

XXXIV. *Mimesis in the Sophistês of Plato*

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Athens in the fifth century was a great center of the arts, but in its everyday life it was more obviously and more publicly a center of the crafts. Most Athenians were somehow engaged in them. Every Athenian had dealings with them,—with the shoemakers, weavers, potters, bronzeworkers who produced and purveyed the articles necessary for daily life. The Athenian observed in the streets the operations of these crafts or *technai* and was led to speculate on the *sophia* and *epistêmê*, the skill and know-how, that constituted the *aretê* or excellence of the craftsman in his craft. To the manual crafts he assimilated professions such as medicine and the arts, painting, sculpture, music and letters. These too were recognized as *technai*, with peculiar skills making for the excellence of their product. Not only the Athenians but all Greeks, as linguistic usage suggests, drew parallels between these crafts and the craft of living, between the craftsman expert (*agathos*) in his trade and the citizen expert (*agathos*) in the conduct of his public and private life. When Socrates “gabbled away” about shoemakers, he was derided for using in argument the analogy of the crafts only because he used it to the point of abuse. It was a pedestrian and not a questionable analogy.

Of this characteristic Socratic analogy Plato made the ample use which is for us such a striking feature of the dialogues. He further associated with the analogy of *technê*—as Socrates may not have done—the notion of *mimêsis*, a notion currently used of dramatic and artistic representation but perhaps not generally extended to all the crafts as the criterion by which their excellence was to be judged. The dramatic actor was said to imitate or mime. The musician was said to imitate or represent the passions. The architect was said to imitate or represent by his columns the tree-trunk. But what can the carpenter or the bronzeworker be said to imitate, unless he is copying from a model? If a generalized use of mimesis was current in Plato’s time, it was current as an

extension of a more specific use. We shall find in Plato instances of both the specific and the generalized use and instances in which, because Plato allowed them to co-exist, the meaning and connotations of the one overlap those of the other, and ambiguities arise. Already in the *Republic* these two senses of mimesis, the specific or dramatic sense and the generalized or metaphysical sense, are both present. They are exhibited again in the final division of the *Sophistês* as two classes related to one another as genus to species. When we have delimited the two senses in the *Republic* we will consider their relation in the *Sophistês* and its implications.¹

In Book 3 of the *Republic* we are concerned with education and so with the ethical consequences for the citizen, and especially for the guardians, of mimesis. Mimesis is defined as making oneself like another either in utterance or in external characteristics (393c). It is not conceived as a mere "aping" in externals nor as an enacting in the sense of assuming a foreign role. It is not achieved critically nor by an effort of the intelligence but in a sense by becoming the fictional person you impersonate or represent. Plato speaks chiefly of the poet who, in drama or in dramatic passages of the epic, makes himself the mouthpiece of his characters; but his real concern is with the guardians, in whose education such poetry plays a principal role. Is the guardian to become an imitator (394E) and surrender himself to the influences of imitation on the soul? ²

¹ For a bibliography of the literature of mimesis see H. Koller, *Die Mimesis in der Antike* (Bern 1954). For a bibliography of the theory of art, R. C. Lodge, *Plato's Theory of Art* (London 1953). For references to periodical discussion, W. Verdenius, *Mimesis* (Leiden 1949). For a general discussion of Plato's theory of art, G. M. A. Grube, *Plato's Thought* (London 1935). For mimesis and literary criticism, R. McKeon, "Literary Criticism and the Concept of Imitation in Antiquity" in *Critics and Criticism*, ed. R. S. Crane (Chicago 1952) 147-75. For the methodology of imitation, R. Robinson, *Plato's Earlier Dialectic*² (Oxford 1953) 202-22. Of the principal commentators on the *Sophistês* only F. M. Cornford *Plato's Theory of Knowledge* (London 1935) discusses mimesis at length, and he does not seem to me to clarify.

² The creative act of the tragic actor is recognized as mimesis (393c) in that "making oneself like another in utterance or in external characteristics is to imitate." It is also recognized that as spectators we come under the influence of this imitation—by *sympatheia* we "follow" it. Is this consequence in us as spectators also to be called mimesis? By participating passively in the mimesis of the actor, or of the poet, do we too imitate? Though he nowhere explicitly considers it, Plato would appear not to consider this secondary phenomenon mimesis. If the guardian "represents" the models of the poet—whether in the recitations of his *paideia*, in dance or in song—then mimesis occurs. But of the *pathos* of the soul in its self-identification with these models Plato nowhere uses the term mimesis. How then did he conceive the psychological process consequent on recitation and on passive participation at spectacles?

