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ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE (AI), SOCIAL MEDIA, AND PLATO'S THEORY OF ART

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Abstract

The convergence of artificial intelligence (AI), social media, and Plato's Theory of Art invites a profound re-examination of creativity, beauty, and truth in a tech-mediated world. Plato's conception of art as mimesis (an imitation of ideal Forms) provides a timeless philosophical framework for evaluating how digital tech redefines artistic production and aesthetic experience. The central problem arises from the erosion of traditional notions of authorship, originality, and meaning. As AI systems generate artworks that rival human creativity and social media transforms art into algorithmic performance measured by visibility and engagement, the intrinsic relationship between the artist, truth, and beauty becomes destabilized. This study seeks to interrogate how AI-driven creation and digital mediation reinforce or subvert Platonic ideals. Adopting a qualitative and historical-critical method, it engages classical philosophical texts alongside contemporary instances of AI-generated art and social media expression to uncover their ontological and epistemic implications. Findings indicate that while AI amplifies the scope of creative production, it simultaneously distances artistic creation from the human source of intention and insight. Social media, though democratizing artistic visibility, often substitutes contemplative appreciation with performative consumption. Together, they embody Plato's apprehension that imitation may distance humanity from reality, even as they reveal new dimensions of participatory creativity and aesthetic evolution. The paper concludes that Plato's reflections remain intellectually potent in navigating the ethical and aesthetic tensions of digital artistry. AI and social media, though disruptive, extend the Platonic discourse on mimesis into the age of intelligent machines. It recommends renewed and sustained philosophical engagement among artists, educators, and

technologists to ensure that technological innovation enriches, rather than eclipses, the human imagination.'

Keywords: Art, Artificial Intelligence, Philosophy, Social Media, Technology

Introduction

The twenty-first century has witnessed a remarkable transformation in the creation and perception of art. The convergence of artificial intelligence (AI) and social media has redefined the boundaries of creativity, authorship, and beauty. What was once regarded as the exclusive domain of human imagination has now become a shared space between human thought and machine learning. AI, originally a tool of computation, has evolved into a creative agent capable of producing paintings, poems, and music with technical precision and stylistic depth. Simultaneously, social media has revolutionized the circulation and appreciation of art. It allows anyone with a digital device to create, exhibit, and evaluate artistic expressions. This democratization of art, though seemingly liberating, has also blurred the distinction between originality and imitation, authenticity and simulation, contemplation and consumption.

Consequently, the background of this inquiry lies in the philosophical tension between technology and creativity. For centuries, art has been understood not merely as craft but as a reflection of the human soul. It has been a medium through which truth, beauty, and moral insight find expression. In the digital era, however, algorithms increasingly replace inspiration, and popularity metrics often substitute for critical judgment. The artistic process has become intertwined with the logic of automation and visibility. What captures attention online frequently owes more to algorithmic manipulation than to aesthetic or moral value. This shift demands a renewed philosophical investigation into whether art can remain a vehicle of truth and virtue when mediated through non-conscious systems and algorithmic structures.

Hence, the problem of this study subsists in the crisis of meaning in the age of intelligent machines and digital performance. If AI can create without feeling and social media can distribute without reflection, what remains of the human dimension of art? The concern is not simply that technology replicates creativity, but that it may redefine it entirely. Hence, it may transform art from a search for truth into an exercise in imitation and entertainment. These questions revive the ancient debate articulated by Plato, who regarded art as mimesis, an imitation twice removed from truth. In his view, art could either elevate the mind toward the Good or entrap it within illusion. The digital age poses this dilemma in a new form: does the art of algorithms and digital influence uplift the spirit, or does it multiply appearances while eroding depth and authenticity?

Against this backdrop, the principal objective of this study is to evaluate how AI and social media confirm, contradict, or reinterpret Plato's philosophy of art. Specifically, it seeks to determine whether AI-generated works and digital performances sustain the moral and aesthetic ideals that Plato envisioned, or whether they mark a departure from the contemplative essence of beauty. Methodologically, the study adopts a qualitative, historical-critical approach. It engages classical philosophical texts, reexamines their central ideas in light of modern technological developments, and interprets contemporary examples of AI-generated art and social media aesthetics. The approach is interpretive rather than empirical and emphasizes conceptual analysis and philosophical evaluation over quantitative measurement.

