1940

Plato and Poets

Vincent G. Savage

Loyola University Chicago

Recommended Citation

https://ecommons.luc.edu/luc_theses/358

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Theses and Dissertations at Loyola eCommons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Master's Theses by an authorized administrator of Loyola eCommons. For more information, please contact ecommons@luc.edu.

Creative Commons License

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivative Works 3.0 License.

Copyright © 1940 Vincent G. Savage
PLATO AND POETS

VINCENT G. SAVAGE S.J.

August, 1940

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Loyola University.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Part I</th>
<th>Plato, the Moralist, and Art</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chapter I</td>
<td>Strictures upon Art on Moral Grounds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Page 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter II</td>
<td>Plato's Doctrine of Good Art, Morally</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Page 12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Part II</th>
<th>Plato, the Metaphysician, and Art</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chapter III</td>
<td>Poets' Lack of Truth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>a) Reality and man's knowledge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>b) Knowledge and virtue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>c) Theory of knowledge and morality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>d) Poets' immorality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Page 17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter IV</td>
<td>The Poet of Plato</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>a) The ideal poet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>b) The possible poet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>c) Censorship of poetry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>d) Canons of legitimate art</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Page 35</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Vita Auctoris

Vincent Gerard Savage was born in Chicago, Illinois, November 6, 1910. He attended St. Lucy's Parochial School and St. Ignatius High School from September, 1917 until June, 1929. He entered St. Mary's College in Kansas in September, 1929, and Milford Novitiate one year later. He received his degree of Bachelor of Literature from Xavier University in 1934. In August of the same year he entered West Baden College. After completing his three year course in Philosophy he was sent in August, 1937 to teach at Loyola Academy in Chicago.
PART THE FIRST

CHAPTER I

STRICTURES UPON ART ON MORAL GROUNDS

In language that only a poet has at his disposal Plato severely criticized poetry even to the extent of excluding much of Homer and of other masters from his ideal state. He saw in poets universal teachers and guides whose words most men take as divinely inspired. The apparent contradictions and errors of poets men either do not perceive or they blindly accept. To Plato, however, falsehood is falsehood in poet or anyone else, and must never be tolerated. The poet, if he be a teacher, should be among the first to prevent error from creeping into the minds of his hearers. As a teacher he should be a model of virtue; consequently, his writings must be noble. He should not lower himself by such indignities as lying. Yet, the greatest of poets, Homer, is guilty above all others of lies. He pictures the gods as they can not possibly be. How can the gods change if they are gods? To act thus would be to deceive. Can truth itself deceive? What could it gain for it already possesses all? Homer’s representation of the gods as cheats, adulterers, drunken liars is not only blasphemous but also absurd. Imagine gods, courtiers of Zeus, being compelled to descend even to the slightest undignified action; a god bribed by mere man to deceive another god; or taking sides in heaven with one faction against another. Even man has a contempt for anyone who takes or gives bribes. Would gods, who in their omniscience know everything, ignore such conduct in one another? Someone, perhaps, would in disgust at Plato’s stupidity maintain that the reader or lis-
tener easily distinguishes fact from fable, and does not for one moment take Homer or the other poets seriously in such matters. Plato not only declares that the poetry in question fails to have any evil effect on the readers or listeners, but he insists that it can be the ruination of souls. Men, Plato says, hear these fables in childhood at a time when they are most impressionable. If they eventually throw off childhood impressions, they do so after the damage has been done. Therefore, their morals, even if men see through the poets' fictitious pictures of the gods, are already founded on an unsound basis. Plato's contention is more forcefully brought out by the evil effects of the poets' descriptions of heroes. They are men like ourselves. Consequently, they influence us more strongly. What will children see wrong in irreverence or unmanly conduct if they read that Achilles spurned the river god? that he carried on in womanish fashion at the death of Patroclus? that he brutally dragged the body of Hector about the plains of Troy? If youths are to have any sense of decorum, then out with pictures of gods or brave men giving way to excessive sorrow or girlish laughter. How will a young man who has heard that Achilles preferred servitude on earth to kingship in Hades count death as little? Will he consider it noble to die for his country? If the poet be allowed to paint the next world as a gruesome prison full of horror, it will be hard to persuade men to face death rather than submit to cowardice or sin.

Although lies such as these could easily be removed from writings, there is still another difficulty. Plato maintains that the poet can do harm not only by what he writes, but also by how he writes it. In fact poetic imitations are ruinous to the understanding of the hearers. Poets are only imi-
tators; they copy images of all things without reaching the truth. The merit of their work is judged not by truth but by its external garb. Their poems have no substance for: "strip the stories of poets of the music which words and rhymn put upon them and what a poor appearance they make when recited in prose." In other words the poet strives to please the ear and the eye; he makes no appeal to the intellect. In fact by his own admission the poet professes to be appealing not to the intellect of man but to his passions alone. As a result whoever gains the most applause from the multitude, which judges in terms of the sense-pleasure derived from a poem, he is the greatest artist.

In these passages Plato is speaking of imitative poetry, imitative in the narrower sense. He and Aristotle understood 'mimesis,' in a twofold sense. It may be rendered in its broader sense as: "a portrayal by means of any art"; in its narrower as: "impersonation," that is, imitation. Now all poetry must be imitative, but all need not be such because its essential constituent is impersonation. Plato condemns only the type that consists essentially of impersonation because he says: "Τὸ μὴ ταῦτα ἔχει στροφὴν καὶ ἔχει στροφὴν αἰσθήματα ἐκ τοῦ λέγοντος. Οὐ τοίς εἰσι καὶ οὐκ εἰσὶν."

He has in mind poetry that portrays men in their moments of strong passion. Poetry as seen in tragedy. Such poetry has two dangerous defects. First of all, it demands that the poet to a degree assume another's character. Secondly, it strongly tends to imitate men given over to their passions because, like tragedy, it strives to give pleasure and gratification. Both these faults are sufficient to condemn anything according to Plato. They can not be tolerated as they are
too much of an impediment to the soul in its struggle for virtue.

How is impersonation, such as a poet employs, an impediment to virtue? To understand this one must first understand Plato's conception of virtue. In the Republic Plato shows us what virtue is, and how the soul attains it.

