

Plato's Perspective on Literature in The Republic

Exploring Mimesis, Moral Concerns, and Critiques of Artistic Representation

Plato's Views on Literature from The Republic

The Concept of Mimesis (Imitation)

Plato's *The Republic* presents the concept of mimesis, which is central to his critique of literature. Mimesis refers to imitation or replication. Plato argues that literature, particularly poetry and drama, are imitations of reality, not reality itself. In his view, artists imitate the physical world, which is already an imitation of the true, ideal forms. Thus, literature is two steps removed from truth.

Example: A painter creates a painting of a bed, which is an imitation of a physical bed. This bed itself is an imitation of the ideal "form" of a bed, which exists only in the realm of forms.

The Three Levels of Reality

1. **The Forms:** These are perfect and immutable concepts or ideals that exist in a non-physical realm. They represent the highest level of reality.
2. **The Physical World:** This is the tangible world we live in, made up of objects that are imperfect copies of their ideal forms.
3. **Imitations:** Artistic representations like poems, paintings, and dramas are imitations of the physical world, making them the lowest level of reality.

Why Plato Considered Poetry and Drama Morally Dangerous

Plato believed that poetry and drama could mislead people by appealing to emotions rather than reason. He argued that they could influence individuals to adopt irrational and immoral behaviors. For instance, dramatic portrayals of gods behaving immorally could lead audiences to question the nature of virtue and morality.

Key Quote: "Poetry feeds and waters the passions instead of drying them up; she lets them rule, although they ought to be controlled, if mankind are ever to increase in happiness and virtue."

His Views on the Moral Function of Literature