The findings of the discourse suggest a complex interplay between creativity and imitation. AI undoubtedly extends the technical limits of artistic production, but it simultaneously detaches art from human consciousness and emotional depth. Social media, while expanding artistic access, often replaces authenticity with performance and converts aesthetic appreciation into a cycle of attention-seeking. Yet, paradoxically, both AI and social media reveal art's enduring resilience: they demonstrate that even imitation, when guided by reflection, can awaken wonder, provoke thought, and invite dialogue about what it means to create.

This study contributes to knowledge by bridging classical philosophy with contemporary technological aesthetics. It demonstrates that Plato's insights remain profoundly relevant in interpreting the ethical and epistemological implications of digital creativity. His conception of art as both a mirror and a moral force offers a metric for examining whether technological art enriches or diminishes the human spirit.

In the final analysis, the paper established that the encounter between AI, social media, and artistic expression represents both a challenge and an opportunity. It challenges traditional understandings of creativity, yet it also invites a broader reflection on the human capacity to find meaning in new forms. The study recommends that artists, educators, and technologists cultivate a reflective relationship with technology. Art in the digital age should not surrender its moral and spiritual dimension to the dictates of speed and spectacle. Instead, technology should be harnessed to extend human imagination, not to replace it. Only through conscious integration of philosophy and innovation can art in the age of artificial intelligence continue to serve its highest purpose. This is the pursuit of truth, beauty, and the elevation of the human soul.

Methodology

This study adopts a historical-critical and qualitative approach to explore the relationship between AI, social media, and Plato's theory of art. Plato's aesthetic theory in the *Republic*, *Ion*, and *Phaedrus* is examined in its classical context and then applied to contemporary realities of AI and social media. The historico-critical method allows for a contextual examination of Plato's aesthetic philosophy as articulated in his dialogues, particularly *The Republic*, *Ion*, and *Phaedrus*, in order to situate his concept of mimesis within both its classical origins and its modern reinterpretations. This method critically traces continuities and ruptures between ancient philosophical ideals and contemporary digital realities through analysis of the transformation of artistic creation and dissemination in the age of AI and social media. Data were drawn from primary texts and secondary analyses by scholars including Gunkel (2022), Boden (2010), Floridi (2013), and Zuboff (2019). Concepts such as imitation, authorship, beauty, and truth were thematically analyzed to assess whether modern technologies reinforce or challenge Platonic ideals. The aim is philosophical illumination, not empirical measurement: to bridge ancient metaphysics with the digital condition of art.

The qualitative approach emphasizes interpretive analysis rather than quantitative measurement. Through textual interpretation, conceptual analysis, and theoretical synthesis, the study interrogates how modern technologies replicate, challenge, or extend Plato's notion of art as imitation. Secondary data were obtained from philosophical texts, journal articles, and contemporary debates in aesthetics, digital humanities, and AI studies. The study further integrates insights from scholars such as Gunkel (2022), Boden (2010), Floridi (2013), and Zuboff (2019), whose works provide critical frameworks for understanding creativity, agency, and ethical implications in the digital era. The methodology prioritizes critical reflection and philosophical reasoning rather than empirical testing. It explores how the Platonic understanding of truth, beauty, and imitation can illuminate present-day concerns regarding algorithmic art, authorship, and the commodification of creativity.

This interpretive design enables a rigorous philosophical engagement that bridges classical metaphysical thought with twenty-first-century technological phenomena.

Data Analysis

The analysis of data in this paper is conceptual and thematic and focuses on the interpretive synthesis of textual and theoretical materials. Data were drawn from three main sources:

- i. Primary philosophical texts, including Plato's *Republic* and *Phaedrus*;
- ii. Contemporary philosophical and technological literature, such as works by Floridi, Gunkel, and Han; and
- iii. Empirical studies on AI and social media, which illustrate how algorithms shape artistic creation and cultural participation.

Using thematic categorization, the study identified recurring patterns and philosophical tensions around three central questions:

- a. How does artificial intelligence redefine creativity and authorship?
- b. In what ways do social media platforms reshape the production and reception of art?
- c. To what extent do these technologies affirm or undermine Plato's concept of art as imitation (mimesis)?

