



# Exploring *Mimēsis* through the Lens of the Principle of Personalization

Ruhupatty C\*

University of Indonesia, Indonesia

\*Corresponding author: Chris Ruhupatty, University of Indonesia, Indonesia, Email: [chrisruhupatty@gmail.com](mailto:chrisruhupatty@gmail.com)

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## Abstract

Personalization is a principle introduced in this article to define the concept of *mimēsis*. From the classical to modern eras, the concept of *mimēsis* has been explained under the principle of representation. This means that the structure of human understanding is based on the ability to reflect on nature. In this context, understanding means mirroring. As a result, under the lens of representation, humans consider they understand the essence of nature by merely representing it. However, in the postmodern eras, the concept of *mimēsis* is perceived differently compared to the previous eras. In these eras, humans are not only mirroring or representing the essence of nature but modifying it into something different. This shift occurs because the essence of nature has transformed human understanding, so what it represents carries human understanding with it. This article explains the topic from the principle of personalization, providing the reason for the evolution of the concept of *mimēsis*. It is intended for those who follow the developments of philosophical discourse and philosophy students. It provides an overview of the theory from classical to postmodern eras, covering thinkers such as Plato, Aristotle, Kant, Derrida, Baudrillard, and Ricoeur. However, it is also accessible to non-philosophy readers, as it addresses the structure of human understanding and how humans embody their understanding within language and artworks. Therefore, the purpose of this article is to contribute to the development of philosophical discourse and the cultivation of knowledge in general.

**Keywords:** *Mimēsis*; Personalization; Phenomenology; Representationalism; Language; Arts

## Introduction

*Mimēsis* is one of the important concepts in the history of knowledge in Western philosophy. This concept has been used to describe the way of understanding and producing artworks. This article has found that this concept has been discussed from the classical to postmodern eras under the principle of representationalism. However, this principle is deemed inadequate to describe the structure of human understanding and how humans embody it within various expressions such as language and artworks. Representationalism has reduced personal experiences within the process of understanding,

leading to the perception of *mimēsis* as merely reflecting or discovering the essence of nature.

This article introduces a new principle to describe the structure of human understanding: personalization. Utilizing the phenomenological method, this article posits that human understanding is structured based on the capacity to personalize the essence of nature that appears as phenomena or symbols into understandable and embodied concepts. Consequently, this article perceives language and artworks as the embodiment of personalization of the essence of nature. It indicates that language and artworks do not merely

represent the essence of nature but reveal the principle of personalization of the essence. It defines the concept of *mimēsis* as a personalization of the essence of nature.

Therefore, this article will elaborate the principle of personalization as the development of the principle of representationalism. It will begin with an exploration of the concept of *mimēsis* under representationalism.

## Mimēsis

In his allegory, Plato (427–347 BC) elucidates the distinction between the true form (*eikōn*) and its imitation (Plato, *Republic*, Book 7). He depicts that the prisoners are only familiar with the shadows or imitations of the true forms, which are projected onto the wall. Unbeknownst to them, the actual forms reside behind them. Plato further asserts, “They [the prisoners] are like us” [1], suggesting that he aims to convey that there exists true knowledge beyond what we perceive. In this context, our current understanding (the imitation) eventually guides us to the true knowledge, analogous to one of the prisoners escaping from the cave.

Regarding imitation (*mimēsis*), Plato exemplifies this concept through *Tragedy* and poetry. He argues that narrations, such as *Tragedy*, imitate human behavior. However, the narrator must exercise caution, as imitation is not merely a reflection of human behavior but also a reproduction of it. Consequently, the narrator cannot imitate all human behaviors; instead, they must reproduce these behaviors into a universal form (*Republic*, Book 3). It becomes evident that Plato views *mimēsis* as an act of creation, even recreation, of what is original in nature. Therefore, it extends beyond mere imitation or reflection; it is an act of creation.

In Plato’s view, *mimēsis* refers to humanity’s ability to comprehend and replicate the essence of nature in their lives. By imitating or recreating what exists in nature, individuals reveal the origins inherent in it. As Plato states, “... and that learning them and acquiring natural truth of reasoning we might imitate the divine movements that are ever unerring and bring into order those within us which are all astray” [2]. Hence, nature unveils the truth, allowing humans to grasp it through imitation. However, in mimicking nature, humans actually recreate nature’s imitation. This encapsulates Plato’s explanation of the concept of *mimēsis*.

