The Department of English

Raja N. L. Khan Women's College (Autonomous)

Midnapore, West Bengal

Study Material--2

On

Background of Classical Literature

(Mimesis, Satire, Athenian City State)

For

Course: English Hons.

SEM: IV

Paper: HCC8

Session: 2019-2020

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Date: 18th May, 2020

❖ Mimesis:

Mimesis is a "term used by Plato and Aristotle when discussing art in general to describe one of art's functions, namely the copying of external appearances, or the representation of life in drama" (*Oxford Companion to Classical Literature*, P. 379). In ancient Greece 'mimesis' was a very important concept regarding the creation of works of art. Plato and Aristotle saw 'mimesis' in the representation of nature and human nature as reflected in the dramatic works.

Plato told about 'mimesis' in *Ion* and *The Republic* (Book II, III, X). In *Ion* he writes about poetry and he says that poetry is one type of art that reflects divine madness and there is less importance of 'knowledge'. At the same time, he mentions that poetry does not bring out truth as it is the concerned area of the philosophers. In Book X of *The Republic,* Plato mentions Socrates' metaphors of three beds: one bed exists as an idea made by God (the Platonic ideal, or form: this theory is attributed to Plato. For him the physical world is not as real or true as the timeless and absolute idea. According to this theory, the forms and ideas are capitalized as "Forms" and "Ideas"); one is made by the carpenter, in 'imitation' of God's idea; one is made by the artist in 'imitation' of the carpenter's imitation. Every poetry from Homer onwards is the 'imitation' of its subject but not the reality. Socrates also in his *Apology* observed that "poets are often at a loss to explain their own poetry" (*Oxford Companion to Classical Literature*, P. 17). Thus, for Plato, the concept of art is 'mimesis', 'imitation' as he compares it to holding up a mirror to an object.

Aristotle also defines 'mimesis' as the perfection and the imitation of nature. For him, art is something more than imitation. It reflects a search for the perfect, the timeless, the absolute with the help of mathematical concepts; it's related to a contrast between being and becoming. The nature is always in a flux, always full of change and decay but art has the power to search for the everlasting thing. Unlike Plato, Aristotle mentions four causes: the formal cause, it's like the blueprint; the material cause, the thing which is made out of the blueprint; efficient cause, it denotes the process and the agent who helps in that process; the final cause, it's the good or the end of thing or the purpose. His *Poetics* is regarded as the counterpart of Platonic conception of poetry. Aristotle states that human beings are mimetic beings and among them there is always a feeling, an urge to produce texts that would have the ability to represent reality.

Both Plato and Aristotle contrasted 'mimesis' with 'diegesis' or narrative as 'mimesis' shows and 'diegesis' tells.

❖ Satire:

The origin of 'satire' is vague except the Latin word *satura* which is the feminine form of *satur*, meaning 'full'. But there is one probable suggestion about its meaning—satire exhibits 'variety' or 'mixture'. The modern scholars claim that satire originated in Greece with the creative hands of Archilochus and Hipponax who became famous writing spiteful iambic poetry against their opponents and the writers of Old Comedy, namely Aristophanes who used to attack many important figures of that time. But the Roman educator and rhetorician Marcus Fabius Quintilian claimed the origin of satire to be Roman: *satura quidem tota nostra est*. Again, Horace in his satires mentions the writers of Old Comedy as his forerunners. But one thing is very clear that satire achieved a matured form in the Roman times; the form was developed from all sides by the Roman literary and creative hands. They gave advanced shape to satire. But satire is completely different from satyr plays. Satires showed the author's capacity as good humourist creating discourses on the contemporary issues related to society, literature and even the personalities of famous figures.

According to the Romans, the first writer of satire in verse was Ennius (239- 169BC) and Lucilius (180-102BC) was a full-fledged satirist giving new shape to satire and he used hexameter. Another famous satirist after Lucilius was M. Terentius Varro (116-27BC) whose model of satire was based on the mixture of prose and verse, but these satires were not so much bitter in their attack. Horace became an important figure among the satirists. He wrote at around 30s BC and he was mostly influenced by Lucilius but his satires did have less dangerous criticism against the influential people. Persius (34-62 AD) also showed less invective tone in his satires.

But in king Nero's time, the track of satire was slightly changed. Caricatures were found with Seneca's *Apocolocyntosis*. Roman poet Juvenal became another important figure giving new shape to satirical writings which were accepted whole-heartedly by men and women of that time. In the 4th century AD, the form of Menippean satire continued to exist. The emperor Julian engaged himself in writing the character assessments of his predecessors.

❖ Athenian City State:

The city of Athens in Classical Greece was the chief city of Attica and major urban centre of notable city-sate or polis. In Classical period the city stood about 5 km from the sea and was surrounded on all sides by mountain except the southern part. Athenian democracy was

established in 508 BC under Cleisthenes following the tyranny of Isagoras. The system of Athens remained unchanging and achieved its peak in the age of Pericles. From all sides Athens became a remarkable and glorious city state. In the classical period, the city was more enriched by the improvement of art and culture. It became a prominent centre for learning and philosophical thinking. Plato's Akademia and Aristotle's Lyceum were established here. The soil of Athens produced many precious gems like Socrates, Plato, Aristotle and others who helped in giving their birthplace a new shape. Politically, socially and culturally Athens became remarkable in the western European continents and thus Athens sowed the seed for democracy giving proper shape to western civilization.

It is already mentioned that Athens was surrounded by mountains. On the north-west it was enclosed by Mount Parnes, on the south-east by Moubt Hymettus, on the north-east by Mount Pentelicus. The city of Athens was consisted of two parts: i) The City which has two parts, **The Upper City** or **acropolis** and **The Lower City**, ii) The port city. The City was surrounded by **long walls** from the Bronze Age. The **acropolis**, the citadel of Athens, is a roughly square rock rising steeply from the middle of the plain, about 50 meters high, 350 meters long, and 150 meters wide; its sides were naturally scarped on all sides except the west end. This city was surrounded by Cyclopean wall and later some portions of the wall was rebuilt. The top of the acropolis was covered with many temples and bronze statues. The **Lower City** was built around the acropolis and that was surrounded by many hills. The **hills** like the Areopagus, the Hill of the Nymphs, the Mouseion, the Pnyx were important aspects of the city. The **streets** like Piraean street, the street of the Tripods, the Panathenaic Way were some notable streets of classical Athens. There were many notable **gates** all over the city, some of them were Dipylon, the Knight's Gate, the Gate of the Dead, the Gate of Diochares, the Acharnian Gate. The names of some **districts** were the Deme Melite, the Kollytos, Koele, Diomea and many more. The **public buildings** of Athens were also very much enriched. Many temples were there and Olympieion was the most important. The Bouleuterion was the Senate House, the Tholos was a round building around the Senate house, the Stoae was used as resort, some theatre houses were there like The Threatre of Dionysus and other important buildings were The Panathanaic stadium. The **suburb areas** like the Outer Kerameikos, the Lyceum, the Cynocarges were also no less distinguished.

Athens did have a high culture. It was enriched in all spheres of life and society. From the end of Persian wars to the Macedonian conquest, Athens reached the peak of prosperity as a centre for literature, philosophy, arts and so on. Many distinguished personalities contributed

in this development; dramatists like **Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides, Aristophanes**, philosophers like **Socrates, Plato, Aristotle**, historians like **Herodotus, Thucydides Xenophon**, poet like **Simonides** and sculptor like **Phidias**. **Pericles** became a great figure who showed his interest in this development and he also contributed a lot in the construction of great monuments in Classical Athens.

Women in Classical Athens did not have enough space for themselves; they did not have freedom like men. They were not allowed to get formal education. They did have two duties to perform: bearing children and taking care of the household activities. They were not allowed to take part in pubic interaction and even they were forbidden to go out in public, though these were basically practiced in wealthy families. Normally, women had to draw water and go to market. So, women's rights were limited as they were not allowed to take part in any kind of public activities that are restricted only for the men. They had no right to represent themselves in law and political affairs. They were dominated by the men and their rights were very limited.

Athenian military army was very enriched and brought success in wars like Peloponnesian Wars with the help of some new techniques. The use and importance of light troops increased with the introduction of the peltasts.

