

Rediscovering the Artist in the Post-Pandemic: An Existential Narrative of People's Challenging Journey During the COVID-19 Pandemic Using Plato's View on Parallelism Between The People and their Society

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Abstract: This paper will talk about the philosophy of Plato, as regards his concept of the human soul and its parallelism with society. This is in consonance with the prevalence of arts and literature in the post pandemic. It will analyze the possibility of people rediscovering their artistic souls and exploiting their sense of artistry through the metaphors of the gold, silver, and bronze souls. There are four main ideas, which shall be explicated as four stages of rediscovering the artist, which support the claim that the inner artist is rediscovered within the post-pandemic. Firstly, society is the extension of the human person. Hall (1992) recounts Plato's theory wherein humans are an extension of society, as he has roles, rights and duties. Secondly, a sick person is extended to a sick society. The mistakes of people are reflected in problems in society. Errors are definitive in society, but a condition to learn from or heal from them (Metcalf 2017). Thirdly, the people rediscovers the artist in them via recollection. Plato explains that knowledge is found within remembering and recollection. The final stage is that society is purified from its illness through the arts. Ideally, in post-pandemic, the society recovers from illness by embracing new forms of art. The society perfects itself through the prevalence of the propagation of arts, now defined as a manifestation of the new artist rediscovered in the post-pandemic. In conclusion Plato's concept of man and society is revealed in the relationship between humans, art, and society. Art is a manifested cure for society, arguing that art is a cure for a man's soul – an extension of society. Although, art only reveals itself only through remembered knowledge.

Keywords: The Republic; Gold Souls; Silver Souls; Bronze Souls; The Workers; The Soldiers; The Rulers; Innate Knowledge; Remembering; World of Ideas; Illness; Society

INTRODUCTION

In Book III of his Republic (c. 373 BC), Plato examines the style of poetry such as comedy, tragedy, epic and lyric poetry. Every style discusses life in general in different means and representations. Here, Plato distinguishes between narration or report which is also known as *diegesis*, and limitation or representation - also known as *mimesis*. In Plato's theory of Mimesis, he says that all art is mimetic or simply an imitation of life. He believed that "idea" is the ultimate reality. Art

imitates idea and so it is an imitation of reality. Furthermore, for Plato, mimesis is the appearance of the external image of things. In this view, reality was not to be found in the world of the objects but in the realm of the ideas. Therefore, Plato sees in the arts an occupation that is inferior to science and philosophy, but that is also a potential source of corruption.

How could Plato's (mimetic) theory of art be applicable to the contemporary post-pandemic world, in which art is no longer understood as

mimesis? According to Plato's theory of mimesis, the arts deal with the illusion and they are imitation of an imitation, since the external world is simply a copy of the ultimate reality which is "ideas". Thus, arts are twice removed from reality. Plato disapproves arts because it is based on falsehood. However, mimetic approach views the literary work or in this case, different forms of artwork as an imitation, or reflection, or representation of the world and human life. The primary criterion applied to a work is the "truth" of its representation to the subject matter that it represents. Plato's mimetic theory remains relevant today, particularly in the post-pandemic world, in the context of understanding and appreciating arts not as a tool to reveal truth in Plato's concept of temporal world but simply to provide therapeutic-happiness and satisfaction in the beauty of imitating an imitation.

Art has taken a different context in the contemporary time wherein art is no longer understood as mimesis. For example, modern art, which can be non-representational. Eric Wayne's "Art & Crit" is one of the best abstract and non-representational art included in the famous "fine Art Asylum". Eric Wayne's point of view is that "Abstract" is similar to "distorted", as in an altered version of reality (e.g. "cubism"). Nonetheless, abstract art can also be cathartic and, arguably, serve as a cure for the soul. It is precisely the point of this paper, that artistic expressions are very useful in curing a sick soul that is affected badly by the pandemic, regardless of its accurate or inaccurate representation of the world. The essence of the artwork in this discourse departs from world and its meaning but rather rests in its therapeutic role and utility.

The initial discourse of this paper is when Plato theorizes that there is a distinct parallel relation between the human soul and its reflection on society. He argued that the roles that are resumed in society coagulate into a large function. Although discussed later, Plato argues that there are different roles, and its citizens are to play their part if society were to function. These roles include the nobility, such as leaders, workers, and soldiers. Respectively, each role is the rational, courageous, and appetite which are values that are also affiliated with the human soul. The soul is what defines humanity, which is a person's sense of being which will dictate the behavior. The conception of the tripartite comes from the human experience, mentioned in his book, "The Republic".

