

1. What does Nehemas mean by saying, “for Plato representation is transparent”?

— p 248 ‘It is precisely because the difference between imitations and their objects is ontological, a difference that cannot be perceived, that our reactions to both, which are based on our perception, are so similar. Plato’s view is that the pleasure we feel at the representation of an expression of sorrow in poetry is pleasure at that expression itself, and for that reason likely to dispose us to enjoy such behavior in life. He does not consider the possibility that the pleasure may be directed not at the expression of sorrow but at its representation, and that this representation is an independent object, having features in its own right and subject to specific principles that determine its quality’

— p. 288 ‘Realistic art is, just in the sense in which Plato thought of imitation, transparent. This transparency, I believe, is not real. It is only the result of our often not being aware of the mediated and conventional nature of the representations to which we are most commonly exposed.’

2. How does this idea of transparency figure in Nehemas’s interpretation of Plato’s attitude towards poetry?

— It explains why Plato holds that our reactions to poetry are transferred directly to, and in fact often determine, our reactions to life, poetry is likely to make us behave in ways of which we should be, and often are, ashamed. Poetry “introduces a bad government in the soul of each individual citizen” (605b7-8).

3. How is the idea of transparency supposed to support Nehemas’s comparison of Plato’s attitude towards poetry with some contemporary attitudes towards television? Does it?

— ‘In Mander’s words, people were believing that an image of nature was equal . . . to the experience of nature . . . that images of historical events or news events were equal to the events . . . the confusion of . . . information with a wider, direct mode of experience was advancing rapidly.’

— ‘it is of the essence of popular entertainment that these hints are not, while the entertainment still remains popular, consciously perceived. Popular entertainment, in theory and practice, is generally taken to be inherently realistic.’ [cartoons!]

— ‘we are still agreed with him that representation is transparent—at least in the case of those media that, like television, have not yet acquired the status of art and whose own nature, as opposed to what they depict, has not yet become in serious terms a subject in its own right.’

4. Does Nehemas’s comparison of Athenian poetry and television support, or undermine, Plato’s attitude towards poetry?

— ‘The common view that television is aesthetically worthless seems to me profoundly flawed. This is . . . because . . . Television is a vast medium that

includes a great variety of genres, some of which have no connection of any kind with the arts.'

— 'Television brings it, as it were, home to us. It imposes a routine on its viewers, it portrays routine for them, and it suggests that their own life mirrors what it portrays. Television will be resisted as long as routine remains, in the absence of criticism and interpretation, its most salient feature.'

— concluding lines tv is routine: 'nothing, in principle, deprives the depiction of routine of aesthetic value just as nothing, in principle, prevents the depiction of foolishness, cruelty, murder, incest, ignorance, arrogance, suicide, and self-mutilation from constituting, as it has on at least one occasion, an unparalleled work of art.'