The virtue of citizens forms the keystone of the ideal state. With it the state possesses virtue in itself and is, therefore, possible. Plato first shows us virtue in the whole, the state, and then in the members, the citizens. The state is composed of three classes of people. There are the rulers, the soldiers, and the craftsmen. Such a state, if properly developed, is good, and, consequently, possesses the four cardinal virtues. Wisdom is plainly the virtue of good counsel, which the rulers possess. Bravery is the quality that under all conditions preserves the conviction that things to be feared are precisely those that the lawgivers have taught. This virtue is embodied in the warrior class. Temperance is a harmony, a right order in the state or in the soul. It may be called self-mastery or self-control. In the individual, it means that the higher faculties dominate the lower; in the state, it insures the supremacy as rulers of the proper class. It is the virtue that maintains the harmony of all three classes of citizen in respect to the seat of authority both in the individual soul and in the whole state. Justice is the universal principle which is found in the life of all three classes. It is the one virtue that makes all other virtues possible; it insures their thriving once they are implanted, both in the state and in the individual soul. Justice is present in the soul if each faculty performs its own function properly. It is found in the state if each class
performs its own function properly, that is, the rulers govern, the warriors assist with their protection, and the artisans obey by doing their particular kind of skilled or unskilled labor. By means of justice the wisdom of the rulers, the courage of the warriors, and the temperance of all three classes work together harmoniously and successfully. Without justice in the whole state the other virtues in the whole state could not be exercised as they should be. Now the citizen is to some degree a small state. He has three individuals within himself just as the state has three classes. His reason can be compared to the ruling class; his spirit to the guardians; and his appetite to the artisans. Justice exists in the individual, as has been said, if each faculty does its own task properly. By means of justice a man establishes a beautiful order within himself. With the three principles of his soul in harmony he is a unit instead of many creatures at variance with one another. Such a harmony makes it possible for the reason to rule, and subdues the other two faculties to their correct place in the soul's operations. It is injustice that overthrows all order in the state and in the individual. In the former injustice brings it about that the rulers are dominated by their inferiors; in the latter, that the spirit or appetite usurps the place of reason. Of course, the state will be just or unjust accordingly as its members are just or unjust because the state is merely a group of citizens.

Now that we have seen what virtue, especially justice, is, we return to Plato's condemnation of imitative poetry on the score that it fosters immorality, or the lack of virtue, in men. Imitative poetry, says Plato, overthrows, either directly or by example, the necessary and correct order in the soul. Through evil influence on the individual it eventually affects the
whole state. By example the imitative poet disedifies men through his at-
tempt to assume any role. Nature, however, has so ordained that every indi-
vidual is fitted for one and only one occupation. The successful operation
of the ideal state depends on each man's doing his appointed work. Yet, the
poet, who as a teacher possesses a vast influence for good or for evil, at-
tempts to do many things through his imitating. "He is like a painter who,
though he understand nothing of cobbling, will make a likeness of a cobbler.
He deceives some people who know no more than he does and judge only by col-
lors and figures." If, therefore, each man is competent to do but one task
well, it would hardly be reasonable to expect the ordinary man to observe
this rule of nature so long as poets, the teachers of men, do not hesitate in
their imitating to play the part of any person in the whole state.

Bad as this example is, the direct influence of poets on the soul of
man is even more fatal. In their attempts to gain popular favor the poets
assume any character and try to reach the people through strong appeals to
their emotions. Plato acknowledges the good of the emotions, but he is care-
ful to keep them always in subjecttion to the intellect. To indulge them
carelessly is to nourish them at the expense of the reason. It is this care-
less indulgence that imitative poetry leads to for "imitation in general,
when doing its own proper work, is far removed from truth, and is the com-
panion of a principle within us which is removed from reason, and it has no
ture or healthy aim." The imitative poet tears down what the state strives
to build up in its citizens. The state teaches men from their youth to bear
grief manfully, and not to give way excessively to any other emotion. The
poet, however, with his art, which by its nature does not aim at pleasing
or affecting the rational principle of the soul, attempts by imitating the fitful and the passionate temper to uproot all the benefit of the state's instructions. If the state admit such a poet, he will awaken, nourish, and strengthen the feelings to the neglect of the intellect. If the state tolerate such writers, it becomes evident that it is not reason that will dominate but the lower faculties. Plato reasons thus:

As in a city when the evil are permitted to have authority and the good are put out of the way, so in the soul of man, we maintain, the imitative poet implants an evil constitution, for he indulges the irrational nature which has no discernment of greater and lesser, but thinks the same thing at one time great and at another time small—he is a manufacturer of images and is very far removed from the truth.

Under such an influence individuals in the state will be encouraged by example to seize the place of another. In the individuals themselves there will be no harmony because each will be a threat to himself because all his faculties are at variance with one another. In short, virtue, man's only means of success for living with himself and with others, will not only not be taught, if the imitative poet be admitted to the state, but will become impossible of attainment.

In criticizing imitative poetry Plato, someone objects, is altogether too serious. Men realize that poetry is merely a story; they do not for one moment confuse the conduct of the characters of fiction with those of reality. Judge for yourself, says Plato, after considering some examples whether such poetry has no evil effects on people. Is it not only too true that the best of men give way to sympathy at the lines of a poet who plays power-
fully on their emotions? Who can avoid sharing the feelings of some hero of Homer or of the tragedians as he pitifully drawls out his sorrow in a long oration, weeping and beating his breast? What is worse, the majority of men praise the poets who stir their feelings the most. Frequently, what men would themselves be ashamed to do, they actually praise in another when they are in deep admiration of some piece of emotional poetry. Even if a person repents of his folly at being taken in by the charms of poetry, the evil has already been done. His emotions have been let loose, and gathered more power by being indulged. Let no one, therefore, imagine, Plato warns, that he will take no harm from listening to such outbursts of emotion. It is a common experience that from the association with evil, even though only portrayed, something of evil is communicated to men. In other words, one can not avoid sympathizing with characters that he perceives carrying on in unmanly fashion. He, to a degree, runs the gauntlet of the emotions with them. If in actual life it is with difficulty that we repress sorrow amid our own trials, what will be the result if the feeling of sorrow has gathered strength at the sight of the misfortunes of others? To permit such exhibitions of men carried away by their emotions is to open the floodgates that we have striven so laboriously to close. Nor is the evil influence of emotional writing to be applied only to the serious. The indulgence of the ridiculous is baneful too. Men are ever ready to rebuke the unseemly conduct of others; yet they give themselves up to buffoonery at the theater. Before they know it, they are betrayed unconsciously into playing the comic poet at home.
Both forms, tragedy and comedy, of imitative poetry, therefore, are outlawed by Plato. Virtue has its price and, because it is worth all sacrifice, any hindrance to it must be refused admission to the ideal state. For virtue rests on the ascendancy of reason; imitative poetry with its undignified emotional appeal blocks this necessary supremacy of reason. Plato, consequently, must reject such poetry because: "If you allow the honeyed muse to enter your state, either in epic or lyric verse, you will find not law and reason of mankind but pleasure will be the ruler." Under such tyrants virtue would be for most men well nigh impossible. Right living, the only source of true happiness, is impossible without virtue. Plato concluded, then, that the ideal state, if it admits imitative poetry, would be frustrated; consequently he necessarily excluded it from his state.
(Notes to Chapter I)

N.B. All references to the works of Plato are according to Stephanus.