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(Please read the attachments below)

Mimesis

William H. *Gass*

IF GREEK THEATER HAD deep religious implications, as some think, and often functioned as a ritual would, then the actor on the stage, his features obscured by a mask and robe, might be thought to be a mouthpiece for the gods. If the play was significant enough, the words powerful and rich and wise, a moment could occur in his impersonation during which the divine spirit entered him; the soul of the actor who, a moment before, had been reciting the playwright's words might, so to speak, stand aside, and his speech take on an imprimatur its actual author could not lay claim to—its metamorphosis would be obvious to every ear—for (in a switch no different than Zeus's frequent changes of form to further an amorous prank or political ploy) these words would be severed from their source of utterance in the actor and from the hand of their author as well; they would participate in the divine; while the audience heard the speech of nature as they had in former times when leaves whispered and torrents roared and the world, more than words, was alive.

Nothing has changed. When the text sings, the reader listens, and soon her soul sings, too; she reenacts thought and passion's passage, adopts Chaucer's, Shakespeare's, Milton's tone, her head echoes with sounds no longer made by Henry James, who is but a portly poor old bachelor after all, and she is not the she of household worry either, or lawyer at her legal tomes, but these words are the words of Sophocles, then, of Oedipus just now blind, and the world is the world it once was when the world was alive.

Like most words, "mimesis" is a nest of meanings. Shadings fly from it like fledgling birds: imitation, representation, replication, impersonation, or portrayal do for Plato; nowadays we could add copy, counterfeit, dupe. Grammatically different forms of what is called "the mimesis group" designate the action of mimicry—or the actor, mime, or mockingbird that performs the tune—while others aim at either the subject of imitation or its result, or sometimes indicate the arena of representation itself: the agora, law courts, or the stage. Mimesis calls the theater home, some say; it is derived from the

dance; it belongs to mockery and mime, not always silent, and is often concerned with events and situations in daily life; no, it is the creation of effigies—statues, scarecrows, voodoo dolls—it is the means by which we call upon the gods. But did these meanings of mimesis really compete, or is the competition to be found in the disputatious pages of contemporary scholars, who prefer one meaning (theirs) over others, much as if, in a mulligan stew, one conferred honor and dominance to six pearl onions.

For Plato and Aristotle, I think, the word is still a wardrobe, but it is stashed backstage where the masks are kept and the chorus instructed. The actor becomes his role, we sometimes say; but what does the role become? I remember that Shakespeare says very little about Hamlet's weight, nor does he give Iago thin lips and an evil nose, as Dickens would be sure to. How can I impersonate a creature whose visible form is unknown? Merely claim to be him or her? Zeus dons and doffs bodies the way we do clothes. Clouds are camels one minute, streaming hair the next. Some things, like Proteus, have no fixed form, so I could claim I was, while in my workaday togs, one of the sea's moods. In many paintings Jesus is as blond and blue-eyed as a Nazi.

If Socrates has a snub nose and thyroid eyes, his portrait should have the same painted nose put in the same painted place, and the same swollen eyes painted as protruding—paint for point and point for paint over the whole head. But what good is a likeness *when it is the reality of the thing that should be realized*—should be, yet can't be—not in another medium. Once, when the world was young and still alive as liquor, the soul itself might slide from fern or face into the leaves that covered Eve and Adam, or love pass from the lover's adoration into the heart of the adored. But now, when the gods were called upon to come from their own play into ours, how could the transfer be effected?

A god enters, but speaks Sophocles anyway, having, as some say, no mind of his own. In the theater it is only the words that can achieve the change. The music, the moving limbs, the spectacle from painted drop to gaudy robe and dancing lads, add their emphasis, their rhythm, their emotion to the speech, but what, when Apollo approaches . . . what will . . . what will the god say? And the gods will have the character the poets give them; the gods will wear whatever raiment can be sewn; the gods will do as they are told. . . . But a person that the audience knows well, such as Socrates in Aristophanes' satires, will have to have at least the demeanor Athenians

are used to. Certainly this is true of Plato's own challenge to the dramatists. *The Dialogues* are nothing less than the theater of reason where Plato's Socrates plays the role of the real one. There is an irony in this that has not gone unnoticed . . . by Gunter Gebauer and Christoph Wulf, for instance, who write: "There is an element of contradiction in the fact that Plato criticizes art as mimesis in principle but at the same time works mimetically in producing dialogues in which artistic elements are present."

In the early dialogues, Plato may be considered to be presenting Socrates to us in his full historical reality, in which case the philosopher's mimetic skills are governed by historical concerns; whereas, in dialogues of the so-called middle period, Plato's interests are more and more "artistic" and "fictional." But I suspect that Socrates' great speech that concludes the *Apology* is about as faithfully mimetic as Pericles' funeral oration in the imaginative reenactment of Thucydides. Nevertheless, Pericles must sound Periclean, and speak as the occasion demanded, just as Socrates must press his case for suicide in the *Crito* because so many are alive who know he did so.

But if the features of the person to be represented have to be created, the chances are they will replicate the characteristics chosen by the first imitator who undertook the task and did Buddha fat and Hamlet thin, Desdemona blonde because Othello's black, Jesus fair with a light beard and wavy hair, handsome as heaven—as if he'd been there; because the audience has attended these plays, too, and knows what Apollo came arrayed in apart from light, and what suited the Furies and Clytemnestra's moods. Although each author interprets the myths in his own way, what Electra says has to be in harmony with what Electra was in her last show, her previously recounted story, her rap sheet. Otherwise she'll not be she, and fool nobody. The operatic custom that permits a fat Carmen to shake the flats when she dances the seguidilla will not travel any better than the local wine. The success you might have in making yourself similar to somebody else will depend upon the ignorance of the audience you intend to fool, and the success, in creating a tradition, of any previous proponents of your scam. Plato knows there are no gods, that the gods are merely Hesiod's manner of speaking. How much of Homer did he honor as the truth, or were the poets liars in every rhyme and line?

I bring this unpleasantness up because it may help us to understand the relation appearance has to reality. If reality remains unknown, then Punch is Punch and Judy Judy, both as real as the

husbands and wives in Devon or Westphalia they might have been used to represent, or as present in the world as the warring forces of good and evil. Furthermore, bowing before a curtain of ignorance, any appearance may choose its cause and claim it. I can be said to resemble my uncle Fred only by those who know both of us. If no one knows, no one can gainsay it. If no one knows, no one will care.

Plato became convinced that Parmenides was too quick to dismiss this world of incessant change, too eager to move on (itself an act of deception) from its illusions to the eternal unshakable plenum that Being really was. These fleeting appearances had to be saved, yet they could be accounted for only if they were explained; and they could be explained perfectly provided this world were indeed a play, much as Shakespeare and others would describe it. It could be saved if the mime it made were as successful as the speeches of Aeschylus and Sophocles, and the world was understood to participate in the Forms through its acts of so eloquently copying them, reality descending to touch our lives like the gods once inhabited the speech of Prometheus, perhaps, or Athena as she made her vows.

And doesn't Plato say in the *Laws* [817b], when the playwrights clamor to be allowed to ply their trade in his second best State, that

> we also according to our ability are tragic poets, and our tragedy is the best and noblest; for our whole state is an imitation of the best and noblest life, which we affirm to be indeed the very truth of tragedy. You are poets and we are poets, both makers of the same strains, rivals, and antagonists in the noblest of dramas, which true law can alone perfect, as our hope is. Do not then suppose that we shall all in a moment allow you to erect your stage in the agora, or introduce the fair voices of your actors, speaking above our own, and permit you to harangue our women and children, and the common people, about our institutions, in language other than our own, and very often the opposite of our own. For a state would be mad which gave you this licence, until the magistrates had determined whether your poetry might be recited, and was fit for publication or not.

Appearances are to be saved by being explained, not improved. It is important to the psyche that this world not be understood to be a deliberate lie, rather just a necessary one. Poets, it is true, do not make things up out of whole cloth. There *was* a Troy. It *was* destroyed. But they are song stitchers of low employ. They make quilts out of scraps and tatters, castoffs, rags, and misfitting sweaters,

which warm as well as the purest wool—a good that frugality might celebrate—if warming were the reason for the sheep.

Plato was of course aware, as many now who peruse these texts or attend these tragedies are not, that committees chose the plays that would compete; that money had to be raised for their performance, much as we squeeze uniforms from our local merchants to doll up our children's soccer teams; that politics was always an issue; that religious implications were rife; and that the aim of the citizens who performed these tasks was principally the reaffirmation of common ideals, and the strengthening of community spirit and purpose. It was important then that the dramas appeal to the public, cause the right sort of stir, and be accounted successes.

