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The Russian Artist in Plato's Republic

In Book 10 of the *Republic*, Plato launches an extensive critique of art, claiming that it can have no legitimate role within the well-ordered state. While his reasons are multifaceted, Plato's primary objection to art rests on its status as a mere shadow of a shadow. Such shadows inevitably lead the human mind away from the Good, rather than toward it. However, after voicing his many objections, Plato concedes that if art "has any arguments to show it should have a place in a well-governed city, [he] would gladly welcome it back."²⁴ Over two millennia later, the nineteenth-century Russian philosopher Vladimir Solov'ev implicitly responded to this challenge in his *Lectures on Godmanhood* (1881).²⁵ Solov'ev cited the phenomenon of art as additional proof in favor of his model of the metaphysical foundations of reality. According to Solov'ev, art is not three steps removed from ultimate reality; rather, an artist creates true art only when he has experienced a vision of the universal and substantial ideas that stand over and above particular things, and then conveys them to the viewer directly, via the artistic medium. Hence, the artist is able to sidestep the intermediate shadow and produce something that is more than a shadow—a clear reflection of that higher reality.

If Solov'ev is correct, the artist should enjoy the elevated status of sage, perhaps even philosopher-king, rather than face exile from Plato's republic, because the artist both knows the Good and guides the less enlightened toward it. After a brief sketch of the metaphysical grounds for Plato's critique of art, I provide an analysis of Solov'ev's ontology, as represented in his *Lectures on Godmanhood*. Next, I describe Solov'ev's concept of the three-fold mission of art and its relationship to human nature, drawing both from the *Lectures* and from *The Universal Meaning of Art* (1890).²⁶ Finally, in the last section, I demonstrate how the aforementioned account comprises Solov'ev's robust and successful response to Plato's challenge, from within a platonic framework.

I. The Artist's Exile

In order to understand Plato's wholesale rejection of art, we must begin with a basic understanding of his ontology.²⁷ Within the *Republic*, Plato uses two primary rhetorical devices to explain the true nature of reality and the human being's relationship to it: the divided line analogy and the allegory of the cave.

²⁴ Plato, *Republic*. trans. C. D. C. Reeves (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 2004), 607c.

²⁵ *Чтения о Богочеловечестве*, first published Moscow: Universitetskaia tipografiia, 1881. For an overview of Solov'ev's life and works, see Judith Kornblatt, "Vladimir Sergeevich Solov'ev" in *Dictionary of Literary Biography Volume 295: Russian Writers of the Silver Age, 1890-1925*, ed. Judith E. Kalb and J. Alexander Ogden (Detroit: Gale, 2004), 377-386.

²⁶ "Общий смысл искусства" first published in *Вопросы философии и психологии* (1890): 84-102.

²⁷ For a more in-depth overview of Plato's ontology and epistemology see Allan Silverman, "Plato's Middle Period Metaphysics and Epistemology" in *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 2003, accessed December 22, 2012 <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/plato-metaphysics/>.

According to Plato, there exist two levels, or layers, of reality, one of which has a more robust existence than the other, and which serves as its foundation. In order to illustrate the relationship between these two spheres, Plato's character, Socrates, requests that his audience imagine a line divided into two unequal sections. Each of these two sections is then further divided into two unequal parts according to the same proportion as the original division. The result is a line divided into four sections. The first is the largest, then two sections of equal size, and finally the smallest portion. Each section of the line represents a level of reality: the first two within the visible realm, and the second two in the intelligible sphere. The first and largest portion represents 'images' within the visible world such as reflections and pictures. Though not themselves real, these reflections are a less substantial representation of existing objects. The second section comprises the originals reflected by the images from the first section: vegetative life, the animal kingdom, artifacts, and the like. It includes everything that fills our visible world and what humans usually take as "reality." The first section of the line representing the intelligible realm comprises the sphere of abstract concepts. We form these ideas by observing objects in the visible world. Finally, the highest and smallest section on the line represents the realm of forms, which are the true originals of our concepts. This is reality at its fullest, though most people live their entire lives oblivious to its existence.²⁸

As Socrates himself interprets it to his audience, this analogy represents the varying degrees of certainty one can experience in epistemic endeavors: imagination, belief, thought, and understanding.²⁹ However, while Socrates' analogy primarily makes an epistemic point, he also states that the level of clarity that ideas experience in each portion of the line corresponds to the degree of truth or reality in which that sphere partakes. This makes it clear that a deeper ontological significance grounds its epistemic import.³⁰ It becomes even more apparent that Plato is making both an epistemic and an ontological point when one considers the allegory of the cave, with which Socrates further illustrates his claims.

