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Imitation in Plato's Aesthetic Theory

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"IMITATION" IN PLATO'S AESTHETIC THEORY

by

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A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of
Loyola University in Partial Fulfillment of
the Requirements for the Degree
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VITA AUCTORIS

Thomas Patrick Kennealy, S.J., was born in Cincinnati, Ohio September 19, 1931.

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INTRODUCTION

The noted French painter Paul Cezanne once remarked: "I have not reproduced nature, I have represented it. How? In its plastic and colored equivalents."¹ In these few words whether he realized it or not Cezanne has paid very eloquent tribute to a theory of art that is almost as old as art itself. For the opinion he expresses, far from being new, has its origin in the distant past.

To the ancient Greeks we of the occidental world owe a debt of gratitude for the artistic and cultural legacy they bestowed upon us. It was they who supplied both the example and the inspiration from which has arisen much of the literary and cultural tradition of the Christian world. But the Greek genius was not limited to the practical sphere of making, they were also much inclined to speculation, as the impressive list of their renowned philosophers amply demonstrates. It is only natural, then, that the more inquisitive, the more profound, of their thinkers would not be content merely to enjoy beautiful art. They would not be satisfied until they had come to an understanding of its very essence.

The world in which these thinkers lived was adorned with some of the

¹Huntington Cairns, Great Paintings from the National Gallery of Art (New York, 1952), p. 166.

noblest works of art the world has ever known. The temples in which they worshiped, the tragedies and comedies which they attended regularly, the stirring epic narratives, the majestic choral odes and the simple lyrics in which they delighted, the polished, impassioned oratory of which they were fond -- all these and many other things besides combined to form the highly cultured world in which they lived. It is only natural that men like Plato and Aristotle would ask themselves: "What is art? What is its essence?"

Of all the ancients whose works are known to us, Plato is the first who attempted a detailed answer to that question. Doubtless, other thinkers had pondered it and had proposed answers of their own. But Plato's solution is the earliest that survives to us. Subsequent aestheticians have evaluated Plato's theory in various ways. Some have adopted it with reservations, some have rejected it, while a few have neglected it altogether. But the significant fact is that the basic concept which Plato developed has found its way into the works of art critics even down to our present day so that we find men like Cezanne reechoing the same basic notion once more.

Plato believed that art was essentially an imitation or representation of nature. This is the position which he assumed in his early dialogues and from which he never departed. In itself it seems to be a rather simple, uncomplicated answer to the question. But here, unfortunately, is one of those instances where appearances deceive. For as Verdenius has remarked very accurately: "The concept of imitation may be said to be the most vexed problem of Plato's theory of art. No doubt his aesthetics contain

more difficulties, but none of them has caused so much misunderstanding."²³

In the pages that follow an attempt has been made to grapple with this "most vexed problem," and to clarify in some way the major points quite often "misunderstood."

The Platonic approach to art has been rather severely criticized within recent times. Art, so the modern aestheticians tell us, is not imitative or representational, it is essentially creative.³ The artist should not restrict himself to copying, he should produce something new. For art is self-expression, it is giving birth to a new reality. Surely such opinions are not without their merit. To close one's eyes to their worth would be to commit the sin of intellectual narrowness which Plato himself so deprecated. On the other hand, there are two things that should be noted with regard to this modern criticism of Plato.

First of all, much of the criticism leveled against Plato is based on an imperfect knowledge of the precise Platonic doctrine. Some, for instance, allege that Plato advocated slavish realism in art, that he neglected the ideal element. Others insist that his whole approach is hopelessly over-intellectual. Still others argue that he overlooked the creative aspect of art altogether. A more careful analysis of Plato's own doctrine will reveal, however, that many of these contentions are not altogether verifiable.

Secondly, the preferability of this modern approach to art in comparison

²W.J.Verdenius, Mimesis: Plato's Doctrine of Artistic Imitation and Its Meaning to Us (Leiden, 1949), Preface.

³A.C.Bradley, Oxford Lectures on Poetry (London, 1950), p. 4-5.

to the ancient can at least be questioned. Without denying the obvious merits of the newer theories we must be careful not to discard what is of genuine worth in the older theories. In fact, a thorough study of the ancient philosophers of art may challenge us to reexamine and reevaluate our own reflections on the subject. In the process we may be surprised to learn, as some of our contemporaries have, that the more traditional theories of art are not devoid of merit.

This present study, then, is an attempt to analyze and evaluate the Platonic concept of artistic imitation. Its author will rest content if he succeeds in clarifying some of the more obscure points of Plato's doctrine in the hope that a more comprehensive understanding and consequently a more intelligent appreciation of Plato's position will be possible.

The general scheme of the thesis is simple enough. In the first part an attempt is made to analyze in detail the philosophical foundation upon which Plato constructed his idea of art. Special attention is given to the concept of imitation as Plato employed it in his philosophy. Secondly, the Platonic concept of artistic imitation is considered. In the next section several of the objections more commonly leveled against Plato's theory are discussed; and, finally, we attempt to point out briefly the permanent relevance of Plato's concept in the history of aesthetics.

CHAPTER I

THE PLACE OF "IMITATION" IN PLATO'S PHILOSOPHY

As Prof. Verdenius has very correctly observed, "The idea of imitation is at the very center of Plato's philosophy."¹ This same opinion is shared by Richard McKeon who has expressed it this way: imitation "embraces the entire philosophy of Plato."² It would seem logical, then, that before one undertakes an analysis of Plato's notion of artistic imitation he must first understand the role that imitation plays in Platonic philosophy as a whole. Such a method of procedure has several obvious advantages. First of all, since Plato's theory of art is merely a further development of his metaphysics, a thorough knowledge of the latter will serve as the best possible introduction to the former. Secondly, a study of the philosophical meanings of "imitation" will help us to understand and appreciate the aesthetic usage of the term. Finally, the place of "imitation" in Plato's philosophy is an important and enlightening study in its own right because, as both Verdenius and McKeon have pointed out, "imitation" is one of the fundamental concepts upon which Platonism is built.

¹Verdenius, P. 16.

²Richard McKeon, "Literary Criticism and the Concept of Imitation in Antiquity," Critics and Criticism Ancient and Modern, ed. R.S.Crane (Chicago, 1952.), p. 157.

Our first task, then, will be to study the concept of mimesis in Platonic philosophy, more particularly in his epistemology, his theory of the forms, his physics and finally his philosophy of language. Once this spade work has been done, we shall be in a better position to analyse and evaluate Plato's concept of artistic imitation.

Plato, like all the great philosophers of every age, was deeply interested in the perplexing problem of human knowledge. The question troubled him a good deal, until at length he struck upon what seemed to him the only intelligent answer. The problem as Plato conceived it came down to this: precisely what is knowledge? Is it perception, or "true judgment", or is it something more? On the one hand, human knowledge seems to begin with the sensible perception of corporeal beings. But does this not lead to a contradiction? Experience tells us that sensible objects are forever changing, are particular, singular, and purely contingent. Our concepts, on the other hand, are characterized by their immutability, universality, and necessity. How then can the former possibly be the cause of the latter?³

In the Theaetetus Plato has given us a very complete presentation of what he believed knowledge was not. In this dialogue the young mathematician Theaetetus enters into a discussion with Socrates on the subject of knowledge. Upon being asked what he believes human knowledge to be, Theaetetus replies that the Protagorean definition of knowledge as mere sense perception seems the most satisfactory to him.⁴ Socrates, however, objects to this opinion

³Frederick Copleston, S.J., A History of Philosophy, I, (Westminster, 1946), pp. 149-151.

⁴Plato, Theaetetus, 152 c, trans. B. Jowett, 4th ed. (Oxford, 1953) IV, p. 246.

for several rather weighty reasons. For one thing, Socrates remarks, if⁷ knowledge is nothing more than perception how could it be said that one man is wiser than another?⁵ According to Protagoras' supposition, is not knowledge a purely relative matter? Does not every man become his own ultimate criterion of right and wrong, good and bad? For after all, who is in a better position to pass judgment on one's own perceptions than the man himself? Clearly, then, while your perceptions may be true for you, mine are true for me, and neither of us can boast of being wiser than the other.

But Socrates has not yet finished with Protagoras. If knowledge and wisdom are relative matters, why do sophists like Protagoras deceitfully pose as teachers and unscrupulously accept handsome sums of money for their services?⁶ Why should anyone sit and listen to their lectures if one man's knowledge is as good as another's?

Further, Socrates continues, sense perception is surely not the whole of our knowledge. For we come to an understanding of many things such as existence and non-existence, the conclusions to mathematical problems, sameness and difference, all of which transcend mere sense perceptions.⁷

As a result of these rather telling arguments Theaetetus sees that his first definition of knowledge is untenable. However, he tries another. Perhaps, he remarks, knowledge is true judgment or opinion.⁸ This definition

⁵Ibid. 161 d, Jowett IV, p. 258-259

⁶Ibid. 161 d-e, Jowett, p. 259

⁷Ibid. 185 c-d, Jowett, p. 286

⁸Ibid. 200 e, Jowett, p. 306.

does not satisfy Socrates any more than the first. He objects to it on the score that not all true judgments need necessarily imply knowledge on the part of the one making them.⁹ An example may perhaps make Socrates' meaning clearer. Suppose I were to say: President Eisenhower is playing golf this afternoon. My statement may be true. But the fact of the matter is that I do not know whether it is true or not since I have no idea of what Mr. Eisenhower is doing this afternoon. Accidentally, I may have judged correctly, but my judgment implied no real knowledge on my part. Socrates' argument against Theaetetus' second definition of knowledge is precisely this. Clearly, then, knowledge is not simply true judgment and Theaetetus is asked to suggest another definition of knowledge.

Theaetetus' third and final attempt is no more successful than either of the previous two. Being hard pressed Theaetetus suggests that true knowledge is "true judgment plus a rational explanation or account."¹⁰ But again, Socrates has an answer ready at hand. If "giving a rational explanation" means an analysis into parts, it is hard to see how it could lead to genuine knowledge. One does not come to a scientific knowledge of a wagon, for example, by enumerating its parts (axle, wheels, etc.), nor does one acquire the grammarian's knowledge of language merely by learning the alphabet.¹¹ Socrates then goes on to demonstrate that, in

⁹Ibid. 201 a-c, Jowett, p. 306-307.

¹⁰Ibid. 201 d, Jowett, p. 307.

¹¹Ibid. 207 a - 208 c, Jowett, p. 314-315.

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whatever sense one takes the phrase "plus a rational explanation," it does not explain the essential nature of knowledge.

And so the question remains, what is knowledge? In several of his dialogues Plato proposes his own answer to this question. For Plato there was nothing quite so evident than that true knowledge was attainable and that it was of the infallible and the "real." "True knowledge must possess both of these characteristics, and any state of mind that cannot vindicate its claim to both...cannot be true knowledge."¹² This basic supposition, which, incidentally, Plato does not attempt to prove, is of extreme importance in Platonic epistemology.

To Heraclitus Plato conceded that the sensibly perceptible world was forever in flux, composed, as it is, of contingent, singular objects perpetually undergoing changes of various kinds.¹³ But against any and every form of Sophistic relativism Plato maintained that absolute knowledge was attainable. Man can and does know the eternal, immutable, necessary essences of things.¹⁴ The problem, as Plato saw it, was how to reconcile these two facts, the stability and universality of knowledge on the one hand, and the constant change and individuality of perceived objects on the other.

Plato never developed a theory of mental abstraction as Aristotle did after him. The Stagirite later answered the problem of universal knowledge

¹²Copleston, p. 149

¹³Theaetetus, 152 d-e, Jowett, pp. 247-248.

¹⁴Republic, 484 b, Jowett, II, p. 342

by pointing out that the mind itself grasps the essential element of the sensible singular and knows that element abstractly and independently of its individuating notes. Plato, unaware of such a solution drew the only conclusion that seemed plausible to him. The perpetually changing beings of sense perception are not the objects of intellectual knowledge because they are not stable nor are they "real." The true objects of intellectual knowledge are the universal, essential forms or ideas themselves which really exist in a world of their own.¹⁵ Since knowledge itself is of the immutable and universal, Plato argued, only the universal essences themselves could be its object. What then is the role of sensible reality? Plato answered this question quite easily. Sensible objects resemble the ideal forms because they participate in them and imitate them.¹⁶ Thus they become the occasion of our knowledge in that they recall to mind the ideas which they resemble.

Thus was conceived Plato's theory of knowledge by reminiscence which has caused a good deal of controversy among scholars. Actually, the theory was more or less the inevitable conclusion of Plato's approach to epistemology. Having stated that the object of intellectual knowledge was the eternal forms alone he was compelled to explain how and when man came to know those objects and secondly how he came to recall them. In the Phaedo he proposes his celebrated solution to these rather knotty questions.

The soul, Socrates tells his friends, existed prior to its entrance

¹⁵Plato, Republic 152 d-e, Jowett, II, pp. 372-375.

