



***Re-Imagining Imagination:
Revisiting Plato's Eikasia and
Aristotle's Phantasia***

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Abstract

Plato in the *Republic* and Aristotle in *De Anima* have touched upon imagination's role in thinking. And this, I maintain, has led to imagination's earning a suspicious auxiliary function in their philosophy and in classical thought at large. I argue that imagination assumes an ambiguous mediation between the appearances and *eidos* (Plato), between the senses and reason (Aristotle), and this ambiguity is constitutive of imagination's indispensable mediational function. I demonstrate further that notwithstanding the ambiguity obfuscating imagination, there is to be seen a strand of imagination operative in Plato and Aristotle which constitute their *modus operandi*—an imagination which plays a pivotal role in (their) philosophy. In piecing together and analysing Plato's and Aristotle's conceptions of imagination, I seek to prove that imagination works in concert with reason and assumes a vital role in Plato's and Aristotle's philosophy and thinking.

Keywords: Imagination, Eikastic, Phantasia, Mediation, Ambiguity, Metaphor.

Introduction

Readership of Plato's *Republic* will call to mind the divide he has drawn between the worlds of appearance and *eidōs* in Book Six and the ensuing discourse on the would-be-philosopher's gradual ascent to the truth in Book Seven. In these Books, Plato had sought to section off ἐπιστήμη (epistēmē) and δόξα (doxa) such that there is to be seen a particular region he assigns to imagination or *eikasia*, the lowest place in the divide. But when careful attention is directed to the would-be-philosopher's ascent to the truth, Plato's *Republic* suggests that a form of imagination, an *eikastic* imagination, is involved in the would-be-philosopher's activity of penetrating through the εἰκῶν (image) to the original.¹ A parallel emphasis in regard to imagination as having a pivotal role in thinking can also be gleaned from Aristotle's conception of *phantasia* (φαντασία) in *De Anima* whereby he bestows upon *phantasia* the role of an intermediary between sensation and reason such that reason must rely upon imagination for the materials necessary for its operations.² It can be argued, therefore, amidst this rapid sketch, that in Plato and Aristotle imagination (eikastic, phantastic) assumes an essential role in thinking. It is with a view to investigating this role of imagination in thinking that I devote myself to in this project.

I argue that Plato's and Aristotle's conceptions of imagination assume an ambiguous mediation between appearances and *eidōs* (Plato), and between senses and reason (Aristotle), and this ambiguity is constitutive of the indispensable mediational function of imagination. Imagination is neither one nor the other but is related to both appearances and *eidōs*, to both perception and thinking. I demonstrate further that notwithstanding the ambiguous status of imagination as a mediation, there is to be apprehended in Plato and Aristotle a role conferred upon imagination which renders it operative in the activity of philosophizing: in dialectical discourse, in metaphor, myths, and allegorical demonstrations. I further maintain that Plato, throughout his attempt to demonstrate ways in which the *eidōs* could be glimpsed will have been undertaking the labor of imagination such that imagination is constitutive of his *modus operandi*. This can be seen in Plato's emphasis on the necessity of a recourse to images as evinced in the *Republic* and *Phaedo*, and in his utilisation of myths, allegories, and metaphor in an effort to investigate things, rather than concentrating on things *directly*. Aristotle likewise has categorically marshalled a thesis in the *Poetics* that mimetic art possesses the capacity to spell out universal meanings inhering within human existence.³ But notwithstanding these promising accounts, imagination's supposed role in thinking has not been fully-developed owing in part to the

conception—or perhaps better, a *bias*—that imagination, when left to its own devices, will prove detrimental to philosophy in that it will contaminate truth.

There is not a single work from either of these thinkers which dealt with imagination at length, hence attempts at revisiting, let alone investigating how imagination figures in these thinkers' works confronts the task of pulling, piecing together, and analysing their conceptions of imagination which are made in passim across their philosophical *oeuvres*. For purposes of this investigation, I focus on the following: the *Republic* and *Phaedo*, and the *De Anima*, *De Memoria*, and *Poetics*. Plato's and Aristotle's other works will be utilised as background when deemed necessary.

In setting out to perform these tasks, I offer a modest contribution to the on-going debates on imagination, its role and place in Plato's and Aristotle's texts and philosophy, and in the classical western metaphysical tradition at large.

