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Title: Mimesis, Morality and Truth: Plato as a genius Literary Critic

Abstract

This paper aims at exploring Plato, an important literary critic who presented his ideas about literature which are presented in his works. Plato's views were considered as an imitation (mimesis) of reality he always considers poetries as an imagination he explores the purpose of nature his theory of mimesis consider as imitation Plato always criticizes the poets for unrealistic presenting of human emotions. He asserts that poetry can affect human nature, emotions, behaviour and suggested that poetry must be realistic. For Plato, poetry should promote truth and good character. His criticism reflects the relationship between art and morality. For Plato literature shows the physical word which is totally unrealistic and imperfect he considers the distance of poetry from truth. His criticism represents responsibility of literature to contribute positively the characters. His views were strict on poetry and have shaped development of literary history.

Keywords: Plato, Mimesis, Truth, Morality, Education, Philosophy

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Mimesis, Morality and Truth: Plato as a genius Literary Critic



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Abstract

This paper aims at exploring Plato, an important literary critic who presented his ideas about literature which are presented in his works. Plato's views were considered as an imitation (mimesis) of reality he always considers poetries as an imagination he explores the purpose of nature his theory of mimesis consider as imitation Plato always criticizes the poets for unrealistic presenting of human emotions. He asserts that poetry can affect human nature, emotions, behaviour and suggested that poetry must be realistic. For Plato, poetry should promote truth and good character. His criticism reflects the relationship between art and morality. For Plato literature shows the physical word which is totally unrealistic and imperfect he considers the distance of poetry from truth. His criticism represents responsibility of literature to contribute positively the characters. His views were strict on poetry and have shaped development of literary history.

Keywords: *Plato, Mimesis, Truth, Morality, Education, Philosophy*

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Introduction

Plato holds an important position in the history of literary criticism because he examined the nature, purpose, and value of literature, especially poetry. In his famous work "The Republic", Plato discusses the relationship between literature, reality, and truth. He raises important questions about the role of poets in society. His literary theory is mainly based on the concept of "mimesis", which means "imitation". According to Plato, poetry and other arts imitate the visible world instead of showing the ultimate reality. According to his "Theory of Forms", the physical world itself is an imperfect copy of a higher and perfect reality. Therefore, poetry, which is an imitation of the physical world, is twice removed from truth. Plato also criticizes poetry because it affects human emotions, encourages irrational behaviour, and can influence moral values in a harmful way. Although Plato's views on poetry are considered strict and controversial, they laid the foundation for literary criticism. He examined the relationship between art, morality, knowledge, and society. Thus, Plato's approach shows his search for truth. He believed that art should not be judged only by its beauty or entertainment, but also by how it contributes to human wisdom and moral development. Plato's main concerns were about moral education, truth, and representation. He believes poetry should teach good moral values, and show people the truth, and should not always represent objects. Try to present the reality and truth about life.

Literature Review

Plato, a Greek philosopher who contribute to Literary criticism. He believed that poetry could be dangerous because it affects people's emotions and may influence their behaviour. Plato argued that poetry always does not present real truth about life. Many poems describe tragic events, and strong emotions, which may affect people's way of thinking. He believed that poetries and stories should teach people good moral values and help



them to become a better human being. Plato argues that poets imitate things which we see in real world. But they do not always have true knowledge about life. He also criticizes Poets of portraying gods and heroes as dishonest. He argues that such stories might be harmful, especially for young people, because this kind of stories can influence their moral behaviour. Therefore, Plato believes that poetry should promote and teach good moral values and help people understand the truth. Habib (2025) explains Plato's importance in the progress of literary criticism, while Eagestone (2021) indicates the ongoing relationship between literature, philosophy, and truth. These studies present a helpful opening point for comprehending Plato's criticism of poetry and the significance of mimesis.

One of the central debates in scholarship on Plato's literary criticism concerns the meaning of mimesis and its relationship to truth and artistic representation. Pfefferkorn and Spinelli (2021) examines Plato's mimesis through the choral dance in *The Laws*. Their discussion connects imitation with moderation, self-control, and moral education. Which shows that mimesis is not essentially restricted to copying reality rather can also have an educational purpose. Telo (2022) explores a related issue by examining Plato's use of philosophical mimesis in his own dialogues. Whereas, Plato criticises imitation in poetry, he uses dialogues and representation to promote philosophical thinking. Telo claims that these techniques can help readers understand the process of philosophical inquiry. Grethlein (2020) also re-evaluate mimesis by analysing the cognitive observation of artistic representation. His perspective draws attention to show audience reaction to works of art rather than treating representation as a simple copy of reality. This is relevant to Plato given his issues about poetry involve both what poets represent and how their representation affect people. Similarly, Casas Hernandez (2024) elaborates relation to representation, knowledge, and human nature. These studies help examine why mimesis is an important issue in literary criticism. It brings up questions about the relationship between reality and appearance and about how people understand the world through artistic representation.

