

Platonic *Mimesis* and the Foundation of the *Kallipolis*. Joking and seriousness, Consistency and Contradiction

As is well known, according to Plato art is *mimesis*, i.e. imitation of the sensible world, which, in turn, is a copy of the world of Ideas; as a consequence, in philosophic debate art is always perceived as a further deviation from the path of truth, wherein the state's meaning and function abide. In the frame of his reflection on Greek traditional education, and within his anti-sophistic polemic, Plato clearly outlines the boundary separating true philosophy from art in general, and the art of the word in particular. This explains his extensive criticism of poetry, with express reference to form and content of the authors and texts that lay at the basis of the traditional musical and poetic upbringing: Homer, Hesiod, and tragedy in the first place.

Art as *mimesis* is made the object of discussion in books II and III of the *Republic*, though there the conclusions drawn by Plato still appear to be shifting and unsettled. By contrast, the rejection of *mimesis* is unambiguous in book X, whose conclusions are apparently dictated by a rigorous logical and methodological approach.

Nevertheless, the *mimesis* theories developed by Plato in his *Republic*, especially books III and IX, amount to a still unsolved problem in Platonic scholarship. In this paper I shall attempt to ascertain whether – and how far – the alleged inconsistencies to be found in those theories are due to real doctrinal twists on the part of the author, or should be seen as the consequence of planned and intentional adjustments required by the arduous task of elaborating, from scratch, a full-fledged theorization of an ideal state. In my opinion the solution to the problem is to be sought in the recognition of the fact that the discrepancies in the treatment of *mimesis* (e.g. the shift from partial to total rejection of art conceived as imitation) do not stem from real ideological changes involving basic principles, but rather from the shifting standpoints adopted by Socrates and his 'dialogic society' as the contemplated *kallipolis* progressively acquires clearer and fuller outlines.

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