

A THEORY OF IMITATION IN PLATO'S *REPUBLIC*

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Plato's discussion of imitation in *Republic* 10 has often been called self-contradictory, or at least inconsistent with the treatment of *mimêsis* in *Republic* 3. It is argued, for example, that while *Republic* 3 banishes only some imitative poetry, *Republic* 10 opens with the statement that all imitative poetry has been excluded from the ideal state (10.595A), but then nevertheless allows some forms of imitation, namely hymns and encomia (10.607A).¹ Others claim that Plato fails to define important terms, such as "imitation," which he uses inconsistently. For example, critics have said that "imitation" means "impersonation" in *Republic* 3, but "representation" in *Republic* 10.² The most extreme position is that Plato has no coherent concept of the imitation he attacks, but simply strings together a series of bad arguments.³

Numerous attempts have been made to resolve or explain these alleged inconsistencies. Some deny that Plato really means everything he seems to be saying,⁴ or argue that Book 10 expresses a different view

¹ See especially C. Brownson, *Plato's Studies and Criticism of the Poets* (Boston 1920) 88-94. More recently L. Moss, "Plato and the *Poetics*," *Philological Quarterly* 50 (1971) 533-42 argues against various attempts to reconcile Books 3 and 10. For other surveys of views about the problem of consistency see also T. Gould, "Plato's Hostility to Art," *Arion* 3 (1964) 70-91; G. Sörbom, *Mimesis and Art* (Stockholm 1966) esp. 129-51; M. Partee, *Plato's Poetics* (Salt Lake City 1981) 1-22; A. Nehamas, "Plato on Imitation and Poetry in *Republic* 10," in *Plato on Beauty, Wisdom, and the Arts*, eds. J. Moravcsik and P. Temko (Totowa, N.J. 1982) 47-78. Unless otherwise noted, I follow Burnet's OCT.

² For the view that Plato uses *mimeisthai* in several different senses see P. Vicaire, *Platon. Critique littéraire* (Paris 1960) 221-25 and E. Schaper, *Prelude to Aesthetics* (London 1968) 42-48. Some of those who hold that Plato uses *mimêsis* in the sense of "impersonation" in *Republic* 3 and in that of "representation" in *Republic* 10 are Brownson (above, note 1) 92-93; F. M. Cornford, *The Republic of Plato* (Oxford 1941) 324, note 1; E. Havelock, *Preface to Plato* (Cambridge, Mass. and London 1963) 20-26.

³ See, for example, J. W. H. Atkins, *Literary Criticism in Antiquity* (Cambridge 1934) 1.48-51 and J. Annas, *An Introduction to Plato's Republic* (Oxford 1981) 336-44.

⁴ Representatives of this view are W. C. Greene, "Plato's View of Poetry," *HSCP* 29 (1918) 56; A. H. Gilbert, "Did Plato Banish the Poets or the Critics?" *Studies in Philology* 36 (1939) 1-19; I. M. Crombie, *An Examination of Plato's Doctrines* (London 1962) 1.147.

from that of Book 3 because it was written later.⁵ Others believe that the apparent inconsistencies are due to the quite different aims of the two books.⁶ Still others argue that Plato defines and discusses a good and a bad kind of imitation.⁷ Or again, certain scholars claim that Plato's aesthetic theories in other dialogues can explain some apparent inconsistencies in the *Republic*.⁸

It has not been noticed, however, that *Republic* 3 and 10 contain a theory of imitation in the visual and poetic arts that is remarkably consistent and detailed in certain respects. In these books Plato defines, explicitly or by clear implication, many characteristics of different imitative arts and many relationships among these arts. This important area of definitions and relationships has never been adequately investigated.⁹

There are many indications of a consistently applied definitional strategy, with Book 10.595A–608B elaborating and explaining ideas briefly stated or merely implicit in Book 3.392C–398B. For example, the discussion of style (*lexis*) in the *Republic* 3 passage defines imitation (*to mimeisthai*) as “likening oneself to someone else” (3.393C5–6), distinguishes genres of poetry from one another on the basis of their use of imitation (3.394B–C), and concludes with the condemnation of one particular kind of imitation. *Republic* 10 opens with a reference to the *Republic* 3 discussion of imitation: “We did well . . . in not admitting any [poetry] that is *mimêtikê*” (10.595A2–5) and explicitly formulates the theory that the imitator imitates the works of craftsmen, a view strongly suggested at *Republic* 3.397Eff. Definitions and relationships among the arts are as important in the *Republic* 10 passage as they are in *Republic* 3. Plato begins the discussion of *mimêsis* in *Republic* 10 by asking for a definition of “*mimêsis* in general,” stating that this has not yet been adequately given (10.595C). Plato then suggests that this definition is given within the next few pages, for he remarks, at 10.599D3–4, that “we defined the imitator as the craftsman of an *eidôlon*.” Book 10 goes on to define the subject matter of one kind of imitative poetry (603C) and to

⁵ This is the view of, for example, R. Nettleship, *Lectures on the Republic of Plato* (London 1901²) 341 and G. Else, *The Structure and Date of Book 10 of Plato's Republic* (Heidelberg 1972).

⁶ Some interpretations along this line are those of W. Jaeger, *Paideia: The Ideals of Greek Culture*, transl. G. Highet (New York 1943) 2.215; R. G. Collingwood, “Plato's Philosophy of Art,” *Mind* n.s. 34 (1925) 163–64; Nehamas (above, note 1).

⁷ The best known proponent of the view that Plato distinguishes between a “good” and a “bad” kind of imitation is J. Tate, “‘Imitation’ in Plato's *Republic*,” *CQ* 22 (1928) 16–23 and “Plato and ‘Imitation’,” *CQ* 26 (1932) 161–69.

⁸ See, for example, W. J. Oates, *Plato's View of Art* (New York 1972) and W. J. Verdenius, *Mimesis. Plato's Doctrine of Artistic Imitation and Its Meaning to Us* (Leiden 1962).

⁹ Vicaire (above, note 2) 236–60, though he does not examine the *Republic* in sufficient detail, is one of the few who have undertaken a study of Plato's views on poetic genres.

give an account of the reactions of the audience to different genres of poetry (605C–606D). Throughout Book 10 Plato is also concerned with the relationship between painting and poetry and with that between imitation and craftsmanship.

Nevertheless, Plato's views on the defining characteristics of the imitative arts are, in *Republic* 3 and 10, often obscured by his not presenting them formally and explicitly. Classification is not, after all, Plato's primary concern in these books, as it is in portions of his *Sophist*,¹⁰ but is subordinate to ethical and psychological concerns. It will therefore be helpful to reorganize Plato's material, collecting his sometimes scattered remarks in *Republic* 3.392C–398B and 10.595A–608B, assigning a single label to each kind of imitative art and explicitly describing relationships that Plato sometimes leaves his reader to infer. The following examination begins with the most general definition of imitation (Section I), proceeds to two important kinds of imitation which Plato distinguishes and which we will call "versatile imitation" and "imitation with knowledge" (Section II), considers the two kinds of versatile imitation with which Plato is concerned: painting and poetry (Section III), and concludes with a study of the genres of versatile poetry Plato mentions: epic, tragedy, lyric, and comedy (Section IV). Our study will, as far as possible, limit itself to the two passages, *Republic* 3.392C–398B and *Republic* 10.595A–608B, that form a structural and thematic unity.¹¹ The diagram on p. 124 outlines our procedure.

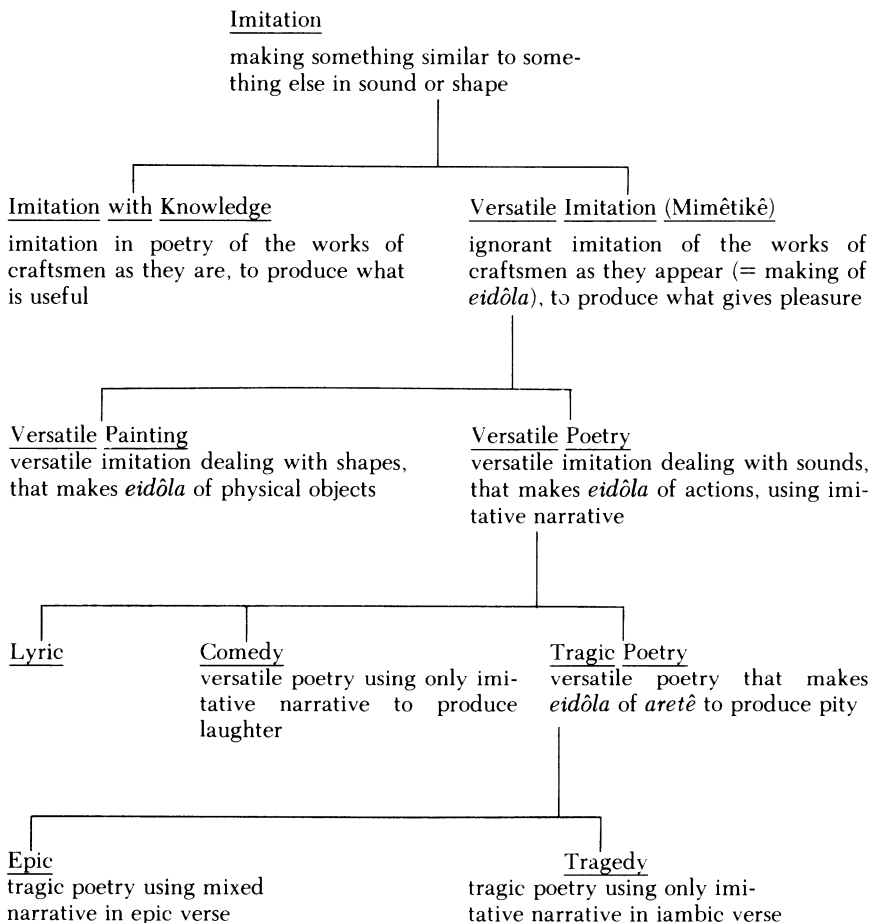
I. Imitation

Republic 3.393C5–6 gives the most comprehensive definition of imitation (τὸ μιμεῖσθαι) we find in our two passages: "Is it not true that to make oneself similar to someone else in sound or in shape is to imitate that person to whom one makes oneself similar?" (Οὐκοῦν τό γε ὁμοιοῦν ἑαυτὸν ἄλλῳ ἢ κατὰ φωνήν ἢ κατὰ σχῆμα μιμεῖσθαι ἐστὶν ἐκείνῳ ᾧ ἂν τις ὁμοιοῖ;)