Plato's answer is that we must exercise control over the poets and the products of their craft. Their poetry is analyzed into the *logos*, the dominant Word that is to determine the character of the rest, and its aids of prosodical device and musical accompaniment (392A-401A). The *logos*, largely narrative and only in minor measure dramatic, must be so contrived as to present examples, for the imitation of the youth to be educated, of that grace of person which reflects the beauty of the soul (400D-E). The education of the guardian will consist largely in living with and forming himself by such models. As in the study of his letters he is said to be proficient when he recognizes and can read the letters in all contexts, so he is said to be *mousikos*—an educated person—when he can recognize the virtues in their kinds whenever he sees them, in fact or in representation (402B-C) and, it would appear, when he is enamored of them (402D).

In this disquisition of the third book Plato is concerned with the moral effects of artistic representation on the youth of his state. If we can propose for them good models (their acceptance of the models is assumed), they will imitate them in their lives, their imitation will pass into character, and they will emerge from the educational process as good citizens (395c). So far no one, not even those who question the feasibility of his theory, would quarrel with Plato's intentions. His critics take alarm only when it becomes apparent that he would bowdlerize Homer and exclude from his state the great tragedians. If the poets do not demonstrate that they can and will purvey the sort of mimesis his scheme demands, they will be bowed out, politely but firmly (401B). Let us for the present accept the necessity of Plato's legislation as following from his premises, deferring a consideration of those premises until the full meaning of mimesis emerges. We should however note that Plato restricts his discussion to education in an ideal state, in its ethical and political aspects. He is *not* discussing the nature of artistic representation, nor of its paradigmatic models except insofar as they exhibit the virtues. It should also be noted that the word *mimeisthai* has not pejorative implications

(From the *Laws* it would appear that his citizens were to have the role of active participants predominantly.) When he speaks of the consequences of imitation in the *Republic* he uses a simile of nurture or nourishment (401B-D) as he does also in the *Phaedrus* (248B), where however souls "follow" rather than imitate their god. The nearest that Plato comes to describing the psychological state is the chain of inspiration of the *Ion* that links poet, interpreter and listener.

in the third book and that *homoioushai*, which never has such implications in Plato, is used as a synonym. The meaning of mimesis is restricted to representation or impersonation, and especially to representation in dramatic form and in literature.

At the beginning of the tenth book of the *Republic* the theme of mimesis is reintroduced abruptly, as if Plato had long repressed a desire to discuss it further. Now that we know something of the constitution of the soul, he says (595A) we see how right we were to exclude all mimetic poetry. (In Book 3 it was proposed merely to restrict it [396E]). He then asks for a definition of mimesis and proceeds to seek it by "our customary method" of positing an *eidos* or form for things having a common name, as "bed" or "table." It is to this *eidos* that the craftsman looks when he makes a bed or table. The *eidos* is made by God;³ the many particular tables of the perceptual world, by craftsmen. But there is a craftsman of another sort who makes a bed by the imitative art of painting. He makes not only beds and other artifacts but also all the objects of the physical world, the heavens, the gods, the world of the dead. He imitates, however, not the form of bed but the craft product; and that not as it is but as, from some one angle of vision, it appears to be (598A). So we have three levels of being and truth: first, that of the form; secondly, that of the craftsman's artifact; thirdly that of the painter's mimesis, a representation of appearances. We have the form "bed," a true and unique existent. We have the artifact bed, made after the form but in many copies, all of them at best an approximation of the form. And we have the painter's imitation, made after the artifact, at two removes from being and truth.

It would appear that this whole discussion (595C-597E) is to be regarded as defining mimesis. It is in fact nowhere defined, and the nearest we come to definition is the statement that we are to call the man who is two "generations" removed from the original creation an imitator. So what we finally arrive at is not a defini-

³ Though the *eidos* is here said to be created by the divinity, nowhere else are the forms said to be created. They are eternal. In the *Timaeus*, as we shall see, they are not created by the Demiurge but somehow given in the model or *autozōon*. At the time of writing the *Republic* Plato may have felt that in simplifying for the sake of symmetry the relation between divinity and form he was not for his immediate purpose falsifying that relation. In the *Philebus* (62A) he speaks similarly of the *divine* circle and the *divine* sphere, though they are nowhere else spoken of as divine and there seems to be no reason why they should be given this attribute.

tion of mimesis but a determination of the ontological status of its manifestation or product. It would appear to be unrelated to the restrictive definition of "making oneself like another." It is based on the *eidos*, and the *eidos* is not here a species but a form of things having a common name, a form that the craftsman "sees" and after which he creates his craft product. The poet or actor "creating" a character does not have reference to a form, and his creation, though it is creation (*poiêsis*) and may arise from a related impulse, is not directly parallel to that of the craftsman but at best only a limited and subsidiary kind of that creation.

