

# FROM PAINTERS TO POETS: PLATO'S METHODS IN *REPUBLIC X*

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*Abstract.* Throughout much of the critique of poetry in *Republic X*, Socrates exploits a parallel between painting and poetry. I argue there are two distinct methods at work here, the 'similarity' and 'heuristic' methods. The first uses painting to discover the general definition of mimesis, which is then applied forthwith to poetry. The second describes certain features of painting before using independent arguments to show that these also apply to poetry. That Socrates sometimes uses the parallel in this heuristic way is not new in the literature. My purpose is to be more precise about what these two methods are, when Socrates uses one or the other, and why. At the end of the paper, I argue that the painting-poetry parallel is methodologically very similar to the state-soul parallel used earlier in the work. This allows us to view the arguments of *Rep. X* in a more sympathetic light.

This paper is about the methods used in the critique of poetry in *Republic X*. From the start of the passage, Plato presents Socrates as working with a parallel between two forms of mimesis ('imitation'), painting and poetry. Some commentators find him continually sliding from the former to the latter, assuming that, because certain features hold true of painting, they apply to poetry as well. Julia Annas, for instance, accuses Plato of 'trying (unsuccessfully) to assimilate poetry to painting—and to a debased form of painting at that'.<sup>1</sup> If Plato's arguments are indeed premised on illicit moves of this kind, they are fundamentally flawed.

To see how the problem arises, we need to start with an overview of the passage. The discussion of poetry in *Rep. X* falls into two parts. In the first (596a-602c), which I shall call the 'epistemological critique', Socrates attacks the claim that poets should be considered authorities on the topics about which they write, especially ethics and religion (598e2). The longest section of this critique argues that they have no knowledge of their subject matter (595c8-601c3). But then Socrates adds another argument, that they do not even have true belief (601c4-602b11). The second half of the *Rep. X* passage, which I shall call the 'psychological critique', argues that poetry, whether tragedy or comedy, corrupts its audiences through its power to strengthen the non-rational part of the soul (602c1-606d8).

Throughout most of the passage Socrates does indeed start from a parallel between painting and poetry. The epistemological critique begins with an analysis of painting in which a painter stands at three<sup>2</sup> removes from reality, creating an imitation of a couch, which is itself an image of the form of couch. Painters are able to do this without any knowledge of couches, capturing only an aspect of the object, the way it looks from a particular angle. Nonetheless, they are able to deceive children and other simple-minded people into thinking they have knowledge of couches, tables and whatever else they imitate. Socrates then argues that poets are also at three removes from reality and have no knowledge of their subject matter; they only appear to be experts.

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<sup>1</sup> Annas 1981, p. 340. On the same page she talks of a 'forced and unconvincing assimilation' of poetry to *trompe l'oeil* painting. The most recent critics of the parallel are Emlyn-Jones and Preddy 2013, p. xxxix: 'The argumentative "slide" from painting to poetry is continually visible in book 10, where the analogy is assumed rather than argued for.'

<sup>2</sup> We would say two removes, but Plato is counting inclusively.

The psychological critique also starts with a case taken from the visual realm. Focusing on optical illusions and *trompe l'oeil* painting, Socrates argues that in such cases one part of us believes the illusion, but the superior and 'calculating' part of the soul knows the truth of the matter through its ability to measure. These cases exploit our susceptibility for illusions and work on an inferior part of the soul. So too, he argues, poets imitate characters in extreme emotional states, pandering to a lower part of our soul, the seat of non-rational emotions like grief, in conflict with the sober judgements of reason. So while reason may tell us to restrain such emotions, poetry works on the lower part, building up our susceptibility to feel them. The result is that emotion will eventually overpower reason and undermine its ability to influence the soul.

There is no doubting the importance of the appeal to painting in *Rep. X*. But what exactly is the parallel, and what work does Socrates make it do in the two critiques? The terms 'analogy', 'illustration' and 'assimilation' have all been used to describe it.<sup>3</sup> But commentators rarely analyse exactly what they mean by these terms, despite the critical tone that they sometimes take. In this paper, I shall try to achieve more clarity on the methods implicit in Socrates' use of the parallel, which will in turn open up the way for a more nuanced assessment of the argument.

In sections I-III, I examine the epistemological critique. Socrates talks as if there are two halves to this passage (see 601c4): one argument that poets lack knowledge, and another that they lack true belief. In fact, the first is much longer, running from 595c8 to 601c3; the second takes less than a page (601c4-602b11). In what follows, sections I-II focus on the first argument, section III on the second. I then turn to the psychological critique in sections IV-V.

## I

*Mimesis stands at three removes from reality (595c-598a)*. Socrates opens the first argument with a question (595c8-9): 'could you tell me in general what imitation is? For neither do I myself quite apprehend what it professes to be.'<sup>4</sup> What this shows is that he intends to launch his critique from a definition of mimesis, the more general form to which poetry belongs.<sup>5</sup> Note also the way in which he approaches this task. Over the next two pages (596a5-597e5), he focuses on just one species of mimesis, painting. In one of the most notorious passages in the corpus, he defines visual mimesis as the production of something that stands at three stages from reality. First there is the form of couch (for example), which is made by god, then a particular couch made by a carpenter, and finally the appearance of a couch made by an artist.<sup>6</sup>

Socrates takes stock of his definition at 597e3-598a1:

'Very good,' said I; 'the producer of the product three removes from nature you call the imitator?' 'By all means,' he said. 'This, then, will apply to the maker of

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<sup>3</sup> Nehamas 1982, pp. 47 and 64, Murray 1996, p. 216, Moss 2007, p. 416 and Emlyn-Jones and Preddy 2013, p. xxxix all describe the parallel as analogy. Ferrari 1990, pp. 128 and 132 refers to it as an illustration. Annas 1981, p. 340 talks in terms of assimilation.