Socrates again asks his listeners to paint a picture in their minds. In this picture, they must imagine people chained from birth in the recess of a dark cave, forced to gaze at the stone wall. Behind them, higher up in the cave, a fire burns. Various objects are carried between the fire and the backs of the poor prisoners, casting shadows on the cave wall in front of them. Socrates suggests that such prisoners, who only ever see shadows dancing on the wall before them, are likely to think of those shadows as reality. However, if one of the prisoners could somehow broke free from his fetters, he would turn and see that the dark forms on the wall are mere shadows of shapes passing before the fire. If he then ascended to the mouth of the cave and peered out, he would realize that the shapes in front of the fire are not even themselves real, but mere copies of real things that exist outside

²⁸ Plato, 509 d.

²⁹ Ibid., 511 d-e.

³⁰ For more on the connections between these two aspects of the text see Silverman.

of the cave.³¹ The prisoners in the cave represent the human condition. Most individuals spend their entire life thinking that objects in the visible world are the proper objects of affection, when they are only shadows. Humans only achieve true happiness when they lay aside their preoccupation with the physical world and, through a contemplative life, rise to the realm of forms.

According to this system, represented both here and elsewhere in Plato's writings,³² forms are ontologically primary. Individual objects in the physical world derive their identity from participation in, or bearing a resemblance to, them. According to this model, a squirrel is a squirrel because it resembles the true form of "squirrel-ness." Human beings come to recognize the reality of the forms by seeing the resemblance that members of a single kind in the visible world have to one another. When we see several squirrels, we recognize that they are similar—members of a single kind—and form an abstract concept of a perfect squirrel. This concept lacks all of the peculiarities of the individual squirrels, but contains the essence of an ideal squirrel. We then recognize that there must be something real, rather than merely conceptual, that all of these particular squirrels resemble. That is the form. It is the truest and most real level of existence. The mind of every person strives to rise to this realm and contemplate the beauty that dwells there.

It should not be difficult to deduce why art garners so little respect within this view of reality. If we recall the divided line, we will remember that pictures and reflections represent the lowest level where they cannot even be the proper objects of beliefs. In the allegory of the cave, they are conspicuously absent. A painting or a poem dedicated to a beautiful woman would be tantamount to drawing a picture of one of the shadows cast onto the wall of the cave by a cardboard cutout of a woman passing before the fire. This picture would be so far from capturing the essence of a real woman that one might wonder if it could communicate anything true, or even hinting at the truth, about femininity. It would be a mere shadow of a shadow—three steps removed from reality.

Indeed, in the last book of the *Republic*, Plato makes clear the absurdity of thinking that art can represent anything helpful. Earlier in the dialogue, Socrates has argued that they must ban poetry from the ideal city because the sorts of story that the poets tell are likely to produce bad citizens. In book 10, Plato revisits this decision and concludes that, in addition to the reasons cited above, he has been just in rejecting art because art is by its very nature imitative.³³

To demonstrate the truth of this claim and to illuminate why imitative things are necessarily deficient, Socrates asks his interlocutor, Glaucon, how it is that craftsmen make the objects of their trade. They conclude that carpenters make couches by entertaining the form of a couch in their mind. Socrates then points out that there is a universal craftsman who can quite easily, with almost no effort at all, produce all of the objects that other craftsmen spend years learning to create.

³¹ Ibid., 514.

³² The two other works in which Plato's theory of the forms is most explicitly discussed are *Phaedo* and *Parmenides*.