¹⁰ The many parallels between the treatments of imitation in the *Sophist* and in the *Republic* have been studied in detail by Else (above, note 5) 26–41. See also B. Bosanquet, *A Companion to Plato's Republic* (London 1906²) 85, who notes a parallel between Plato's introduction of "hunters and imitators" into the "feverish city" at *Republic* 2.373B and his divisions of hunting and production in the *Sophist*. It is not, then, surprising if the *Republic* is also similar to the *Sophist* in its concern with classification.

¹¹ This restriction means, for example, that we will not attempt to study Plato's views on music, an important imitative art. For more comprehensive studies of *mimêsis* in the works of Plato and other Greek writers see R. McKeon, "Literary Criticism and the Concept of Imitation in Antiquity," *Modern Philology* 34 (1936) 1–35; H. Koller, *Die Mimesis in der Antike* (Bern 1954); G. Else, "'Imitation' in the Fifth Century," *CP* 53 (1958) 73–90 and *addendum* 245; Sörbom (above, note 1).

It has not been noticed that this passage anticipates some important features of *Republic* 10. First, it implies that since the imitator imitates by making something that is similar to something else in sound or shape, he is both an imitator of sounds or shapes and a maker of (other similar) sounds or shapes. Plato fails to spell this out, and it is of little importance in *Republic* 3. It does become significant, however, for our understanding of Book 10, where Plato calls the imitator both an imitator of *eidôla* (sounds or shapes), at 10.600E5, for example, and a maker of *eidôla*, at 10.599A7.¹² In using the concepts of sound and shape to define imitation *Republic* 3.393C5–6 also anticipates *Republic* 10.603B6–7, which distinguishes painting and poetry by their respective use of sight and sound.



¹² See Nehamas (above, note 1) 62 for a good discussion of this aspect of *Republic* 10.

Republic 3.393C5–6 also anticipates another important concept of *Republic* 10: mistake. To imitate in sound (voice) is to make oneself similar to someone else in voice (3.393C5–6), and this, Plato tells us at 3.393C1–3, is to speak as though one were someone else. To speak as though one were someone else is, in turn, to try to make people believe that one is someone else (3.393A8–B2), that is, to try to make people mistake one for someone else. Thus, to make oneself similar to someone else (to imitate someone else) is to try to make people mistake oneself for someone else. On the other hand, Plato writes, there is no imitation when the poet does not hide himself (3.393C11–D2) or try to deceive us (3.393A6–7).

In *Republic* 10 also, imitators try to make people mistake imitations for something else. At 10.600E7–601A2, for example, an imitation is said to be mistaken for the truth by those “judging from colors and shapes.”¹³ In *Republic* 10, however, Plato does not follow the linguistic usage of *Republic* 3, in which the relationship between artifacts and imitations is said to be one of similarity. This may be because he wishes to reserve the vocabulary of similarity for the relationship between artifacts and Forms; at least, artifacts are said to be *τοιούτων οἶον τὸ ὄν* at 10.597A5. However we interpret this latter relationship, we should not confuse it with that between imitations and artifacts. Imitations are mistaken for artifacts, but artifacts are never mistaken for Forms in *Republic* 3 and 10. Further, Forms could not be imitated in the sense defined at *Republic* 3.393C5–6, “making similar in sound or shape,” for they do not have these sensible qualities. At *Republic* 5.476B, for example, Plato explicitly distinguishes the Form Beauty from “the beautiful sounds . . . and colors and shapes and everything that is crafted from such things.”¹⁴

In one respect, however, 3.393C5–6 might at least appear to contradict Plato’s view of imitation in *Republic* 10 and elsewhere in *Republic* 3. Since it describes only a kind of imitation in which one human being uses himself (*ἑαυτόν*) to imitate another human being (*ἐκείνον* and *ἄλλω* are masculine), it cannot define the imitation of animals or of inanimate objects mentioned frequently in the two books (for example, at 3.396B5–7, 3.397A4–7, 10.598A1–3). Many have in fact thought that Plato uses “imitation” to

¹³ Plato frequently stresses the imitator’s ability to cause his audience to make mistakes. See, for example, *Republic* 10.598C1–4, 598D2–3, 598E5–599A3, 601A4–B1, 602B1–4, 602C10–D4, 605B6–C4. On the kinds of mistakes involved, and on audience psychology generally, in *Republic* 10, see Belfiore, “Plato’s Greatest Accusation Against Poetry,” *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* suppl. vol. 9 (1983) 39–62.

¹⁴ This passage was called to my attention by G. Vlastos, “Self-Predication and Self-Participation in Plato’s Later Period,” in his *Platonic Studies* (Princeton 1973) 338, note 9. We should note that since imitation in the sense defined in *Republic* 3 is imitation of sensible qualities, when Plato writes at *Republic* 6.500C5 of imitation of “that which is always the same” he cannot be using the term “imitation” in the sense of *Republic* 3.393C.

mean “impersonation” (in which a human being uses his own body to imitate another human being) in *Republic* 3, and to mean “representation” (as when, for example, a painter imitates a bed) in *Republic* 10.¹⁵

This interpretation, however, risks imputing to Plato a distinction in which he is not interested. While it is true that in his *Sophist* (267A3–4) Plato distinguishes imitation using one’s own body (acting, for example) from imitation using implements (painting, for example), in the *Republic* Plato not only ignores this distinction, he also fails to distinguish imitation of human beings from imitation of animals or of inanimate objects, shifting without warning from discussion of the one to the other. Thus, in *Republic* 3, Plato equates imitation of the sounds of animals and of natural phenomena with imitation of madmen (3.396B5–9); and in *Republic* 10 he shifts unexpectedly from the painter who imitates the “products of craftsmen,” (10.598A2–3) to the painter who paints “a shoemaker, a carpenter, the other craftsmen” (10.598B8–C1).¹⁶ The masculines in 3.393C5–6, then, do not have any theoretical significance and may be replaced by more general terms in a definition of “imitation” (τὸ μιμεῖσθαι). What Plato consistently means in *Republic* 3 and 10 is that “To imitate is to make one thing (or person) similar to another thing (or person) in sound or shape.”

II. Versatile Imitation and Imitation with Knowledge

A. Versatile Imitation (*Mimêtikê*)

Mimêtikê, “versatile imitation,” is Plato’s technical term for imitation of many things, and *mimêtikos*, “versatile imitator,” is the term for the practitioner of this art. That the *-ikê* forms of *mimeisthai* refer only to imitation of many things and that this helps to reconcile the account of *Republic* 3 with that of *Republic* 10 has been noticed only by Victor Menza, in an unpublished dissertation, to which the first part of this section owes much.¹⁷

Like other Greek *-ikê* words, *mimêtikê* designates an art or science, and *mimêtikos* refers to the expert in this art. As far as we know, these terms were coined by Plato and first used by him at *Republic* 3.395E1.¹⁸

¹⁵ See above, note 2.

¹⁶ P. Shorey cites this shift as an example of “inconcinnity” in his “Illogical Idiom,” *TAPA* 47 (1916) 207.

¹⁷ V. Menza, “Poetry and the *Technê* Theory,” Diss. Johns Hopkins 1972.

¹⁸ P. Chantraine, *Études sur le vocabulaire grec* (Paris 1956) 98, finds more than 350 *-ikos* words in Plato, of which more than 250 are not attested earlier. Chantraine notes that these words are often used with the terms *technê* or *epistêmê*, expressed or understood, to describe an art or science (141–42). According to the exhaustive study of A. N. Ammann, *-IKOΣ bei Platon* (Freiburg 1953), *mimêtikos* does not occur before Plato (127). Else, “Imitation,” (above, note 11) also fails to find any occurrences of *mimêtikos* or *mimêtikê* in the Fifth Century. L. Brandwood’s computer study, *A Word Index to Plato*, Compendia Series, vol. 8 (Leeds 1976) indicates that Plato uses the *-ikê* forms of

There, as Menza notes, Plato asks whether the guardian should be a *mimêtikos*, and immediately after, at 3.395A2, he gives what amounts to a definition of this new term: “A person will imitate many things and be a *mimêtikos*” (πολλὰ μιμήσεται καὶ ἔσται μιμητικός). Πολλὰ μιμήσεται explains the new *-ikê* form: the *mimêtikos* is someone who imitates many things.¹⁹ Although Plato also uses other forms of *mimeisthai* and its cognates in this way, *mimêtikos* always has this meaning in the *Republic*, and *mimêtikê* always designates the art of imitating many things.²⁰

Plato characterizes versatile imitation as imitation of many things, or as imitation of the works of craftsmen, or as imitation and making of *eidôla*. As we will see, these different descriptions all refer to the same aspect of the imitator’s activity.