Another important issue in Plato's criticism is the relationship between poetry and truth. Plato questions whether poets possess genuine knowledge of the subjects they describe. Trivingo (2020) in his exploration of Plato's *Ion*, discusses the relationship between poetic inspiration and command. The dialogue raised multiple questions whether poets understand what they describe. He argues that does poets have command on subject what they discuss in their poetry. This examination helps understand Plato's doubts on poetic authority. A poet may describe a subject beautifully without having true knowledge about it. Pitari (2021) further investigates the relationship between literature and truth by contrasting Plato's *Republic* with Aristotle's poetics. His analysis questions the simple view that Plato rejects literary turn while Aristotle accepts it. Rather, the relationship between literature and truth needs a careful exploration. Harts (2022) also analysis the connection between poetry, philosophy, rhetoric, and metaphor. Literary language can help communicate complicated ideas, but it can also convince an audience without giving credible knowledge. These explorations show that Plato's criticism of poetry is likely relevant to a broader philosophical question: can artistic representation help people understand reality or does it away them from reality?

The psychological effects of poetry forms another vital role in this debate. Campeggiani (2018) explores mimesis and emotion in *The Republic*, engaging concentration to the impact of artistic representation on the audience's emotional reaction. From this approach, Poetry is important because it may transform the way people feel and react to different situations. De Los Ríos (2018) similarly connects the criticism of imitative poetry with Plato's concepts of the soul. This method explains the effect of art can be psychological, moral, and political as well as aesthetic. Araújo (2018) includes to this debate through her exploration of mimesis and empathy. Her works captures attention to the way audience examine with represented characters and react to their observations. Alongside Grethlein's (2020) cognitive approach, Araujo's (2018) analysis argues that literary representation should also be studied in terms of audience's reaction. These scholars help identify why Plato

pays focus to the emotional and psychological problems of poetry instead of criticising to only by its subject matter.

The relationship between poetry and moral education is likely related to the psychological issues. In *The Republic*, Plato gives credible importance to the education of young people and the stories they absorb while their development. Literature can affect their knowledge about courage, justice, virtue, and appropriate behaviour. Kotsonis (2020) explains cognitive character education and the progress of attitudes pointed towards truth and intellectual virtue. While, this subject is wider than literary criticism. It presents beneficial connections to Plato's matters with the creation of character. Frank (2018) also explores the ethical and political educational aim of *The Republic*. Her work motivates deliberation of the dialogue as a philosophical and literary construction. Plato's own use of stories, images, and dramatic discussions poses an important question: if representation can influence people, can it also be used to maintain moral and intellectual progress? This question is fundamental to the debate regarding whether Plato should be considered an opponent of poetry. Hill (2024) investigates the issue of poetry in Plato, specifically the tension between poetry's cultural importance and its rejection from the ideal city.

Campbell (2021) also explores questions excessively in simple explanations of Plato's treatment of poetry in Book X of *The Republic*. Kiaris (2025) explains the relationship between Plato's worries about artistic production and the educational role of music and poetry. Collectively, these studies indicate Plato's stance needs a contrast between different kinds of artistic representation and their possible result. This political importance of poetry presents another method to recognize Plato's debate. Poetry was a significant part of Greek culture and supported ideas about heroes, gods, and social values. Pangle (2021) identifies Homeric poetry in relation to civic morality, adding the possibility that poetic representations may indicate questionable actions as credible. Such audience's approach of acceptable behaviour.

Reviews mimesis in relation to art and the political community, capturing attention to a broader representation. Anagnostou-Laoutides (2024) presents a wider background of exploring Plato's political thought, including the relationship between education, political order, and the regulation of discourse.

Overall, the literature defines that Plato's perspective on poetry are more complex than he argues that he simply rejects literature. Research on mimesis identifies the relationship between representation and reality. Whereas studies of *Ion* examine the distinction between inspiration and genuine knowledge. Other scholars focus on the emotional impact of poetry, its role in moral education, and its problems for political life. These observations show that Plato's criticism includes multiple questions: what does poetry represent? Whether it shows truth? How it influences the soul? What role it should play in society?