2. Crito 26 A and B.
4. Ibid. 388 A.
5. Ibid. 391 C.
6. Ibid. 388.
7. Ibid. 386.
8. Ibid. 595.
9. Ibid. 601.
10. Ibid. 602, Laws 700, Gorgias 502 A
11. Republic 595.
12. Gorgias 502 A.
15. Ibid. 429.
16. Ibid. 430 E.
18. Republic 431, 432.
19. Ibid. 443, 444.
20. Ibid. 443 E.
21. Ibid. 601.
22. Ibid. 603 B.
23. Ibid. 605 B.
24. Republic 605 C.

25. Ibid. 606 A.

26. Ibid. 607 A.
CHAPTER II

PLATO'S DOCTRINE OF GOOD ART, MORALLY

What has been cited in the preceding chapter may readily lead one to believe that Plato would have nothing to do with poetry. Such an impression is misleading. Plato not only admired poetry, he even wrote it. All his condemnations so far have been directed at the misuse of poetry. Plato saw that poetry like music fixes herself in the heart of man, and can be a source of good or evil to him. Up to this point, however, Plato has shown us what he rejected of poetry and why he did so. Now we come to his description of imitative poetry as it should be. For, Plato reasoned, if lies and unbecoming imitation bring only evil in their train, truth and pictures of virtuous conduct have their influence for good.

One of Plato's condemnations, already seen, of mimetic poetry is based on the fact that man gets his strongest impressions in early youth. Although most mature men can easily see through the myth and fable of poetry, young people can not. As a result their characters are influenced to some degree for evil in proportion to all the falsehoods and unbecoming conduct pictured in imitative poetry that they happen to perceive. The poet, therefore, to be the teacher he should must first of all have truth as his norm. Hence, if he writes about the gods, they must be represented as they actually are, that is, perfect in everything. They are the source of all good and are utterly opposed to all evil both in their beings and in their actions. One
can with consistency draw no other picture of them. Poetry of this genuine type, contrary to the false, will do good in this way. The child who hears such a characterization will from earliest years have a reverence for religion that will carry him through his formative period. When he matures, he will be able to investigate theology for himself without having to rid himself of many absurd notions. What is more, his morals will be founded on truth that carries a sanction with its laws. He will have avoided vice and pursued virtue as a child because of fear of punishment and hope of reward—the one effective motive for most men. He will grow into manhood with his character soundly formed.

Another violation of truth on the part of the poets is their false representation of great men. The poets paint great men as giving way excessively to sorrow, laughter, or even to baseness. This is to represent these men as they actually are not. On the other hand, if only the virtues of the great are portrayed, truth does not suffer. If men have no virtues, they are not great, and, consequently, are hardly fit subjects for a theme. Men are great because of their virtues and in spite of their vices. Let the poet bring out this fact. Then, just as the youths will be helped by true portraits of the gods, so will they by true pictures of great men. If the youth see their heroes as obedient, noble, and utterly opposed to all meanness, they will be better disposed toward a life of virtue. They will strive in some way within their reach to be like these men. Plato cites examples from Homer of lines that bring out the character of a hero in a true light. Where Homer describes Odysseus as: "He smote his breast, and
thus reproached his heart 'Endure, my heart, far worse hast thou endured,' he shows us the real Odysseus. Lines like these would restrain many souls under the stress of some strong temptation about to yield to cowardice, excessive sorrow, or even sin. Other passages praise directly or imply the characteristic virtues of individuals of the story. A few more instances suffice to show what Plato has in mind. "They marched breathing prowess and in silent awe of their leader," would teach youth how a soldier should be obedient. The fidelity of a wife to her husband, or a servant to his master, is rewarded as something noble in the story of Penelope and the swineherd. At the same time the infidelity and lust for wealth, as seen in the servants and the suitors, is punished by death as ignoble.

Plato, therefore, has based his criticism of mimetic poetry on its im-morality. We have seen, however, that he has also laid down certain principles of morally good poetry. To repeat for clarity's sake, we have found that Plato would prohibit mimetic poetry which panders to the lower faculties of the soul. He maintains that such poetry causes harm not only to the audience but also to the rhapsodist and even to the poet himself. Poetry, however, like pictures of noble men, that impersonates good characters has an uplifting effect morally. This follows from Plato's contention that impersonation tends to instill into one's being that which one impersonates. If the poets imitate virtuous men truthfully, and preserve in their imitation the correct order among the faculties of the soul, they can do just as much good as they do evil when they imitate men in their moments of weakness. Plato does not for one moment suspect that this is an easy
assignment for the poet. He will have his hands full because the virtuous character is hard to impersonate. In fact it is required of the poet to be virtuous himself for no man can write about virtue without first appreciating it. As a result of these regulations there will be fewer poets, but there will be no emotional orgies to do their evil all who in any way take part in them. Just as the rejected types of mimetic poetry wielded a threefold influence for evil, so healthful impersonation will in some way make poet, reciter, and hearer better men for having enjoyed it.

Thus from a moral point of view poetry is not essentially an evil. When man misuses it, only then does any harm result. There is nothing of the puritan in these principles of Plato. One may say about almost all creatures that they are means to good ends if used correctly. It is only logical, therefore, to permit that they be used only as they should. Such a decision Plato has made about mimetic poetry. He, one gathers, did not believe that because a thing is good, it can not be misused. Nor did he hold that something need be evil in itself if that thing is harmful when abused. His stand on poetry is analogous to that of a balanced man on freedom of the press who, though he concede it to be a right, would not maintain that it can not be an evil if misued. Now just as a sane man would take measures lest freedom of the press become tyranny of the press, so Plato would curb the tendency of the poet to use his art as it should not be used. In other words Plato applies to the art of poetry the precautions of common sense.
(Notes to Chapter II)

1. Republic 401 E.
2. Ibid. 379-380.
3. Ibid. 388-389-390.
4. Ibid. 603.
PART THE SECOND

CHAPTER III

POET’S LACK OF TRUTH

All the objections Plato has raised so far against poetry would be seconded by most moralists. They would probably recommend the same principles to maintain high standards. Plato, however, has only skimmed the surface when he attacked poetry from the obviously moral point of view. While his whole difficulty is centered on the immorality of the poetry which he criticized, Plato attributed its immorality to a source more profound than that of the defects that we have seen so far. Plato opposed the poets chiefly on the score of their ignorance. Now ignorance to Plato is the source of all immorality. To understand correctly the relation of ignorance to immorality, we have to know something of Plato’s theory of knowledge and, consequently, of his theory of being.