1. Imitation of Many Things

In *Republic* 3, as Menza points out,²¹ Plato condemns only the versatile imitator. The young guardians are not allowed to be *mimêtikoi*, imitating the many things (artisans, women, slaves, vicious people) they should not themselves become (3.395D–396B), but they are allowed to imitate the one “craftsman of freedom” (3.395B8–C5) they are to become as adults. Plato also finds acceptable the poet who imitates the one good thing (τὸν τοῦ ἐπικκοῦς μιμητὴν ἄκρατον: 3.397D4–5), exiling only the poet who “is able to become everything because of his cleverness and to imitate everything” (3.398A1–2), that is, the *mimêtikos*.

Republic 10 is, as Menza notes, consistent with Book 3 in condemning only the versatile imitator. The technical vocabulary at the opening of Book 10 alerts us to the fact that versatile imitation alone is being considered: “We founded the city well . . . when we did not admit all of it [poetry] that is *mimêtikê*” (10.595A2–5). This is entirely consistent with Book 3, which, as we have just seen, also rejected only the *mimêtikos*.²² Plato departs from this technical vocabulary when he goes on to ask what “*mimêsis* in general” is (10.595C7). This departure is explained by the fact

mimêsis only in his *Republic* (where the first instance is that at 3.394E1), *Sophist*, *Laws*, *Epinomis*, *Statesman* and *Timaeus*. Thus, since at least the first books of the *Republic* are generally agreed to have been written before these other dialogues, *Republic* 3.394E1 is the earliest occurrence of an *-ikê* form of *mimêsis* in Plato and in extant Greek.

¹⁹ See Menza (above, note 17) 132. Chantraine (above, note 18) 141–42 notes that Plato often defines the *-ikê* words as he introduces them. On the use of *kai* to introduce “a more accurate definition” see J. D. Denniston, *The Greek Particles* (Oxford 1934) 291 (4).

²⁰ According to Brandwood’s data (above, note 18) these forms occur in the *Republic* only in *Republic* 3 (the two instances we have just mentioned) and in *Republic* 10, in 12 other instances: 595A5, B5; 598B6; 602A11, B7, B10; 603A11, B4, C1, C5; 605A2, B7. In all of these cases Plato is writing about the unacceptable imitator of many things.

²¹ Above, note 17, 126–33.

²² See Menza (above, note 17) 252 and note 1, p. 362.

that, since 10.595C–598C is a proof that the painter (or at least one kind of painter) is a *mimêtikos*, Plato does not want to use the technical term until the proof is complete. In this proof, Plato first compares the painter to a man who carries a mirror around everywhere. Because the man with the mirror does not try to deceive people, he is not an imitator,²³ although he resembles an imitator in that he “makes” many things. He can make “everything that each of the craftsmen makes” (10.596C2), “every artifact,” “everything that grows from the earth,” “every living creature,” “everything in the heavens,” and “everything under the earth” (10.596C4–9). Next, Plato establishes that the painter is an imitator (*mimêtês*, not *mimêtikos*) in an argument ending at 10.597E10: “We have agreed on the imitator (*mimêtên*).” Finally, Plato proves that painting imitates *eidôla* and is, therefore, *mimêtikê* (10.598A–C). The technical term *mimêtikê* reappears in this proof, at 10.598B6, after which it is used frequently in the dialogue. Hereafter, the imitator Book 10 condemns is the *mimêtikos*, who pretends to imitate and know “everything” (for example at 10.598C5–D1, 10.598E1). At 10.603A11, in fact, Plato replaces the earlier “*mimêsis* in general” with “*mimêtikê* in general.”

2. Imitation of the Works of Craftsmen

The many things the versatile imitator imitates are the many works of many kinds of craftsmen. That Plato’s main concern is with craftsmanship has often been noted,²⁴ and is obvious from his constant opposition of imitator to craftsman. In *Republic* 10 the painter is said to be “an imitator of that which those others make.” Plato then concludes: “This, then, is what the tragedian also will be, if he is an imitator, and all the other imitators: someone who is by nature third from the king and the truth. . . . Then we have agreed on the imitator” (10.597E2–10). The painter is then said to imitate “the works of the craftsmen as they appear” (10.598A–B). Plato also writes that Homer will be shown to be a versatile imitator rather than a craftsman if he proves not to have done the deeds (*erga*) of different kinds of craftsmen (10.599B3–7) but only to have imitated their words (10.599C2). As we will see below (Section III.B.2), imitation of *êthos* in *Republic* 10 is also imitation of the works of craftsmen who have knowledge of how to act wisely.

²³ This difference between the man with the mirror and the painter is not usually noticed: see, for example, Partee (above, note 1) 113–14; Annas (above, note 3) 336; R. Cross and A. Woozley, *Plato’s Republic* (New York 1964) 274. There is no question of deception in *Republic* 10 until 598C, where the painter, “if he is a good painter,” is said to be able to deceive “children and fools” by showing his works “from a distance.” Imitation, unlike the act of carrying a mirror, requires skill and intent to deceive.

²⁴ Some good discussions of this topic are those of Menza (above, note 17) and J. Moravcsik, “Noetic Aspiration and Artistic Inspiration,” in *Plato on Beauty, Wisdom and the Arts* (above, note 1) 29–46.

In *Republic* 3 also the versatile imitator imitates the works of craftsmen, though Plato is less explicit about this than he is in *Republic* 10. The ideal state of *Republic* 3 is founded on the principle of one man one work. There must be no “double man” or “manifold man” in this state, writes Plato, since “each one does one work” (3.397E1–2). Only in this state is the shoemaker a shoemaker and not a pilot in addition, the farmer a farmer and not a juryman as well (3.397E4–7). For this reason, the person who can “become all sorts of things and imitate everything” must be sent on his way (3.398A–B), and the guardians must not be *mimêtikoi* (3.394E–395D). Plato could only write in this way if he thought of the versatile imitator as someone who tries to imitate all the crafts. If the versatile imitator were himself a real craftsman, he would be doing one work, like the others. If, however, he were no craftsman at all, he would be an idler rather than a “manifold man.” Instead, the versatile imitator is exiled because he is a pseudo-craftsman, a meddler in every sort of craft.²⁵

3. Making of *Eidôla*

That the *mimêtikos* is a pseudo-craftsman who imitates many things has been well understood in the literature, but Plato’s concept of imitation of *eidôla* has been much misunderstood.²⁶ On our present account, “imitation of *eidôla*” is simply a more accurate, technical term for “imitation of many things” and “imitation of the works of craftsmen.”

At *Republic* 10.599D2–4 Plato remarks, as he cross-examines Homer, that the imitator has been defined: ὦ φίλε “Ὅμηρε, εἴπερ μὴ τρίτος ἀπὸ τῆς ἀληθείας εἶ ἀρετῆς πέρι, εἰδῶλου δημιουργός, ὃν δὴ μιμητὴν ὠρισάμεθα (“Dear Homer, if you are not third from the truth concerning *aretê*, the craftsman of an *eidôlon*, whom we defined as an imitator [*mimêtês*] . . .”). Since, as we will see below (Section IV.C), *aretê* is the subject matter of only one kind of versatile imitator, Plato’s question to Homer tells us that the *mimêtikos* (*mimêtên* obviously has this meaning here) has been defined as “third from the truth, craftsman of an *eidôlon*.” Plato must be referring, first, to the argument ending at 10.597E10 (above, Section II.A.2), where the imitator was “agreed” (ὡμολογήκαμεν) to be “third from the truth” about craftsmanship. Next,

²⁵ N. White, *A Companion to Plato’s Republic* (Indianapolis and Cambridge 1979) 96–97 notes that Plato’s condemnation of imitative art in *Republic* 3 is based on his “Principle of the Natural Division of Labor.” See also P. Shorey, *What Plato Said* (Chicago 1933) 219, and Bosanquet (above, note 10) 99 (cited by White, p. 97).

²⁶ For example, the *eidôla* of *Republic* 10 have been connected with the images (*eikones*) of the Divided Line (*Republic* 6.509–11) by, among others, H. J. Paton, “Plato’s Theory of *Eikasia*,” *Proc. Aristotelian Soc.* 22 (1921–22) 69–104; S. Ringbom, “Plato on Images,” *Theoria* 31 (1965) 95–96; J.-P. Vernant, “Image et apparence dans la théorie platonicienne de la *mimêsis*,” *Journal de Psychologie* 72 (1975) 136. Other common errors are discussed below, in this section.