<sup>4</sup> Translations are from Shorey 1937, with occasional modifications.

<sup>5</sup> Socrates reminds Glaucon that they are attempting to find a general definition a couple of pages later, at 597b1-2.

<sup>6</sup> For reasons of space, but also because they do not directly affect my concerns, I shall ignore the difficult questions this passage throws up for Platonic ontology: the extension of the range of forms to include artefacts, and the claim that the forms (elsewhere eternal and ungenerated) are made by god.

tragedies also, if he is an imitator; he is in his nature three removes from the king<sup>7</sup> and the truth, as are all other imitators.’ ‘It would seem so.’ ‘We are in agreement, then, about the imitator.’<sup>8</sup>

This text is central to our purposes. Socrates is not just summing up his account of visual mimesis; in this quote, he states his definition of mimesis quite generally, to cover both painting and poetry. But is he really entitled to so much, so soon? Even if he is correct about painting, why does he so easily assume that poetry will also stand at three removes from reality?<sup>9</sup>

It should come as no surprise that these lines have attracted criticism.<sup>10</sup> And Socrates’ inference here clearly is open to objections.<sup>11</sup> But it is important to be precise as to where the vulnerability lies. It is all too easy to caricature his method here, as if he is guilty of a gross fallacy: ‘painting is at three removes from reality; therefore the same is true of poetry’. So crude an argument would certainly be invalid. But his approach is more principled than this.

Take a closer look at the quote. When Socrates says, ‘the producer of the product three removes from nature you call the imitator’, he must be talking about imitation in general because, in his next statement, he infers that the same applies to tragedian ‘if he is an imitator’. In other words, Socrates already thinks he has reached the general definition of mimesis (his quest ever since the beginning of the argument) in the opening line of the quote. So the inferential leap is from the characterisation of painting as being at three removes from reality to the claim that this same characterisation applies to mimesis in general, as (part of) its definition. Once this inference is accepted, then, so long as poetry is a species of mimesis and all species of

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<sup>7</sup> This is a way of referring to the forms. See Adam 1963 II, pp. 464-5 and Halliwell 1993, p. 116.

<sup>8</sup> I have made a significant change to Shorey’s translation here. I have no disagreement with the way he translates the first part (‘the producer of the product three removes from nature you call the imitator’), but with what he does next: ‘this, then, will apply to the maker of tragedies also, if he is an imitator and is in his nature three removes from the king and the truth, as are all other imitators’. This is a possible translation of the Greek, but (to my ear) makes it sound as if Socrates is saying, ‘if the poet is an imitator *and if* he is three removes from the truth, then my previous statement, “the producer of the product three removes from nature you call the imitator”, will also apply to poetry’. If this were what he meant, the inference here would be harmless and trivial. But this cannot be right, because he ends the quote by saying that *all* other imitators are at three removes from the truth. This would not make sense unless he has already made the general inference that mimesis as such stands at three removes from the truth. (Also, in everything that follows, Socrates assumes he has now shown that all imitators stand at three removes from the truth.) I suspect Shorey was aware of the problematic inference contained within these lines, and tried to airbrush it out of the text.

<sup>9</sup> One might also ask exactly how the triadic analysis of painting is meant to carry over to poetry. I think the most plausible answer is as follows. Socrates is most interested in the claim that poets know about virtue (whether pertaining to the individual or the state). So the first level of the triad would include such forms as the good, the fine, justice and so on. For evidence of this, see 599d2-e3 and 600e4-6. The next level would be individual cases of the virtues, for example just people. Finally, the poets produce appearances of just people.

<sup>10</sup> Commenting on this passage, Emlyn-Jones and Preddy 2013, p. 402 n. 8 say: ‘This abrupt, unmotivated, and brief transition to dramatic art as a parallel to painting slides over problems with the analogy.’ Halliwell 1993, p. 116 is also mildly critical: ‘This direct inference from painting to poetry is ... a weak link in the argument.’ See also Murray 1996, p. 198.

<sup>11</sup> It may very well be that Plato himself encourages them. In response to Socrates’ question as to whether poetry will follow painting in being at three removes from reality, Glaucon’s reply, ‘it would seem so’ or ‘probably’ (κινδυνεύει: 597e9), signals hesitation. Emlyn-Jones and Preddy 2013, pp. 402-3 n. 8 draw attention to this point. Even if Plato himself thought the inference justified, perhaps he expects us to question it.

mimesis share the same features, it is legitimate to conclude that poets stand at three removes from reality.

What is the underlying method here? In order to support his criticisms of poetry, Socrates starts by trying to establish its definition. He does this by taking another instance of the same kind, painting, and from an analysis of this extracts a general definition of mimesis. He then transfers this to poetry. In other words, Socrates is not making a simple lateral move from painting to poetry; he first ascends from painting to a general definition of mimesis and then moves down to apply it to the other species. (For want of a better term, I shall call this method the ‘similarity method’.) Now this ought to sound familiar to any reader of the *Republic*. In books II-IV, Socrates wanted to articulate the value of justice in the individual by first finding a definition. He did this by looking for the definition of justice in another kind of entity, the state, before returning to apply that same definition to the individual. I shall explore this comparison in more detail at the end.