¹⁶Plato, Parmenides, 132 d, Jowett, II, P. 676.

into this world.¹⁷ During that period of pre-corporeal existence it contemplated the essence of beauty, goodness, and all the other absolutes. At the time of birth, however, man forgets this knowledge and would never regain it except for the fact that sense objects resemble the ideas and hence help him recall the knowledge that he possessed prior to birth.¹⁸

Whether the theory of reminiscence actually represents Plato's mature opinion on this subject or whether it is a tentative, hypothetical solution of his earlier years is disputed by scholars. Cornford¹⁹ and Taylor²⁰ apparently believe that the theory represents Plato's true mind on the subject, but Copleston is not quite so sure.²¹ So far as the present consideration is concerned, however, it makes little difference who is right. What does concern us now is the more fundamental assertion that true knowledge transcends sensation altogether. For Plato the world of sense experience, as Taylor says, "always falls short of a complete realization of the form,"²² and sensible objects are therefore only imitations of reality.

The real key to true knowledge, then, is the realization that sense objects are at best faulty imitations of reality and truth itself. This is the point which is of importance here. In the Republic Plato has explained at length precisely what he means.

¹⁷Plato, Phaedo, 73 a - 76c, Jowett, I, pp. 425-430.

¹⁸Ibid. Also Meno 81e- 86b, Jowett, I, pp. 278-285.

¹⁹Francis M. Cornford, Plato's Theory of Knowledge (London, 1935), pp. 2, 129.

²⁰A.E.Taylor, Plato, The Man and His Work (New York, 1936), pp. 186-189.

²¹Copleston, pp. 168-169.

²²Taylor, Plato, The Man, p. 188.

In the fifth book of the Republic Plato divides all knowledge into two general categories, δόξα and ἐπιστήμη²³ Each of these is redivided into two parts. δόξα, he explains, is knowledge of sensible object or images, while ἐπιστήμη is knowledge of the forms or the originals themselves.

δοξα is of two kinds. There is εἰκασία whose object is mere shadows or reflections of sensible realities. The works of second-rate painters might well be an object of such knowledge. πίστις is the second type of δόξα. It has for its object the sensibly perceptible beings of every day experience. For example, to know a just man or a just constitution would be πίστις. It is knowledge of sorts, but only the knowledge of justice in itself is really worthy of the name.

ἐπιστήμη or genuine wisdom is similarly of two kinds, the first being διάνοια. As to the precise nature of διάνοια the scholars are at variance. Nettleship prefer to take διάνοια as that mathematical or scientific knowledge which is built on basic, unproven postulates and axioms.

Plato tells us further that διάνοια reasons from 'hypotheses'. Plato meant by a hypothesis a truth which is assumed to be ultimate or primary when it really depends upon some higher truth; not that it is untrue or could ever be proved false, but that it is treated for the present as self-conditioned... Arithmetic and geometry rest upon certain assumptions or hypotheses. The ultimate assumption of arithmetic is number, with its primary properties of odd and even. The arithmetician does not expect to have to give an account of this; if any one denies the existence of number, the possibility of his studying arithmetic is destroyed; but, granted number as a starting-point the arithmetician reasons from it connectedly and consistently, and discovers from it any particular arithmetical truth he wants.²⁴

²³Plato, Republic, 509d-511e, Jowett, II, pp. 372-375.

²⁴Richard L. Nettleship, Lectures on the Republic of Plato, ed. by Lord Charnwood, 2nd ed. (London, 1929), p. 252.

A. E. Taylor²⁵ and Copleston,²⁶ although their ultimate explanations are quite different, agree that *διάνοια* has as its own peculiar object *τὰ μαθηματικά*. Unlike the *τὰ ὄρατά*, the *τὰ μαθηματικά* are intelligible particulars. In so far as its object belongs to the intelligible order, *διάνοια* differs from *δόξα*. In so far as its object is particular it is distinguished from *νόησις*.

νόησις, however, is the summit of intellectual perfection. There the mind leaves behind the sensible and the particular and soars to a knowledge of reality itself. Employing the hypotheses of *διάνοια* as a starting point the philosopher "passes beyond them and ascends to first principles."²⁷ By means of the dialectical process he contemplates the ideas themselves. And "having clearly grasped the first principles, the mind then descends to the conclusions that follow from them, again making use only of abstract reasoning and not of sensible images."²⁸ Therefore, the ideas themselves which, it should be remembered, are ontologically as well as logically real, furnish the true object of *νόησις*. Plato's famous cave allegory which opens book six is but an illustration of this so-called "simile of the line."

According to Plato, therefore, that man alone is wise who perceives the essentially "imitative" nature of the sensible world. The men, the

²⁵Taylor, "Forms and Numbers," *Mind*, XXXV (Oct. 1926), pp. 419-440.

²⁶Copleston, p. 156-157. (Jan. 1927), pp. 12-33.

²⁷Ibid. p. 159.

²⁸Ibid.

animals, the justice, the goodness which we perceive in our every day life merely copy or mirror man, horse, justice as they really are. Hence the philosopher aware of this world's imperfect and inconstant nature rises above it to the world of transcendent reality, to the abode of the ideas themselves.

These epistemological considerations naturally give rise to several difficulties of a more metaphysical nature. For example, how and why do the objects of sensation resemble the ideas? That there is some connection between them in the Platonic universe is evident from Plato's theory of knowledge. But as yet he has not told us the nature of source of this relation. The problem by Plato's own admission is a difficult one and it must be said that Plato never really answered it even to his own satisfaction. What answer he did propose, however, has a direct bearing on the subject under consideration at present.

In themselves the forms are nothing else than absolute essences of created things. As Thonnard has pointed out these absolutes are distinguished by four characteristic qualities.²⁹ In the first place they are totally spiritual, that is they enjoy some form of ontological existence independent of matter and are perceived immediately by the mind alone. Further, they are not merely concepts but possess full-fledged extra-mental existence, although, as Copleston has very astutely pointed out this does not mean that they exist in some real place. "There can be no question of the Ideas being in a place for ex hypothesi they are incorporeal essences and incorporeal essences cannot be

²⁹F.J.Thonnard, Précis D'Histoire de la Philosophie, Nouvelle Edition, revue et corrigée (Paris, 1951), pp. 51-52.

in a place. It is absurd to speak as though the Platonic theory involved the assumption of an Ideal man with length, breadth, etc., existing in a heavenly place. To do so is to make the Platonic theory gratuitously ridiculous."³⁰

Where, then, do these Ideas exist if they do not occupy a corporeal place? According to Plato they abide in the heavenly sphere, the *τόπος νοητός* where the gods and the souls of the blessed contemplate them. The *τόπος* is described in the Phaedrus as follows: "Now of the heaven which is above the heavens no earthly poet has ever sung or ever will sing in a worthy manner. But I must tell, for I am bound to speak truly when speaking of the truth. The colorless and formless and intangible essence is visible to the mind which is the only lord of the soul. Circling around this in the region above the heavens is the place of true knowledge."^{30A}

Thirdly, the ideas are immutable and eternal; and lastly they are "pure," or as Thonnard expresses it, "Chacune dans son ordre est parfaite; on pourrait les dire infinies." Furthermore, they are "absolument déterminées; rien ne reste obscur en elles pour l'esprit,..elles se distinguent parfaitement les unes des autres."³¹

Further, among these numerous subsistent forms we find that Plato has established a hierarchy of grades. At the very summit there resides as the sovereign form absolute goodness. In the Republic Plato tells us that the idea of the good is "the universal author of all things beautiful and right, parent of light and the lord of light in this world, immediate and supreme

³⁰Copleston, p. 168.

^{30A}Phaedrus, 247 B.

³¹Thonnard, p. 52.

source of truth and reason in the intellectual."³² In an earlier passage he remarks that "the good is not essence, but far exceeds essence in dignity and power." Further, the good is "not only the source of intelligibility in all objects of knowledge, but also of their being and essence."³³ It would seem, then, that according to Plato the "good" as the supremely real transcends essence yet is the cause or principle of the being and essence of all things.³⁴

The good or one, then, as the source of all reality, stands at the summit of Plato's hierarchy of forms. Below it, however, we find the other subsistent ideas ranging from those nearest to the idea of the "good," and hence the richest and the most real, all the way down to the infimae species or the ἄτομα εἶδη, which represent the most specific and lowest grade of ideas. In the Sophist, Plato explains that each of the ideas has a definition which can be arrived at by dividing the notion (ἰδιότης) into genus and specific difference. Plato speaks as though a generic form is one and at the same time many. It is many in that it pervades the subordinate specific forms somehow or other, "blending" with each of them yet retaining its own unity.³⁵ There is a communion (κοινωνία) between forms, and the more generic partakes of (μετέχειν) the specific forms.³⁶ Thus, for example, the form "animal" is

³²Republic, 517b-c, Jowett, II, p. 379.

³³Ibid. 509b., Jowett, II, p. 372.

³⁴If we can trust Aristotle's testimony on the point, Plato was accused to identify the good with the "one." Aristotle, Eudemian Ethics, 1218 a, 24.

³⁵Plato, Sophist, 253 d, Jowett, III, pp. 407-408.

³⁶Copleston, p. 185.

one, yet at the same time it is many, since it "blends" with or "partakes in" the universal forms of "dog," "horse" or "man." Similarly, "being" is one yet it pervades all the lower, subordinate forms.³⁷ Hence Plato established a neat hierarchy of subsistent ideas beginning with the most generic at the summit of the pyramid and finishing with the most specific at the pyramid's base. These *ἄτομα εἶδη*, then, constitute the lowest rung on the ladder and below them there is nothing except the individual objects of sense perceptions.

So much for the ideas themselves and their inter-subordination. A more important question now confronts us. If the heaven of Ideas alone is really being, while the world of phenomena is mere becoming and if the Ideas are both the cause and the exemplar of sensible things, how is the inter-connection to be explained? The chasm separating the intelligible from the sensible world is indeed a wide one, and it should be admitted at the outset that Plato never adequately bridged it. He tried valiantly, but never quite succeeded.

To the end Plato insisted that the sense world was only imperfectly real and what reality it possessed was due to the resemblance it bore to the Ideas. In the Parmenides Plato explains this relation as, 1) a participation (*μέθεξις*) in the Ideas and as 2) an imitation (*μίμησις*) of the Ideas, the Idea serving as the exemplar or *παράδειγμα* while the particular objects are the *ὁμοιώματα* or *μιμήματα*.³⁸ Such explanations lead to innumerable difficulties, as Plato himself was aware. He considers a few of them in the Parmenides. But he never discovered any really adequate answers even

³⁷Sophist, 254 c-d, Jowett, III, pp. 408-409.

³⁸Parmenides, 132 d, Jowett, II, p. 676.

to these self-proposed objections. As a result the χωρισμός that separated the intelligible from the sensible was never satisfactorily eliminated.

Copleston remarks: "Plato very probably considered that by bringing down the Forms, by the process of division, to the border of the sensible sphere, he was providing a connecting link between τὰ ἀόρατα and τὰ ὄρατα. It may be that the relation between the individuals and the infimae species was to be elucidated in the Philosopher, the dialogue which, it is conjectured, was once intended by Plato to follow the Statesman and which was never written, but it cannot be said that the chasm was ever satisfactorily bridged, and the problem of the χωρισμός remained."³⁹

What this explanation does establish quite clearly, however, is what we might call the metaphysical significance of imitation in Platonic philosophy. The sensible world, in so far as it has a raison d'être at all, derives it from the fact that it mimics the real world of Ideas. Perhaps the notion is unsatisfactory and inadequate in many ways. But it is essentially Platonic and, as will be pointed out later on, formed the basis of his entire aesthetic theory.

In the Timaeus Plato has left us a fairly clear statement of his doctrine on the subject of physics. Here again the concept of imitation occupies a conspicuous place.

Some few scholars, A.E. Taylor among them, have contended that the doctrine proposed in the Timaeus is not Platonic at all. Taylor believes that the views expressed in the dialogue are those of the Pythagorean Timaeus. He is willing to admit that perhaps Plato had accepted the doctrine as his own

³⁹Copleston, p. 186.

provisionally as "the most promising line in fifth century science and the one most directly connected with his own developments."⁴⁰ But as a doctrine, it belongs more properly to *Timaeus* than to *Plato*.

F.M.Cornford among others rejects this theory as an "improbability so great that overwhelming proof must be required."⁴¹ Cornford also points out that "all the ancient Platonists from Aristotle to Simplicius and all mediæval and modern scholars to our own day have assumed that this dialogue contains the mature doctrine of its author."⁴¹ It is this majority opinion that the present writer prefers to accept.

This sensible world, like all objects of becoming, necessarily implies some kind of a cause, which Plato refers to as the divine Craftsman or Demiurge.⁴³ The demiurge is responsible for the order in the universe, but he did not create ex nihilo since the matter or primeval chaos was somehow or other supplied to him. The demiurge "took over" what he found, namely, the four primary qualities out of which he molded the objects of this world as we know it in imitation of the ideal forms. Then he placed these objects in the receptacle or space which he also found and "took over."⁴⁴

In this way, then, the objects of our ordinary sense perception came into existence. They are the handiwork of a divine craftsman who has

⁴⁰A.E.Taylor, A Commentary on Plato's *Timaeus* (Oxford, 1928), p. 19.