If Plato felt that his two differing definitions of mimesis needed to be reconciled (and he may not have), he makes no attempt at reconciliation in *Republic* 10, but simply proceeds to apply to the poet his conclusions as to the painter. The tragic poets and Homer, he says (597E and 599A) are, like the painter-imitator, at two removes "from the king and truth." It might be urged on their behalf that they should be accorded the same ontological status as the craftsman. But if they are in fact craftsmen working in a productive craft, if they are like makers rather than painter-imitators of beds, then they should be able to point to their product. Homer should be able to show us legislation he has produced, patterns in education he has evolved, successful wars he has waged. He is indeed said to teach virtue, but in fact he produces a mimesis of the semblance or *eidôla* of virtue. That the poet is at two removes rather than one from truth is shown if we consider a further parallel: first, the horseman, who is the user of bridles and *knows* their use; secondly, the craftsman who is a maker of bridles and has a correct opinion about their use; and finally the painter who depicts by mimesis a bridle "as it is held to be beautiful by the ignorant multitude" (601c-602b).

Not yet content with his equation in ontological status of painter and poet, Plato goes on to point out that we correct the reports of sense perception by counting, measuring and weighing—processes of the intellect—whereas painting depicts the uncorrected reports of sense. So "being itself inferior and consorting with an inferior faculty it begets inferior offspring." (603b). Is this condemnation of mimesis in painting, he asks, also valid for mimesis in poetry? Let us judge poetry by the company it keeps. Does it not choose as its subjects men who are *unmeasured* and a prey to the passions? Does it not by preference depict them in their excesses

of passion, and thus induce even in the best of us a sympathy with such excess and so encourage us to similar excess (605c-d) ?

This excursus on mimesis of the tenth book is not to be related to the simile of the Line, which illustrates orders of being and the knowledge corresponding to each order in the perceptual and intelligible world. Nor is it to be related to the Cave, a simile that exhibits the progress of the soul towards a knowledge of true being. It is to be connected, as it is specifically connected by Plato (595A) with the doctrine of the tripartite soul; and this doctrine is used to show that the poets appeal to, and furnish nourishment for, not the intellectual and most truly human element in the soul, nor for the spirited element, but for the element of the appetites. The painter, and the place in the scale of reality of his product, is apparently introduced only for the sake of applying conclusions as to the ontological status of his product to the allied art of poetry. The familiar illustration of maker-user-depicter is brought in only to bolster up that argument. Plato's concern throughout is with poetry, and with the moral consequences of poetry in education. His tone is protreptic. No unified doctrine of mimesis emerges.

In the final division of the *Sophistês* (232B-end) the theme of mimesis crops up again. The problem is now attacked not analogically, as heretofore, but by the method of division; and a much closer analysis results. The purpose of our division is to isolate and define the sophist and his craft of contentious argument, by means of which he makes to appear as true what is not true—craft of illusion or mimesis (235A). Once again the painter must serve as example or paradigm (233D) for the sophist. The painter's profession of ability to create by his single craft all physical objects tells us that what he creates are imitations such as, when seen from a distance, deceive only the sillier sort of boy. In the same way the sophist, by his words rather than by the brush, and working through the ears rather than the eyes, creates word-pictures or illusions that deceive the young. So our sophist is to be discovered somewhere in the class of imitators, illusionists, creators of *eidôla* or semblances. All these appellations are used for the class, the specific characteristic of which however is mimesis.⁴

⁴ The imagery of this passage is not as Cornford, *Plato's Theory of Knowledge* (London 1935) 195, suggests, intended to recall the allegory of the Cave. There the shadows are not created by sophistry and the illusion is not destroyed by experience. Most men remain lifelong prisoners in the cave.

This class is then divided into two sub-classes, *eikastikê* and *phantastikê*. *Eikastikê* is the art or craft that creates *eikones*, replicas or true likenesses of their *paradeigma*-exemplar (235D-E). It is not in the *Sophistês* apparent what the *eikones* are. In the *Cratylus* (432B) the *eikôn* is a portrait, but in the *Sophistês* a two-dimensional portrait could not be classified under *eikastikê*, nor are there any replicas made by a craft, and not at two removes from the Forms, that could be classed as *eikones* in the present sense. *Eikastikê* would appear to be a class without members, serving only a purpose of symmetry. The *eikôn* of the *Timaeus* and its paradigm-exemplar has a very different significance, not relevant here.