My aim so far has not been to claim that this method, and the argument based on it, is beyond reproach—far from it. But I do think it fair to say that Socrates is being principled in following a (well-established) method: he is not fallaciously picking any old feature of painting and applying it forthwith to poetry; instead, by framing the argument as an inquiry into the definition of mimesis as such, he shows that he is only interested in transferring to poetry features of painting that he thinks fall out of the definition of mimesis.

## II

*Knowledge and mimesis (598a-601c)*. At 598a-d, Socrates turns back to painting and argues that painters have no knowledge of their subject matter, even though they manage to deceive certain people that they do. He shows this by starting with a more nuanced account of visual imitation. So far we have been told that painting is an imitation of something that itself is an image of the form. He now argues that the painter only captures the object as it appears from a particular angle: a painting ‘touches or lays hold of only a small part of the object’ (598b7-8; it merely captures the surface of the object). This established, he proceeds to the central point: painters can do this without any knowledge of the object they represent (598c1-d6).

He now returns, again, to poetry, and prepares to argue that poets also lack knowledge and yet deceive others into thinking that they have it. How does he manage to do this? Does he, as before, argue from the similarity with painting?

This is how the passage begins (598d8-599a5):

‘Then,’ said I, ‘have we not next to scrutinize tragedy and its leader Homer, since some people tell us that these poets know all the arts and all things human pertaining to virtue and vice, and all things divine? For the good poet, if he is to poetize things rightly, must, they argue, create with knowledge or else be unable to create. So we must consider whether these critics have not fallen in with imitators of this kind and been deceived by them, so that looking upon their works they cannot perceive that these are three removes from reality, and easy to produce without knowledge of the truth. For it is phantoms, not realities, that they produce. Or is there something in their claim, and do good poets really know the things about which the multitude fancy they speak well?’

The reason I quote these lines at length should be obvious. Socrates is clearly not proceeding as he did at 597e3-598a1. Instead, he treats poetic ignorance as something

to be demonstrated, not inferred from what has just preceded. The argument for this comes in 599a7-600e3. If you had knowledge of both the subject matter itself and how to imitate it, would you devote yourself to a life of action or imitation? In the case of the most important matters, politics and warfare, you would surely rather engage in the activity itself and not (just) write poems about it. Yet Homer never did this. *Ergo* he had no knowledge.

I am not going to attempt to defend this argument.<sup>12</sup> My interest is in the fact that it is offered at all. The argument is completely separate from the analysis of painting. It depends not on applying the parallel with painting, but on an empirical survey about the inability of Homer and Hesiod to effect any change in the world for the better. So the similarity method is already doing less work than we might have expected. It has been used to establish that poets stand at three removes from reality, but not that they lack knowledge.

The method that Socrates is now following, which I shall call the ‘heuristic method’, can be characterised as follows: he presents a relatively detailed account of painting in order to give his interlocutors a clear model of what we might transfer, *mutatis mutandis*, to poetry. But we shall make this transfer only on the basis of independent argument. The function of the painting analysis is essentially pedagogical, not logical or inferential: it clarifies in our minds what the demonstrandum is, but plays no role at all in demonstrating it.<sup>13</sup>

Why the difference between the two stages of the argument (595c-598a and 598d-601c)? Why does Socrates not use the similarity method in the second case? One explanation might lie in whether the point he wishes to establish can be traced back to the essence of mimesis. Now, the specific claim Socrates wishes to attack is that Homer could not have written such good poetry without knowledge of his subject matter (598e3-4). So Socrates needs to show that you can write successful poetry without such knowledge. Does it follow from the essence of mimesis that the imitator does not need knowledge of what they imitate? Or, when Socrates argued that painters do not need any knowledge of their subject matter (598b6-d6), did he think he was stating something true of painting *qua* mimesis? If he did, one might expect him to transfer the point straight to poetry. So the fact that he does not might indicate that he would deny that this is something essentially connected to mimesis.

In my view, however, Socrates probably *does* think that it falls out of the definition of mimesis that the imitator needs no knowledge of what they imitate, since they only capture superficial appearances. So, on this basis, he would be able to infer that the admirers of Homer are not entitled to attribute knowledge to him merely because he was good at writing poetry.

But there is another explanation of why Socrates provides an independent argument here. It would have been highly controversial to claim that poets do not need knowledge of their subject matter. In the case of painting, no one would seriously press the point. Only fools and children are deceived into thinking of the painter as some kind of expert about couches, tables and suchlike. But Socrates is

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<sup>12</sup> For a sympathetic discussion, see Ferrari 1990, pp. 130-31.

<sup>13</sup> Here I fully agree with Heath 2013, p. 34, who writes of this stage of the argument: ‘Note that he does not automatically transfer his conclusions about painting to poetry. The comparison with painting is a heuristic device, not a proof. Thinking about painting generates ideas which may be applicable to poetry as well, but Socrates must verify that the application to poetry works independently of the comparison.’

emphatic that, where poetry is concerned, there is a formidable body of opinion that things are different. In the light of this, he needs an independent argument.<sup>14</sup>

