2. Notice throughout this passage its realism, deliberate or otherwise: 'it realizes'; 'a sense of real humour'; 'a true image'; 'realistically materialised'.

[24] *Republic* 515c-d.

[25] *op. cit.*, p. 10.

[26] *Phaedrus* 275a, my translation. On the intricacies of this passage, see notably Ferrari, G. R. F., *Listening to the Cicadas,* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), or—for a more extreme take—Derrida, J., "La pharmacie de Platon" in *La Dissémination* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil 1972) pp. 77-214

[27] See McCabe, *Platonic Conversations*, ch. 1.

[28] Compare, for example, the thoroughgoing puzzles generated by the impasses at the end of the so-called 'Socratic' dialogues (a good and complex example is the *Protagoras*); or the more elaborate impasses to be found in the 'critical' dialogues, such as *Theaetetus* or *Parmenides.* If this is right, then we should avoid the easy assumption that Plato was just a dogmatic idealist.

[29] Artaud, *The Theatre and its Double,* ch 7.

[30] See, for example, *Republic* 389e.

[31] Auden, W. H., 'Musée des Beaux Arts', in his *Collected Poems* (London: Faber and Faber, 1976), p..179 . William Carlos Williams makes much the same point in 'Landscape with the fall of Icarus', in his *Pictures from Brueghel and other poems* (New York: New Directions Books, 1962), p.4.