Phantastikê is the mimetic craft that creates *phantasmata*, imitations in the sense that they appear to be (*phainetai*) what they are not. The class includes all the plastic, dramatic, rhetorical, and literary arts. But in saying that their products *are not* what they appear to be, we are denying them existence in the full sense. How can anything be said *not to be* what it appears to be? Then we must say that *not-being is*. And so the divisions of the mimetic craft have launched us into the problems of *not-being*. Even though we cannot affirm that the products of mimesis are invested in the panoply of existence, even though being and reality and truth cannot be predicated of them (and we agree they cannot), we must nevertheless affirm that they somehow *are*—and so that non-being is—or we must acknowledge defeat and abandon our inquiry into the nature of the sophist. So we embark on the discussion of non-being.

It is apparent already in this preliminary discussion that Plato is shifting his ground. In the *Republic* his real concern was with the person subjected to mimetic techniques, the guardian to be educated. In the *Sophistês* he is concerned with the person practising the art or craft and with his product. The pre-occupation with art as an ethical and political phenomenon that

⁴ (cont.)

In this passage the word *eidôlon* serves as name for the genus or class. It implies a semblance in all respects like the reality, except that it is insubstantial. The essential characteristic is *likeness*. The *eidôla* that Ulysses sees in Hades are in all respects so like the persons as to be distinguishable only to the sense of touch. When he attempts to embrace his mother, she escapes his hands like a shadow or a dream (*Od.* 11.206-14). The *eidôlon* of Aeneas over which Greeks and Trojans fight deceives them both (*Il.* 5.449-53). In its most extended meaning the *eidôlon* has all the qualities of the living thing or natural object except substance, and so can serve as genus for the *eikôn* or faithful replica and the *phantasma* or deceptive semblance.

Socrates showed in the *Republic* has yielded to a probing into its ontological status. The shift however is more apparent than real. In the end the sophist is discredited as an educator, shown to be without ethical principle and put in his proper place.

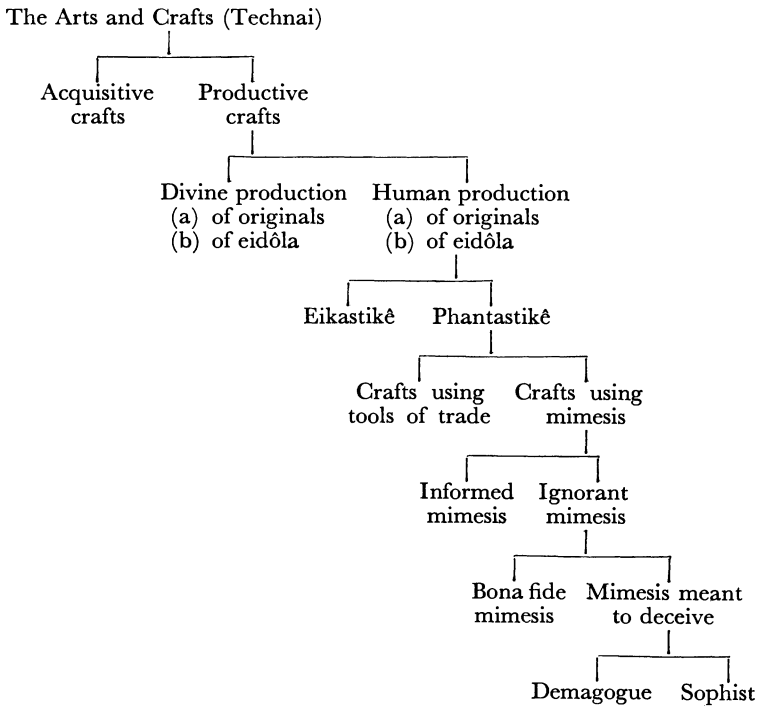
We return to our interrupted division and to *eikastikê*—*phantastikê* only after the long digression on non-being, when the Eleatic Stranger has established that there is an area between being and non-being, and that in discourse we can properly say of something “it is *not* (i.e. is *other than*)” something else, a judgment we may express by “it appears to be.” On these grounds we conclude that there can be imitations having a limited being/reality and capable of deceiving us. “Now that the existence of false statement and false judgment is apparent, we must admit that imitations of real things and a deceptive craft arising from the state of mind of false judgment can exist” (264D).⁵

The final division, when it is completed, will take the form shown in the chart on the opposite page.