### III

*Imitation, knowledge and true belief (601c-602b)*. Having concluded that poets do not have knowledge (601c2), Socrates adds an argument to show that they also lack true belief. Returning yet again to the case of visual mimesis, he considers someone painting reins and a bridle and then contrasts them with the maker (601c7-10). This cues a further distinction, between the maker and the user, along with the claim that it is not the maker who has knowledge of the excellence of the artefact, but the user. Socrates then introduces a general principle to include not just artefacts, but also animals and actions (601d4-6): in every case, when it comes to whether something is well grown or well done, it is the user who has to direct the maker; the maker only succeeds in so far as he pays close attention to the instructions of the user. It is this reliance on the verdict of another that places the maker into the category of true belief. In turn, the imitator, being one step removed from the maker, does not even attain the level of true belief. The argument ends by applying this directly to the poetic imitator.<sup>15</sup>

Because Socrates starts from the painter and ends up drawing a conclusion about all imitators, including poets, it may sound as if he is using the similarity method again: if one form of imitator, the painter, lacks true belief, so does the poet. But a closer look at the argument shows that this is not how it proceeds. True, he starts with a reference to visual mimesis, contrasting the painter of the bridle with its maker. This leads him onto a new distinction between the maker and the user, attributing knowledge only to the user. But notice what happens at this point. He asks Glaucon (601c15): ‘so shall we not say that the same holds true of everything?’ Although this appears to invite the inference that what holds true of artefacts holds for all cases, Glaucon simply responds: ‘what do you mean?’ This forces Socrates to give a separate argument for the general principle:

‘There are some three arts concerned with everything, the user’s art, the maker’s, and the imitator’s.’ ‘Yes.’ ‘Now do not the excellence, the beauty, the rightness of every implement, living thing, and action refer solely to the use for which each is made or by nature adapted?’ ‘That is so.’ ‘It necessarily follows, then, that the user of anything is the one who knows most of it by experience, and that he reports to the maker the good or bad effects in the use of the thing he uses. ... Then in respect of the same implement the maker will have right belief about its excellence and defects from association with the man who knows and being compelled to listen to him, but the user will have knowledge.’<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Also, the argument actually given provides the stronger conclusion that the poets actually lacked knowledge (not just that they did not need it *qua* poets). This might have been an added reason for providing the argument.

<sup>15</sup> How does the argument apply to poetry? Who are the users and makers corresponding to the poets, and what do they use and make? At 601d4-6 Socrates generalises his principle about the superior status of the user to include not just artefacts, but actions as well. In the context of the ideal state, we can think of the actions performed by the subordinate citizens, who are only imperfectly virtuous and have only true belief (IV 430a1-430c4 and VI 500d5-9). These are the ‘makers’. The guardians, who have knowledge, will use (and control) the actions of these citizens with a view to creating the best state of affairs possible, imitating the forms as they do so. Compare Aristotle’s *Politics* III 4, 1277b18-30. See also Bosanquet 1895, p. 391 and Ferrari 1990, p. 129.

<sup>16</sup> 601d1-602a1. The lines I have omitted (601d10-e6) illustrate the argument with the case of flute makers and players.

He then contrasts the imitator with the maker and the user, putting the imitator in an even lower epistemological position than the maker (602a3-9). Finally he applies this point specifically to poetic imitators (602a11-b3).

In all this Socrates is using the heuristic method, not the similarity one. He begins by setting out the epistemological facts with regard to painters, artefact makers and users. But he only uses the artefact case as a cue for asking whether the same epistemological point applies as a general principle. He then argues for this principle independently; he does not infer it from the artefact case.<sup>17</sup> Only once he has established the principle in this way does he apply it to poetry. Of course one can dispute the truth of the principle, and hence the argument derived from it. But that is not our concern here.<sup>18</sup>

#### IV

*The psychological critique (first part: 602c-605b).* What role do the similarity and heuristic methods play in the psychological critique of poetry? This passage has two main components. In 602c1-605c4, Socrates criticises poetry for consorting with an inferior part of the soul (by which he means the seat of certain non-rational emotions), building up its strength and so undermining the role of reason. In 605c5-606d8, he adds that it has the capacity to do this even to those whose character is decent:<sup>19</sup> it can foster their non-rational part to the extent that it may undermine the role of reason and law that had operated in their lives.

As in the epistemological critique, Socrates starts by making a parallel with visual mimesis before turning to poetry. So our focus will be on the exact role that this parallel plays. The argument begins at 602c1-5:

‘In heaven’s name, then, this business of imitation is concerned with the third remove from truth, is it not?’ ‘Yes.’ ‘And now again, to what element in a human is its function and potency related?’

The first question just restates a conclusion reached in the epistemological critique, derived by using the similarity method. But the next sets the agenda for what follows. Socrates goes about answering this question by turning to the visual realm, focusing on optical illusions, such as the stick that appears bent in water, and on *trompe l’oeil* painting. First, he gives an account of such illusions in terms of conflict of appearance (602c7-603a8). In the course of this passage he appeals to the principle of conflict from book IV 436b9-c2 to argue that, if the same thing appears both bent and crooked, for example, there must be two different parts of the soul corresponding to these appearances (603a1-2). One will be the calculative or reasoning part, which correctly judges the measurements in question; the other (which is not given a name)

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<sup>17</sup> In the course of the argument for the general principle, he does refer again to artefacts, citing flute makers and players at 601d10-e6 (see previous note). But this is merely an illustration of what he is saying (οἶον, 601d10); he is not arguing here by way of induction.

<sup>18</sup> When Socrates says that the user has knowledge, he is talking about evaluative knowledge: the user knows, for instance, whether a given artefact is a good instance or not. Once the conclusion is circumscribed in this way, it becomes a little easier to defend. Socrates is not saying that users know better how to make the instrument; merely that they have a superior grasp of what constitutes a good one. That is not wildly implausible, even if it needs more examination and defence.

