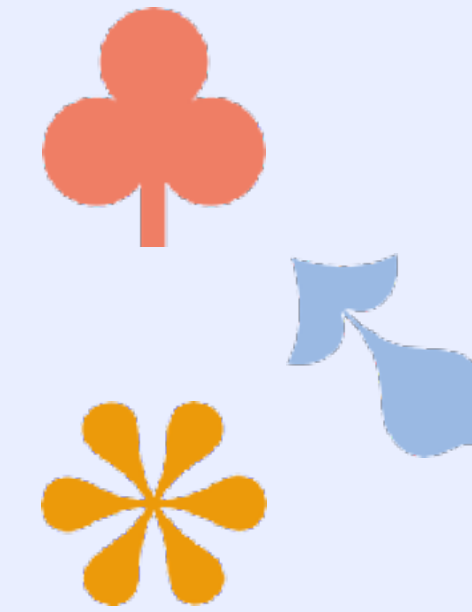


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# Ancient Criticism

Plato, Aristotle, Horace,  
Quintilian, Longinus, Neo-Platonists



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DR. KALYANI VALLATH

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# Ancient Criticism

- Criticism evolved from the Greek word “kritēs” or judge
- The creative act involved the critical act
  - The art of the rhapsode involved critical interpretation
  - Performance is interpretation
- Criticism emerged in about 1000 years
  - From the time of Homer
  - To the establishment of Roman Empire under Augustus Caesar

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# Classical Greece: Socio-political Conditions

- Direct, exclusive democracy (rather than representative)
- Athens at the head of the Delian League of more than 100 city-states
- Leading role against Persian invasions
- Pericles dominated
- Tragedy and philosophy came into being
- Spirit of political discussion and intellectual inquiry
- Challenged by Sparta

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# Three Developments

- The emergence of 'polis' or city-state
  - Plato & Aristotle considered poetry a concern of the state
- Peloponnesian War
  - Between open-minded democratic values of Athens and the rigidly militaristic oligarchic values of Sparta
  - In this conflict, Greek philosophy was born
- Pan-Hellenism (standardization of Greek literary ideals)
  - Poetry became independent of mythology, and more allied to truth
  - A 'canon' of texts emerged
  - The concept of 'mimesis' developed

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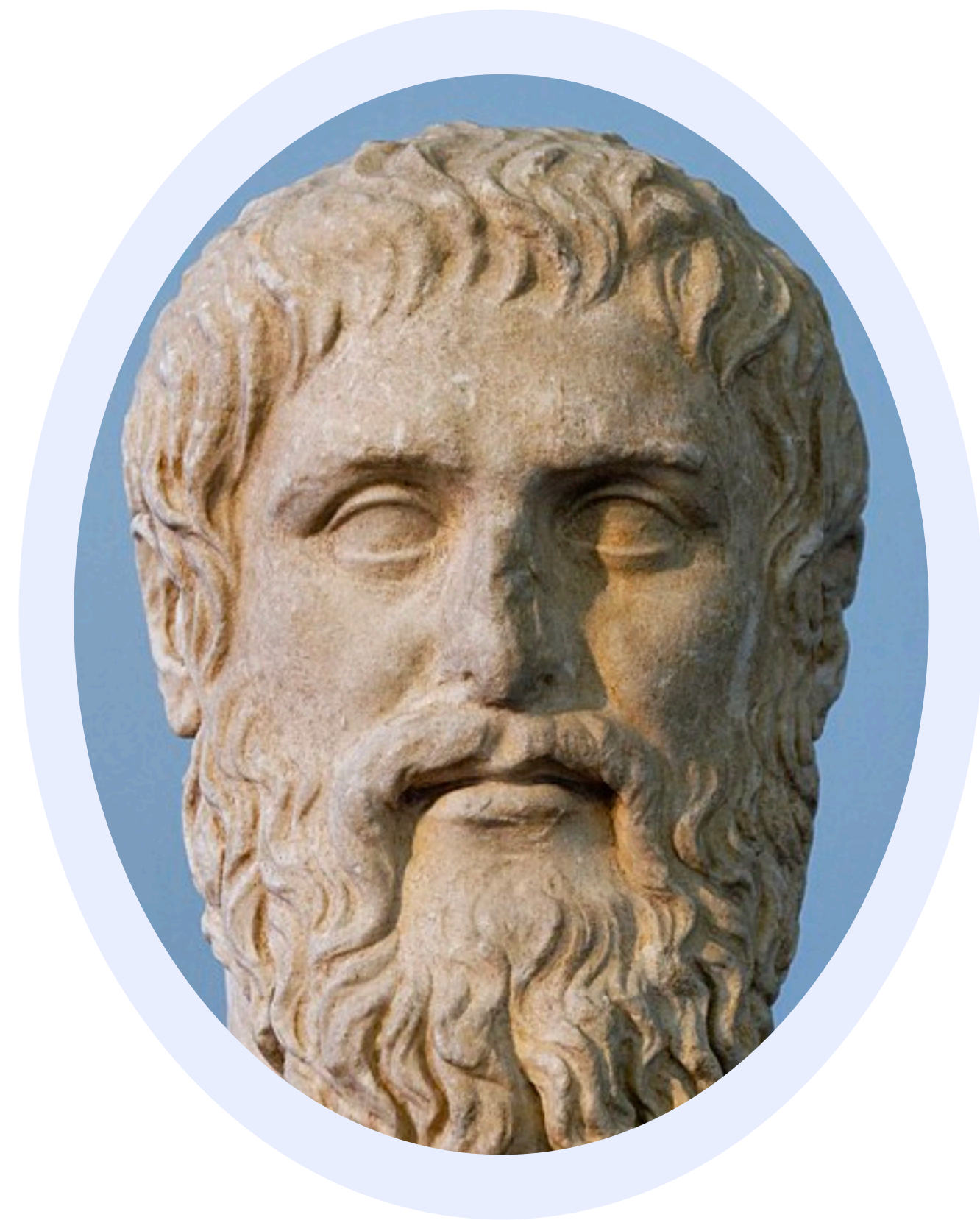
# Elements of criticism

- The elements of literary criticism can be found in
  - The judgement of who is the better poet / playwright
  - The critical discussion in Aristophanes's *The Frogs*
  - The comments of the Chorus

# Special Note: The Frogs

- There are no good poets left in the world, and Dionysus and his slave Xanthias (following the advice of Dionysus's half-brother Heracles) have comic adventures as they go to Hades to bring back a good poet from the dead.
- They listen to the arguments of Aeschylus and Euripides, the former representing the traditional virtues of a bygone generation, and Euripides representing the democratic, secular current generation.
- Aeschylus—We the poets are teachers of men and the sacred poet should avoid depicting any kind of evil (such as harlotry and incest found in Euripides)
- Euripides agrees that the poet trains citizens to be better men. Unlike Aeschylus, he himself employs a democratic manner, depicting characters from all classes, showing common life. He accuses Aeschylus's language as bombastic and obscure, and asserts a poet should write in human fashion.
- Aeschylus replies that a high style is appropriate for mighty thoughts and chastises Euripides for teaching the youth to harangue, debate and refute.
- This critical debate on poetic art is evidence of the erudite Athenian audience, who are described by the chorus as sharp and keen, and will not miss a single point.
- Ultimately a pair of scales are brought in, showing Aeschylus' verse to be weightier. To be double sure, Dionysus asks their advice on a political problem involving a general called Alcibiades, to which Euripides gives cleverly worded but meaningless reply, but Aeschylus gives practical advice. Thus, Dionysus makes up his mind to choose Aeschylus.
- Aeschylus is praised by the chorus as embodying wisdom (required in tragedy), in contrast with the idle talk of Socrates.