⁴¹Francis M. Cornford, Plato's Cosmology-The *Timaeus* of Plato translated with a running commentary (London, 1937), p. ix.

⁴³*Timaeus*, 28 c, Jowett, III, p. 716.

⁴⁴*Ibid.* 28c-40d, Jowett, pp. 716-727.

fashioned them in imitation of the eternal realities themselves. Admittedly, these reproductions are only imperfect facsimiles not to be confused with the "real" thing. Nevertheless, they copy reality, they mirror it because in some way they participate in it. Once again we find Plato having recourse to his fundamental contention that this universe of ours is one step removed from the true and once again we find him leaning heavily upon the concept of imitation.

But still other uses of *μιμησις* could be cited in the dialogues of Plato, if time and space allowed. Again and again Plato employs the term. The essence of true statesmanship, for example, implies "imitation." For the enlightened administrator of a city is the one who realizes that his government must imitate good government itself if he is to be worthy of the name statesman.⁴⁵ In a sense he must be a philosopher far wiser and more prudent than his fellows. Otherwise, the state he rules will be like a ship "in which there is a captain who is taller and stronger than anyone else in the ship, but he is a little deaf and is shortsighted, and his knowledge of navigation is not much better."⁴⁶ The sailors will eventually mutiny against such an incompetent captain and take charge themselves. But since they have no knowledge of the pilot's art, inevitable destruction awaits them. Enlightened government can only come from those who know what good government is in itself. Elsewhere Plato remarks that laws which are the source of true government imitate the truths which they embody.⁴⁷

⁴⁵Plato, Statesman, 293e-297c, Jowett, III, pp. 509-513.

⁴⁶Republic, 488a-489a, Jowett, II, pp. 347-348.

⁴⁷Statesman 300b-c, Jowett, III, p. 516.

But there remains one use of the term "imitation" of which mention has not been made as yet and which is quite interesting in its implications. At the very beginning of the dialogue which bears his name, Critias remarks: "All that is said by any of us can only be imitation and representation."⁴⁸ When someone discusses matters divine and heavenly, he goes on, we are quite content if his words bear only a remote likeness to the realities which they imitate, because our knowledge of heavenly things is so meager. On the other hand, since all of us are quite well acquainted with human matters, we are more critical of those who attempt to "imitate" them in words. Hence Critias begs the kind indulgence of his hearers before he begins his disquisition.

At the beginning of the Timaeus Socrates registers a similar complaint but for a different reason. He yearns, so he remarks to his hearers, to describe in fitting language the ideal state which he has outlined in the Republic. If he could only describe the history of such a city, its wars, the courage of its warriors in battle, its magnanimity towards other cities! But he realizes that he is incapable of doing so, nor can the ordinary run of poets or the Sophists do so for him because "that which is beyond the range of a man's education he finds hard to carry out in action, and still harder adequately to represent in language."⁴⁹ In other words, discourse is nothing more than an imitation of that which it describes. Such linguistic imitations are quite difficult especially of those matters that are outside the scope of one's education.

⁴⁸Critias 107b, Jowett, III, p. 789.

⁴⁹Timaeus, 19b-e, Jowett, III, pp. 707-708.

Turning now to the Cratylus we discover Plato carrying the point one step further. Here Socrates tells us that "a name ($\acute{\omicron}\nu\omicron\mu\omicron$) is a vocal imitation of that which the imitator imitates."⁵⁰ It is an imitation, however, quite different from artistic imitation because it does not mimic the colors, forms, or sounds of things but rather their natures or essences. Thus, for example, the word "table" is an imitation of that nature "tableness" found in certain four-legged objects. A little later he goes on to contend that the letters of which words are comprised are themselves imitations. P, for instance, expresses motion, $\varphi, \psi, \sigma, \zeta$, indicate shaking or shivering as in the words $\mu\upsilon\chi\rho\acute{\omicron}\nu, \sigma\epsilon\iota\sigma\mu\acute{\omicron}\varsigma$, etc. Σ and Γ signify a state of rest while Λ indicates smoothness as in $\lambda\epsilon\tilde{\iota}\omicron\varsigma$.⁵¹

Thus there is a real art to formulating words out of syllables in such a way that the name produced adequately imitates or represents the nature of the object to be imitated. Not every man is capable of such a task. For "he who by syllables and letters imitates the nature of things, if he gives all that is appropriate will produce a good image, or in other words, a name; but if he subtracts or perhaps adds a little, he will make an image but not a good one; whence I infer that some names are well and others ill made."⁵² Socrates adds one more caution. Do not expect that words will always be so formulated that they will imitate the object's nature perfectly. For "do you

⁵⁰Cratylus, 423b, Jowett, III, p. 86.

⁵¹Ibid. 426c-427d, Jowett, III, pp. 87-89.

⁵²Ibid. 431d, Jowett, III, p. 95.

not perceive that images are very far from having qualities which are the exact counterpart of the realities which they represent?"⁵³ On the other hand we must demand that words do imitate their objects as faithfully as possible.

From what has been said thus far, one can appreciate the wisdom of those words of Prof. Verdenius with which this chapter opened. It is certainly true that the concept of "imitation" is at the center of Plato's philosophy. Without it Plato's world is meaningless, his epistemology is unintelligible, his notion of physics empty. His concept of education, of statesmanship, rest upon it. For all of these imply the essentially imitative nature of this world of becoming (τὰ γιγνόμενα). And finally his concept of language has meaning only in so far as one is willing to concede that words are basically imitations of natures and discourses are imitations of the things described.

Is it any wonder, then, that when Plato approached the subject of art he was inclined to emphasize the imitative or representative aspects of that subject? Would we not be more surprised if he had emphasized anything else? One might even go so far as to say that Plato was metaphysically necessitated to adopt this approach to art. And yet as true as this last remark may be, it should not be misunderstood. Plato did not insist upon the essentially imitative nature of art merely for the sake of logical consistency. He did so, as we shall see later, because he was convinced that the essence of art could be analyzed in terms of *μίμησις* and only in those terms, and good art differed from bad precisely as good imitation differed from bad. But this point will be discussed later in its proper place.

⁵³Ibid. 432d, Jowett, III, pp. 96-97.

CHAPTER II

THE PLACE OF "IMITATION" IN PLATO'S THEORY OF ART

Having considered the major role that imitation played in Plato's philosophy as a whole, we are in a much better position to appreciate why the father of the Academy looked upon art as essentially an imitation. It is to this point that we would like to turn our attention now. Before we do so, however, one prefatory remark seems in place. In approaching this matter a certain amount of care must be exercised. It should be noted that Plato's position is not so simple as it might seem at first encounter. Anyone who is deceived by appearance will be inclined to scratch Plato's opinion off as a naive and childish over-simplification. Close study will reveal, however, that the Platonic theory of art is anything but naive or juvenile. And his contention that art is basically a representation or imitation of some aspect of reality, far from being frivolous, has a good deal of objective validity.

In the section that follows the notion of art as an imitation will be subjected to rather close scrutiny. Besides pointing out precisely what Plato meant by the phrase, it will be necessary to indicate the difference between good imitation and bad imitation, since therein lies the distinction between good and bad art in Plato's opinion. Once we have pointed out the essence of true art we will be in a position to understand that Plato's concept of artistic imitation does not imply a slavish copying of sensible objects. These are the major points that will be treated in the present chapter.

The reader must not look for a detailed analysis of Platonic aesthetics here. The present writer does not pretend to be giving a thorough study of Plato's theory of art. As a matter of fact, this has been done already by several very competent scholars.¹ Such an analysis would be beyond the scope of the present study. What we are concerned with is something more fundamental, namely, the basic presupposition upon which Plato's aesthetics has been constructed. The belief that art is primarily imitative forms the foundation upon which Plato's theory of art stands. In so far as that notion is valid Plato's theory rests upon a sturdy foundation. In so far as that notion is false, Plato must be accused of having built upon sand.

What, then, does Plato mean when he speaks of art as a mimesis? Does he mean, as some have hinted, that art is nothing more than a scrupulously exact reproduction of its model? Is the artist to be looked upon as a mere copier whose task is to reduplicate the original with the utmost fidelity? It is certainly true that Plato frequently used the word mimesis in precisely this sense. But he did so for the express purpose of denouncing it and exposing it as the travesty of art that it is. If art is mere slavish copying and nothing more, Plato has no use for it whatever.

But if mimesis does not mean servile copying, what does it mean? Perhaps the most satisfying answer to this question is the one that Lane Cooper has proposed. He prefers to translate the term mimesis as "representation." "The poet, like the painter, the musician, the sculptor, has in mind a conception which he will represent for his own and other's delight... The

¹John W.H. Atkins, Literary Criticism In Antiquity: A Sketch of its development (Cambridge, 1934), I, pp. 33-70.

Rupert C. Lodge, Plato's Theory of Art (London, 1953)

conception which the artist 'imitates' is his 'object'; the pigments, or the stone, or the notes, in which he represents his object, we call the 'medium.'²

The artist, then, does not copy, he represents. The starting point of good art is the noble concept, the product of the artist's intuitive vision by which he penetrates through mere appearances to that higher and most sublime reality that is hidden within. Thanks to this insight he perceives universal realities and significances. He becomes aware of the universal essences or forms of things which the individual objects of this world mirror in an imperfect manner.

It is this concept, the result of his intuitive vision, that the artist attempts to re-present with the aid of the medium of his art. Taken in this sense mimesis does not imply slavish reproduction. Quite the contrary, it implies creative activity of the highest order. For the inspired artist accomplishes what nature has never attempted. "His distinctive work as an artist consists in stamping the given material with the impress of the form which is universal."³ What Butcher says of Aristotle on this point applies equally well for Plato. "There is an ideal form which is present in each individual phenomenon but imperfectly manifested. This form impresses itself as a sensuous appearance on the mind of the artist; he seeks to give it a more complete expression, to bring to light the ideal which is only half revealed in the world of reality."⁴

²Land Cooper, The Poetics of Aristotle: Its Meaning and Influence (New York, 1927), p. 18.

³S.H. Butcher, Aristotle's Theory of Poetry and Fine Art with a critical text and translation of the Poetics, 4th ed. (New York, 1951), p. 153.

⁴Ibid.

Such activity is surely creative, for "to seize the universal and to reproduce it in simple and sensuous form is not to reflect a reality already familiar through sense perceptions; rather it is a rivalry of nature, a completion of her unfulfilled purposes, a correction of her failures."⁵

Verdenius, speaking of Plato in particular, remarks:

It may be concluded that there are two points differentiating good art from mere trickery: its truthfulness and its modesty. The artist should not content himself with a superficial glance at his object, but he must try to penetrate its inner structure. His task is faithful interpretation, not slavish imitation. Secondly, he should have the honesty to admit the poorness of his means and not try to overstep the limitations they lay upon him. His work should clearly show that its representation of reality, in spite of, or rather, on account of, its very faithfulness, is fundamentally different from reality itself. It should present itself, not as a copy, but as a transposition on a different level and as obedient to the laws of this medium.⁶

More often than not the Greek word mimesis is rendered into English as "imitation." If understood correctly "imitation" is not an inappropriate translation of the term. Unfortunately, however, "imitation" to many people is synonymous with "slavish copying." Mimesis, if it meant anything to Plato, did not mean "slavish copying." For this reason the English word "representation" is perhaps a more apt translation of the Greek, as Professor Cooper has suggested.

That Plato was firmly convinced of art's mimetic nature is clear enough from his dialogues. For example, at one point in the Laws he describes the origin of art in the following manner; "Art sprang up... and produced in play certain images and very partial imitations of the truth, having an affinity

⁵Ibid., 154.

⁶Verdenius, 21.

to one another, such as music and painting create and their companion arts. And if there are other arts, these have a serious purpose and cooperate with nature, such, for example, as medicine and husbandry and gymnastic."⁷

Although at this particular point in the Laws Plato is summarizing the opinions of "certain philosophers" with whom he does not wholly agree, it is nevertheless clear from what he says elsewhere that these remarks are an excellent summary of his own opinion in the matter. For example, in the Sophist Plato remarks that art is imitative and as such it is a form of creative activity. "Imitation is a kind of creation of images, however, and not of real things."⁸

When speaking of the various "fine" arts more specifically Plato is at pains to point out their essentially mimetic nature. An apt example is the painter's art. In the Republic Plato remarks: "And the painter too is, as I conceive, just another creator of appearances."⁹ And just a few lines later he reiterates the same idea by remarking that the art of painting is designed to be an imitation not of things as they are but of things as they appear.¹⁰ Again in the Sophist, we hear the Stranger describing the painter as one who "makes resemblances of real things." He then goes on to add that at times the painter "can deceive the less intelligent sort of young children, to whom he shows his pictures at a distance, into the belief that he has the

⁷Plato, Laws 889b-d, Jowett, IV, p. 457.