Mediational Imagination

How does imagination assume a mediational function in Plato's and Aristotle's philosophy? How does this mediational role of imagination lead to its ambiguous status as being availed of and jettisoned simultaneously? I wish to elaborate on two theses in response to these questions. First, when attention is directed to Plato's allegorical recounting of the would-be-philosopher's ascent to the truth, there is to be seen a role eikastic imagination assumes in the interplay between the image and the *original*. Eikastic imagination bridges between the *phenomenon* (i.e., what appears to view) and the original, such that imagination immensely aids the freed prisoner's journey towards the truth. Eikastic imagination, in other words, allows the would-be-philosopher to penetrate through the image to the original such that the original is recognised and made known through it. But Plato's ensuing discussion of the ascent to truth suggests that logos or dialectical discourse will come to usurp this role of imagination thereby rendering eikastic imagination operative only until logos has taken over. Hence, the ambiguity obfuscating Plato's eikastic imagination: of it being availed of on the one hand, and jettisoned, on the other. Second, as Aristotle informs us in *De Anima*, *phantasia* supplies the intellect with images, i.e., materials necessary for its operations such that devoid of *phantasia* the intellect could not function. But this in no way amounts to Aristotle's legitimation of imagination's role in philosophy since, as we shall soon see, he will

categorically insist that *phantasia* is an offshoot of perception and that it is for the most part deceptive and false. Thus, *phantasia*, as Aristotle suggests, must be rigorously distinguished, and separated from, the operations of the intellect—hence the ambiguity clouding Aristotle’s theory of imagination. Let us examine closely these two theses in what follows.

Eikastic Imagination: Irrelevant to Philosophical Discourse?

Early on in Book Six of the *Republic*, Plato spells out what may be called a foundational thesis, a guiding principle proper to, and should be espoused by, those who wish to seek the truth. He who pursues the truth, Plato maintains, must direct his attention to examining it by way of “*phainómenon*” (φαίνόμενον), but should be on guard against the temptation to “remain with any of the things that are believed to be” (Plato, 1997, p. 1113).⁴ However, more than it being a guiding principle, Plato’s injunction hints at a particular *modus operandi* operative in truth-seeking, a mode of proceeding which consists in an examination of “what appears to view.” As such, the phenomenon will have served as an element indispensable to navigating a path towards the *eidós*.

Plato’s demonstration of the ‘divide line’ towards the end of Books Six, and the demarcation he makes between the visible and the intelligible region defines the labor of eikastic imagination. The prisoner who unshackled from the manacles which confined him into the cave from birth commences his journey towards the truth by way of *seeing through* the shadows reflected in the walls of the prison cave. He has come to recognise that what he countenanced for a long time are mere appearances—reflections formed from out of the “puppet show” behind them which have been forged through the aid of fire. And as Plato’s ensuing discourse suggests, the “image-original schema” continues to govern the piecemeal advance of the would-be-philosopher towards the truth. It is for this reason, I maintain, that eikastic imagination will not have come to a complete halt with the freed prisoner’s gradual recognition of the puppet show, but is essentially at work even when, finally going out of the cave, he apprehends reflections of trees and other empirical objects into the pool of waters; or as Plato puts it: “at first, he’d see shadows most easily, then images of men and other things in water, then the things themselves” (1997, p. 1134; cf. 532c & *Phaedo* 99d-e). The image-original schema is, therefore, a multi-stage process with its piecemeal advance towards the transcendental *eidós*.

Furthermore, Plato forges a parallel thesis in 510d-e of the *Republic* when he speaks of the way in which students of geometry should utilise the visible figures of square with a view to examining the square in its essence. As Plato writes: “these figures...they now in turn use as images, in seeking to see those others themselves that one cannot see except by means of thought” (1997, p. 1131). Hence, the would-be-philosopher apprehends the figures or shadows as if they were shadows of the artifacts themselves, consequently “disclosing,” as Sallis puts it in *Delimitations*, “the artifact itself” (Sallis, 1995, p. 6; cf. Klein, 1965, p. 115). Thus, imagination, when understood in this context, assumes a positive role in Plato—a role which is certainly in contradistinction to Kearney’s thesis in *The Wake of Imagination* (1998) that Plato’s eikastic imagination is a passive and unreflective faculty which is strictly confined to the domain of images. Kearney implies that eikastic imagination has not played any dynamic or pivotal role in the cave-dweller’s gradual ascent to truth, but such reading, I maintain, is simplistic in that it fails to consider the fact that there is an image-original dynamic, a multi-layer process that can be gleaned from Plato’s cave-allegory within which the eikastic imagination is generously employed. It is this multi-layer process which creates conditions within which eikastic imagination could perform its essential role as a power of *seeing through* in the freed prisoner’s gradual apprehension of *eidōs*.