The analytical process involved a critical comparison between Plato's philosophical principles and contemporary digital practices. Data were coded thematically under concepts such as imitation, authorship, truth, beauty, and moral purpose. Each theme was examined to determine its alignment or contradiction with Platonic ideals.

The findings from this qualitative analysis reveal that AI-generated and social media-mediated art often reinforce Plato's skepticism toward imitation and emotional manipulation, while simultaneously opening new pathways for reflection and participation. The analysis, therefore, provides both a critique and an evaluation of Plato's aesthetic philosophy in light of technological innovation. It affirms the continued relevance of his thought in understanding art's moral and epistemological function in the digital age.

Plato's Theory of Art: An Overview

Plato's reflections on art are inseparable from his broader philosophical commitments to metaphysics, epistemology, and ethics. At the heart of his aesthetic theory is the concept of mimesis, often translated as imitation or representation. In *The Republic*, Plato outlines a three-tiered model of reality: the highest level consists of the eternal and unchanging Forms, the second consists of the physical world, which imperfectly participates in the Forms, and the third comprises artistic representations, which merely imitate the physical world and thus are twice removed from the truth (Plato, trans. 1992). For Plato, the Form of Beauty, like all other Forms, is the ultimate standard by which particular things are judged. Since art does not engage directly with the Forms but only produces images of particular things, it cannot convey true knowledge. Art appeals primarily to the senses rather than to the rational soul, and this sensory appeal, in Plato's view, risks distracting the soul from the philosophical pursuit of truth.

Plato's suspicion of art is not limited to its ontological status but extends to its psychological and moral effects. He is deeply concerned with the emotional influence that art exerts on the human soul. In *The Republic*, Book X, Plato criticizes the tragic poet for encouraging irrational passions. He argues that poetry, especially when performed with music and rhythm, bypasses reason and stimulates the non-rational elements of the soul, particularly the appetitive and spirited parts. This stimulation may feel pleasurable, but it weakens the rational faculty that should govern the soul according to Plato's tripartite psychology (Plato, trans. 1992). Thus, rather than cultivating virtue and wisdom, art may corrupt the soul by reinforcing illusions and inflaming uncontrolled desires.

This concern leads Plato to recommend the strict regulation or even exclusion of certain forms of artistic expression from his ideal state.

In the dialogue *Ion*, Plato further interrogates the role of the artist by portraying the poet as someone inspired by divine possession rather than by knowledge or skill. The rhapsode Ion, though capable of eloquently reciting Homer, cannot explain the rational basis of his performance. Plato suggests that artistic inspiration is a form of divine madness, which lacks intentional understanding and cognitive clarity (Plato, trans. 1997). From this point of view, the artist becomes a passive conduit of emotion rather than an active agent of truth. Since Plato places the highest value on rational knowledge and philosophical clarity, he concludes that art, grounded in emotional fervour and imitation, is epistemologically suspect and politically dangerous.

Despite these criticisms, Plato does not entirely dismiss the potential value of art. In *Phaedrus*, he acknowledges that beauty can awaken the soul to a recollection of the Forms. When properly encountered, beauty serves as a kind of bridge between the physical world and the world of intelligible realities. It can inspire philosophical longing and direct the soul toward contemplation of the Good (Plato, trans. 1997). This more positive view of beauty introduces a tension within Plato's aesthetic thought. On the one hand, art can deceive and mislead; on the other hand, beauty can point toward transcendence and truth. Scholars have interpreted this tension in various ways. Tatarkiewicz (1970) argues that Plato's position evolved, becoming more nuanced in his later dialogues. Ferrari (2003) suggests that Plato's philosophical project seeks to rehabilitate beauty by aligning it with the moral and rational development of the soul.

Plato's dual approach to art, both critical and aspirational, has influenced centuries of philosophical debate. His suspicion of art as imitation laid the foundation for a long-standing dichotomy between reason and emotion, truth and appearance, philosophical knowledge and aesthetic pleasure. Later thinkers such as Aristotle, Plotinus, and Kant would wrestle with the implications of Plato's theory, sometimes extending it, at other times contesting it. Yet the basic Platonic concern remains: how does art affect the soul, and can it lead us toward or away from truth?