⁸Sophist 265b, Jowett, III, p. 423.

⁹Republic 596e, Jowett, II, p. 470.

¹⁰Ibid. 598b, Jowett, II, p. 472.

absolute power of making whatever he likes."¹¹

Like painting, music is an imitative art, odd as that fact may seem to Plato's modern day reader. At one point in the Laws the Athenian Stranger poses this question to Cleinias, the Cretan: "Do we not regard all music as representative and imitative?" Cleinias answer, "Certainly." The Stranger then continues: "Everyone will admit that musical compositions are all imitative and representative. Will not poets and spectators and actors all agree in this?" Cleinias' answer again is a decisive "Yes."¹²

In the Cratylus we find much the same opinion expressed with regard to music. Socrates is trying to explain to his friends in what sense "words" are an imitation. By way of clarification he points out that music is not imitative in the same sense that words are imitative though both may be classified as vocal utterances. "All objects," he says, "have sound and figure, and many have color... the arts which have to do with these are music and drawing."¹³ In other words the musician imitates sound and figure while the painter imitates the color.

At another point in their discussion the Athenian Stranger speaking of music remarks: "I may observe, in passing, that in music there certainly are figures and there are melodies; and music is concerned with harmony and rhythm, so that you may speak of a melody or figure having good rhythm or good harmony... And let us say that the figures and melodies which are

¹¹Sophist 234b, Jowett, III, p. 383.

¹²Laws 668a-c, Jowett, IV, p. 235.

¹³Cratylus 423b, Jowett, III, p. 86.

expressive of virtue of soul or body, or of images of virtue, are without exception good, and those which are expressive of vice are the reverse of good.¹⁴ Or in other words music is more than an imitation of sounds and figures, it is imitative of moral qualities, of virtues. Good music can be distinguished from bad on the basis of the object imitated. If it is virtuous the imitation is good, if it is expressive of evil then it is essentially evil.

We of the modern age may find it somewhat difficult to conceive of music as imitative. We are accustomed to think of it in a different way.

The emotion it suggests, the message it conveys, corresponds but little with a reality outside itself, with a world of feeling already known. We cannot test its truth by its accordance with any original. It is capable of expressing general and elementary moods of feeling, which will be variously interpreted by different hearers. It cannot render the finer shades of extra-musical emotion with any degree of certainty and precision. Its expressive power, its capacity to reproduce independent realities, is weak in proportion as the impression it produces is vivid and definite.¹⁵

But Plato and Aristotle did not conceive of music in this manner. For them "music is the express image and reflexion of moral character.... Not only states of feeling but also strictly ethical qualities and disposition of mind are reproduced by musical imitation, and on the close correspondence between the copy and the original depends the importance of music in the formation of character. Music in reflecting character moulds and influences it."¹⁶

Dancing too must be added to the list of mimetic arts. Plato tells us in

¹⁴Laws 655 a-b, Jowett, IV, p. 220.

¹⁵S.H. Butcher, Aristotle's Theory of Poetry and Fine Art with a critical text and translation of the Poetics, 4th ed. (New York, 1951), p. 129.

¹⁶Ibid.

the Laws that dancing is of two kinds: "One of nobler figures, imitating the honourable, the other of the more ignoble figure, imitating the mean." The first or noble type can be redivided again. "Of the serious, one kind is of those engaged in war and vehement action and is the exercise of a noble person and a manly heart. The other exhibits a temperate soul in the enjoyments of prosperity and modest pleasure."¹⁷ The Bacchic dance, however, which imitates drunken men is to be outlawed altogether.

Finally, there is poetry and drama both of which in the Platonic system are imitative arts. In the Republic Plato divides all poetry into three classes: the purely narrative in which the poet merely relates a story without assuming the role of any of the characters; the imitative, in which the poet impersonates the characters of his story; and, finally, a type of poetry which is a union of both the narrative and imitative methods.¹⁸

As an example of the purely narrative Plato mentions the dithyramb, "a choral lyric originally connected with the worship of Dionysus, sung by a 'circular choir' probably of fifty singers."¹⁹ Comedy and tragedy quite clearly are examples of poetry that is wholly imitative, while epic verse is a mixture of the imitative and the purely narrative.

Other passages might be cited, but these will suffice for our present purpose. They demonstrate clearly the essentially imitative nature of art according to Plato's point of view.

¹⁷Laws, 814e-817e, Jowett, pp. 383-386.

¹⁸Republic 392d, Jowett, p. 238.

¹⁹The Oxford Companion to Classical Literature, compiled and edited by Sir Paul Harvey (Oxford, 1951), p. 149.

That Plato adopted such a point of view is not in itself at all surprising. The belief that "art imitates nature" was quite probably a prevalent one among the philosophers and artists of Plato's day. They doubtlessly accepted this point of view from earlier thinkers "who devoid of mystical insight and interested primarily in explaining the physics of the world, tended to look upon art in the plainest and most obvious manner possible."²⁰ What else did the sculptor, for example, do but mold a bronze or marble copy of an athlete or a charioteer? And what was the net result of his labors, but an imitative representation of the athlete copied? It was a simple and rather obvious answer and one that appealed to the unsophisticated philosophers of the Pre-Socratic era. As we shall see, however, Plato did more than merely adopt their opinion. He altered it radically so as to make it fit in with his philosophy.

This last remark brings us to a second reason why Plato looked upon imitation as the essence of art, namely, that it fitted into his general philosophical system quite neatly. If it had not, Plato would not have adopted it. For Plato was not one to follow tradition blindly. He borrowed from his intellectual forbears when he could do so in all honesty. But he did not hesitate to disagree with them when he felt obliged to do so. In the matter of the arts, however, the currently popular opinion suited his philosophy well, and consequently he adopted it willingly.

For after all, what is art, looked at metaphysically, but an imitation of reality? Consider the painter. What does he do but copy the objects which

²⁰ Atkins, p. 52.

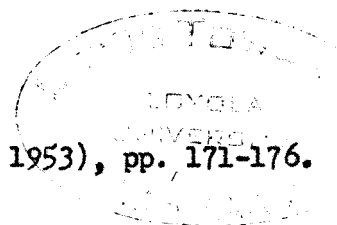
make themselves present to his senses? He paints a portrait, or a picture of a bird or some other sensibly perceived object. And yet if we analyse the nature of these phenomena more carefully, do we not find that they themselves are but feeble copies of an even higher and more noble reality? And if, as was stated in the previous chapter, these Forms or Ideas alone truly exist, must it not be admitted that the artist's work is merely a copy of a copy of reality? It is two steps removed from the "real." Just as God imitates in organizing the universe, the painter imitates in practising his art. Clearly, then, the popular notion of the "imitative" nature of art was quite in conformity with Plato's metaphysics.²¹

It likewise fits in very logically with Plato's epistemology, as Rupert Lodge has pointed out. While the philosopher has *ἐπιστήμη*, the practical craftsman has at least *δοξία*. But the painter of pictures and his fellow practitioners of the "fine" arts have neither. They tend to confuse their works of art with reality and hence they have mere *εἰκασία*.²²

Since for Plato imitation was at the very heart of art it was only natural to expect that imitation would play a major role in his criticism of art. And in this regard Plato was thoroughly consistent. To his mind, good art was true art; that is to say, art was truly good in so far as it imitated or copied the original as faithfully as possible. Art was defective or faulty in so far as it fell short of this standard. This statement, however, should not be misconstrued. Plato did not equate good art with a slavish copy of the sensible

²¹Republic 596e-598d, Jowett, II, pp. 469-472.

²²Rupert C. Lodge, Plato's Theory of Art (London, 1953), pp. 171-176.



model, as we shall point out at length later on. Nevertheless, Plato very definitely made truth the ultimate criterion distinguishing noble from worthless art. The poet, the dramatist, the musical composer who is neglectful of truth is most assuredly a poor artist and, what is more, a menace to society and the state.

Perhaps the modern art critic will be annoyed at what has been called Plato's excessive intellectualism. But before he discards Plato's point of view, it might be worth his while to give it serious consideration. For Plato's position is by no means naive or indefensible.

But why, the modern critic might logically ask, did Plato think it necessary to link beauty and truth so closely? Is there no such thing, he might argue, as poetic fiction or dramatic exaggeration? Why should the artist feel bound to reproduce things as they are? Should he not, as Aristotle advised, imitate things as they could be? Before these questions can be answered, it will be necessary to make a few preliminary remarks on Plato's general attitude toward poetry and art.

The problem of distinguishing between good and bad art was one of tremendous importance to a man like Plato who was so much concerned with the question of morality, education and political philosophy. In Plato's day poetry and the arts were much cultivated and esteemed.²³ They had assumed a position of prominence in Athenian life both in the education of the young and as a source of pleasure and delight for their elders. For this was the age when the heritage of Phidias and Myron, Sophocles and Euripides, Aristophanes and Execias were delighting their fellow citizens with some of the most

²³Atkins, p. 36-37.

magnificent art western civilization has ever known. Plato was not insensible to all this beauty. He too had been a poet of merit in his earlier years and even the dialogues themselves are works of consummate artistry and skill displaying a "poetic touch."

But Plato, philosopher that he was, would not let himself be diverted in his search for truth by that which was merely pleasing to the eye or the ear. Truth, philosophic wisdom, was his first love. And therefore, poetry and art-like everything else would have to be marshalled before the supreme tribunal of truth. If it was found wanting in this respect it would have to be amended or censured. For after all, had not poetry been entrusted with the sacred task of training the young? Did not the arts wield unquestionable influence in the molding of public opinion and sentiment? Clearly, then, poetry and art ought to be subjected to a careful analysis by the philosopher lest it inflict incalculable evil upon the souls of men and the state itself. As a matter of fact, it had already done much harm.²⁴

But, one might object, if this point of view is correct, if Plato's contention that good art equals true art is granted for the moment, and if on the other hand, all art is a mere copy of a copy, two steps removed from reality and truth, are we not forced to conclude that art is bad? Logically should we not outlaw all artistic imitations? Did not Plato, at least implicitly, advocate such a course of action?

The problem which this question raises is admittedly a complicated one. However, the present writer believes that a satisfactory answer can be

²⁴Ibid.

proposed. Following in the footsteps of such scholars as Ritter²⁵, Collingwood²⁶, Atkins²⁷ and others, he believes that what Plato inveighed against was faulty, untruthful imitation alone. It is his opinion that Plato distinguished between good and bad imitation and hence between good and bad art, retaining the former and rejecting the latter. As Robin George Collingwood has remarked: "Most modern writers on aesthetics attribute to Plato the syllogism 'imitation is bad; all art is imitative; therefore all art is bad.' Hence, they go on, Plato 'banishes art from his city.' I will not document my assertion. There is no need to pillory a few offenders for a crime that is almost universal."²⁸

The difference of opinion on this point is due in large part to an apparent contradiction in the Republic. At the beginning of book ten Plato remarks: "Of the many excellences which I perceive in the order of our State, there is none which upon reflection pleases me better than the rule about poetry, namely, our refusal to admit the imitative kind of poetry, for it certainly ought not to be received."²⁹ Plato here seems to be referring to some earlier part of the dialogue in which he has laid down a ruling abolishing imitative poetry from the state. Obviously, the reference is to that section of Book III where he has discussed the educative value of poetry. And yet in Book III

²⁵Constantin Ritter, The Essence of Plato's Philosophy, Trans. by Adam Alles (New York, 1933), p. 366.

²⁶Robin G. Collingwood, The Principles of Art, (Oxford, 1950), p. 46.

²⁷Atkins, p. 52.

²⁸Collingwood, p. 46.

²⁹Republic 595a, Jowett, II, p. 468.

we find that Plato, far from outlawing all poetry, distinguishes various kinds of imitation, praising some while rejecting others. For instance, Plato praises the "rougher and severer poet or storyteller who will imitate the style of the virtuous only, and will follow those models which we prescribed at first when we began the education of our soldier."³⁰ Clearly such poetry implies imitation and he explicitly welcomes it into his state. Later Glaucon remarks, "Yes, I quite agree with you in thinking that our youth should be trained in music."³¹ Now if music (poetry) is imitative and if Plato is willing to receive it into his model state for its educative value, is he not guilty of an inconsistency when later on he tells us all imitative poetry has been abolished?

Although the inconsistency poses a problem it is not as inexplicable as it might appear. This writer believes that a careful scrutiny of the text itself will reveal Plato's consistent, if somewhat hidden logic. First of all, let us consider what Plato has to say in Book III about imitation.

The reader will recall that in Book III Plato distinguishes three kinds of poetry; the pure narrative, the purely imitative, and the mixture of these two. The question then arises: Can the guardians imitate? A simple "yes" or "no" answer is impossible. Certainly, imitating can be harmful, Plato remarks. For it destroys single-mindedness³² and tends to make us like the people we imitate. Imitation is apt to become reality. And if we imitate inappropriate qualities

³⁰Ibid. 398 b-c, Jowett, II, p. 245.

