

## THE ‘PHILOSOPHICAL PAINTINGS’ OF THE REPUBLIC.

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### RESUMEN

En el presente artículo examino la apropiación platónica del lenguaje poético en *República* y sostengo que, a pesar de sus críticas a la poesía en los libros 3 y 10, el lenguaje poético está correctamente entrelazado dentro del tejido filosófico para pintar lo corrupto, lo feo y lo inmoral. En términos específicos, la adaptación platónica de diversos motivos poéticos e imágenes en *República* se vuelve más significativa si prestamos atención a Sócrates como un *quasi*-pintor en el diálogo e interpretamos sus imágenes filosóficas como una respuesta de la filosofía a las engañosas representaciones dramáticas de la poesía. De este modo, el arte de la pintura que, incluso es criticado en el libro 10 de *República*, en manos de Platón resulta una herramienta filosófica que le permite investigar la relación de nuestro mundo senso-perceptivo ordinario con el campo metafísico de las Ideas y el lugar de lo humano en él.

### ABSTRACT

In this article I examine Plato’s appropriation of poetic language in the *Republic* and argue that, despite his criticism of poetry in Books 3 and 10, poetic language is justifiably weaved into the philosophical fabric to depict the corrupt, the ugly and the base. In specific terms, Plato’s adaptation of several poetic motifs and images in the *Republic* becomes more meaningful if we choose to pay attention to Socrates as a *quasi* painter in the dialogue and interpret his philosophical images as philosophy’s response to the deceptive dramatic representations of poetry. Thus the art of painting, which is also criticised in *Republic* Book 10, in Plato’s hands becomes a philosophical tool which helps him investigate the relation of our mundane sense-perceptive world to the metaphysical realm of the Ideas and humans’ place in it.

### PALABRAS CLAVE

Pintura-Poesía-Filosofía-Platón- *República*

### KEY WORDS

Painting-Poetry-Philosophy-Plato-*Republic*

Plato's *Timaeus* begins with a reference to the dialogue which Socrates had had the previous day on the organisation of the best constitution of a city-state. *Timaeus*' short description of the *aristē polis*, which is a summary of Books 2 to 5 of Plato's *Republic*, contains a rather important piece of information regarding its reception: Socrates draws in the *Timaeus* an explicit parallel between his theoretical, verbal construction of a *polis* and the life of its citizens on the one hand and viewing a representational work of art, a painting on the other:

ἀκούουσ' ἂν ἤδη τὰ μετὰ ταῦτα περὶ τῆς πολιτείας ἦν διήλομεν, οἷόν τι πρὸς αὐτὴν πεπονθῶς τυγχάνω. προσέειπεν δὲ δὴ τινὶ μοι τοιῷδε τὸ πάθος, οἷον εἴ τις ζῶα καλὰ που θεασάμενος, εἴτε ὑπὸ γραφῆς εἰργασμένα εἴτε καὶ ζῶντα ἀληθινῶς ἡσυχίαν δὲ ἄγοντα, εἰς ἐπιθυμίαν ἀφίκοιτο θεάσασθαι κινουμένα τε αὐτὰ καὶ τι τῶν τοῖς σώμασιν δοκούντων προσήκειν κατὰ τὴν ἀγωνίαν ἀθλοῦντα: ταῦτόν καὶ ἐγὼ πέπονθα πρὸς τὴν πόλιν ἦν διήλομεν.

“Listen to what my feeling is with regard to the polity we have described. I may compare my feeling to something of this kind: Suppose, for instance, that on seeing beautiful creatures, whether works of art or actually alive but in repose, *a man should be moved with desire to behold them in motion and vigorously engaged in some such exercise as seemed suitable to their physique.*” (19b3-c2)<sup>1</sup>

Socrates' comment here points towards two directions: on the one hand, in the *Timaeus* Plato views anew the *Republic*'s theoretical city and polity; on the other hand though, his comment foregrounds an essential question which already exists, all the same less explicitly, in the *Republic*: namely, what lies behind Socrates' comparison of the ideal city-state with a painting? And what would be the implications of this comparison or analogy for our understanding of Socrates' verbal depiction of an ideal city, apparently nowhere to be found on earth?

Starting from Plato's remark in the *Timaeus*, in what follows I would like to focus on the relation of the art of painting to the construction of philosophical speech in the *Republic*. What I call 'philosophical painting' in the *Republic* has not received much treatment in the relevant literature; nonetheless, Plato's observation in the *Timaeus*, as well as his several comments on the similarity of a painter's work to that of the philosopher's in the *Republic*, allows us to locate in this dialogue a number of 'philosophical paintings' that depict the ideal city, human nature, the acquisition of knowledge, and, most importantly, the pinnacle of the Platonic metaphysics – the supreme idea of the Good.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Transl. by W.R.M. Lamb. Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press; London, William Heinemann Ltd. 1925.

<sup>2</sup> This is an elaboration of some points of chapters 3 and 4 of my book *The poetics of philosophical language* (2011). In this article I have expanded and refined the issue of the pictorial art of *skiagraphia* and

Of course such a suggestion about the pictorial character of philosophic speech may lead to several interpretative problems. In *Republic* Book 10, it is poetry and not philosophy which is linked with the art of painting. According to Plato's Socrates, both arts share a mimetic character and both rely on "colours" (verbal-musical colours in the case of poetry) and "coloured diversity" (*poikilia*) to achieve the *mimesis*. Thus in *Republic* Book 10 Socrates equates the poet with the painter (both are *mimetai*) and develops his famous three-level scheme of Reality: the Idea, the object made by the craftsman after the Idea, and the painted image made by the painter after the Object. Within this context, Socrates argues that the craftsman is capable of using an abstract model (the Idea) in constructing the artefact, whereas the painter is not. In specific terms, in *Rep.* 601 a craftsman is said to produce the reins and bit of a horse, whereas a painter merely depicts them, without having true knowledge of his theme (that is its appropriate usage). As has been rightly suggested in the relevant literature, Plato's real target in Book 10 is poetry, for which the representational art of painting appears to work as an excellent analogy. Nonetheless, in the final book Plato does reject the mimetic arts *in toto* for being "twice removed from truth" and for seeking to stir the emotions rather than to appeal to the rational part of the soul. In fact, according to Socrates, *mimesis* "destroys reason" (605b-c; cp. 606d).

Nonetheless, if we choose to ignore for a moment Plato's vehement attack on pictorial and poetic *mimesis* in Book 10, there are other instances in the dialogue where Plato makes Socrates compare the philosopher-king's work in the ideal *polis* to that of a painter, and the speech that Socrates himself employs in his philosophical exchange with his interlocutors is compared to the construction of verbal images or paintings (*eikones*).<sup>3</sup> Thus if we follow, as I propose, Plato's comparison of Socrates to a verbal painter, who mixes words and motifs in his philosophical speech in the same way that a painter mixes colours to produce pictorial art, we adopt a new viewpoint which helps us cast new light on the controversial relation between philosophy and poetry.<sup>4</sup>

In specific terms, we may provide an answer to the following two questions: Firstly, what are the reasons that make Plato on the one hand severely criticise, condemn, and eventually ostracise poetry and its techniques in Books 3 and 10 of the *Republic*? At

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supplemented the bibliography.

<sup>3</sup> *Rep.* 501a2-b7; See also *Rep.* 484c6-d3 and 517d-e.

