



Plato's Views on Art and Literature: A Critical Study of Plato

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Abstract

This research paper studies the complex and sometimes confusing relationship between Plato's ideas and the role of poetry in an ideal state. As we all know, philosophy and art often go in different directions, and this is clearly seen in Plato's thinking. By looking at important works like The Republic, Ion, and Phaedrus, the study explains the "Ancient Quarrel" between philosophy and poetry. It mainly focuses on why Plato suggested removing imitative artists from the Kallipolis. The analysis explains this idea in three simple parts: first, the question of reality and how things exist; second, the problem that artists may not have true knowledge; and third, the concern that poetry can affect the human soul in a negative way, which is commonly discussed even in our country today. The paper also says that Plato was not against beauty as such, but he was more concerned about truth and the balance of the human mind. Interestingly, it shows a kind of contradiction, because Plato himself uses stories and dialogue to question poets. This is something very interesting to observe. At the same time, the study points out a "Third Realm" where some forms of art, like songs praising good values, are allowed because they help society stay united. In the end, the research reminds us that art has strong influence over human thinking, sometimes even beyond logic, and this idea is still very relevant today, especially when we see media and education in modern times.

Keywords; Mimesis, Platonic Idealism, Theory of Forms, Censorship, Aesthetics, Didacticism, The Republic

Introduction

Plato's philosophical system works in a society where the writings of Homer and Hesiod were the main source of moral and educational guidance. As we all know, in earlier times people depended a lot on stories to learn values. For the Greeks, epic poetry was not just for enjoyment; it acted like a guidebook of life, showing ideas of bravery, justice, and even explaining the nature of gods. Because of this strong influence, poets had great power over people's thinking, shaping their social and moral values in a big way, something commonly seen

among Indian people also when stories guide behaviour. The tension in Plato's ideas comes when he decides to remove poets from the Kallipolis, which is his idea of an "Ideal City." This step looks very confusing because Plato himself was highly skilled in writing. His works include strong characters, deep ideas, and creative storytelling—like the famous Allegory of the Cave. Even though he used stories and symbols to explain difficult ideas, he still believed that traditional poetry could be dangerous for a balanced and logical society.

Plato's doubt about art mainly comes from the idea of mimesis, which means imitation. He explains that the world we see is already not fully real, but only a copy of higher truths like Justice and Beauty. So, when art copies this world, it becomes a copy of a copy, which is far away from truth. "The artist is a creator of appearances, not of truth." From this view, poets may create illusions instead of truth. For example, if a child keeps seeing heroes crying or gods behaving badly, they may start accepting such behaviour, instead of learning truth through reason, which is a serious concern even in our country today. The main idea of this study is that Plato was not against beauty or art, but he was trying to protect the human mind. He felt that poetry has strong emotional power, and it can directly affect feelings without using logic, which can weaken the thinking ability of a person. By controlling poets, Plato wanted to protect the people of Kallipolis from confusion within themselves. According to him, a balanced soul should be guided by logic. If art only plays with emotions and ignores truth, it can disturb the inner peace of a person. In the end, removing poets was his strong step to make sure that truth remains the highest goal in human life, without being affected by the attractive but misleading nature of imaginative literature.

Objectives of The Study

- To analyze the Metaphysical Critique: Art as "thrice removed from reality."
- To examine the Psychological Critique: The effect of art on the irrational part of the soul.
- To evaluate the Political Implications: The necessity of censorship for the stability of the State.
- To reconcile Plato's philosophical prose with his condemnation of poetry.

Literature Review

The discussion about why Plato rejected poets has slowly changed from old defensive ideas to modern views that also appreciate his own writing talent. As we all know, ideas grow with time, and people start seeing them in new ways. By studying these different opinions, we can better understand how art, emotion, and truth are connected in Western thinking, something which is also commonly discussed among Indian people in today's academic circles. The first strong reply to Plato came from his student, Aristotle. In his famous work *Poetics*, Aristotle did not agree that poetry and drama harm society. Plato believed that watching tragic heroes suffer would make people weak, but Aristotle gave a new idea called catharsis. Aristotle explained that art actually helps the human mind. It gives a safe space where people can release strong feelings like fear and sadness. Instead of making people irrational, a good tragedy helps them understand emotions better and feel balanced. According to him, poetry is even "more philosophical" than history, because it talks about general truths, not just specific events, which is quite interesting to think about.