# Plato (427 BC-348 BC)



- Born in the island of Aegina near Athens in 428 BC to an aristocratic family
- Real name was Aristocles; Plato means “broad-shouldered”
- Received excellent education
- Disciple of Socrates; gave up political ambitions and turned to philosophy
- Using the dialectical method, Socrates deflated the pretensions of the powerful and learned people. Undermined conventional notions of good and questioned democracy. The unpopularity led to his being sentenced to death on charges of impiety.

# The Academy

- After Socrates' death, Plato travelled to Italy, Sicily and Egypt.
- In 387 B.C. Plato returned, and along with the mathematician Thaetetus, founded the philosophical school, the Academy.
- “Let no one without geometry enter”
- Taught geometry, mathematics, philosophy, astronomy, biology, political theory
- The Academy became very famous due to the Neoplatonists
- Functioned until A.D. 526
- Closed down by emperor Justinian for its pagan (non-Christian) orientations.

# Plato: Work

- Peloponnesian War ended and the oligarchic rule of the Thirty Tyrants began.
- Glory of Athenian art and literature declining: Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides, Aristophanes... already past
- Decline in national character and in standards of social and public life
- Philosophers were applying the test of reason to a variety of matters
- 36 Dialogues (Republic, Phaedrus, Apology, Gorgias, Ion, etc) and 13 letters
- Dialogues have Socrates as the main speaker
- Prof. Alfred North Whitehead (mathematician and philosopher who co-authored with Bertrand Russell Principia Mathematica) said, “Western philosophy is a series of footnotes to Plato.”

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# Early Period

- Expound central philosophical concerns (virtue, temperance, piety, courage, justice) following the method of Socrates; rational analyses and definitions
- Socrates is a systematic questioner
- Include Apology, Gorgias, Ion, Protagoras, Republic Book 1

# Middle Period

- Include Gorgias, Apology, Phaedo, Symposium, Phaedrus, Republic
- Move beyond moral concerns to epistemology (theory of knowledge), the nature of Justice and the other virtues, Platonic love, and the soul (psyche)
- Socrates goes unchallenged
- Here Plato is reacting against disorderly and mythical vision of the world given by poets as well as against the skepticism of thinkers like Democritus and Protagoras
- Theory of Forms (expanded in Phaedo and Republic)
- Phaedo discusses the last moments of Socrates before death
- In Symposium, at a party each of the guests (including the poet Aristophanes) gives an encomium in praise of love
- Phaedrus discusses speech and writing. Derrida noted that Plato argued that writing was "poisonous" to memory, since writing is a mere repetition, as compared to the living memory required for speech. Derrida points out however, that since both speech and writing rely upon repetition they cannot be completely distinguished.

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# Later Period

- Includes Philebus, Sophist, Parmenides, Thaetetus, Timaeus, Laws
- Questions his own Theory of Forms

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# Two Dominant Methods



Sophistic



Rhetoric

- In Plato's time, the two dominant methods of intellectual inquiry were
  - Sophistic, that focussed on a broad practice of education
    - Was secular, humanistic, relativistic
    - Opposed to religion
    - Sceptical of truth
  - Rhetoric, that promoted the art of public speaking
    - Focus was not on truth but persuasion
- Plato rejected both

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# Plato's Method

- Plato rejected the Sophistic and Rhetoric because he preferred
  - Order to chaos
  - Permanence to temporality
  - Timeless and universal truths
- Practised dialectical method
  - Systematic question and answer method

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# Plato's Poetic Vision

- In Homer, the vision of the world is ruled by chance and chaos
  - Fighting and indecorous conduct among gods
  - Plato rejects the undignified and unsystematic vision of the world
- Plato held the pre-Socratic naturalistic view of the world
  - Gods are entirely good and just
  - An underlying reality is accessible not through the senses but through reason

# Plato: Influences

- Heraclitus and Parmenides
  - Plato sought to describe another reality underlying physical appearances
  - Heraclitus: physical world is changing and plural
  - Parmenides: Ultimate Reality is unchanging and unitary
- Socrates
  - dialectical method of questioning established and accepted truths
  - rejected the vision of the world found in Homer and Sophocles — as disordered, irregular, unpredictable and subject to the whims of the gods
- Pythagoras
  - Mathematical foundation

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# Ion

- Plato's views on poetry appear in Ion and Republic
- In Ion, Socrates debates with a rhapsode
  - A rhapsode is a person who recites (not composes) epics
- Here Socrates focuses on the critical (not emotional) function of rhapsody

# Poetry is divine inspiration

- Ion's power is not in his art or knowledge, but in his “divine inspiration”
  - Divine inspiration is dangerous because it has no rational involvement of the poet
  - Socrates says, “The poet is a light and winged thing, and holy, and never able to compose until he has become inspired, and is beside himself, and reason is no longer in him”
- Rings of inspiration
  - The Muse is like a Magnet, who inspires the Poet, who inspires the Rhapsode, who inspires the Audience
  - So rhapsodes are interpreters of interpreters

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# Genuine knowledge is comparative

- Ion limits himself to Homer and is indifferent to other poets
- But Socrates contests this
  - Homer's excellence is related to other poets' deficiency
  - Each art has its own area of expertise; for e.g., when Homer speaks of charioteering, it is the charioteer, not the rhapsode, who is a better judge

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# The Republic

- A Socratic dialogue probably set against the Peloponnesian War
- Written in ten books
- Central concern: nature of justice
  - The just city state and the just man
- Other issues discussed:
  - Nature of the city-state
  - Theory of Forms
  - Roles of philosophers and poets, etc

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# The Republic

- Vision of utopian society
- City (Kallipolis) should be ruled by philosopher-kings who are trained to rule
- Other classes: Soldiers, commoners
- No mention of personal freedom, individual rights

# Major Characters

- Socrates
  - The major speaker in the dialogue.
  - In Plato's Dialogues, it is he who advances all of Plato's theories
- Book I
  - Socrates is returning home from a religious festival with Glaucon, one of Plato's brothers
  - They meet Adeimantus, another brother of Plato, and the young nobleman Polemarchus
  - They visit Polemarchus's aging father Cephalus, and Socrates begins a discussion on the merits of old age
  - This discussion quickly turns to the subject of justice

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# Ring of the Gyges

- Book II
  - Glaucon talks of the Ring of the Gyges
  - Gyges of Lydia gets a ring that has the power to grant invisibility
    - Procured from a cave by his ancestor
  - Gyges uses the power of the ring to murder the king of Lydia and become the king himself

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# Ring of the Gyges

- Glaucon raises the question: Will a man, who can perform any act without being discovered, be virtuous?
- Concludes: Morality is a social construction whereby one maintains one's reputation for virtue and justice
- Socrates refutes Glaucon's contention
  - When a just man and an unjust man wear the ring, the unjust man who abuses the power becomes a slave of his appetite, while the just man remains rationally in control of himself

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# Book IV

- Shows that individual justice mirrors political justice
- Society has three classes: producers, warriors, guardians
- Soul has three levels: reason (seeks truth), spirit (desires honour, harbours feelings), appetite (desires things esp. money)
- In a just society, the guardians should rule, just as in a just individual, reason should rule

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# Books V, VI, VIII

- Theme: rulers should be philosopher kings
- Philosopher means lover of truth and wisdom
- The Allegories of the Sun, Divided Line and Cave
- The Theory of Forms