³³ Ibid., 595a.

Glaucon initially expresses incredulity at this idea. When Socrates reveals that the universal craftsman he is thinking of produces all of these objects merely by holding up a mirror and showing the reflections, Glaucon responds by insisting that such a craftsman has not produced things “as they really are.”³⁴ Socrates agrees. To elaborate further, Socrates points out that there are three kinds of couch. First, there is the very nature of a couch. A god must create this nature. Then there is the physical couch that the carpenter makes, and finally the one that the painter represents. When the carpenter builds the couch, he holds the concept of an ideal couch in his mind and strives to make the individual couch as much like the ideal as possible. He desires to represent the truth about “couch-hood.” In contrast, Socrates argues that the painter does not aim at capturing as much of the truth about the essence of a couch at all. In fact, the painter only strives to make his picture appear as the couch appears to his eyes, from one perspective, which is an illusion with regard to the nature of a couch. Thus, “it [is] an imitation of an illusion” and “is surely far removed from the truth.”³⁵ If the highest good of the human being is to arrive at truth by contemplating the realm of the forms, observing or listening to art can only draw the mind of the audience further away from its true end. Therefore, Socrates concludes that imitative art “is an inferior thing that consorts with an other inferior thing to produce inferior offspring.”³⁶

This is especially true of imitative poetry, which aims primarily at arousing the passions and entertaining the audience with things that they should despise rather than from which they should draw pleasure. Yet, even when considering this worst of all artistic forms, Socrates concedes that he is open to hearing a counter argument in its defense, if it is possible to give one. From the context, it appears that Plato does not think anyone can provide such a response. This is the presupposition that Solov’ev’s *Lectures on Godmanhood* calls into question.

II. The Artist’s Role

The Russian philosopher Vladimir Solov’ev stands out within the Christian neoplatonic tradition for his rejection of Plato’s position on the status of art. When reading St. Augustine, for example, one cannot help but hear the voice of Plato echoing through Augustine’s own invectives against tragedy and the theater.³⁷ Because Solov’ev’s metaphysical system bears a striking resemblance to the platonic tradition, specifically as embodied in the works of Plotinus, his rejection of Plato’s position on art serves as a corrective from within the general framework, rather than an objection from without.³⁸ Therefore, I begin this section with a summary of Solov’ev’s ontology

³⁴ Ibid., 597e.

³⁵ Ibid., 598b.

³⁶ Ibid., 603b.

³⁷ Augustine, *Confessions* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), Book III.

³⁸ Throughout this section, I point to similarities between Solov’ev’s philosophy and that of Plato and Plotinus. While the influence of both of these thinkers is unmistakable, they were by no means the only, or even the primary, influences on Solov’ev. Tracking the influence of one philosopher on another is notoriously difficult. Solov’ev was strikingly well read; therefore, while he refers to Plato directly in the *Lectures*, it appears that his Platonism came to him not only through Plato’s own writings, but also through Plato’s interpreters such as Plotinus, Augustine,

as represented in his *Lectures*. This will provide the basis for understanding how the artist works in Solov'ev's system. It will also demonstrate the connection between Solov'ev's thought and the platonic tradition. I will then present Solov'ev's argument that art serves as an auxiliary proof for the accuracy of his ontological conclusions. I end by turning to *The Universal Meaning of Art* to discover the significance of beauty and the mission of art within this frame.