However, notwithstanding this positive valuation of imagination, Plato’s texts give the impression that the image-original schema works only until *logos* or dialectical discourse comes into the scene. And having reached a point where eikastic imagination will have ceased to operate, *logos* begins to take its role—a role which is analogous with examining an image rather than concentrating on things themselves. Here, Plato exercises caution to avoid the error committed by his predecessors in directly investigating things, hence the necessity of a recourse to discussions or dialectical discourse. As Plato informs us in *Phaedo* (99d-e): “I feared that my soul would be altogether blinded if I looked at things with my eyes and tried to grasp them each with my senses. So, I thought *I must take refuge in discussions and investigate the truth of things by means of words*” (Plato, 1997, p. 86, italics mine). The *logos* has thus come to usurp the role which was originally held by the eikastic imagination and consequently, eikastic imagination has been set aside. Plato speaks further of this usurping of the role of eikastic imagination by the *logos* when he examines the power of the dialectic—a power which guides the would-be-philosopher towards the truth, towards the “end of the journey,” where, as Plato puts it, one “would no longer be seeing an image...but the truth itself” (Plato, 1997, p. 1148). The “*dialectic*,” Plato

declares, “*is the only inquiry that travels this road, doing away with hypotheses and proceeding to the first principle itself, so as to be secure*” (1997, p. 1149, italics mine). And as Plato further maintains (in 510b): in the examination of truth, one proceeds from “hypothesis but without the images...using forms themselves and making its investigation through them” (1997, p. 1131). As such, the allegory has to be translated into conceptual terms, and ideally and ultimately, one has to dispense with such imagery.

Thus, from what has been adumbrated above, the supposed positive role of the eikastic imagination beyond the image-original schema has been supplanted indeed by, and relegated to, dialectical discourse, to *logos*—a supplantation that undermines the possibility for it to have been at work in, and in concert with, philosophical dialectical discourse. As such, the *logos*, to put it in Hegelian terms, *has sublated into itself the imagination*. Hence, insofar as his allegorical recounting of the would-be-philosopher’s gradual ascent to truth is concerned, Plato has simultaneously and undoubtedly availed of and downplayed eikastic imagination. This ambiguity characterising Plato’s theory of imagination is also evident in Aristotle’s treatment of *phantasia*.

***Phantasia*: Closer to Perception or Thought?**

In *De Anima* (*De. An.*), Aristotle maintains that *phantasia*, albeit different from perception and reason, is the intermediary between perception and reason such that without it, reason could not function. As Aristotle writes: “imagination is different from both perception and reasoning, and it does not come about without perception, and without this there is no conceiving” (Aristotle, 2016, p. 56). He further maintains in *De Memoria* (*De. Mem.*): “without an image thinking is impossible” (Aristotle, 1995, p. 1566).⁵ The intellect, therefore, establishes a connection with the empirical world through *phantasia*. But Aristotle is quick to note that while *phantasia* is vital to thought operations, it is not *sponte sua* self-sufficient in that it relies upon perception and memory for its functioning. Here, Aristotle avoids conflating *phantasia* with either perception or thought whilst remaining acutely aware of the fact that it must proceed from perception or impression. By way of impression, images are formed, recorded, and stored, so to speak, in memory—and from out of which *phantasia* will draw and supply these images to intellect, thereby allowing the latter to function.⁶ Memory, thus, serves a double function: (i) it forms images and (ii) serves as reservoir within which images are deposited and utilised *sponte sua* by *phantasia*. Hence, for

Aristotle thinking and contemplation will always be performed, and can only come about, in and through the aid of images deposited in memory and which are at the disposal of imagination. It is worth noting that Plato forwards a similar strand of imagination in *Philebus* 39a-c and in *Theaetetus* 193b when he hints at an imagination occurring after sense-perception. But Plato has not developed this form of imagination any further. In fact, there has never been any other hint as regards this strand of imagination across the Platonic dialogues.

