Chapter - I
Theory of Mimesis: Plato and Greek Aesthetics
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‘Mimesis’: It’s meaning

Paintings, the earliest identified examples of art belonging to the visual class are often and, quite naturally appreciated in terms of its capability to represent ‘Nature’, -- the visible world. “The earliest known examples of visual art belong to the category of painting and in the minds of many, painting is the paradigmatic visual art, if not the paradigm of art itself” (Alperson Philip, 1992). Some of the basic issues related to this ancient mode of pictorial imitation/representation of the world are still live in contemporary world. In ‘Republic’, Plato made enquiry into the nature of pictorial representation and he provides an undeniable sign for the artist who holds a mirror up to reality. (Alperson Philip, 1992) Objects in painting do seem to copy reality and have a capacity to capture the likeness of what they reflect. What is closely resembled or represented generates pleasure and thought. He argued for his metaphysical views about the nature of reality and their immense value. In addition, the exceptional character of reality as represented in painting in a persuasive manner keeps the viewer’s away from the world of forms or essences toward the sensible world of appearances (Dyson M, 1998). However, in recent years, the notion of representation has come very much to the forefront in philosophy and the related discipline of cognitive science.

Mimesis: the principal philosophy of Art.

Imitation was called mimesis in Greek and imitatio in Latin, and the term exists since antiquity. However, the concept has changed. Today imitation means
relatively the same as copying. It is a post-Homeric, and presumably, originated with the rituals and mysteries of the Dionysian cult performed by the priest-dancing, music and singing. Plato and Strabo established this. Later it signified the reproducing of reality in sculpture and theatre arts. Imitation did not indicate reproducing external reality but expressing the inner one. It had no application then in visual arts (Golden, Leon.1975) iv.

Fifth century B.C onwards the term *mimesis* moved into philosophy, meaning reproducing the external world. The meaning changed so much that Socrates had some reservations about calling the art of painting as art and used words close to it such as ‘ek-nemesis’ and ‘apo-mimesis’ in Greek. However, Democritus and Plato had no such principles and used the word to indicate imitation of nature. To each of them, however, it was a different kind of imitation. For Democritus mimesis was an imitation of the way nature functions. He wrote that in art we imitate nature: in weaving, we imitate the spider, in building the swallow, in singing the swan or nightingale. This concept was applicable mainly to industrial arts. (Princeton: 2002) v

A different group of philosophers initially introduced by Socrates and further developed by Plato and Aristotle formed another popular concept of imitation in the fifth century in Athens. For them it was appearance of things.

Socrates enquired into the way the arts like painting and sculpture differ from the others. The response was the way they repeat and imitate things; we see these repetitions and imitations. Therefore, he conceived a new concept of imitation. He formulated the theory as if imitation is the basic function of the arts
like painting and sculpture. It was an important move in the history of philosophy of art.

The fact that Plato and Aristotle accepted this theory was equally important for centuries to come in history of the leading and principal theories of the arts. Each of them assigned a different meaning to the theory of mimesis and, therefore, variants of it or rather two theories originated under the same name.

In his early writings Plato was rather vague in his use of the term ‘imitation’. Sometimes he applied it to music and dance and sometimes he confined it to painting and sculpture. At first, he called only poetry or tragedy ‘imitative’. Finally, he accepted Socrates’ broad concept, which embraced almost the entire art of painting, sculpture, and poetry. Later, his conception of art as imitating reality grew extreme and he presented it as a passive and faithful act of copying the outer world. This particular formulation was invoked primarily by the then contemporary illusionist art of painting. Plato’s idea was similar to what was in the nineteenth century advanced under the name of ‘naturalism.’ His theory was descriptive of this naturalistic proclivity. From the normative standpoint, it disapproved the imitation of reality by art because imitation is not the right way to truth. Aristotle’s modification was faithful. However, Plato transformed his concept and theory of imitation. He continued that artistic imitation may present things either more or less beautiful than they are. It also may present them such as they could or have to be. “Plato uses the word with a primary visual significance, mimesis suggests image, a visual image related to imitation, representation” (Arne Melberg, 1995) vi.