³¹Ibid. 402 a, Jowett, II, p. 250.

³²Ibid. 394e-395a, Jowett, II, p. 241.

we are liable to develop those inappropriate qualities in ourselves. For "did you never observe how imitations beginning in youth and continuing far into life, at length grow into habits and become a second nature, affecting body, voice, and mind?"³³

Surely the guardians must be forbidden to mimic depraved, ambitious men, or quarrelsome, love-sick, emotionally distraught women. Likewise cowards, drunkards, or madmen ought not be imitated. On the other hand, Plato encourages the imitation of "those characters which are suitable to their profession—the courageous, temperate, holy, free, and the like."³⁴ A good and just man will be happy to "play the part of the good man when he is acting firmly and wisely. But when he comes to a character which is unworthy of him... he will assume his likeness, if at all, for a moment only when he is performing some good action."³⁵ The point to be noted here is a crucial one. Plato has distinguished two kinds of imitation, one of which he has accepted as "good."

With this distinction in mind we are in a better position to evaluate Plato's threefold division of poetry of which we spoke before. Pure narrative now becomes the style of the virtuous man. The imitative element is minimal but, and this is of extreme importance, it is not absent altogether, since the good man "will adopt a mode of narration that is imitative and narrative, but there will be little of the former."³⁶ Purely imitative poetry, the second kind, is banished altogether as is the third or "mixed" form of poetry.

³³Ibid. 395d, Jowett, p. 242.

³⁴Ibid. 395c, Jowett, p. 242.

³⁵Ibid. 396d, Jowett, p. 243.

³⁶Ibid.

So much for Book III. Can it be shown that what Plato has to say in Book X harmonizes with our analysis of Book III? In the very first sentence of Book X Plato reminds his reader that "we have abolished imitative art from the State." Is this contradictory? No, not in the least. The conclusion reached in Book III was that poetry of the second and third types, the wholly imitative and the partially imitative were to be abolished. Here Plato merely reiterates that condemnation. Of the 'non-imitative' poetry, in which some imitation is allowed, Plato says nothing here. Hence the opening lines of Book X merely summarize the conclusions reached in Book III and in no way contradict them.

Later on in Book X, however, Plato has much more to say about the metaphysics of artistic imitation. At first glance these statements seem to be even more irreconcilable with the sentiments expressed in Book III. But further analysis will reveal, as Professor Tate has demonstrated so ably, that Plato's metaphysical analysis of art is thoroughly consistent with what he has said heretofore.³⁷

Plato's metaphysical interpretation of art as sketched in Book X is briefly this. As was noted elsewhere, Plato divides reality into three levels; the world of subsistent ideas, which alone are really real; the world of everyday sense perception, which is not being but only becoming, not real but only phenomenal; finally we have the artist's world of images or copies. Now if we cannot call the sensed world real because it only copies reality, what are we going to say about the world of the artist who copies that

³⁷J. Tate, "Imitation in Plato's Republic," Classical Quarterly, XXII (New York, 1928), pp. 16-23

copy of reality?

Plato felt compelled to the conclusion that the sculptor's statue, the poet's verses are two steps removed from real being, real truth, and real beauty.³⁸ Being a mere copy of a copy the painter's picture is too far removed from truth and beauty to be of value. The artisan's knowledge is unphilosophic because he knows only appearances and imitates these in his work. The essential untruthfulness of his work makes it wholly unacceptable to Plato, regardless of whatever charm it may have. As J. Tate has remarked: "Similarly, if such a poet represents to the satisfaction of those as ignorant as himself—a virtuous man or one gifted with any quality or art, it must not be thought (as most men think) that he himself knows the truth about virtue and whatever arts he happens to represent."³⁹

If a man possessed genuine knowledge, Plato argues, if he really knew what virtue is in itself, what enlightened statesmanship or true education are, he would not waste his time in image-making but would interest himself in realities. He would strive to become an enlightened statesman like Lycurgus, a clever general, or an inventor like Thales. Or if he could do none of these at least he would impart his wisdom to others in his desire to improve mankind. In short "the real artist..would be interested in realities and not imitations; and would desire to leave as memorials of himself works many and fair; and, instead of being the author of encomiums, he would prefer to be the theme of them."⁴⁰ But the cruel truth of the matter is, Plato concludes, that Homer,

³⁸ Republic 597a, Jowett, II, p. 470.

³⁹ Tate, "Imitation in Republic", p. 20.

⁴⁰ Republic 599b, Jowett, II, p. 473.

Hesiod and the other poets content themselves with shadow making, thus showing their lack of any real knowledge.

Are we, then, to conclude that all poetic and artistic imitation is outlawed? Must we reject the conclusions reached in Book III? Apparently not, for Plato himself remarks that "hymns to the gods and praises of famous men are the only poetry which ought to be admitted into our State."⁴¹ What Plato leaves to be understood here is that the poet need not necessarily imitate the objects of his sense world. The painter or the poet can produce a direct copy of the divine paradigms⁴² unlike the ignorant artist who merely holds up a mirror to nature. Such art will partake of philosophic wisdom, it will be founded on a first-hand knowledge of the "real." Just as the enlightened ruler of the state must be a man whose education has led him to a contemplation of the divine paradigms, so the enlightened artist of the state must be a man of the same philosophical training. His works will be highly acceptable in the state since they are not nearly so devoid of truth and beauty as those of the ordinary run of artisans. J. Tate has summarized this point well:

The distinction between the good and bad senses of imitation is, broadly speaking, a distinction between two kinds of artist, the ignorant on the one hand and the enlightened on the other. Here we have the key to understanding Plato's attitude towards poetry and art in general.

We have seen Plato using an analogy between imitative poetry and imitative painting, in order to illustrate the remoteness of

⁴¹Ibid. 607a, Jowett, II, p. 483.

⁴²Ibid. 500c, Jowett, II, p. 361. "His eye is ever directed towards things fixed and immutable, which he sees neither injuring nor injured by one another, but all in order moving according to reason; these he imitates, and to these he will, as far as he can, conform himself."

imitative art from truth. But there is an art which is not imitative in this sense, though imitative in another sense; an art which does not merely copy external reality."⁴³

The conclusion to be drawn, then, from Book X of the Republic is that there are two kinds of imitation, the good and the bad. The former has the eternal Ideas as its model, the latter, the world of becoming. Thus Plato's position is thoroughly consistent and the distinction which he made earlier in the Republic still stands.

But the question might be raised, does Plato remain faithful to this distinction in the other dialogues? Can passages be cited in other Platonic works in which Plato distinguishes between good and bad imitation? The answer is a very definite "yes" For example, in the Symposium Plato describes poets as "those souls which are pregnant with wisdom and virtue in general.. Who, when he thinks of Homer and Hesiod and other great poets, would not rather have their children than ordinary human ones? Who would not emulate them in the creation of children such as theirs, which have preserved their memory and given them everlasting glory?"⁴⁴ Could more laudatory expression of the poet's worth be found anywhere?" But why is this? Why should Plato who usually abuses the poets, become so enthusiastic in their praise all of the sudden? The answer is clear from the remarks that follow. Plato here is referring to the artistic imitator of the Ideas themselves, especially ideal beauty. The true poet is he who has learned to love "abstract beauty," not this or that beautiful thing. Such an intellectual perception demands much contemplative

⁴³Tate, "Imitation in the Republic," p. 21.

⁴⁴Symposium 209a-d, Jowett, I, p. 541.

study. Only by degrees does one rise from the contemplation of beautiful objects to the realization that beauty is one. Few attain that highest summit from which beauty itself "absolute, separate, and everlasting, without diminution or increase or any change, can be viewed."⁴⁵ But the genuine poet is he who has climbed to that summit and with the eyes of his soul has gazed upon "divine beauty, pure and clear and unalloyed, not infected with the pollutions of the flesh and all the colors and vanities of mortal life."⁴⁶ Such an artist, then, will be able to "bring forth, not images of beauty but realities for he has hold not of an image but of a reality."⁴⁷

Only one conclusion can be drawn from remarks such as these. Plato carefully distinguishes between poor art which imitates the sensible world and truly noble art for which ideal beauty and the subsistent essences serve as models. As Ritter has put it:

In a more careful description we are told that what is patterned after an eternal prototype is always beautiful; whereas that which the human artisan has patterned after the prototype of sensible things is ugly. From this I conclude that the true artist always produces in accordance with an idea, but never in accordance with images. One may logically divide the concept of imitation in various ways; but the division which aesthetics alone considers holds to the distinction whether an idea is imitated immediately or mediately.⁴⁸

In the Phraedrus we find much the same sentiment expressed. Socrates remarks: "To Homer and other writers of poems.. to Solon and others who have

⁴⁵Ibid. 211b, Jowett, p. 543.

⁴⁶Ibid. 211e, Jowett, p. 543.

⁴⁷Ibid. 212a, Jowett, p. 543.

⁴⁸Ritter, p. 366.

composed writings in the form of political discourses which they would term laws- to all of them we say that if their compositions are based on knowledge of the truth and they can defend or prove them, then they are to be called, not only poets, orators, legislators, but are worthy of a higher name, befitting the serious pursuit of their life... Philosopher is their modest and befitting title."⁴⁹

In short, Plato's poet strives to transcend the material world; in his poor way he "tries to evocate something of that higher realm of being... In true art likeness does not refer to commonplace reality, but to ideal Beauty."⁵⁰

The "Athenian" who acts as the interlocutor in the Laws expresses this very same opinion when speaking of music. "We must assert," he tells us, "That imitation is not to be judged of by pleasures and false opinion, but... by the standard of truth... And if there be any music of which pleasure is the criterion, such music is not to be sought out or deemed to have any real excellence but only that other kind of music which is an imitation of the good."⁵¹

From all this evidence the inevitable conclusion seems to be that Plato was by no means an enemy of all artistic imitation. Despite the apparent discrepancy in the Republic, Plato's thought on the subject is quite consistent. Some artists imitate mere appearances, hence their work is untruthful, ugly, and dangerous to the general well-being of the State. On the other hand, some

⁴⁹Phraedrus, 278 c, Jowett, III, p. 188.

⁵⁰Verdenius, p. 18.

⁵¹Laws 667e-668a, Jowett, IV, p. 234-235.

few artists, possessing genuine ἐπιστήμη and not mere opinion, employ reality itself as their model and create something that is beautiful and uplifting because it is essentially truthful. Perhaps one may be inclined to object to Plato's insistence that beauty and truth are one. This objection will be considered in its proper place. But the point to be noted here is that Plato did make a distinction between good and bad art.

There is no questioning the fact that Plato's approach to art is unpopular among modern critics.⁵² As influential as the Platonic concept of artistic imitation was in Hellenistic and Roman times and in the modern era up until the mid-eighteenth century, it has fallen into disrepute in our times. Some modern scholars have condemned the whole concept calling it, as Otto Apelt did, "a systematic violation of art depriving it of all its charm."⁵³ Even such critics as Maritain, Cory, Collingwood and others employ the notion with caution and only after drawing several very careful distinctions.⁵⁴

Some of these objections at least, are based on a misunderstanding of precisely what Plato meant when he spoke of the mimetic character of art. Much of the criticism is based on the false assumption that imitating implies a slavish copying. If this is what one understands by imitation then it is not difficult to appreciate why one rejects it. But happily neither Plato nor Aristotle held such an opinion. Imitation for them had a richer, fuller significance. When one realizes this fact, many of the objections levelled at

⁵²McKeon, "Concept of Imitation in Antiquity," p. 147.

⁵³Otto Apelt, Platonische Aufsätze (Leipzig-Berlin, 1912) pp. 68-70, cited in Verdenius, pp. 1-2.

⁵⁴Jacques Maritain, Art and Scholasticism, p. 64.

their theory vanish into thin air. That Plato did not advocate slavish realism can be shown from his own words. "So let us turn to his own words, with an open mind and attending to their qualifications and limitations."⁵⁵

As Professor Verdenius has pointed out very well, the Platonic notion of imitation contains two elements, the realistic and the idealistic. Both must be present in a truly good piece of art. In Plato's theory a true reconciliation of idealism and realism takes place.⁵⁶

A work of art, as Plato analyzed it, was nothing more than a concrete, sensible representation of an idea. Plato insisted that the artist imitates or represents objects which are sensibly discernible. The artist depicts men in action, legislators, warriors, sages, philosophers. Further, he strives to make us conscious of their virtuous qualities, their sagacity, their prudence, their sense of proportion and moderation, their temperance, their fortitude, their courage. He represents gods, or animals, or inanimate objects in so far as these influence the ordinary course of human life. The sensibly recognizable element is always present. Pure abstractionism or formalism were wholly foreign to Plato's concept of art. And that is why Plato conceived art as an imitation of what is or at least of what could be. For him a good play centered around human characters, a praiseworthy statue was of a man recognizable as a man, a painting was a visible manifestation of a visibly discernible object. And in every case the imitation was made in some sensible medium, marble, colors, or words. Art was all of this for Plato, but it was something more besides.