In the Athens of this time there was another contest: that between the poets, priests, philosophers, and politicians, for the power that the approval—the applause of the people—might give them. So that they might lead, they claimed to bear the solemn burden of the truth, a burden that many liars are eager to say they carry like an Olympic torch to light the public way. Plato's complaints about the poets—in this context where the truth of things is at stake—are, I think, entirely appropriate and right, because the truth, in the politician's oratory, arrives arrayed in rhetoric fit to the public's fears and wants, while in a poet's mouth, such truth becomes the sweet taste of the line, not the hard design of science or the rigor of philosophical argument. Rhyme, of the sort I have just employed, might be sugar to the ear and thus agreeable to the mind. Although Sophists like Gorgias might make a public show of their rhetorical gifts, it was the mimesis of the drama that most frequently encouraged passion and desire to rule the soul. In the arena of the theater, people sometimes charged the stage, shouted angrily, and even fainted. None of this was known to be a reaction to the premises of an argument.

Plato is critical of the mimesis of the poets and the painters because he has made Truth and Beauty predicates of the Good as every puritan has since. But he has plenty of positive use for mimesis in his own great contribution to aesthetics (in addition to the *Symposium*, of course), namely the cosmological dialogue, the *Timaeus*. This dialogue, cast in meaningful mythological terms, is a description of the making (the poesis) of the sensible universe. The Demiurge of the dialogue is a creator par excellence—the best, in fact, that could be imagined—and he will be responsible for the existence of appearance as well as its relation to reality.

From the Beginning there existed Being, Nonbeing, and the great Receptacle, Space. Being is understood as the realm of Forms, and these are formulas, as I prefer to see them, expressible in mathematical terms. The epistemological essence of Platonism (I shall foolhardily say) is that we shall recognize that we have knowledge in any sphere to the degree we can express it mathematically. In any case, these Forms are arranged in a hierarchy topped by the Good that contains them all. It does not, however, contain them the way Aristotle's idea of Being contains all that really is, for Aristotle's formulation is always in terms of genus and species expressed in extensional language—as spaces, or classes, or sets. For Aristotle, the widest, the most embracing class is the least informative one, and to say of anything that it has Being is to say the least possible about it; whereas, for Plato, the Good is an integration of other Forms the way flavors blend or colors mix, and we can find in this intentional interpretation remnants of animistic and naively realistic thinking, because Plato's daring formulae are like recipes interested in the qualitative flavor of ideas rather than classes that can enter a large sphere as dogs might join cats in the realm of pets without altering either their own nature or habits, those of cats, or even the defining properties of the class of pets. You can't mix paint with that expectation.

The realm of Forms has Being but it is not alive. Only the soul is alive. It is the moving principle, an intermediary between Being and the created world that it will animate. The Forms are the Demiurge's model. His palette is the chaos of sensible qualities Plato calls Nonbeing, though it is scarcely nothing. It is called Nonbeing because it is a mess, because without order there can be no Being. And what are these qualities? colors, noises, feelings, I suspect, flavors, pains probably? aches wandering around without knees or any other place to inflict? smells that have never known noses, sours apart from their whiskeys, and every adjective as it would be if bereft of its noun—unattached, meaningless, waiting to modify. They are adrift like seawrack in the Great Receptacle, as Plato calls it. In the womb of things to be. Time will be created as the moving image of eternity, but emptiness has always been, and here it serves as the canvas for the artist, the place the pigments will finally find their regal robes and handsome face.

With every element prepared, the Demiurge makes the Pythagoreans look smart by fashioning the frame of the universe from such simplicities as their treasured right triangle, whose figured image,

when flipped so that one shape lies provocatively upon another, causes a rectangle to appear, and when spun creates a cone, and by various whirls around its hypotenuse produces whatever geometry requires, since spheres are cones rolled the right way.

Three important factors in creativity are singled out, and these three remain as resolutely present now as they were then. The Demiurge must suffer some things to come about through sheer Necessity: space is what it is, the qualities are what they are, the mural's wall is but ten feet high, and there is an oval window in it; the words of any language, its grammar, its historical contexts, are as given as a flaw in the sculptor's marble, or as the nubble of the canvas that requires it to be sized, or the fact that the blond the studio has cast in the lead has a lisp more prominent than her notorious chest. On the other hand, many things come about through reason alone, when the Demiurge's intentions are nowhere impeded. Finally, for most effects, the Demiurge must "persuade necessity," as Plato puts it. Here the artist's skill is at its utmost: that flaw in the marble becomes the center of the composition; necessity is not merely the mother but it is the entire household of invention; and what could not be helped is made a help, or as the formula would later be: for the artist, the arbitrary is a gift to form.

Reality is not alive. It is the Pythagorean world of number and as still as the plenum of Parmenides. But think of the plight of the Forms. Put yourself in their place. You are a law of motion yet you do not move, nothing moves, there is no performance. You are the way things would change if anything did but it does not—a falling body would go splat if there were bodies and if they fell, but they do not; or you are the definition of a species extinct before knowing life and have only imaginary members; and though you are an object of knowledge, you will never know what knowing is, or like a castled virgin—flaxen-haired Beauty herself—what it is like to be seen, longed for, touched, loved.

Plato never tells us why the Demiurge felt that need . . . to create an inferior realm, a necessarily imperfect copy of the Forms, a realm of Becoming . . . but I think I have suggested a reason. The Forms have what Aristotle would later call "second-grade actuality"—the kind that things made for a function possess while waiting for that function to be realized: the tool in the box, the book on the shelf, the manuscript at the bottom of a drawer, a talent not yet discovered, young men at puberty before being killed in a war. The realm of Forms will not be perfect if it remains as pure as Plato at first

imagines it to be. So its image is required. The forms have implicit denotations. What does it mean to say that there are theories, laws, explanations, definitions without the heat, movement, makeup, character, or morals they delimit, regulate, and rule. Reality needs appearance to complete it.

The world needs souls if the world would be moved, and souls need poets to move them. Pythagorean formulae that resemble those for the harmonic mean are mixed like ingredients for a Christmas loaf by the Demiurge, and out of these numerals soul stuff is rolled into orbits and raised into spheres: the passage of the planets and the ceiling of the sky with all its stars becomes the soul of the world, now understood, in purely animistic terms, to be a living, breathing animal within one of whose countless furrows we live like mites, mostly ignored. Such an amazing dream.

The movement of the planets is rational, therefore it is circular, another bit of animistic logic that prefers cycles: the daily sun, those of human generations, the phases of the moon, the periodicity of women, the revivals of the seasons, and the return of past times like comets from a long journey. And while such perfection the circle has suits the planets, who resemble real gods—unolympian, unanthropomorphic, undeterrable—it will not do for man or any other living things whose perfection falls far short of even the circulations of the hula hoop. Now comes a moment in Plato's account that is straight out of the atelier. The Demiurge may not make man more rational than he is, yet his touch will do just that, so, having created reason, fashioning the lower parts of the soul is left to the planetary gods, subordinate workmen, and from them our vegetable lives and our animal instincts are made, as if the background of a mural were left to the master's best pupils to practice on. Frank Gehry cannot be expected to have designed everything he signs his name to.

These identical three-part souls are sown throughout the universe and bring to life the bodies they enter, with the curious consequence that a carrot will possess as full a soul as the rabbit who fancies it or the hunter who snares, and it will be the inadequacies of their respective bodies that will determine individuality. Souls have no more individuality than a plastic drinking cup. So if you are smarter than I am, it is because your body (hence the lower orders of the soul) has less influence on your thoughts and actions than mine has.

That is to say: you are better ruled. This is another mimetic element in the Platonic system, and develops from a proportional metaphor: the soul resides in the person as the person resides in the

state. The soul, it seems, is a little kingdom that may be run well or badly depending on whether it is governed by reason or by passions and desires. The political entity that Plato calls the Republic has a soul as well. It is composed of the three classes of citizens in the state: guardians, functionaries, and workers. Of the cardinal virtues, three are particularly appropriate to the structure of the soul and the ruling organization of the commonwealth: temperance suits the workers who are mastered by their appetites, as fruits and vegetables are—breeding and feeding—next, two kinds of courage, of body and spirit, are appropriate to the soldiers and administrators, while wisdom, of course, is special to the guardians. Justice, the final virtue of the four, is the harmony in each soul that is reflected in an analogous harmony in the state, each element performing its proper task.