On this our second attack we begin at a higher level than we had done before the interruption. We now divide the whole class or genus of arts and crafts into acquisitive crafts and productive crafts; and we proceed to divide, by dichotomy, always that one part of our twofold division under which the sophist must eventually fall. Productive crafts are those that can create what did not exist before (265B). This class is divisible into divine production and human production, each of these having within it two sub-divisions. The divine craftsman or Demiurge creates all plants, animals, and natural objects; and he also creates their images—dreams, shadows, reflections. The human craftsman creates all the products of crafts such as houses, chairs, tables; and he also creates their images—pictures of houses, chairs, tables. So in human as in divine creation we have a twofold production, of originals and of images. We are not here told, as we are told in the tenth book of the *Republic*, that in making his

⁵ *Phantastikê*, the craft of making deceptive semblances, is a species of the craft of semblance making. There can be a craft of deceptive semblances only if deception—and so false judgment and false statement—is possible. It is possible if we can say “It appears to me (*phainetai*)” and be in error. Error arises in the misapplication of the form *non-being*. The manner of this misapplication is described *Soph.* 261c–264d, a passage fraught with difficulties of interpretation which however do not affect our present discussion. It is discussed in the commentaries of Campbell, Cornford, Taylor but perhaps best by O. Apelt, *Platonische Aufsätze* (Leipzig 1912) 238–90.

artifacts the craftsman looks to a form, partly because we are here including with the maker of artifacts in the one class also those craftsmen who, like the painter, look to the sensible particular rather than the form, partly perhaps because Plato is unwilling to consider the implications for the divine craftsman. Does he too



look to the forms? Do they exist independently of him and his creation? Are the forms “the paradigmatic cause of all natural composites” as they were said to be by Xenocrates, apparently in quotation of Plato? Do the forms have their existence in the divine mind, as has been suggested by Platonists in the past and is suggested with some cogency today?⁶ We can only say that in this division Plato makes no allusion to the problem.

⁶ K. F. Doherty, “The Location of the Platonic Ideas,” *Rev. Metaph.* 14.1 (Sep. 1960) 57–72. Doherty on pages 57 and 58 cites Platonists ancient and modern who held that the Ideas were the thoughts of God.

Xenocrates in Proclus *In Plat. Parmen.* 136c defines Form as αἰτία παραδειγματικὴ τῶν κατὰ φύσιν αἰεὶ συνεστώτων.

So of human creation as of divine creation the products are originals, like beds, or images-*eidōla*. Earlier (235B ff.) before the digression on non-being we had established that the craft of image-making falls into two parts, *eikastikē* (or the art of making true images) and *phantastikē*. It is to *phantastikē* that we now turn our attention as being that division of the class in which we must discover—and so define—the sophist. *Phantastikē*, as we recall, is the art of creating *phantasmata*, or deceptive semblances. They are of two kinds (267A). In the first kind the artist creates by the use of the tools of his craft, as in the arts of painting and sculpture. In the second kind he creates in his own person, by mimesis. This mimesis is not necessarily bad. It can be practised with a knowledge of what you are imitating (267B) as the guardians of the *Republic* are to “imitate” the virtues and as the citizenry is to do in the *Laws*. In our present division, however, we are seeking after the sophist, and he imitates not with knowledge but in ignorance, and not with the ignorance of the naïve but with intent to deceive (268A), and to deceive not the body politic, as does the demagogue, but the private person. So the sophist is pronounced to be an ignorant creator of semblances meant to deceive in private instruction.

The striking feature of this final division of the *Sophistēs* is that productive craft, from which our division proceeds, is explicitly recognized to be mimetic (234B ff. and 265B). Then, three classes lower in the division, we encounter a more restricted and specialized kind of mimesis that also is known by that name (267A). We met with mimesis in these two senses, the restricted and the generalized sense, in the *Republic*. Our division here tells us that they are related to one another as sub-species to genus. How are we to understand this relation? How has the meaning of mimesis in the restricted, and so probably primary, sense been extended to cover the wider meaning and class?

Mimesis in the restricted sense is here defined as occurring when the person creating a deceptive semblance uses his person as a tool or instrument for the creation of that semblance. “When someone, employing as his instrument his own physical person (or voice) makes it appear closely to resemble your person or your voice, this kind of semblance is called, I take it, mimesis” (267A). Here the class *phantastikē* or semblance-making, which includes all the arts, is so divided as to create two sub-classes.