First of all let us consider just what is meant by the dependence of morality on knowledge. Grube tells us that to the very last in Plato’s work the 'no man sins on purpose,' of Socrates is reasserted. Wrongdoing is due entirely to ignorance, either on the part of the malefactor or on that of a person’s educators. In the latter case the result of the ignorance in question is manifested in the unhealthy condition of a man’s soul. It is this condition that drives him to choose evil. In either case the defect is removed by education and not by punishment. Grube’s phrase
'on purpose,' seems quite misleading. One could gather logically from it that Plato's theory of will is Calvinistic or mechanistic, that is, that man is just a machine or has no part in his actions. Such a conclusion would, of course, be false because it is evident in the vision of Er in the tenth book of the Republic that Plato believed in free will. Er therein describes souls choosing their future lives. The choice rests entirely on the individual. What is more, Er tells of souls condemned eternally to an existence of pain, and of others who suffer punishments proportioned to their guilt. Eternal punishment is obviously not corrective or preventive but must be retributive, which in justice is merited only through a misuse of free choice. To say that 'no man sins knowingly,' seems closer to Plato's idea. By 'knowingly,' Plato means that a man with knowledge could not choose evil in the presence of good. Of course, any philosopher would grant that in the presence of perfect and absolute good no one could choose evil. Plato means exactly this in saying that morality is a matter of knowledge. Hence, it seems to follow that our knowledge of the good should always be sufficient to direct us correctly in our choosing anything. If we, therefore, choose evil, we do so because we are in ignorance of the good; we do not know reality. It is in this sense that Plato maintained that wrongdoing is involuntary, as he did formally. The evildoer, consequently, is at fault not in the very act of choosing evil, but because he has neglected to learn reality, the knowledge, or lack of knowledge, of which is man's norm in all his rational actions. As for the maleeducated, they are not to blame in their actions, but their educators are, because they neglected to teach their charges truth. Morality is in this sense knowledge; immorality
Knowledge evidently must mean something to Plato that it does not mean to other men. To Plato knowledge can be held about reality, as he conceived it, and reality alone. His conception of reality did not include this world, or our ideas; reality is identified with the universal forms existing apart from this world. A specific example of what Plato means makes his concept clearer to us. The relationship of equality, as he explained it in some detail, serves as well as any. Plato grants that there is such a thing as equality. Now only reality is unchangeable. Consequently, the equality found between two equal objects, as the equality of a piece of wood which is equal to another piece, can not be equality the reality. The dimensions of the wood change constantly, and the pieces are by no means exactly equal. The equality of material things is a copy of the reality, equality. Real equality is the form $\exists \bot \psi \tau \delta \varepsilon \alpha \iota \sigma \circ \rho \nu \varepsilon$. Equality as such, equalitiness, never changes; it exists apart from that found between objects in this world because they are not unchangeable. We could go through the predicables of Aristotle and find that according to Plato all substances and accidents have an existence apart from the world of sense. It may be well to remark here that Plato, as some falsely assert of him, never taught that our universal ideas—our intellectual concepts—exist outside the mind. His forms, realities, are not concepts, but abstractions existing beyond this world. What is more, Plato taught these forms, like that of equality, are the only reality. They are of themselves existent and exist by themselves. They are reality because they never change. Hence they are color-
less, formless, and intangible. It must not be imagined that as a consequence the objects of sense are mere figments of the mind. They are actually existent; they are, however, only copies of reality.

To what degree the world of sense about us is real Plato tells us in the allegory of the cave. Picture men, he says, in a cave so chained that they can look only ahead at a wall farther in the cave. Behind them is another wall of some height but not reaching the ceiling of the cave; next, a road parallel with this wall, not as high; finally, a fire kindled between the entrance and the road. See other men walking over the road, carrying various objects on their shoulders. As the objects are now higher than the nearby wall, the light of the fire casts their shadows on the wall that the chained men are facing. These men, as they gaze on the shadows, believe in their ignorance that they are beholding real beings. Suppose now that one of the prisoners is released and brought into the light of day. The brilliance of the sun dazes him; he suspects that he is dreaming and is in the land of make-believe. Only by force is he restrained from going back to the cave to what he believes to be reality. After some time, during which he remains outside perforce, he realizes that the cave and its shadows are mere copies of copies of the reality which he sees now. Far from attempting to return to the cave and his companions he now has no desire to leave the real world. It is with pity rather than with envy that he now recalls his mates in their folly. Plato explains his allegory. The cave is the world of sight; the light of the fire is the sun; the released prisoner's experiences are those had by the soul in its flight into the intellectual
world. The creatures outside the cave make up reality, and the sun is the idea of the good with which all things must be viewed if truth is to be found. In other words we are like the men chained in the cave. We, imprisoned in our bodies on this earth, imagine that we behold reality as we look on objects illuminated by the light of the sun. Just as the released prisoner had a difficult struggle to remain in the sunlight before he beheld reality, so we, in order that we may see truth, must refrain from using our bodies as much as possible, and with the eye of the soul look beyond the visible world. With our mind on the idea of the good, the sun of the allegory, and with much effort, dialectics, we can perceive reality, that is, the world of forms. Once man has attained knowledge in this life of reality, all things on earth are seen at their real value. One's sentiments are now similar to those of the released prisoner after his disillusionment. One is loathe to become engrossed with anything short of reality. This world with its material beings is regarded as a prison rather than as our true home. We must not imagine that Plato speaks here as a Christian philosopher telling us that all things under the sun are passing and God alone is reality. Plato would grant that fact. The Christian, however, would not be denying truth to this world. Plato makes this world a shadowy copy of existence. The Christian in speaking thus has in mind the relative value of creatures on this earth; Plato would be looking toward their absolute value.

How, then, can man know reality if it does not exist around him in the objects he perceives through his senses? One may say that we know God by
dim reflections of Him in His creatures. Can we not, therefore, know reality through imperfect copies of it? Yes, Plato would grant if those copies had some stable existence. In other words the constant change in material objects led Plato to believe that they are mere shadows of real and eternal forms which are spiritual entities quite distinct from their far removed earthly copies. He maintained that, because a person has an idea of something in its perfection, he must have actually known it as it is. To be specific, we can take the example of hardness. Hardness as we perceive it in objects is constantly varying. Yet, we have an idea of hardness as such. According to Plato, then, we could not have obtained our idea of hardness as such from the hardness in objects about us. He taught the same about all the predicables. Unlike Aristotelians, who hold that objects of sense are partial causes of knowledge, Plato taught that they are mere occasions of knowledge. We do not, Plato says, gain knowledge on earth, but merely regain what we knew before we were born to this exile here on earth.