Using this scheme it is possible to describe governments in terms of the balance of the classes in them, and whether the citizens have been properly sorted out. Tyrants, who were as plentiful then as they apparently always are, furnished examples of city states ruled by the worst rather than the best, and democracy (by which Plato understood a government largely run by tribes or demes, with officials chosen from them somewhat at random) to be little better run than if they were not run at all.

We have not yet passed through the entire mimetic chain. If the Forms are definitions—definitions of functions—they are also instructions, and the world of appearance participates in the Forms (one meaning of mimesis) by carrying out these instructions, though how specifically Plato never makes clear. Any bed, for instance, will exhibit the physical laws that make its structure suitable for sleep, a need that human beings have, according to a Form's program for us. But we do not dwell in this world the way trees or stones or beds do, unconscious of their surroundings. Is what we see when we see, and feel when we touch, a copy, too?

It would be too much to expect that a culture that has just discovered the self, just made the distinction between appearance and reality, located abstract ideas as if they were stars from another hemisphere, and begun the foundations of logic as well as the entire remaining table of contents for philosophy, to have driven their epistemology so quickly into subjectivity as later the Enlightenment would; but in the *Theaetetus* Plato has put his pedal to the metal. He fashions for us another amazing sexual metaphor. Such images appear to be his specialty.

He conjectures that when we see, rays emanating from the eyes

encounter, as a searchlight might, other rays reflected by or sent forth from objects. These rays intermingle like passionate limbs and from their intercourse are born twins (which, as we know, are a sign their mother has suffered trespass as well as the owner's tread over his rightful property). Then the eye *sees.* That is one child. And the object *becomes* white. That is the other. After all, what has Plato's favorite word for our world been but that of Becoming. Perhaps Plato has imagined one too many rays, though today we wallow in frequencies. Still, if I blow the dog's whistle, his ears hear, and the whistle grows loud. We would probably say: for him; but the Greeks don't doubt the public nature of appearances. The world is as external, as objective, as the facade of the palace at Thebes. And Oedipus enters for all to see.

In Plato's day, art was becoming more mimetic by the minute. And that meant: more faithful to appearances. Figures were now individualized, not so hieratic, symbolic, and formal; casts were being taken from the bodies of athletes to the scandal of the connoisseurs; decoration was looser and less geometrical; paintings that deceived the eye were marveled at (Plato was not pleased that painters were proud when birds pecked at their painted grapes); drama was undergoing the same slow transformation: had not Agathon—the writer whose victory in the theatrical competitions the *Symposium* celebrates—introduced, for the first time, nonmythological elements? and what was one to say about Euripides' sensationalism, and his vulgar pandering to the passions of the populace? Aristophanes had made fun of the saintly Socrates before the Athenians murdered him. Artists were in cahoots with the priests who looked after the numerous sanctuaries that had sprung up as if piles of rock had been watered into bloom, and votive objects and other offerings to the gods had collected in the precincts of the shrines like leaves in a windless corner. The politicians, moreover, had led the people into an ill-favored, unfortunate, and lengthy war. Plato's attitude would become a familiar one. Mass culture has been eating away at high culture's cookie for as long as baking has been a business. Sculptors were manufacturing huge heavily bedizened statues for the public to marvel at, and countless pretty boys in marble toes or ladies dressed in plump breasts and long thighs that Roman pillagers would later resell to the Latin bourgeois, received the ardent admiration of the masses—not just then, but, in the guise of Roman copies, since.

What a pleasure it was to produce reasons why copying was so detrimental to the rational spirit, and put painters in their place,

because the people and scenes they painted were already artifacts, already appearances, already removed from reality by at least one degree. Falsehoods follow falsehoods like pilgrims to their shrine. The world loves the flattery that all likeness intends.

However, that very character of mimesis is essential to the educational process, much of which must take place before the age of reason, and therefore very often by means of imitation. The youth must be provided with proper role models—to employ one of our popular euphemisms. Plato has still another use for his proportional metaphor of the divisions of the soul and state, because when we are infants, we are also as vegetables, we eat and excrete, cry and kick, and our parents are expected to supply the moderation that would otherwise be lacking. As youths we are controlled by our passions, and we must be taught to bleed for peace instead of oil, to direct our feelings to their appropriate objects, to love the good and hate the ill informed. When adults, we rule ourselves. This is an ideal, of course, because when the State is badly managed, its citizens remain children; they fire their guns into the sky; they die for the wrong causes; they allow their passions to be stirred by raucous music; they read only one book.

Alas, for consistency, if we tell only nice things about Zeus and his fellow loungers on Mount Olympus, so that the youth will have something to be devout about, we shall have to tell lies, for the gods are as wicked as you and I, and don't rule the way guardians are supposed to. Lying is not a seemly exercise, nevertheless Plato recommends a shield of lies to protect the innocence of the people and enable them to be more easily managed.

Yet one more proportion can be lined up alongside Plato's controlling metaphor, namely parallel levels of knowledge. When the appetitive portion dominates, the soul lives in a state of ignorance, is psychologically a child, and should be allowed only a workman's productive role in the ideal Republic. He or she depends upon successful praxis to make do, and learns a trade by imitating those who already have it. Skills, like casting bronze, are passed down from a master to his sons like recipes for stews, and may include good, bad, or irrelevant advice, often a surprising mingling of superstition and good sense. Administrators are allowed doxa—opinions—beliefs that, whether right or wrong, are not supported by satisfactory reasons. Only guardians possess the logos, theoretical knowledge, the justification that makes some opinions sound.

These three levels of "knowledge and education"—praxis, doxa,

logos—match up with the parts of the soul, and those with the stages of human growth and psychological types, and those with the classification of citizens along with their appropriate virtues, to form the soul of the State; and in every case the connection is established through mimesis—mimesis as either impersonation, participation, or copy—and one in which Form is made manifest through the order it lends to illusion.

If Plato is prepared to put every meaning of mimesis to use, and make it a modest philosophical jack-of-all-trades, Aristotle appears inclined to confine it to more purely aesthetic contexts. Either because of the fragmentary character of the *Poetics,* its sketchy lecture-note quality, or its immense concision, there seem to be more flagrant misrepresentations of its contents than most early tracts have had to suffer. As Stephen Halliwell points out in *The Aesthetics of Mimesis,* "The philosopher's concept of mimesis has played a vital role in the long story of Western attitudes to artistic representation, [but] that role has often been mediated through the reworking and misrepresentation of his ideas, especially those found in the *Poetics.*" I would suggest that the philosopher's concept has not played a vital role, after all, but only misconstruals of it have, much in the same way that the Bible has suffered from its readers, so that what it has been taken to mean, not what it means, matters. Falsehood and error have played a far larger role in history than truth and correctness, for falsehoods always find a way to be convenient and of use.

Even if Aristotle had said, "Art is an imitation of nature," the words he would have used—*techné,* mimesis, *physis*—would have given the game away for each of these terms has considerable philosophical significance in Aristotle's work, and understood in that context, make the formula one I, at least, might love, instead of this infamous sentence's historic meanings, all of which are vulgar and abhorrent. Aristotle says he is going to investigate one of the productive arts—the craft of making poems—and that investigation will involve distinguishing poetry's genres and their particular effects, defining the elements that constitute the craft, especially how to turn traditional plots into decent drama, as well as whatever else proves to be pertinent during the course of his study. And he will begin, as he customarily does, with first principles.

He could have said he was going to study the skill of a pilot of ships, whose aim is a safe arrival in harbor, or that of a physician, whose purpose is healing; but neither is a part of poiesis—the

productive arts. He could have made his subject the sandal maker's art: what kinds of sandals there were, what end each was designed to serve, and how you went about making them: the tools you would need, the materials you might choose, and so forth. But, you might say, in that case where does mimesis come in? Some animals have padded paws, some have hooves, some skins as leathery as gloves. But we have no such protection from the sharp stones of the road, so the cobbler remedies that lack, not by imitating hooves but by following the hints thrown out by nature, and bringing shoes into being mechanically without any thought of resemblance, only one of function. The principle of change lies in the cobbler, and is clearly external to its object. When the artisan goes to work, he makes things by *following the pattern of nature* (that is the right rendering of "mimesis" here): it makes lava, he manufactures plastics; it grows talons, he invents corkscrews; it encourages eagles, he runs after rats with baited traps.