In the contemporary context, Plato's reflections take on renewed significance. With the rise of AI, which generates images based not on direct experience but on abstracted data sets, and the dominance of social media, which often promotes visual appeal over intellectual substance, the idea that art might be removed from truth is once again a pressing concern. If modern technologies further widen the gap between representation and reality, Plato's theory invites us to examine whether contemporary forms of art still serve the soul's ascent toward truth or whether they have become instruments of distraction and deception. This examination is not simply theoretical but profoundly ethical, for it asks what kind of human beings we become when we consume or create art through machines and platforms governed by non-rational criteria.

The relevance of Plato's aesthetic theory lies not in prescribing rigid rules for what counts as art, but in prompting us to ask what purpose art ought to serve. For Plato, true art must be in harmony with the rational order of the soul and directed toward the Good. In our era, where images can be generated by code and distributed by algorithms, this Platonic criterion offers a valuable standard for evaluating the aesthetic and ethical dimensions of our technological culture. Whether artificial and digitally mediated art can meet that standard remains an open question, one that this paper continues to explore.

Plato's aesthetics rest on his metaphysics of Forms. Reality has three levels: the eternal Forms, their physical copies, and artistic representations-copies of copies (Plato, trans. 1992). Art, appealing to the senses rather than the intellect, risks misleading the soul. In *The Republic*, Plato argues that

poetry and painting gratify emotion rather than reason. The tragic poet, for instance, excites pity and fear, thereby weakening the rational part of the soul. Thus, art should be morally regulated to ensure harmony within the individual and society. In *Ion*, Plato portrays the poet as divinely inspired yet irrational. The rhapsode, moved by divine madness, lacks knowledge of what he performs (Plato, trans. 1997). For Plato, true art requires knowledge of the Good, not mere passion. Yet Plato's later dialogues reveal a more positive view. In *Phaedrus*, he concedes that beauty can awaken recollection of the Forms and direct the soul toward transcendence. Tatarkiewicz (1970) notes that Plato's stance evolved: art could lead upward if disciplined by reason. This duality (art as both deception and revelation) frames all later Western aesthetics. For Plato, the artist must aim beyond imitation, using beauty as a moral and intellectual guide. In the digital era, this tension resurfaces: does technology amplify illusion or extend art's contemplative potential?

Artificial Intelligence and the Evolution of Creative Agency

AI's entrance into the arts disrupts traditional ideas of creativity. Machine learning models such as generative adversarial networks (Goodfellow et al., 2014) can now produce portraits, music, and poetry indistinguishable from human works. Boden (2010) distinguishes three forms of creativity: combinational, exploratory, and transformational. AI can recombine and explore existing patterns but struggles to achieve transformation, the radical innovation that redefines understanding. It lacks consciousness, intention, and emotional depth. This absence of self-awareness complicates authorship. Human artists express inner experience; AI systems reproduce correlations. McCormack, Gifford, and Hutchings (2019) argue that while machines autonomously generate outputs, they lack autonomy in the philosophical sense. Their "art" is derivative (an echo of human creativity filtered through data).

Ethical questions also arise. AI models often train on copyrighted material without consent, embedding hidden biases (Crawford & Paglen, 2019). The result is not neutral creativity but a reflection of social hierarchies. Yet some, like Gunkel (2022), argue that AI challenges human exceptionalism. Creativity, he suggests, may be relational, emerging through interaction between humans and machines. Artists such as Refik Anadol use AI as a collaborator rather than a competitor, thereby expanding art's expressive field. Still, Dreyfus (2007) insists that machines lack the lived experience and embodiment essential for meaning-making. From a Platonic standpoint, AI art could be seen as "imitations of imitations," thrice removed from truth. Without reason or moral intention, it cannot guide the soul toward the Good.

Social Media and the Transformation of Art

Social media has revolutionized artistic production and dissemination. Platforms enable anyone to share creative work, bypassing traditional gatekeepers (Highfield & Leaver, 2016). This democratization gives visibility to marginalized voices but also subjects art to the logic of algorithms. Artistic value now depends on virality, likes, shares, and engagement. Aesthetic judgment becomes quantitative rather than contemplative (Bucher, 2018; Dean, 2010). The algorithm favours immediacy and emotion, thereby rewarding art that captures attention rather than invites reflection. Marwick (2015) calls this "instafame," where success depends on performance and branding.