Many years later, Sir Philip Sidney responded to Plato in his work *An Apology for Poetry*. He gave a different meaning to the idea that poets "deceive." Sidney said this is not wrong, but actually creative. He mentioned that the poet "nothing affirms, and never lieth." Unlike scientists or historians who talk about facts, poets create an ideal world that encourages people to become better. He believed that philosophy shows the right path, but poetry gives the push to walk on it, which we can relate to even in our country today. In the 20th century, writer and thinker Iris Murdoch again discussed this issue in *The Fire and the Sun*. She studied the deep competition between philosophers and artists. Murdoch suggested that Plato's dislike for art actually came from his respect for its power. She said Plato saw art as a risky substitute

for real truth, like a false light that may stop people from searching for real knowledge and understanding. In recent times, scholars have started focusing on the irony in Plato's own writing. This idea, called the "Literary Plato," shows the contradiction of a person who criticised poets but wrote in a very poetic way himself. Many experts say that his dialogue style is like drama, which keeps readers involved and thinking, instead of giving fixed answers. Modern studies also suggest that Plato's idea of removing poets may not be fully literal. It could be a teaching method or a warning, like telling people to be careful about what they believe. By using stories like the Chariot Allegory or the Ring of Gyges, Plato shows that when storytelling is guided by reason, it can actually help people move towards truth and higher understanding.

Methodology

The study of Plato's rejection of poets uses a mixed method approach to understand the real philosophical reasons behind his strict control over art. As we all know, one method alone is not enough to understand deep ideas. So, by combining close reading of texts with historical background, this research tries to give a full and clear picture of Plato's thinking. The main method used here is Qualitative Hermeneutics, which means carefully reading and interpreting original texts. The study mainly looks at *The Republic*, especially Books II and III, where the education system is explained, and Book X, where Plato clearly rejects imitative art. It also studies *Ion*, which talks about divine inspiration and skill, and *Phaedrus*, which explains the connection between madness, beauty, and writing. This detailed reading helps us understand how Plato builds his ideas step by step, something we also try in our country while studying classical texts. Another important part of this method is comparing Plato's idea of reality. The study explains the difference between the World of Forms, which is perfect

and eternal, and the World of Appearances, which is temporary and based on what we see. Lastly, the study uses historical context to explain these ideas better. During Plato's time in ancient Greece, society was slowly changing from oral storytelling to written philosophy. Earlier, poetry was the main way to pass knowledge and values, but now logical thinking was becoming important. Plato's criticism can be seen as an effort to shift power from poets to philosophers, especially the philosopher-king. This change shows a bigger movement towards logical thinking and structured learning, which is also commonly seen among Indian people as education systems develop over time.

Analysis

Plato's main concern comes from his idea of reality. He says that true reality exists only in the "Forms," which are perfect and eternal models of everything. The world we see around us is only an imperfect copy of these Forms. When an artist paints or a poet writes, they are not showing the real essence, but only copying what already exists in the physical world. This creates a simple order of truth: Reality > Physical World > Imitation. For example, the perfect idea of a bed is the real truth. A carpenter makes a real bed, which is already one step away from truth. Then a painter draws that bed, which becomes a copy of a copy. So, from this view, art moves us away from truth and brings us closer to illusion, something Plato strongly warns about. The second idea is about knowledge. Plato explains that there are three types of people connected to any object: the user, the maker, and the imitator. The User: Like a flute player, who knows how to use it properly and understands its purpose. The Maker: The person who makes the flute by following the user's needs. The Imitator: The artist who only copies how the flute looks, without knowing how it works. Plato says that artists do not have true knowledge. For example, poets like Homer talk about war, politics,

and medicine, but they are not experts in these areas. This can mislead people, as they may believe these ideas without questioning them, which is commonly seen among Indian people also when stories influence thinking. Lastly, Plato talks about the moral impact of art. He was worried about how young people learn from stories. Many poems showed gods and heroes behaving badly, like lying or showing too much emotion. Since young minds are easily influenced, Plato feared that people would copy such behaviour. If even gods are shown as imperfect, then people may lose their sense of right and wrong. In his ideal society, art should only show good values like courage, control, and justice. So, removing poets was like a strong step to protect society, making sure that people are not negatively influenced by wrong examples shown in art.