<sup>19</sup> Those who are decent, but not fully wise (or virtuous): see 606a7-8.

will be the source of the opposing judgement.<sup>20</sup> In comparison to the reasoning part, this is inferior.<sup>21</sup>

Socrates is now in a position to take stock and turn back to poetry. Referring to the claim just established (that painting appeals to an inferior element in us), he says (603a9-c3):

(1) ‘This, then, was what I wished to have agreed upon when I said that [i] painting, and in general the mimetic art, produces a product that is far removed from truth in the accomplishment of its task, and [ii] associates with the part in us that is remote from intelligence, and is its companion and friend for no sound and true purpose.’ ‘By all means,’ said he. (2) ‘Mimetic art, then, is [a] an inferior thing [b] cohabiting with an inferior and [c] engendering inferior offspring.’ ‘It seems so.’ (3) ‘Does that,’ said I, ‘hold only for vision or does it apply also to hearing and to what we call poetry?’ ‘That seems likely, at any rate,’ he said. (4) ‘Let us not, then, trust solely to the likeness with painting, but also approach in turn that part of the mind to which mimetic poetry appeals and see whether it is inferior or serious.’

This is a difficult passage, and we need to consider it carefully. Sentence (1) refers back to the beginning of this section (602c1-5), reminding Glaucon of the task they had set themselves and what they were seeking to establish.<sup>22</sup> Sentence (2) takes stock of what Socrates thinks they have concluded by this point, and seems to incorporate three claims, which I have separated out as [a], [b] and [c]. The easiest of these to decipher is [b], that mimesis is something ‘cohabiting with an inferior’. This simply picks up the conclusion established in the immediately preceding stretch of argument and summarised in (1)[ii], that painting consorts with an inferior part of the soul. As for the other two components, I take [c] to be referring to the product of mimesis, the imitation. It is inferior because it stands at three removes from reality. This, of course, just restates the conclusion established in the first stage of the epistemological critique (596a5-598a1), and reasserted at the beginning of this passage as [i] (602c1-2). The first component, [a], that mimesis ‘is an inferior thing’, really just falls out of the other two. Thus the sense is: ‘mimesis is an inferior thing, because it works on an inferior part of the soul and produces something inferior.’<sup>23</sup>

We now turn to (3) and (4), which are of course central to our concerns. Socrates asks whether we should apply what we have just said about painting to poetry.<sup>24</sup> Glaucon’s reply is cautious (just as it was at 597e9): he thinks it *likely* that

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<sup>20</sup> Once again, for reasons of space and relevance, I shall duck a notorious issue: the question of how this way of dividing the soul corresponds to the theory of book IV. This has been discussed extensively in the literature. See, for example, Burnyeat 1999, pp. 222-9 and, most recently, Storey 2014.

<sup>21</sup> I do not think he intends to attack such painting. After all, only a few people are actually taken in by it. Rather, his point is to set it up as a parallel to poetry, where the effects on the audience are far more damaging. See Nehamas 1982, pp. 47 and 67, and Kamtekar 2008, p. 352.

<sup>22</sup> Taken literally, clause [ii] of this sentence comes as a surprise. (See Adam 1963 II, p. 408.) It is misleading to suggest that both [i] and [ii] were already established in 602c1-5. In fact, only [i] was asserted; what Socrates states in [ii] here is actually the answer to the question he merely raised at 602e4-5: what sort of element in us does mimesis address?

<sup>23</sup> This may all seem a bit dogmatic, but I think it can be confirmed by looking ahead to a back reference to sentence (2) at 605a7-b2: here he summarises the two principal points at issue as being that poetry generates ‘inferior’ products in relation to the truth and that it consorts with a lower part of the soul. If this text is to match 603b5 in sentence (2), I think my interpretation of 603b5 ought to be adopted. I discuss 605a7-b1 below.

<sup>24</sup> Even though in (2), 603a10, he had already said that mimesis *in general* consorts with an inferior part of the soul. Given his own caution in 603b7-c3, 603a10 seems to be a point where he gets ahead of himself.

the parallel applies, but he is not willing to be more confident. Socrates picks up on this hesitation and proposes that they add a further argument.<sup>25</sup> This proceeds in two stages. First, at 603c11-604d9 he analyses the moral psychology of grief, again using material explicitly adapted from book IV (439b3-441c3 on the divided soul). He takes the case of someone who has suffered a loss such as the death of his son, and argues that here there must be distinct parts of the soul, given the kind of conflict that ensues: on the one hand the person is tempted to give in to his grief; on the other, he feels the tug of reason and law bidding him to exercise self-restraint. The compromise is that he may indulge his grief, but only in private. Since he feels a conflict, there are two parts of the soul: one rational and superior, the other emotional and inferior. In the next phase of the argument, 604e1-605a6, Socrates turns to the role of poetry in grief. His main point is that tragedy appeals to the lower element of the soul. He does actually allow for the possibility that another kind of poet could imitate the rational part, but such poetry would be difficult to follow, and hardly very popular. So the poetry that is actually prevalent is the kind that ‘consorts’ with the non-rational part. Notice that all this is established without any reference to the visual arts: it is Socrates’ own analysis of what makes for successful (or popular) tragedy.

By 605a7-c3, he thinks he has vindicated the move that he was wary of making at 603b5-c4:

So we’d be right to lay hold of [the poet] and set him down as the counterpart of the painter; for [i] he resembles him in that his creations are inferior in respect of reality; and [ii] the fact that his appeal is to the inferior part of the soul and not to the best part is another point of resemblance. And so we may at last say that we should be justified in not admitting him into a well-ordered state, because he stimulates and fosters this element in the soul.