A. Solov'ev's Ontology

In his fourth *Lecture*, Solov'ev argues that natural phenomena—what we call the external material world—are “only an appearance, and not reality.”³⁹ We experience the external world through our five senses. What we call light, for example, is not something outside of us; rather, it is the name we give to the way some outside object acts upon our senses. If one took away the perceiving subject, only a certain movement of photons would be left. This bears no resemblance to what we call light. In this claim, Solov'ev implicitly points to the common distinction between primary and secondary qualities. Primary qualities exist within objects themselves. The extension and position of an object in no way depend on the presence of a sensitive subject for their existence; therefore, they are considered primary. Secondary qualities such as color, taste, and texture, on the other hand, do not primarily describe the external object, but the way that the primary qualities of the object affect the observer's senses. Thus, Solov'ev says that when we think of our perceptions as themselves representing external reality, we are subject to an illusion. However, it is an illusion with an external cause. We can deduce the existence of an external cause from the lack of control we experience over our sense perceptions. When our eyes are open and functioning properly, we cannot help but see light. The external cause is not identical to our perceptions, but it is their foundation. Furthermore, the multiplicity and multi-faceted nature of material phenomena suggest that whatever underlies the material world must, in some relevant sense, consist in a multiplicity of substances that can interact with one another.⁴⁰ From this conclusion, Solov'ev goes on to deduce three essential characteristics of fundamental reality.

First, in order to serve as the basis for reality, the elemental substances or “causes” must be eternal, unchangeable, indivisible, and indestructible—that is, they must be atoms. Here Solov'ev fails to provide a reason for the ‘logical deduction’ of this characteristic. Nonetheless, he is careful to point out that he does not mean ‘atom’ in the same sense as the materialists, who claim that matter, of which the atom is the most funda-

Nicholas of Cusa, Pseudo-Dionysius and German idealists such as Schelling. For the purposes of this paper, however, I will focus more narrowly on the connection between Solov'ev and Platonism, as represented by Plato and Plotinus, in order specifically to understand how Solov'ev's claims should be seen as a response to Plato

³⁹ Vladimir Solov'ev, *Чтения о Богочеловечестве*, in *Собрание Сочинений* (CC) v. 3 (Brussels: 1966), 49. Translation mine.

⁴⁰ The term multiplicity may easily mislead us, since there is also a relevant sense in which fundamental reality is a unity. However, since I will discuss this below, and since Solov'ev himself introduces the idea of multiplicity in lecture four, but only explains the aspect of unity in lecture five, I think it legitimate to use the term in this way.

mental unit, is the only substance that exists.⁴¹ If atoms were material, they could not be fundamental, because material things are only expressions of secondary qualities. Perhaps this qualification provides a hint of the philosopher's reasoning. If the fundamental principles of reality could change, be divided or destroyed, this change would need the same sort of explanation that material phenomena demand. Thus, what was purported as fundamental could not provide a basis at all. Second, considering these substances as the *cause* of sense perception suggests something impenetrable that can act and be acted upon. Solov'ev follows Leibniz in calling these active forces monads.⁴² Finally, each substance must consist of unique content; otherwise, primary substances would all be identical, and there would be no reason for one to strive toward another. Furthermore, the highest and truest level of reality cannot be more impoverished or contain less content than the illusory reality we experience. For this reason Solov'ev claims that "it is necessary to propose that everything that is found in the last (that is visibly, or illusory, reality) coincides with something in the true, or authentic reality. In other words—that all being of this natural world has its own idea or its own true, authentic substance."⁴³ This claim may bring to mind Plato's theory of the forms as authentic existence. While the other two aspects of fundamental reality—its status as atom and monad—play important roles within Solov'ev's system, the philosopher's theories of beauty and art rest on the divine source as idea.

B. *The Artist's Vision*

In the fifth *Lecture on Godmanhood*, Solov'ev takes up the problem of the One and the Many—a quandary that dates back to pre-Socratic thinkers such as Heraclitus and Parmenides.⁴⁴ On the one hand, "we must admit the multiplicity of fundamental substances and think of the unconditioned all as their sum total."⁴⁵ Without this multiplicity, action and interaction are not conceivable. Therefore, one could not understand the phenomenal world as the result the interactions of some fundamental substances. Additionally, Solov'ev says that God would have to be pure potentiality if he had never actualized as independent essences the ideas that are only potential in the 'all-unity.'⁴⁶ In that case, God would be pure nothingness.⁴⁷ On the other hand, if we admit an unconditioned plurality, in which each fundamental substance is an unconditionally inde-

⁴¹ Solov'ev may have the Epicureans (who believed that material atoms were the only things that exist) in mind, since he has just given as historical sketch of different understandings of the 'all-unity' in lecture 3. However, he may also be referring to the logical positivists of his own day, whom he attempts to refute in the first two lectures.