Plato's concerns about emotional manipulation find new relevance here. Digital art often seduces through spectacle and distances viewers from truth (Plato, trans. 1992). Han (2017) argues that the contemplative subject has been replaced by the performing self, driven by visibility. Still, social media has birthed new aesthetic forms, which include memes, filters, and augmented reality art. These mirror the participatory culture of our time (Manovich, 2020). Activist art movements such

as #BlackArtists and #IndigenousArt use digital platforms for justice and awareness, thereby echoing Plato's hope in Phaedrus that beauty, rightly directed, can uplift the soul (Plato, trans. 1997). Yet this potential is undercut by what Zuboff (2019) calls surveillance capitalism. Platforms commodify creativity, turning attention into profit. Artistic expression becomes data for commercial exploitation. In Plato's terms, art thus risks serving appetite rather than reason. Social media, therefore, embodies both the promise and peril of art. It democratizes beauty but commodifies it, offering freedom while deepening illusion.

Intersecting Realities: AI, Social Media and Plato's Idea of Art

AI and social media together create a new aesthetic order: art generated by algorithms and circulated by algorithms. Plato's notion of art as imitation finds an uncanny echo here. Machine-generated art is imitation without understanding; social media art is imitation for validation. Plato warned that such imitations distract from truth (Plato, trans. 1992). AI-generated art, built from data and probability, lacks intellectual vision. Social media multiplies these images, flooding perception with appearances detached from meaning. Yet these same technologies provoke philosophical reflection. Their strangeness forces us to reconsider what art is and what it does. If viewers are moved to question authorship, beauty, or humanity, the experience may still fulfill Plato's goal: awakening the soul's desire for truth. Gunkel (2022) suggests that AI's challenge to human centrality invites humility and deeper reflection on creativity itself. Thus, while AI and social media extend imitation, they also extend inquiry. The latter continues Plato's dialogue about art, truth, and the good life.

Ethical Implications

Consider the following ethical implications of the interface of AI and social media with art:

1. Authorship and Creative Agency

AI-generated art destabilizes the idea of the artist as a rational moral agent. Lacking consciousness or purpose, machines cannot embody the ethical responsibility Plato demands of creators (Plato, trans. 1992). Human oversight thus remains essential to preserve intention and accountability.

2. Aesthetic Value and Originality

Boden's (2010) distinction between novelty and originality reveals the superficiality of most AI art. While it can mimic form, it lacks existential substance. From a Platonic view, art without a truth-directed purpose is mere semblance.

3. Imitation and Ontological Distance

For Plato, art imitates appearances already removed from the Forms. AI art, imitating human art, deepens this removal. In this sense, AI art becomes an imitation of an imitation. Such recursion risks emptying art of meaning.

4. Emotion and Manipulation

Plato feared art's power to sway emotion. Machine-generated and algorithm-curated art magnify this risk by engineering emotional responses through predictive analytics. Han (2017) warns that such environments trade reflection for stimulation.

5. Surveillance and Commodification

Social media's data-driven architecture transforms creativity into capital. As Zuboff (2019) shows, attention is monetized, turning artists and audiences alike into products. Plato would see this as art enslaved to appetite, not reason.

6. Bias and Exclusion

Training data in AI systems reflect societal inequities (Crawford & Paglen, 2019). The resulting art reproduces biases rather than transcends them. This is contrary to Plato's vision of art guiding the soul toward universality.

7. Redefining Beauty and Human Flourishing

Despite these concerns, technology can still serve a Platonic function if it cultivates wonder and reflection. Floridi (2013) argues for an "infosphere ethics," where human and artificial agents co-create meaning responsibly. Beauty, in this sense, remains a moral force when aligned with truth and care.

