

Plato on Poetry, Music and Art

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Is watching tragedy really bad for you? Can listening to music really shape your emotions? Does perceiving visual art really deceive you? Plato is often presented as an enemy of poetry, music and the arts, but this presentation is based on a one-sided reading of the crucial texts in which Plato deals with these issues. A more careful reading of the relevant texts reveals a much more nuanced picture of Plato's position. He is



undeniably critical of the arts, but the main reason for this is that he has such high standards for what counts as good fine art and he thinks that the fine arts are so psychologically powerful in their ability to move and shape us. The flip side of Plato's critique is his great faith in the ability of the arts to educate its audience and to reveal important philosophical insights.

This course will be a close reading and analysis of two central texts in which Plato treats these issues: the *Ion* and the *Republic* (esp. books 2, 3, and 10). The meaning of these texts is highly contested, and the purpose of the course is to go through them carefully and in detail in order to formulate what Plato's position on poetry, music and art really is. Topics treated will include the possibility of truth in art, the nature and value of artistic beauty, the structure and epistemic status of imitation, the possibility of divine inspiration, the educational value of narratives, the ethical meaning (if any) of harmonies and rhythms, and the role of pleasure in aesthetic experience.

The semester page for the course can be found here:

<https://www.uio.no/studier/emner/hf/ifikk/FIL4012/v19/index.html>

If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to contact me at:

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