⁵⁵Verdenius, p. 3.

⁵⁶Ibid., p. 19.

For really fine and noble art "does not lapse into flat realism," because it strives to transcend the material world."⁵⁷ As was pointed out earlier the inspired artist attempts to imitate the essences of things. He soars above this world of becoming to the realm of the "real." And although he is compelled to employ sensible media nevertheless he tries to represent the hidden meaning and significance of what he imitates. Thus he copies what he sees with the eyes of the soul. He imitates the truly just man, the truly wise man, the truly temperate man. He imitates not merely some beautiful object, but rather beauty itself.

Thus a fine painting has its "real" aspect. It is a visible, sensible representation of objects familiar to all of us. Considered from this aspect, it is of inferior value because it is a shadow, a mirror held up to nature.⁵⁸ But it likewise has its ideal aspect in so far as it captures and mimics the essence of the object imitated. Approached from this point of view it is a noble, uplifting thing of beauty that will remain a joy forever.

As Prof. Verdenius has demonstrated brilliantly, this Platonic doctrine is "well illustrated by the spirit of Greek art."⁵⁹ The Greek artist, Verdenius points out, aimed at imitating "nature," that is, what he saw, and heard, and felt. "But he did not stick to its casual aspects. He rather tried to detect its deeper meanings. He was well aware of the fact that the essential nature of things is not identical with their visual appearance, but

⁵⁷Ibid., p. 19.

⁵⁸Republic 596e, Jowett, p. 469.

⁵⁹Verdenius, p. 19.

that it must still be represented in natural forms. He also knew that suggesting a deeper meaning is not to be achieved through deforming nature but through clarifying its fundamental structure."⁶⁰

The art of Plato's time gave evidence of a growing inclination toward "realism." Plato himself bitterly denounced slavish copying of appearances. Such worthless imitation is deceitful and essentially untruthful.

From these considerations it becomes clear that Plato did not advocate a mere slavish copying of nature. He believed that the "real" element could, in fact should, be present. But he also maintained that the ideal element was as equally indispensable. As Atkins has remarked: "Alive as he (Plato) was to an unseen reality existing behind the objects of sense, he conceived of an imitation of the ideal forms of that unseen world, ideas of justice, beauty, and truth, which were to be embodied in human character. And it is this kind of 'imitation' that he associates with poetry in its highest form."⁶¹

Poetry, indeed all arts in their highest form consist essentially in the representation of an intuition. The artist, with an insight akin to that of the philosopher, comes to perceive universal realities and significances. The permanent and universal characteristics of human life and thought reveal themselves to him. The artist then endeavors to represent these eternal, universal realities in the sensible medium of his art. Hence what he represents is not the individual, particular object - man, let us say but rather he re-presents for us his intuitive vision into human nature itself. As Lodge has remarked: "If the artist is one of the great ones, his work will

⁶⁰Ibid. p. 20.

⁶¹Atkins, p. 52.

express, not merely a particular flash of inspiration, significant only for his own time and place; but an inspiration of universal human significance."⁶²

Or as Fitcher puts it: "Imitative art in its highest form, namely poetry, is an expression of the universal element in human life."⁶³

It is precisely this universal aspect that accounts for the enduring reputation and fame of all great art. For universal forms, the essences of things, remain unaltered although time may play havoc with the accidentals. The artist whose poetic insight enables him to perceive the universal aspect and whose genius enables him to represent it in the medium of his art will live forever in the memory of men. For his masterpiece will possess that universal appeal which time cannot destroy.

The artist's activity, considered in this light, is truly creative. For he very definitely makes something (poiesis). Furthermore, that which he makes has heretofore never existed. His endeavor has been to re-present the Idea, the immutable, eternal, universal form or essence in a sensible medium. Such activity as this is not sterile, uninspired mimicry. For, to quote Fitcher's apt words again: "To seize the universal, and to reproduce it in simple and sensuous form is not to reflect a reality already familiar through sense perceptions; rather it is a rivalry of nature, a completion of her unfulfilled purposes, a correction of her failures."⁶⁴

The works of nature reflect dimly and imperfectly those universal higher truths. The artist's product also reflects, manifests, or represents these

⁶²Lodge, p. 139.

⁶³Fitcher, p. 150.

⁶⁴Ibid., p. 154.

same universal realities. The difference consists in this, the artist works with more conscious intellectual intent. Consequently, his product is a more accurate manifestation of the universal. "He seeks to give it (the form) a more complete expression, to bring to light the ideal which is only half revealed in the world of reality."⁶⁵

Were this fact more adequately understood, many modern critics would take a more sympathetic stand with regard to Plato's theory. Nor would they shy away from such expressions as "representative art" or "artistic imitation." Collingwood is a good example in point. At one place in his book he remarks: "The doctrine that all art is representative is a doctrine commonly attributed to Plato and Aristotle." Then in a very cryptic footnote he informs his reader that the concept is "falsely attributed" to them.⁶⁶ What bothers Mr. Collingwood is that "representative art" will be mistaken for "slavish copying of nature." Indeed, if the two expressions are synonymous then Collingwood is correct in maintaining that the former is falsely attributed to Plato and Aristotle. But why should they be looked upon as synonymous? Instead of abandoning the term which both Plato and Aristotle chose to use, would we not do just as well to find out precisely what Plato and Aristotle meant by it?

Thus far in this resume of Platonic *μῦθος* we have pointed out, first of all, that Plato considered all the so-called "fine arts" imitative, even music and dancing. Secondly, we noted that some artistic imitations are good, some bad, depending on how closely they represent the subsistent Ideas. Thirdly, it

⁶⁵Ibid., p. 153.

⁶⁶Collingwood, p. 43.

was pointed out that genuinely good imitations contained both a realistic and an idealistic element, thus making it quite clear that Plato did not propose flat realism as the artist's supreme goal. Only one thing remains, namely, to say something about the imitator or the artist himself.

According to Plato two virtues should characterize the "maker of images," truthfulness and modesty. The "Philosopher-artist" must surely be a lover of truth. For he is one of those blessed souls who has been permitted to emerge from the cave of images and shadows and has been granted the inestimable privilege of contemplating reality itself. Ever afterwards, although he is compelled to dwell among the shadows and illusory appearances of the cave for the sake of his less fortunate fellow mortals, he will be haunted by the overwhelming realization of what truth, beauty, and goodness are in themselves. In all his work he will imitate those higher realities, despite the fact that he must employ sensible material media.⁶⁷

Secondly, the true artist is modest enough to admit that he is only a maker of imitations and that imitations are no more than a second best. There is a great danger that he might mistake resemblance for identity. Many a poet has erred in this way. For the artist who so intensely absorbs himself in his subject matter that "his soul supposes herself to be among the scenes he is describing,"⁶⁸ is likely to forget the cleavage which separates him from reality and to claim a greater independence for his images than they deserve. And so the ideal artist, although he labors assiduously at his work, attaches little

⁶⁷Republic 500c, Jowett, II, p. 361.

⁶⁸Ion 535 b-c, Jowett, I, p. 109.

value to it. As a matter of fact he admits "the deficiencies of his knowledge and his means and gives his products for what they are: images which, by interpreting the real nature of their objects, try to suggest something of the world of Being, but which never belie their irrational origin and the limitations of their medium."⁶⁹

Obviously, such a degree of humility is quite rare and that is precisely why Plato forewarns us against the magic spell which the artist creates. We must be forever on our guard lest the tantalizing charm of imitation overwhelm us and lead us far from the path of truth and virtue. For art "seems to be a corruption of the mind of all those who do not possess as an antidote a knowledge of its real nature."⁷⁰

⁶⁹Verdenius, p. 23.

⁷⁰Republic 595b, Jowett, p. 468.

CHAPTER III

AN EVALUATION OF PLATO'S THEORY AND ITS INFLUENCE

As was mentioned earlier, modern critics of art have been inclined to reject the Platonic-Aristotelian notion of "imitation." This attitude of mind is due, at least in some cases, to an imperfect understanding of what Plato and Aristotle meant. In the previous chapter we have endeavored to analyze Plato's position in the hope that a fuller knowledge of his doctrine might lead to a greater esteem of its merits. To be sure, neither Plato nor Aristotle said all that can be said on the subject of art, and this is particularly true of Plato. This writer is not contending that Plato's theory should be accepted blindly as the "last word" in artistic analysis. Nor does he mean to infer that all subsequent philosophies of art are so much wasted effort. Both the ancient and modern worlds can boast of outstanding thinkers whose penetrating insights have enriched the western world's knowledge of art's purpose and nature. None of these contributions can be disregarded. Nevertheless, while admiring and accepting what is truly of value in the "new", one need not abandon the "old." The contention of this writer is that Plato (and with him Aristotle) understood the nature of art profoundly. Their observations on art are not without relevance even today. One need not, perhaps should not, accept all of Plato's conclusions. But he ought to sift the wheat from the chaff and take the former for what it is worth.

Numerous objections have been levelled against the Platonic theory of

artist imitation, some quite justified, others less justified. Now that we have seen precisely what Plato's doctrine is in this matter we are in a position to evaluate some of the objections.

In his book, Art and Reality, F.O. Nolte takes exception to what he calls "Plato's naive understanding of art's purpose."¹ Plato's notion, Nolte maintains, that the artist's work is a copy of a copy two steps removed from reality, is based on the false supposition that the purpose of a work of art is the same as that of its visible model. In other words, the painting of a bed should serve the same purpose as a bed. "Only under this assumption could it pertinently be called a reproduction or a copy." Naturally, Mr. Nolte rebels at such a concept of art and very rightly so. For as he remarks later: "It is not permissible to condemn a painting as an inferior substitute for a bed; for, it was never intended to serve as such."²

Underlying this objection there seems to be a basic misconception of Plato's doctrine. If one studies the Platonic dialogues carefully, and does not restrict himself to Book X of the Republic, he will be forced to the conclusion that we reached in the preceding chapter. As was pointed Plato advocated realism, but a realism that imitated the ideal as well as the sensibly "real." He did not advocate slavish copying. He believed that the true artist portrayed not merely the appearances, but the inner meaning and significance, the essences of things. Plato certainly did not look upon art as a substitute for reality. In fact, he explicitly condemns those patrons of the

¹F.O.Nolte, Art and Reality (Lancaster, 1942), pp. 107,108,113. Cited in Verdenius, p. 28.

²Ibid.

beaux arts who take artistic imitations as real.

Other critics of art, on the other hand, have objected to the Platonic theory on the grounds that it is too coldly intellectual. Plato, they say, confused beauty and truth and as a result neglected the emotional aspects of artistic appreciation. There is certainly a good deal of truth in this objection. Plato distrusted the emotions because he looked upon them as an unruly force in man constantly warring against sovereign reason.³ A man's virtue and character depended largely on his ability to dominate his emotions in a rational manner, and this was not easily done. For the emotions are like high-spirited steeds constantly rebelling against all forms of restraint. Since art pandered the emotions by calling them into play, Plato was quite distrustful of the arts. Because of this same distrust of the emotions Plato was unwilling to grant that art's principal aim is to give pleasure, since pleasure implies arousing the feelings and emotions. Speaking of music Plato remarks: "When anyone says that music is to be judged of by pleasure, his doctrine cannot be admitted... Those who seek for the best kind of song and music ought not seek what is pleasant, but for that which is true."⁴ As Verdenius has remarked: "It must be admitted that Plato did too little justice to the specific function of aesthetical feeling and emotion." Hence there is some truth in the accusation that Plato's approach to art is too intellectual.

On the other hand, it must also be said that Plato "did not completely

³Republic 591 a-e, Jowett, II, pp. 466-467.

⁴Laws 668 a-b, Jowett, II, pp. 235.

ignore the emotions."⁵ For example, he recognized the importance of "true pleasures in the appreciation of art." "True pleasures are those which are given by beauty of color and form, and most of those which arise from smells; those of sound, and in general those of which the want is painless and unconscious, and of which the fruition is palpable to sense and pleasant and unalloyed with pain."⁶

What is more, Plato was the first to point out the emotional effect proper to tragedy. In the Republic he tells us how pity and fear are aroused by the tragic plays.⁷ He also attempted to explain why a tragic spectacle full of sorrow and pathos can give pleasure to the audience. When one is moved by a tragedy, Plato tells us, he can be said to smile through his tears. His emotions, painful in themselves, have been aroused. He feels anger, or fear, or envy, or pity in his soul. Yet for some reason or other these emotions afford him considerable pleasure. "Need I remind you," he remarks, "of the anger which stirs a wise man to violence and is sweeter than honey and the honey-comb?"⁸

Equally valuable are Plato's observations with regard to the emotional effects of comedy. What causes our laughter, Plato tells us, is another's "harmless self-conceit."⁹ "The pleasure of the ludicrous springs from the

⁵Verdenius, p. 29.