This is another important signpost passage. Socrates is saying that they now have two reasons for treating the poet as the counterpart of the painter, specifically the *trompe l’oeil* painter, which I have numbered as [i] and [ii]. The first of these just recalls the ontological point established in the first stage of the epistemological critique, while the second picks up the newly established claim about poetry’s effects on the emotions.

Methodologically speaking, it should now be clear what is happening in this passage (603c-605b). Socrates is prepared to use the similarity method to show that poetry works on an inferior part of the soul, but (like Glaucon) only with caution. This motivates him to give an independent argument, providing further support for his conclusion.<sup>26</sup>

So why does Socrates agree with Glaucon that the similarity method is not sufficient in this case? Why does he need an independent argument? The best explanation, I think, lies in the weight of opinion against him. (This would create an exact parallel with the argument of 599a7-601c3, showing that poets lack knowledge.) It may be fine to claim that *trompe l’oeil* painters manipulate some non-rational element in us, but he surely needs more argument to apply the same to poetry. Defenders of Homer will doubtless respond that poetry engages with the intellect (as

<sup>25</sup> It is important to keep track of the Greek particles here (603b9-10). The use of γε is a way of italicising εικόσις, underlining Glaucon’s belief in the fragility of the inference (as in the parallel case of 597e9). In reply, Socrates uses τοίνυν, which has inferential force. In effect he is saying, ‘since, as you say, it’s only *likely* that the parallel holds, let’s try and do better: let’s not rely purely on likeness or similarity, but mount an independent argument.’

<sup>26</sup> Halliwell 1993, p. 136, Murray 1996, p. 216, Moss 2007, pp. 417 and 439, Emlyn-Jones and Preddy 2013, p. xl and Heath 2013, p. 37 all agree that Plato is less reliant on the parallel with painting as a mode of inference at 603b10.

well as the emotions). Because of the strength of this objection, he clearly needs to do more than rely on the similarity method.<sup>27</sup>

## V

*The psychological critique (second part: 605c-606d).* So far Socrates has argued that poetry consorts with an inferior part of the soul and has described in general terms the sort of damage it can do: consorting with the emotions in a way that builds up their strength, which in turn undermines the rule of the better part (605b2-c3). In 605c9-606d7 he goes on to argue that even decent people can be corrupted in this way by tragedy and other forms of mimetic poetry. He imagines someone who believes that it is wrong to indulge their grief, but harmless to enjoy a drama that depicts another person doing so. But enjoying such poetry will stimulate the spectator to feel more grief, thus feeding their non-rational part. So, when an occasion arises in their own life that excites the emotion, they will feel it more strongly. Although most of the argument uses the example of grief, at 606c2-d7 Socrates expands the range of feelings to include sex, anger, laughter and many others, thus applying his argument to comedy as well as tragedy.

We need not dwell on this argument in any detail, because Socrates drops the parallel with painting altogether.<sup>28</sup> It is not as if he starts with a description of a hitherto ‘decent’ observer of visual phenomena, describes his judgement being corrupted through the enjoyment of *trompe l’oeil* painting, and then applies the parallel to the case of a well-brought up person who decides to indulge his taste for tragic drama. Instead, the argument relies purely on claims about the psychology involved in the enjoyment of poetry, specifically about the ways in which such enjoyment carries over into one’s own life. Whether or not we find these claims plausible is another matter; my point is simply that they do not rely in any way on a fresh appeal to the parallel between painting and poetry. And if the painting-poetry parallel is absent, the question of whether he uses the similarity or the heuristic method does not even arise.

## VI

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<sup>27</sup> Does it belong to the essence of mimesis that it works on an inferior part of the soul? If so, we can see why Socrates is prepared to use the similarity method here—though, because of the controversial nature of his conclusion, we can also see why he supplements it with an independent argument. However, there is room for doubt here. At 604e1-605a5, when analysing the effect poetry has on the emotions, he only argues that *some* poetry imitates people experiencing strong emotions and targets the irrational part of the soul. He explicitly leaves open the possibility of imitating good and stable characters, though such mimesis would be unpopular and difficult to follow. Given this point, it seems, he cannot claim that imitative poetry, *qua* mimesis, works on an inferior part of the soul. But, if so, why is he even weakly inclined to use the similarity method to show that (popular) mimesis works on an inferior part of the soul? Perhaps he is only *very* weakly inclined. But I have an alternative suggestion. His view could be that there is such a thing as mimesis as a genus, which simply involves creating an appearance that stands at three removes from reality. The extra feature, targeting the non-rational part of the soul, serves to distinguish sub-species of mimesis, which can in turn be divided into visual and audible kinds: when applied to vision the feature yields *trompe l’oeil* painting; when applied to hearing, popular tragedy and comedy. But alongside these, there could be types of imitation that do not target the irrational part, whether in painting or poetry. Plato’s depiction of the death of Socrates in the *Phaedo* could be a case in point: see Erler 2011, p. 95. These would constitute different sub-species of mimesis. If this suggestion is correct, it is legitimate to apply the similarity method in this passage. Socrates started with a specific kind of visual mimesis (*trompe l’oeil* painting), and identified one of its defining features (targeting an irrational part of the soul). He then applied this analysis to popular tragedy—rightly so, since that also has as an essential feature targeting an irrational part.

<sup>28</sup> See Annas 1981, p. 341.