<sup>4</sup> Socrates compares himself to a painter in *Rep.* 487e4-488a7, but he has already made a number of images in the text and will continue to build even more impressive ones as the conversation progresses. See also *Rep.* 399e5-10. Several interesting studies have offered insightful analyses of the vexed issue of philosophy's ancient quarrel with poetry. See, for example, Ferrari (1987) and (1989), Nightingale (1995), and Halliwell (1988) and (2000b). In addition, see the several enlightening analyses in a volume focused on this idiosyncratic relationship in Destree, P. and Herrmann, F.-G. (eds.) (2011). In this paper I focus instead on the way the art of painting may help us grasp the reason why Plato attacks the representational-performative aspect of poetry. See also Petraki (2011: 8-18).

the same time how does he weave into the fabric of his philosophical prose in the same work themes and motifs that can be easily recognised as belonging to the poets' thematic and discursive stock? This necessarily leads us to a further question: Is the philosopher who aims to investigate the truth and reach the Real, and who condemns poetry for misrepresenting reality and deception, justifiably allowed to employ in his work the very same verbal features he rejects?

In the rest of this article I will argue the thesis that Plato's adaptation of several poetic motifs and images in the *Republic* becomes more meaningful if we choose to pay attention to Socrates as a *quasi* painter in the dialogue and interpret his philosophical images as philosophy's response to the deceptive dramatic representations of poetry. Thus the art of painting in Plato's hands in the *Republic* becomes a philosophical tool which helps him investigate the relation of our mundane sense-perceptive world to the metaphysical realm of the Ideas and humans' place in it.<sup>5</sup>

### **The Republic**

But before I turn to investigate the methodological value that lies in Plato's use of painting as an analogy for philosophical speech, let me first give a short summary of the dialogue under discussion.<sup>6</sup> The *Republic's* main theme is well-known: Socrates' attendance of the festival of Bendis in Piraeus brings about the grand challenge of demonstrating the importance of justice and its prevalence over injustice. In the course of the discussion it becomes evident that this undertaking is no easy task as Plato's Socrates must also show that, contrary to the opinion of the majority, the just life is the happiest form of life for humans. Indeed, for Socrates the unjust way of life is identified with the life of the tyrant and it is the worst possible choice that one could make. According to the Platonic argument of Book 9, the unjust man experiences a continuous psychological turmoil and imbalance that consumes him from the inside and also compels him to "devour" his fellow citizens in the civic courtrooms and elsewhere. Behind the choice of injustice and the unjust way of life lies one's insatiable desire for pleasure (*hēdonē*). In the course of the dialogue, Plato also demonstrates that the pleasure of this sort is false and radically different from the true pleasure experienced by the knowledgeable and the true philosophers. Thus the subject-matter that Plato examines in the *Republic* is primarily ethical, but of course in Platonic thought the boundaries between ethics, politics, metaphysics, and ontology are often blurred and thus indistinguishable.

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<sup>5</sup> Halliwell (2000a: 102-3). Note that in *Cratylus* 431a-d, which antedates the *Republic*, Plato links again words with colours and associates *logos* at large this time with painting, *mimesis* and image-making.

<sup>6</sup> In the summary of the *Republic* in the following paragraphs I restate ideas which I have discussed in Petraki (2011: 1-2).

Plato investigates the nature of justice by way of an analogy, the comparison of the human soul to a city, and argues for a tripartite division in both planes. The soul is divided in three parts—the appetitive, the spirited, and the rational—and the city into three classes—the economic class, the guardian class, and the philosopher-kings. He then argues that justice in both city and soul is to be found in “each part performing its own task”. It is Plato’s fundamental thesis in the dialogue that correct education is the only way towards both the harmonisation of the tripartite soul and the preservation of the ideal *polis*, once this is created by the city founders. Socrates then devotes a great part of his discussion to laying out the guidelines and the specific characteristics of this type of education, which is directed to the city-guardians (Books 2 and 3) and the philosopher-kings (Book 7) of the *Republic*.

The guardians of the ideal city will be educated in *mousikē* (music and poetry) and gymnastics; the philosopher-kings’ education, on the other hand, is far more demanding. In Book 7, Socrates offers a list of five subjects which are intended to free them gradually from the confusing reliance on the senses so that they can grasp the Platonic Forms. These are theory number, geometry, stereometry, harmonics and, finally, dialectic. It has been widely acknowledged that the *Republic*’s educational programme of the guardians is essentially a reformation of current education in *mousikē* and gymnastics in contemporary Athens.<sup>7</sup> In Books 2 and 3 of the *Republic* (377d7-e3), Socrates condemns the poets for “not lying well” to their audience for the things that matter most in life, namely the gods and the heroes. In this view, the poets also fail to represent correctly the “simple character” of humans (392a-b, 604e1-6; cp. *Crit.* 107a-108b). In Book 10 (605b8-c4), Plato’s Socrates informs us that the poets fail to depict or convey a correct (re)presentation of ethical values as regards gods, heroes, and simple people because they lack true knowledge of these values. In addition, what they present (incarnate) in the various poetic performances is *mixtures* of *antithetical* ethical values: heroes who are brave but at the same time arrogant, selfish or liars; powerful but unjust and cunning; beautiful and good but cowardly.<sup>8</sup> The consequence of poetic performances of this sort is the creation of wrong ethical prototypes, which result in the ethical confusion of the audiences.

<sup>7</sup> See, for example, Clay (1988: 18-33) and Rocco (1997).

<sup>8</sup> That Plato views this as a problem in the *Republic* is evident from 604e-605b. This “clash” of character features is a vexed issue which relates to the successful harmonization of the tripartite human soul. A detailed discussion of this issue lies outside the scope of this paper. In her analysis of *thymnos* in Plato Angela Hobbs discusses this “clash” in the *Hippias Major* and the *Hippias Minor*, but, in her view, Plato does not view it as a problem in these two dialogues (Hobbs 2000: 175-219). The problem of the conflicting characteristics is raised for the first time in the *Republic*. Although I agree with Hobbs that Plato does not address this problem in the two shorter dialogues, I am more inclined to detect an irony on his part in the way he has Socrates converse with Hippias about these two traditional heroes. According to my reading, Plato recognizes the problem but does not address it explicitly as he does in his *Republic*, where Socrates has a different philosophical agenda and interlocutors.

In the *Republic*'s terms, the knowledge of our earthly ethical values, which are manifested in the actions of humans as much as they are represented in the actions of gods, heroes, and simple people in myth and poetry is inextricably linked with a new type of philosophical knowledge, namely, one's acquaintance with the Platonic Forms. According to the ontology of the *Republic*, the Forms differ from their visible or sense-perceptible earthly manifestation in that, contrary to the doings in our own mundane sphere of human action, the Forms are transcendent and unchanging, eternal, pure, unmixed, and thus truly "real". In the metaphysical realm of the Platonic Ideas, concepts such as justice or beauty cannot be seen as beautiful and just from one point of view, and unjust and ugly from another. (Platonic ideas cannot be mixed thus.) This is not the case though with the sense-perceptive realm that we mortals inhabit. Ours is a world of instability, variability, and constant change; a world of mixture and continuous conflict of pairs of opposites. In *Republic* Book 5, Plato calls this level of cognition *Doxa* and argues that those who remain trapped therein and fail to move to the level of Knowledge will never attain the Real. What is more, for Plato, ethical concepts such as courage, moderation, wisdom or justice cannot be fully identified in their earthly manifestations unless one knows the Forms which make the very many particular things or actions bear the qualities that people ascribe to them.

### **Painting, paideia and philosophy**

For my purposes this observation is critical for grasping the versatile educational aspects of the Platonic *Republic*. In this dialogue Socrates offers guidelines for the education of the guardians and the philosopher-kings of his *ideal* city. Thus in Book 3 Socrates puts emphasis on the fact that the young guardians must be raised and educated in an environment devoid of "*images of baseness and injustice*". On the contrary, their souls will be nurtured with unmixed "*images of goodness*" only (401b-d). It would appear then that the ethical prototypes which Socrates favours in his educational scheme, and which the city guardians should take after, are more or less an earthly manifestation of the Platonic Forms. It is also the ethical quality of characters of this sort that the hard and demanding education of the philosopher-kings in science and dialectic is designed to perfect.