“craftsman of an *eidôlon*” at 10.599D3 can only refer to 10.597E10–598B8, where Plato introduced the technical term *eidôlon* (*eidôla*) to explain “in what way” (διὰ τοῦτο: 10.598A7) the *mimêtikos* is able to make “everything.” After it was agreed that the *mimêtikos* imitates not the Form but the works of craftsmen (10.598A1–4), Plato asked whether he imitates these works “as they are or as they appear” (οἷα ἔστιν ἢ οἷα φαίνεται: 10.598A5), and explained this distinction in the paragraph at 10.598A7–9: “It’s like this. A couch, if one sees it from the side or from the front or in any way whatsoever, does it differ at all itself from itself, or does it not differ at all but appears different?” (ᾧδε κλίνη, ἕαντε ἐκ πλαγίου αὐτὴν θεᾷ ἕαντε καταντικρὺ ἢ ὀρθοῦν, μή τι διαφέρει αὐτῇ ἑαυτῆς, ἢ διαφέρει μὲν οὐδέν, φαίνεται δὲ αλλοία;) The couch was then agreed not to differ but only to appear different (10.598A10) and painting was said, at 10.598B1–5, to imitate not “that which is” (τὸ ὄν) but “that which appears” (τὸ φαινόμενον), and to be imitation of a “phantasm” (φαντάσματος), not of “truth” (ἀληθείας). The conclusion then followed: “*Mimêtikê* is, then, far from what is true, and, as it seems, for this reason makes everything, because it grasps some small part of each thing and that an *eidôlon*” (Πόρρω ἄρα πού τοῦ ἀληθοῦς ἡ μιμητικὴ ἔστιν καί, ὥς ἔοικεν, διὰ τοῦτο πάντα ἀπεργάζεται, ὅτι σμικρόν τι ἐκάστου ἐφάπτεται, καὶ τοῦτο εἶδωλον: 10.598B6–8).

In this passage (10.598A1–B8) *eidôlon* is a synonym of “that which appears” (τὸ φαινόμενον), of “appearance” (φαντάσμα), and of a thing “as it appears” (οἷα φαίνεται). It is the opposite of “that which is” (τὸ ὄν), of “truth” (ἀληθεία), and of a thing “as it is” (οἷα ἔστιν).

Plato distinguishes *eidôlon* from truth on an epistemological basis. The couch “as it is,” or the truth about the couch, is the object of the craft knowledge of the user or of the true belief of the maker (10.601C–602B). It cannot be perceived by the senses: the couch looks different no matter how (ὀρθοῦν) one sees it (10.598A7–9). The couch “as it appears,” the “appearance” (*to phainomenon*) or *eidôlon*, on the other hand, is the object of ignorant versatile imitation. The versatile imitator can imitate *eidôla* “though he does not know about the crafts of any of these [craftsmen]” (10.598C1);²⁷ he deceives the person who is “not able to distinguish knowledge and ignorance, that is, imitation” (10.598D4–5);²⁸ he neither knows nor has right belief about what he imitates (10.602A). His ignorance distinguishes him from the craftsman, and is a necessary condition for his imitation of *eidôla* (10.599A6–B7). The same contrast between *mimêtikos* and

²⁷ J. Adam, *The Republic of Plato* (Cambridge 1963²) 2.394–95, interprets the passage in this way, reading τεχνῶν instead of his earlier conjecture τεχνιῶν.

²⁸ μή οἷός τ' εἶναι ἐπιστήμην καὶ ἀνεπιστημοσύνην καὶ μίμησιν ἐξετάσαι. The second *kai* in this passage links “appositionally related ideas”: on this use of *kai* see Denniston (above, note 19).

craftsman was strongly suggested at *Republic* 3.394E–395B, where Plato stated that it was impossible to do or imitate many things well: only the ignorant person, he implied, could attempt to do this. At 10.601B9–10 Plato clearly indicates the epistemological basis for his distinction between *eidôlon* and “truth” when he characterizes the *mimêtikos* as someone who does not know the truth but only [perceives] the “appearance” (*eidôlon*): “The maker of an *eidôlon*, the imitator, we say, knows nothing about the truth, but [perceives] the appearance” (ὁ τοῦ εἰδώλου ποιητής, ὁ μιμητής, φαμέν, τοῦ μὲν ὄντος οὐδὲν ἐπαίει, τοῦ δὲ φαινομένου).

The *eidôlon*, then, is sound or shape as perceived by someone ignorant of anything but sound and shape. The maker of *eidôla* makes *eidôla* that may be mistaken, by someone as ignorant as himself, for “that which is.” “That which is,” on the other hand, is a sensible artifact, a couch or a table, as understood by someone with knowledge of craftsmanship. The person with knowledge, like the *mimêtikos*, directs his attention to sensibles; however, by also “looking to the Form” (10.596B7), and consulting the user about what is truly fine (10.601D8–E2), he has come to understand and not merely perceive sensible artifacts.

Because, then, an *eidôlon* is *any* object perceived by an ignorant person, it is a mistake to think, as Else does, for example, that the *mimêtikos* will be better off if he happens to find a well-made artifact to imitate than if he imitates a poorly made one.²⁹ Plato’s point is that even if, as in the examples in *Republic* 10, the “model” is a well-made product of craftsmanship, the ignorant *mimêtikos* is only capable of grasping, imitating, and making *eidôla*.

Another common mistake is to confuse imitation of *eidôla* in *Republic* 10 with *phantastikê* in the *Sophist* 235D–236C.³⁰ Plato distinguishes *eikastikê*, which gives imitations the true proportions and colors of the originals (*Sophist* 235D6–E2), from *phantastikê*, which gives them the proportions that merely appear fine, “letting the truth go” (*Sophist* 236A4–6). It makes, for example, the upper parts of very large statues proportionately larger, and the lower parts proportionately smaller than those of the originals (235E5–236A6). The products made by *phantastikê*, Plato writes, only appear to resemble what is fine “because of our view from a poor position” (διὰ τὴν οὐκ ἐκ καλοῦ θέαν), but if someone could “view them adequately” (ικανῶς ὁρᾶν), they would not appear to resemble the originals (236B4–7). Thus, while the *Sophist* distinguishes poor and good viewing conditions—good conditions being sufficient to tell us whether or not the truth is adequately represented—the *Republic* opposes an unchanging “that which is,”

²⁹ Else, *The Structure and Date* . . . (above, note 5) 35.

³⁰ The connection is made, for example, by Adam (above, note 27) ad 598B; K. Gilbert and H. Kuhn, *A History of Esthetics* (1939; rpt. Bloomington, Indiana 1953) 33; J. P. Maguire, “The Differentiation of Art in Plato’s Aesthetics,” *HSCP* 68 (1964) 393.

that can be understood, to a constantly changing “that which appears,” that can only be seen. The couch in *Republic* 10 appears different no matter how (δπηοῦν: 10.598A8) one sees it, and one view is as bad as another. And again, unlike the *Republic*, which distinguishes imitation of *eidôla* from imitation of that which is on the basis of craft knowledge, the *Sophist* makes no distinction between *phantastikê* and *eikastikê* on this basis: the two arts would require the same knowledge of the proportions of the original in order to make their respective products.

Once we have rid ourselves of these misunderstandings we can also see another of Plato’s motives for introducing his concept of *eidôla*. In *Republic* 3 Plato had characterized the *mimêtikos* as someone who imitates many different things. Now, Plato adds that the *mimêtikos* also imitates many different appearances of a single thing. He then uses this very demonstration of the apparent breadth of the *mimêtikos*’ field to prove its truly narrow scope, for he concludes that the *mimêtikos* does not really imitate “everything” but only one thing over and over: an *eidôlon*, which is a “small part of each thing” (598B7). The versatile imitator’s claim to universal skill has been demolished in a neat elenchus.

Plato’s concept of *mimêtikê* thus remains the same throughout *Republic* 3 and 10: versatile imitation is the ignorant making of *eidôla* of the works of craftsmen as they appear. This concept is, however, elucidated only gradually. At first, the *mimêtikos* is said to be someone who imitates many things. These many things are then explicitly shown to be the works of craftsmen, and finally, to be these works “as they appear,” that is, *eidôla* as opposed to “that which is.” The *mimêtikos* is consistently distinguished from the craftsman by his ignorance. He is ignorant of the truth about that which he imitates, and he leads others equally ignorant to mistake his *eidôla* for “that which is.”

As many passages indicate, the aim of *mimêtikê* is to produce pleasure. At 3.397D6–8 Plato notes that the “mixed man,” the *mimêtikos*, is pleasing, especially to boys and the crowd. *Republic* 10.605D3 and 606B4 speak of the pleasure we get from imitations; 10.607A5 refers to the “sweetened Muse”; 10.607C4–5 mentions “that poetry and imitation [which is] devoted to pleasure,” and 10.607D6–E2 asks the defenders of poetry to prove that it is not only pleasant but also useful. This association of pleasure and imitation has often been noted.³¹

B. Imitation With Knowledge

Plato’s views on the possibility of a “good” kind of imitation are much less clear and coherent than his theory of *mimêtikê*. He says very

³¹ On the opposition of pleasure and the useful in Plato’s aesthetics see Moravcsik (above, note 24) esp. 30, and V. Goldschmidt, “Le Problème de la tragédie d’après Platon,” *REG* 61 (1948) 23.

little about it, and when he does, he seems at one time to imply that there is or can be a good kind of imitation, while at another he appears to deny or ignore this possibility. Nevertheless, our analysis of *mimêtikê* is helpful here also. As we will see, Plato's views on *mimêtikê* and craftsmanship imply that there cannot be a good kind of imitation (in the sense of "imitation" defined above, Section I) in painting. In the case of poetry, however, his views do allow for a good kind of imitation, the antithesis of imitation of "things as they appear."