# Theory of Forms

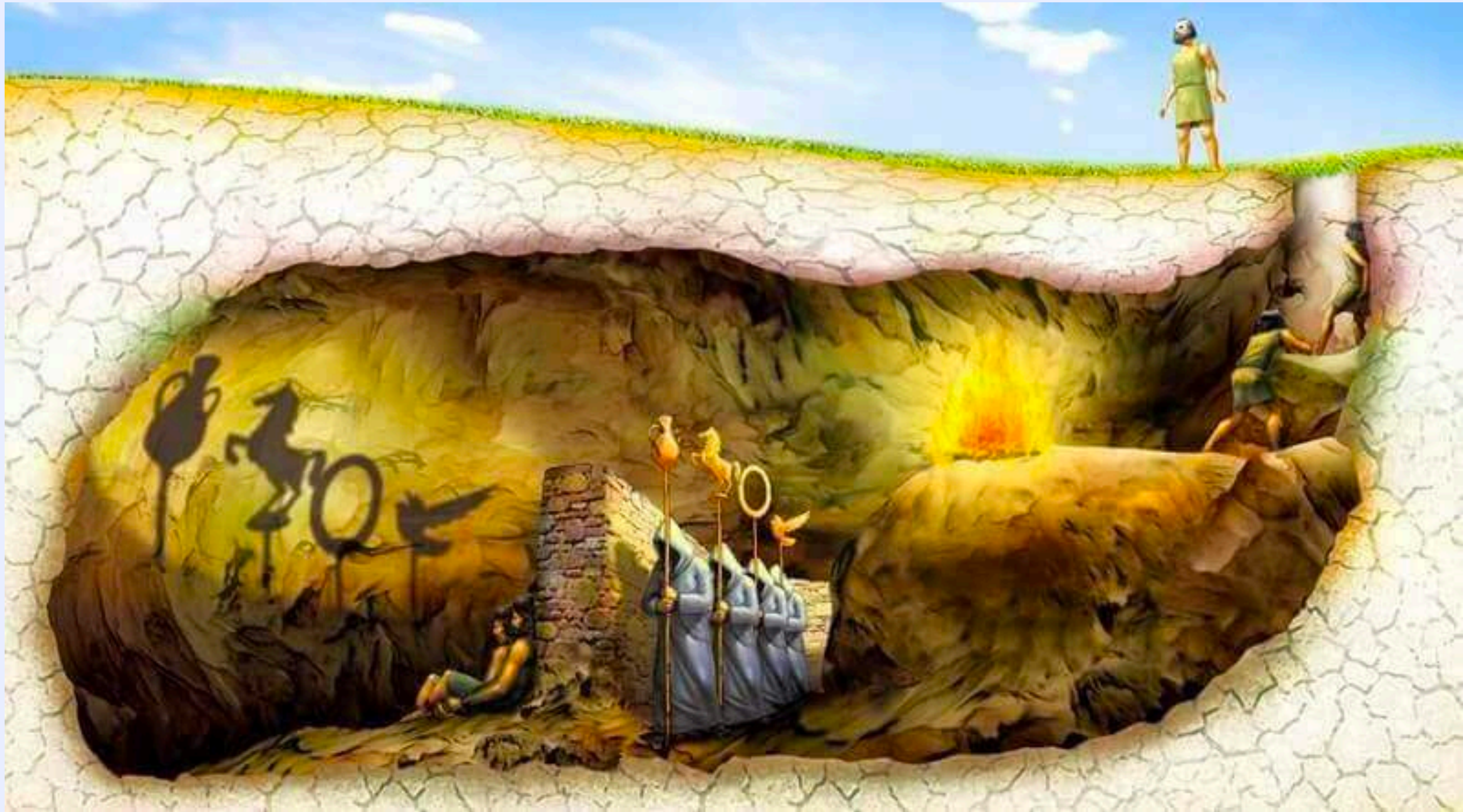
- Plato's theory based on mathematics as a model of inquiry
- Ideas are the Ultimate Reality (Sun)
- The idea of everything is the original; the thing itself is a copy (Two-tiered Metaphysics)
- The copy falls short of the original
- Ultimate Reality is changeless and eternal while physical reality is the world of change, decay and multiplicity
- All knowledge is a reflection of the ultimate idea; hence, is recollected from a previous experience (anamnesis)

# Plato's Ideas

- Theory of Forms
  - Ideas are the Ultimate Reality (Sun)
  - The idea of everything is the original; the thing itself is a copy (Two-tiered Metaphysics)
  - The copy falls short of the original.
- Art reproduces (imitates) physical reality
  - Mimesis is a theory introduced by Plato
  - So images of art are copies of copies.
- A chair exists firstly as idea, secondly as object of craftsmanship, and thirdly as object of representation in art. Thus, mimesis is thrice removed from reality.
- Art, when rightly pursued, brings good; but few use it well.
- Plato's cave image is a metaphor for education.

# Allegory of the Cave (Book VII)

- The physical world is in the form of a cave, in which the humans are trapped from the beginning of life, where we are stationary and cannot move our heads, so we perceive only shadows and sounds. Without reason, one of us is released and is encouraged to travel upward to the entrance of the cave. Then he is pulled to the entrance of the cave, where the light is hurting his eyes that are accustomed to the dark. The world of daylight represents the realm of Ideas. His eyes grow accustomed to the light and he can look up to the sun, and understand what the ultimate source of light and life is. This gradual process is a metaphor of education, and enlightenment. The enlightened person now has a moral responsibility to the unfortunate people, still in the cave, to rescue them and bring them into the light.



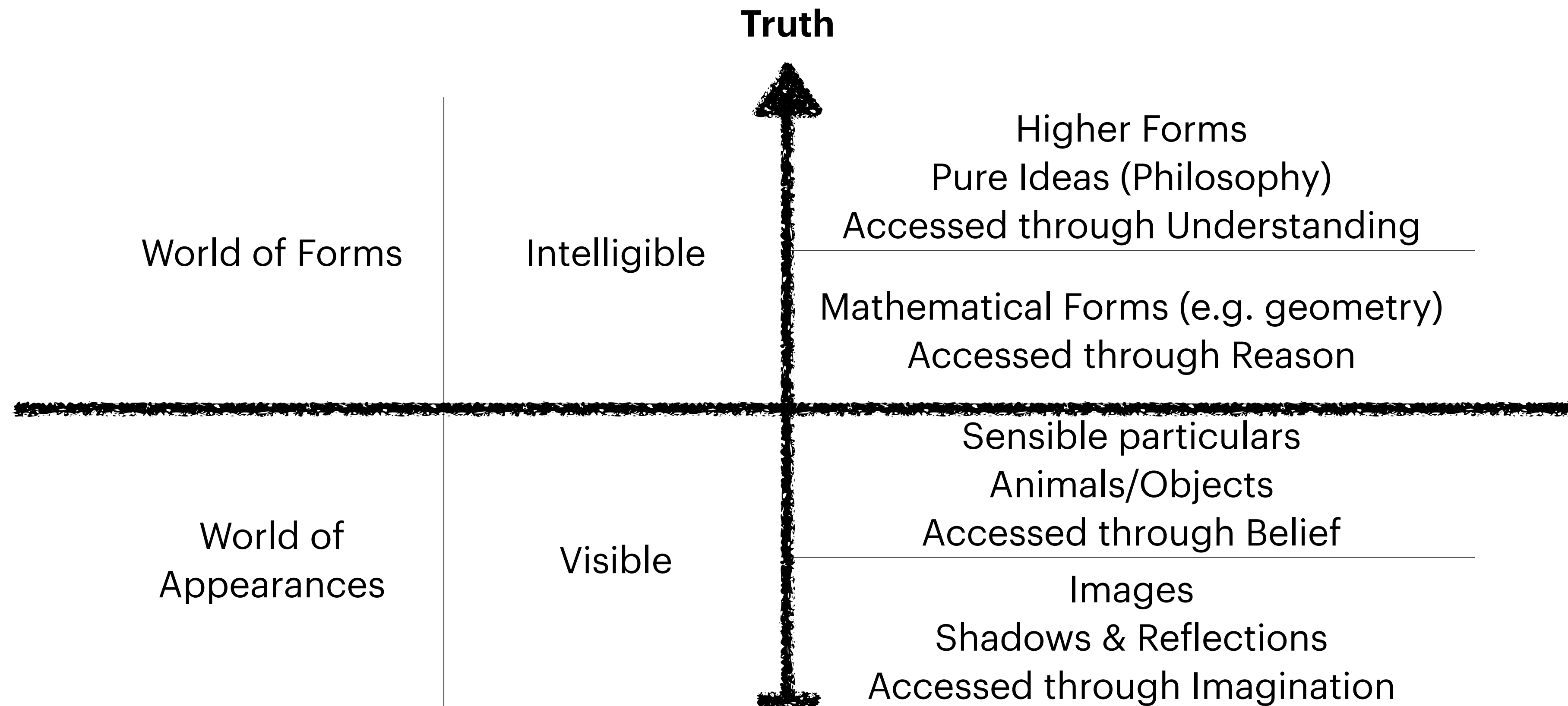
## Allegory of the Cave

# Allegory of the Sun

- Just as the Sun, with its light, gives the ability to see, the Idea of Goodness illuminates the intelligible with Truth
  - A mind without Goodness is like seeing without light / sun