Nonetheless, this brings us to Socrates' interlocutors in the *Republic* (and perhaps to the dialogue's fourth century readership), that is, to the fifth century BC people gathered at Cephalus' house in Piraeus.<sup>9</sup> These are people of various backgrounds

<sup>9</sup>I am here referring not only to the two main interlocutors of Socrates throughout the dialogue, Glaucon and Adeimantus, but also to the several dramatic *personae* of Book 1, Polemarchus, Lysias, Euthydemus, and Thrasymachus, to name some of them, most of whom participate in the dialogue on justice as mere listeners. There is a growing literature on the dialogues as dramas as well as on people which surround Socrates. See, for example, Arieti (1991), Stokes (1986), Blondell (2002: 1-80) and Petraki (2011: 26-30 and 142-155 with further bibliography). In addition, see Nails (2002).

including metics, democrats, Athenian aristocrats, and foreigners, who, more or less, share the same cultural bonds. On the basis of the guidelines that Socrates sets in the *Republic*, these people can become neither guardians nor philosopher-kings in the ideal city-state because they have been culturally and cognitively contaminated in the “mud of ignorance” (535e). So what of these people that Socrates converses with at the house of Cephalus? What is Plato’s philosophical and educational agenda as regards them? To put it in a different way, what sort of philosophical education does Plato hold for people who have been brought up to be confused because they have been bombarded with conflicting ethical prototypes? What becomes of people who for years listen to stories about gods who can be bribed with generous sacrifices so that they forgive injustice because gods are powerful enough to behave in this way? Who listen to stories about gods who eat their children? To stories about favoured heroes who serve the flesh of their children to the gods in common banquets? To stories about gods who literally change form (being both diverse and colourful - *poikiloi*) to get hold of what they desire? To stories about gods who are thieves and who fabricate empty images of smoke in order to deceive humans; stories about gods who raise wars and keep them for decades; about gods who torture humans, and about humans who torture other humans. The list of Book 2 of the *Republic* is long and possibly inexhaustible from Plato’s point of view.<sup>10</sup> How does Plato educate people who have been brought up not just listening to the above myths but also viewing them in, literally, numerous colourful performances? How does one educate the ‘sight-lovers’ of the fifth century Athens, who are used to running from ‘one choral festival to another’ and who insatiably attend all kinds of different performances, sophistic, rhapsodic, and poetic?<sup>11</sup>

I believe that Plato ventures an answer to this question in his *Republic* by making full use of the new paths and possibilities that his comparison of painting and philosophical speech can offer to an audience well-trained in viewing pictorial art representations. In other words, Plato’s imagery addresses the audience’s visual capacities, which have been trained anyway due to attending the various poetic performances, and builds on people’s act of visualisation seeking to re-direct it towards new philosophic directions. This is achieved through the employment of an imagistic

<sup>10</sup>Note that all of the above, and yet more according to Socrates, are to be erased from the poetic myths that the guardians will be listening as they are being brought up. See *Rep.* Book 2 and 3.

<sup>11</sup>See *Rep.* 475d1-8: οἱ τε γὰρ φιλοθεάμονες πάντες ἔμοιγε δοκοῦσι τῷ καταμανθάνειν χαίροντες τοιοῦτοι εἶναι... ὥσπερ δὲ ἀπομεμισθωκότες τὰ ὄτα ἐπακοῦσαι πάντων χορῶν περιθέουσι τοῖς Διονυσίοις οὔτε τῶν κατὰ πόλεις οὔτε τῶν κατὰ κόμης ἀπολειπόμενοι. [“You will then be giving the name to a numerous and strange band, for all the lovers of spectacles are what they are, I fancy, by virtue of their delight in learning something... but as if they had farmed out their ears to listen to every chorus in the land, they run about to all the Dionysiac festivals, never missing one, either in the towns or in the country-villages.] The text of the *Republic* used is Burnet’s OCT (1903) edition. I have also consulted Slings’ 2003 OCT edition.

type of philosophical language (*eikōn*). When employing this type of language Plato accommodates the rejected poetic modalities, imagery, themes, and motifs that are familiar to his audience. This results in the formulation of a highly poeticised philosophical prose, which both ancient and modern critics have observed, that serves as the most appropriate dialect for conveying highly complicated ethical, ontological, and epistemological concepts to people who have not been properly educated in Platonic philosophical thought, such as Socrates' interlocutors at Cephalus' house.

We are now in a better position to understand the idiosyncratic relation of philosophic speech and verbal painting in the *Republic*. In the last book of the *Republic* Plato strikes the final and severest blow against poetry: he now attacks it both on metaphysical and epistemological grounds, rigorously condemning its mimetic character.<sup>12</sup> But elsewhere in the *Republic* Plato resorts to painting as an analogy for his philosophy. Socrates compares the philosopher-king with a painter who, after rubbing off his slate the various images of baseness and injustice, draws on a clean one ethics and constitutions which are only good.

λαβόντες, ἦν δ' ἐγώ, ὡσπερ πίνακα πόλιν τε καὶ ἤθη ἀνθρώπων, πρῶτον μὲν  
καθαράν ποιήσειαν ἄν, ὃ οὐ πάνυ ῥάδιον: ἀλλ' οὖν οἷσθ' ὅτι τούτῳ ἂν εὐθύς  
τῶν ἄλλων διενέγκοιεν, τῷ μῆτε ιδιώτου μῆτε πόλεως ἐθελῆσαι ἂν ἄψασθαι  
μηδὲ γράφειν νόμους, πρὶν ἢ παραλαβεῖν καθαράν ἢ αὐτοὶ ποιῆσαι.  
καὶ ὀρθῶς γ', ἔφη.  
οὐκοῦν μετὰ ταῦτα οἶει ὑπογράψασθαι ἂν τὸ σχῆμα τῆς πολιτείας;  
τί μήν;  
ἔπειτα οἷμαι ἀπεργαζόμενοι πυκνὰ ἂν ἐκατέρωσ' ἀποβλέποιν, πρὸς τε τὸ  
φύσει δίκαιον καὶ καλὸν καὶ σῶφρον καὶ πάντα τὰ τοιαῦτα, καὶ πρὸς ἐκεῖν'  
αὐτὸ ἐν τοῖς ἀνθρώποις ἐμποιοῖεν, συμμειγνύντες τε καὶ κεραννύντες ἐκ τῶν  
ἐπιτηδευμάτων τὸ ἀνδρείκελον, ἀπ' ἐκείνου τεκμαιρόμενοι, ὃ δὴ καὶ Ὀμηρος  
ἐκάλεσεν ἐν τοῖς ἀνθρώποις ἐγγιγνόμενον θεοειδές τε καὶ θεοεικελον.  
ὀρθῶς, ἔφη (501a2-b7).

“They will take the city and the characters of men, as they might a tablet, and first wipe it clean— no easy task. But at any rate you know that this would be their first point of difference from ordinary reformers, that they would refuse to take in hand either individual or state or to legislate before they either received a clean slate or themselves made it clean.”

“And they would be right,” he said. “And thereafter, do you not think that they would sketch the figure of the constitution?” “Surely.”