There are some things in nature that need to be fixed, and there are others that aren't there at all, but ought to be. The physician mends, the cobbler adds. Potions that physicians might need, our chemists sometimes supply. It will be like that with the craft of poetry. Tragedy, it will turn out, is a purgative, and good for the body politic—an analogy that has its origins in Plato, but one which Aristotle is happy to continue. He was the son of a physician, after all.

There is another consequence of Aristotle's treatment of poetry as a craft. As Gerald Else remarks in *Aristotle's Poetics: The Argument*, "... there is not a word anywhere in the *Poetics* about the persons Homer and Sophocles. The artist does not produce *qua* man, person, individual, but *qua* artist; or as Aristotle says, with his special brand of vividness, 'it is accidental to the sculptor that he is Polyclitus.'" Another example, updated from Plato: the art of medicine is a body of knowledge that the physician internalizes. Then when Dr. Weisenheimer cures my gout, it is the art of medicine that does it. When he botches the job, he does so as old Joe Weisenheimer of Louisa Alcott Lane. When the Romantic poets fly their kites, it is the wind that keeps them airborne. They just think is it their own hot air.

So poetry is placed among the productive arts. In the most businesslike fashion possible. I don't think one can stress this placement too strongly. As Gerald Else concludes, "His treatise is not a discussion of 'poetry' in either, or any, sense of the English term; it is, in all sadness and sobriety, an analysis of the nature and functioning of the

art of poetry and of its species."

It is not *about* Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex.* And those species: what are they? They are the epic (which is recited), tragedy and comedy (which are performed), and dithyrambic poetry (which is sung by a chorus). Flute and lyre music are also deemed imitations. Aristotle goes on to say that some arts use color and shape, but all the others employ the voice, or are at least audible.

Aristotle resides in an oral culture still. Moreover, he knows that the written word can resemble only other written words. "The cat sat on the mat" in no way imitates its situation. When Creon enters in a snit, however, his words enable the actor to impersonate his character, mimic his tone of voice, and say what he might say under the circumstances. We also know that he won't talk American, though he does in this translation.

> Citizens, I have come because I heard
> deadly words spread about me, that the king
> accuses me. I cannot take that from him.
>
> —*Oedipus the King,* David Grene translation

The stage direction "Creon enters" does not imitate an action, it orders it. The words Creon speaks do not imitate his state of mind, they express it. However, Creon's speaking them—his tone of voice, his choice of the Americanism "cannot take that from him"—do help the actor impersonate Creon's character and consequently could be said to be an imitation.

In the case of music, both Plato and Aristotle seem to find it especially infectious—that martial music makes one martial, that lullabies lull, and so on—that is, they encourage participation, but it is the dynamics of music, more than anything else, that is transferable, and it is music, too, that achieves its harmony through the formal relations of its sounds and the manner of their production, since the Pythagoreans had presumably discovered a connection between tones and the length of a lyre string. Its harmonies and disharmonies affect the morally important emotions; indeed, as Stephen Halliwell puts it in *The Aesthetics of Mimesis,* "They are enacted by the qualities of the artwork. That these qualities are 'in' the (musically organized) sounds themselves is inferred from music's capacity to convey emotional-cum-ethical feelings to the audience."

Previously I observed how Plato had argued for a division between the realm of Being and the world of Becoming that could only be

crossed on a bridge of mimesis. The Demiurge uses sensory qualities to imitate the Forms: the things of this world impersonate their real counterparts, and gain their secondary and only reality by participating in them. Aristotle, with so much common sense it seems daring, does not have a gulf he must cross because his Forms exist in every instance of their kinds. They are sunk in their particulars like posts. If all the members of a species are there, in that species, because they have "the same form," then might it not be possible to imagine a situation in which a form customarily found in one place was found in another as well? A musical score possesses a note structure that the performer follows and reproduces in the piece he plays; moreover, the auditory waves that microphones capture and transfer to digital tapes can boast that structure, too, as have a disc's grooves. It might only be a metaphor, but music's moods and the emotional coloration of our consciousness could share similar dynamic relationships without in the least having the same content.

Ultimately, Aristotle interprets the form/content connection first as a structure/function relation and finally as one of potency and act. To understand this we have to remind ourselves of Aristotle's classification of causes into four kinds, because they apply to the sources of action in a tragedy, and to the course of mimesis there, as surely as they do to nature and life generally. Every event has a material cause. It is made of something, sometimes several different kinds of things, and this matter must be considered, when confined to artistry, as canvas and pigment, words in a language, sounds from a flute, stone from a quarry. Every material will have its own actuality (the idea of something that is pure potentiality—prime matter—is entirely conceptual); that is, marble will have that stone's qualities and forms. These, however, will be the basis for the many things it might do or become. The efficient cause is simply the work done in order to realize those potentialities; it is energy enabled by tools and directed by skills, in the sculptor's case, so that out of the marble a marble fawn emerges.

The formal cause is what will be later called the object's essence, and like the material cause is a combination of what the thing actually is and what it can become because of what it actually is; however, the formal cause is its definition, and determines what a thing is destined to become or do if allowed to express its nature. In the case of a work of art, the formal cause, as I've said, lies outside the thing itself and resides in the artist. Nothing grows into a marble fawn on its own, though fawns do. Those principles of change that

reside within an object or event are said to be its entelechy—its direction of self-realization. The final cause is, of course, the end at which a course of action aims, the fully realized deer, or statue, or polished skill.

All this is elementary Aristotle. What scholars seem less inclined to do is to apply Aristotle's physics and metaphysics (even his ethics and his logic) to the principles of the *Poetics.* If we do that, many obscurities become immediately clear and the concision of the text understandable. For instance, a tragedy, Aristotle says, is the imitation of a morally serious action—clearly one that has taken place, or might take place, in the ordinary life of extraordinary people—in such a way as to show how its consequences follow inevitably from its nature. These consequences invariably involve the loss of eudaemonia, well-being, or self-fulfillment, not merely for the individual but for the society. So often catastrophe is the result of excess: of success, as if a vine choked the tree it twined upon; or certainty, as if you bet your life on your ability to guess right; or duty, pursuing what you think proper against every advice; or of innocence, or loyalty, or honesty itself, so often not the best policy because virtue is the way to ruin.

Aristotle advises the plot maker to concentrate upon a single unified action, and therefore one that is definable and has a beginning, middle, and an end. His advice is not as simpleminded as it sounds. It has to do, as he says later, with raveling and unraveling, tying the knot, and untying it.

The beginning of a play is complete when the dramatist has established a situation that implicitly contains the conclusion. It is the planted seed. Henry James used to feel that his beginnings always needed more material put in them to support the story, consequently they grew too large, so he studied various methods of foreshortening. For Aristotle, the play's course—the object of its mimesis—must resemble an entelechy. The play's middle occurs at that point in the arc of an arrow's flight when its rise weakens and the course of its return becomes inevitable. This is often seen as a reversal of fortune, since the action was initially regarded as a good and wise one, and prospers in that guise, before showing its true self, and reversing its direction. The conclusion is the completed actualization of what was there to be realized from the beginning. When there are many subordinate plot lines, the trick is to find one fulfillment that will satisfy them all.

The infamous unities of one place/one day are suggested only

because such a confinement makes far easier the disclosure of consequences. A tragedy should move like a syllogism from premises to conclusion. The fewer premises the better. The ordinary world rarely offers us such a sight because there are too many competing courses of action. The seed of a tree must not only cope with the earth it finds itself in and employ the moisture and nutrients that are there, but it must compete with other plants for its light and food, avoid being munched into oblivion by a deer, and stand up eventually against the elements, dodge disease, the sawmill, and the forest's fires. History is an account of accidents, collisions of causes, and its results are always maimed. Thousands are throwing their basketballs at the same basket. History hears only the din of disappointed ends. There is no song that isn't interrupted almost the moment it's begun. History is wreckage. Whereas the tragic action grows like a plant in a nursery or a bacterium in a laboratory. No one is permitted to knock it from its stand; no diseases darken its leaves, no worms chew its blooms. We can therefore see what it will be; what it is in its inner self—a complete action as rounded as a racecourse. Who better than Kant to warn us against actions with unintended consequences, advice that, given early, nevertheless comes to our politicians too late. Tragedy drops one small smooth pebble into a calm, pure pond and then measures, whereas history tosses a handful of gravel into a raging sea on a foggy day. That is why poetry is more philosophical than history. History's universals are all dead or dismembered.