Whilst Aristotle has rigorously distinguished *phantasia* from sensation and reason, he nonetheless contends that it is involved in deliberation. The capacity of the intellectual soul to distinguish between good and bad, right, and wrong, and the actions issuing from this distinguishing will have implicated imagination in thinking (cf. *De. An.* 431a15). For after all, it is, as Aristotle maintains in *De. An.*, the deliberative or rational imagination and not the ‘aisthētikē’ which converts sense-perception into phantasmata which is then supplied to reason. And this contention is augmented by Aristotle’s thesis in *De. Mem.* that it is the rational or deliberative imagination which combines our impressions such that impressions are configured in such a way that they become materials properly of, and for the intellect (cf. *De. An.* 427b17-20). As such, Aristotle stretches forth the power of *phantasia* beyond its mediational or transitional function to the activity of thinking or reason. Hence, whilst *phantasia* and how it operates in human cognition is tainted by its close association with perception or sensation, Aristotle, no doubt, hints at a promising rapport between imagination and thinking. But as Kearney reminds us in *The Wake of Imagination* (1998), one must not conflate this with Kant’s conception of the productive function of transcendental *Einbildungskraft* which figured in the first edition of the *Critique of Pure Reason* (2007). For, as Kearney observes, it is not until Immanuel Kant and the burgeoning of German idealism that imagination is considered an “agency” properly so-called and recognised as having the capacity to create and reinvent meaning *sponte sua*. Hence, imagination conceived as an agency similar to, but distinguished from, perception and thinking is, as Kearney informs us further, a “modern event.”

What becomes clear amidst this rapid sketch is that the indispensable mediational role of *phantasia* augments our capacity to distinguish between good and bad, right and wrong, and allows us to figure out and design courses of possible action which will be deemed proper to any circumstance we might be in. As such, *phantasia* influences human actions insofar as actions issue from, or are influenced in some shape or form by deliberation and thinking. In

this manner, *phantasia*, albeit not in itself the agency which determines and judges between right and wrong, stretches forth its power and influence to thinking, and consequently, to the moral, existential, and social dimensions of human existence. And it is in this case, I maintain, that Aristotle's imagination has the power to *project* the future—a power which he, albeit in a different context, speaks of in the *Rhetoric* when he contends that “fear,” characterised as an experience of pain, springs forth from one's experience of *beholding an image of pain yet to occur*. Or, as Aristotle puts it in *De. An.*, “whenever we come to believe something terrible or frightful, we are correspondingly affected right away, and similarly with something audacious. But in the case of imagination, we are just as if we had seen the terrible or audacious things in a picture” (Aristotle, 2016, p. 56; cf. *De. An.* 433a-434). Put differently, imagination, determines how we dispose ourselves in the face of an experience of fear. Hence, imagination projects the future by way of reference to images which are stored in memory such that “sometimes, on the basis of images or thoughts in the soul, just as if seeing them, one calculates and plans future things with reference to things which are present” (2016, p. 64). I venture to suggest that even concepts and language, insofar as they proceed from, and are concrete manifestations of thought, will have, in one way or another, presupposed and depended on the operations of *phantasia*. Hence, there will have been a role for *phantasia* in thought, concepts, and language—i.e., in configuration and reconfiguration of language we find not only in philosophical texts but also in other genres of discourse, and whatnot—other than it being a vital conduit and bridge between perception and thinking—a role which transcends its properly and strictly *psychological* function.⁷ From what has been adumbrated thus far, Aristotle has, without a shadow of a doubt, availed of imagination. In what follows, we examine what I argue constitutes his downplaying of *phantasia*.

I propose two entry points to determining Aristotle's downplaying of imagination. The first can be discerned in the structure of *phantasia* itself, that is, its strategic placement between perception and thinking, and the second centers on Aristotle's thesis in *De. An.*, that whereas knowledge or intelligence is free from error, *phantasia* might be false. I must note that there is a thin line demarcating these two points such that the first is better understood when approached in parallel with the second—hence, I shall deal with them simultaneously in what follows. As emphasised above, *phantasia* is neither perception nor thinking, but must proceed from perception in that devoid of perception *phantasia* could not function; and likewise, thinking could not operate without *phantasia*. Hence, *phantasia* is neither one nor the other, but is related to both perception and thinking. But *phantasia*, Aristotle

maintains, is an offshoot of perception, a species of sensation, if you like, a weak strand of sensation, or, as he writes in the *Rhetoric*: “*imagination is a feeble sort of sensation*, and there will always be in the mind of a man who remembers or expects something an image or picture of what he remembers or expects” (Aristotle, 1995, pp. 1362-1363, italics mine).