⁶Philebus 51b, Jowett, III, p. 610.

⁷Republic 605d and 387 b-d, Jowett, II, p. 481 and 231.

⁸Philebus 47e, Jowett, III, p. 606.

⁹Ibid. 48-49, Jowett, pp. 606-609.

sight of another's misfortune, the misfortune, however, being a kind of self-ignorance that is powerless to inflict hurt.. Plato anticipates, but goes deeper than, Hobbes, whose well known words are worth recalling: 'The passion of laughter is nothing else but a sudden glory, arising from a sudden conception of some eminence in ourselves, by comparison of the infirmity of others or with our own formerly.'¹⁰ Clearly, then, Plato was not altogether oblivious of the emotional aspect of art.

Still some have attacked Plato's whole concept of art as an imitation by maintaining that art is essentially a creative activity. Hence self-expression not imitation, is at the center of artistic endeavor. A.C.Bradley, in a series of lectures at Oxford, developed this position at some length. He states: "Poetry may have also an ulterior value as a means to culture or religion because it conveys instruction or softens passions...But its ulterior worth neither is nor can directly determine its poetic worth as a satisfying imaginative experience; and this is to be judged entirely from within... For its nature is to be not a part, nor yet a copy, of the real world, but to be a world by itself, independent, complete, autonomous; and to possess it fully you must conform to its laws, and ignore for the time the beliefs, aims and particular conditions which belong to you in the other world of reality."¹¹

Professor Bradley concedes that "there is plenty of connection between life and poetry," but it is an "underground connection." The real world is in no way a measure of poetic value, for the only test of artistic worth "lies

¹⁰Butcher, p. 374.

¹¹A.C.Bradley, Oxford Lectures on Poetry, 2nd ed. (London, 1950), pp. 4-5.

simply in the question whether it satisfies our imagination."¹²

Such a notion of art as a complete, autonomous reality wholly independent of the "beliefs, aims, and particular conditions" of the world in which we live poses several serious difficulties. As Verdenius has observed: "If artistic value is to be judged entirely from within, the essence of a work of art is supposed to lie in its harmony, in its formal beauty."¹³ Some critics have actually accepted such a position. L.W.Beck, for example, maintains that artistic appreciation is nothing more than the pleasure consequent upon observing phenomenal forms.¹⁴ S. Alexander similarly holds that to appreciate art is to "delight in construction itself."¹⁵ Whether A.C.Bradley would care to go as far as this, is not altogether clear. Nevertheless, his position is certainly open to such an interpretation. For in neglecting the "content" aspect of art, he falls into that category of thinkers, condemned so vigorously by Plato, who are enthralled by the play of colors and forms.¹⁶

As Rhys Carpenter has pointed out, the representational element in art is quite as important as the formal element. "Pure form to the detriment of representational fidelity, or representational fidelity to the detriment of pure form-both are esthetically mistaken; for both tend to suppress an essential

¹²Ibid. p. 7.

¹³Verdenius, p. 31.

¹⁴L.W.Beck, "Judgments of Meaning in Art," Journal of Philosophy, 41, (1944), p. 175. Cited in Verdenius, p. 31.

¹⁵S. Alexander, Philosophical and Literary Pieces (London, 1939), p. 248. Cited in Verdenius, p. 31.

¹⁶Republic 601a, Jowett, p. 475.

factor of the artistic appeal."¹⁷

By way of illustration Mr. Carpenter relates the following story about himself.

In a certain London studio I was once shown an inlaid table-top whose geometric assortment and arrangement of planes and lines were intended to give me (so I was told) emotions of speed and power, of thwarted effort, and energy ready to burst forth. But I stood dully by and felt none of this intarsiate vitality rush over me. For it is not abstract speed and power that I can understand, but the speed of a railway train or the power of a goaded ox...The table-top was a demonstration in pure form. It was also a demonstration of the futility of such formal effects when they are not immanent in the illusion of sensuous objects, amid whose time and space we put ourselves with that strange sympathetic power which we employ whenever we see picture in a mere square of painted cloth.¹⁸

Lines, curves, mass, colors and all the other "formal" elements are essential to the artist's work, but the representational aspect is equally important. When Plato called arts "imitative" this is precisely what he pointed out.

But Bradley's theory presents another difficulty. He insists that the artist is a "creator" who brings into existence not a copy of an already existing being, but something new, something unique. The artist is free, he is not bound down to any model. Plato's theory, therefore, is deficient since it fails to do justice to this creative aspect of art.

First of all, it must be confessed that Plato did not emphasize the notion of creation in art. But as Verdenius has pointed out: "Is there no danger in proclaiming the freedom of artistic creation?"¹⁹ Was not Plato correct when he

¹⁷Rhys Carpenter, The Esthetic Basis of Greek Art, (Eryn Mawr, 1921) p. 51.

¹⁸Ibid. p. 39.

¹⁹Verdenius, p. 33.

warned against those artists who pass their illusions off as something totally new?²⁰ The history of art can answer this question for us. "Whenever artistic imagination has taken absolute power, freedom has degenerated into caprice, creation into jugglery, and expression into self-idolization. It has too often been forgotten that the artist is not himself a Muse, but a 'servant of the Muse.'"²¹ The artist possesses freedom to a degree, but he "is restricted by the fact that he lives in a given world. So he cannot create new realities, but can only try to give new interpretations of reality."²²

Imagination has its place in art, to be sure, as Bradley mentions. But imagination is no absolute monarch possessing despotic sovereignty. The imagination must work upon the realities which the senses and the intellect perceive. Therefore, although the artist creates in one sense, he nevertheless imitates in another.

One final objection should be considered. Some years ago Carleton L. Brownson published an article entitled "Reasons for Plato's Hostility to the Poets."²³ In that article Brownson comes to the conclusion that Plato's metaphysical argument against the poets given in the tenth book of the Republic is "mere naive sophistry" and that Plato probably did not want us to take it seriously. "In Book X we cannot help feeling that Plato in following whither the

²⁰Sophist 234, Jowett, III, pp. 382-383.

²¹Verdenius, p. 33.

²²Ibid.

²³Carleton L. Brownson, "Reasons for Plato's Hostility to the Poets," Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association 28 (Boston, 1897), pp. 5-41.

argument leads has forgotten to be broad-minded. Did Plato regard his own work this way? It seems to be altogether probable."²⁴ Yet as was pointed out earlier, Book X of the Republic, if understood in the light of what Plato tells us in Book III, poses no genuine problem. Plato is quite serious in Book X. He meant every word that he said. What we must remember, however, is that he is speaking there of faulty, second hand imitations that for Plato were not worthy of the name "art." Whether one agrees with Plato's analysis of art as outlined in Book X is another question. But understood properly, the argument there presented is typically Platonic and is consistent with what he says about art elsewhere.

But as the old saying has it, "the proof of the pudding is in the eating." If this adage has any value in matters aesthetical then it can be said that Plato's theory has "proven itself." For art critics and philosophers, ancient, medieval, and modern, have eaten of Plato's offerings and have found them altogether palatable. The first philosopher to do so was Plato's renowned pupil Aristotle. Although the Stagirite disagreed with his teacher on many fundamental points, he did accept Plato's opinion that the "fine" arts were essentially imitative.

Naturally, Aristotle changed the meaning of the term to fit his more realistic philosophy. Actually he did more than that. He "enriched and deepened its signification" by interpreting it anew.²⁵ But basically the concept is the same, as will become evident.

Professor Butcher seems to infer that "imitation" was, as it were, the

²⁴Ibid., p. 12.

²⁵Butcher, p. 122.

specific difference by which Aristotle distinguished the "fine" from the "useful" arts.²⁶ But as McKeon points out the "useful" arts are just as imitative for Aristotle as the "fine."²⁷ In the opinion of the present writer, Mr. McKeon's point is well taken for two reasons.

First of all, consider the purpose or aim of the practical artisan. As Aristotle pointed out, he attempts to supply for man those necessary or useful items with which nature has not equipped him. By using his rational powers the artisan comes to nature's aid and fulfills her uncompleted purpose. Where nature has failed, art rushes to the rescue. The medical art is a good example of this, the political art is another. In these cases and others the "useful" arts "supply the deficiencies of nature."²⁸

But the useful artisan takes not only his aim or purpose from nature. He also copies nature's method. Thus in building a house the artisan proceeds just as nature would proceed if she were in the habit of producing houses. Like nature he is an efficient cause with a definite intention or purpose in mind, in other words a finis. Like nature he works with certain materials (causa materialis) so as to produce an object of a certain form (causa formalis.)²⁹ In other words, the practical artist imitates nature's process in completing her unfulfilled designs.

Similarly, the so called "fine" arts imitate nature according to the Aristotelian theory. They differ from the "useful" in their end. "For they

²⁶Ibid. p. 121.

²⁷McKeon, "Literary Criticism and the Concept of Imitation," p. 161.

²⁸Aristotle, Politics, IV, 17, 1337a, 1-2.

²⁹Butcher, p. 117-120.

have no other end beyond the perfection of their product as determined by their object and the means they employ."³⁰ The purpose of imitation in the "fine" arts is not utility. Rather the painter or the poet attempts to produce a beautiful work for its own sake, something that will be a source of delight to all beholders. The object which they represent is "men in action."³¹

For Aristotle, then, the fine arts imitate nature, though for a different purpose and in a different manner. When employing the phrase "art imitates nature" with regard to the "fine" arts, one must be careful to understand it in its strict Aristotelian sense. For example, the English verb "imitates" does injustice to Aristotle's precise meaning. It connotes a slavish fidelity of the copy to its model, a notion wholly foreign to Aristotle's mind. Perhaps it would be more correct to say "art represents nature, takes its lead from nature, uses the objects of nature as its model."

Similarly, the term "nature" must be taken in its philosophical sense. For us "nature" signifies the created world around us. It is synonymous with the "great out of doors," the babbling brook, the roaring wind, the towering mountains, the field of daffodils with which the romantic poets of a century ago were fond of communing. But for Aristotle it meant something far different. It was rather the creative force, the productive principle of each and every being.³² Or to put it more philosophically, the nature is the essence of a thing in so far as that essence is the source of the being's activity.

³⁰McKeon, "Literary Criticism," p. 161.

³¹Aristotle, Poetics, 2, 1448, al.

³²Butcher, p. 116.

Once one understands the precise meaning of the term "nature" he can appreciate why Aristotle maintained that "men in action" were the objects to be imitated in the "fine" arts. After all, what in this vast universe of ours is of greater interest to man than man himself? Does it not seem only natural, then, that man should imitate man in his art? Not, however, static, inactive, lifeless man. Such a representation would be farcical and essentially untrue since man by his very nature is an active, vital, intelligent being. And after all, it is his nature that art imitates.

Dr. Butcher is very right when he remarks that the "fine" arts imitate "everything that expresses the mental life, that reveals a rational personality."³³ Among these qualities of rational personality we might list *ἦθος* or characteristic moral qualities, those permanent dispositions of the mind which reveal a certain condition of will; *πάθος*, the more transient emotions, the passing moods of feeling; *πράξεις*, that internal, immanent activity of man "from which force flows to the exterior". True, the artist imitates man's external activity. But the external is meaningless unless the interior is also portrayed. Until the artist gives us a glimpse inside the man he has not represented for us the man's rational, moral nature. "An act viewed merely as an external process or result, one of a series of outward phenomena, is not the true object of aesthetic imitation. The *πράξεις* that art seeks to reproduce is mainly an inward process, a psychical energy working outwards."³⁴

While Aristotle very definitely enriched the Platonic concept of artistic "imitation" in a variety of ways, he was at one with his teacher in maintaining

³³Butcher, p. 123.

³⁴Ibid.

that a work of art was "an idealized representation of human life under forms manifest to sense."³⁵ Naturally the two men did not mean precisely the same thing when they employed the term "idealized" because their epistemologies were essentially different. Nevertheless, both were eager to remind us that truly noble art never devolved into flat, slavish realism. For, as Aristotle pointed out, the true artist follows the intimations and guidance of nature itself. "He aims at something better ($\beta\epsilon\lambda\tau\iota\omicron\nu$) than the actual. He produces a new thing, not a copy of reality but a higher reality--for the ideal type ($\pi\alpha\rho\acute{\alpha}\delta\epsilon\iota\gamma\mu\alpha$) must surpass the actual."³⁶

The concrete, existing man, Aristotle pointed out, is singular and particular, but the artist is interested in a higher and "better" reality, he strives to capture the universal aspect of man and to represent this in the medium of his art. Such activity is surely not a slavish reproducing of nature. In fact, "Imitation," so understood, is a creative act.. To seize the universal, and to reproduce it in simple and sensuous form is not to reflect a reality already familiar through sense perceptions; rather it is a rivalry of nature, a completion of her unfulfilled purposes, a correction of her failures."³⁷

To produce such a work requires a profound and penetrating insight into the workings of human nature. It presupposes a deep appreciation and a tender regard for man, his problems, his aspirations, his desires, and so forth. In this matter also Aristotle agreed wholeheartedly with what Plato had written in the *Timaeus* about ill-informed poets. "Now I, Critias and Hermocrates, am

³⁵Ibid. p. 153.