Oedipus sees his own tragedy unfold and is the best spectator for his own blinding. He learns that what he never intended to happen fate has seen to. The play that so fascinated the Philosopher does not imitate our world. Nor do Galileo's mechanics. When has a kid slid down a slide the way a kid would if the kid were an imaginary kid computing the rate of his passage along geometry's inclined plane? Utopias, like Plato's Republic, attempt to control causes and consequences, generally with ludicrous results. Better a plausible impossibility, Artistotle remarks, to the consternation of countless commentators, than an implausible possibility; because history is nothing but the implausible, the unpredictable, the incredible concatenation. A good play's movement is inexorable. It is, in that sense, the equal of any argument. In real life, people recover from incurable cancers—occasionally. And nearly always in bad movies. We complain of such conclusions. We blame them on Hollywood.

Aristotle wants his action to be performed by a powerful person

so that the consequences will escape their agent and implicate the State. All of Thebes is suffering, the chorus is quick to tell us. Tragedy is a massive loss of opportunity. Right or wrong, Aristotle always makes sense.

The artist brings things into being the way nature brings things into being. Art adds realities to the world that were missing from it, and that well might belong here. That is Aristotle's sense of mimesis: it does not make copies of things. It does not end with a likeness. It is, instead, an investigation, an argument, a realization.

Alexander H. Zistakis[1]

Mimēsis—Imitation as Representation in Plato and His Modern Successors

The central issue here is the concept of representation, taken in a rather broad sense; the sense in which it was present in European philosophy until recently, namely, as articulated within the concept of *mimēsis.* Representation is not just contained within the (traditional and not-so-traditional) notion of *mimēsis*; rather it constitutes its very kernel. Far from indicating simple imitation, *mimēsis* is primarily about re-presenting, in the sense of a renewed or repeated presence. In the same sense, *mimēsis* is also re-pro-duction, even a (repeated and repetitive) deduction and induction. As such, it also implies a return to presence, and thus the reversion and reversibility of presence and absence. At issue is always some absent presence, or temporally speaking, some past, lost presence. Also, at issue are being and nothingness, life and death, knowledge and ignorance, oblivion, speech and muteness, silence, etc. To speak of re-presentation also means to be confronted with a *tremendous tension* that is at once *theoretical* (ontological-epistemological) and *political*. This tension is so extensive that all the political conflicts come down to a conflict over representation, whether this be *for* or *against* it.[2]

Plato's legacy

Throughout aesthetic and discursive theory and practice, a distinctly *negative* approach to *mimēsis* prevails. The earliest association, as well as the primary reason for this largely negative approach, comes from Plato, and his critical analysis of the the concept, status, and consequences of mimetic (re)presentation. Yet it should be noted that *mimēsis* is proscribed by Plato on accout of its *representative* character and pretension, rather than due to its *imitative* character. That is, *mimēsis* is problematic insofar as it is a *re-presentation*.

In the Classical Greece, "representation by means of art" seems to have been the primary association for *mimēsis*.[3] Plato certainly based his own critical analysis of art on precisely this sense of *mimēsis*, thanks to which *mimēsis* came to be especially understood as the *essence of artistic creation and representation*. Furthermore, through his efforts to limit and undermine *mimēsis*, Plato (almost unintentionally) made that concept and term theoretically relevant. He did that by explicitly and

emphatically relating it to the essence of the world and reality. Plato connected *mimēsis* with the problems of truth and being (and the truth of being) so that, from then on, *mimēsis* could not remain just some ritual action, nor just a secondary quality of mimetic creations; rather, it became an *ontological and epistemological concept*, while raising its own problems.

In the notorious passage from Book X of the *Republic*, *mimēsis* is *denounced* on account of its *deferred and distant relationship with being*—i.e., with the ideal of what is absolutely true. This is not only because a mimetic representation is never any actual, fundamentally real entity (idea, reality, thing-in-itself), nor that it fails to represent such a thing as it really is, or even faithfully and closely enough. Rather, mimetic representations are primarily derided for their subsistence at a lower ontological level *and register*.

Plato begins this epistemological-ontological argument with the famous image of three beds, constructed by three kinds of makers [artisans, producers],[4] with three distinct arts [skills].[5] The three levels are simultaneously differentiated according to their adherence to truthfulness. Therefore, the three beds are used to indicate both an *ontological* and *epistemological* hierarchy. For, that which lacks perfection, or which possesses a certain degree of imperfection, not only isn't completely true (or isn't true at all), but also doesn't exist in the full sense of the word. *Mimēsis* is, therefore, marked by a certain *absence* and *lack* in epistemological-ontological terms. *Mimēsis* itself, as well as its phenomena and products, lack a certain element or aspect. Importantly, Plato does not deny the existence of imitation; he only denies its epistemological and ontological value.

Indeed, any lacking or insufficiency in epistemological and ontological value for a thing implies that thing is to some degree a semblance, an illusion; but even Plato does not claim that the illusion and the deception do not themselves exist. Thus, if one cannot deny the existence of deception and illusion, then it should at least be possible to demonstrate their epistemological and ontological inferiority, and thereby also their axiological weakness. In that sense, the problem of *mimēsis* becomes the problem of truth and truthfulness—specifically, the *problem of the representation of truth*.

This insufficiency follows primarily from the *register* on, and in which, *mimēsis* stands and acts. Namely, *mimēsis* exists and acts

exclusively in the perceptual/sensuous dimension. It relates to and belongs to *perception and the perceptual*; and it never transcends the purely perceptual sphere. In that sense, one could say that the *fundamental insufficiency of mimēsis springs exactly from its completeness*; that is, from its complete enclosure within the perceptual sphere. For Plato, perception not only isn't the true expression and form of the truth of being, but is also a necessary obstacle for the cognition and grasping of that truth. It is a *necessary evil*, which must be used, but also resisted and overcome. Therefore, from the point of view of truth and its cognition, the necessity of the *presence* of perception and the perceptual is, at the same time, the necessity of their *overcoming* and their *collapse*.[6]

Thus, sensuousness (i.e. the perceptual apparatus as such, together with everything that is perceived through it) obstructs the recognition of truth and the true being. And the task of philosophy, more precisely epistemology, is exactly the overcoming of this *false register* of the appearance of truth; it is a kind of *filtration and distillation*, *uncovering and dissolving of the veil of sensuous representations* (however, Plato never explains the origin or the purpose of that veil). The untrue and wrong representation should be rejected for the sake of the real (i.e. true) representation of truth and being. One must dig his way to the true representation exactly by the dissolution and rejection of the *untrue mode and register of representing/representation*.

Mimēsis is unacceptable because and to the extent that it tends to provide a *sensory representation of the supra-sensory*. *Mimēsis* is not necessarily, nor primarily, imitation. *Mimēsis is sensory representation*, or re-presentation by means of sensuousness, and operates exclusively in sensuousness and for it. It re-presents (brings into presence again) sense data and impressions by representing only the way things *appear* to the senses, and as such is a wrong and deceptive kind of representation. Perception and the perceptual sphere at large is the sphere of illusion and phantasm, and that which is ontologically untrue must also be epistemologically untrue.

The mimetic artist "mimics" the makers of things, the artisans who can and do make real material beds and cabinets; but he does so inappropriately. He does it in an inappropriate *material* and *medium*; he does it in an inappropriate *register* of being; and he does it in an inappropriate *manner*. Thus, he generally remains in the realm of fraud and illusion. He presents himself as a universal craftsman and artisan

while he is neither, knows nothing about the crafts, and is incapable of producing something tangible, material, and real.[7]

So, again, the question is about the register of representing rather than representation itself. It is a question of the sensory and imaginary character/register of this kind of representation. Therefore, *mimēsis*, as representation in a different ontological register (one could even say: in the **non**-ontological or **anti**-ontological register), is an inferior representation—i.e. an inferior mode and form of representing in every respect.

On the other hand, it follows from such an ontological perspective that the main problem of (primarily artistic) *mimēsis* is the fact that it is *visual*, *iconic*, and thus *imaginary* or (put in a more contemporary fashion) *virtual*. The problem is that it is a mere image, *imago*, which as such remains simply *imaginary*. Exactly this visual, *imaginary* and *virtual character of representation* is, for its part, the cause of its remoteness and detachment from the truth of being.[8]

The *character* of that representation is the problem here, namely the fact that it is mere play, nothing serious or productive.[9] Its imitative character is secondary here, and follows from its specific register and sphere of representation, which are both structurally remote and detached from the being itself. Hence, it is possible to condemn *mimēsis* as mere imitation and play only on the basis of its being sensory representation.