In the first are painting, sculpture, all the plastic arts. The second, explicitly called mimetic, is what we might call the peculiarly dramatic class. It includes actors and rhapsodes, who *know* their craft and so in fact impersonate or represent what they profess to represent. It also includes pseudo-actors, whether naïve or insincere, who assume deceptive roles in public or private life. This whole mimetic class is patterned after the actor, its other members playing parts without knowledge of the prototypes they feign to represent.

What characteristic of the mimetic class in this restricted sense permits of the extension of the notion mimesis to the whole class of productive crafts? The definition quoted above suggests as the means and process "making yourself *like*." We find the same emphasis on likeness in the definition of the *Republic* (393c), "making oneself *like* another either in utterance or in external characteristics," and in the *Cratylus* (423A) it is said of mimetic gesture that in executing it we make ourselves as *like* as possible. The word *homoios* or *like* means in earlier Greek "equal" or "identical," and in later usage it continues to imply a likeness in which some element of identity is present. In dramatic mimesis the actor impersonating or enacting assumes his role by making himself in some respects *like* the person he is representing, so that in these respects we recognize in the imitator the person imitated.

In the larger sphere of the productive crafts this same process obtains. Here the craftsman makes his *craft product* like a model, as the actor makes *himself* like his model; but the craftsman's model is an archetype, a *form* of the product to which the particular instance imperfectly conforms. It is a *like* element in form and craft object that shapes that object. The craftsman knows his form and makes his product *like* that form. This process of making in the likeness of the form is called mimesis. In our division itself, however, though the existence of the form or paradigm is implied, no allusion is made to forms because Plato is subsuming under the class of productive crafts both divine and human imitation; and while human mimesis is parallel to the divine in respect of the creation of real things and of their likenesses, for divine mimesis there are no archetypes.

The nature of divine mimesis emerges more clearly in the *Timaeus* (28A ff.). There Plato considers only the creative activity of the Demiurge or divine craftsman-artist, to whom

creation of originals and images was ascribed also in the *Sophistês* (265c–266c). The Demiurge has the *autozôon* as a *paradeigma* or exemplar for his creation. He then proceeds to create its unique *eikôn*, our physical world. The *autozôon* is not said to be created. It consists of eternal and unchanging elements and may therefore be said to be a parallel to the forms to which the human creator looks in the creation of his craft product. Our physical world is an *imitation* of the *autozôon* (48E–49A) and the shapes that pass into and out of the Receptacle of Becoming are *imitations* of its eternal existents (50c). In the *Timaeus* mimesis is described chiefly in terms of transcendental exemplar and faithful copy. This terminology is taken from the visual arts, where you can “see,” and in particular from sculpture and painting; but even if the terms are understood as limiting the kind of creativity of the Demiurge, nevertheless they remain a form of mimesis.⁷

This use of the notion of mimesis in the *Timaeus*, though it explains in greater detail the manner in which divine mimesis is conceived as operating, remains within the bounds of the *Sophistês*’ analysis, as does its use in other dialogues subsequent to the *Sophistês*. In the *Politicus* (288c and 304c) reference is made to mimesis of the kind sketched in *Republic* 3; and it is that literary and musical mimesis, employed in education, that we have in view in the important discussions of the *Laws*. These discussions

⁷ One can no more give a fixed and constant meaning to the term *paradeigma* than one can to *mimêsis*, though both words are to be understood in the context of the notion of mimesis. Here the meaning of *paradeigma* derives from its use in connection with painting and sculpture, where you have exemplar-model and likeness. The logical *paradeigma* of the *Politicus* is there described (278c): “We then have a paradigm when having in mind our paradigm we correctly judge that there is an identical essence in some other thing separate from it: and we bring the two together and make as to them, singly and as a pair, one true judgment.” This analogical method is discussed by Kucharski, *Les chemins du savoir* (Paris 1949) 154 and 193, note 1; also by Goldschmidt, *Le paradigme dans la pensée platonicienne* (Paris 1947). It is the element of likeness or identity that sanctions the analogy.