Those who argue for a Platonic theory of a "good" kind of imitation³² can point to a number of passages in *Republic* 3 and 10 in which Plato opposes the kind of imitation he condemns not only to craftsmanship but also to imitation of "that which is," or of the good. Thus, in *Republic* 3 he exiles the *mimêtikos*, but writes that "if they [the guardians] imitate, they should imitate . . . brave, self-controlled, pious and free men" (3.395C3–5). He also permits the poet who is an "unmixed imitator of the good man" to remain (3.397D4–5). Plato is most explicit about a good kind of art at 3.401A^{ff.}, a passage outside those with which we are primarily concerned. Here, Plato commends poets who can "put the image of the good disposition into their poems" (3.401B1–3), and craftsmen who can "track down the nature of the beautiful and the graceful" (3.401C4–5), whether in painting "images of living creatures" or in making houses (3.401B5–6). In *Republic* 10 also, Plato opposes versatile imitation of the works of craftsmen "as they appear" to the possibility of imitation of the works of craftsmen "as they are" (10.598A–B), and he contrasts imitation of the "complaining *êthos*" with the possibility of imitating the "wise and calm *êthos*" (604E).

In themselves, however, these passages offer little support for a Platonic theory of good imitation. In all of *Republic* 10 Plato says nothing about this kind of imitation except to deny that the *mimêtikos* engages in it. In the passage at 3.395C he discusses this kind of imitation in merely hypothetical terms: "if they imitate. . . ." Again, in the passage at 3.401A^{ff.}, *mimêsis* and its cognates occur only once, in a usage apparently quite different from that in the earlier discussion of *mimêtikê*.³³ The same passage subsumes both artists and other craftsmen under *dêmiourgoi*,³⁴ though elsewhere imitators and craftsmen are strongly

³² See above, note 7.

³³ At 3.401A8 Plato writes that grace and harmony are "kin and *mimêmata*" of the wise and good *êthos*. Though imitation of *êthos* in *Republic* 10 can involve the idea of mistaking one thing for another it is hard to see how this can be true of the *mimêmata* of 3.401A8.

³⁴ In *Republic* 10 the *mimêtikos* is called a "craftsman," but he is always clearly just a "craftsman of an *eidôlon*" (10.599D3, for example), as opposed to a craftsman of the things we use. At 3.401B3–4, however, *τοῖς ἅλλοις δημιουργοῖς* indicates that Plato includes poets, painters, and housebuilders in the same category.

contrasted. Thus, it is doubtful that Plato is discussing imitation at all at 3.401A^{ff}. What he is praising may instead be a kind of craftsmanship.

Plato's explicit statements offer even less evidence of a theory of a good kind of imitation in painting. The account of imitation and *mimêtikê* in *Republic* 3.392C–398B is concerned solely with poetry, and while we find that the painter and musician are indeed said to produce *mimêmata* (3.400A7, 3.401A8), no account is given of these products. In fact, Plato seems to be deliberately refusing to give such an account, for he leaves consideration of musical *mimêsis* up to the expert Damon (3.400B), and he writes in only vague terms of grace and harmony in the visual arts (3.401A1–8), saying nothing that might define grace and harmony and distinguish them from their opposites. Thus, no theoretical account of imitation in the visual arts, good or bad, is given in *Republic* 3.

In *Republic* 10 also Plato fails to give an account of imitation in the visual arts of “things as they are.” Here, moreover, his more detailed account of *mimêtikê* and craftsmanship must imply that there cannot be a good kind of imitation in the visual arts.

At 10.598A–C Plato makes the following claims:

1. The painter imitates the works of craftsmen (598A1–3);
2. Painting imitates the works of craftsmen not as they are but as they appear, and is imitation not of the truth but of that which appears (598A5–B5);
3. Therefore (*ἄρα*) *mimêtikê* is far from the truth and grasps only an *eidôlon* (598B6–8);
4. For example (*οἷον*) the painter will paint a shoemaker, a carpenter, though he does not know about the crafts of any of these [people] (598B8–C1).³⁵

In this passage Plato concludes (*ἄρα*, *οἷον*) that the *mimêtikos* in general and (at least one kind of) painter in particular are ignorant of craft knowledge of what they imitate. He arrives at this conclusion by arguing that the painter fails to imitate the truth about artifacts. Plato implies, then, that the person who could imitate the truth about artifacts would have craft knowledge about that which he imitates. Thus, the imitator of a couch “as it is” would be a carpenter, who had knowledge (or true belief) about what makes a useful couch (10.601C–602B).

If such an imitator existed, however, he could not, Plato also implies, imitate a couch “as it is” by painting a couch. Plato insists that a painting of a couch is a couch, just like the artifact (10.597B5–11). He also holds that:

1. All of the many things which we call by the same name have the same unique Form (10.596A5–7); this Form has the same name

³⁵ On this interpretation of the text, see above, note 27.

(for example, “couch”) as the many of which it is the Form (10.597B5–11);

2. The Form is that which determines what is the proper function (*chreia*)³⁶ of that of which it is the Form (10.596B6–9, 601D4–6).³⁷

From these views it follows that both the painting of a couch and the artifact must be judged by the same unique standard of function. But if, as we may reasonably assume, a couch functions as something to sleep on, *any* painting of a couch must, Plato’s statements imply, be a useless couch, a mere apparent couch.

The same argument would apply to sculpture. If a sculpture does not have the functional characteristics of a couch, it must be an “apparent couch.” If it does function perfectly as a couch, on the other hand, it could hardly be called an imitation of a couch.

Plato is not, however, committed to the same negative conclusion in the case of poetry. The craftsman of the things imitated by the poet knows “what pursuits make people better or worse” (10.599D4–5) and makes products useful for this purpose. There is no reason why a poem could not have the same use as these products, if made by a craftsman. The poet would also be an imitator, however, if he tried to make people think he was another good man in different circumstances, instead of himself.

This view of the poet who imitates things “as they are” is supported by Plato’s example at *Republic* 3.396C. The good man, Plato writes, when he reaches in his narrative “some speech or action of a good man,” wishes to “relate it as if he himself were that person” (ὡς αὐτὸς ὦν ἐκείνου ἀπαγγέλλειν) and he will not be ashamed of this kind of imitation (3.396C5–8). But he does not wish seriously to liken himself (ἀπεικάζειν ἑαυτὸν) to an inferior (3.396D4–5). This is surely imitation in the same sense as that of 3.393A–C: making oneself similar to (trying to make others mistake one for) someone else in sound or shape. Compare especially 3.393A8: ὥσπερ αὐτὸς ὦν ὁ Χρύσης λέγει and 3.396C7: ὡς αὐτὸς ὦν ἐκείνου ἀπαγγέλλειν.

Our study of the implications of Plato’s theories, then, leads us to conclude that Plato would admit imitation of the good as a separate category of imitation in poetry, but not in the visual arts. Plato, however, says little to define this kind of imitation, mentioning it chiefly in order to contrast it with *mimêtikê*. For this reason, we must conclude that his

³⁶ As White points out (above, note 25), 251–52 [D] and 87 [F], Plato uses the term *ergon* for “function” in *Republic* 1, while in *Republic* 10 he uses *chreia*. In *Republic* 10, as I note below, Section III.B.2, *ergon* refers not to “function” but to the product made by a craftsman.

³⁷ For this interpretation of the Form of the Bed see N. R. Murphy, *The Interpretation of Plato’s Republic* (Oxford 1951) 238; Crombie (above, note 4) 143–44; Moravcsik (above, note 24) 38–39.

views imply that imitation of the good is the antithesis of imitation of “things as they appear.” We will, then, define imitation of the good as imitation with knowledge, in poetry, of the works of craftsmen as they are, to produce what is useful.

III. Versatile Poetry and Painting

Plato distinguishes two kinds of *mimêtikê*, versatile painting and versatile poetry, according to medium and objects imitated.

A. Medium

Plato explicitly distinguishes poetry and painting at 10.603B6–7: “. . . that [*mimêtikê*] . . . concerned with sight, or that concerned with sound, which we call poetry. . . .” The two media, sounds and shapes, of imitation in the most general sense (above, Section I) distinguish two kinds of *mimêtikê* from each other. Painting imitates and makes that which has color and shape. While the distinguishing characteristic of versatile poetry is imitation and making of that which has sound, it also, of course, uses “shapes,” *schêmata*, in the sense of gestures or motions (3.397B2).