“And then, I take it, in the course of the work they would glance frequently in

<sup>12</sup>This comparison has generated the opinion dominant in the relevant literature that Plato's view of painting is primarily, if not only, negative. See Schuhl (1952, rpr.), Demand (1975: 1-20), Plochmann (1976: 189-200) and Morgan (1990: 23: 121-145). See also Hub (2009).



either direction, at justice, beauty, sobriety and the like as they are in the nature of things, and alternately at that which they were trying to reproduce in mankind, mingling and blending from various pursuits that hue of the flesh, so to speak, deriving their judgment from that likeness of humanity which Homer too called when it appeared in men the image and likeness of God.” “Right,” he said.<sup>13</sup>

The “slate” in this Platonic analogy stands for the human soul. On the citizens’ souls, his included, the philosopher-king, as a painter, as it were, will draw virtues only, taking as his paradigms or prototypes the Forms. In line with Socrates’ guidelines regarding the organisation of the ideal city in Book 5, the philosopher-ruler’s aim is to create a human soul which resists conflict and strife and is as unified and thus as virtuous as possible. Along the same lines, the philosopher-king will also organise the earthly ethics and constitution of the ideal city-state. The duty that Socrates assigns to the philosopher-king in Book 5 is similar to that instructed earlier to the poets in his guidelines concerning the upbringing of the young guardians (401b-d). What is common in both is that sentiments of strife, injustice, and baseness should be erased from the ideal society (401c5-d3; cp. 462b and 470b4-9) and should be substituted with gracefulness, unity, and friendship. Yet, Socrates’ task as an educator in the *Republic* is different from that of the philosopher-kings. Maintaining Plato’s simile of painting, Socrates’ “slate” as a philosopher in fifth century Athens has not been (and cannot be) wiped “clean” (see 378d). His interlocutors have been brought up with conflicted ethical prototypes: these conflicts, which result in ethical confusion, cannot be easily erased from their souls. It is to battle this ethical and epistemological confusion, I argue, that Plato compares Socrates to a painter in the *Republic* and has him create some of the most impressive and memorable verbal images (*eikones*) in Western literature.

The Platonic word *eikōn* (image), which is very often translated as “simile” or “analogy” because of its etymological relation to the verb *eoika* (to be like, or be similar to), obliquely emphasizes the similarity between two concepts, or objects; it is also ideal to explore notions of resemblance between a copy (that is an image) and its prototype.<sup>14</sup> From this point of view, the term bears affinities also with the concept of *mimesis*. Being thus pregnant with semantically loaded nuances of this sort, the term *eikōn* turns out to be particularly informative in the *Republic*; in a dialogue, that is, which seeks to investigate the relation of our sense-perceptive world with the realm of the Forms and which aims at educating human sight so that it supports the intellect’s long cognitive journey to the Forms. In the Platonic dialogues, the term *eikōn* and its various cognates (*eikazō* and *apeikazō*) can be used both rhetorically to mean

<sup>13</sup> Unless indicated otherwise, all translations of the *Republic* are after Shorey (1969) and slightly modified.

<sup>14</sup> On what follows see also Pender (2000: 7) and Silk (1974: 5). See also Vernant (1991: 164-185), Gallop (1964/65: 113-131), Said (1987: 309-30). In addition, see Radke-Uhlmann (2011: 153-179). I have discussed in detail the notion of Plato’s *eikōn* in Petraki (2011: 58-69).

“metaphors, similes, and other types of verbal comparison” and, in non-rhetorical contexts, to denote a statue, a portrait, or figures in paintings. Within the broader context of art, in the *Republic*, the *Laws*, and the *Philebus*, the term is employed to refer to representation in music or the likeness created by actors on stage. In the *Republic*, in particular, the word is used in representations of bad and good characters as depicted in poetry. Outside the context of art, the term may also denote reflection on water and other shiny materials or shadow.<sup>15</sup> But, most importantly, for the needs of my argument, in the *Republic* the word *eikon* refers to a specific type of discourse which primarily addresses our visualisation with a view to investigating complicated and highly elusive epistemological and ethical concepts. Thus, by means of a verbal image, invisible or abstract difficult concepts are related to our sense-perceptive world, become palpable, and can be inspected.

Socrates is the only speaker to use *eikones* in his speech in the *Republic* and, when using them, he always emphasises their distinction from another type of philosophic speech, rigorous argumentation. He also underlines the inferiority of verbal image-making to the construction of philosophic argumentation. Socrates grounds his choice of this type of discourse on his own and the interlocutors’ inability to follow an alternative philosophical method and/or type of philosophic speech. Thus the famous dialectic, Plato’s favourite method for doing philosophy and the philosopher kings’ ultimate method for ascension to the Forms, is *presented* in the dialogue, but is not *employed* in Socrates’ conversation with Glaucon or Adeimantus.<sup>16</sup>

What we have instead are several lengthier or shorter verbal images: the city’s guardians are compared to watchdogs (375d), and the Form of the Good is presented to the interlocutors in the image of the Sun (508e-509c). The four distinct levels of human cognition (*eikasia*, belief, *dianoia*, and *noēsis*) are presented in the image of the Cave as mixtures of light with darkness (514a-517d). In Book 5, the harmonious unification of all three classes of the ideal city-state and of the tripartite soul is also presented in an image. This is the least adorned image in our text, an *andreikelon*, namely, the painting of a male body in carnation colour which depicts the unity, harmony, and homogeneity of all the citizens and all the souls of the ideal city-state (464b).<sup>17</sup> At another instance in the text, Socrates presents the pursuit of philosophy by useless and incompetent people, philosophers in name only, by way of an image: philosophy is compared to a woman who has sexual relationships with men below her and who gives birth to illegitimate children; that is to other non-genuine philosophers (495c-d). In another image, the city-state which disrespects the true philosopher is

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<sup>15</sup> On Plato’s use of the epistemological imagery of reflection and art representation in the Line and the Cave, see Petraki (2009: 27-68) with further bibliography.

<sup>16</sup> See *Rep.* 506d-e; cp. 532d-533a.

<sup>17</sup> On *andreikelon* see Keuls (1997: 115-6).

similar to a ship in disarray (487b-488d). It is the incompetent and ignorant sailors-counterfeit philosophers who take charge of the ship of state in the end.

And lastly there is the famous image of injustice in Book 9 of the *Republic*. Plato's *eikōn* of the unjust tyrant's soul is rhetorically powerful indeed. Socrates now becomes a verbal sculptor and fashions with words the statue (*eikōn*) of an incongruous, multi-headed, and wild beast to depict the soul of the unjust tyrant (588c-589b). The tyrant's soul is both the incongruent result of several wild and tame animals and a weak little man who stands for the rational part and strives to be set free, but is constantly weakened by the other 'beasts'. Socrates concludes the image by covering the tyrant's soul in a 'human flesh-coat'. The famous image of Book 9 is intended to demonstrate that there is more than meets the eye when it comes to assessing people's true power, happiness or ethical behaviour. It is very difficult indeed for human vision to penetrate the tyrant's external cover and take a good look at the intrinsic characteristics of a creature which appears powerful and truly happy, but which in fact partakes very little of human nature. The tyrant's soul is diverse, ugly, disharmonious, unjust, and truly unhappy. In other words, it is the *complete opposite* of what the majority think of the tyrant and of a tyrant's life.

This list is not exhaustive of all the verbal images that Socrates produces for the 'sight-lovers' in the dialogue he holds in Piraeus. It is images of this sort and not virtues (*ēthē agatha*) that he imprints on their souls (and on ours). What is the aim of this Socratic image-making? Does it form a coherent and systematic whole? And in what way is the art of painting an appropriate philosophical analogy for the discussion of division or separation, of strife and baseness, or friendship and unification? How does this analogy relate to the verbal paintings (*eikones*) that Socrates produces in the *Republic*? I would like to argue that Socrates' image-making serves a twofold aim. Firstly, it seeks to educate the interlocutors, and all those present in the conversation at Cephalus' house, on the disentanglement of the mixtures of opposite concepts and ideas which surround us humans in the mundane world of *Doxa*. Thus Plato relates the verbal ornaments of poetry (*chrōmata* and *poikilia*), its wording, distinctive themes and motifs, with injustice and the ethically confused world of *Doxa*.<sup>18</sup> In doing so, he has assigned to baseness and confusion its own distinctive dialect, the poets' language.