Aristotle summarized the thesis that art imitates reality but imitation is not
supposed to take recourse to mere faithful copying but speaks of an approach to reality and the artist who imitates and presents reality in his own way. In fact, the idea of imitation, therefore, was as applicable to music as to sculpture and theatre.

Alternative formulation: Though theoreticians of art referred quite often to Aristotle, they intended to defend the simpler and more attractive version of imitation by Plato. Due to Aristotle’s personal interests, the theory of imitation remained for centuries more concerned with poetry than with visual arts. To Aristotle “imitation” was initially imitation of human actions but it gradually meant the imitation of nature and regarded as the source of its perfection (Else Gerald .F) vii.

In brief, in the period of fourth century B.C., four different concepts of imitation were in vogue: 1; the ritualistic concept (expression) 2; the concept of Democritus (imitation of natural processes) 3; Platonic (copying of nature), and 4; Aristotelian (free creation of work of art based on elements of nature). While the original meaning of the concept was gradually fading, the idea of Democritus was recognized. The Platonic and Aristotelian notions proved to be basic enduring concepts in art; they were often fused into one. The idea that they were originally different concepts went into oblivion. Several centuries later, Cicero contrasted imitation with truth and considered imitation as a free expression of the artist and supported the Aristotelian doctrine. Yet in Hellenistic and Roman days, the interpretation of ‘imitation’ as the copying of reality was more focussed. Such an oversimplified interpretation of the arts could not go a long way. Imitation was contrasted with and replaced by such ideas as imagination. Philostratus Flavius
regarded imagination as wiser and more creative than imitation, because the latter could only of that which is actually seen but the former includes also those things that are not seen \( ^{viii} \) (Alperson Philip (Edit), 1992).

The theory of imitation was a product of the classical era of Greece. The Hellenistic and Roman era preserved this doctrine in principle but at the same time expressed reservations over it and brought forth counter proposals. It was their contribution to the doctrine’s history that the aged theory of imitation was considered more as a typically Greek property and founded on the theory that the human mind is passive and therefore able to perceive only what exists. In the middle Ages, other premises were advanced, formulated early by Dionysius, the Areopagite and by Saint Augustine. If art is to imitate let it concentrate on the invisible world, which is perfect. In addition, if art is to limit itself to the visible world, let it search in that world for traces of eternal beauty. This may be better achieved by means of symbols than by imitating reality.

Near the beginning of the theory radical thinkers like Tertullian went even so far as to believe that as God does not permit things out of pure human imagination of that which do not exist, it would be advisable to leave room for imitation. There was another idea that only spiritual representations are important. At the height of the Middle Ages, Bonaventura was to say of painters and sculptors that they could only show externally what they had thought internally. Painting which faithfully imitates reality was scoffed at and labelled as the “aping of truth”. As the result, the theory of imitation was pushed aside in the middle Ages. However, it did not disappear completely and it survived among the twelfth century
humanists like John of Salisbury. His definition of painting was the same as that of
the ancients as imitation. Moreover, Thomas Aquinas, the great Aristotelian
philosopher of the middle Ages, repeated the classical definition without any
reservations ‘art imitates nature’. During Renaissance, the theory of imitation
became again the basic theory of art and poetry, and reached its peak. It appeared as
a revelation.