Strictly speaking, painting is just one kind of imitation dealing with shapes and colors. Weaving and embroidery are other visual arts mentioned (2.373A7, 3.401A2) but nowhere formally distinguished. Again, Plato seems to indicate that poetry is only one kind of imitation dealing with sound when he writes of “those [imitators] . . . dealing with music, that is, poets and their helpers: rhapsodes, actors, dancers, and contractors” (2.373B5–8), and when he distinguishes poets, rhapsodes, and actors at 3.395A. But these distinctions are blurred in *Republic* 10. At 10.605C10–D2 “Homer” would appear to be a rhapsode or actor performing the poems, though at 10.600A10 and C1 “Homer” is the long-dead author of the poems. We will, then, ignoring distinctions among the various visual and musical arts, let versatile painting be that kind of *mimêtikê* that uses colors and shapes, and versatile poetry that which uses, as Plato tells us at 10.601A8, speech, meter, rhythm, and harmony.

B. Objects Imitated

Both versatile painting and versatile poetry imitate the *eidôla* of the works of craftsmen, but each imitates those of a different sort of craftsman.

1. Versatile Painting

In most of Plato’s examples, the versatile painters imitate the *eidôla* of artifacts, *skeuê*. Plato first mentions tables and couches (10.596B1ff.), then bits and reins (10.601C6ff.). But there are indications that the versatile painter also imitates the bodies of living creatures. He is, after all, often

called *zôgraphos*, literally, a painter of living creatures.³⁸ At 10.598B9 he is said to paint a shoemaker and a carpenter, and 10.601D4–6 suggests that living creatures, like artifacts, are objects of craftsmanship, since they also have excellence and beauty dependent on use. Just as a horseman knows what makes reins beautiful and useful, so he also knows what makes a horse beautiful and useful, and could, by breeding and training, help to produce a useful animal. A versatile painter might, then, imitate this animal.³⁹

2. Versatile Poetry

It has long been recognized that the subject matter of (versatile) poetry is action, *praxis*, or more exactly, human beings acting.⁴⁰ Plato explicitly makes this point in *Republic* 10.603C4–8: “*Mimêtikê* [sc. in poetry: ἡ τῆς ποιήσεως μιμητική: 603C1] imitates, we say, human beings doing forced or voluntary actions, and as a result of this acting thinking they have fared well or ill, and in all these cases feeling pain or pleasure.” In a section of *Republic* 3 outside that with which we are primarily concerned Plato also mentions imitation of *lexis* or *praxis* (3.396C6). Plato then draws a distinction similar to that between forced and voluntary actions made at 10.603C, when he writes that the ideal state should retain “the harmony that would imitate the tones and accents of a brave man in warlike action and in every forced deed . . . and another harmony that would imitate his accents in a peaceful and not forced but voluntary action . . .” (3.399A–B).

A number of aspects of Plato’s view that poetry is imitation of action become clear when we treat it as an integral part of the theory of the imitative arts with which we are now concerned.

³⁸ *Grapshein* and cognates occur 9 times in *Republic* 3 and 10; *zôgraphein* and cognates occur 12 times. At *Gorgias* 453C6–8 Plato defines the *zôgraphos* as “he who paints living creatures.”

³⁹ For a parallel see *Gorgias* 464B–466A, where Plato contrasts the crafts, medicine and gymnastics, that are concerned with what is best for the body, with that branch of flattery that merely pretends to have this concern.

⁴⁰ *πράττοντας, φαμέν, ἀνθρώπους . . . πράξεις . . .* (10.603C4–5). Contrast Aristotle *Poetics* 6.1450A16–17: ἡ γὰρ τραγῳδία μίμησις ἐστὶν οὐκ ἀνθρώπων ἀλλὰ πράξεως καὶ βίον. R. Dupont-Roc, “Mimesis et énonciation,” in *Écriture et théorie poétiques* (Paris 1976) 11, note 14, notes this difference in phraseology between Plato and Aristotle. See the excellent interpretation of this difference by G. Finsler, *Platon und die Aristotelische Poetik* (Leipzig 1900) 42–43.

Plato’s remark at 10.603C4–5 is also interesting because it restricts poetic *mimêtikê* to imitation of humans, and does not mention imitation of gods. Although at 10.598E2 Homer is said to claim to know all divine things, and at 10.596C8 the man with the mirror “makes” all things in the heavens, Plato is exclusively concerned with imitation of humans in the passages in which we are primarily interested. This restriction follows from Plato’s definition of *mimêtikê* as imitation of the products of craftsmen, and not of the Form made by a god (10.598A).

First, Plato's concept of imitation of action in *Republic* 10 is anticipated by the definition of imitation (τὸ μιμῆσθαι) in *Republic* 3.393C as "making oneself similar to someone else *in sound* (or shape)" (above, Section I). This is evident from the fact that Plato uses "sound" and "action" interchangeably in *Republic* 10. Thus, he introduces versatile poetry, at 10.603B6–7, as *mimêtikê* concerned with sound (κατὰ τὴν ἀκοήν) and then goes on to write that versatile poetry imitates action (10.603C). Moreover, the analogy between versatile painting and versatile poetry in terms of vision and sound (10.603B6–7) is restated at 10.603D1–3 in terms of vision and action. In Plato's view, *praxis*, action, is essentially "sound," that is, the *logos*, speech, that communicates and expresses true or false human beliefs.⁴¹ Thus, at 10.599C the "imitator of medical *logoi*" is clearly equivalent to the imitator of medical *praxeis*. In the *Republic*, Plato, unlike Aristotle, does not consider any formal properties of a plot in writing of imitation of *praxis*.⁴² Even when he uses *logos* to mean "story" rather than "speech of a human being" he is concerned only with truth value. *Logoi* are true or false (*Republic* 2.376E11), not plots with beginnings, middles, and ends.

Second, action is the subject matter of all versatile poetry, and not just of one kind.⁴³ Plato discusses versatile poetry as a whole ("that [imitation] concerned with sound, which we call poetry . . ." (10.603B6–7) just before he tells us, at 10.603C, that versatile poetry imitates humans acting. He mentions pleasure as well as pain at 10.603C: "thinking they have fared well," "feeling pleasure," and would thus seem to be thinking of comedy as well as tragedy. At 10.606D1–3 Plato states that poetry stirs up "all the desires and pains and pleasures in the soul, which we say follow upon every action of ours." That comedy, at least, is included in this generalization, is shown by Plato's statement at 10.606C2–3 that "the same account" (as that given of tragedy) applies to "comic imitation."

Finally, Plato treats actions, like artifacts, as works of craftsmen, which require knowledge to be made (done) well.⁴⁴ This view was implicit in

⁴¹ Plato is not departing from accepted Greek usage when he treats *logos* as a form of *praxis* (*ergon*). See, on this subject, A. M. Parry, *Logos and Ergon in Thucydides* (New York 1981) Part I.

⁴² At *Phaedrus* 268D4–5, on the other hand, he writes that tragedy is the "proper arrangement" (σύστασιν πρέπουσαν) of parts.

⁴³ *Republic* 10.603C is not a definition or description of *tragedy*, as has been thought, for example, by Dupont-Roc (above, note 40) 7 and Goldschmidt (above, note 31) 42.

⁴⁴ T. Irwin, *Plato's Moral Theory* (Oxford 1977) 177–248, argues that in the *Republic* Plato rejects the Socratic analogy between virtue (or virtuous actions) and craft. Irwin's argument, however, is weakened by his failure to give adequate consideration to *Republic* 3 and 10. The passages I discuss below seem to me sufficient evidence that at least those passages in *Republic* 3 and 10 with which I deal do assume an analogy between crafts and virtuous actions. (I thank the anonymous referee of *TAPA* for reminding me of Irwin's views.)

Republic 3's characterization of the guardians as "craftsmen of freedom" (3.395C1). In *Republic* 10 Plato is more explicit. First, he uses the same word, *erga*, "works," "deeds," to describe both the artifacts imitated by the versatile painter (10.598A2–3) and the deeds imitated by Homer (10.599B4–6), and he uses *erga* and *praxeis* interchangeably at 10.600A4–5. Again, he states, at 10.598E, that the defenders of Homer and the poets say that "these people know all the crafts and all human things concerning *aretê* and vice, and divine things." He then states that he will not bother to question Homer concerning medicine or "the other crafts" (10.599B9–C6) but will instead examine whether Homer has knowledge of "the greatest and finest things," that is, generalship, government, and education (10.599C6–D2). The makers of these actions or activities, Plato writes, use knowledge of "what pursuits make humans better or worse" (10.599D4–5) in the particular circumstances of war, government, etc. The poet, however, knows nothing about what he imitates, but only "paints on the colors of each of the crafts with words and phrases," whether he writes about generalship or about anything else (601A–B). Moreover, at 601D4–6, Plato includes *praxeis* with artifacts and living creatures as things whose *aretê* and beauty depend on use and of which there is a user and maker. Now because pain and pleasure attend every action of ours (10.603C, 10.606D) and because dealing with pain or pleasure also requires knowledge of what is good for humans (10.604B–D), acting well in *every* circumstance would seem to be, at least in *Republic* 10, a kind of craft, and all fine actions (*kala erga*) would seem to be craft products. Plato suggests that acting well in painful circumstances is a *technê* when he compares it with medicine at 10.604D1–2. This comparison also links the discussion of acting well (10.603–604) with the previous (10.599Bff.) consideration of Homer's craft knowledge of medicine and other *technai*.

Like other craft products, fine actions have two "aspects": actions "as they are," and actions "as they appear," that is *eidôla*. Like the versatile painters, the versatile poets imitate things "as they appear," making *eidôla* (εἰδῶλα εἰδωλοποιοῦντα: 10.605C3).⁴⁵ They are "imitators of the *eidôla* of *aretê* and of the other things they write about" (10.600E5–6).