A further downplaying of *phantasia* is also evident in *De. An.* There exists, says Aristotle, a close affinity between sensation and imagination such that “even when the objects of sense have gone away, perceptions and imaginings remain in the sensory organs” (Aristotle, 2016, p. 52). This thesis entails the implication that it is within the province of sense organs that the materials of, and for perception and imagination are stored and preserved, and therefore suggesting a close relation between sensation and imagination. Imagination works closely with the senses in that it is only through impressions formed out of perception that it can operate, or perhaps, better put: it is fundamentally of imagination’s nature that it works with images forged from our impressions. For this reason, imagination “remains alio-relative,” as Kearney maintains in *The Wake of Imagination*, “for it owes both its mode of *existence* (at a metaphysical level) and of *truth* (at an epistemological level) to either sensation or reason or both” (Kearney, 1998, p. 112). But Aristotle is quick to note that notwithstanding such role accorded to perception and imagination, they both belong to the faculty of reason, that is, they are subsumed under the power and authority of reason. In being categorised as such, imagination only assumes an auxiliary role to reason or thinking—hence the ambiguity inhering within Aristotle’s conception of imagination: of it being involved in thinking, on the one hand, and being strongly linked to perception and thus subordinated to thinking, on the other.⁸ Having demonstrated thus far, albeit in cursory manner, what I argued to be constitutive of Plato’s and Aristotle’s ambiguous treatment of imagination, I seek to prove, in what remains of the space this paper, that notwithstanding the ambiguity beclouding imagination, there is a particular strand of imagination operative in Plato and Aristotle which lies near, if not at the core of their *modus operandi*.

Imagining other than Penetrating

Plato’s exposing of the divided line brought to bear the existence of a species of imagination operative in his philosophy. His employment of the ‘metaphor of the sun’ with a view to representing and demonstrating the world of truth—the celestial heights within which the *eidōs* resides—is a

potent point. Motivated by Glaucon's insistence, Plato sustains a discussion on the divided line by opening up Book Seven with the "cave-allegory"—another *imaginative* device. Plato summons the power of human imagination thusly: "next, I said, compare the effect of education and of the lack of it on our nature to an experience like this: Imagine human beings living in an underground, cavelike dwelling, with an entrance a long way up, which is both open to the light and as wide as the cave itself" (Plato: 1997, p. 1132).⁹ But more than Plato's mentioning or summoning of imagination into discourse, I contend that by opening Book Seven in an imaginative manner, Plato sustains the dialectical discourse on education through the creative force of imagination.¹⁰

One may also observe a similar move in the early passages of the *Republic*. In Book Two, for instance, Plato brings to bear into discourse on "justice" the myth of the "ring of Gyges." Here, myth is deployed with view to penetrating through the core of the subject-matter in question inasmuch as, by way of analogy, the eikastic imagination is utilised in seeing the original in an image. Needless to say, justice is hardly a trivial matter for philosophical discourse, and Plato's recourse to myth with a view to expositing justice accounts, I maintain, for the contention that imagination assumes a pivotal role in philosophical discourse. Hence, it can be deduced that Plato, on important occasions, avails of the creative force of imagination not as a detour but as an element integral to the constitution of philosophical discourse itself. This thesis is hardly alien to Platonic scholarship. Thomas Gould, for instance, reverberates a parallel point in an article titled "Plato's Hostility to Art" (1964). Plato in his philosophising, Gould argues, utilises imagination to an enormous extent such that "it is certainly very difficult to read Plato's own brilliant, dramatic dialogues and his haunting myths without being struck by the thought that he is essentially an ally of lovers of art and imagination" (Gould, 1964, p. 71).¹¹ Indeed, the superabundance of myths, analogies, and metaphors woven into Plato's dialogues magnanimously testifies to his availing of imagination. And while in Book Ten Plato launches a critique of phantastic imagination: that works of imitation are a third removed from the truth; it is evident that throughout the course of the same critique, he has, known or unbeknownst to him, resorted to analogical demonstration thusly: "just like men who have once fallen in love with someone, and don't believe the love is beneficial, keep away from it even if they have to do violence to themselves; so [,] we too—due to inborn love of such poetry we owe to our rearing in these fine regimes—we'll be glad if it turns out that it is best and truest" (Plato, 2016, p. 291).¹² Here, Plato speaks of a *possibility*, an exception, if you like, for the produce of imagination such that of the works of Homer to

be granted entrance to the city; and the admission has just been compared, if not equated with, human loving.