In his work *Poetics*, Aristotle (384–422 BC) elucidates the concept of *mimēsis* through various art forms such as poetry, music, and painting. According to him, *mimēsis* is the act of imitating or duplicating something using different mediums. This implies that anything can potentially be imitated through various mediums, as exemplified by the mentioned art forms. Moreover, not only objects but human

behavior can also be imitated in different art forms. In this context, Aristotle emphasizes the role of the artist or poet in the creation process, noting that the “manner” of the artist significantly influences the outcome of the artwork [3]. Thus, Aristotle explains that the act of recreating, inherent in the concept of *mimēsis*, involves the artist’s personal perspective. In other words, while *mimēsis* creates a new substance or perspective of nature, the act of creation within the concept of *mimēsis* cannot replace nature itself.

Despite the gap between nature and the product of *mimēsis*, the act of creation still reveals truths about things or human behavior. To illustrate this concept, Aristotle compared the truths found in poetry and history. He stated, “Poetry, therefore, is a more philosophical and a higher thing than history : for poetry tends to express the universal, history the particular. By the universal I mean how a person of a certain type will on occasion speak or act, according to the law of probability or necessity ; and it is this universality at which poetry aims in the names she attaches to the personages” (*Poetics*, 1453–4). In essence, *mimēsis* is the means by which humans uncover the origins of nature. Thus, the essence of nature resides in *mimēsis*.

In the modern era, the concept of *mimēsis* continues to be explored in greater depth and detail. Immanuel Kant (1724–1804), one of the prominent modern philosophers, addresses this concept in his work *Critique of Judgment*. Kant makes a clear distinction between imitating as an act of creation and mere duplication. He argues that *mimēsis* is not about duplicating or replicating the origin of nature. Instead, it is about discovering the essence of nature. However, this discovery is not solely for the benefit of the discoverer. If it serves only the discoverer, it does not qualify as *mimēsis*. *Mimēsis* involves uncovering the essence of nature with the intention of teaching it to others, as Newton did with the law of gravity [4]. Thus, in Kant’s perspective, *mimēsis* encompasses not only artistic works but also scientific endeavors. He refers to it as a “beautiful Art,” which includes both artistic and scientific works that reveal the essence of laws of nature and convey them to others.

In the postmodern era, *mimēsis* has evolved into an unconventional concept when compared to the classical and modern interpretations. Jacques Derrida (1930–2004), in his *The Truth in Painting*, elaborates on this concept under the notion of *parergon*. According to Derrida, the truth in painting is not an imitation of the original object in nature. For instance, Van Gogh’s *shoes* do not represent actual shoes but rather his ideas of shoes. This implies that what exists in nature is already imitated through ideas and then represented through artwork or writing. As a result, the imitation replaces the original, which is what Derrida refers to as *parergon* [5]. Consequently, the truth in artwork

or poetry does not pertain to the original, as the original is already imitated through the idea. In short, there is no origin other than the imitation perceived as the origin.

Similar to Derrida, Jean Baudrillard (1929–2007), in his work *Simulacra and Simulation*, also emphasized the notion that the truth in nature is supplanted by its conceptual representation through technology. He illustrates how society has evolved under the influence of communication technologies such as television, newspapers, magazines, radio, and telephones. In this context, Baudrillard highlights how these technologies have advanced to produce even more sophisticated forms of technology. This suggests that technological progress stems from the renovation of existing technologies rather than from the origins of nature. Baudrillard demonstrates how technology, initially a simulation of nature, has evolved into simulacra [6]. In other words, the representation of nature has transformed into a representation of itself, leading society to be influenced by this representation of the representation of nature.

In conclusion, the concept of *mimēsis* has evolved from the classical to the postmodern era, transitioning from representing nature directly to representing the representation of nature. This indicates that *mimēsis* in classical and modern discussions has been viewed as a medium capable of directly revealing the truth in nature. However, the postmodern era has demonstrated that *mimēsis* reveals the truth indirectly. This article elaborates on this topic through the principle of personalization, emphasizing how personal experience influences the revelation of the truth in nature.

### From Representationalism to Personalization

This article delves into the detailed exploration of *mimēsis* and identifies representationalism as the foundational principle shaping its conception from classical to postmodern times. Representationalism has constructed the notion of *mimēsis* from its inception, forming the framework of knowledge as a representation of the truth in nature. Consequently, artworks and written works are perceived as representations of the origins in nature. In other words, the truth of nature can objectively reside within these works. However, the manner or personalization of the creator always directly influences that work. This article, therefore, provides an argument for the role of personalization in revealing the essence of nature.

John Locke (1632–1704) posits that human understanding is shaped by the reflection of subjective experiences. He employs the Latin phrase “*Tabula rasa*” to illustrate that human understanding is akin to the blank slate, inscribed by direct experiences with nature [7]. This suggests

that direct human experience with nature embodies the essence of nature itself. Consequently, Locke emphasizes the role of subjective experience as the primary source of human understanding. Overall, Locke articulates his thoughts under the principle of representation, wherein direct subjective experience reflects or represents the essence of nature.