Critical Evaluation of Plato's Theory

Plato's theory of art endures as one of the earliest moral interrogations of creativity. He saw art as a mirror that reflects appearances, not truth. In *The Republic*, he condemned art as imitation—an echo of an echo, capable of exciting emotions but not enlightening the mind. This suspicion of artistic illusion, though ancient, finds new urgency in the age of artificial intelligence. AI now creates images, poems, and music without human feeling. Its works often dazzle, yet they rarely edify. Plato's warning that art can seduce the senses while dulling reason is startlingly relevant. Algorithmic art is designed to please the eye and provoke engagement, not to awaken virtue. It confirms Plato's fear that beauty detached from truth becomes manipulation. The AI artist imitates without understanding, creating shadows without soul.

Still, Plato's framework meets its limit when tested by the logic of modern technology. AI does not mimic nature through paint or song; it generates novelty through patterns of data. Its creativity is mathematical, not emotional. Here lies a paradox. Plato distrusted artists for being slaves to passion. Yet, AI art is passionless. It creates without desire, without envy, and without the chaos of human impulse. Would Plato see in this cold precision a truer reflection of order, or a deeper form of emptiness? Plato's conviction that beauty must lead the soul to truth remains a timeless moral compass. His standard exposes the shallowness of AI-generated aesthetics. For him, beauty was never a matter of form alone; it was a path to the Good. True art must illuminate, not merely entertain. AI, however, lacks the moral consciousness to pursue truth. It reproduces what it learns but cannot know why beauty matters. Its art is intelligent but not wise.

Yet, Plato's vision of beauty as a bridge between sense and spirit opens a door of redemption. If guided by human reason and moral purpose, AI can still serve truth. The fault does not lie in the tool but in its user. When human intelligence directs artificial creativity toward understanding rather than vanity, the result may reflect something of the Platonic ideal—a union of intellect, order, and wonder. Therefore, Plato's critique does not condemn AI art outright. It disciplines it. His philosophy challenges humanity to remain the moral author of its creations. Art, whether produced by brush or algorithm, must serve the soul and not the senses alone. The ultimate question is not whether AI can make beauty, but whether humans will ensure that beauty still points to truth.

Contribution to Knowledge

The paper is a compelling philosophical interrogation of the intersection between classical aesthetics and contemporary technological creativity. It undertakes the ambitious task of reinterpreting Plato's metaphysical and moral framework in light of AI and social media. It demonstrates strong intellectual depth and coherence.

One of the paper's most commendable contributions to knowledge lies in its conceptual synthesis. It skillfully bridges two seemingly disparate worlds—the idealism of ancient Greek philosophy and the technological materialism of the 21st century. The paper's ability to juxtapose Plato's mimesis

theory with the algorithmic imitation of AI systems reveals both philosophical creativity and methodological maturity. In linking Plato's suspicion of art as imitation with the proliferation of digital illusions, the paper achieves a refreshing interpretive relevance that reawakens Platonic discourse for the digital age.

Another incontrovertible contribution is the clarity of exposition and structural discipline. The paper maintains a logical progression from Plato's theory of art to its application in the digital sphere, avoiding excessive abstraction. Its engagement with contemporary scholars such as Boden (2010), Gunkel (2022), Han (2017), and Zuboff (2019) reflects a robust awareness of current debates in digital aesthetics and information ethics. This scholarly range situates the work within an interdisciplinary conversation spanning philosophy, technology, and cultural studies.

Moreover, the paper's ethical orientation is distinctly Platonic. By insisting that art must ultimately serve moral and intellectual elevation, the paper implicitly argues for a humane use of technology that transcends commercial exploitation. In this regard, the work aligns with the Socratic imperative that knowledge must serve the good of the soul. It thus provides a moral corrective to the celebratory technophilia that dominates modern digital discourse.

Conclusion

Artificial intelligence and social media have transformed the creation and experience of art, making Plato's ancient insights startlingly relevant. Both technologies amplify the dangers he foresaw: illusion, emotional manipulation, and detachment from truth. Yet they also open new avenues for reflection and collaboration. If art, for Plato, should guide the soul toward the Good, then the task today is not to reject technology but to direct it ethically. AI and social media can either deepen imitation or become tools for philosophical awakening, depending on how consciously they are used. The enduring lesson from Plato is that art must serve reason, virtue, and truth. Whether made by hand or by code, art's ultimate measure is not its novelty or popularity but its capacity to elevate the human spirit beyond mere appearances toward the contemplation of what is real.

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