# Allegory of the Divided Line

- A philosopher should move upwards until he reaches the Form of the Good



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# Plato's conception of Poetry

- Poetic inspiration divine, without poet's rational involvement (impulse of the moment). Hence poetry cannot be relied upon.
- Being a product of impulse, poetry appeals to baser emotions rather than higher intellect. It encourages passions and lets them rule.
- Poetry indiscriminately lets virtue as well as vice triumph; it presents gods and heroes as susceptible to vices. So poetry is non-moral.

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# Plato's conception of Poetry

- Poetry should instruct.  
It should mould character and promote the interests of the state.
- Poetic truth must comprise the highest truth—ideal forms of justice, goodness, beauty...

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# Plato's conception of Drama

- Drama arouses baser instincts by offering cheap pleasure to the masses. This leads to bad taste and laxity in discipline.
- Impersonation represses individuality and enfeebles character.
- Tragic and comic pleasure arise from excesses and weaknesses.

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# Plato's Objections

- Plato objected to poetry on four grounds
  - Moral
  - Emotional
  - Intellectual
  - Utilitarian
- Plato objected not only to poetry, but to painting, sculpture and music also

# Banishment of Poetry

- In Books III & X, Plato censures poetry
- In Book III
  - When a clever poet arrives in our city-state, we should worship him (sarcastically) and send him away for he does not belong here
- In Book X, Plato concludes that poetry must be banished from the ideal Republic
- However, if poetry makes “a defense for herself in lyrical or some other meter,” she may be allowed to return from exile
- This is considered to be a challenge to fellow poets and philosophers to defend poetry
- This challenge was taken up by Aristotle

# Plato's view of Art: A revision

- Believed that art is essentially an imitation of nature. (Mimetic Theory of Art)
- Bharata, contemporary of Plato, also asserted that “anukarana” is the basis of “natya”
- According to Plato, art is at best:
  - (1) useless and
  - (2) potentially dangerous
- Art is useless:
  - It serves no useful purpose in society.
  - As an "Imitation of Nature" it added no knowledge.
  - Has no intellectual value.
  - Art is an imitation of an imitation, thus barely real at all.

# Plato's view of Art: A Revision

- Art is dangerous for several reasons:
  - A. Art is essentially deceptive.
    - The whole aim of art was to deceive. Success was achieved when the spectator mistakes an imitation for reality.
    - Furthermore, artists were unconcerned with facts/truth. It makes no difference to artists nor to the success of their works whether the images or stories they depict were real or their messages true or good.
  - B. Art is mainly concerned with sensual pleasure.
    - Art seems directed entirely towards pleasing the senses and ignoring the mind, intellect, or concepts.

# Mind / Body Dualism

- According to Platonic Mind/Body Dualism, our bodies are the least valuable, least permanent, least “real” aspects of our personalities.
- Further, according to Plato’s Rationalism, our senses are incapable of providing us with genuine knowledge since they only gather impressions from an ever-changing physical world but not immaterial / invisible forces which guide, direct and sustain the physical world.
- Thus our senses and, consequently, art are “metaphysically” misguided since it is directed towards illusion and not “reality”.
- Further, Art serves to perpetuate and sustain this misdirection, keeping us ignorant of truth, justice, goodness and “real” beauty.

# Plato's view of Art: A revision

C. Art is psychologically destabilising.

- Human existence is, in great part, a struggle to master the emotions and sensual urges by using reason and intellect according to Plato.
- Therefore art was dangerous and counterproductive to this end (i.e. rational self-mastery) since it appeals not to reason and intellect, but to the psychological forces which constantly try to over-throw reason, namely passion and emotion.

"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"

# Plato's view of Art: A revision

## D. Art leads to immorality.

- Art was unconcerned with morality, sometimes even teaching immoral lessons. (The Iliad) Morality, it would seem, has nothing to do with a work's success as art.
- Plato worries that such art would encourage immorality in the citizens of this state. People might uncritically accept and admire immoral, vicious traits when they are attractively packaged by skilled artists.
- Like a skilled chef, artists are only interested in pleasing the palate, even if it poisons the diner. Since (mimetic) art is institutionally divorced from truth, goodness or any concern with 'real' beauty, it creates an environment of superficial "flavours" where all sorts of atrocities can be made to seem a tempting confection.

# Plato's view of Art: A revision

E. Art is politically dangerous, a threat to common good.

- Similar to the point made earlier (C), Plato worried that strong art which appeals to emotions stirs up negative emotions which we are trying to control.
- But this is more than just a problem for the individual. For a people with a history of "mania," strong, emotion-stirring art is rightly seen as a threat to the good of state/community.
- It was, therefore correctly the concern of government.

# That's all about Plato!

- Art is potentially dangerous for several reasons:
  - A. Art is essentially deceptive.
  - B. Art is mainly concerned with sensual pleasure.
  - C. Art is psychologically destabilising. (for the individual)
  - D. Art leads to immorality.
  - E. Art is politically dangerous. (threat to the common good)

# Aristotle (384 BC-322 BC)



- Son of a physician
- Disciple of Plato
- Tutor to Alexander the Great
- Founded Lyceum
- 27 Dialogues and other works like Poetics, Rhetoric
- Scientific method
- Poetics incomplete, 26 chapters  
Mainly concerned with tragedy, which was in his day, the most developed form of poetry
- Disagreeing with much else that Plato said, Aristotle agreed that art was essentially Mimesis.
- But, he maintained, (good) art was neither useless nor dangerous, but rather natural and beneficial.

# Poetics

- “I propose to treat poetry in itself and of its various kinds...”
- Three main points
  - Poetry is mimesis (Poetry is first and foremost a medium of imitation)
  - Mythos or plot (involving action) is the primary element of tragedy
  - Tragedy serves to arouse pity and fear and thereby effect a katharsis of these emotions

# Imitation

- Different kinds of poetry are all imitative
  - Epic, Tragedy, Comedy, Dithyrambic, Music of flute and lyre
- Imitation differs according to
  - Medium: Rhythm, Language, Harmony
    - Music uses rhythm and harmony
    - Dance uses rhythm without harmony
    - Mime & Socratic dialogues use only language
  - Objects: Men in action
    - Of a higher or lower type
    - Presenting ideal truth
    - External / Internal action
  - Manner or Mode: Narrative (poet speaking as himself, as in epic) and Action (as in drama)

# In Comparison with Plato

- Crucial to Aristotle's defense of art is his
- Rejection of Plato's Dualism  
Man is not an "embodied" intellect, longing for the spiritual release of death, but rather an animal with, among all the other faculties, the ability to use reason and to create.
- Rejection of Plato's Rationalism  
We must study humans as we would study other animals to discover what is their "nature." Look among the species; see who are the thriving and successful and in what activities do they engage? For Aristotle, this is how to determine what is and is not appropriate for a human and human societies.
- Rejection that Mimesis = Mirroring Nature

# Aristotle: Art is Not Useless

- It is Natural
  - It is natural for human beings to imitate.
  - Any human society which is healthy will be a society where there is imitative art.
  - Nothing is more natural than for children to pretend.
- Art production and training is a necessary part of any education since it uses and encourages the imaginative manipulation of ideas.
  - Nothing is more natural than for human beings to create using their imagination.
  - Since art is imitation, it is an imaginative use of concepts; at its heart art is "conceptual," "intellectual."