This interpretative approach to the *Republic's* images becomes fully meaningful if we pay close attention to the reasons that make Socrates condemn in the dialogue not

<sup>18</sup> *Poikilia* (colour diversity) traces its origins both back to Homer and to the Pre-Socratics. In the art context it is linked with music, painting, and embroidery. In Plato it also refers to the vivid and diverse colourfulness of our sense perceptive world, which can deceive the intellect (see, for example, *Rep.* 529d-e). Note that in the *Pheadrus* 247c true reality is presented as colourless. On Plato's view of the concept of *poikilia* in philosophy see Wallace (2009: 201-213). See also extensive discussion in Petraki (2011: 15-6 with ns. 28 and 29 and 177-214). With regard to *poikilia* in poetry and music, see Fowler (1984: 119-149), Barker (1995: 41-60), Roch (2001), Rocconi (2004: 29-34) and LeVen (2013: 229-242).

painting at large but one particular pictorial technique: *skiagraphia* (literally shadow-painting or shading). Shadow painting is a visual technique which flourished in the fifth century BC.<sup>19</sup> Unfortunately, Plato and Aristotle's few references to *skiagraphia* are our main fourth century sources for inferring the characteristics distinctive to this particular painting technique.<sup>20</sup> The sources suggest that the technique was based on distant viewing and relied on colour mixing to depict what one would see from afar as a "faithful" or "cohesive" representation, usually that of nature or landscapes. Nonetheless, the pictorial coherence would dissolve once one ventured a *closer* look at the painting. The colours then were analyzed and separated, the artistic integration was lost, and the viewer could not make sense of what previously had appeared to be a coherent whole.<sup>21</sup>

The term appears in the dialogues ten times, five of which occur in the *Republic*.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>19</sup>The technique of *skiagraphia*, apparently a breakthrough in pictorial representation of the fifth century BC, has been linked by some with the very birth of painting. As Pliny himself acknowledges, 'the question of the origins of painting is uncertain...' (*N.H.* 35. 15-16; cp. his comments in *N.H.* 35. 58-60 on Apollodorus the *skiagraphos*: 'he first established the method for representing appearances and first conferred glory upon the paintbrush *iure.*) According to Plutarch (*De Gloria Atheniensium* 2 [*Mor.* 346A]), the technique was developed by Apollodorus of Athens in the latter part of the fifth century who was for this reason called *skiagraphos*: Scoliast on *Iliad* 10.265, s.v. πῖλος ἄρηρει; Hesychius, s.v. σκιά: ἐπιφάνεια τοῦ χρώματος ἀντίμορφος; Photius s.v. σκιαγράφος; *RE* s.v. 'Apollodorus' no. 77. In addition, see Overbeck 1641-47.

<sup>20</sup>The *skiagraphia* is a highly contested technique. See Keuls (1975: 1-16), Pemberton (1976: 82-84), Pfuhl (1910: 12-28) and (1912: 227-31); Also, Steven (1933: 149-55), Pollitt (1974) and Trimpi (1978: 403-413). However, the wall paintings found in the Macedonian tombs at Phoenikas and Hagios Athanasion in Thessaloniki have cast new light on the controversies. See its detailed description offered in Τσιμπιδου-Αυλονίτη (2005).

<sup>21</sup>Ascertaining the technical details has been no easy task. There has been particular controversy over the creation of 'shading' (*skia*). Namely, the manner in which colours were mixed to create hues, and its relation to the pictorial technique of *skênographia* (scene-painting). As both trace their origin in the Classical era some scholars have argued for their identification. According to this view, *skiagraphia*/*skênographia* was a technique invented for the theatre. It sought an imitation of reality by way of visual trickery and is best translated as 'trompe l'oeil' (Rouveret [1989: 24-5]). As regards the Platonic corpus in particular, the view has been taken that the two techniques have been confounded, with Plato using the term *skiagraphia* to refer to *skênographic* representation as well. This is Trimpi's view (1978: 403-413) who, nonetheless, argues that Plato does not use the term in all the textual environments in the same way. Thus behind the term *skiagraphia*-*skiagraphemena* may lie the technique of *skênographia* depending on the context. According to Trimpi, in the long history of the two terms the distinction became philologically obscured and the terms *skiagraphia* and *skênographia* became interchangeable and remained so for Hesychius and Photius in the Middle Ages.

<sup>22</sup>With the exception of the *Phaedo* 69b, Plato uses the term in the *Republic* and in the late dialogues. See also *Parm.* 165c-d, *Thet.* 208e, *Crit.* 107c-d and the *Laws* 663b-c. Different dialogues highlight different aspects of the technique. In the *Critias* 107c-d, Critias informs us that the "unclear and deceptive" *skiagraphia* is adequate for the representation of landscapes and broad vistas, but not for the representation of human bodies. According to the *Theaetetus* 208e, this technique requires remote viewing. Should the viewer approach the painting, coherence broke up and the representation makes no sense at all. The *Parmenides* 165c-d provides us with further information. The *skiagraphia* uses mixture of colour and requires distant viewing. In the *Parmenides* the technique is used as a metaphor for "the unreal divisions of the one". Thus what appears to be "one" from afar (ἀποστάντι μὲν ἐν πάντα φαινόμενα) soon turns into "many", "different", and "dissimilar" (προσελθόντι δὲ γὰρ πολλὰ καὶ ἕτερα καὶ τῷ τοῦ ἑτέρου φαντάσματι ἕτεροῖα καὶ ἀνόμοια ἑαυτοῖς). These

Its usage and distribution in the *Republic* is interesting. The term is used almost exclusively metaphorically: as an analogy for deceptive poetry on the one hand, and for the mixed and non-philosophical pleasure of the many on the other. Thus Adeimantus uses it for the first time in Book 2, and Glaucon and Socrates re-employ it in Books 7, 9, and 10 to refer to the way in which the distinction of opposites can confuse and deceive the mind. Opposites are often confused. This confusion may stem either from the *alternation* or the simultaneous *co-existence* of all kinds of opposites.<sup>23</sup>

I shall return to Adeimantus’ intriguing use of the term in Book 2 shortly. First I would like to focus on the context in which the term re-appears in Book 7, after, that is, Socrates has concluded his description of the ideal *polis* and right before he embarks on the vivid presentation of the corrupt souls and polities. In 523b Socrates is about to present to Glaucon the five lessons which are intended to free the philosopher-king from reliance on the (deceptive) senses. These are studies whose aim is to awake the intellect (*noēsis*) and assist it so that it is drawn towards essence. This is no easy explication and Socrates starts from the basics. There are times when the reports of our senses help us form adequate judgments, but there are also other times when the senses seem unreliable and thus the intellect is summoned to reflect and reach judgment (523b). Glaucon intervenes at this point and employs the term *eskiagraphēmēna*:

ΓΛ. τὰ πόρρωθεν, ἔφη, φαινόμενα δῆλον ὅτι λέγεις καὶ τὰ ἐσκιαγραφημένα (523 b5-6).

“You obviously mean distant appearances,” he said, “and shadow-painting.”

