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Ontological and educational *mimêsis* in Plato's *Republic*

In this talk I want to show how Plato's account of the ontological relation between intelligible and sensible things as *mimêsis* leads to problems for his educational program based on *mimêsis* in Book III of the *Republic*. Even though it is only in Book X that *mimêsis* in its ontological function is fully spelt out, I want to argue that it is not only already prepared for with different terminology in the *Phaedo*, but is indeed the standard model according to which Plato also conceives *mimêsis* when employing it for education.

This ontological *mimêsis* shall be demonstrated to be static, to imply a difference in value between model and copy, and to require an isomorphic mapping. As a relation between things it is static, holding between an unchanging intelligible thing x and a sensible thing in so far as it is x (not in so far as it is changing, or including changes in any way). The ontological gap between model and copy also carries a distinction in value: what is imitating is of less value and perfection than the model. The ontological *mimêsis* relation itself is seen as positive if the model is good and if the copy is as similar as possible to the model. It is this second requirement that shall be shown to suggest an isomorphic mapping, which is prominently illustrated by *mimêsis* with a mirror in Book X.

When this ontological model of *mimêsis* is used for giving an account of education, as Plato does in Book III of the *Republic*, at least two problems arise:

(a) Instead of the static imitation of things, we are dealing with the imitation of activities. Accordingly, in contrast to the *mimêsis* investigated in Book X, there is no difference in "medium" between what is imitated and what imitates, both are actions. And as imitating activities is claimed to lead to a certain *physis* and *ethos* through habituation, it seems that there could actually be full equality between what is imitated and what imitates here, blurring the difference between the two. Accordingly, Socrates seems to seek other ways of keeping this difference, e.g., when demanding no lamenting whatsoever from the heroes and gods while agreeing that even the best man will, on his own, mourn in case of great misfortune.

(b) Due to the isomorphic structure, whatever is required for reality, e.g., morally good people, is also needed for that from which the children learn. Thus, Plato does not give

us the tools to conceive of learning from a negative example. For this would require a certain distance from the activity imitated, based on a difference between the structures of reality and of the arts from which to learn. Learning by way of Platonic *mimêsis* is accordingly more of a drill.

It is Plato's consequent usage of the ontological model of *mimêsis* which shall thus be shown to be responsible for some peculiar features of his educational program. (496 words)