# Aristotle: Good Art is Not Dangerous

## A. Art is not deceptive:

- Artists must accurately portray reality to be successful.  
(Drama must accurately portray psychological reality in order for characters to be believable and their actions understandable.)
- It teaches effectively and it teaches the truth  
(Convincing and powerful drama is convincing and powerful because it reveals some truth of human nature.)

# Aristotle: Good Art is Not Dangerous

## A. Art is not deceptive (Continued):

- Introduces the concept of "Organic Unity" —the idea that in any good work of art each of the parts must contribute to the overall success of the whole.
  - (Just as in biological organisms each part contributes to the overall health and well-being of the creature, so too in good works of art, each element must contribute to the thematic development. This is another way in which a work of art reflects or imitates reality.)
  - Aristotle admires Homer's capacity to lie and offers a sophisticated theory of fiction, arguing that poets should strive for "probable impossibilities" rather than "improbable possibilities"
- Unified action, "with its several incidents so closely connected that the transposal or withdrawal of any one of them will disjoin and dislocate the whole"

# Aristotle: Good Art is Not Dangerous

## B. Sensuous art is not a bad thing:

- Aristotle did not believe that the mind was one thing and the body was something else and therefore Aristotle did not have the bias against physical pleasures that Plato did.
- The only way of acquiring knowledge at all, according to Aristotle, was through the senses and so developing, exercising and sharpening those senses through art was a healthy thing to do.
- Art was not solely concerned with the sensual pleasures, but rather was/should be an intellectual, conceptual affair.

# Aristotle: Good Art is Not Dangerous

## C. (Good) Art is tied to Morality and Truth

- (Successful Tragic) Drama always teaches morality. When trying to understand how tragedies achieve their peculiar effect (Pathos), he notes the psychology and morality on which they must be based.
- NB: Aristotle believed that drama imitated not only "events" but actions. As such they imitated intended behaviors, psychological forces and the unseen "inner life" of persons.
- He unwittingly set up two functions for a work of art to fulfill; to imitate nature's perceptual detail and to imitate nature's "organic unity"

# Aristotle: Good Art is Not Dangerous

D. & E. Drama is not psychologically or politically harmful

- Aristotle agreed that art did stir up negative emotions but, he claims it then purged these in a harmless, healthy way.
- Doctrine of "Catharsis"
  - Art is neither psychologically de-stabilizing nor politically destructive.
  - Art is a therapeutic part of the healthy life of not only the individual, but of the nation.
- NB: Similar to arguments made today in defense of graphically sexual or violent art or even of pornography or of violence on television.

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# Mimesis ≠ Imitation

- Mimesis ≠ Imitation (Mirroring)
- It is more creative, like:
  - Rendering
  - Depicting
  - Construing
  - Idealizing
  - Representing
- NB: Unlike mirroring, these are acts of intellect.

# Aristotle's Critical Responses

- Poetry is more Philosophical than History (Poetics IX)
  - "poetry is something more philosophic and of graver import than history (He means a mere chronicle of events here.), since its statements are of the nature rather of universals, whereas those of history are singulars."
  - Poetry describes "not the thing that has happened" as Aristotle imagines history does "but a kind of thing that might happen, (i.e. what is possible) as being probable or necessary"
  - Thus history mere "mirrors," but not art. Art is necessarily conceptual/cognitive.

# Plato's and Aristotle's Views:

- **Plato:** Art is potentially dangerous for several reasons:
  - A. essentially deceptive.
  - B. mainly concerned with sensual pleasure.
  - C. psychologically de-stabilizing.
  - D. Art leads to immorality.
  - E. Art was politically dangerous.
- **Aristotle:** Art is not potentially dangerous for several reasons:
  - A. essentially truthful.
  - B. concerned with sensual pleasure, and that's good.
  - C. psychologically healthy
  - D. leads to moral knowledge.
  - E. Art was politically necessary and healthy.

# Aristotle's Mimesis: A Review

- Poetry is mimesis
- There is natural pleasure in mimesis
- Mimesis is imitation of
  - what is past or present
  - what is commonly believed
  - what is ideal
- Poetry is not twice removed from reality—it is closer to reality  
Illustrated by comparison between poetry & history

# Aristotle's Conception of Poetry

## History

- what has happened
- particular incidents
- factual

## Poetry

what may happen  
universal truths  
philosophical

- Pleasure is the primary aim of poetry. Instruction should be incidental to pleasure.
- Poetry does arouse pity and fear, but this amounts to catharsis (purgation of excess emotions)  
So the emotional appeal of poetry grants health & satisfaction.

# Poetry and Other Arts

- Plato had objected to poetry, painting, music and sculpture
- Aristotle says painter and poet are different
  - One imitates through form and colour; the other through language, rhythm and harmony
- Hence poetry is akin to music
  - Because music also imitates through rhythm and harmony