The fluctuation in the connotations of *mimêsis* are pointed out effectively by McKeon, *op. cit.* (above, note 1) 149–51. I am not suggesting here that mimesis has only the two meanings mentioned above, cosmic principle and actor’s technique, nor that fluctuation occurs only between those two extremes of meaning. Sometimes *mimêma* clearly means counterfeit (as *Politic.* 300c): sometimes (as *Politic.* 274A) mimesis has only a vague and general sense. There, in the reversal of the cosmic revolution, our human world “imitates” the universe only in that the principle of “congenital appetition” (272E) which, together with fate, now rules the universe, also determines the manner of our procreation. Here mimesis implies little more than “following a pattern.”

add to our knowledge of how Plato would have mimesis used, especially in education. They add little to our knowledge of the nature of mimesis, and nothing to our analysis of its kinds.⁸

So we observe in Plato's use of the notion mimesis that he distinguishes two principal kinds. First there is the restricted or dramatic kind in which a person enacting impersonates or represents another, a craft recognized to be a creative activity with its own proper techniques. Then we have the mimesis of eternal existents by sensible particulars, and here again we recognize a creative activity, human or divine, with its characteristic knowledge and technique. We can also observe how Plato links and associates these two kinds of mimesis. But how did two so disparate notions come to be linked in the first place, assuming (as we must assume) that Plato was not the first to associate them? An inquiry into early usage of mimesis words gives us only hints, but on the basis of these hints Koller (*op. cit.* [above, note 1] 13-14 and 25-47) has constructed a plausible hypothesis of origin in the cult of Dionysus, with the *mimos* and his characteristic mask. W. F. Otto, in a study of the religion of Dionysus (*Dionysos* [Frankfurt 1960] 20-23) makes a similar suggestion. He writes,

The cult is one of the great creations of the human spirit. To achieve a proper point of view one must see it together with architecture, the plastic arts, poetry, and music, all of which were at one time in the service of the godhead. It is one of the principal means by which mankind speaks with its god. . . . Its epoch is so distant from us that it need not surprise us if it has become more foreign than those other forms. For it bears witness to so immediate a presence of the godhead that man himself, offering and giving his own person, has to become the representational—or imitative—medium to express that which the other forms express through the medium of stone, color, musical sounds, words . . . The serious observer cannot doubt that the dances and the acts performed in cult practice have been given their form by contact with the godhead. Its presence has filled them and so in rapture transported them that they often express not the attitude of humanity but rather the nature and action of the god himself. In later times it is said that men are imitating the god and his story.”

⁸ For an excellent discussion of the role of art in the *Laws*, G. M. A. Grube, *Plato's Thought* (London 1935) 196-202; of mimesis in education, G. R. Morrow, *Plato's Cretan City* (Princeton 1960) 297-318. In *Laws* 653A-674 Plato modifies his views as to the *uses* of art in education, but not as to the nature of mimesis.

Any such hypothesis, however plausible, can be used only to make understandable to us how and in what context the notion of mimesis had its origin. It cannot be more than conjectural. But with the imitation of the Form by the particular we are on firmer ground. Aristotle (*Metaph.* 987B, 11) tells us that mimesis was used by the Pythagoreans as an analogical illustration of the structure of the physical world. So original notion and Pythagorean extension were both current when Plato for his own purposes adopted the term, and our problem here is not origin nor earlier acceptance but Platonic usage.

Plato, though he defines mimesis in its narrowest sense, nowhere attempts to define its wider meaning nor to elaborate a doctrine of mimesis. It is a notion, like that of *technê* to which he relates it, which he accepts, amplifies and uses as a tool of discourse. The analogy of the crafts that were omnipresent in Athens served him, as it had served Socrates before him, in many contexts. The craftsmen who were makers of a product, like their fellows who were impersonators, created or represented in that they made their product *like* a model visible to the creator only by the eye of the mind. Even the Divine Craftsman, in Plato's account of the making of our world, creates after an invisible and incorporeal model that serves him as exemplar (just as the sculptor has his exemplar-model) in the creation of our physical universe.

What was it that made this notion of mimesis, in spite of its inherent difficulties that only the dialectical method enables him to avoid, seem so useful and congenial to Plato? For him the real world was an incorporeal world, not visible to the bodily eye. Our physical world is made after an incorporeal exemplar, which it imitates. The Craftsman who made this our corporeal world made his human creature, though not after his image, with a faculty of intelligence implanted in him like that of his creator. This like faculty enables the creature to know, insofar as he does know, the incorporeal world perfectly known to his creator; and the creature is endowed, like his creator, not only with the power of knowing but also with the ability to create. And the human like the divine creator creates by means of his *technê*, imitating the *form-models* of his crafts.⁹

⁹ Already in the *Symposium* (205B–C) Plato says: "The cause of anything whatever moving from non-being to being is creation (*poiêsis*) through and through. So the