In *praxis* as in the visual world, writes Plato at 10.603C10–D7, a human being is at war with himself, and has contrary elements in his soul at the same time (ἄμα: 10.603D2). For example, a "reasonable man" (ἀνὴρ ἐπιεικής) who loses a son will bear his misfortune "most easily," but he will nevertheless grieve (10.603E3–8). When he is in the company of his equals he will fight and resist pain more (μᾶλλον), but when alone he will "dare to say many things . . . and he will do many things he would not want someone to see him doing" (10.604A1–8). We know,

⁴⁵ This reading, followed by Burnet's OCT and Adam (above, note 27) is much preferable to the alternate εἰδωλοποιοῦντι. See Adam's note ad loc.

then, Plato writes, that there are two contrary things in his soul at the same time (*ἄμα*: 10.604B4). One part of his soul, which is ready to obey reason and law (10.604B6–7), resisting pain (10.604A10), is the “wise and calm *êthos*, being always nearly the same itself to itself” (10.604E2–3). Another inferior part, which draws him to pain (10.604B1), is the “complaining *êthos*” (10.604E2). Plato concludes that the *mimêtikos* imitates only the complaining *êthos*, which “furnishes much and varied imitation” and that he does not imitate the wise *êthos* because it is not easy to imitate or to understand when it is imitated (10.604E1–6).⁴⁶

Enduring the loss of a son, the *praxis* in Plato’s example, is a craft product (*ergon*) made by a craftsman, the “reasonable man,” and it has two “aspects,” corresponding to the carpenter’s couch “as it is” and “as it appears.” The *praxis* “as it appears” consists of the many sounds and movements that pain forces the man to make. Though he will give in to pain more in solitude, perhaps beating his breast and wailing, even in company he will be unable to avoid some outward signs of grief: a sorrowful expression, sighs, etc. These signs of pain are the *eidôla* imitated by the versatile poet. No matter when or where the ignorant *mimêtikos* hears the reasonable man who is enduring grief, he will grasp only these many and varied *eidôla*. On the other hand, the *praxis* “as it is,” the endurance of grief by a craftsman with knowledge, is resistance to and struggle against pain. This struggle remains the same, like the couch “as it is,” and can only be understood and imitated by another craftsman.

Plato’s example is of emotional reactions in tragic circumstances. However, since pain and pleasure attend all our actions (10.603C6–7, 10.606D1–3), in comic and other circumstances as well, someone with knowledge will create craft products and will also exhibit outward signs of emotion that may be mistaken for “that which is” by the ignorant. Certain kinds of actions also require other specific applications of knowledge: that of how to make people better in war, for example. The craftsmen of these actions or activities will not only give outward signs of emotion, they will also make sounds and movements that may be mistaken for the practice of their specific craft, for example, generalship. We will discuss imitation of this sort of action in Section IV.C.

We have found, then, that Plato distinguishes two kinds of *mimêtikê*, versatile painting and versatile poetry. Versatile painting imitates,

⁴⁶ Plato’s use of this term is significant. *Êthos* means both *dramatis persona* and “delineation of character” in the visual arts (LSJ). *Êthos* was also a traditional subject matter of poetry, as Havelock notes (above, note 2) 62–64. Havelock defines *êthos* as “a man’s proper feelings and reactions to intimates and enemies” (63): it thus includes both an “inner” state and “outer” manifestations. Plato has a similar concept of *êthos* in 10.603–5, where he treats it as both a part of the soul and as actions and speech. On the lack of a distinction between “inner” and “outer” in Greek drama see also J. Jones, *On Aristotle and Greek Tragedy* (London 1962) 43–46.

and makes, visible things. It imitates the *eidôla* of the works (*erga*) of those craftsmen who have knowledge of artifacts and living creatures. Versatile poetry, which is Plato's main concern, imitates and produces sound (speech) and imitates the *eidôla* of the works (*erga*) of those craftsmen who are concerned with actions (*praxeis*). Versatile poetry uses meter, rhythm, and harmony.

IV. Criteria for Distinguishing Genres of Versatile Poetry

Plato mentions four kinds of versatile poetry: epic, tragedy (together these are often called "tragic poetry"), comedy, and lyric. Epic, tragedy, and comedy are distinguished on the basis of style (*lexis*), meter, actions imitated, and specific effects on the audience they aim at.

A. Style (*Lexis*)

In all imitative poetry, whether *mimêtikê* or not, the poet of *Republic* 3 uses imitative narrative, that is, he "makes his speech (*lexis*) similar to that of someone else" (3.393C1–2). This is true in *Republic* 10 also, where sound is the medium of poetry and human speech is what imitative poetry imitates.

Different poetic genres, however, differ in their use of imitative narrative, that is, of dramatic dialogue. Plato lists three kinds of *lexis*: (1) "plain narrative" (*ἀπλῇ διηγήσει*; 3.392D5), narrative "by report of the poet himself," which the dithyramb uses exclusively (3.394C2–3);⁴⁷ (2) "imitative narrative" (*διηγῆσει διὰ μιμήσεως*; 3.392D5), in which the poet speaks "as though he were someone else" (3.393C1), the kind of narrative tragedy and comedy use exclusively (3.394C1–2); and (3) "mixed narrative," a combination of (1) and (2), used by epic (3.392D6, 3.394C4).

Plato then uses a second *lexis* classification to distinguish the versatile poet from the non-versatile poet (3.396B10–397D5). There are two "unmixed" styles (3.397D1–2): (4) plain narrative with little imitative narrative (3.396E4–8), the style of the "unmixed imitator of the good" (3.397D4–5), and (5) "imitation of everything" (3.397A3), that is, either imitative narrative alone or imitative narrative with little plain narrative (3.397B1–2). There is also (6) a "mixed" style (3.397C8–10, D6), a combination of (4) and (5). Plato accepts only the person who uses (4), the "unmixed imitator of the good" (3.397D4–5), and he bans the user of (5) and (6) on the grounds that the imitator of everything is a "manifold man" who is not in harmony with the ideal state (3.397D10–398B4). The

⁴⁷ Plato's treatment of the dithyramb as purely narrative presents a problem, since it was in fact dramatic in the classical period. See the discussion of this problem by Vicaire (above, note 2) 240–42. Partee (above, note 1) 7, note 15, calls attention to Plato's ambivalent attitude toward the dithyramb.

mimêtikos, that is, the person who imitates everything, is, then, someone who uses (5), imitation of everything, or (6), which includes some (5).

It is obvious that these two classifications are very different.⁴⁸ Though Plato never attempts to clarify their relationship, our present study allows us to draw some conclusions with confidence. First, poetry that is *mimêtikê* must have at least some imitative narrative. Thus, the dithyramb, which does not contain any imitative narrative, cannot be *mimêtikê*. Again, since Plato classifies epic as *mimêtikê*, in *Republic* 10 (10.602B9–10), and since (5) and (6) include some plain narrative, a genre may be *mimêtikê* even though it contains some plain narrative.

We cannot, however, tell whether every poetic genre using only imitative narrative is *mimêtikê*. Plato tells us, in *Republic* 10 (602B9–10, 606C), that tragedy and comedy are *mimêtikê*, and (5), which is *mimêtikê*, includes some genres using only imitative narrative. But it is not clear whether (5) includes *all* genres of this sort. How would Plato classify a drama with only good characters? Nor do the *lexis* classifications help us to classify lyric. The genre's inclusion with epic at 10.607A5, however, indicates that it is *mimêtikê*, and the fact that it contains much imitation of unworthy speeches and actions of men and gods points to the same conclusion.⁴⁹

In sum, use of some imitative narrative is a necessary and sufficient condition for imitative poetry. It is a necessary condition for *mimêtikê*, but we do not have enough information to decide whether or not exclusive use of imitative narrative is a sufficient condition for *mimêtike*. Plato is much less concerned with style than with imitation of *eidôla*.

B. Meter

Epic and tragedy differ in meter as well as style. At 10.602B9–10, Plato speaks of “those dealing with tragic poetry in iambic or epic verse,” naming the meters of tragedy and epic respectively. The same phrase also indicates that he often treats tragedy and epic as the same genre of “tragic poetry.” Plato is little concerned with meter and says nothing more about differences in meter.⁵⁰

⁴⁸ For a helpful summary of Plato's discussion of the *lexis* classifications see Cross and Woosley (above, note 23) 272–73. Dupont-Roc's attempt (above, note 40) 13–14, note 51, to coordinate the two classifications is, though unsuccessful, worth noting.

⁴⁹ Brownson (above, note 1) 94–96 argues convincingly against Stallbaum that Plato did not intend to admit all lyric when he allowed hymns and encomia. R. G. Collingwood, *The Principles of Art* (Oxford 1938) 48 draws the erroneous conclusion that after Plato excludes all drama “he finds himself left with that kind of poetry whose chief representative is Pindar.” A glance at the *Odes* (e.g. *Ol.* 1, *Pyth.* 4 and 9, *Nem.* 10) shows that Plato would have found little to choose between Pindar and Euripides.

