

### Plato's views on poetry

[Plato](#) was opposed to poetry. In particular, he did not like the mimetic aspect of poetry - namely that poetry imitated life. This aspect of poetry was seen as opposed to true reality. Plato had a robust idea that what one really needed to know was the eternal forms and one could only gain this knowledge through dialectics, that is, philosophy. This is why Plato banished the poets from his ideal [Republic](#). However, to say that Plato does not use poetry in his writings would be wrong. Any platonic scholar would tell you that Plato uses plenty of poetic forms and devices all throughout his works. I think he does this, because he sees himself as a true philosopher. True philosophers are not really prone to the dangers of poetry, because they have been trained in the school of philosophy.

Admirers of Plato are usually lovers of literary art. It is so because Plato wrote dramatic dialogues rather than didactic volumes and did so with rare literary skill. You would expect such a philosopher to place a high value on literary art, but Plato actually attacked it, along with other forms of what he called mimesis. According to Plato's theory of mimesis (imitation) the arts deal with illusion and they are imitation of an imitation. Thus, they are twice removed from reality. As a moralist, Plato disapproves of poetry because it is immoral, as a philosopher he disapproves of it because it is based in falsehood. He is of the view that philosophy is better than poetry because philosopher deals with idea / truth, whereas poet deals with what appears to him / illusion. He believed that truth of philosophy was more important than the pleasure of poetry. He argued that most of it should be banned from the ideal society that he described in the [Republic](#).

#### **Plato's objection to Poetry from the point of view of Education:**

a. In 'The Republic' Book II – He condemns poetry as fostering evil habits and vices in children. Homer's epics were part of studies. Heroes of epics were not examples of sound or ideal morality. They were lusty, cunning, and cruel – war mongers. Even Gods were no better.

b. Plato writes: "if we mean our future guardians to regard the habit of quarreling among themselves as of all things the basest, no word should be said to them of the wars in the heaven, or of the plots and fighting of the gods against one another, for they are not true.... If they would only believe as we would tell them that quarreling is unholy, and that never up to this time has there been any quarreling between citizens..... these tales (of epics) must not be admitted into our State, whether they are supposed to have allegorical meaning or not."

c. Thus he objected on the ground that poetry does not cultivate good habits among children.

#### **2. Objection from Philosophical point of view:**

a. In 'The Republic' Book X: Poetry does not lead to, but drives us away from the realization of the ultimate reality – the Truth.

b. Philosophy is better than poetry because Philosophy deals with idea and poetry is twice removed from original idea.

c. Plato says: "The imitator or maker of the image knows nothing of true existence; he knows appearance only .... The imitative art is an inferior who marries an inferior and has inferior offspring.

#### **3. Objection from the Moral point of view:**

a. In the same book in 'The Republic': Soul of man has higher principles of reason (which is the essence of its being) as well as lower constituted of baser impulses and emotions. Whatever encourages and strengthens the rational principle is good, and emotional is bad.

b. Poetry waters and nourishes the baser impulses of men - emotional, sentimental and sorrowful.

Plato says: "Then the imitative poet who aims at being popular is not by nature made, nor is his art intended, to please or to affect the rational principle in the soul; but he will prefer the passionate and fitful temper, which is easily limited .... And therefore we shall be right in refusing to admit him into a well-ordered state, because he awakens and nourishes and strengthen the feelings and impairs the reason ... Poetry feeds and waters the passion 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."