*The state-soul parallel.* In this paper, I have argued that Socrates uses the parallel between painting and poetry in two quite distinct ways, either as part of the similarity method or as part of the heuristic method. The first of these makes his arguments more vulnerable than the second. But in general, we have found that the similarity method is given less work to do as the passage goes on. In the epistemological critique, we found it used only to establish that poetry stands at three removes from reality. Thereafter the heuristic method took over, and the conclusion that the poets have no understanding of what they write about was derived independently of the parallel with painting. In the first part of the psychological critique, we found that the similarity method was used to show that poetry, like painting, works upon an inferior, irrational part of the soul. But this was treated only as a weak inference and a further, independent argument was given to confirm the conclusion. In the second part of the psychological critique the parallel between poetry and painting was dropped altogether.<sup>29</sup>

Finally, I wish to return to the comparison I made above between the painting-poetry parallel in book X and the state-soul parallel in *Rep.* II-IV and VIII-IX, and develop it in a little more detail.

The state-soul parallel appears on the scene as soon as Socrates starts to respond to the challenge to justice issued by Glaucon and Adeimantus at the beginning of book II. In order to answer the two brothers and explain the value of justice in the individual, he proposes to define it. But rather than launch straight into this task, he first analyses justice in the state, which he thinks will help define individual justice. This procedure is illustrated at 368c8-d7 with the ‘letters analogy’: just as if we were trying to make out some letters written in one place and were able to look at the same letters elsewhere, but in a larger format, so we should start by analysing justice in the larger entity, the state, where it will (apparently) be easier to apprehend, and then return to the smaller entity, the soul. Thus Socrates embarks on a long account of the ideal state and, once this is completed (427c5), turns to the task of analysing its four virtues: wisdom, courage, temperance and justice. At 434d1, he is ready to return to the individual, reminding his readers of the letters analogy of II 368c8-d7. He then proceeds to define the four virtues of the soul. Finally, he returns to the question of the value of justice in the individual at 444e6.

Now compare this with what we have seen in *Rep.* X. For justice, read mimesis; for justice in the state, read mimesis as painting; and for justice in the soul, read mimesis as poetry. In both *Rep.* II and X, Socrates’ initial interest is in a specific question about value—the value of individual justice and the value of poetry.<sup>30</sup> He wants to answer these questions by way of a definition (a familiar enough strategy to readers of the earlier dialogues). But instead of proceeding directly to the definition of the initial object of interest (poetry/individual justice), he points out that it is a species of a more general kind, which has another species. His procedure is then to analyse that

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<sup>29</sup> In n. 3 above I mentioned some of the different terms commentators use to describe the parallel between painting and poetry. In the light of this paper, it is appropriate to talk of painting as an ‘illustration’ for poetry in the context of the heuristic method, though not when the similarity method is being used, because here painting is treated as another species of the same genus (mimesis), which is different from its being used as an illustration for poetry. ‘Analogy’ is also too weak to describe what Socrates has in mind when he uses the similarity method: the relation that two species of the same genus hold to each other is of a more robust kind. (For the same reason I think one should avoid calling the state-soul parallel an analogy. See Scott 2015, pp. 13-15.)

<sup>30</sup> In fact the (meta-)parallel is even closer, because in both cases he wants to know about the effects of justice or poetry on the soul: compare II 367b4-6 and e1-4 (on the beneficial effects of justice) with X 595b5-6 (on the harmful effects of poetry).

other species (painting/justice in the state), and then use this analysis to answer questions about the species in which he was originally interested.<sup>31</sup>

As we have seen, Socrates uses the analysis of painting in two ways in book X, as part of the similarity and heuristic methods. Does he also use both of these as part of the state-soul parallel? To start with the similarity method, recall the way Socrates uses it early on in book X to show that poetry stands at three removes from reality (595c8-598a1): having described painting, and hence mimesis, as creating a product at three removes from reality, he then applied this forthwith to poetry, without an independent argument. Is the same true of the way he uses the state-soul parallel earlier in *Rep.* IV? With some qualifications, I think it is.

It is true that his procedure in book IV is not as direct as it is in X 597e3-598a1. There are two ways in which this is so. (1) Having analysed justice in the state, he does not immediately apply that account to the soul. Instead, he first checks that the soul is tripartite, which involves an independent argument of some complexity (436b6-441c3). But once this is done, he moves swiftly to apply the definitions of the four virtues ascertained in the earlier discussion of the state to the soul. In each case, he assumes that what went for the state will apply to the soul, now that it has been shown to have three parts. What needs to be stressed here is that the argument for tripartition does not itself justify applying the same definition of the virtues of the state to the soul: merely because he has shown that the soul has three parts, he has not thereby shown that justice is a matter of each part performing its own function (*oikeiopragia*). It could be the case that, even though the soul has three parts, justice in the soul is not a matter of *oikeiopragia*; the same point could be made *mutatis mutandis* for the definitions of the other virtues. He only establishes this extra result by using the similarity method. In other words, the argument for tripartition is a precondition for applying the definition from state to soul; it does not itself prove that *oikeiopragia* can be applied from one to the other. (2) Another difference between books IV and X is that, after he has defined individual justice as *oikeiopragia* of the three parts, he does attempt to give this definition independent support. This consists in showing that the person whose soul is ordered in the way described will indeed conform to conventional expectations of justice (442e6-443a10). But the existence of this confirmatory process does not undermine my claim that, until this point, Socrates has been using the similarity method.<sup>32</sup>

The other way in which Socrates uses the painting-poetry parallel in book X is as part of the heuristic method. So the question arises as to whether he also uses the state-soul parallel in this way earlier in the dialogue. This is a somewhat underexplored issue in the literature. Let me suggest one section of the work where the heuristic method may be at work.