Discussion

One of the most interesting contradictions is what we call the “literary Plato.” Instead of writing simple and direct theory, Plato uses stories and conversations. His dialogues have strong settings, real-like characters, and deep emotional situations. Characters like Socrates are shown with great detail, almost like heroes in stories, which is something commonly seen among Indian people when we connect with characters. By using storytelling methods like metaphor and irony, Plato actually uses art to question art itself. This shows that he was not fully against art, but against how it was used earlier. He uses the power of stories to guide people towards logical thinking. In this way, his writings become a kind of “philosophical poetry” that replaces blind belief in traditional stories. Another important idea is the difference between harmful stories and what Plato calls the Noble Lie. In *The Republic*, he says that poets should be removed because they may mislead people, but at the same time, the state can use certain stories for social good. One example is the Myth of the Metals, where

people are said to be born with different qualities like gold, silver, or bronze. This shows that Plato was not fully against false ideas, but he was concerned about their purpose. If a story creates confusion or wrong thinking, it is harmful. But if it helps society stay peaceful and united, it can be useful. This creates a balance between truth and practical needs, which we can also relate to in our country today. Lastly, the dialogue *Ion* gives a different idea about art. Here, Socrates says that poets are not skilled experts, but they are inspired by divine power. Like a chain, this inspiration flows from a higher source to the poet and then to the audience. “The poet is a light and winged and holy thing, and there is no invention in him until he has been inspired.” This idea makes the issue more complex. If art comes from divine inspiration, it has a special value beyond logic. But at the same time, it can be risky, because poets may not fully understand what they create. So, Plato accepts the beauty of art, but removes its authority as knowledge. In the end, we see that Plato was deeply affected by art, yet he was also careful about its power to influence human thinking without logic.

Result

The study makes it clear that Plato’s removal of poets was not a complete rejection of creativity. Rather, he was against uncontrolled and emotional imitation. In his thinking, any art that shows wrong ideas or promotes bad behaviour can harm the human mind. But art that follows reason and truth can be useful, especially in education. The main outcome here is that Plato wanted to reshape art as a part of philosophy, where every form of expression supports balance and order in the Kallipolis. An important result of this study is the idea of a “Third Realm” in the Ideal City. Even though Plato rejects many forms of poetry, he still allows some types of creative work. He supports: Hymns to the Gods: Songs that show the perfect and unchanging nature of divine powers.

Praises of Famous Men: Stories that highlight good people and heroes, giving strong moral examples for young minds. By allowing these forms, Plato accepts that humans are naturally attracted to rhythm and stories, which is commonly seen among Indian people also. He does not want to remove the love for beauty, but he wants to guide it in the right direction. This “Third Realm” acts like a link between the real world and higher truth, showing that Plato’s aim was to create a pure form of art that supports thinking and wisdom, rather than only emotions.

Conclusion

The conclusion of this study clearly shows that Plato’s rejection of poets was not a simple or careless act of censorship. As we all know, his ideas go much deeper. It was based on strong philosophical and moral reasons. By giving more importance to the “Forms” than to what we see and feel, Plato wanted to build a society where reason becomes the main guide for understanding everything. His criticism works like a protection for the human soul, making sure that the attractive nature of art does not confuse people or disturb their thinking. The idea of the “Ancient Quarrel” between philosophy and poetry is still very relevant today. In modern times, we can see this conflict in discussions about media, education, and influence. Just like Plato questioned the effect of old stories on young people, today we also think about how movies, social media, and digital content affect our minds. In our country also, this topic is commonly discussed when we talk about education and values. The main concern of Plato—whether stories help build good character or spoil it—still continues today. It makes us think about the role of creators and also the responsibility of the audience in understanding what they see and hear. In the end, Plato’s ideas act like an important warning about the strong power of art and beauty. His writings show that stories and images can directly affect human

emotions, sometimes even more than logic. By asking art to prove its value through truth and usefulness, Plato reminds every generation to be careful. He tells us that the search for truth needs constant awareness, especially when imagination can easily attract us. His decision to remove poets can be seen as a message for humanity to move away from illusion and focus on clear thinking, guided by knowledge and the aim of achieving the highest good.

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