But this is not what Socrates has in mind. He rather refers to:

ΣΩ. Τὰ μὲν οὐ παρακαλοῦντα, ἦν δ’ ἐγώ, ὅσα μὴ ἐκβαίνει εἰς ἐναντίαν αἴσθησιν ἅμα. Τὰ δ’ ἐκβαίνοντα ὡς παρακαλοῦντα τίθημι, ἐπειδὴν ἢ αἴσθησις μὴδὲν μᾶλλον τοῦτο ἢ τὸ ἐναντίον δηλοῖ, εἴτ’ ἐγγύθεν προσπίπτουσα εἴτε πόρρωθεν. ὧδε δὲ ἂ λέγω σαφέστερον εἴσῃ. Οὗτοί φαμεν τρεῖς ἂν εἶεν δάκτυλοι, ὃ τε συμκρότατος καὶ ὁ δεύτερος καὶ ὁ μέσος.

“The ones that don’t summon the intellect, I said, are all those that don’t at the same time go over to the opposite sensation. But the ones that do go over I class among those that summon the intellect, when the sensation does not reveal one

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three dialogues aside, Plato uses this art metaphor in the *Phaedo*, the *Republic*, and the *Laws* to discuss the vexed concepts of pleasure and justice.

<sup>23</sup> See *Rep.* 523b and 602c7-d4 with the discussion further below. At an ethical level this would mean that one *is* truly unjust but *appears* in a manner similar to a straight stick which appears bent.

thing any more than each opposite, regardless of whether the object strikes the senses from near or far off. But you will see my meaning more clearly this way: these we say would be three fingers – the smallest, the second and the middle.”<sup>24</sup>

When viewed in relation to the other passages in Books 9 and 10, the above passage is crucial for our understanding of *skiagraphia* in that it draws attention to one specific aspect of it; namely, the utterly illusionary character of this pictorial technique. The *eskiagraphēmēna* are not ‘provocatives’ (*parakalounta*) according to Socrates because the viewer does *not* experience *at the same time* a contradictory perception. For the *skiagraphia* to work it must create the illusion of coherence and integration. And this it does through its distant viewing and colour mixture. The coherence is dropped only when the viewer approaches the painting.<sup>25</sup>

Plato uses the term again twice in Book 9 and one last time in Book 10. The passage of Book 10 sheds further light on the particulars of the technique. *Skiagraphia* is now linked with the deceptive appearance of objects reflected in water. According to this passage, the use of colours in *skiagraphiai* can have the same impact on the human soul with our perception of reflected objects in water: the viewer can reach no stable judgment as to whether a stick is straight or not. On the contrary, depending on the circumstances each thing will appear to be its opposite. In the case of *skiagraphia*, this is the result of the effect of its colour-mixture.

καὶ ταῦτα καμπύλα τε καὶ εὐθέα ἐν ὕδατι τε θεωμένοις καὶ ἔξω, καὶ κοιλὰ τε δὴ καὶ ἐξέχοντα διὰ τὴν περὶ τὰ χρώματα αὐτῶν πλάνην τῆς ὄψεως, καὶ πᾶσά τις παραχρῆ δῆλη ἡμῖν ἐνοῦσα αὕτη ἐν τῇ ψυχῇ: ὅ δὴ ἡμῶν τῷ παθήματι τῆς φύσεως ἡ σκιαγραφία ἐπιθεμένη γοητείας οὐδὲν ἀπολείπει καὶ ἡ θαυμαστοποιία καὶ αἱ ἄλλαι πολλαὶ τοιαῦται μηχαναί. (602c7-d4).

“And the same things appear bent and straight to those who view them in water and out, or concave and convex, owing to similar errors of vision about colors, and there is obviously every confusion of this sort in our souls. And so shadow-painting in its exploitation of this weakness of our nature falls *nothing short of witchcraft*, and so do jugglery and many other such contrivances.”

Nonetheless, it is in Book 9 that the richness of this art metaphor is fully divulged. Pictorial art, and *skiagraphia* in particular, is Plato’s favourite metaphor to discuss the vexed issue of pleasure (*hēdonē*). In 583b3-6, Socrates draws a distinction between

<sup>24</sup> Translation after Bloom (1968).

<sup>25</sup> That this is a characteristic feature of this technique is evident from Socrates’ comments in the *Theaetetus* 208e and the *Parmenides* 165c-d.

two types of pleasure. The philosopher’s pleasure is pure (*kathara*) and must be differentiated from the pleasure of the many which is *skiagraphēmenē*, namely, mixed.

ἄθρει ὅτι οὐδὲ παναληθῆς ἐστὶν ἡ τῶν ἄλλων ἡδονὴ πλὴν τῆς τοῦ φρονίμου οὐδὲ καθαρά, ἀλλ’ ἐσκιαγραφημένη τις, ὡς ἐγὼ δοκῶ μοι τῶν σοφῶν τινος ἀκηκοέναι.

“observe that other pleasure than that of the intelligence is not altogether even **real or pure, but is a kind of shadow-painting**, as I seem to have heard from some wise man.”

In the second passage Plato refers to the mixture of pleasure and pain as an *eidōlon* of true pleasure and describes false pleasure in the language of pictorial and poetic art. Poetry cultivates false pleasure only, an *eidōlon* of true pleasure comparable to Helen’s phantom at Troy. In this pictorial art context the mixture of colours is used to explain how sentiments of pain and pleasure are mingled in the non-philosophical majority (ὑπὸ τῆς παρ’ ἀλλήλας θέσεως ἀποχραινομέναις). Thus from Socrates’ point of view, the pleasure of the many either contains pain or it is perceived as pleasure because it follows the feeling of pain.

ἄρ’ οὖν οὐκ ἀνάγκη καὶ ἡδοναῖς συνεῖναι μεμειγμέναις λύπαις, εἰδώλοις τῆς ἀληθοῦς ἡδονῆς καὶ ἐσκιαγραφημέναις, ὑπὸ τῆς παρ’ ἀλλήλας θέσεως ἀποχραινομέναις, ὥστε σφοδρούς ἑκατέρας φαίνεσθαι, καὶ ἔρωτας ἑαυτῶν λυττῶντας τοῖς ἄφροσιν ἐντίκτειν καὶ περιμαχίτους εἶναι, ὥσπερ τὸ τῆς Ἑλένης εἶδωλον ὑπὸ τῶν ἐν Τροίᾳ Στησίχορος φησι γενέσθαι περιμάχητον ἀγνοία τοῦ ἀληθοῦς (586b7-c5);

“And are not the *pleasures with which they dwell inevitably commingled with pains*, phantoms of true pleasure, illusions of shadow-painting, *so colored by contrary juxtaposition as to seem intense in either kind*, and to beget mad loves of themselves in senseless souls, and to be fought for, as Stesichorus says *the wraith of Helen* was fought for at Troy through ignorance of the truth?”