# Aristotle's Conception of Tragedy

Poetry imitates  
noble actions  
of good men

Epic

Tragedy

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of bad men

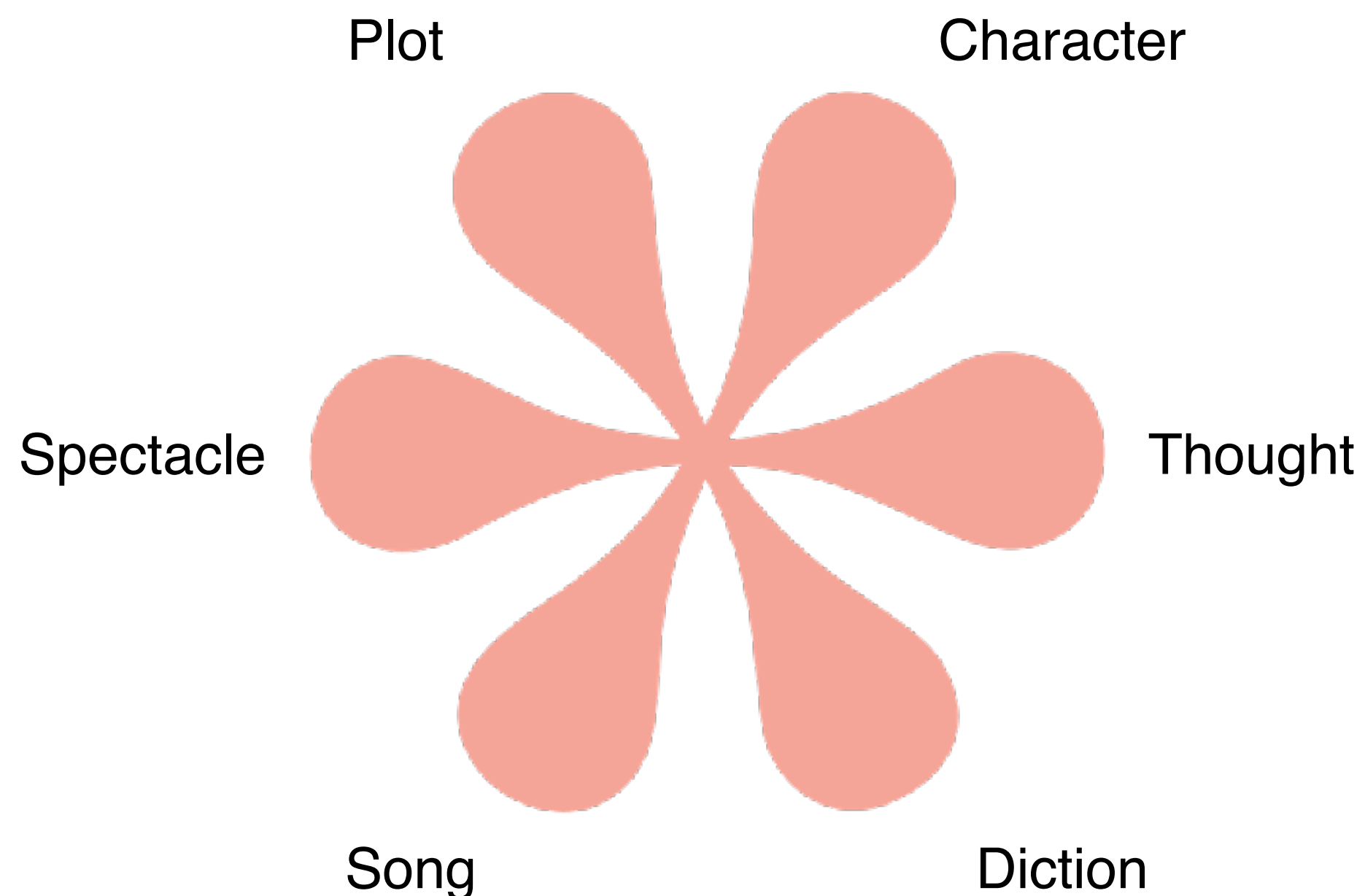
Satire

Comedy

# Aristotle's Conception of Tragedy

- Tragedy is an **imitation** of an **action** that is **serious, complete** and of a certain **magnitude**; in **language** embellished with each kind of artistic **ornament**, the several kinds being found in **separate parts** of the play; in the form of **action**, not of narrative; through **pity and fear** effecting the proper **purgation** of these emotions.

# Aristotle's Conception of Tragedy



- Six constituent elements:  
Plot (mythos), Character (ethos),  
Thought (dianoia), Diction (lexis), Song  
(melos), Spectacle (opsis)
- Plot (arrangement of incidents)—soul of  
tragedy
- Action ensues from Character
- Character is moulded by Thought,  
which reveals itself in Dialogue or  
Diction (language embellished with  
ornaments such as Song)
- Spectacle (stage presentation), least  
connected with Poetry, adds to power of  
Tragedy.

# Plot or Mythos

- The most important feature of plot is unity
- Plot must move from beginning to end according to a tightly organized sequence of necessary and probable events
  - With respect to the requirements of art, a probable impossibility is to be preferred to a thing improbable and yet possible. The tragic plot must not be composed of irrational parts.
  - Even if something is impossible, if it is presented as probable, then it's acceptable. For example, the spirit Ariel helping a human Prospero to create an artificial storm is impossible. But in the play it is probable. That means it seems as if it can happen. Then it's acceptable.
  - Now the second part--it is possible that Othello decided to kill Desdemona but in the last moment falls at her feet and begs her not to leave him and go to Cassio. In reality it might happen. But it is not probable in the play. In the story it cannot be accepted. If we rewrite the story like that it will disrupt the unity and effect of the play. So such an improbable possibility cannot be accepted.

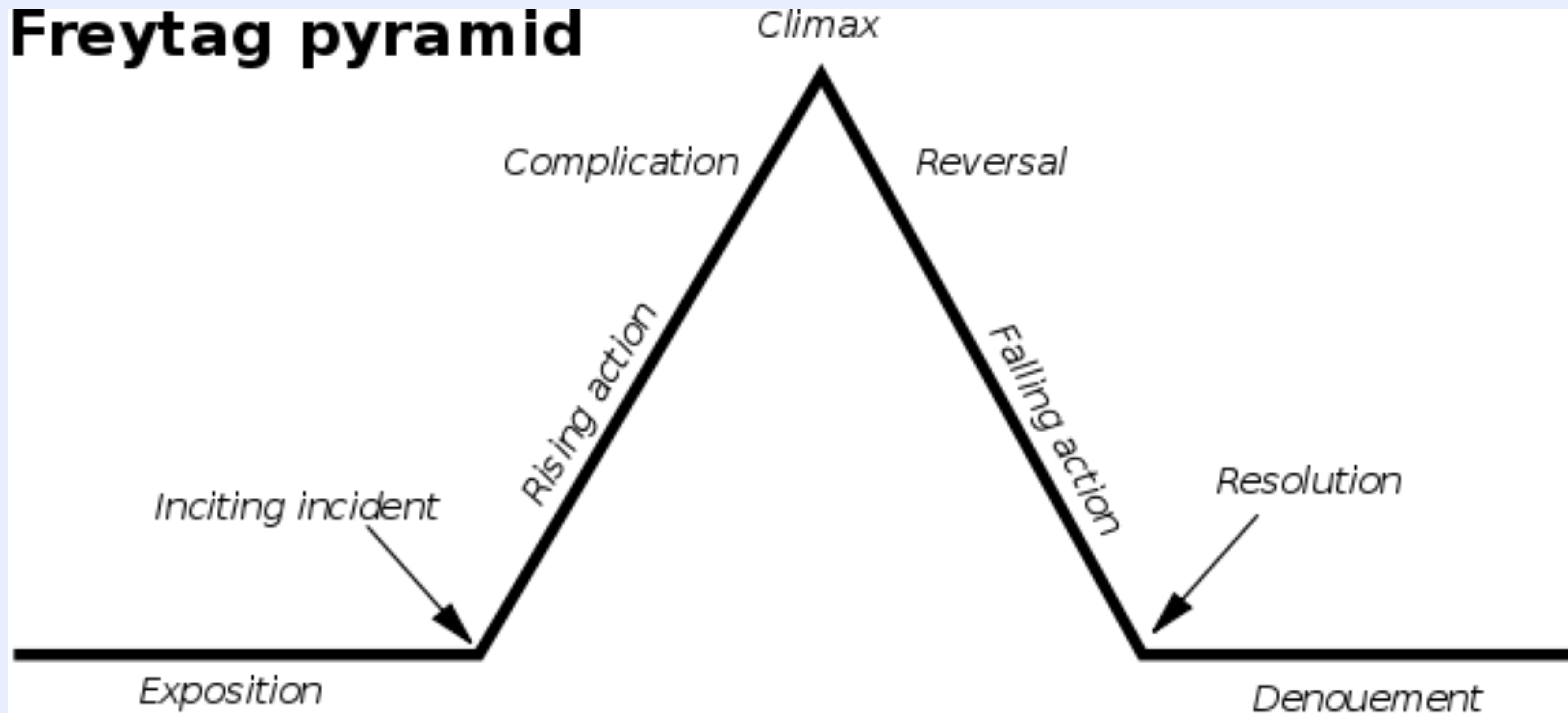
# Plot or Mythos

- The beginning should not follow from earlier events
- The end should tie up all loose ends and not produce further consequences
- Plot should consist of a hero going from happiness to misery
- Episodic plots without probability or necessity are the worst kind of plots

# Freytag's Pyramid

- Gustav Freytag was a Nineteenth Century German novelist who saw common patterns in the plots of stories and novels and developed a diagram to analyze them
- Exposition: setting the scene
- Inciting Incident: A single event that signals the beginning of the main conflict
- Rising Action or Tying the Knot (Desis)
- Climax: the moment of greatest tension in a story
- Falling Action or Untying the Knot (Lusis)
- Resolution of Conflict
- Dénouement (French) or the ending

# Freytag pyramid



# Classical Unities

- Plot should have Unity of Action (only those actions intimately connected with one another and appear as one whole; usually actions concerning one man). That is, a play should have one main action that it follows, with no or few subplots.
- Unity of Time mentioned casually, only once. (conformity between time taken by the actual events of the play and the time taken for their representation on stage—usually, a ‘single revolution of the sun’ as against epic action, which has no time limit). A play should represent an action that takes approximately the same amount of time as the play; years should not pass during the hours a play takes.
- Unity of Place an addition of Renaissance critics. (conformity between the scenes of the tragic events). A play should cover a single physical space and should not attempt to compress geography, nor should the stage represent more than one place.