Furthermore, Plato speaks of virtues and the ways in which human beings can live virtuous lives. And he does so yet again in analogical or metaphorical fashion by demonstrating that just like the human body with its constitution which has a particular good or bad proper to each of its parts, so does the soul, which is responsible for the acquisition or development of virtues, must contend with the corresponding good or bad proper to it. As Plato writes: “just as the badness of the body, which is disease, melts and destroys a body, and brings it to the point where it is not even a body, similarly all the things of which we were just speaking are corrupted by their own specific vice” (2016, pp. 292-293). Furthermore, when attention is directed to passages immediately following, one will detect that Plato will again summon the power of imagination in the form of myth to speculate what lies in wait for those who live just or unjust lives; and the entire discourse on virtue which consumes the final pages of the *Republic* is devoted to a mythical demonstration of life hereafter and the supposed repercussions of living a just or unjust life in the *here* and *now*.

Furthermore, imaginative formulations are not only in evidence in the *Republic*. In *Phaedrus* (1997, cf. 426a, ff), Plato speaks of the human “*psychê*” as a relationship between a charioteer and the team of winged horses. The soul’s taking on of empirical shape spring forth from the tension between these two horses—the one being noble (in character), and the other, the ignoble; and immortal soul assumes concrete form due to the ignoble horse’s prevailing over the noble one. This imaginative demonstration is also evinced in 945c of the *Laws* (1997)¹³ when Plato likens the “Polis” to a “ship” with its many parts whereby successful navigation of which depends on harmonious coordination of its parts—of each component performing their distinct *ergon* (function) while in concert with each other in the light of the ship’s *telos* (end/purpose). Yet again, Plato has indeed generously availed of imagination contrary to the conception that he has, for the most part, been suspicious of its workings. And I venture to surmise that Plato must have succumbed to the power of the self-same imagination he so insistently and rigorously criticised. In so doing, he has proven yet again that imagination, when purged with its deceptive or *chimeral* elements, will prove immensely germane to philosophical discourse, and consequently, to philosophy. Writes Plato: “*you must know that only so much of poetry as is hymns to gods or celebration of good men should be admitted into the city*” (Plato, 2016, p. 290, italics mine). In this light, a question can be posed: why would Plato not

straight off speak of virtues and their nature instead of employing analogical or metaphorical devices as a sort of detour? Imagination is woven into the fabric of Platonic texts and philosophy and the superabundance of these metaphorical formulations permeating his dialogues testifies to the thesis that imagination assumes such a positive and pivotal role in his philosophising and thinking.

Having articulated, albeit in a cursory manner, an imagination operative in Plato's texts and philosophising, I venture to prove, in what follows, that such role accorded to imagination is also in evidence in Aristotle's conception of poetry, rhythm, and metaphor—the so-called “imitation of actions,” as Aristotle will put it in 1450a15 of the *Poetics*.

Imagining other than Phantasy

Recognising Aristotle's articulation of the fertile rapport between imagination and thinking consists in analysing his assertion that imagination forms and apprehends universals. In the *Poetics*, Aristotle maintains the primacy or superiority of imagination over history thusly: for “the one,” (i.e., history) Aristotle argues, “describes the thing that has been, and the other a kind of thing that might be” (Aristotle, 2001, p. 1463). Imagination, therefore, in the shape of poetry, opens up to the realm of possibilities—and precisely because it functions as such, that it resists being restricted to facts. Thus, Aristotle categorically concludes: “poetry is something more philosophic and of graver import than history, since its statements are of the nature rather universals, whereas those of history are singulars” (2001, p. 1464). Put differently, for Aristotle, poetry is superior to history insofar as it speaks of universal truths about human existence, while history is merely composed of empirical accidents confined to the realm of facts.

Furthermore, Aristotle continues to speak of imagination's capacity to flesh out the universal inhering in human experience within the context of yet another form of imitation he calls “rhythm.” Writes Aristotle (in 1447a25): “rhythm alone, without harmony, is the means in the dancer's imitations; for even he, by the rhythms of his attitudes, may represent men's characters, as well as what they do and suffer” (2001, p. 1455). And in more pronounced terms, Aristotle reasserts the primacy of imaginative configuration in the form of metaphor over and above other linguistic formulations thusly: “but the greatest thing by far is to be a master of metaphor. It is one thing that cannot be learnt from others; and it is also a sign of genius, since a good metaphor

implies an intuitive perception of similarity in dissimilars” (2001, p. 1479, cf. 1457b6-7).