A similar perspective on subjective experience is presented by David Hume (1711–1776) in his work *A Treatise of Human Nature*. Hume posits that human understanding is shaped by direct impressions of subjective experiences, which represent the truth of nature. For instance, the sensation of pain in the body is an impression that reflects the experience of the body. Thus, Hume demonstrates that human understanding is constructed from subjective experiences and the concepts that represent them [8]. Nonetheless, Hume’s explanation of human understanding remains within the framework of representationalism, asserting that human impressions reflect the truth of nature.

For this article, Locke and Hume’s notions remain under the influences of the classical and modern eras. This implies that both philosophers perceived human understanding and its mediums, whether artworks or written works, as directly presenting the truth of nature. Such a notion, as discussed in this article, diminishes the complexity of personalization’s role in the construction of human understanding, as if personality could be detached from the objectivity of nature’s structure. Consequently, the structure of human understanding is perceived as mirroring the structure of nature.

This article has found a notion that explains how the essence of nature transforms subjectivity. For this reason—explaining how the truth of nature can transform the subject—this article terms the notion as neo-representationalism, indicating that human understanding and its medium remain perceived as the representations of the essence of nature. This concept is elucidated by Paul Ricoeur (1913–2005) in his ideas of appropriation and *mimēsis*. In short, Ricoeur incorporates subjectivity in the process of understanding but maintains that subjectivity is always shaped by the objective meaning of nature revealed through text.

Appropriation is a concept introduced by Ricoeur to explain that the objective meaning of nature can be discerned within the structure of text. According to Ricoeur, it is within the text’s structure that one can observe the *distanciation*, or distancing, between the subjectivity of the author and their work, which is the text itself. In essence, the text exists independently of the author’s world. Consequently, the text in front of the reader reveals an objective meaning that is distinct from the author’s original intention. Simultaneously, the text also influences the reader, necessitating that the

readers relinquish their subjectivity to appropriate the objective meaning of nature revealed within the text [9]. Thus, Ricoeur signifies that an objective meaning is embedded within the text's structure, which maintains a distance from the subjectivities of both author and the reader.

Ricoeur also employs the concept of *play*, as discussed in Gadamer's thought, to signify the embodiment of the essence of nature within the mediums of text, author, and reader. The concept of *play* serves as a metaphor to illustrate how the essence of nature can reveal itself through these mediums. In a *play*, the subject or center is not the player but the *play* itself, as the player must relinquish their subjectivity and adhere to the rules of the play. Thus, within the players, the rule of the play can be embodied. Through this concept of *play*, Ricoeur posits that the essence of nature is the central element embodied within the "players." This implies that the text, author, and reader are transformed by the essence of nature to become mediums of its embodiment [9]. Consequently, Ricoeur dethrones human subjectivity and replaces it with the essence of nature.

In his earlier manuscript, Ricoeur elucidates how the concept of appropriation operates in the process of understanding the essence of nature. He introduces the terms *mimesis*<sub>1</sub>, *mimesis*<sub>2</sub>, and *mimesis*<sub>3</sub> to describe the entire process of interpretation. *Mimesis*<sub>1</sub> refers to the pre-understanding stage, where the origin of nature manifests as symbols recognizable to humans. *Mimesis*<sub>2</sub> represents a stage where these symbols transform into a more structured representation, namely text. The final stage, *mimesis*<sub>3</sub>, pertains to the event of appropriation, where readers internalize the essence of nature within the text [10]. According to Ricoeur, the objective of understanding the essence of nature is to embody it within the structure of text and action, as carried out by humans. However, in this process, individuals must relinquish their subjectivity under the influence of the essence of nature.

Ricoeur, therefore, introduces a novel idea of representationalism. For him, representing the truth of nature involves not only mirroring it but also engaging subjectivity. However, within this representational process, the subject is not superior to the essence of nature revealed within text. Instead, throughout the process of representation, what is disclosed within the structure of text predominates over the subject. In essence, Ricoeur's thought promotes the sovereignty of the essence of nature over the subject. Consequently, in Ricoeur's view of representationalism, the subject undergoes a process of metamorphosis to become a medium of representation that embodies the essence of nature.