Modern theories took the term imitation from the Romans, imitazione in
Italian, imitation in French and English. At the very beginning of the fifteenth
century, the doctrine of imitation was accepted as the earliest of all others in the
plastic arts. It appeared clearly in L. Ghiberti’s Commentaries where he spoke of
having tried to imitate nature ‘as well as it was possible for him’. L.B. Alberti
adhered to the same theory and he maintained that there is no better way to beauty
than by imitating nature. Leonardo da Vinci had an even more radical view.
According to him, the more faithfully the painting depicts its object the more
praiseworthy it is. Other Renaissance writers followed these pioneers. The concept
and the theory of imitation did not enter Renaissance poetics until the middle of the
sixteenth century, -- only after Aristotle’s Poetics had been fully accepted. From
that time on it became the most essential element of poetics. F. Sassetti explained in
an Aristotelian way that imitation is one of the four causes of poetry, namely, the
‘formal’, the ‘efficient’, the ‘material’ and the ‘final’ one. The Italian theory of
imitation penetrated into Germany attracting Durer then to France where it was
taken up by Poussin and many others. Even in the days of Baroque and academism,
the Italian theory remained in all countries the basic theory of art.
In the beginning of the eighteenth century it was still regarded as an important principle of aesthetics even by such innovators as Abbe Dubos and Vico, who declared that poetry was nothing else than imitation. The modern theory of imitation held its position of strength in the theory of art for at least three centuries. However, over this period the evolution of the theory did not manifest any uniformity and different meanings were ascribed to it in the contexts of visual arts and poetics. Some understood it in the Aristotelian way and others in accordance with Plato and some retained the popular conception of faithful imitation. Hence agreement in this respect was more terminological than in relation to matters of fact. Various thinkers tried to overcome in many different ways the problems which ‘imitation’ encountered.

Some Renaissance writers stressed the point that not all imitations serve art but only those that are good, ‘artistic’ beautiful, imaginative. Other theoreticians tried to interpret imitation more accurately and in doing so, they departed in various ways from the concept of literal copying of nature. Imitation has to be ‘original’, openly wrote Pelletierdu Mans. In Alberti’s interpretation, art imitates the laws of nature rather than its appearances. According to Scaliger, art imitates nature’s norms, and for Shakespeare, it is the modesty of nature. The followers of Aristotle maintained that nature should be imitated as it could and have to be. Michelangelo assigned a religious meaning to the doctrine of imitation. It is God in nature, which should be imitated. Torquato Tasso concerned with imitation in poetry, realized what a complicated process it was. Words (parole) imitate concepts (concetti) and these, in turn, imitate things (cose).
Principally important was many writers and French classicists who upheld that art should not imitate nature in its rough state, but after its faults are corrected and a selection has been made. Other theoreticians stressed the fact that imitation is not a passive act. First nature has to be ‘de-coded’ and its beauty has to be extracted. Some other writers assigned to imitation such a broad meaning that it embraced not only imitation of nature but also of ideas. Others integrated in imitation even allegories and metaphors. Imitation is indeed nothing else but spinning of fiction. G. Del Bene was of a similar opinion that imitation is the same as Finzione. Those writers might have seemed revolutionary but in fact, they were close to Aristotle. Some like T. Correa differentiated two kinds of imitation, one is literal, and the other is free; similarly, R. de Piles separated it from truth, the simple and the ideal. He had in view two imitations, one is faithful copying and the other is beginning by selection and synthesized with the elements of perfection scattered in nature. However, many Renaissance and Baroque writers reached the conclusion that it was worthless to stick rigidly to the old theory instead of producing a new and a more accurate one. They were prompted by two entirely different reasons. A minority group maintained that imitation is a task also difficult for art because imitation can never equal the representation.

The term imitation was gradually being replaced not by creation but by invention. Ronsard offered a compromise; ‘imiteretinventer’, one should ‘imitate and invent’. In V. Danti’s view the aim of art was not to imitate but to portray; F. Patrizi said that the poet is not an imitator but a ‘facitor’. Danti maintained that the poet produces new wholes, if not new things. F. Robortello was bold in holding that
art presents things that defy imitation. Moreover, G. P. Capriano in his poetics said poetry is an invention out of nothing and art certainly does not imitate. The new idea was that art might be more perfect than object of its imitation, nature. M. Ficino called art ‘wiser than nature’. Michelangelo professed that he makes nature more beautiful and Dolce wrote that the duty of a painter is to surpass nature, and G. Vasar stated that nature was conquered by art.