Plato then has found in the technique of *skiagraphia* and in its colour mixture (*apochrainomenais*) a most appropriate metaphor to address poetry and its impact on the audience, deceptive pleasure at large, and the confusion of opposites. Elsewhere in the *Republic* Plato links colours (*chrōmata*) with the beauty of poetry and music and argues that, if divested of them, poetry “looks” ugly (601a-b):

οὕτω δὴ οἶμαι καὶ τὸν ποιητικὸν φήσομεν **χρῶματα ἅττα ἐκάστων τῶν**

τεχνῶν τοῖς ὀνόμασι καὶ ῥήμασιν ἐπιχρωματίζειν αὐτὸν οὐκ ἐπαίοντα ἀλλ' ἢ μμεισθαί, ὥστε ἐτέροις τοιοῦτοις ἐκ τῶν λόγων θεωροῦσι δοκεῖν, ἐάντε περὶ σκυτοτομίας τις λέγῃ ἐν μέτρῳ καὶ ῥυθμῷ καὶ ἁρμονίᾳ, πάνυ εὖ δοκεῖν λέγεσθαι, ἐάντε περὶ στρατηγίας ἐάντε περὶ ἄλλου ὁτουοῦν: οὕτω φύσει αὐτὰ ταῦτα μεγάλην τινὰ κήλησιν ἔχειν. ἐπεὶ γυμνωθέντα γε τῶν τῆς μουσικῆς χρωμάτων τὰ τῶν ποιητῶν, αὐτὰ ἐφ' αὐτῶν λεγόμενα, οἶμαί σε εἰδέναι οἷα φαίνεται. τεθέασαι γάρ που [...] ἔοικεν τοῖς τῶν ὠραίων προσώποις, καλῶν δὲ μὴ, οἷα γίγνεται ἰδεῖν ὅταν αὐτὰ τὸ ἄνθος προλίπη (601a-6).

“And similarly, I suppose, we shall say that the poet himself, knowing nothing but how to imitate, *lays on with words and phrases the colors of the several arts in such fashion that others equally ignorant*, who see things only through words, will deem his words most excellent, whether he speak in rhythm, meter and harmony about cobbling or generalship or anything whatever. So mighty is the spell that these adornments naturally exercise; *though when they are stripped bare of their musical coloring and taken by themselves*, I think you know what sort of a showing these sayings of the poets make. For you, I believe, have observed them.” “I have,” he said. “Do they not,” said I, “resemble the faces of adolescents, young but not really beautiful, when the *bloom* of youth abandons them?”

Although it is not my aim to enter here the tantalizing art history discussions which seek to throw light on the exact specifics of the technique, I believe we cannot fully understand the philosophical richness of this pictorial metaphor without paying attention to the technique’s use of colours.<sup>26</sup> Vincent Bruno’s comments are very enlightening in this direction. According to Bruno, in the painting of *skiagraphia*, “gold as well as other bright and valuable colours, such as murex purple, lost their aesthetic value shared in earlier times. What was more important in the new painting attitude was the description of space and volume by the alternative application of light and dark tones as well as of subtle warm and cold hues.”<sup>27</sup> In his treatment of the technique he offers an enlightening description of the viewer’s experience of a fifth century *skiagraphic* painting: “If we stand at a distance from a painting represented in three dimensions by means of some coherent system of dark and light, we see that each garment, each chair, each head of hair has a colour which we can easily discern and even name.... Yet the moment we were to step up closer to the picture, the entire situation would change, for it would soon become obvious that the real colours of which the picture is composed are not at all as those we named in our analysis of the

<sup>26</sup> Note that in Plato colours and coloured diversity is often linked with deceptive multiplicity and diversity and is thus criticised and rejected (see *Symposium* 211e; but cf. *Phaedo* 110b-d, *Philebus* 51d, and the *Seventh Epistle* 342d). See also *Timaeus* 68d. On colours see Gaiser (1965), Crone (1999) and Ierodiakonou (2009).

<sup>27</sup> Bruno (1977: 80). See also Walter-Karydi in Tiverios and Tsiafakis (eds.) (2002: 76): ‘In archaic age painters used pure colours – they now mix them creating hues that lie between the primary values’.



overall design. It would become clear that the shadows of folds in the white of the cloaks were full of unexpected strokes of blue and violet..."<sup>28</sup>

Plato likens this viewing experience of the fifth century Athenian to poetic deception and contrasts it to his philosophy and the restorative effect of his own philosophical image-making. According to this interpretation, poetic performances build on contradiction and confusion of opposite ethical concepts and create similar, though mixed, pleasures to their audience. In Plato's philosophical prose, traditional vision (*theasis*) has been substituted by visualization (what could be called *enargeia*) with Plato employing poetic language (traditional poetic words, themes, and motifs) to make philosophic images (*eikones*) that present ethics and politics in the correct light. Thus, for example, the psychological image of the multi-headed beast-tyrant traces its origins in Hesiod's Typhon,<sup>29</sup> while the image of the ship of the State in disarray evokes the poem of Alcaeus (46a D.). Verbal painting has worked successfully indeed, for some of Plato's images in the *Republic* are among the most memorable in Western literature.

We can now return to Adeimantus' early employment of the term *skiagraphia* in *Rep.* Book 2. Adeimantus introduces the term in his analysis of how one should find a balance between justice and injustice; namely, *be unjust in the inside but appear just from the outside*: περι ἑμαυτὸν **σκιαγραφίαν** ἀρετῆς περιγραπτέον, τὴν δὲ τοῦ σοφωτάτου Ἀρχιλόχου ἀλώπεκα ἐλκτέον ἐξόπισθεν κερδαλέαν καὶ ποικίλην (365c3-6). The language he uses to promote this anti-Socratic idea regarding real life ethics is distinctively poetic. Far from rejecting this discourse, Socrates will re-employ it in Books 8 and 9 to describe the rejected, corrupt, and unjust polities. Plato, I argue, has associated from the beginning this pictorial technique with poetry and with the deception that results from its confusion of ethical opposites. We are still early in the dialogue, but Plato's Socrates is preparing artistically the ground for bringing together poetry and the deception which stems from its mixture/confusion of ethical opposites with this particular technique, which relies on colour-mixture to create (illusionary) integrity and cohesion.

### The categorization of the *Republic's* images

I have already suggested that through his images Plato seeks to educate the *Republic's* "sight-lovers" and demonstrate how poetry and its language should be linked with specific psychological, ethical, and political conditions. With this interpretation, the philosophical images may be organized in three groups: a) images of human nature and polities (ethics), b) images of knowledge and its attainment (epistemological images), and c) images about the truly Real (ontological images). In making these images Socrates is careful to employ language fittingly. Thus the

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Hesiod, *Theogony* 820.

“diverse” and “colourful” language of the poets is given a specific place in the Platonic philosophic discourse and ethical system. Poetry’s verbal colours (*chrōmata* and *poikilia*) are linked with instability, conflict, polymorphy, and variety. Socrates, on the other hand, handles imagery in a different manner in his epistemological images of the Line and the Cave and in the ontological image of the Sun.

### **The paintings of ontology and epistemology**

In *Republic* Book 6 (507a-509b), the image of the Good as the Sun constitutes the pinnacle of what I have called Platonic philosophical painting. From this interpretative point, Plato’s image of the Sun becomes the measure by which we may assess the *Republic*’s various paintings. Through this image Plato tries to show how the Form of the Good assigns meaning to all the other Forms as well as to difficult concepts such as knowledge and truth. Socrates’ analogy highlights the simplicity (*haplous*) and purity (*katharos*) of the most significant Form. To grasp the supremacy of the Form of the Good, Socrates’ interlocutors are asked to visualize the Sun. But if we reflect on the pictorial effects of this image, we find illustrated Socrates’ response to the various poetic shadow-paintings (*skiagraphiai*). The Sun’s homogeneity and purity of light *does not* allow for any form of colour mixture, shading or optical fusion. Neither does it allow for the illusion of perspective or depth. On the contrary, the interlocutors are asked to see the unmixed white, since the Form of the Good *in itself cannot* be mixed.<sup>30</sup> It is not Good in relative terms; i.e., good from one point of view, but bad from the other. On the ontological level of the Platonic Forms, the relativity of the human perspective is absent. And along with it so is the poets’ language with their diverse themes and motifs. Plato may have resorted to an image in his presentation of the Sun, which otherwise can be approached only through dialectic, but he has kept this memorable image as unadorned (a non *poikilē*) as possible.