Thus, the concept of *mimēsis* under the principles of neo-representationalism is not only embodied within artworks

and written works but also within human actions, as humans are directly involved in the process of revealing the essence of nature. In this context, the essence of nature resides within certain artifacts produced by humans, namely texts. As a medium of revelation, texts transform into mediums with revelatory potential [9]. In other words, text is not merely a set of narrations but a form of presentation that can lead the reader to encounter the essence of nature. Hence, both humans and texts embody the revelatory of the essence of nature.

This article, on the other hand, introduces the principle of personalization in the discourse of *mimēsis*. This principle, grounded in the phenomenological approach, posits that the mechanism of human understanding is always connected to the essence of nature. In this context, Husserl, the founder of phenomenology, elaborates this connectivity using the German term *Lebenswelt* or lifeworld [11]. It suggests that the essence of nature consistently manifests in human understanding as phenomena or symbols familiar to humans. This implies that humans are always indirectly connected to the essence of nature due to the difference between the structure of human understanding and the structure of nature. Consequently, humans are continually exposed to symbols or phenomena.

For this article, the structure of nature is consistently personalized by the structure of human understanding. This means that the essence of nature is transformed into symbols that can be processed by the human mind-body mechanism. Consequently, the colors perceived by the human eye are personalized into symbols or phenomena within the mechanism of eyesight. Subsequently, neural mechanisms convert these symbols into concepts that can be embodied in actions such as language signs or artworks. Thus, the colors used by humans are actually produced through the personalization process of the essence of nature.

Therefore, the colors used by humans daily, whether in conservation or artworks, do not mirror the origin of colors in nature. Since colors, in the form of language and various products, are embodiments of the personalization of nature's colors. This indicates that the concept of colors, the word of "C-O-LO-R-S," and related products adhere to the principle of personalization. Nonetheless, within the colors used by humans, there remains a residue of the origin essence in nature. This is similar to a *Luke Skywalker* Lego character, which does not represent the real Luke Skywalker from the movie but is personalized into the concept of Lego. In other words, the Lego character of *Luke Skywalker* does not directly present the real one, as it embodies the engineering of the Lego character.

The principle of personalization perceives *mimēsis* as the process of adapting the essence of nature to human

understanding. It is not an act of duplicating what exists in nature or discovering its essence. Instead, *mimēsis* under the principle of personalization involves manipulating what is in nature to make it relevant within the framework of human understanding. For instance, sun is perceived differently through a human eye than through an eagle eye; similarly, sunlight affects the human body differently than it does in the process of photosynthesis in plants. In summary, the principle of personalization involves personal experiences in the process of *mimēsis* by emphasizing mind-body mechanisms. This distinguishes it from representationalism and neo-representationalism.

However, personalization does not isolate a person within their own world. Its purpose is to embody the personalization of the essence of nature through various expressions such as language and artworks. Thus, personalization fosters interpersonal relationships by sharing common experiences that transform the essence of nature into something understandable. Consequently, interpersonal relationships among personae formalize or universalize the expression of nature's personalization. Language, for instance, transforms into formal signs used to communicate these shared experiences.

The formalization of language and artworks does not imply that these expressions are independent of the mechanism of personalization. This article asserts that language and artworks remain connected to the structure of personalization, making them dynamic signs capable of generating new signs. In other words, even though language and artworks have undergone formalization, they still possess the capacity to reveal new meanings due to the influence of personalization. Additionally, language and artworks have the capacity of revelation, as they appear as symbols or phenomena within the structure of personalization. This suggests that personae are surrounded by the essence of nature and signs that reveal this essence. Therefore, personae are exposed to symbols from the essence of nature and the essence revealed through signs, which in turn produce new signs within the process of personalization.

## Conclusions

*Mimēsis* is a concept used to demonstrate how humans understand and explain the essence of nature. This article reveals that, from classical to the modern eras, this concept has been discussed within the framework of representationalism. Consequently, the discussion has been confined to notions that perceived human understanding as a mirror reflecting the essence of nature. Ricoeur introduces a new aspect of representationalism by incorporating personal experiences into the entire process of revealing the essence of nature. However, in Ricoeur's thought, personal

experiences are always overshadowed by the superiority of the essence of nature revealed within the text. This implies that *mimēsis*, under the principle of representationalism, continuously diminishes the role of personal experiences in the mechanism of human understanding.

This article, on the other hand, reveals that personal experience, as personalization, is the foundation of the structure of understanding. It defines human understanding of the essence of nature by personalizing it into understandable and embodied concepts. This is due to the gap or the difference between the structure of nature and the structure of human understanding. Thus, the article does not attempt to bridge this gap through representationalism or the capacity to represent the structure of nature. Instead, it demonstrates the gap between the structure of nature and the structure of human understanding can be addressed by revealing the principle of personalization as a pair of "binoculars" to view the other side.

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