Recognising the differences inhering in things implies seeing the common in them—the “universal,” so to speak, which binds these apparently different objects together—and which transcends the specificities constituting the objects’ individuality. This contention, I conjecture, is related to what Aristotle puts forward in the *Rhetoric* when he likens the capacity to apprehend and forge the meaning of metaphors to the activity of philosophising. As Aristotle has it (in 1412a9-12): “Metaphors must be drawn, as has been said already, from things that are related to the original thing, and yet not obviously so related—just as in philosophy also an acute mind will perceive resemblance even in things far apart” (1995, p. 4825). Metaphor translates into and conveys truths about human existence through a linguistic format or structure which implies other than what a statement, be it in spoken or written form, will have literally meant. Furthermore, forged through creative-imaginative construction, metaphor consists in not only conveying meaning other than its linguistic or syntactical structure’s sense but also in assuming, as Aristotle maintains in 108b of *Topica* (2001), a central role in inductive argumentation and hypothetical reasoning—the, for lack of a better term, two critical faculties or concrete activities of philosophising. It is in this manner, I conjecture, that imagination, inasmuch as its metaphorical shape or function is concerned, will have assumed a quintessential role in philosophy. The capacity of imagination in poetry, tragedy, rhythm, and metaphor to elevate into a transcendental or universal plane the truth discernible across the plurality of human experience bears witness not only to the thesis that imagination takes on a pivotal role in philosophy but also to the conception that imagination envisages possibilities, i.e., that imagination *projects* the future. And this holds true notwithstanding the fact whether throughout the course of writing, the poet (or the writer) directly draws inspiration from factual historical accounts at his disposal or that his compositions hugely issue from fictional or imaginative configurations.

But even when poetry and other imaginative creations spring forth from (purely) creative imagining, they will still, in one way or another, draw from and utilise bits and pieces of facts present in human experience. To some degree, in other words, in imaginative creation, the writer must draw his resources from factual events which are either directly or indirectly experienced by him or by others—with the definite inclusion of those which are put into writing, i.e., the vast corpus of literature which has been preserved in some shape or form. And the reconfigurations ensuing from this

activity of drawing from will have involved, more than supplying the intellect with images, the constitution or (re)-formulation of the products of creative imagination. As such, factual events serve as reservoir, a depository from which the writing activity draws its sustenance. Thus, fictional, or imaginative creations are ‘inspired’, so to speak, by factual events no matter how remote these imaginative creations may be to the actual facts. This is yet another statement to the effect that from specifics constituting any historical accounts—accounts which are in themselves pregnant with truths and meaning about human existence—that imagination gives birth to universal truths by making these truths explicit in creative-imaginative fashion. Imaginative creations, therefore, establish a promising rapport between imagination and thinking, between imagination and philosophising—a rapport which is evident in Aristotle’s texts, and which could have been further enhanced.

Towards a *Re-Imagination* of Imagination

In what may be called a *certain path* that we have navigated through with a view to demonstrating that imagination assumes a vital role in Plato’s and Aristotle’s philosophy and thinking, we have apprehended a *positive role* accorded to imagination—a role which could have been made explicit and further enhanced. For no matter how Plato hurls his harshest critique of the imagination, it is evident that he has availed of it on two fundamental counts, namely, (i) in seeing the original in an image, and (ii) in setting out to demonstrate his arguments on important philosophical issues—as is made manifest in the discourse on justice. Aristotle appears to have toed the line regarding the dominant treatment of imagination in classical thought by distinguishing imagination from other mental faculties and by bestowing upon it a mediational but an indispensable auxiliary role. The power of *phantasia* to allow the intellect to function and to elevate into a universal plane certain truth present across the variety of human experience testify to the thesis that imagination takes on a significant role in philosophy. Without a shadow of a doubt, in Aristotle, there is an increasing and explicit recognition of imagination’s role in philosophy relative to Plato. As such, our ensuing analysis and demonstration have shown that, for all their differences, there is indeed a fertile rapport between imagination and thinking, between imagination and philosophy which has figured in Plato’s and Aristotle’s texts—a rapport which when pursued and enhanced, will lead to a renewed appreciation and legitimation of imagination’s role in philosophy and thinking.

It is, therefore, in revisiting the relationship between imagination and thinking evident in the texts of these two principal thinkers of the antiquity that a specific *reimagining* of imagination can come about, a reimagining which will create a possibility for a recognition of a legitimate strand of imagination, and consequently, a legitimation of an imagination operative in philosophy and thinking. And as the preceding analyses have shown, imagination, be it *eikasia* or *phantasia*, works in concert with reason and assumes a powerful role in setting the stage for the activity of philosophising. Thus, the task that I have sought to execute here will, I hope, provide a form of preamble to the ambiguous relationship between imagination and reason that has figured in Plato's and Aristotle's texts and philosophy, and in classical thought, and which, to broader extent, has come to dominate the western metaphysical tradition until the advent of German Idealism and Immanuel Kant's controversial positing of the powers of the empirical and the transcendental *Einbildungskraft*.

