There is no scholarly discussion of *mimesis* (µίμησις, “imitation”) that covers the sweep of the ancient literary and documentary evidence. In approaching the topic, modern scholars have gravitated towards the development of aesthetics as an intellectual discipline, analysing the seminal contributions that Plato and Aristotle made to Western literary and artistic theory. In particular, the momentous collision between Plato and Aristotle over the nature of *mimesis* has generated an avalanche of scholarship.1 In Plato’s...
**Republic**, Socrates is presented as arguing that poetry imitates reality. Consequently, only those artists who imitate noble actions should be allowed into the ideal state (Plato, *Resp.* 3.392d–398b.). Although Aristotle agrees with Plato that the ideal work of art should express what it seeks to imitate (Aristotle, *Poet.* 6.1450a; 9.1451b; 23.1459a; 24.1460b; 25.1461b; 26.1461b–1462b), his view is diametrically opposed to Plato’s because of its cathartic rationale; that is, when people view evil actions in a dramatic performance of tragedy, they can be emancipated from the desire to act badly by being moved to pity. This philosophical debate is central to the development of the Western intellectual tradition in the arts and in ethics. However, the failure of many modern scholars to move outside of the confines of the ancient debate on the role of *mimesis* in aesthetics has meant that the public context of imitation in civic life remains largely unexplored. The centrality of honour culture in the Greek East and the Latin West ensured that the imitation of the “great man” was a vital dimension of civic ethics in antiquity; but, inexplicably, this has been little discussed by classicists and New Testament scholars alike.

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2 However, Plato brought a series of charges against tragedy and wanted to ban it. Consequently, in Plato’s view, there is no worthwhile knowledge purveyed by poetry (*Apol.* 22b–c; *Ion* 534a) because it relies on inspiration (*Ion.* 34b–e; *Phaedr.* 245a) and propagates falsehoods (*Resp.* 337–391). Ultimately, poetry is idiosyncratic and irrational (*Resp.* 605c), articulating private opinion as opposed to universal truth (*Prot.* 347c–e).


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Of style. In seeking precedents for this, Auerbach posits that the first break with the classical tradition came about because of the Christian gospel: “It was the story of Christ, with its ruthless mixture of everyday reality and the highest and most sublime tragedy, which had conquered the classical rule of styles” (Auerbach, *Mimesis*, 490). However, the same comment could apply equally to Paul’s graphic portrait of the incarnate and crucified Christ as “weak,” “poor” and “foolish” (1 Cor 1:18–30; 2 Cor 8:9; 13:4). On the social and artistic dimensions of the Pauline metaphors, see J.R. Harrison, *Paul’s Language of Grace in Its Graeco-Roman Context* (WUNT 2.172; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003); L.L. Welborn, *Paul, the Fool of Christ: A Study of 1 Corinthians 1–4 in the Comic-Philosophic Tradition* (ECC; JSNTSup 293; London: Continuum, 2005).