We come now to Plato's own explanation of how man knows reality. The soul of man is immortal. Immortal to Plato, it is well to note, means existence from all time and forever after. In various stages of her existence the soul has acquired a knowledge of all things, for example, straightness as such. Man, when he is borne on this earth, buried in what Plato calls 'an outlandish slough,' the body, loses this knowledge, but the traces of it remain. How can he recover knowledge while here on earth, and out of contact with reality? He is an exile and imprisoned in his body. Unlike most philosophers who have followed him, Plato did not consider man to be
an animal but a being who is nothing but soul. He is in his quest for
knowledge free of any causal dependence on the body. What is more, one's
body may be a hindrance to one's obtaining knowledge. Plato cautions us
with this remark: "...and while we live, we shall, I think, be nearest to
knowledge when we avoid, so far as is possible, intercourse and communion
with the body." It is true, however, that the senses play a small part
in the recovery of knowledge. Their operations can be occasions of the
mind's recollecting. But if they are relied on beyond being a mere occasion
they can become impediments. In fact, sight, hearing, pain, and pleasure
have to be ignored as much as possible because, if used too much, they de-
ceive the soul and hold it back in its reaching out towards reality. By
pure reason with no causal dependence on the senses man regains his know-
ledge by recollecting what he formerly knew in the world of reality. To
Plato, then, learning is recollection.

As has been said, man at one time knew all things. If he but recollect
them, he will get back all the knowledge of reality that he lost at birth.
Plato in the Meno shows how he can elicit knowledge from his students, know-
ledge not gained in this life, by stimulation recollection in them through
questioning. He used this experiment as his proof that knowledge which
one may have here on earth is only recollection of truths already known
but merely forgotten. This doctrine of ammnesis is not a debatable ques-
tion in Plato; he has used for proof of other theories. One of the argu-
ments for the immortality of the soul is based on the conviction that man
has the power to know reality, something he could not have learned on this
In the process of learning, that is, recollecting, something, the senses come into play merely as a stimulator, an excitator. They draw the attention of the soul to an object; then they are finished their work. The soul now does not abstract from the singularity of the object perceived, and then form an universal idea. It begins, rather, to recollect the absolute form of which the object of sense is a faint copy. From the recollection of one form it may remember all other truths due to the fact that all nature is akin. The act of recollecting, apparently easy, is extremely difficult. Man, so bound up in the sense world, is easily satisfied to remain in his "cave." No, one must resist the body; shuffle it off with its bonds as much as possible. The serious minded seeker after knowledge has to exert himself heroically according to Plato:

The lovers of knowledge, then, I say, perceive that philosophy, taking possession of the soul when it is in this state, encourages it gently and tries to set it free, pointing out that the eyes and the ears and the other senses are full of deceit, and urging it to withdraw from these, except in so far as their use is unavoidable, and exhorting it to collect and concentrate itself within itself, and to trust nothing except itself and its own abstract thought of abstract existence; and to believe that there is no truth in that which it sees by other means and which varies with the various objects in which it appears, since everything of that kind is visible and perceived by the senses.²²

In the passage just cited Plato denies truth to objects apprehended by the senses. Are these objects, therefore, unreal? are the senses concerned with unreality? Plato does not call the physical world unreal. In his own words: "even the starry heaven, although it is the most beautiful
and most perfect of visible things, must necessarily be considered vastly inferior to the true motions of absolute swiftness and absolute slowness."

From this we see that Plato considered the visible world and its wonders very inferior copies of the absolute forms that they imitate. The absolutes are abstractions, that is, non-physical; because they are in the world of reality, they are perceived by reason alone. The senses perceive the physical, far removed from the world of reality. If the intellect perceives truth, what do the senses perceive? What, in other words, is the visible world as it is not unreal nor is it wholly real?

Plato himself has given a very clear answer to these questions. He tells us that knowledge, opinion, and ignorance comprise the states of the mind. Knowledge is opposed to ignorance; opinion is an intermediate state. As knowledge is of reality and ignorance is of non-being, so opinion is of matter in between, that is, partial unreality, the world of sense. Plato thus represents our field of cognition. A line unequally divided represents in its longer section, which may be called A, the intelligible world of ideas; in its shorter section, B, the world of sense and opinion. He next divided the sections as he did the whole line. The smallest segment represents the lowest stage of being, that is, images and reflections. The larger segment of B represents the objects of sense, the visible world of nature. Line A represents reality, the forms, as we know it through reason by means of dialectical methods or discursive thought. We are interested now in the matter of opinion, or sense perception. It is concerned with the world about us. It is not of being or of non-being, but of the inter-
mediate stage. One who has opinion has not knowledge nor is he ignorant. He does not know reality but only a copy of it, which is very remote from the original, or, what is even farther removed from reality, only a copy of a copy, that is, images as seen in most art that deals with the physical world. We conclude, then, that Plato believed the world to be real, but at best, merely a faint copy of truth.

To apply these facts now to morality. It is to be recalled that morality depends on knowledge, wisdom. The philosopher, however, is alone able to attain wisdom, an achievement requiring long and difficult preparation, and certain fundamental qualities found in relatively few men. Is the philosopher, therefore, the only person capable of being moral or immoral? Plato does not go so far as to assert this; he does, however, say that the most gifted alone can be very virtuous or depraved, while weak natures are not capable of any very great good or very great evil. What of the majority of mankind that makes up the non-philosophical group? They do not attain to knowledge; are they, consequently, irresponsible as dumb animals? While Plato taught that one becomes virtuous as one increases in wisdom, he modified this principle somewhat by adding that it is possible to be virtuous without being wise by means of right opinion. Right opinion does not reach reality by itself; yet, it approximates knowledge if inspected by the philosophical with their dialectics and causal reasoning. What men without any contact with philosophers are supposed to do in order to be moral, Plato does not say. He faced the problem for the most part while considering an ideal state or an approximation to one. In such a state no one
would be without a guide because the rulers are supposed to be philosophers. These men determine the norm of morality for their subjects. The subject, by heeding the advice of the rulers, would have right opinion. In both societies, that of the Republic and that of the Laws, portrayed by Plato the leaders attain morality through philosophy; the citizens through right opinion which is inculcated by their leaders. The rulers, therefore, have knowledge of what the others have only belief, or right opinion. It can be seen now why the philosophers alone with their clear vision of truth are capable of great virtue. The subjects lack the potent force of knowledge, the source of virtue; they have only belief as a guide. According to Plato, then, morality is due either to knowledge gained by oneself or to correct opinion as established by legitimate authority; immorality is due to the blameable and avoidable presence of ignorance in the soul. This ignorance manifests itself either in a particular act or in the habitual disorder of one's faculties. Plato maintained that the individual who has disregarded the instructions of his educators, and, as a consequence, has no harmony in his soul, that is, passion is supreme, is guilty because of culpable neglect of right opinion. Would, someone may ask, a person be guilty if his educators did not meet the requirements of their profession? In such a case the educators would be responsible, but in the state Plato has designed the educators would be all they are supposed to be because they would be philosophers.