Consequently, the problem with *mimēsis* for Plato lies in the fact that it unlawfully tries and pretends to be at least on the second degree of truth, to represent itself as *equal to the real crafts and production of physical reality and objects*. The problem is not that *mimēsis* might imitate, in the sense of "look like," something else. The real problem is that it *does not produce or bring that something else into presence*. It *represents* on the basis of *wrong premises* and presuppositions, represents in the *wrong way*, and therefore also represents and creates the *wrong entities*.

For Plato, the ideal of *mimēsis* should be and is **re-**presentation, in the sense of a repeated immediate presentation (realization and materialization) of the object. This concept of *mimēsis* and representation would thus ascribe central, if not exclusive, importance to that which is represented. It puts forward the demand for the correspondence of the medium with the content/object-message. In short: the same must be represented with the same, representation and

the represented must stand in the same register, on the same ontological level, within the same formal framework, etc. This again leads to the paradox of self-representation. The goal of an ideal *mimēsis* is, therefore, the attainment and achiement of the original, re-production in the sense of repeated production of the object. In other words, the goal of *mimēsis* would be a renewed bringing-into-presence of being and its truth. *Mimēsis* should transform into its own opposite: into direct and immediate creation of presence.

An immediate consequence of such a notion of *representation* (which refers only to the imitative character of artistic creations/ products) is that the *object* mimicked in *mimēsis* should be the *creation of beings*, and not necessarily the image of those beings. Mimetic art, in other words, *represents (repeats and reproduces) the very act and process of creation*, but it does it in a different way. According to Plato, of course, that different way is wrong, insufficient, and fundamentally flawed.[10] Such a representation is not a *re-presentation*, since it does not reintroduce or recreate any substance or presence. It also causes *moral and ethical corruption* of everything it touches, as well as its own moral and ethical *corruptness and corruptibility*. Thus, the assumed falseness of mimetic representation provides the direct path to the other side of Platonic argumentation, the side that deals with the *content of representations* and their *ethical-political aspects*.

Plato directly derives the *ethical-political s*phere from the epistemological-ontological sphere and function. It is present in the discussion from the very beginning, not least through the constant emphasis on the *demand for truthfulness*—i.e. the demand to speak the truth about being (and thus speak out true being itself). And, of course, the demand to speak the truth is *par excellence* ethical and political.

Within this emphatically ethical-political function of *mimēsis*, the didactic moment takes absolute precedence.[11] Immediately, without hesitation or mediation, Plato moves from epistemological-ontological considerations to the primarily negative ethical-political consequences of *mimēsis*: more precisely, to its detrimental influence on virtue, and the "health of the soul" in general.[12] His further critical remarks about the display of human passions and vices, and about their contribution to the corruption of the soul, proceed in the same direction.

The issue, however, is no longer the implementation or application of epistemological-ontological principles to art.[13] Now, it is much more

about the damaging effects of seductive representation on the weaknesses and vices of the citizens, i.e. on individual human beings. Not only does such representation imitate the lower, weaker, more vicious part of the soul—i.e. emotional and cognitive abilities; but *mimēsis* directly addresses exactly that part of the soul. Therefore, it is primarily a question of the benefit or detriment that mimetic art brings to the individual and society. Namely, the appropriateness/inappropriateness of certain representations—and certain types and kinds of representing—with resepct to the education of citizens, and the development of society and state. This represents a shift that later would become the *locus classicus* of every dictatorship and censorship. Here, therefore, the attitude and approach are almost exclusively *didactic*, and from the didactic character follows the *ethical-political conventionalism* as well. Art must be/become the true teacher of nations, but not as it was in the past, or as it likley is even now. Art must teach correct—i.e. true and desirable—things and behaviors. This artistic instruction, via the didactic character of art, is determined by the social-political consequences it produces.

***Mimēsis* in modern art**

The epistemological-ontological discussion is thus only an introduction to the real focus: the axiological aspect of *mimēsis*, and consequently, its social-political and moral function and status. In that sense, Plato is extremely modern; or, at least, the modern artists and theoreticians of art are extremely Platonic. Very much like Plato, Modernity and especially modern art denounce *mimēsis* as an unproductive repetition of the real, as its simple copy; or at best, an attempt to grasp and hold the essence of the real, by imitating its appearances. Similar to Antiquity, Modernity also ascribes in-sufficiency and unoriginality to *mimēsis*, and denounces its error: *mimēsis* looks for truth in the wrong place, and even when it gets a premonition of the hiding place of truth, it represents it in the wrong way, using the wrong means.

The anti-mimetic disposition and character of modern art is obvious and explicit, most of all in the art of the end of the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century, which, in turn, brought about the abstract and conceptual tendencies of the art of the second half of the twentieth century. Thus, first, there was the problem of realism and the post-impressionist resistance to it, which was picked

up by later movements and styles that emphatically strive to transcend object and objectivity as such, and thereby also to overcome the representational character of art. They were no longer satisfied with, for example, just pointing out and expressing the truth of the image and the visual, or the truth of artistic representation. Instead, they attempted to go above and beyond all that, and achieve transcendence of the artistic itself—a kind of *transcendence of art by and through art*.

It is of utmost importance to notice that the *political basis and purpose* of the modern rejection of artistic *mimēsis* depends upon understanding of *mimēsis* as representation and representativeness. For, it is precisely the political disposition embodied in avant-garde social-political activism and interventionism that causes and conditions the rejection of the imitative sense/meaning of *mimēsis*, while practically leaving its representational essence intact—at least until after the Second World War, when representation in art was finally abandoned.

There is plenty of evidence in modern art, both in its theory and practice, of the understanding of *mimēsis*—and thus also of art itself—primarily as representation, rather than simple imitation. However, the considerations of *mimēsis* in modern art seems to be triggered and motivated exactly by the byproduct of representation, i.e. by the understanding of *mimēsis* as predominantly an imitation of the perceptual appearance of things and of nature.

The *post-impressionist* intervention carried out by *Cezanne* and his followers is the first example of such an approach. Cezanne's insistence on the study of nature and its true representation—that is, his insistence on representing its innermost forms and laws—provides the first reflection or self-reflection of what modern art is supposed to aim at and eventually be.[14] His works at the turn of the century give clear examples of what this practice looks like. And, this new *mimēsis* of nature, in its capacity as representation of both the truth of nature and the truth of painting—more precisely, the truth of painting as the true representation of nature—is anything but imitation of the appearance of nature. The opposition and rebellion against illusionism (*trompe l'oeil*) as the criterion of a work of art, therefore, spring exactly from this specific understanding of *mimēsis*. Simply put, painting should not be realistic, but *real*. Therein also lies the truth and purpose of painting: to be a true representation of the truth.

To that effect, then, Cezanne reached out for geometrical forms. Namely, by virtue of their being the basic forms recognizable in every (simple or complex) natural phenomenon and form, he considered them not only the source of real forms of nature (including the perceptual and perceived forms), but the essences of every possible form of natural truth. And, by definition, natural truth (or the truth of nature) is *the* truth, since nature is synonymous with true being. By the same token—i.e. by considering geometrical forms to be the truth—Cezanne set a distinctly Platonic path which other modern artists and theoreticians would follow. He essentially pronounced forms for the truth of nature—that is, of material reality—and thus re-inaugurated idealism, formalism and rationality as the essential characteristics of modern art, and of the relevant modern artistic production. From then on, modern art was going to search for the ideal representation—*mimēsis*—of its own essence and truth.

