

[Review of *Art and Society*, by Catherine Rau. *The Philosophical Review* 61, No. 2 Apr. 1952]

ART AND SOCIETY. A Reinterpretation of Plato. By CATHERINE RAU. New York, Richard R. Smith, 1951. Pp. 88. \$2.50.

The chief aim of this small but interesting treatise on Plato's theory of art is to defend him from the charge of committing the "moralistic fallacy" in aesthetics. To do this the author not only examines Plato's words, but tries to understand them in the light of the new developments in art that Plato had in mind; and further by an independent aesthetic experience she finds the Platonic position to be commendable in general, if not in every particular.

The description of the art which Plato opposed is enough but barely enough to serve the author's purpose. References to other studies are given, and with these the reader must be satisfied. Her support of the Platonic position by independent aesthetic experience will seem particularly good to one who, like the reviewer, finds himself in substantial agreement. For example: squalid slums and hideous factories depress one's personality; harmonious and noble sights pass through the soul as health-giving breezes; art always influences our emotions; aesthetic experiences affect our morals and our morals affect our taste; the moral effects of art do not end with childhood; and, further, the moral personality of the artist is one of the determinants of the total aesthetic quality of a work of art.

There seems to be a slight though recurrent flaw in the book, all the more regrettable because so unnecessary. The author, in criticizing Plato's interpreters, seems to exaggerate and strain in order to produce a greater contrast with her own view.

True, Walter Pater was mistaken in making Plato anticipate the modern theory of art for art's sake; but, when Pater says that art has no purpose but its own perfection, he might just possibly mean that the ideal city is a work of art, of discipline, and harmony, and that this art has no further purpose (*Laws*, 817 b). Also, the views of Tolstoi seem somewhat closer to Platonism than the author thinks. Nor does it seem accurate to give the impression that virtually all the critics understand Plato to have wished to suppress all art or even all drama; indeed, Santayana (*Reason in Art*, p. 176) says almost precisely what the author (p. 32) says he failed to observe.

And again, Carritt may be right or wrong in his own theory of art, but is it an "error" to take "Plato to hold that art has no value in its own right; that it is merely pleasant in a sensual way" (p. 25)? Mrs. Rau is entirely correct in pointing out that Plato was sensitive to all art; and no doubt aesthetic quality can in modern axiology be called a value; but it is also possible that Plato may have regarded aesthetic quality or artistic perfection as of no value in its own right, but only as it tended to produce moral character. The ambiguity lies in the word *value*, and I fear that in these pages (23-28) the author

leans over backward in her defense of Plato. Nor can I accept literally (pp. i8, 39) the proposition that Plato, even in the *Republic*, is discussing education and propaganda and not art. He is discussing both. And perhaps the main question is not whether Plato had a moralistic theory of art, but whether a moralistic theory of art is a fallacy.

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