# Later Critics

- Italian critics of the 16th century, from Lodovico Castelvetro onwards, and then 17th century French critics, proponents of the neoclassical movement, both expanded Aristotle's descriptions. The result was to make them into hard-and-fast rules for how any play must be structured. French drama of the 17th century, particularly that of Molière and Racine was highly regular; whereas the English dramatists writing for the Jacobean stage were largely unaware of these strictures.
- By the later 17th century, however, English dramatists (under the influence of French criticism picked up by those in exile during the English Interregnum) did begin to assess their own plays according to these rules. Thus, John Dryden, among many others, compares the "irregular" Shakespeare with the "regular" Ben Jonson in his *Essay of Dramatick Poesie* (1668).
- Alexander Pope criticizes the violation of the unities in his *Dunciad*.
- Even Samuel Johnson was not free of applying the unities to drama when judging it in his *Prefaces to Shakespeare*. However, Johnson was well aware that Aristotle had only recommended the unity of action, and knew that rules must serve drama, not vice versa

# Catharsis

- Tragic pleasure is achieved through Catharsis—arousal and purgation of the emotions of pity and fear.
- In Catharsis, emotions are aroused in two ways
  - (1) by spectacular means (e.g. physical torture, lamentation, etc.)
  - (2) inner structure of the plot (e.g. brother unknowingly killing brother and discovering later; intending good and doing evil, etc.)  
the second is superior.
- Two parts of plot:
  - Complication (tying the knot, everything from the beginning to the climax)
  - Denouement (untying the knot or the unravelling after the climax)

# Kinds of Plot

- Simple & Complex Plot
  - Simple Plot has no puzzling situations; no surprises.
  - Complex Plot—one with Peripeteia (reversal of fortune) and Anagnorisis (discovery or recognition)—is artistically satisfying
  - Aristotle considered anagnorisis, leading to peripeteia, the mark of a superior tragedy.
  - The **three** most important moments in a tragedy are the **reversal** of fortune, the **discovery** of the critical fact which hastens the denouement, and the **suffering** – the final submission of the hero.
  - Peripeteia and Anagnorisis can happen simultaneously
  - In Oedipus Rex, anagnorisis happens when the messenger comes and reveals to Oedipus his true birth. This is followed by peripeteia or reversal, when his true parentage is revealed.
  - In Othello, anagnorisis happens when Othello discovers that he was deceived by Iago. Following this, peripeteia happens.

# Tragic Hero

- Character of noble stature
- High position in society
- Not perfect—tragic flaw (Hamartia) or error in judgement
- Punishment exceeds crime
- With Fall, there is increase in awareness

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# Oedipus Rex as a Perfect Tragedy

- As a tragic hero
  - High social standing
  - The only one to solve the Sphinx's riddle
- Not perfect
  - Does not heed Tiresias's warning
  - Blind to truth
- Hamartia is ambiguous
  - Ignorance of who he really is
  - Coupled with determination, anger, pride

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# Oedipus Rex as a Perfect Tragedy

- Has dramatic irony
  - Element of good tragedy
  - Achieved by the element of fate
  - Hero is painfully ignorant of what is to come
- Anagnorisis leading to Peripeteia
  - Anagnorisis (Discovery)—The Messenger who announces the death of Polybus and Merope tells Oedipus that he is not their son
  - Peripeteia (Reversal)—Oedipus learns from the Herdsman that the man he killed is Laius from whom the Herdsman had also received Oedipus as a baby

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# Concluding Remarks on Tragedy

- Tragedy is Superior to Epic
  - Appeals to a more refined audience even when read (Theatrical performance is only an external aid)
  - Greater pleasure
  - It has limited length—greater unity, concentrated effect

# Plato & Aristotle - A Comparison

## Plato

- Social reformer
- Idealist
- Art for moral purpose
- Emphasis on Ultimate Reality
- Mimesis as Imitation

## Aristotle

- Scientist
- Realist
- Art for aesthetic purpose
- Emphasis on Empirical Reality
- Mimesis as Re-creation



# The School of Athens (1510-1511)

- The School of Athens (1510-1511) by Italian Renaissance painter Raphael adorns a room in the Vatican Palace. The artist depicts several philosophers of classical antiquity and portrays each with a distinctive gesture, conveying complex ideas in simple images. In the center of the composition, Plato and Aristotle dominate the scene. Plato points upward to the world of ideas, where he believes knowledge lies, whereas Aristotle holds his forearm parallel to the earth, stressing observation of the world around us as the source of understanding. In addition, Raphael draws comparisons with his illustrious contemporaries, giving Plato the face of the Renaissance genius Leonardo da Vinci, and Heraclitus, who rests his elbow on a large marble block, the face of the Renaissance sculptor Michelangelo. Euclid, bending down at the right, resembles the Renaissance architect Bramante. Raphael paints his own portrait on the young man in a black beret at the far right. In accordance with Renaissance ideas, artists belong to the ranks of the learned and the fine arts have the stature and merit of the written word.



# Horace (65-8 BC)



- Roman lyric poet during Augustus Caesar's reign
- Advocate of moderation & practical wisdom
- Considered by the classicists to be, along with Virgil, one of the greatest of Latin poets.
- Associated with phrases like “carpe diem” (seize the day), “dulce et decorum est pro patria mori” (It is sweet and appropriate to die for the fatherland).
  - Owen in the poem “Dulce Et Decorum Est” calls it “the old Lie.”
  - In medias res, follow the Greek, even Homer nods, purple patch

# Works

- “Variation” one of the principles of his work.
  - Tried his hand at several genres.
    - Odes, Satires, Epistles or Letters
  - Various subject positions
- Hexameter Horace
  - Satires, Epistles, Ars Poetica
- Lyric Horace
  - Epodes, Odes, Carmen Saeculare (The Secular Hymn; about Augustus Caesar’s Rome)
- Principles of his work: decorum, moderation, friendship & self-control

# Works

- Odes
  - Express in conversational style the pleasures of friendship and love
  - Autobiographical and ironically self-effacing
  - Reflect the mood of the Roman empire at a time of peace following a long period of civil wars
  - Known for his use of Greek metres in latin
- Satires
  - Mild and witty
  - Represent a break from the invective-laden attacks of his predecessors

# Roman Criticism

## [in the time of Augustus Caesar]

- Golden age of poetry and criticism
- Augustus and his courtiers patronized art.
- Height of Roman empire's wealth & political security.
- It was an age of peace, not war. So men turned to literature to achieve distinction.
- Upsurge of nationalism and revival of Greek classicism in Rome.
- Poetasters corrupting and degrading public taste. Increased critical activity against this.
- Horace accepts the Greeks as masters; but his rules appeal more to “common sense”

# Ars Poetica (Art of Poetry; Letter to Piso)

- Began a new tradition in literary criticism.
- Highly influential during Renaissance.
- 1st trans. Elizabeth I; then Ben Jonson.
- Modelled on Aristotelian theory.
- Horace speaks with vigour & directness as a person; establishes a personal relation with the reader.
- I. POESIS, or the treatment of the subject-matter of poetry.
- II. POEMA, or form.
- III. POETA, or the poet.

# I. POESIS (subject-matter of poetry)

- Poetry is not mere imitation; it is a **creative adaptation**.
- A poem must have an organic **unity**.
- “Purple patch”—a brilliant or ornate passage in a literary composition, usually in the midst of mediocrity
- **Imagination** should be exercised with discretion & **moderation**.
- **Language** of poetry is **higher** than the language of common use.
- **Discretion** in the use of words.
- A **genre** should stick to its metre.