⁴² G. W. Leibniz, *G.W. Leibniz's Monadology: an edition for students*, ed. Nicholas Rescher (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh 1991).

⁴³ Solov'ev, *Чтения о Богочеловечестве*, CC, v. 3, 55-56.

⁴⁴ For a fuller discussion of the 'all-unity' and "all-one" in Solov'ev's thought, and its foundation in medieval and ancient thought, see Teresa Obolevitch, "All-Unity According to V. Soloviev and S. Frank. A Comparative Analysis," in *Forum Philosophicum: International Journal for Philosophy* 15, no. 2, (2010): 413-425.

⁴⁵ Solov'ev, *Чтения о Богочеловечестве*, CC, v. 3, 60.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*. See, Obolevitch, 415.

⁴⁷ Interestingly, despite his inference that God's being 'nothing' would be a negative result, Obolevitch (414) points out that Solov'ev later rejects this perspective and begins to refer to the 'all-unity' (God) as 'nothing.'

pendent and self-contained entity, “having everything of itself,” then those substances would be “deprived...of all internally necessary connection amongst themselves.”⁴⁸ The result is the same as in the first case. Interaction would be impossible, and the phenomenal world could not exist. Solov’ev concludes that if “the admission of unconditioned unity and the admission of unconditioned plurality of substances identically lead to contradictory results...then, clearly, the truth lies in...allowing *relative* unity and *relative* plurality.”⁴⁹ Still, we might fairly ask, how is it possible for the divine source simultaneously to be one and many? To what does this suggestion even amount? It is one thing to claim that logic demands a conclusion; it is quite another to provide an explanation of how the proposed conclusion might work.

Solov’ev answers, first, by pointing to the common phenomenon of complex organisms. Every organism is an aggregate of complex and multifaceted parts. It is the cooperation and interaction of those parts for a common end that makes it an organism as opposed to a mere heap of matter. “In this way, a plurality of substances is not a plurality of unconditionally separate singularities, but only a plurality of elements of an organic system, occasioned by the substantial unity of their universal source.”⁵⁰ While this account places Solov’ev’s claim within a familiar context, he must go a step further to ensure that the unity described is not merely an external or apparent unity that arises out of a purely mechanical, external interaction of parts in which “each is in itself and outside of others.”⁵¹

Because substances are ideas, they have the level of universality that abstract concepts contain in the realm of thought. But, as atoms, they contain the specificity of content found in unique particulars. When a rational being sees multiple entities that instantiate a single kind, he forms an abstract concept of the kind instantiating. In doing so, he rejects, or leaves out, all of the peculiarities of each individual he observes. As a result, the concept embraces a greater number of entities, while communicating less content. Solov’ev uses the example of the concept *person*. This abstract notion embraces a much larger number of entities than the concept *monk*. Yet, *monk* expresses all of the qualities contained in the term *person* and more. It has more content than *person* does. Thus, in the realm of thought, as one ascends to more and more general concepts, embracing more and more of reality, one loses the richness of content contained in the more specific concepts. Not so for Solov’ev’s ideal substances. “The relation of scope to content is necessarily direct. That is, the wider the scope of an idea, the richer it is in content.”⁵²

In making sense of this claim, it may be helpful to recall Plotinus’s theory of emanation. According to Plotinus, everything that exists is the emanation of the One. While remaining a perfect, unchanging unity, the One overflows because of its fullness. This overflow is the Intellectual Principle which, by its very nature, loves, strives for, and contemplates the One. What it sees in its vision of the One are the forms or ideas. These ideas are instantiated in the material world through

⁴⁸ Solov’ev, *Чтения о Богочеловечестве*, СС, v. 3, 61.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 62.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid., 63.

the World Soul that emanates from the Intellectual Principle. Within this system, each posterior level of emanation is contained potentially in its prior. Thus, everything the Soul communicates to the world of sense is found in a fuller and richer way, already potentially in the One.⁵³