Following Cezanne's intervention, all the significant movements in modern art set out to determine and define artistic *mimēsis* against figuration and, of course, imitation. Thus, in the first decade of the twentieth century, the *Expressionists* were the first to pursue such goals for art. For example, Emil Nolde declared in quite a Platonic manner that "Conscientious and exact imitation of nature does not create a work of art. (…) A work becomes a work of art when one re-evaluates the values of nature and adds one's own spirituality."[15]

In one way or another, at one time or another, others followed. First, the *Cubists*. Not only did they expand the practices of painting with basic forms, but they also introduced other spatial and geometrical factors, such as surfaces, dimensions, perspectives, etc. Their self-understanding and idealism were eventually endorsed by others and recognized as the purpose and essence of new art. Thus, Cubism was almost literally Platonism, primarily by virtue of its striving to go beyond and beneath perception, towards pure forms. Moreover, it finds these forms in exactly the same place as Plato (mathematical/geometrical abstract forms: cube, cylinder, line, circle, parallelogram, etc.). To complete the picture, the Cubists' own declarations were teeming with statements such as "the visible world can become the real world only by the operation of the intellect," as well as those distinguishing between "superficial realism" and "profound realism," where the former was exemplified by

impressionism (in which "the retina predominates over the brain"), and the latter, by Cezanne and Cubism.[16] Again, there is a strong idealistic rejection of imitation as a genuine artistic mode of representation, which in no way can be understood as the rejection of *mimēsis* as such and *en bloc*. Thus, they go on to say that "The only possible error in art is imitation."[17]

Even when the Cubists insist on the difference between artistic and theoretical (scientific, philosophical) representation, they do so without denying the formal, ideal/idealistic, and intellectual/ speculative core of their artistic program and project. On the contrary, they tend to extend and enhance that core in art, thus going above and beyond scientific-theoretical representation, and actually proclaiming art not only as autonomous, but also it seems, superior—more all-encompassing, and therefore truer. Consider Braque's "Thoughts and Reflections on Art," where he explains:

> The goal is not to be concerned with the reconstitution of an anecdotal fact, but with constitution of a pictorial fact. Painting is a method of representation. One must not imitate what one wants to create. One does not imitate appearances; the appearance is the result. (…) The sense deforms, the mind forms. Work to perfect the mind. There is no certitude but in what the mind conceives.[18]

Consider also Léger's seemingly anti-platonic statements, which regularly end in almost extreme agreement with what Plato intended as the only acceptable essence and function of artistic *mimēsis*. In passages such as this, it seems that Modernity and modern art perfectly realize the platonic goal:

> *Modern man lives more and more in a predominantly geometric order. All human creation mechanical or industrial is dependent upon geometric intentions. (…)* I believe that plastic beauty in general is totally independent of sentimental, descriptive, or imitative values. Every object, picture, piece of architecture, or ornamental organization has a value in itself; it is strictly absolute and independent of anything it may happen to represent.[19]

Or, in the same vein:

> Every effort in the line of spectacle or moving-picture, should be concentrated on bringing out the values of the object—even at the expense of the subject and of every other so-called photographic element or interpretation, whatever it may be.[20]

Then, of course, we have Paul Klee, probably the most modern of them all, and his *Creative Credo*, which he begins by claiming that:

> Art does not reproduce the visible; rather, it makes visible. A tendency toward the abstract is inherent in linear expression….The purer the graphic work—that is, the more the formal elements underlying linear expression are emphasized—the less adequate it is for the realistic representation of visible things.

Then, later on, he goes on to say how "It may be true that 'in the beginning there was the deed,' yet the idea comes first. Since infinity has no definite beginning, but like a circle may start anywhere, the idea may be regarded as primary."[21] Even later, he speaks like a genuine modern Plato, and says:

> Formerly we used to represent things visible on earth, things we either liked to look at or would have liked to see. Today we reveal the reality that is behind visible things, thus expressing the belief that the visible world is merely an isolated case in relation to the universe and that there are many more other, latent realities. Things appear to assume a broader and more diversified meaning, often seemingly contradicting the rational experience of yesterday. There is a striving to emphasize the essential character of the accidental. By including the concepts of good and evil a moral sphere is created. Evil is not conceived as the enemy whose victories disgrace us, but as a force within the whole, a force that contributes to creation and evolution. The simultaneous existence of the masculine principle (evil, stimulating, passionate) and the feminine principle (good, wrong, calm) result in the condition of ethical stability.[22]

Finally, Klee establishes a completely creative and expressive—i.e. representational and representative (but definitely non-imitative and non-figurative)—conception of art, which enables him to define it in the

following terms: "Art is a simile of the creation. Each work of art is an example, just as the terrestrial is an example of the cosmic."[23]

In the modern era, art is understood as the creative discovering of truth, i.e. as the anti-mimetic demonstration and production of the true, and the truth about itself and the world. On the same basis, art sees itself as the *productive repetition* of the creative act and its result (work). This is almost the same anti-mimetic impulse that we find in Platonism, only now it is turned inside, toward art itself and its own essence and truth, and that essence is neither mimetic nor *mimēsis*. In other words, if art has a truth of its own, if it should be true, then it cannot be imitative; it cannot imitate reality, and even less the appearance and the appearing of reality—i.e. the phenomenon and phenomenality as such. According to the same principle that guided Plato's rejection and expulsion of art from the world, state, and philosophy, modernity now "saves" and justifies art. The principle is, indeed, the same, the *principle/problem of representation*. Furthermore, the problem is again being solved *anti-mimetically*, which is to say *rationally, intellectually, and didactically*. Again, the issue is not so much the truthfulness of knowledge and being of art, but rather the *production and bearing-out of the truth of art*. Furthermore, its *establishment and embedding in the ethical-political sphere* springs exactly from this autonomous truth; such that, in its *truth and reality*, art appears as a *social-political phenomenon and agent*.

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[2] The example of the first are all the minorities and their activities as such. For the second, the most characteristic are the extreme/extremist reactions that demand the banning of works of art. The classical examples of the latter are, of course, Kazantzakis and Rushdi, e.g. *The last Temptation of Christ* and *The Satanic Verses*.

[3] Exactly the main meaning given for the entry *mimēsis* in Liddell, Scott, and Jones's *Greek Lexicon*.

[4] Cf. *Republic* X, 597b.

[5] *Republic* X, 601d.

[6] One only needs to recall the *Symposium* 210a-211d, where Plato extensively describes the path from sense data and sensuous representations of objects of beauty and love, towards the purely intuitive idea of pure love and the beautiful in itself. One can also refer to the *Philebus* 59c—"That fixed and pure and true and what we call unalloyed knowledge has to do with the things which are eternally the same without change or mixture, or with that which is most akin to them; and all other things are to be regarded as secondary and inferior"—or to other parts of the same dialogue, where the dialectic of the existing things and the ideas (upon which those things are founded and in which they participate) is elaborated and displayed in a similar manner (e.g. *Philebus* 16c-e, 23c-24a, 25a-26d etc.).

[7] *Republic* X, 596d-598d, 600e-601d.

[8] That is, of visual as well as literary and poetic representation.

[9] *Republic* X, 602b.

[10] *Republic* X, 603a-b.

[11] Therefore, the second part of Plato's argumentation against *mimēsis*, and especially mimetic art, turns out to be a continuation of the censorship critique from Book III of the *Republic* (see esp. 386a-392c).

[12] *Republic* X, 602c-606d.

[13] Which we find earlier in the *Republic* (III, 386a-388c), where all these weaknesses are mostly shown as logically incompatible with the very notion of gods and heroes.

[14] Constantly present in his letters at the turn of the century, e.g. at the time of his turn away from figuration and impressionism. Cf. *Paul Cézanne: Letters*, ed. John Rewald (London: Cassirer, 1941).

[15] Cf. E. Nolde, *Jahre der Kämpfe*, Berlin: Rembrandt, 1934. (English translation by Ernest Mundt, in H. Chipp, *Theories of Modern Art* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 146.

[16] Albert Gleizes & Jean Metzinger, *Du Cubisme* (Paris: Figuière, 1912). Published in English as *Cubism* (London: Unwin, 1913). The above quoted after the partial reprint in Chipp, op. cit., 208.

[17] Chipp, op. cit., 209.

[18] George Braque, "Thoughts and Reflections on Art," *Nord-Sud*, ed. Pierre Reverdy (Paris, December 1917). English translation in: Robert Goldwater & Marco Treves, eds., *Artists on Art* (New York: Pantheon, 1945).

[19] Fernand Léger, "The Aesthetic of the Machine," *Bulletin de l'Effort Moderne,* I, 1 & 2 (January & February), Paris, 1924. (English translation in Chipp, *Theories*, p. 277.)

[20] Fernand Léger, "A New Realism – the Object," *The Little Review* XI, 2 (Winter), Paris 1926. (English translation from Chipp, *Theories*, p.279.)

[21] Originally published in *Schöpferische Konfession*, ed. Kasimir Edschmid (Berlin: Erich Reiss, 1920) (*Tribune der Kunst und Zeit*, No. 13). English translation by Norbert Guterman, from *The Inward Vision: Watercolors, Drawings and Writings by PaulKlee* (New York: Abrams, 1959). Reprinted in Chipp, *Theories*, p.182-186.

[22] Chipp, op. cit., p. 185.

[23] Ibid., p. 186.