The Renaissance introduced a new thesis, which was of doubtful value, but rich in consequences implying that the object of imitation should be not merely nature. The concept of imitation appeared in as early as the fifteenth century and by the end of the seventeenth century, it succeeded almost completely the idea of imitating nature. This was the greatest revolution in the history of the concept of imitation. It changed the classical theory of art into an academic one. A compromise formula was devised for the principle of imitation that nature should be imitated but in the way, the Ancients imitated it. The fifteenth and sixteenth centuries called for more imitation of relics in poetry, and the seventeenth and the eighteenth centuries asked for the same in the visual arts. However, rebellious voices were sometimes raised. During the Renaissance, at least three protests against the imitation of antiquity took place. Poliziano against Cortesi said, “Only he writes healthy who has the courage to break the rules”. Giovanni Francesco Pico Della Mirando lamented against Cardinal Bembo and finally Desiderius Erasmus argued that he acts truly in Cicero’s spirit, keeping with the changing times.

To give a very general outline of the development from the sixteenth to the eighteenth century, some theoreticians defended the principle of imitation with
some concessions, while others abandoned it completely. It was discarded for the radical Platonic concept of imitation and the moderate Aristotelian concept. After all, in between the fifteenth and the eighteenth century there was no other principle commonly applied than imitation. The eighteenth century fundamental ideas of mimesis were accepted, but indiscriminate application of it ended. An aesthetician who was a typical of his century, Edmund Burke, best voiced the responses, “Aristotle has spoken so much and so solidly upon the force of imitation in his poetics, so no need of any further discourses upon this subject and it has less necessity”.

This appeared in a Philosophical Enquiry into the origin of our ideas on the Sublime and the Beautiful; however, he himself did not interpret imitation in the Aristotelian way, as he demanded faithful copying.

At the end of the eighteenth century after the discovery of Herculaneum and Pompeii and the archaeologists’ travels in Greece, it became more popular than ever to imitate antiquity. It was the era of Mengs and Winckelmann, Adamand Flaxman, Canova and Thorwaldsen. However, the concern was a matter of practical application so the theory of imitation did not advance further.

The nineteenth century laid the greatest stress on being faithful to nature. Moreover, the term ‘imitation’, which for ages played the leading part in the theory of art disappeared suddenly when it acquired a negative meaning, and was used to indicate something unauthentic, faked, like the imitations of diamonds, marble, furs, and could no longer be applied to art.

The other terms had taken its place, mainly ‘realism’ and ‘naturalism’.
Those were the watchwords of writers like G. Planche, J. H. Champfleury and E. Zola and the artists, beginning with G. Courbet. In fact, the theory of naturalism was a continuation of the theory of imitation but with a certain difference. It was concerned not so much with art but like reproducing things and science.

The twentieth century theorists of art neglected not only the term ‘imitation’ but also its principle. Contemporary age does not contradict that art relies on nature but it does not maintain that art imitates nature. Picasso says that it could not be possible otherwise. For some art is construction, for others, it is for expression. In the present times, the artists do not wish to imitate in the sense of copying the appearance of things. The majority of contemporaries would rather agree with Girolamo Savonarola who asserted that what in fact belongs to art is only that which does not imitate nature.

**Plato and Greek Aesthetics**

Plato (c.427-3-17 BC) Greek philosopher was the follower of Socrates’ and Aristotle’s teacher. His discourses and arguments were developed into the most influential philosophical works ever written, containing the first extensive dialogue of many of the central issues of metaphysics, ethics, politics, and art. For the same reason Plato can be regarded as both the founder of philosophical aesthetics and the extreme critic of any aesthetics marked on an independent reality. These issues are approached from diverse angles all through Plato’s works and the link factor of his argument is that artistic values be subject to the authority of truth and morality. Those views rationalize themselves in relation to the needs of psychology, politics
and metaphysics. Plato in his Republic displayed a new notion of art and its interrelation with psychology and metaphysics. His concern was again chiefly with poetry, yet he was to question the value of other representational art, especially painting, and all art. Mimesis was exemplified as mirror like image making or the creation of mere ‘appearances’ that reduce little even of sensible reality. At first, he presented a critique of the false and harmful views against the poets, especially Homer and the tragedians ix. (Margolis Joseph, 1978)