Despite this, these issues can be discussed separately. A connective investigation of mimesis, truth, and moral education can present a obvious understanding of Plato as a Literary Critic. This study reviews how Plato's perspectives on artistic representation are related to his worries about knowledge, emotional development, and the creation of character by indicating these questions, it targets that Plato's criticism of poetry is not simply a rejection of imitation, rather it reflects a wider issue with the power of representation to impact on how people feel, think, behave, and understand truth.

Analysis and discussion

Plato's literary criticism focuses with relationship between literature, truth, morality, and human behaviour. In *The Republic* he explores the role of poetry in society and also questions can poetry provide genuine knowledge. His perspectives expose the clash between artistic beauty and its potential to misguide people. Plato believes that literature can shape people's thoughts, actions, feelings, and the way they behave. Literature also can affect people's emotions and may influence their moral education. Like if there is tragic poetry so that may influence their emotions, and they may take it in badly towards their behaviour. So this is the reason why Plato is worried

about Poetry and the way it affects people. However, he is not fully against he praises poetry when it teach people good moral values, and have a good influence on their emotions, and a good poetry may help them make better their personality and become a good human being. Plato believes poetry should teach people and change the Way they think, fee, and behave with providing good moral values.

Plato's Concept of Mimesis

Mimesis means imitation or representation of reality. According to Plato, the physical world is already an imperfect reflection of a higher and perfect world of Forms. Poetry and art imitate the physical world, so they are further removed from the ultimate truth. For example, a poet may describe a beautiful tree, but the description is only a representation of the tree, not the perfect Form of beauty itself. Plato therefore believed that poetry does not always present the complete truth. Plato believes that poets do not show reality to the people they just show an imitation a copy of any object. For example, there is a tree and an artist create a picture of that tree, and a poet describe the same tree in his/her poem. So neither art is real nor the poetry is but shows representation of the tree to the people and people may get attracted to that, and don't know about real beauty of the object which is representation. Plato argues on the same thing again and again he wanted to say that artistic representation may attract people but it cannot show them the real truth and beauty about that object.

Plato's Views on Poetry

Plato had a critical attitude towards poetry. He admired its beauty and influence, but he questioned its value when it presented false ideas or encouraged harmful behaviour. He argued that poets often describe imaginary events and emotional experiences instead of presenting rational knowledge. According to him, poetry could confuse people about right and wrong if it was not guided by truth and wisdom. Plato argues that poetry can be dangerous for people because it may affect people's emotions, the way the think, feel, and behave, he is worried about specifically young people because they may imitate what poetry shows to them. Plato does not fully disagree poetry he is just fear about how people may behave after reading tragic, and emotional poetry. Plato basically questioned the poets that they truly don't present true knowledge they describe. Plato believes only artistic beauty is not enough for a great literature, having enough knowledge about their subjects also matters in literature. Like some poets show gods and heroes as dishonest which can badly affect the people specifically young generation. He simply says that people should understand the real messages from the poetry rather than judging it. Plato simply leaves a message to readers that poetry could be dangerous for people because it may affect people's emotions and the way they feel, think, and behave. Poetry is most important in shaping people, it can shape them mentally, emotionally, and morally. Plato argued that poetry can shape people the way they thinks anything. Because poetry do not represent the reality of life just imitate the objects. People may easily attract from the beauty of the representation without knowing the reality of that object, real beauty of the object.

Poetry and the Pursuit of Truth

Truth was very important in Plato's philosophy. He believed that people should use reason and knowledge to understand reality. Poetry, however, often depends on imagination and emotional expression. Plato worried that people might accept poetic descriptions as truth without examining them critically. He therefore encouraged people to seek wisdom through philosophy, reasoning, and the search for genuine knowledge. Plato is worried about that poetry does not always show truth to the people so people may believe on a false thing which is not even truth in reality. Such things make Plato to hate poetry like a poet may beautifully describe war, and politics without having genuine knowledge about these areas. So this make Plato worry about poetry. He argues people may get attracted to the poem which is beautifully described. They accept it but do not the

reality and knowledge same like poet. Plato says poets should present those subjects which they genuinely know about rather than describing unknown subjects. So Plato believes poetry should always show the real truth about life.