Solov'ev appears to envision a similar system in which each more general level of idea embraces all of the content of the ideas below it. Each idea is unique and individual, but is simultaneously an integral aspect of the more abstract idea that embraces it. They are simultaneously one and many, united yet separate. These ideal substances inform and order the matter of the phenomenal world through the mediation of Divine Sophia. V. V. Bichkov explains the role of Sophia at this stage of Solov'ev's philosophy as that which "realizes the ideas contained in *Logos*" in creation.⁵⁴ Here the connection to Plotinus' thought is palpable. The divine source, or 'all-one' (corresponding to Plotinus' One), is expressed as plurality in *Logos*, or 'all-unity' (Plotinus' Intellectual Principle), which is then embodied in matter through the soul of the world—Sophia (World Soul).⁵⁵ However, Sophia's activity in the world is neither immediate nor complete. The physical world is undergoing a slow process of evolution in which Sophia is progressively bringing great and greater order within matter.⁵⁶ As the process continues, the material world becomes a clearer and truer embodiment of the ideas within the *Logos* that flows from the divine source.⁵⁷

Thus far, Solov'ev takes himself to be following the strict dictates of logic, moving from our experience of material reality to the necessary conditions for that experience in a Kantian-style deduction. However, just in case some remain unconvinced, he provides an auxiliary proof for the ontological structure described above: the phenomenon of successful art. According to Solov'ev, good art would not be possible if his 'ideas' did not simultaneously express both the universality and the specificity of content he has just described. If his ontology is a necessary condition for art, and his audience agrees that good art is possible, then by *modus ponens*, his ontology is correct. But why think that art is not possible apart from his ideal framework?

The philosopher argues that forms the artist represents are not simply copies of particular objects observed in experience. Neither are they general ideas abstracted from experience. Both observation and abstraction are necessary for the

⁵³ For further discussion of this issue see Dominic J. O'Meara, "The Hierarchical Ordering of Reality in Plotinus," in *Cambridge Companion to Plotinus*, ed. Lloyd P. Gerson (United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 1996) 72.

⁵⁴ V. V. Bichkov, "Эстетика Владимира Соловьева как актуальная парадигма," *История философия* (1999): 18.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Because it is not central to my arguments here, I have limited my treatment of the role of Sophia within Solov'ev's philosophy. One should note, though, that the Divine Sophia played a central role in both Solov'ev's personal life and his philosophical works, even appearing to him in visions at different times in his life. His devotion to her also had a profound impact on the Russian Symbolists of Russia's Silver Age. See further Samuel Cioran, *Vladimir Solov'ev and the Knighthood of the Divine Sophia* (Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1977), and Judith Kornblatt, *Divine Sophia: The Wisdom Writings of Vladimir Solovyov* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2009).

development of an artistic idea, but not for its creation. If observation and abstraction were at the heart of artistic representation, then any sufficiently intelligent person could become an artist. But we know that this is not the case. The artist who merely copies an object or represents things in general never creates good art. The best art always takes the form of the “union of perfect individuality with perfect... universality.”⁵⁸ Moreover, such a union is the symptom of rational reflection on the “ideas.” Thus, we have reason to think great artistic geniuses encounter the divine source. We have evidence that they gained a vision of the ideal world and represented that beauty to us within the material world. If this is correct, then Solov’ev’s artist does not create an illusion of an illusion, but a reflection of the truth, which is closer to reality than the other things we see in the physical world. Furthermore, the mind of the viewer is not drawn away from truth as Plato suggests. Rather, the artistic form draws the mind of the viewer upward toward the reality that it reflects. Solov’ev describes a process of artistic creation that provides the first reason to question Plato’s conclusions about art. In the next section, we turn to the proper mission of art for a second reason.