Although each role is different from one another, carrying their own responsibilities, they continuously engage with one another. This exchange becomes a foundation not only for society but also for humankind itself. Moreover, this becomes a foundation for where society can meet and harmonize. Plato believes that society is disharmonious, conflicted by different interests. However, it could also cooperate and organize on another so it could flourish in its own term. A functioning society is a "healthy" society wherein it is observable in means of artistry, exchanges, gatherings, etc. On the other hand, it is believed that each person is an artist. It is their true nature to think with reason, and understand circumstance through the perspective of the arts. The arts as a catalyst for escapism, but also in understanding different realities. It allows perspective and formulation of new ideas in our society, such as inventors and trendsetters.

Upon emergence of the COVID-19 virus, many governments imposed lengthy lockdowns. People were prevented from leaving the house, or attending gatherings and schools. Mostly, it left people reclusive as they remained within the safety of their homes. This puts a pause in our society, however, allows a chance for self-reflection. Given the time the pandemic has been prolonged, it is the opportunity for people to recollect and find the artist from within. In a report written by Mak et. al (2021), it is revealed that many turned to the arts for escapism. Artistic activities such as digital art, music, dance etc. became a catalyst of new talents discovered or flourished from the respondents. That is evidence that art finds a way to enlighten the mind, and restore the sense of 'soul' in a human. The soul is sick as long as it remains stagnant, but the arts function as a cure for the 'sick' soul.

With regard to the aforementioned, it may be proposed that art is the key to healing our sick society. Supporting this claim, four main ideas, explicated as COVID-19 pandemic-existential stages are expounded: firstly, society is the extension of person; secondly, a sick person extends to a sick society; thirdly, the artist is rediscovered by recollection; and fourthly, the arts will purify the (sickness, thereof) society. Each argument expounded later is founded upon the claims of Plato, as it is contextualized in the post-pandemic society prevalent in the years 2021-2022.

4 Stages of rediscovering:

A. First Stage

Society is the extension of persons. Hall (1992) recounts Plato's theory wherein society is the extension of a person, as they have roles, rights, and duties. Similarly, Plato theorizes that the person is composed of reason, courage, appetite while society is composed of rulers, soldiers, workers. A parallel is created wherein: reason parallels to rulers; courage parallel to soldiers; and, appetite is parallel to workers.

The understanding of the human person may be analyzed in terms of its composition or substance. There are two approaches: Metaphysical and Existential. The metaphysical approach answers the question "what" is a person, rather than "who" is a person (M. Heidegger). In Filipino culture, a person is not just their body but also has their soul. Religion plays a big role in the lives of Filipinos. It is almost unthinkable for most Filipinos not to deal with the state of affairs of their spiritual component. Hence, the soul or spiritual component greatly affects how Filipinos cope with their predicaments in life.

Plato said that "man [humans] is composed of a body and a soul" (dualism). Body for Plato is temporary and merely an imperfect copy of the "ideal" body in the perfect world of ideas. On the other hand, the soul is eternal. It has no extension in the world, not empirical, and cannot be manifesting imperfection in form, unlike the nature of the human body. The soul of a person has 3 parts: Rational, Courageous, and Appetitive. The rational part of the soul is above both the courageous and appetitive parts. It means that the person must use the rational part of their soul in making decisions or choices. It also governs the state of affairs of the courageous and appetitive part of the soul. However, the courageous and appetitive parts are essential because without these two parts of the soul, it cannot be a fully functional soul. A person needs the appetitive part of the soul for its nutrition, while the courageous part actualizes the ideas, intentions and choices of the rational part.

The rational, courageous and appetitive parts of the soul are paralleled to the rulers, soldiers and workers of the society. While the rational part of the soul governs the courageous and appetitive parts, the ruler governs the soldiers and workers in the society. Rulers are the administrators, planners

and decision makers for the society. Plato said: "if you rule, you cannot own but if you own, you cannot rule". Clearly, Plato does not want a ruler to use power to enrich themselves and the rich to use their wealth to be politically empowered. This is a very clear distinction between rulers and workers. Being a ruler requires selflessness and wisdom. Hence, Plato said rulers have gold souls.