Hypothetically, he expressed the powerful way in which poetry’s dramatic mode ‘mimesis’ invites a subtle act of psychological identification on the part of actor, listener or reader. He also was apparently concerned with the education of the young and efficient constructing of an aesthetic scheme. But he was also concerned with a challenge to aesthetics as a study subject which judged art by three main criteria; truthfulness, ethical quality of content and psychological benefit. Following this anxiety with art Plato laid a confidence on the unity of all values and disapproval with practical and relativist definitions of ‘beauty’ or ‘fineness’. From the initial dialogues, there were tensions noticeable in Plato’s attitudes to art, especially poetry. Plato manifested a strong hold for poetry more than its dramatic and verbal qualities in his own writings. His master Socrates often expressed deep admiration for poetry, but at the same time he nurtured a choice of reservations about its identification. If poets are motivated, they may put forward valuable experiences, which cannot be examined with regular transparency. However, the poets do not know how or what they create keeping the standard conception of knowledge. Their status as directly involved with life must be believed, and the
commanding emotions, which they unmistakably invoke, may be psychologically hazardous. In this sense, enjoyment of art stands in a nervous relation to moral purpose. On the other hand, Plato was also capable to allow for ‘internal’ aesthetic principles such as form, organization and rationality. The thought pattern so far mentioned was variously elaborated throughout Plato’s ‘middle’ period, which culminates in the Republic. However, the latter also provided much more constant point of view of aesthetic significance, and ones, which were influenced by a progressively more methodical and determined philosophical outlook.

A turning point seemed to have been the Cratylus, where for the first time Plato focused his questions about art on the concept of mimesis. Significance of this new angle is that poetry, the visual arts and even music were treated as comparable in their representational relation to the world. In Cratylus itself, artistic mimesis was located primarily as a position point for many-sided arguments about linguistic meaning, but in the Republic two major discussions of mimetic dimensions of poetry and art.

Plato continued with explicating the concept of art in Republic in the context of its relation with psychology and metaphysics. His concern was again primarily with poetry, but he was capable of questioning the value of impression in other representational arts especially painting. All art, qua mimesis, is then asserted as mirror like image making or the creation of mere ‘appearances’ that fall short even of sensible reality, and are ‘twice removed’ from the inspirational truth viewed by Plato’s metaphysics. So far poetry, in particular is a more difficult strength than this proposes, because the spirit and making the responses of those whom it affects.
However, Plato completes his considerations finally with a reflective consent to poetry’s permanent attractions. The effectiveness of poetry can be analysed by extreme stimulation of emotions. So he proposed that to some extent it should be ‘either banned or at least subjected to political control’. The place of art and aesthetics within the purview of Plato’s philosophy is thus rather paradoxical and constrained. The concept of mimetic or imitative nature of art is little impaired when art is raised above deception and copying in a superficial manner. This happens with the artist Plato. The combination of arguments in Republic was thus deeply unsure to hate for the deception, make believe which served a merely superficial realism, and close a disturbed awareness of art’s capacity to feel deep psychic roots. Such paradoxes continue to be compounded by the activities of Plato the artist. The Republic itself ended with an eschatological myth that both emulated and offered to replace some of the myths of the poets like the faith in the emotive and persuasive value of narratives and of imagery. Here lies trace of a very different Platonic aesthetics, which links imagination with higher truths and with a vision of ideal beauty or possibility of a future aesthetics eventually elaborated by neo Platonism and in the Renaissance.