³⁶Ibid. p. 152.

³⁷Ibid. p. 154.

conscious that I myself should never be able to celebrate the city and her citizens in a befitting manner, and I am not surprised at my own incapacity; to me the wonder is rather that the poets present as well as past are no better--not that I mean to depreciate them; but everyone can see that they are a tribe of imitators and will imitate best and most easily the life in which they have been brought up, while that which is beyond the range of a man's education he finds hard...adequately to represent in language."³⁸

But the concept of artistic imitation did not die with Aristotle. True, its meaning underwent a radical change, but it remained a part of the literary critic's vocabulary right down to and including Roman times. Yet, as might be expected, the lesser lights of succeeding generations were unable to penetrate or appreciate the wisdom of the Stagirite. As the years passed the notion of imitation lost its place of distinction in the discussions on art and literature. Though it was not neglected altogether, it was relegated to a second place and took on unusual and decidedly non-Platonic, non-Aristotelian meanings.

For example, when we look into the works of Cicero, or Quintilian, or Dionysius of Halicarnasus we find that they use the word imitation to mean the imitation of recognized writers of the past. The treatise On Imitation by Dionysius consisted of three parts, the first treated of imitation in general, the second on the choice of writers for imitation, and the third on the proper methods of imitation. According to him imitation is a "copying of models with the help of certain principles."³⁹ Longinus likewise regards "zealous

³⁸Timaeus 19d, Jowett, III, p. 707.

³⁹Dionysius of Halicarnasus, On Imitation, A, iii (28) cited in McKeon, "Literary Criticism," p. 169.

imitation of the great historians and poets of the past as one of the roads which leads to sublimity."⁴⁰ As good a suggestion as this is, it is clearly a non-Aristotelian use of the term "imitation."

Did the later ages abandon the Platonic-Aristotelian notion of artistic "imitation" altogether? By no means. However, where Aristotle had insisted that "men in action" were to be imitated, these critics stressed the imitation of character and even natural, lifeless objects. Plutarch marks this transition to the imitation of natural objects quite clearly. "Imitation is of actions, or works or things."⁴¹ Longinus also employed the term in much the same way as Plutarch: "Best prose writers by use of inversions imitate nature. For art is only perfect when it looks like nature."⁴²

This, after all, was the age of rhetoric and its writers were more concerned with principles and criteria of rhetoric. Imitation, as a result, moves to a place of secondary importance. As McKeon has remarked: "Although nature still supplies the object of imitation, imitation is no longer the central concept, either in the sense of Plato or in that of Aristotle, about which the analysis of poetry is organized."⁴³

In Horace's day the concept of artistic "imitation" retained its place of secondary importance. At that time "there grew up a generation of critics, of numerous and long-lived progeny, who judged literature by considering its

⁴⁰Longinus, On the Sublime, 22. Cited in McKeon, p. 169.

⁴¹Plutarch, Essays on Poetry, 3. Cited in McKeon, p. 170.

⁴²Longinus, On the Sublime, 22.

⁴³McKeon, Literary Criticism, p. 172.

effect on the audience."⁴⁴ The commonly accepted opinion of the day was that, although a poet may imitate that which is, in other words, the actions of men or the objects of nature, his principal task is to please his audience.

Horace himself reminds the would-be artist: "It is not enough for poems to have beauty. They must also be pleasing and lead the listener's soul whither they will... If the speaker's words are inconsistent with his fortunes a Roman audience, high and low will roar with laughter."⁴⁵ Horace has any number of practical hints for the would-be playwright on how to keep the audience in their seats until the end, on how to arouse their applause, or in other words, how to please them. Horace does concede, however, that faithful imitation will further this particular end. The hopeful young poet is encouraged to imitate models from life and the customs of men.⁴⁶ He is likewise advised to study very carefully and consciously imitate the ancient Greek works especially the dialogues of Plato.⁴⁷

Such renowned Stoics as Seneca and Marcus Aurelius accepted the ancient belief that "art imitates nature." Seneca, the philosopher-tutor of Nero, in a letter to his friend Lucilius once expressed the opinion that "All art is an imitation of nature."⁴⁸ For Marcus Aurelius nature itself is an art and art an imitation. "Nature is never inferior to art and art is an imitation of

⁴⁴Ibid. p. 173.

⁴⁵Horace, Art of Poetry, II, pp. 99-112.

⁴⁶Ibid. p. 130.

⁴⁷Ibid. pp. 268-269.

⁴⁸Seneca, Ad Lucilium Epistula, 65, 3.

nature."⁴⁹ Aurelius goes on to remark that such artistic imitation, whether of men or actions, is good artistically if it embodies values which are not themselves perceived by the senses. Clearly, then, he did not advocate slavish realism.

The most famous of the pagan neo-Platonists, Plotinus, is quite faithful to the doctrine of Plato in this matter.

If any one despises the arts because they create only imitations of nature, it should be pointed out first that natural things likewise are imitations of other things, secondly that the arts do not imitate visible objects directly but point to the reasons from which nature derives, and finally that they create many things themselves and add that which is lacking to the perfection of the object because they possess in themselves beauty. Phidias made Zeus without reference to any visible model, but rather imagined him as he would be if he consented to appear to our eyes.⁵⁰

Plato's theory is very much in evidence in these words. Not only is art an imitation according to Plotinus, but natural objects are imitations as well, a concept highly reminiscent of the Platonic dialogues. Secondly, the artist imitates not mere appearances, but the reasons or ideas of which the phenomena are but imperfect copies. Another doctrine full of Platonic echoes.

During the era of the Renaissance the Platonic notion of art as imitation was the commonly accepted doctrine. As Dr. McKeon has remarked: "Literary criticism was strongly influenced during the Renaissance by the Platonic tradition, with its conception of the imitation of the ideal, and by the rhetorical tradition, with its conception of the imitation of the artist and of his writings, as developed by Cicero, Horace, Quintilian, and Longinus."⁵¹

⁴⁹Marcus Aurelius, To Himself, xi, 10.

⁵⁰Plotinus, Enneads v, 8, 1. Cited in Thought, Action and Passion, by Richard McKeon (Chicago, 1954), p. 123.

⁵¹McKeon, Thought, Action and Passion, p. 175.

During the Seventeenth century and the first half of the Eighteenth century we find the philosophers commonly employing the term "imitation" to distinguish art from nature and to mark the relation between the two. Not all of them, of course, agreed on precisely what the term meant. Nor could they agree on which arts were imitative and which not. But that "imitation" was a concept basic to the understanding and appreciation of art was quite universally acknowledged by such leading critics as Batteaux and Lessing and others.⁵²

Within more recent times the term "imitation" has fallen into disrepute and is no longer a prominent one in the vocabulary of critics.⁵³ Rarely does one run across the word "imitation" in a philosophical analysis of art, and even in these cases the writer is most careful to assure the reader that he does not mean a "literal representation of the object." Bernard Fosanquet has expressed the modern critics' opinion in this matter quite well when he wrote: "It is natural that the earliest formula adopted by reflection should be strained to the breaking point before it was abandoned."⁵⁴ The obvious implication is, of course, that the "early formula," namely imitation, having reached the breaking point, has been abandoned. And it must be admitted that at least the last part of Fosanquet's statement is true. Modern aesthetics has in large part abandoned the term.

For art, many modern critics insist, is essentially a creative, not an imitative act.⁵⁵ It is self-expression, the externalizing of one's feelings

⁵²Ibid. p. 180.

⁵³Verdenius, pp. 1-2.

⁵⁴Bernard Fosanquet, A History of Aesthetics, 4 ed. (London, 1917), p. 13.

⁵⁵Verdenius, p. 2.

and emotions, not the mere copying of nature. It is not the present writer's purpose to evaluate, much less criticize, this modern point of view. In so far as these notions have been proposed as refutation of Plato's doctrine they have been considered earlier. What we would like to point out is simply this. It would be wrong for the present student of art to conclude that the ancient notion of artistic "imitation" is to be rejected.

As a matter of fact, several rather prominent critics of our day have seen fit to employ the concept in their work. Among these we find the name of Jacques Maritain. In his book Art and Scholasticism, Maritain writes: "Art is fundamentally constructive and creative. It is the faculty of producing, not of course ex nihilo, but out of a pre-existing matter, a new creature, an original being capable in its turn of moving a human soul."⁵⁶

On the other hand Maritain remarks that "nature is in the first place a stimulus and a check to artists... They (artists) imitate her in a truly filial spirit, and according to the creative agility of the spirit; but their imitation is not literal and servile."⁵⁷

In his most recent book Maritain expresses the same sentiments.

Yet the fact remains that this genuine concept of imitation, correctly understood, expresses a necessity to which human art is bound... For without the instrumentality of natural appearances made present or 'represented' in such a way, the intended manifestation cannot be intuitive, that is the work falls short of the essence of art. As I have previously noticed, it is through the instrumentality of natural appearances that things reveal some of their secret meanings to the artist's intuition; it is also through the instrumentality of natural appearances...that the same secret meaning can be intuitively revealed in and by the work. Taken in

⁵⁶Jacques Maritain, Art and Scholasticism, p. 63.

⁵⁷Ibid. p. 64.

this correct philosophical sense, the law of 'imitation' (misleading as this unhappy word may be), the law of transference or reproduction is inescapable.⁵⁸

Mortimer Adler is even more emphatic in his espousal of the ancient concept. In his book, Art and Prudence, he mentions quite frankly that "the basic principle in the analysis of any work of art is that it is an imitation of nature.. To say that the motion picture is a work of art is to say no more than that it is something made by man and hence an imitation."⁵⁹

Elsewhere Mr. Adler remarks, "Art imitates nature, first in that making as a process is an imitation of natural processes and second, in that the thing artificially made is an imitation of a natural thing (or more generally a creature of God.)"⁶⁰

Other modern philosophers too have come to the conclusion that there very definitely is an imitative aspect to art.

The return of 'imitation' to basic importance in the discussion of poetry during the last fifteen or twenty years is an important sign both of the problems of contemporary aesthetics and criticism and of the availability of new devices for the treatment of recurrent dilemmas and oppositions. Croce's somewhat grudging defense of a proper meaning of imitation, Santayana's wholehearted employment of the concept as central to reason in art, were earlier preparations for the recognition of problems which have led to the more recent insights into the implications and applications of imitation.⁶¹

Clearly, then, the Platonic concept has exercised a good deal of influence

⁵⁸ Jacques Maritain, Creative Intuition in Art and Poetry (Kingsport, 1953), p. 225.

⁵⁹ Mortimer J. Adler, Art and Prudence (New York, 1937), p. 459.

⁶⁰ Mortimer J. Adler, "Creation and Imitation," Proceedings of the American Catholic Philosophical Association, Vol. XI, (1935), p. 154.

⁶¹ McKeeon, Thought, Action, and Passion, p. 174.

in the history of literary and artistic criticism. To be sure, the notion of imitation underwent an alteration of meaning with every new philosopher who employed it. Some, like Aristotle, enriched its significance immeasurably, while others, incapable of grasping its full meaning, used it incorrectly. That the concept has managed to survive so long would seem to indicate that it possesses at least a basic validity.

This last remark, however, should not be misinterpreted. It is not our contention that the Platonic concept of "imitation" should be re-adopted precisely as it was enuniated by Plato himself. Such a proposal would be as naive as it would be unrealistic. Clearly, much scholarly work has been done in the field of artistic analysis since Plato's day which cannot in all intellectual honesty be disregarded. Furthermore, Plato's aesthetics has its roots buried deep in the soil of his metaphysics and epistemology. To accept one is to accept a good deal of the other. Many a present day philosopher would be exceedingly reluctant to do this, and understandably so. Who, for example, would accept Plato's theory of subsistent Ideas? How many would be willing to look upon the world of sense experience as a faulty imperfect copy of reality? Their number, without doubt, would be exceedingly few.

On the other hand, Plato's point of view is not without its relevance, and this is the point which the present study has tried to make. Understood properly, Plato's analysis of art's nature can be quite instructive. By placing the emphasis on "imitation" he warned us against excessive formalism and subjectivism. At the same time he has pointed out the role of both realism and idealism in art. Further, he has put us on our guard against mere photographic copying, on the one hand, and esoteric subjectivism, on the other. For this, if for nothing else, Plato deserves our sincerest "thanks."

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The thesis submitted by Mr. Thomas P. Kennealy, S.J., has been read and approved by three members of the Department of Classics.

The final copies have been examined by the director of the thesis and the signature which appears below verifies the fact that any necessary changes have been incorporated, and that the thesis is now given final approval with reference to content, form, and mechanical accuracy.

The thesis is therefore accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

Sept 11, 1958
Date

Raymond V. Schoder, S.J.
Signature of Adviser