

PHIL 4403: Philosophy of Art  
Prof. Funkhouser  
1/24/05  
Plato, “The Republic, Book X”

[You need to read only through p. 12, according to the online pagination. This is slightly more than halfway through book X. Stop when Socrates begins to present an argument for the immortality of the soul (p. 13).]

\*Socrates is having a conversation with Glaucon. Earlier (in Book III) Socrates concluded that imitative poetry ought to be banished from the Republic (their ideal state).

\*Here they are inquiring after the nature of imitation. Recalling our terminology from last time, Socrates is after the Form of imitation.

“Well, then, shall we begin the enquiry in our usual manner: Whenever a number of individuals have a common name, we assume them to have also a corresponding idea or form.”

--There are many particulars of a given kind, but only one Form (Idea) for each kind. We make particulars, not ideas. We can easily make *appearances* of many things—e.g., by directing a mirror at various things. This is how Socrates understands the painter (and poet):

“And the painter too is, as I conceive, just such another—a creator of appearances, is he not?”

--Forms (Ideas) have true existence; particulars have “only some semblance of existence”. Particulars are imitations of Forms. And paintings are imitations of particulars—i.e., imitations of imitations.

--Painters are even further removed from the truth, as they paint things as they appear, not as they are “in reality”.

\*A warning about painters and poets:

“And whenever any one informs us that he has found a man who knows all the arts, and all things else that anybody knows, and every single thing with a higher degree of accuracy than any other man—whoever tells us this, I think that we can only imagine to be a simple creature who is likely to have been deceived by some wizard or actor whom he met, and whom he thought all-knowing, because he himself was unable to analyse the nature of knowledge and ignorance and imitation.”

--If the artist really knew the reality, then he would busy himself there instead of in the world of imitations. The example of Homer.

“The imitator or maker of the image knows nothing of true existence; he knows appearance only.”

\*Socrates points out a paradox of fiction (one that we will discuss in several weeks). In reading or viewing a fiction, we often take pleasure in the sorrows of others. But, we would not do so in real life. Why do we take such pleasure?

--Socrates thinks that the pleasure we take in tragedies is indicative of a *moral* failing:

“Now can we be right in praising and admiring another who is doing that which any one of us would abominate and be ashamed of in his own person?”