However, things change once the human perspective is introduced in this picture. In the epistemological images of the Line (509d1-511e) and the Cave (514a-517d), Plato introduces the Pre-Socratic and poetic motif of mixture of light and darkness, which generates shadows, as well as the recreation of the physical environment by way of reflection, to demonstrate how true reality can be fabricated (*agalmata*), distorted (shadows), and misperceived. In the Cave, in particular, he has invented insightful imagery to draw attention to the confusing mixture and enlightening analysis of pairs of opposites. Plato’s framework for the epistemological image of the Cave is of poetic origin. The contrast of light and night/darkness is linked with the traditional myth of *katabasis*, thus evoking the heroes’ visits to the underworld.<sup>31</sup> But this traditional

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<sup>30</sup> On the use of white colour in the fifth century technique of *skiagraphia*, see Bruno (1977: 58-9). Bruno observes that for the ancient painters white would have been the equivalent of light.

<sup>31</sup> The contrast of light and night has a long history in poetry and in Pre-Socratic philosophy, starting from

theme too is re-worked in Plato’s hands, for his own *katabasis*, contrary to its poetic precedents, is a plunge into darkness and with it, ignorance and deception.<sup>32</sup>

### Images and paintings of psychology and politics

It is in the depiction of corrupt souls and polities, though, that poetic diction predominates.<sup>33</sup> Socrates starts with the traditional image of the State as a ship to describe the society which disrespects and finally subverts its “deaf leader”, the philosopher (488a), and culminates in his imagery (*eikōn*-statue) of the soul of the tyrant (588c-d). What comes in between, in Books 8 and 9, are several shorter images dressed in the language of poetry to describe the ethical and political decline. And the more corrupt the city and soul, the more Socrates resorts to the language of poetry (iambus and Comedy) to describe it. Thus the democratic city, the representative of coloured diversity *par excellence*, is compared to a *poikilon himation* ornamented with all sorts of flowers (*anthesi*).<sup>34</sup>

The citizens, on the other hand, are similar to their *poleis*: In the oligarchic man, evil appetites transform him into a “drone” (552c2-4).<sup>35</sup> In democracy, on the other hand, one can find diverse and multifarious people, with all sorts of features (ισονομικοῦ τινος ἀνδρός... παντοδαπὸν τε καὶ πλείστων ἡθῶν μεστόν, καὶ τὸν καλὸν τε καὶ ποικίλον, ὥσπερ ἐκείνην τὴν πόλιν... (561e). The citizens of this *polis* resemble all sorts of animals: “beasts”, “dogs”, “horses” and “donkeys” (θηρία, κύνες, ἵπποι, ὄνοι 563c-d).<sup>36</sup>

Still, it is for the description of the tyrant, the representative *par excellence* of ethical baseness and injustice, that Socrates fashions not a painting, but a verbal statue with the colours of poetic language. His aim is to lay bare for the sight-lovers to see a despicable soul which cannot be admired. The sight-lovers also learn that traditional poetic discourse is appropriately used only when it describes psychic turmoil, injustice, and badness. They also learn that poetry and its language, which traditionally caused pleasure (*hēdonē*), when viewed under the right light, can only bring pain and terror. The *poikilia* of the unjust is ugly; the pleasure they enjoy is mixed, torturous, and false; their actions make them subhuman.

On the other hand, it is not fortuitous that poetic words and traditional motifs are

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Homer to the end of the fifth century. With regard to poetry, see the detailed discussion in Irwin (1974: 157-200). See also Tarrant (1960: 181-187) and Notopoulos (1944: 163-172).

<sup>32</sup> I am referring here to the mythical *katabaseis* of Odysseus, Heracles and Theseus. See also Segal (1978: 315-336).

<sup>33</sup> See Petraki (2011: 229-254).

<sup>34</sup> *Rep.* 557c5-7: Democracy is *ἀναρχος καὶ ποικίλη* and resembles a *ποικίλον ἱμάτιον*: πᾶσιν ἄνεσι πεποικιλμένον, οὕτω καὶ αὐτὴ πᾶσιν ἦθεσιν πεποικιλμένη καλλίστη ἂν φαίνοιτο.

<sup>35</sup> Βούλει οὖν, ἦν δ' ἐγώ, φῶμεν αὐτόν, ὡς ἐν κηρίῳ κηφὴν ἐγγίγνεται, *σμήνους νόσημα*, οὕτω καὶ τὸν τοιοῦτον ἐν οἰκίᾳ κηφῆνα ἐγγίγνεσθαι, νόσημα πόλεως; Cp. Hesiod *Works and Days* 304ff.; Arist. *Wasps* 1114.

<sup>36</sup> Plato bases his description of democracy and tyranny on poetic wording. The *poikilia* and *polueidia* of these two constitutions requires all sorts of verbal colours (*anthē*). See Petraki (2011: 237-254). See also Adam (1963/[1902] vol. 2: 232).

not present in Book 5 of the *Republic*, where Socrates describes the ideal city and life in it. In Book 2 (375d5), Socrates had compared his guardians to watch-dogs, but this peculiar image, which was intended to investigate the features of the best human *physis*, is left behind as we move to the ideal city. As I suggested earlier, the only Platonic image (*eikōn*) of the central book is a male body figure (an *andreikelon*) through which Socrates strives to depict the simplicity and harmonized unity of the many into one (462c10-e2; 464b1-3). This unification is intended to stand in stark contrast to the *polueidia* of the tyrant and the confusing *poikilia* of the corrupt polities. It would also seek to emulate the true Reality of the One which can only be attained at an ontological level.

### Conclusion

Contrary to the viewpoint which has interpreted Plato's stance towards painting as derogatory, in this article paper I have tried to show that Plato's treatment of it, far from being so straightforward, is intended to serve several needs.<sup>37</sup> Thus painting is for Plato an analogy which allows him to discuss vexed philosophical issues and has provided him with useful vocabulary for his philosophical investigations. Behind the diverse treatment of the art of painting in the dialogues lies the versatile Platonic notion of *mimesis*. The term which is discussed in *Rep.* Books 3 in relation to poetry, in Book 10 and elsewhere in the corpus becomes epistemologically significant and can refer to the relation of our mundane world of change with the fixed Realm of the Forms, to the ability of language to formulate statements that may represent faithfully either the world, or to the metaphysical Real (the *Cratylus*, the *Sophist*). The *Republic's* verbal paintings should be viewed in this light: *as verbal images which help the sight-lovers review, or view anew, their beliefs about ethics and politics.*<sup>38</sup>

For Plato, philosophy is anyway a cognitive journey of vision (a *theōria*) with many levels but a specific target, the Forms.<sup>39</sup> His inventive metaphor of painting and his association of poetic words with colours allowed him to demonstrate how his own philosophic image-making differs from that of poetry. The philosopher *knows* how to use language correctly in his discourse in order to investigate both the sense-perceptive and the invisible reality. The poet does not. Plato's images render his philosophical speech mimetic too. Yet this is the positive aspect of *mimesis*: images

<sup>37</sup> See, for example, Steven (1933: 154ff), Schuhl (1952), cf. Keuls (1974: 100-127) and (1975: 1-16); Also, Halliwell (2000a: 99-116).

<sup>38</sup> See McKeon (1952: 147-175), Verdenius (1949), Vernant, J-P. (1975: 133-160). See also Halliwell 2002. The multi-layered notion of *mimesis* receives insightful treatment in several chapters in Destree, P. and Herrmann, F-G. (eds.) (2011).

<sup>39</sup> For an examination of the institution of *theōria* and its transformation into a philosophic concept, see Nightingale (2004).

and copies when used correctly support knowledge and function as cognitive levels, which in turn can lead us to the Forms.

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