However, so far as Plato himself is concerned, no radical shift can be noticed after Republic from this chasm between admittance of credentials of art in human life in its relational space shared with morality, psychology and a negative stand on the relevance of art in human life for its removal from truth. For this ambivalent stand on art no pure Platonic aesthetics could be developed in consonance with the total philosophical perspective of Plato. As a result we come
across both disapproval of art as consisting in mimetic image-making for example, in *Sophists* and *Republic* and an involved way of looking at the psychological experience of both tragedy and comedy in *Philebus*. The beauty of art was a manifestation of moral beauty for him. The ‘Laws’ have a special and hidden awareness of an ‘internal’ principle towards the arts and experiences. To establish a complementarity between this consciousness and his moral or value aspiration was a challenge for Plato. Plato was regarded as a philosophical lover of art and he was the only great moral questioner of art and aesthetic experience. Late as the *Laws*, Plato was provoked to call his own work ‘the truest tragedy’. An essential wisdom of the aesthetics was ingrained in his total philosophical innovation. x (Soroom.G, 1966)

‘*Kalon*’, for Plato and Greeks means, beauty which includes a face or body or natural object and natural equivalent also the alternatives like unnatural sound, all are ‘beautiful’. However, the Greek adjective has broader applications than those meaning ‘noble.’ The *kalos, kagathos* is refers to the aristocratic ideal of a man not ‘beautiful and good’. The first one is upright and admirable and the other is good warrior, the adjective of an ethical term. Exact translation is ‘fine,’ rather than ‘beautiful’ and it is suitable to both ethical and aesthetic contexts. The communication criterion will be not philological but philosophical. Even today the *Hippias Major*, a study of Plato’s treatment to *kalon* and it is relevant to the questions about beauty.

‘Imitation’ is the common term used for English translation of *mimesis* and some other words for it include ‘representation’ and ‘emulation’. The translation
intends to mean more than what ‘mimesis’ used to mean in Greek context. The Greek word ‘mimesis’, the translation is capture something other than of the word’s meaning in classical Greek. But ‘imitation’ is used for everything that is mimesis. ‘Imitate’ functions well enough as the verb mimeisthai means, ‘mimic.’ It is not a great trouble to use the Greek mimesis, for simplicity; however, some prefer the English word ‘mimesis’, which has begun picking up its own senses and particular uses. Other than mimesis, Plato speaks of another term mimema. Either ‘Imitation’ like mimesis can refer to an action or to that activity but a mimema is a copy and not the act of copying that produced it. The Republic assess as poetry’s role in the curriculum for the city’s guardian class. The first part, criticizes the images of Gods and demigods that Homer and the tragedians produced. They are both unholy and setting bad examples to the young. After this criticism of content, Socrates turns to it as ‘style (lexis)’ of narration. Poetic narration can take place through narration alone, through mimesis alone, or by means of a mix of two. Plato’s Socrates defined imitation, which developed two arguments, and finally proclaimed that, ‘no poetry of this type will be admitted into the city, the Republic findings and defining example establishes mimesis as impersonation’.

Homer’s poems alternate between third person accounts of events and directly quoted speeches of the characters involved in those events. The ambiguity lets Socrates deploy more than one argument against the presentation of characters. The main argument is blunt but clear, and plausible enough. What the new city really does not want is the presentation of base types because acting is found in the persons being mimicked. If acting is like imitation, then Plato has in one respect a
powerful point and in another respect a dishonest argument. It is powerful in as much as it lets Plato ban all portrayals of vicious and ignoble characters but shield the portrayals of brave soldiers, philosophers, and other wholesome types from censorship. Plato’s list of things unworthy of imitation proves surprisingly commodious. Alongside villains, one finds women, slaves, animals, musical instruments, gears and pulleys and sounds of water. The argument works dishonestly in that it exploits the ambiguity between impersonation as something a writer does and impersonation as the performer’s task. The on one hand the most convincing part of Republic has to assume that mimesis is performance. On the other, performance hardly upset a whole population. It is true that young male Athenians formed the choruses for comedy and tragedy. Future farmers and doctors, generals and gentlemen, spent a season preparing for their time on stage. Even so, the extensiveness of the practice among young people does not justify barring all drama from the city, and that is what Plato’s concluding ban comes to,

“If a man were to arrive in the city whose wisdom empowered him to become everything and to mimic all things together with the poems he wanted to perform, the people would worship him as someone holy and wonderful and pleasant, but tell him there is no man like him in our city, nor by our traditional law can come to be here, and we would send him off to another city after pouring myrrh on his head and crowning him with wool’.