## II. POEMA (form of poetry)

- Most elaborate section.
- Plot
  - Based on old familiar stories. Novelty may be imparted by skilful treatment.
  - Into the “middle of things” (in medias res) (Homer)
  - Comic themes should not be treated in the vein of tragedy or vice versa (decorum).
  - All the incidents of the plot should have a logical connection.

## II. POEMA (form of poetry)

- Decorum in Characterization
  - Characters true to life, consistent.
  - The quality of characters must fit their respective ages.
- The dramatist must know what to represent on the stage and what to report to the audience.
- Only 5 acts; 3 characters in a scene.
- Denouement natural outcome; Chorus essential
- Follow Greek (Read by day and meditate by night)

# III. POETA (the poet)

- Incessant toil.
- Keen observer of men and manners.
- Teach and delight (mix pleasure with profit)
  - Poetry should be “dulce et utile” (sweet and useful)
- Even good Homer nods. (faults may be forgiven)
- As is painting, so is poetry. (“Ut pictura poesis”; they have equal merit)
- Poetic inspiration / madness is absurd.
- Horace, with typical self-mockery, acknowledged that he was not the most original or most inspired of poets.

# Quintilian (AD 35- c. 95)



- Spaniard educated in Rome
- Best known for *Institutio Oratoria* (The Education of an Orator)
  - Treatise in 12 books on the art of oratory
- Guided by his own experience and reason (Voice of Nature)
- He is aware of the limitations of his theories
  - They are not eternally valid like the laws of nature
  - They do not cover the subtle graces that lie beyond the reach of art

# General Ideas

- Wrote about the art of speaking (applicable to writing as well)
  - For him there was no essential difference between speaking well and writing well
- Style is the product of both nature and art
- Art does not interfere with one's natural gift of expression, but helps it acquire full power
- Like Aristotle and Horace, he believed that everyday subjects need familiar words for convincing expression
- Language of daily life is NOT the language of the masses, but “the agreed practice of educated men”

# Theory of Style

- Style consists of words and their arrangement
  - Right choice of words necessary, for all words are not alike in sound and sense
  - Kinds of words
    - Words associated with some writer (have greater significance than their ordinary use)
    - Newly coined words (use sparingly when no current words serve the purpose)
    - Archaic words (when used with discretion, impart dignity to style)
    - Familiar words of daily use (graceful in the hands of a great artist)
- Arrangement of words should have Clarity, Ornamental Grace, Artistic Structure, & Rhythmical Ease

# Longinus (c. 1st century AD)



- First Romantic critic (Scott-James)
- Other critics have pointed out his classical features
- Influenced 18th century critics
- Paved the way for Romanticism
- On the Sublime (Peri Hypsous)
  - Inspired by Plato
  - First English translation by John Hall 1652
  - Sublime associated with religious awe, vastness, natural magnificence and strong emotion

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# From Pope's An Essay on Criticism

Thee, bold Longinus! All the Nine inspire,  
And bless their critic with a poet's fire.  
An ardent judge, who zealous in his trust,  
With warmth gives sentence, yet is always  
just;  
Whose own example strengthens all his  
laws,  
And is himself that great Sublime he  
draws.

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# Sublime

- Definition: a certain distinction and excellence in expression. Sublimity flashes forth at the right moment, scatters everything like a thunderbolt and at once displays the power of orator in all its plenitude
- “the first and most important source of sublimity is the power of forming great conceptions.”
- Leads to ecstasy

# Sources of Sublimity

- Innate Sources
  - **Grandeur of Thought:** This results from the faculty of conceiving great thoughts. Sublimity is the echo of a great soul.
  - **Passion:** vehement and inspired passion—Pathos
- Rhetorical Features
  - **Schemata:** the proper use of figures of speech and thought. The fact that it is a figure is concealed by splendour of style.
    - Appropriate figures
    - Asyndeton (conjunctions deliberately omitted: I came, I saw, I conquered)
    - Hyperbaton (disruption of normal word order (Some rise by sin, some by virtue fall—Measure for Measure)
    - Periphrasis, Hyperbole, Polyptota
  - **Phrasis:** noble language and diction. Language and diction must be appropriate to the grandeur of thought.
  - **Composition:** It is harmony in composition that gives definite shape to art.

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# Longinus on Vices of Style

- Turgidity (bombastic, theatrical notions and images)
- Puerility (words overelaborate to express inferior ideas)
- Parenthyrsos (overdone, artificial emotional tone)
- Frigidity (expressions unworthy of the thought)

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# Longinus's Examples of the Sublime

- Poetry
  - Homer, Aeschylus, Sappho
- Prose
  - Plato, Demosthenes, Herodotus

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# Effects of the Sublime

- Loss of rationality
  - “the Sublime leads the listeners not to persuasion, but to ecstasy”
- An alienation leading to identification with the creative process of the artist
- Writer arouses in his audience a deep emotion mixed with pleasure and exaltation
- The sublime determines the greatness of both the author and the reader
- Sublime effects were the desired end of baroque art & litt

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# Other ideas

- True sublime—experiences human limitedness in the face of the limitless
- False sublime displaces the limitless or God, with a constructed human infinite
- The poet has two aspects—genius and acquired art.
- The poem has two sides—sublimity and technique.
- Pleasure is the immediate end of art.

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# After Longinus

- Many later philosophers and aestheticians have deliberated on the Sublime.
- Eighteenth century philosophers like Edmund Burke and Immanuel Kant talked about the distinction between the Beautiful and the Sublime.
- Sublime also has relevance in Romanticism

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# Sublime, Beautiful, Picturesque

- Longinus, On the Sublime (AD 50)
  - Resulting from spirit--a spark from writer to reader--rather than technique
- Edmund Burke, Philosophical Inquiry into the Origins of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful (1757-1759)
- Immanuel Kant, Critique of Judgment (1790)
  - Beauty is finite; the sublime is infinite
  - Sublime is a displeasure arising from the inadequacy of imagination
  - Three kinds of Sublime: Awful, Lofty, Splendid

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# Burke on the Sublime

- Painful idea creates a sublime passion (sublimity of terror)
- Sublime concentrates the mind on a single facet of experience, producing a momentary suspension of rational activity
- Harsh, antisocial, “masculine” representations exist in the realm of obscurity and brute force

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# Contemporary Sublime

- Sublime related to experience of modern life through the incredible power of technology
- Extreme space-time compressions as a result of globalized communication technologies
- Everyday life seems destabilising and excessive
- Here, sublime blends into terror

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# Neo-Platonism

- Dominant in 3rd and 4th centuries
- Derived inspiration from Philo Judaeus (Hellenistic Jewish philosopher who lived in Alexandria)
- Developed systematically by Plotinus (204/5-270)
- Profound influence on Christian thought
- Takes from Plato the idea that ultimate reality lies in another world (a transcendent and spiritual realm) from which the physical world takes its meaning
- Plotinus' 54 treatises compiled under the title Enneads

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# Plotinus' Theory of Existence

- Various phases of existence emanate from Divinity (or an eternal spiritual and intellectual realm)
- Divinity is a triad
  - **The One** embodying Unity, Truth and Absolute Goodness)
  - **Eternal:** The Intellectual Realm (contains all particular intelligences, archetypes of all that exists in the lower sphere)
  - **There:** The All-Soul (comprises Intellective Soul, Reasoning Soul, Unreasoning Soul) which forms and orders the physical world
- **Here:** Below the three levels of Divinity is the World of Matter, Sense and Time

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# Plotinus' Theory of Art

- Plotinus talks about beauty in two treatises of Enneads
- He discusses “Intellectual Beauty”, throwing light on the nature and function of art, beauty, imitation and knowledge
- Challenges Plato's theory that art imitates nature/world of appearances and is thus twice removed from reality. He gives art a higher position in his system.
- Plotinus' theory maintains the objectivity of beauty alongside other transcendental properties of being.