Society follows a hierarchy of rulers: first in hierarchy (Rational part); soldiers second in hierarchy (Courageous part); and workers found in the 3rd hierarchy (Appetitive part). The courageous part parallels the soldiers in the society. The soldiers are second in the hierarchy of powers in the society. They implement the laws created by the rulers. If law and rules are not implemented, the society cannot function well. Appetite parallels the workers in the society. Like the body cannot function if it has lost its appetite, a society cannot function well if workers are not doing their share in the society. A society will cease to exist if its economy will fall and be destroyed.

B. Second Stage:

A sick person is extended to a sick society. The mistakes of people are reflected in problems in society. Errors are definitive in society, but a condition to learn from or heal from them (Metcalfe 2017). It accounts that the illness of people becomes the illness of society. However, it may be said that the cure to the sickness of the body is reflected in the solutions to the problems of society.

In 2019, COVID-19 has taken a toll on people's lives and health around the world. Not a single person would have foreseen the gravity of COVID-19. Similarly, the prolonged lockdown was the adversity the country had faced. There were food rises, unemployment, and delays in the academic calendar. All in all, there was a sudden shift in dynamic from the outgoing, interactive life of the "old normal" to the solemn, virtual "new normal". People have changed their lifestyles radically and drastically. This included adapting new routines, crowding for resources, such as disinfectants and food, and adapting a work-from-home environment. Of course, this discounts the creation of a new social environment and new-found culture that had been adapted online. In between these gaps of reality, there is the disruption of personhood. Amidst lockdown, social affairs and gatherings were restricted. Faces of people, groups, families and society as a whole has been covered with masks,

resulting in an existential crisis as regards purpose and role in the community. Hall (1992) reviews the roles that functioning individuals of society resume. It is the human rationale that allows for society to flourish and achieve excellence. However, this is not an individual effort but one as a group. The human being is not just a means but also an end to achieving goals. When the tripartite of the soul does their work, they are functional, just as Hall (1992) explains. Although if one were to fail their performance, then the human is flawed. They are sick, especially if they fail to utilize both the knowledge and skill.

As a result, society fails to progress and fall into stagnancy. Considering the nature of the lockdown, hindering opportunities of engagement and creating gaps of social responsibility, it can be argued that the illness of the people has manifested into the society. COVID-19 has allowed for stagnancy, which does not allow people to exchange ideas. It does not allow people to attend to their duties and responsibilities, and would injure the academy. In addition, society radically, and drastically, changes into a sick society. To put into context, a person who is sick cannot continue their duties. A person who is demotivated will not have the will to continue their work. This does not only concern the physical illness, but also the emotional or mental illness that one may incur over the pandemic.

Of course, crises such as the pandemic are matters that the governing body is challenged with. Plato says, that it is the responsibility of the people and role of the governance to organize itself harmoniously. Although, several corruptions and inequities were revealed over the pandemic. It also highlights that only further divides the people from one another. This is evidence that even culture has also shown manifestations of illness. When there is division, then society will not be able to harmonize and instead prosper within a 'bubble' of differentiated ideas.

Conclusively speaking, society is suffering from the illness of non-engagement among people in the society. When people are divided, then there is no movement and progression. Plato argued that society is meant to be harmonious, for it to flourish. All members of society must play their part, straight to the heart. If not, then there is stagnancy and no reassurance that society is to ever return to its undisturbed state until after the pandemic.

C. Third Stage

Thirdly, people rediscover the artist in them via recollection. Plato explains that knowledge is found within remembering and recollection. Remembering in a sense that it is an awakening of the skill, and engagement with the arts. Moreover, Plato also explains that the extension of the good and the beautiful is the arts. All that is good and beautiful is what can heal the society, thereby the people use art to cure their sick souls.

Knowledge is a process of recollection. Moreover, knowledge is innate to the person. To Plato, knowledge is the definite foundation of 'reason' or 'believe'. It is a mere abstraction of an idea, though entails that there is a deeper understanding and wisdom to human kind. In the "world of ideas", aesthetics becomes a joint reality between the real world and the world of ideas (Maguire, 1964). Although he defines that the aesthetic is intelligible, the "idea" is what manifests and contrasts as the creation of "man-made artifacts". Art, in itself, is an expression of the human mind and emotion, this includes knowledge. It is why inventors are "innovative", wherein their new ideas assist in the creation of machines and other necessary functions that progress our society. Moreover, it is why the sciences may be an art as new information is found and processed, it is engineered into a function. Maguire (1964) would also argue that Plato only ever found "valuable" if it were 'morally useful'.