Since teachers should be philosophers, and people accept poets as teachers, it is evident why Plato was so hard on the mimetic poets. In nov-
rishing the passions and feeding the soul on falsehood, poetry strikes at the base of morality. Furthermore, Plato maintained, even though poets refrain from indulging the passions and from telling lies, they are still false teachers because they do not know reality. Such a teacher is as dangerous as a blind man leading another blind man. It is here that Plato attacks the real root of the evil. Throughout he is criticizing poets because they are immoral or lead others to immorality. Now he tells why they, the mimetic poets, can not be otherwise.

God, Plato says, whether from necessity or from choice, made one bed in nature. There is, consequently, but one bed with real existence. Any other beds will be copies of this absolute bed. The skilled workman, if he makes a bed, does not make an object of reality, he makes a particular bed which has a semblance of reality. His product is once removed from reality according to Plato for: "...and if anyone were to say that the work of the maker of the bed, or of any other workman, has real existence, he could hardly be supposed to be speaking the truth."

The poet is twice removed from the truth because he imitates the copy of the workman. His model is not the ideal but the imitation of the ideal. It is easy to understand now why the poets are so respected for their universal knowledge by the majority of mankind. They can do anything simply because they merely take the images of reality and write lightly about them. As an example, a poet may write about a carpenter without knowing anything about carpentry. Naturally a reader who may know even less than the poet imagines that he is reading about a real carpenter. Poets can write as
well about any other workman and his products, or about the creatures of nature because they write skillfully about appearances. Although Plato granted that the poets have many attractions to their credit—he from earliest youth had an awe and love of Homer, yet he could not reverence a man before truth, no matter what his gifts.

In the midst of these criticisms Plato raises an objection to his own view of poets. Perhaps people are correct who say that Homer and the tragedians must know what they are talking about and actually know the arts and all things human and divine? They have to because he who lacks this knowledge can not be a poet. But says Plato, if a person were able to make the original as well as the image, he would hardly spend so much time at image-making. He would not allow imitation to be the ruling principle of his life as though he could do nothing better. Homer has given us examples of legislators, generals, and other important officers in the state. How is it, then, if he possessed this wide knowledge, that he was not a legislator like Solon or Lycurgus, a general like Agamemnon, an inventor or discoverer like Thales and Anacharsis, a founder of a religion or way of life like Pythagoras? If a person possessed the knowledge to be the thing copied, it is hardly logical, Plato reasons, that he would be content to be a mere image-maker. That would be irrational; one who has knowledge always strives to get closer to reality. The poets, because they do not know what makes a thing good or bad, imitate only that which appears good to the ignorant multitude. Plato likens them to blind men in the following description:
and are those not verily and indeed wanting in the knowledge of the true being of each thing, and who have in their souls no clear pattern, and are unable as with a painter's eye to look at the absolute truth and to that original to repair, and having perfect vision of the other world to order the laws about beauty, goodness, and justice in this, if not already ordered, and to guard and preserve the order of them -are not such persons, I ask, simply blind? 42

Whether the poet possesses knowledge can be investigated from another angle. A man who has knowledge of something can explain it. If he could not do this, he would not understand what he pretends to know. If he knows, he understands, and can explain his knowledge. Plato recalls his experience with poets. When he asked them about the most elaborate passages in their writings, they were unable to explain their meaning. This test proved to Plato that poets work by a sort of genius and inspiration and not by wisdom. He compared them to soothsayers who say many fine things but do not understand the meaning of them. In the Ion Plato proves that the poets compose their beautiful poems not as works of art, but because they are inspired and possessed. In the same dialogue he raised a difficulty already referred to. Why, he asked, was not Homer called in as a general if he really knew the art of strategy? Later it will be seen that truth can be reached through inspiration, but such access to truth is not sufficient in the teacher of the ideal state. He must know, that is, he must be able to explain what he writes about. The inspiration of the poet is likened to a madness which, when it enters into a delicate soul, awakens lyrical and all other numbers. Poets, Plato grants, sometimes by the aid of the Muses and the Graces attain truth, but they do not know truth. In his own words Plato gives us a view of the
the poet according to the tradition which has ever prevailed among us, and is accepted by all men, when he sits down on the tripod of the muse, is not in his right mind; like a fountain, he allows the stream of thought to flow freely; and his art being imitative, he is often compelled to represent men under opposite circumstances, and thus to say two different things; neither can he tell whether there is any truth in either of them, or in one more than in the other.

To Plato the poet's ignorance is the strongest proof of his immorality. If he knew truth, he would not write falsehoods about men or gods. He would not appeal to the base in man to satisfy the crowd. A knowledge of truth would prohibit such writing. If the poet really possessed truth, reality, and not the imitation world of creatures, twice removed from reality, would be his model. It is, therefore, only reasonable that such a teacher, for a poet needs must be looked on as a teacher, be prohibited to enter a state in which virtue is the cornerstone.
I. Plato's Thought, pp. 230-231.

2. Republic 614-621 A.


5. Phaedo 74 A.

6. Ibid. 78.

7. Ibid. 77.


10. Ibid. 597.

11. Meno 81.

12. Phaedrus 250 C.

13. Alcibiades I 130.


15. Ibid. 75 E.

16. Ibid. 65.

17. Ibid. 75 E, Meno 81 D.

18. Meno 85, 86.

19. Phaedo 73 A.

20. Meno 81 D.


22. Ibid. 83 AB.

23. Republic 529 D.
24. *Theaetetus* 187 A.
31. It may be well to note here that when the term 'morality,' is used, morality considered 'formaliter,' is meant.
42. *Ibid.* 484 C.
44. *Apology* 22 B, *Meno* 99 E.
45. *Ion* 532-536.
46. *Phaedo* 245.
47. *Laws* 682.
48. Laws 719.
CHAPTER IV

THE POET OF PLATO

Plato might well have applied to education most of what he has said about poetry. The case is very similar. If educators are ignorant men who know not reality, they, too, must plan their system on an unsound basis. Because they can not know what makes a theory good or bad, they are like people trying to give what they themselves do not possess. They, as ignorant poets do, have to confine their efforts to the lower faculties of their charges because they have nothing with which they can train the reason—with knowledge alone can one train the reason. Popular taste is their single norm in determining their plans. Even greater evil results from their type of education than does from harmful poetry because it leaves no one sound in the whole state. In fact the more gifted people become by maleeducation more immoral in proportion to their innate ability. While it is true that there were in Plato's time false educators, no one needed much persuasion to see the wisdom of the system of education proposed by him. He did not have to show people something in false systems entirely hidden to them. It is easier to perceive more obvious weaknesses. In the case of poetry it is different. Men do not understand the actual influences for evil of much of the poetry that is produced. Plato has treated the question of false poetry at such lengths that a first impression leads one to think that he had a quarrel with poetry that could not possibly be settled. As a matter of fact he might have given the same impression about education had he writ-
ten about it in a different manner than he did. Further study, however, re-
veals that Plato has not rejected poetry, but that he has rejected the poe-
try of false poets. Their ignorance is all to which he has objected in poets. Just as education would not be intrinsically evil if the educators were not learned men, so, too, poetry in itself is not evil because its com-
posers happen to be ignorant. Plato asks only that the poets prove their knowledge. In virtue of this fact Plato shows a high regard for poetry. To demand that poets know truth is to say that poetry is an art worthy of only the highest talent in the state, worthy of those who know reality, truth. Plato admits the charm of poetry, and consequently he wants her to appear at her best, that is, as she should only and ever appear. She must not only give pleasure by her strains; she must attain truth. It is for her to make men moral by leading them away from immorality. Poetry, there-
fore, that is genuine is based on truth. Writers of such poetry are men who work by wisdom; they have a knowledge of reality, they are philosophers. For:

...go and tell Lysias that to the fountain and school of the Nymphs we went down, and were bidden by them to convey a message to him and to other composers of speech-to Ho-
mer and other writers of poems, whether set to music or not; and to Solon and others who have composed writings which they term laws-
to all of them we are to say that if their compositions are based on knowledge of truth, and they can defend or prove them, when they are put to the test, by spoken arguments, which leave their writings poor in comparison with them, then they are not only poets, orators, legislators, but worthy of a higher name...

...Wise, I may not call them; for that is a great name which belongs to God alone,-lovers of wisdom or philosophers is their modest and befitting title.
A poet with knowledge would satisfy any of Plato's demands on writers. Such a poet could bring forth, not an image of a bed which an artisan has made, but a likeness of \( \text{bed, the one bed existing from eternity which is the only perfect bed.} \) He would have knowledge, while the artisan has but opinion, and would, therefore, not be so far removed from reality as the artisan is. The same may be said of anything that the poet would imitate. If he possesses knowledge, he could bring forth imitations of the perfections of the real world. His images would be based on reality and not on the artisan's copies. The knowledge of such poets would draw followers to them, and could give a way of life to people that would bring them successfully to their last end. Poets of this sort would have the abilities of legislators, militarists, discoverers because they would be philosophers. They would have in their souls a clear pattern, and could as with a painter's eye look at truth and order laws about beauty, goodness and justice, and preserve these laws once they were enacted. Although they sometimes worked by inspiration, because they possess knowledge, they could render an account of the truth in their writings. Possessing knowledge they would be moral; truth, as a consequence, would always be in their work. There would be no lies about gods or men. Undignified actions would appear in their true light, and those who listened to the poems of such poets would never be moved to imitate aught but virtue. Genuine poetry, therefore, is not only charming, but also useful to the state. That it be useful is all Plato asks. Poetry, if genuine, then, is not rejected by Plato, but heartily welcomed into his state. As such poetry depends on the existence of philosopher-poets in the state, Plato might have altered his words slightly and said:
Until then, philosophers are poets, or the poets of this world have the spirit and power of philosophy, and poetic greatness and wisdom meet in one, and those commoner natures who follow either to the exclusion of the other are compelled to stand aside, cities will never cease from ill-no, nor the human race, as I believe—and then only will our poetry have a possibility of life and behold the light of day.

Plato has shown that his quarrel is with poets rather than with poetry. He has made the most of them out to be false teachers. Does he give any remedy for their errors? He makes the one positive assertion, which we have seen, that poets must have knowledge, that is, they must be philosophers if their work is to be considered art. In making this demand he implies that they, too, to be philosophers have to go through practically the same training that philosopher-kings have to. True, there will be some variation in the course of study due to the difference between the ruler’s occupation and the poet’s. Now a philosopher has certain traits that make him stand out from the ordinary man. He is a lover of true being; falsehood is never intentionally received by him. He desires all truth, and is drawn towards knowledge in every form. He is absorbed in the pleasures of the soul; bodily pleasure will hardly be felt by him. Intemperance, covetousness, meanness can have no part in such a man’s life. He is so harmoniously constituted that he is the reverse of a boaster or a coward. He is in everything just. This is the philosopher as he is when fully formed. How is a man to become such?

The education of the philosopher is a long drawn out course. Not every-
one can be a philosopher because not everyone is born with a nature that is
given to severe and abstract thought—a requisite that the philosopher-to-be
must have. To temper his nature and to instil harmony in his soul the pro-
spective philosopher has to undergo training in music and gymnastics, as
everyone does who is being educated. The novice must study, not as an ama-
teur, arithmetic and calculation until he sees the nature of numbers in the
mind only. These studies make a person more independent of visible objects
and so move the soul to seek for reality apart from the world of sense.
Geometry, as it draws the soul towards truth and creates the spirit of phi-
losophy, follows with astronomy and harmony. Last of all comes dialec-
tics, the crown and consummation of the philosopher's education. The stu-
dies before dialectics are strictly preparatory, and taken individually will
not educate a man. A good mathematician is not by reason of his field a
good logician. Dialectics will give the student a full view of things. He
will see things in their relation and interdependence with one another. At
this point Plato seems to be afraid of what we know as premature specializa-
tion. He put his idea on the matter thus:

Now when all these studies reach the point
of intercommunion and connection with one
another, and come to be considered in their
mutual affinities, then, I think, but not
till then, will the pursuit of them have a
value for our object; otherwise they are
useless.

The student now nearing the end of his formal training is able to renounce
sensuous imagery and hypothesis and is ready to rise through the pure ideas
of reason to the idea of the good. He can contemplate the world of ideas, rea-
ality; but if he is to attain to the idea of the good, he must persevere
yet longer in his contemplation. And all this he must do because without
the idea of the good his work is useless. For;

...until a person is able to abstract and
to define the idea of the good, and unless
he can run the gauntlet of all objections,
and is ready to disprove them, not by appeals
to opinion, but to true existence, not fal-
tering at any step of the argument-unless
he can do all this, you would say that he
knows neither absolute good nor any other
good; he apprehends only a shadow which
is given by opinion and not by knowledge. 15

It may be well to consider here just what the idea of the good meant
to Plato. In the allegory of the cave we say that the sun represented the
idea of the good in the world of reality. The sun in our world is the au-
thor not only of visibility in visible things but also of generation and
nourishment and growth. In like manner, Plato says, in the world of reali-
ty the good may be considered not only as the author of all things that are
known, but also the author of the being and the essence of these things.
Like the sun which is not generation, nourishment, growth, or visibility
so, too, the good is neither knowledge nor essence but far exceeds these
16
in dignity and power. The philosopher must contemplate the idea of the
good in order to regulate his whole life and every action. It is this idea
that gives him his motives because the idea of the good is that which has
put order and beauty in the universe and keeps them there. The philoso-
pher now through this idea can dimly copy the divine plan because the idea
17
of the good is in some way identified with God. He, it may be said, looks
at the whole universe through God's eyes.
The philosopher-poet is now prepared to produce poetry that would meet Plato's standards. Of course philosophy has not made up his whole training with its auxiliary courses. To be any kind of poet has its own requirements. Plato has told us what a person must do to have knowledge; in addition to these demands the real poet naturally has to have poetic skill, that is, a knowledge of the mechanics. Plato describes the artist of his ideal state in the following passage:

Let our artists rather be those who are gifted to discern the true nature of beauty and grace; then will our youth dwell in the land of health, amid fair sights and sounds; and beauty, the effluence of fair works, will visit the eye and ear like a healthful breeze from a purer region, and insensibly draw the soul even in childhood into harmony with the beauty of reason.