Notes

¹ Cf. Sallis (1995), particularly chapter one. See also A. Kind (2016) and E.T.H. Brann (1991) for detailed presentation of the concept of imagination in the western philosophical tradition.

² Henceforth, I shall interchangeably use the terms "phantasia" and "imagination" in my analysis of Aristotle's conception of imagination.

³ Two important points require further clarification. I must point out that Plato has two conceptions of imagination, namely, eikastic and phantastic imagination. Phantastic imagination is confined to the domain of works of imitations or works in which an artist, as in the case of a painter, a poet, or an artisan, *imitate* the original, thereby producing, as it were, a copy of a copy. I maintain that Plato in the *Republic* did not launch a critique on the eikastic but the phantastic imagination. But he nonetheless avails, albeit with a degree of censorship and caution, of the same phantastic imagination he so rigorously criticised. Furthermore, I wish to clarify that while for Aristotle, animals other than humans do have *phantasia*, my investigation will not touch upon or elaborate on this so-called 'animal phantasia' or 'aisthētikē'. In my analysis of Aristotle's imagination, I confine myself only to *phantasia* operative in human cognition, or what Aristotle, in *De. An.* 434a5-7, calls 'bouleutikē' and 'logistikē' respectively.

⁴ All succeeding references which will be made to the English translation of the *Republic* are from Grube, unless otherwise indicated.

⁵ Cf. *De. An.* 431b, 432a5-10, and 433b11-12. While there is truth to Aristotle's thesis that images aid our thinking, this view and any other parallel views have been debunked by Daniel Dennett in "Our Experience of the Internal World" in *Consciousness Explained* (1991, pp. 55-65).

⁶ In *De. Mem* 450a2—25, Aristotle states that it is the memory and not *phantasia* that forms images which are supplied to reason. The view that images and ideas are formed out of impressions would come to receive a more pronounced treatment in David Hume and in the so-called classical image-theory, or the "*Bildertheorie*" as Edmund Husserl will have it in *Logische Untersuchungen* II/II. It is, however, worth noting that Aristotle has forged a thesis that will form part of the key elements constituting Hume's empiricism.

⁷ This is a point that will receive much attention at a much later time, particularly from Paul Ricoeur. As a matter of fact, Ricoeur will make several allusions to Aristotle. See, for instance, Ricoeur's *Rule of Metaphor* (2003), *From Text to Action* (1991), *Lectures on Ideology and Utopia* (1986), and an as yet unpublished *Lectures on Imagination* he delivered at the University of Chicago in 1975. (I thank Prof. George H. Taylor for allowing me to access the yet unpublished version of Ricoeur's 1975 *Lectures on Imagination*).

⁸ This relationship between imagination and reason dominated the western metaphysical tradition until Immanuel Kant's controversial positing of the powers of the empirical and the transcendental *Einbildungskraft* (imagination) in the first edition of the *Critique of Pure Reason*. In so doing, Kant overturns, though not without controversy, the entire classical metaphysical tradition by putting forward a thesis that imagination synthesizes the contents of sensory experience and the categories of understanding and thereby claiming that it is the imagination which allows for the possibility of experience, cognition, and understanding. Kant, in so doing, places imagination over and above reason. It must also be noted that Kant, in the *Critique of the Power of Judgement*, stretches imagination's power beyond its synthesizing function by arguing that imagination takes on a role in interpretation. For an astute reading of this added powers of imagination, see Rudolf A. Makkreel (1990).

⁹ As is certainly known to the readers of the *Republic*, the succeeding

passages, particularly 514c and following, are loaded with parallel formulations

¹⁰ As regards education proper to Nomophylakes, Plato will provide a detailed articulation in the *Laws*.

¹¹ It must be pointed out, however, that here Gould refers to Plato's conception of the phantastic imagination—the imagination which has received Plato's harshest critique in the *Republic*.

¹² The shift of reference made here from Grube to Bloom is due to my assessment that Bloom's rendering of this passage of the *Republic* has made clearer Plato's analogical demonstration of the exception which may be granted to poetry and imagination into the *Polis* than Grube's. Thus, succeeding references will be based on Bloom's translation, unless otherwise indicated.

¹³ Other metaphorical demonstrations have also been made in the 198c and 215a-b of the *Symposium*, *Gorgias* 447a, *Meno* 80a, and *Theaetetus* 180a.

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