C. *Human Nature, Beauty and Art*

Art occupies a central position within Solov’ev’s understanding of the role of humanity in the world. In order to see why, we must briefly consider the human constitution. In *The Philosophical Basis of Integral Knowledge* (1877), Solov’ev claims that human beings experience the ideal world, which they come to know by reflection, on three different levels. These levels correspond to the three primary aspects of human nature. As the object of reason and thinking, humans experience the ideal world as Truth; as the object of will, they desire it as the Good; and as the object of feeling, they behold it as Beauty.⁵⁹ We saw above that ideas inform matter through the mediation of Sophia. This means that there is a degree to which the physical world, though lower and less real, embodies this Good, Truth, and Beauty.

When an artist creates, the artist participates in and furthers the work that Sophia performs in the cosmos. If Sophia embodies the ideas in matter, but only partially as a process over time, the artist can achieve a more complete reflection of the ideas through his work. As a result, as Solov’ev makes it clear in *The Universal Meaning of Art*, the creative act of a human being is the apex of his role in the world. Both the mission of art and the process of its realization elucidate this. In the artistic act, the underlying idea must first be known (Truth) and serve as the object of desire (Good), before the artist can embody it in the physical medium (Beauty).⁶⁰ Furthermore, according to the philosopher’s three-fold mission of art, good art must 1) embody in an object the most profound content of divine ideas that by their nature cannot be expressed by natural phenomena, 2) reflect natural

⁵⁸ Solov’ev, *Чтения о Богочеловечестве*, СС, v. 3, 68.

⁵⁹ “Философские принципы цельного знания” [*The Philosophical Basis of Integral Knowledge*], in *Собрание Сочинений* (Санкт-Петербург: Просвещение, 1911-1914) vol. 1, 258.

⁶⁰ Vladimir Solov’ev, “The Universal Meaning of Art,” in *The Heart of Reality*, ed. and trans. Vladimir Wozniuk (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2003), 71.

beauty, and 3) make enduring what in the physical world is ever changing and unstable.⁶¹

Scholar Adam Drozdek objects to this theory of art and beauty on a number of levels. He concludes his article “Solov’ev on Beauty” with the claim that Solov’ev “hardly gives the reader an idea why beauty matters and how exactly it affects the work of these great artists.”⁶² While it is not within the scope of this paper to defend Solov’ev’s aesthetics against all of Drozdek’s objections, we will consider one that directly address Solov’ev’s vision of the mission of art. Drozdek argues that the third aspect of art’s mission is in principle unattainable. Drozdek correctly points out that the only eternally enduring entities within Solov’ev’s ontology are ideas. In order for the artist to create an eternally enduring embodiment of idea, the creation would have to be itself an idea. This is impossible, since one can neither create nor destroy ideas.⁶³ However, it appears that this objection demonstrates Drozdek’s misunderstanding of Solov’ev’s meaning. Drozdek translates the third aspect of the mission of art as the “immortalization of its individual manifestations.”⁶⁴ The word Drozdek translates as “immortalization” is “увековечение.”⁶⁵ While this word can communicate the idea of immortalization, it can also mean, more moderately, “perpetuation.” Given the claims that Solov’ev makes in the following paragraph, it is clear that he wants to make the weaker of the two claims. There, Solov’ev emphasizes that absolute beauty is unattainable in the present world. Within history, we will only ever have “anticipations” of perfect beauty. Furthermore, he specifically ties this to the nature of art. “Today’s art” he says, “in its greatest works, captures *flashes* of eternal beauty in our current reality and extends them” (emphasis mine).⁶⁶ Solov’ev sees art as something that connects natural beauty with the true beauty of the life to come. Clearly, the same writer who claims that art serves only as a temporary connection to the ideal world “while history still continues” could hardly make the high demands that Drozdek’s objection suggests. Solov’ev fully understands art’s limitations as temporary instantiations of ideal beauty. Yet, he equally understands art’s power. If humans are themselves the embodiment of an idea, and ideas, as monads, strive toward one another, then people necessarily desire to rise to the higher realm with all aspects of their being. In both the production and enjoyment of art, the entire human soul unites with the ideal through her will, her mind, and her feelings. What else could the soul desire but union with the Good, Truth, and Beauty?