The grand conclusion that Plato wants depends on the ambiguity in his definition of imitation. Imitation is a formal concept. This is to say that one can distinguish poetic mimesis from poetic narration by looking for a formal element in
the poetry and the other is that mimesis may make poetry more deleterious. But it
does not work these bad effects by itself, only when the characters represented are
bad to begin with.

The definition of imitation entails no general ideas of similarity or likeness. Mimesis
functions as a technical term with a narrow literary meaning. Socrates
establishes the continuity of the coming treatment with what he had said about
imitation but also the difference between the passages. What follows will defend
banishment of ‘imitative poetry’ in terms of the Republic developed in and
afterwards. In all Plato develops three theses. About poetic mimesis, Plato’s
ultimate verdict stands as follows:

‘Poetic mimesis, like the kind in a painting, is the imitation of appearance
alone and its products rank far below truth. Therefore, poetic mimesis corrupts the
soul, weakening the rational impulse’s control over the person’s other drives and
desires. It should therefore be banned from the good city’.

The difference between Form or Essence and the sensible things is ultimate
according to Plato. Mimesis is the mimesis of things. In this sense it is ‘copy’. And
it corrupts the soul. The true aesthetics emerges when mimesis involves acting for
copying the innermost essence or Form of that which appears as beautiful or Greek
‘kalon’ that is the ideal of physical/moral beauty especially as conceived by the
Greek philosophers, the kind of beauty that is more than mere physical beauty. The
true aesthetics is, from Plato’s view point, and is possible from beyond mimesis.

The ambivalence of Plato over the real purpose of mimesis and the change
in its semantics is actually because of its final relationship conceived with truth or
Form of the beautiful. It centres upon the ideality of physical beauty and not the physical beauty as such. The impact of Plato’s critique of mimesis and his strenuous trajectory to develop aesthetics beyond mimesis in its ordinary sense of ‘copying’ is undoubtedly a major contribution in Art history. This strenuous trajectory turns ‘mimesis’ into mimesis of the form on the one hand and form from his very well-known philosophical perspective becomes form of both beauty and virtue on the other.

The carpenter works with eyes aiming toward the ‘form’ significantly not with eyes on the Form, the individual bed is something less than the actual Form. This shortcoming is an honest failing after a decent try, or no illegitimate act brought the carpentered object into existence. If the Form is an object of knowledge, human creators at least possess true opinion. Without being philosophers, they stand in a legitimate relationship to philosophical knowledge. Thus, the second category is not a domain of imitation. The table, though modelled on the form of table does not mimic that form. So the table in a painting is not to use the words with which people mis-interpret the ‘imitation of an imitation’. Nevertheless Plato’s phrase ‘imitation of appearance’ characterizes the artistic mimesis as a compounded problem or intensifies a weakness present in the existing objects. It not only fails but fails twice. While the first and second categories reflect knowledge and true opinion, respectively, the third category is a product of ignorance or even something worse. But painting and other visual arts are exemplified from the ill treatment since they are never Plato’s main targets. He wants the mimesis in painting to reveal by analogy something about mimesis in poetry. So he has to justify his analogy which
Socrates launches into a condemnation of tragedy and its ‘father’ Homer. (Halliwell, Stephen. 1984). This apparent attack is designed to show that poetry too imitates appearance and the purpose shows that the poet writes without knowledge.