By his dual training the philosopher-poet is this type of artist. As a poet he possesses a skill with words; as a philosopher he knows the true nature of beauty and grace. By combining both faculties he can bring into being true creations of virtue. He can employ the beauties of earth as steps toward the real beauty.

Plato has drawn up his ideal state not with the intention of demonstrating the possibility of such a state to exist. He was seeking a pattern of ideal justice and the perfectly just man and their opposites.

We wished to fix our eyes upon them (the perfectly just man and his opposite) as types and models, so that whatever we discerned in them of happiness or the reverse would necessarily apply to ourselves in the sense that whosoever is likest them will have the allotment most like to theirs.
We may say that he had the same plan in his criticism of poetry. The philosopher-poet is an ideal type as the philosopher-king is. Even if he cannot be found in this world, he serves as a model for all earthly poets. The poet who looks to the ideal poet with his ideal poetry can judge that his poetry is perfect in proportion to his own and his work's approximation to his archetype, and is imperfect to the degree that he and his work are unlike them. A state formed with the ideal state as its model is the next best state to the ideal. In the same manner poetry which has the ideal for its model is the next best form after the ideal. In the practice Plato looked to duly appointed censors rather than to the poets to see to it that poetry retained the best form next to the ideal. Such an arrangement would save much poetry. Then, even if the poet worked merely by inspiration or correct opinion, the censors would save his poetry if he had attained truth in it.

In the Laws Plato has laid down the canons of legitimate art. The few principles from the Republic, already seen, are virtually included in those of the Laws. In the Republic the element of pleasure is treated as one of the strongest influences for evil. In the Laws pleasure appears to be part of all poetry. There is no contradiction because Plato in the Republic was condemning pleasure of the lower faculties, pleasure that excluded the rational and exalted the irrational. In the same work he viewed poetry in what he believed to be its essential reason for existing, its usefulness. He did not consider whether there is pleasure in it or not. The case is different in the Laws. Poetry must primarily be concerned with truth, and, if
pleasure is given by genuine poetry, Plato does not seem to have worried about it. In this same work he again says that truth is the norm which is to be used in judging poetry, but, he grants, pleasure determines in some way the excellence of poetry. There is no radical departure from the Republic in this feature because he has in mind:

....not pleasure of chance persons; the fairiest music is that which delights the best and the best educated, and especially that which delights the man who is preeminent in virtue and education. And, therefore, the judges will require virtue-having wisdom and also courage.

This pleasure is not necessarily intellectual, but whatever it is, it is becoming to a man of virtue. In several passages in the Laws Plato gives specific instances of errors which must not be tolerated in poetry. Many of these have been seen already in the Republic. As to what the poets may write about, he mentions by way of suggestion a few themes; for the most part he leaves this feature to the discretion of the censors. He does, however, treat in detail the elements of rhythm and melody.

Plato gives us now a description of the censors and his norms of judgment. From this one can gather Plato's practical ideas on what the poet should be, that is, the best poet we can hope to find in this world. The censor is to be an educated man and, as a consequence, he is wise and virtuous. To judge any work of poetry the censor must know of what the poem is an imitation; whether it is true; and whether the imitation has been well executed in words, melodies and rhythms. If we interpret these three principles by which a poem should be judged, we have what we may call Plato's practical theory of art in literature. First, one must know of what the
poem is an imitation. From this we can say that a poem must be a true picture of what it is supposed to portray. It is not a photographic copy, but it approximates the original sufficiently to enable the reader to understand what is imitated. Secondly, the poem must be true. That is to say, it may not in any way violate the true order of nature. All persons and things should appear in their proper places in the universe with becoming dignity. The divine, therefore, must be pictured as perfect in being and actions. Man, as a responsible creature of the gods, is to be represented as observing all obligation to the gods, his fellowmen, and himself. Other creatures are to be understood as instruments or aids of man to help him to live his life more perfectly. As a consequence, any unbecoming actions on the part of the gods towards some another or creatures are not to be allowed because they are impossible in perfect beings. Actions of men must receive their just due, that is, the good life is to be praised as the only happy life, and the evil life condemned as being miserable and a total failure. Thirdly, the imitation must be well executed in words, melodies and rhythms. This third feature is determined to a great degree by the other two. The poet manifests his ability and taste in the mechanics and imagery he uses in treating various themes. Words, melodies and rhythms differ with different characters, that is, certain persons call for stately measures in accord with their dignity. Again, words, melodies and rhythms have an interdependence among themselves. Therefore, the first of the principles outlined may be considered a test of the imaginative in a poem; the second, of the intellectual; and the third, of the emotional.
In conclusion, a poem possesses imaginative, intellectual, and emotional elements, but truth is its keystone. The poem arouses the emotions by giving pleasure through the use of words, rhythms, and melodies, and imagination and fancy provide a peculiar charm which may or may not be distinct from that of the strictly emotional features. But though the poet's picture is imaginative, it represents objectively in some way an external person, object, or action, and its presentation must be guided accordingly; it is not of the realm of pure fancy.
(Notes to Chapter IV)

1. Republic 607 DE.

2. Ibid. 608.

3. Phaedrus 278.

4. Republic 607 E.

5. Ibid. 473. Original words of the text are: kings, kingly, and state.

6. Ibid. 486.

7. Ibid. 475.

8. Ibid. 376.

9. Ibid. 525.

10. Ibid. 529.

11. Ibid. 530.

12. Ibid. 532.

13. Ibid. 531.


15. Ibid. 534.

16. Ibid. 509.

17. Ibid. 506.

18. What Plato Said, p. 231. The idea of the good is understood here as Plato uses it in the Republic.


20. Symposium 211, 212.

21. Republic 472 DE.

22. Laws 801.

23. Ibid 667.


BIBLIOGRAPHY


The thesis, "Plato and Poets", written by Vincent G. Savage, S.J., has been accepted by the Graduate School with reference to form, and by the readers whose names appear below, with reference to content. It is, therefore, accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

Father Walsh
Father Farrell

July 1, 1940
July 5, 1940