IV. The Artist’s Return

Thus far, we have seen that Solov’ev’s response to Plato is two-fold. First, he gives an account of the nature of art that is potentially consistent with, but differs from, Plato’s. For Solov’ev, art is not a shadow of a shadow or an illusion of

⁶¹ Ibid., 75.

⁶² Adam Drozdek, “Solov’ev on Beauty,” *Studia Philosophiae Christianae* 43, no. 2 (2003): 54.

⁶³ Ibid., 49.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Solov’ev, “The Universal Meaning of Art” in *Собрание Сочинений*, (Санкт-Петербург: Просвещение, 1911-1914) vol. 6, 84.

⁶⁶ Solov’ev, “The Universal Meaning of Art,” in *The Heart of Reality*, ed. and trans. Vladimir Wozniuk (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2003), 75.

an illusion. Indeed, one only becomes a true artist when one experiences an intuitive vision of the true ideas and successfully embodies them in matter. Second, Solov'ev provides an account of the purpose of art, according to which the agent participates in divine activity through his creative acts. In Plato's language, the artist is a person who has loosened his chains and ascended from the cave. His art is an expression of what he has seen there, not of the shadows the others see dancing upon the walls of the cave. While Plato ostensibly denies this possibility in his discussion of art, it is not clear that his system requires a commitment to that rejection. Indeed, Plato's character, Socrates, engages in something closely resembling art repeatedly throughout the *Republic*. He asks his audience to imagine the Sun, the divided line, the cave, and the shell of man whose inner heart is a lion and snake, but whose bowels are grotesque beasts. The reader can only conclude that Plato distinguishes Socrates' use of art from what the poets use because Socrates' art is a reflection of true reality—the world of forms—rather than the immoral charades of the theater. If this is right, then Plato's own hero is an example of the kind of artist Solov'ev describes. Furthermore, while it does not appear that Plato himself had any concept of humans' being able to participate in making the physical world more clearly reflect a higher reality, the belief that they can appears consistent with later platonic models, such as the one we saw in Plotinus. Therefore, I argue that Solov'ev successfully responds to Socrates' challenge. He has given true art a way to recommend itself to Socrates that is consistent with Plato's view of the world. If Solov'ev is correct, Socrates should not only welcome art back into his ideal state; he should confer on the artist the status of a philosopher-king, because he has experienced a vision of the forms, embodied them more fully in the world, and, as a result, helped turn the mind of the less enlightened from the world of sense to the world of the forms. What better description of a sage could we ask?

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НАРДУГАН – НОВОГОДНИЙ ОБРЯД ГАДАНИЙ ЧУВАШЕЙ

Нардуган – один из любимых новогодних праздников среди народов Урало-Поволжья. Этот обряд с удовольствием проводят башкиры, татары, чувашаи, мордва и другие народы. Основное место в обряде занимает гадание с кольцами под пение песен. У чувашей, как и у других народов, нардуган начинался 25 декабря, в день зимнего солнцестояния и длился почти две недели, вплоть до Крещения. Для проведения обряда первым делом в деревне выбирали какой-либо просторный дом. Как правило, это был дом какой-нибудь одинокой старухи или старика. С хозяевами расплачивались небольшой суммой денег или помогали по хозяйству. Иногда для проведения обряда выбирался возведенный в этом году новый дом. Чтобы хозяин не отказал, во время строительства дома молодежь устраивала коллективную помочь (*ниме*). Вечером, в назначенное время девушки и парни собирались в избранном для проведения праздника доме. Девушки приходили в своих лучших нарядах и усаживались вдоль стен. Когда все приглашенные были в сборе, начинались игры, танцы и песни.

Наконец, ближе к полуночи кто-то из девушек напоминала, что пора сходить за водой и начать гадания. Для гадания была необходима речная вода. За водой посылали трех человек, причем один из них должен был быть единственным сыном или единственной дочкой в семье. Такие дети наделялись сверхъестественными способностями. Посланные за водой шли к реке необычным способом – верхом на кочерге или венике. Чтобы прорубить прорубь, брали с собой топор, а также лучинки для освещения. Дорогой туда и обратно им строго запрещалось разговаривать между собой и оглядываться