Socrates returns to his analogy between poetry and painting. If in a painting depicted a table and spotted its falseness, the soul’s rational impulse must be part of the knowledge that the table in the painting is not a real table. However, it established one fundamental principle that the soul inclines in more than one direction, that conflict represents the work of more than one faculty or part of the soul. So being taken in by an optical or artistic illusion must be the activity of some part of the soul that is not identical with reason. Invoking psychological theory integrates the critique of poetry into the Republic’s overarching argument. The dialogue identifies justice with a balance among reason, the high-spiritedness that Plato calls thumos or to thumoeides, and the desires collectively known as epithumiai. This controlled balance is the happiest state available for human souls as well as the most moral. Thus imitation not only the soul’s justice, but it brings both vice and misery. Plato does not specify the irrational part in question in this passage and indeed thinking the sun is the size of your hand does not feel like either anger overwhelming you or desires tempting. The illusions have also to do with irrationality of motive. He illustrates that five characters types, eide of soul, graded from best to worst. The pleasure is the lowest soul that, that the body delights not in true beings but in ‘idols of true pleasure’ and painted images. Skiagraphia was an impressionistic manner of painting that juxtaposed contrasting hues to create illusionist shadow and intensify colour. Plato disapproved this that, where the
desirous part of the soul and finds its objects to be mere idols, it determines mimesis to be a show of mere idols and concludes that it keeps company with the soul’s desirous part. The dictator is ‘at the third remove’ from the oligarch that his pleasure is ‘a soul’s’ pleasure. The oligarch’s soul in turn stands third below the kingly man and the imitator third from the king and the truth.

The language equation of base pleasures is with illusory ones in third place idol compared to the truth of the oligarchic to its attack on art. If it can show that, an art form fosters interest in illusions it will have gone a long way toward showing that the art form keeps company with irrational desires. But Plato commendably did not confine himself to reasoning by analogy from painting to verse. He recognizes that though analogies can illuminate a subject they also encourage lazy reasoning. Socrates proposed looking at imitative poetry on its own terms, not just as a painting made of words. He exerts himself to show on independent grounds that poetry presents false representations of virtue, and that because of their falseness those images nourish irrational motives until all but the finest souls in the audience lose control over themselves.

An essential premise is what ‘Book 3’ acknowledged as an exception to its critique that the imitation of virtuous and thoughtful characters is not apt to happen. Socrates has tragedy in mind and observes that playwrights know neither the quiet philosophical type nor profit from putting that type on stage before spectators who came to the theatre to see something showily agitated. Here Plato intensifies his condemnation of mimesis, no longer a dangerous technique when it presents the wrong types of people but a technique that never presents any other kind. Being as
he is an impulsive impassioned man, the tragic hero behaves incompatibly with the dictates of reason. An illusion of virtue guides him. His son dies and he does not save the tears for a private moment but lets them flow publicly and at length. The spectators’ reason is appalled that their other impulses rejoice. Plato knows that even his upright contemporaries check their reason at the door when they enter the tragic theatre. They figure there is no harm in weeping along with the hero, enjoying the emotional release without the responsibility one has in real life situations. Moreover, in this way, dramatic illusion induces bad habits of indulging the passions, and the soul that had learned self-control sets about unlearning it.

Incidentally, this part of the argument turns on an assumption that Plato asserts but never discusses that *mimesis* is the presentation of characters. Sometimes speaks of *mimesis* in other terms (*mimesis* of virtues), the argument about the encouragement of passions requires that objects of poetic representation be humans. What Plato called *literary works* of his time practice, is called *representation*. He claims that they represent human beings.\textsuperscript{xii} (Cooper, John, (ed). 1997)

Character is the essence of epic and drama, Plato’s emphasis on character predisposes him not to find philosophical worth in literature. A character speaks from a single point of view. Bring several characters together representing several idiosyncratic perspectives on the world and the very idea of deriving a general statement from the work becomes impossible. Aristotle notably based on his appraisal of tragedy on the premise that tragedy imitates not people but actions. From his privileging of plot over character, Aristotle goes on to find general statements in poetry, philosophical ones. In the process Plato concedes to poetic *mimesis* was
indeed the *mimesis* of characters and it may indeed not Issue statements of epistemic merit.


Joseph Margolis, 1978, Philosophy looks at the Arts ”. Encyclopaedia of Britannica, Inc.

