

# Aristotle's defense of poetry against plato

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## ARISTOTLE'S DEFENSE OF POETRY AGAINST PLATO IN THE LIGHT OF

LITERARY CRITICISM As literary critics, Plato and Aristotle have different opinions on poetry and also it's social effects. Plato's Republic is a work which is not directly about literature; but his comments on poetry determine his position to it. He presents us a view of literature in a mainly negative way. Unlike Plato, Aristotle regards poetry as something positive in his Poetics.

Thus, they approach the critique of poetry from different perspectives; however it is obvious that Aristotle makes his points by taking Plato's commentaries into consideration. In this way, Aristotle's Poetics is a kind of answer to Plato's arguments on poetry. First of all, it's clear that both men regard poetry as a form of imitation but they approach to imitation from different perspectives. Plato sees imitation as a copying process, thus it is always beyond the truth. He illustrates this process with a " bed example" in his Republic.

In this example, he tries to define a copier man as a three moves away from true being by saying that "(...) We get three beds; one which has true being- God produces that one; one which the workman made; and one which the painter made. " (Book X, pg. 187) So, according to Plato whatever the artist imitates is far from the truth. And a poet also as a copier, have never knowledge of true being. Plato's this negative view of imitation should be regarded as an idealistic approach because of his worries about the Ideal State.

His main concern is the ideological function of poetry. Unlike Plato, Aristotle does not use imitation term as “copying”. On the contrary, he regards imitation as an intellectual and creative process. In this point, he rejects Plato's comments on imitation and he claims that it is something very natural by saying “(...)Imitation is natural to man from childhood, [the humankind] as the most imitative creature in the world, learns at first by imitation. ” (Poetics, Chapter 4) Thus, he also goes further and sees imitation as the part of education process of humankind.

It is the other aspect of his rejection to Plato, because we should remember that Plato was regarding imitation as out of the reality so it was unacceptable in education process of his Ideal State. It is clear that imitation issue is considered in more realistic way by Aristotle because of its various aspects. Aristotle regards imitation as a basic human instinct towards taking pleasure and learning. In Republic, Plato's claim was that poetry have a negative influence on people. A man who listens to “unworthy representations of the gods” can lose his self-control; in this way, it causes emotional weakening on men according to Plato.

On the contrary, Aristotle sees this kind of imitation as a purgation of emotions. Thus, he talks about a type of “katharsis” which provides people to release their emotions. In this regard, Aristotle rejects not only Plato's defining way of imitation but also its so-called harmful effects on public. Plato and Aristotle differ also in understanding way of Homer. In Republic, examples which have been given by Plato in order to show deceiver aspect of poets, especially Homer, determine Plato's impression about him. He thinks

that Homer does not have true knowledge, that's way he cannot educate people.

On the other hand, In Poetics Aristotle exalts Homer and his poetry. He talks about Homer's high qualifications by saying that "Homer, evidently understood this point [here, he talks about the unity of plot] quite well, just in the same way he excels the rest in every other respect." (Poetics, Chapter 8) Aristotle does not have any quarrel with the works of Homer; yet Plato blames poets because of their sayings. Thus, their understanding of Homer is another way to see their different approaching ways to the poets and poetry.

Plato describes a poet as an "inspired person" in his Ion. According to him, rhapsode does not use his artistic talent but he gets this from the divine inspiration. Thus, he emphasizes that poet is a person conveying the sayings of God through inspiration. However, Aristotle sees this talent as an artistic value and he makes more realistic argument by explaining poetry in details and as having an organic structure. Although Aristotle answers Plato in many respects argued so far, he also goes further and considers poetry in a systematic way.

Actually, this difference in their approach is based on their philosophical backgrounds. The Poetics bases in Aristotle's rejection of Plato's Theory of Forms, the theory that produces the sequence: Form (Idea), object (in the physical world) and mimesis (artistic representation). In Republic, through this philosophical background Plato tries to explain characteristics of his Ideal State and thus, he evaluates poetry in an idealistic way. According to

him, poetry can be ideologically used for certain purposes and it can harm people of his Ideal State.

However; Aristotle being independent of such an idealistic aims, focuses on only the theory of poetry. Thus, he talks about “ making poetry” in details. What he does is called as literary criticism in the meaning that we use today; in this way, he shows that how poetry has an organic structure as a literary work by explaining its parts as a kind of climax pattern. Consequently; while Aristotle tries to defend poetry against Plato, he also creates his own arguments on how a poetry is composed. Thus, he separates poetry from philosophy and he creates a special area for literature itself.

While he is doing this, he takes Plato's commentaries on literature into consideration and he answers him point by point. In addition, he goes further and makes a literary criticism independent of any idealistic aims in contrast to Plato. In Poetics Aristotle presents us a literary criticism by evaluating poetry as a poetry itself. WORKS CITED Aristotle. “ Poetics” in The Complete Works Of Aristotle: The Revised Oxford Translation. Ed. Jonathan Barnes. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984. Brittan, Simon. The Western Tradition” in Poetry, Symbol, and Allegory: Interpreting Metaphorical Language From Plato to the Present. U. S. A: University of Virginia Press, 2003. Dorsch. “ Introduction. ” Classical Literary Criticism. U. S. A: Penguin Books, 1965. Excerpts from Plato's Republic and Ion in TKL301 Course Pack and Lecture Notes ————— [ 1 ]. Simon Brittan,” The Western Tradition” in Poetry, Symbol, and Allegory: Interpreting Metaphorical

Language From Plato to the Present, (USA: University of Virginia Press, 2003), 13.