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<sup>31</sup> In book II, his reason for following this procedure was that the nature of justice would be easier to apprehend in the state than the individual. So the question arises as to why Plato might have thought the nature of mimesis clearer in the case of painting than poetry. An answer to this question can be found by drawing on Nehamas 1982, pp. 55-8. He argues that, in his account of mimesis, Plato wanted to emphasise the distinction between appearance and reality, such that the imitator represents only appearances. Interestingly, this was a relatively novel point to make for the case of poetry. Traditionally, poets were seen as imitators in the non-pejorative sense of creating likenesses of their subject matter. So '[t]o make this controversial point ... Plato appeals to painting, which can *easily* be said to be an imitation of the look of its subjects' (p. 58, emphasis added).

<sup>32</sup> See Burnyeat 2013, pp. 224-6 for a discussion of the way the argument breaks down into two phases: first the direct application of the state-soul parallel to produce a definition of justice in the individual, then a separate confirmatory argument in 442e6-443a10.

Consider the account of the four kinds of vice in *Rep.* VIII-IX (544c1-580c9). In each case, Socrates first analyses a kind of vice in the state, and then turns to the soul. But in the individual character descriptions, he does not use the similarity method: he does not argue that, because timocracy (for example) takes a certain form in the state, this must be the definition of timocracy as such; hence it must also apply to the soul. Rather, he gives a separate analysis of the individual vice, which could stand on its own feet. This applies to all four vices, which receive quite detailed treatment in their own right, especially the lengthy description of the tyrant. In all four cases, Socrates is following the heuristic method. His analysis of the state sets up an account that we can consider applying to the soul. But whether it does indeed apply is something for which he argues independently.<sup>33</sup> In this respect, his treatment of the four types of vice is quite different from his analysis of the virtues back in book IV.<sup>34</sup>

What do we gain by highlighting the close similarity between the ways in which Plato uses the two parallels (other than finding compositional elegance in the *Republic*)? First, it can be used to confirm that the appeal to painting in *Rep.* X is more principled than some scholars might think: the parallel is part of a procedure that Socrates has tried out, articulated and defended before. Second, the state-soul parallel brought with it an attitude of methodological wariness. Even when it is used as part of the similarity method, we were only meant to apply the conclusions about the state to the soul with caution. Specifically, we should look out for any inconsistencies that may arise as we transfer claims about one to the other; if problems do arise at this point, we have to be ready to go back to the drawing board and start again (434d1-435a5). The idea that applying the parallel might meet with a challenge fits well with the analysis of poetry in *Rep.* X when, at the end, Socrates acknowledges that the poets may well make a counter-attack, and he is quite willing to listen to it (607c4-e2). We should also remember that the use of the state-soul parallel in books II-IV was part of what for Socrates was the ‘shorter route’ (435c9-d4 and 504b1-d3): an admission that the methods they were following lack full precision and that the conclusions derived from them are always open to revision.

So it has never been my purpose to mount an outright defence of the similarity method as it is used in *Rep.* X; I am not denying that, at least early on in the passage (597e3-598a1), Socrates applies it too briskly.<sup>35</sup> But I do want to say that Plato

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<sup>33</sup> That this is the correct way of understanding the method implicit in VIII-IX is clear from a couple of points—namely, when he draws the accounts of the oligarch and the democrat to a close. In the first case, he says: ‘Then have we any further doubt that a thrifty money-maker is like an oligarchic city?’ (555a8-b1; see also 553e5-554a1); in the second: ‘Then shall we set this man beside democracy as the one who is rightly called democratic?’ (562a1-2). In each case he first gives a description of a certain character and then infers that this character corresponds to a particular political constitution. He does not start with the political type and then simply generate a psychological parallel.

<sup>34</sup> I am not claiming that the similarity method plays no role at all in books VIII-IX. For instance, it could be said that Socrates does use it to argue that the tyrant is the most wretched of all the characters (IX 577b10-578b5). See especially 577b10-c2, where he recalls the parallel between the tyrannical state and soul, then looks to the way a tyrannical state is enslaved and quickly infers that the same must be true of the tyrannical individual. That said, he still offers extra, independent arguments to demonstrate the unhappiness of the tyrant and of the unjust person more generally (for example at 583c3-588a10).

<sup>35</sup> Here is one suggestion to offset the criticism: perhaps Plato wants us only tentatively to accept the conclusion that poetry stands at three removes from reality (see Glaucon’s hesitation at 597e9), precisely because it relies on the similarity method. However, after the independent argument that poets lack knowledge (599a7-600e3), we might retrospectively confirm the conclusion. We have shown that poets, like painters, lack knowledge of their subject matter, and yet can still persuade others that they have it; so we might conclude that the best explanation of this is that poets also capture only a

encourages the reader to continue the process of confirming whether or not what applies to painting really does carry over to poetry. If the poets or their defenders have arguments to show that it does not, we must be ready to give them an audience.<sup>36</sup>

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superficial aspect of their subject matter and are, like the painters, at three removes from reality. (Plato makes this explanatory move in the case of painting at 598b68.) For the claim that Plato supports his use of the state-soul parallel with a confirmatory inference to the best explanation in book IV, see Burnyeat 2013, pp. 225.

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