Poetry and Moral Education

Plato believed that literature plays an important role in educating young people. Stories, poems, and dramas can shape a person's character, beliefs, and behaviour. He argued that literature should promote courage, honesty, justice, and self-control. He criticized poetry that glorified immoral actions or portrayed gods and heroes behaving badly. In *The Republic*, he suggested that poetry should be carefully controlled in the ideal state to protect the moral development of citizens. Plato main argument about poetry is that poetry always does not teach moral values to people, it may affect people emotionally. He believes that poetry should teach good moral values to people and help them become better human beings. According to Plato poetry influence moral values. With such stories which shows the gods and heroes behaving dishonest, violent, if young people read these kind of stories so they may imitate the same behaviour. And this is very dangerous according to Plato. Because it is affecting people's moral values and due to this they may become a bad human being. Morality is most important for people because it makes them a real human, and they learn how to behave and be a good human. Plato that is why worried about Poetry that some poets shows bad moral values about life. So he says poets should always teach good moral values to people specially to young people.

Plato's Criticism of Poets

Plato believed that poets might not possess true knowledge of everything they describe. A poet can write about a warrior, a ruler, or a doctor without having the actual knowledge required to perform those roles. He also argued that poetry appeals strongly to emotions. Excessive emotional influence, in his view, could weaken rational thinking and self-control. These concerns explain his criticism of certain forms of poetry. Plato basically criticized those poets who don't have any idea about what they write. He says that a poet may beautifully describe an object but have zero knowledge about that object in reality. Most of the poets have zero knowledge about the subjects which they describe beautifully. Plato believes having imagination power is good but there should be a reality in poetry which people get to know about life.

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Importance of Plato as a Literary Critic

Plato is considered one of the earliest and most influential literary critics. His ideas raised important questions about the relationship between literature, truth, imagination, and society. His theories had impact later literary criticism and encouraged thinkers to discuss whether literature should entertain people, teach moral lessons, represent reality, or search for truth. Plato remains an important figure in literary criticism because of his concerns about poetry that how he rejects poetry, but also praise literature in some places. Meanwhile, Plato discusses the relationship between literature reality and representation. In his literary criticism is main focus is on truth, reality, he says poets should always show the reality of life rather present only imitations. Modern poets may disagree with Plato due to their own concerns about poetry. But it still convinces readers to think that poetry may influence people's opinions, their emotions, morality, and education. Plato's main concern was about moral education he believed poetry always should teach people moral values. However, Plato's does not disagree with poetry he also praises beauty of power, deep imagination, and having genuine knowledge about subjects. He encourages readers to get the real purpose of poetry rather accepting its beauty and powerful emotions.

Conclusion

Plato plays an important role in the history of literature because he worked hard to understand the relationship between literature reality, morality, and society. In his famous book the republic and Ion carries ideas about the nature and purpose of poetry. Plato made people think: does literature give us real morality, education, make us morally good or does literature mislead society? In Plato's literary criticism, imitation is one of the important ideas which is called mimesis. Plato always thought poetry mimesis outward world instead of understanding their reality (real world). Plato also expressed that just because poets explain perfectly it doesn't mean poets know authentic knowledge (real knowledge). For example; A poet writes about a war it does not mean the poet himself is expert about strategies of war. Plato does make us think that describing something perfectly and knowing real knowledge about something are two different things. Literature affects people's beliefs and sometimes misleads them. One of the important parts of Plato's literary criticism is morality and education. He believed that poetry plays an ideal role to make human's personality, especially children, inspired from stories and learn from them. Therefore, Plato wants literature to bring bravery, justice, and self-control on these emotions and develop wisdom. Literature should not promote bad behaviours which cause immorality and provoke bad behaviour. Also, Plato's criticism on Homer's poetry shows the same belief. Plato believes that a writer must have responsibility and do care about impacts on society. Although Plato's ideas are important but there are limitations too. He sees impacts of poetry more negatively, but literature creates sympathy and makes them able to think critically. Plato's literary criticism is still relevant today. In today's era, there is a massive impact of social media, film, television on society which can easily influence people's opinions. That is why Plato just not ask questions about ancient time he also expressed today's literature impacts. Plato's contribution was not limited till poetry; he raised questions about relationship between literature, emotions, reason, and individual creativity and responsibility. Today's critics may disagree with Plato's view of literature but his ideas can still create arguments on the purpose and importance of literature.

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