Nevertheless we must not see in mimesis simply a metaphor that serves to suggest similarities of structure between the incorporeal and the corporeal worlds, between transcendent forms and sensible particulars, between the models and the products of the crafts. Mimesis for Plato suggests the creative activity by which the higher realities are sensibly embodied; it also implies a real transcendental relation which does not, however, exclude the immanence implied by the presence of a like element in exemplar and example. Indeed *homoious thai*, often regarded as a typical immanence word, is regularly used as a synonym for *mimēisthai*, usually regarded as a typical transcendence word. It is perhaps only in use that we can distinguish between them. In the *Theaetetus* (176B) Plato describes the highest end of the philosophical activity, *dialektikê*, as being "to make ourselves like the divine, insofar as we can." Here as elsewhere where the formula occurs Plato always uses *homoious thai* and its derivatives, never *mimēisthai*, probably because there is in *homoious thai* greater emphasis on sameness or identity. We are bidden to imitate or make ourselves like the divine not in the sense of achieving a partial or a deceptive semblance (*mimēisthai* admits of these pejorative extensions as *homoious thai* does not) but in the sense of becoming like not merely as copy is to exemplar but as exhibiting in ourselves some element which, in spite of differences of scale or state or place, makes us in that respect identical instances. We can achieve this god-likeness only by unremitting and strenuous effort of the intellect. For Plato the life of the philosopher is a life of struggle towards the goal of knowledge, towards "searching the heavens and measuring the plains, in all places seeking the nature of everything as a whole" (*Theaet.* 173E).

processes involved in all the crafts are acts of creation, and all craftsmen are creators (*poiētês*)." Creation in the Greek implies primarily the making of something, usually in the processes of a craft. It is in that sense that the Demiurge is said to create. Our "Creation" translates *genesis* and not *poiêsis*.

When, later in the same discussion (*Symp.* 212A) Plato speaks of bringing to birth "not the semblances (*eidôla*) of virtue, as not having had intercourse with a semblance, but the very truth, as having had intercourse with truth," though he uses the term "*eidôlon*," which has associations with mimesis, the process by which our vision is achieved is not the more intellectual process of mimesis but the ascension by means of Eros, by its nature emotional. When he speaks of our artistic activity Plato speaks of it in terms of mimesis, as he does when he speaks of its secondary form, our mimesis of existing products of the arts in song, dance, education, etc. He does not discuss our psychological reaction to mimesis, though there are hints of how he might have described it in the *Ion*, *Phaedrus*, *Symposium*. He assumes that secondary mimesis, and therefore our reactions, affect character.

We must then ask ourselves: What enables us to know? and by what process of knowing do we make ourselves like the object of our knowledge? Self-movement is the image of the nature of the intellect (*Laws* 897D–898c) and self-movement characterizes the human soul (*Phaedr.* 245E). The Intellect of which our universe of incorporeal and corporeal existents is an expression is the macrocosm of which our minds or souls are microcosm. It is the paradigm of the *nous* in us. And you have a paradigm when you have two things which, in spite of difference of place and scale, are in substance the same (*Politicus* 278c). Because the divine artist in creating us implanted in us his own faculty of *nous*, the paradigm to which the philosopher must conform is mind accessible to his mind. But the fact of our endowment does not ensure the exercise of the faculty with which we are endowed. “It is not the god who chooses you but you who choose (or decide for) the god” (*Rep.* 617E). It is only by consistent and strenuous exercise of the faculty given us that we can, in a measure, conform to the divine intellect.

But why should a knowledge of the divine mind make us good, and so happy? By knowing do we necessarily imitate, make ourselves like, the virtues we observe there? For Plato the Socratic *nemo sua sponte peccat* was only a corollary of the more positive doctrine that the process of knowing entails a relation of paradigm-*eikôn* and an imitating. It is by making yourself like that you know, and by knowing that you make yourself like. Just as the human craftsman in the process of his creation comes to know and so to represent or imitate his model, so the philosopher’s pursuit of knowledge involves in its acquirement the making of himself like the divine insofar as he can.¹⁰

So we affirm that in the wide spectrum of meaning given to mimesis in the Platonic dialogues we can distinguish two principal senses: a restricted or dramatic sense of making oneself like another, and a wider sense describing the creative processes in all the productive crafts; and further that in the final division of the *Sophistês* we find the latter related to the former as genus to species.

¹⁰ It is in this sense that *homoiôsis theôi* is developed by the Stoics and Neoplatonists. See Pohlenz, *Die Stoa* (Göttingen 1959) 2.115, 133, 174.