⁵⁰ See also 10.595B10–C2, 598D7 and 607A1–2, where Homer is called the “leader of tragedy.” Havelock (above, note 2) 8 notes that Plato does not distinguish between tragedy and epic. Vicaire (above, note 2) 243–44 argues that this assimilation of the two genres in *Republic* 10 was a current idea taken up by Plato.

C. Actions Imitated

As we have seen (above, Section III.B.2), all versatile poetry imitates actions (*praxeis*). Presumably, different genres imitate different kinds of actions, but Plato is specific only in the case of “tragic poetry” (tragedy and epic). Tragedy and its leader Homer are said by their advocates to know “all the crafts and all human things about *aretê* and *kakia*, and all divine things” (10.598D7–E2). This list includes the entire range of the subject matter of tragic poetry. In the paragraph at 10.599B9–E4, however, Plato says that he will not examine Homer on medicine and the other *technai* (10.599B9–C6) and proposes instead to question him about “wars and generalships and the government of cities and the education of human beings” (10.599C7–D1). These are the “greatest and finest things” Homer writes about (10.599C7). Plato then begins his questioning of Homer by asking him if he is someone with knowledge or merely an imitator, “third from the truth concerning *aretê*” (10.599D2–3). It is clear that *aretê* refers to the “greatest and finest things” just mentioned, that is, to a particular part of Homer’s total subject matter. The less important *technai*, such as medicine, are excluded, but important discoveries and inventions are included, at 10.600A4–7. In the conclusion at 10.600E, Homer and the poets are again said to be “imitators of the *eidôla* of *aretê* and of the other things they write about.”

While it has been recognized that *aretê* (the “greatest and finest things”) is Homer’s subject matter, our analysis suggests that, because Homer is the representative of only one kind of poetry, tragic poetry, *aretê* is the subject matter of this kind of poetry, marking it off from other kinds of poetry.⁵¹ This inference is supported by some unnoticed features of Plato’s use of the term *aretê* in *Republic* 10.598E–600E.

This section of the *Republic* deliberately plays on several different meanings of *aretê*. *Aretê*, in the technical, Platonic sense, refers to the order in the soul (*Republic* 4.444D13–E2) and not to activity. In a less strict Platonic sense it can refer to useful actions done with knowledge of moral excellence, and would include activities such as enduring the loss of a son, which are certainly not among the “greatest and finest” things Plato discusses in the passage at 10.599C–600E. In the “Homeric” sense, on the other hand, *aretê* is the excellence of someone with high social standing, successful in war and leadership.⁵² *Aretê* in this sense is the subject matter of the epic poets who sing the *klea andrôn*.⁵³ In showing

⁵¹ Thus, *aretê* is not the subject matter of poetry in general, as is suggested, for example, by Else, *The Structure and Date* . . . (above, note 5) 34.

⁵² A. W. H. Adkins, *Merit and Responsibility* (Chicago and London 1960) 32–33 defines “Homeric” *aretê* in this way, and distinguishes it from a Platonic use of the term in which the cooperative excellences play a much larger part (Chapters 13 and 14).

⁵³ Havelock (above, note 2) 64 argues that the poets’ subject matter is “the mighty deeds

that Homer is an imitator of the *eidôla* of *aretê*, Plato is not concerned with the order in the soul but with that kind of *aretê* belonging to useful actions that he mentions at 10.601D4–6. He plays on both the less strict Platonic sense and on the “Homeric” sense of *aretê*. After restricting the scope of *aretê* to those activities in which “Homeric” *aretê* is chiefly exhibited, he asks (10.599D4–6) whether or not Homer had *aretê* in the Platonic sense, knowing what makes people better in public and in private. He then demonstrates that Homer did not have *aretê* in the “Homeric” sense, since he was not remembered as a successful general or statesman but was “much neglected in his own lifetime” (10.600B9–C1). This allows him to conclude that Homer is an imitator of the *eidôla* of *aretê* not only in the Platonic sense (he has no craft knowledge) but also in the “Homeric” sense (he did not leave behind him memorials of fine works: 10.599B6).⁵⁴

Aretê, then, as it refers to the objects imitated by tragic poetry, retains much of its Homeric sense, though with a Platonic twist. Plato accepts the traditional view that tragic poetry deals with *aretê* in the sense of the important and memorable actions recorded by the singers of the *klea andrôn*. However, he insists that since *aretê* depends on use (10.601D4–6), true *aretê* requires craft knowledge of what is useful. A general with *aretê* in this sense is one of Plato’s craftsmen of freedom, who uses for purposes of war his knowledge of what makes people better. Someone with no knowledge of this kind can only imitate the *eidôla* of *aretê*: the shouting of commands, the waving about of weapons, all the sounds and gestures of someone who happens to be in charge of an army. He will also, as we have seen, imitate the man’s outward signs of emotion.

D. Effects on Audience⁵⁵

While all versatile poetry aims at producing pleasure, it can also arouse more specific emotions in the audience. *Mimêtikê*, Plato tells us, arouses and increases all the desires and pains and pleasures in the soul (10.606D1–7). Specifically, tragedy arouses pity (10.606B3, C5) and

of former men / And the blessed gods” (Hesiod, *Th.* 100–101). Compare Plato’s statement at *Republic* 10.598E1–2 that some people claim that Homer knows “all human things concerning *aretê* and *kakia*, and divine things,” and see *Ion* 531C. On the close connection between *kléos* and poetry in the Greek tradition see G. Nagy, *Comparative Studies in Greek and Indic Meter* (Cambridge 1974) 229–61.

⁵⁴ In fact, Plato argues at 10.598E–601A that Homer was not successful, not that he was ignorant. Since success is a criterion of Homeric, but not of Platonic *aretê*, Plato has only proved that Homer lacks Homeric *aretê*, not Platonic, as he leads us to believe. The demonstration that he lacks Platonic *aretê* is given in a later section of *Republic* 10 (603–6), when Plato argues that Homer represents “a man claiming to be good, who laments out of season” (10.606B2–3).

⁵⁵ For a detailed analysis of this topic see Belfiore (above, note 13).

comedy arouses laughter (10.606C2–9). While Plato links pity and fear elsewhere, in *Republic* 10 he says that tragic poetry arouses “pity and praise” (10.606B3) and omits fear.⁵⁶

Conclusion

In *Republic* 3.392C–398B and 10.595A–608B Plato maintains a clear and consistent view of the relationships and distinctions among the visual and poetic imitative arts. To imitate in the most general sense is to make something similar to something else in sound or shape, that is, to try to make people mistake the imitation for something else. Plato distinguishes imitation in this general sense from a particular kind of imitation, imitation of many things, for which he invents a technical vocabulary, the *-ikê* forms of *mimêsis* (*mimêtikê*, *mimêtikos*). *Mimêtikê* alone is attacked in *Republic* 3 and 10. In *Republic* 10 Plato explains what he only suggests in *Republic* 3, that *mimêtikê* imitates craft products, in the sense of things made or done with knowledge of the useful. Then, introducing another technical term, Plato shows that *mimêtikê* can imitate and make only *eidôla*, the works of craftsmen as they appear. This art thus turns out to imitate not many different things, but only one thing over and over, an *eidôlon*. Plato also implies that there can be a kind of imitative poetry, different from *mimêtikê* in that it imitates with knowledge, but that there cannot be a kind of painting that imitates with knowledge. Plato adopts the traditional view that epic and tragedy, which he classifies as kinds of *mimêtikê*, deal with the “greatest and finest things,” *aretê*. But his theory allows him to condemn them for imitating only the *eidôla* of *aretê*, which are the mere sounds and shapes the ignorant associate with *aretê*. Finally, Plato holds that the aim of *mimêtikê* is to produce pleasure, and that the aim of tragedy is also to produce pity.

In sketching this outline of Plato’s theory of the imitative arts we have deliberately left many problems unexamined, even in those sections of the *Republic* to which we have restricted our inquiry. Our outline may nevertheless provide a useful tool with which to study some of these

⁵⁶ *Republic* 3.387C mentions fear (*φρίκη*) as an effect of tragic poetry, but no mention is made of this reaction in *Republic* 3.392C–398B or 10.595A–608B. Although at 10.606C5–6 pity and fear are indeed closely connected, fear is the reaction of reason to the desire for excessive laughter. Plato links pity and fear in the *Ion* (535C) and *Phaedrus* (268C–D), and this was of course Gorgias’ view in his *Encomium of Helen* (9), a work with which Plato was certainly familiar. See M. Pohlenz, “Die Anfänge der griechischen Poetik,” *NGG* 1920, 167–72 = *Kleine Schriften* II (Hildesheim 1965) 461–66, for a discussion of Gorgias’ influence on Plato. Plato’s omission of fear in *Republic* 10 may thus be deliberate and significant.

other problems. It will in any case have served its purpose if it has demonstrated that Plato's theoretical treatment of *mimêsis* in *Republic* 3 and 10 is, however obscurely presented, at least much more consistent and coherent than has often been thought.⁵⁷

⁵⁷ Portions of this paper were read at the annual meeting of the Classical Association of the Middle West and South, Columbus, Ohio, April, 1983. I wish to thank my colleagues, George Sheets and Marcia Eaton, and the anonymous referees and editor of *TAPA* for their helpful criticisms of an earlier draft of this paper, and the University of Minnesota for a Faculty Single Quarter Leave in the fall of 1982, during which this paper was completed.