The challenge, however, is that everything physical is a mere imitation (callback to his Allegory of the Cave), with the exception of ideas. Where if a person were to gather ideas, and internalize them, through recollection, the artist is rediscovered. Therefore, the human rediscovers the artist in them via recollection. Ideas come from knowledge and other preconceived notions that allow humanity to create and forge new ideas. It is an arbitrary and never ending cycle, especially within the academe. Just like knowledge, ideas of the artist can be internalized through recollection. Given that the pandemic had allowed the opportunity for reflection, even enlightenment of reality such as inequity and privilege, it left many inspired. It allowed people to find the artist in them because of the situation they were facing. Realistically, over the pandemic, there was not a lot of opportunity to step out into the daylight and garner experience. So, new experiences were created such as the solitary place that put people to engage in arts. These new relationships

shared by people, whether with others or their hobbies, as an effect of COVID-19, became the inspiration in their art works.

People made their artwork a cure to the “illness and suffering”. To reiterate, Cooper (1984) writes that Plato theorizes that desire with reason attracts intellect. It allows the human to reflect what they aspire to contribute to society, which shapes the desire to act or contribute to society. This desire, which motivates the human to act, is for one self’s own satisfaction. In the process, however, they begin to help their society. Actions are influenced by desires, specifically the desire for harmony or as a result of conflict. Mak et. al (2021) had expounded how that over the pandemic, artistic desire was the result of reflection and also desire to engage in the arts. The more they engaged in the arts, digital arts and writing, musical activities, crafts, and reading for pleasure were the major artistic mediums cited. Although it is found that educational attainment and social support were determinants to artistic engagement, it is a hypothetical aspect to the rational aspect of the soul. Hence, humans were able to cope from COVID-19 illness because of their engagement with the artwork

Therefore, art became prevalent at the time of the pandemic. It may be in the media, such as the rise of the “tiktok” phenomena or other trends that were set over the quarantine. New discoveries were found in the individual, so long as there was a will. As Plato argues, desire with reason is what allows action from humanity which revitalized the human soul amidst the stagnancy.

D. The Fourth Stage

Society has recovered from its illness because of the engagement to the arts. To recount the study by Mak et. al (2021), respondents were found to engage themselves in the arts over the pandemic, in various means and mediums of art. Ideally, in post-pandemic, the society recovers from illness by embracing new forms of art. Its foundation is derived from how the arts heal the soul of the person. The society perfects itself through the prevalence of the propagation of arts, now defined as a manifestation of the new artist rediscovered in the post-pandemic.

Society is purified from its illness through the arts. Recounting the previous arguments, it is established that the illness of the people extends as the illness of society. Of course, this “illness” of

society is simply an allegory for stagnancy. The COVID-19 built borders, which made the human soul lonely. Aristotle, Plato’s student, claimed that humans are social animals. We seek engagement, exchanges, accompaniment and are drawn towards forums of people. These illnesses, as mentioned previously, include mental illnesses and fatigue. Even demotivation and lack of enthusiasm is a testament to these illnesses. However, it is the arts that finds a way to help restore this “will” in people because the arts reflect their innermost thoughts (rational), feelings (courage), and desires (appetite). This then returns to the conceptualization of the Tripartite of the soul. In consideration of the arguments, finally it is argued that the arts have shaped society to a better, and more relaxed atmosphere. The drive for creation allowed humanity to remain lively, while locked away from society. On the other hand, human reason is drawn toward “aesthetic value”. When the artistic is rediscovered, the value of creation is entitled into the mind which later manifests itself into our society. Thus, the arts become the cure to our sick society.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion Plato’s concept of the human, and society is revealed in the relationship between humans, art, and society. Art is a manifested cure for society, arguing that art is a cure for the soul – an extension of society. Although, art only reveals itself only through remembered knowledge. The human person heal themselves through the arts: as an effect, society heals from its old sickness of chaos and confusion. Chaos and confusion are found upon a loss of direction. As discussed previously, the arts may also be a vessel for engagement and a tool of self-discovery. To reiterate, the soul dies when stagnant and may only be reawakened by the power of the arts.

Since society is an extension of the people, the power of an artwork to heal the illness of these people are also extended in the healing of society. It allowed for the engagement of ideas which began to harmonize groups and build engagement once again. For so long as the rationale and the desired state of humankind remains to pursue the arts, this cure will extend itself to humanity. When that time comes, the cure of the person that reflects the cure of society would later aid its members to harmonize and flourish past the post-pandemic.

(RE)IMAGINING THE ARTS IN THE POST-PANDEMIC RECOVERY

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