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**Does Plato criticize art in the Republic?**

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## INTRODUCTION

As widely known books II, III and X in the *Republic* contain various examples of what may seem to be criticism of art. These include criticism of the works of famous poets such as Homer and Hesiod, and artistic disciplines as for instance poetry and painting. However, even if Plato may have criticized art, it does not follow that he disapproves of art as such. It is not certain that he is generally hostile towards artistic practices such as painting and composing poetry although he may have been critical to particular works. The purpose of this paper is to clarify whether or not Plato's criticism is indeed a criticism of art as such.

Julia Annas is one of the scholars who claims that Plato is divided in his view of art as expressed within the *Republic*. In her article, "Plato on the Triviality of Literature"<sup>1</sup>, she argues that the discussion of books II and III is incompatible with the treatment poetry receives in book X. If Annas is right, the *Republic* is divided on the very question that this paper attempts to answer. Her paper suggests that one passage (book X, 595A-605C) should be understood as a criticism of art as such contrary to the rest of the work. After a preliminary discussion of what it could be to criticise art and an examination of what the *Republic* says about art Annas' ideas will be thoroughly discussed. Contrary to Annas' view, I shall argue that the *Republic* is coherent in its views on poetry. I also hope to show that the emphasis on the educational value of poetry in books II and III, and the discussion of its dangers to the soul in book X, complement each other rather than suggest a conflict between the two.

In the last part of the essay I shall look at some of the possible objections to the claim that the *Republic* criticizes art. I shall start with the ideas of Alexander Nehamas who claims, in "Plato and Mass Media", that in the present cultural context it is more plausible to view Plato's criticism as directed at popular entertainment than at the fine arts.<sup>2</sup> I will try to show that although Nehamas is right in drawing attention to the different position of today's interpretations of art compared to the art Plato criticized, his conclusions are questionable. The main reason for this is that if parallels between

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<sup>1</sup> Julia Annas "Plato on the triviality of literature", *Plato Critical Assessments*, London, 1998

<sup>2</sup> Nehamas, Alexander: "Plato and mass media". *Virtues of Authenticity*. Princeton, 1999.

modern times and antiquity are to be drawn, there also seem to be similarities between that which Plato criticizes and ideas usually connected to the so-called fine arts rather than entertainment, such as beliefs about the moral and educational value of the fine arts.

Another objection to the claim that Plato criticizes art that I shall discuss is the possibility of his criticism being directed at a specific kind of personality, the mimetic one, rather than at poetry as such. This might be suggested by the conclusion of book III (398A) where the imitative poet is dismissed from the ideal state. The general ideas about poetry and what is involved in poetic creation seem to have been markedly different among Plato's contemporaries from what they are today. This seems to be one of the grounds upon which Plato criticizes the poets, as Miles Burnyeat points out in *Culture and Society in Plato's Republic*.<sup>3</sup> I shall still argue it is not plausible that Plato's criticism is only directed against the poets' psyche, as the argument of the Republic is too general in order for this to be the case.

I shall also discuss the possibility of contesting that the Republic criticizes art depending on whether it is true that the role of art in the Republic is limited to the education of one class, the guardians. But even though the main theme of the Republic is the education of this class in particular, the importance of art for society as a whole is also strongly indicated. A more likely way to challenge the claim that Plato criticizes art in the Republic is to point out that the description of the relationship between ideas and imitation (e.g. 569A-597B) could apply to most kinds of communicative practices of today (e.g. art, television, newspapers, writing) rather than to art specifically.

I hope to show that in the ideal state, one of the main objectives of artistic practices and of other kinds of occupations as well, is to mediate the values of the philosophers, i.e. the true values, to society as a whole. It seems to be a general rule that jobs cannot be done sufficiently well without philosophical guidance. The reason for the central place of poetry in the Republic is probably a consequence of the main topic of its discussion, namely education (376DE), and the fact that poetry had a central place in education and culture for Plato's contemporaries. The poetry of the ideal state is supposed to reflect the knowledge that the philosophical rulers possess. The criticism of poetry seems to be

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<sup>3</sup> Burnyeat, M.F: "Culture and Society in Plato's Republic", *The Tanner lectures on human values 20*, Salt Lake City. 2000.

closely related to the elitism of the work, which seems to hold that it is the role of Philosophy to give the citizens of the ideal State what is best for them: a parental guidance that shapes their nature, views and roles. Rather than criticizing art, Plato may be addressing the cultural role which poetry had in his own society, which to some extent may have been parallel to the expected position of philosophy within the ideal state.



## **A PRELIMINARY: HOW CAN ART BE CRITICIZED?**

To enjoy artistic expression, either as a participant or a spectator, has given meaning to people's lives throughout history regardless of cultural circumstances. People have discussed the value of artistic works, such as music, books or movies, and contemplated their strengths or faults. There seem to be at least two ways to criticize artistic works: as due to lack of artistic qualities and because of aspects, which do not necessarily relate to their artistic merits or faults.

Criticism directed at artistic qualities usually focuses on whether or not a particular work can be considered a good token of the type it belongs to. An example might be when one makes a rational assessment of why a novel or a play may be good or bad. Many aspects can be taken into account such as the skill of the author, the credibility of its characters and the plot itself. An example of criticism not directed at the artistic qualities might be when one focuses on the essence of an artistic work and its making from a moral perspective, such as when movies are accused of showing good and respectable phenomena in a bad way or the opposite – presenting badness and criminal activities in a glorifying way.<sup>4</sup> Criticism of the lack of moral standards in artistic works often goes together with criticism of accessibility to particular groups that should not be exposed to them. It is a common view that children and teenagers can be harmed by works that deal openly with topics which they lack the maturity to understand, such as sex and violence. Therefore, they should not have access to that kind of material.

Artistic works have also been criticized for giving the wrong impression and not paying attention to historical facts. Such accusations may arise when history indicates that an artistic work gives a distorted picture of an historical event. And if religious works that use artistic methods<sup>5</sup> are considered to be works of art, it seems possible to criticize them in this way if they are used to explain things that artistic works are unable to do.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Example of the latter is when movies are criticized for portraying gangsters in a positive way and not paying enough attention to the negative consequences of their actions.

<sup>5</sup> Like the Bible does when using parables.

<sup>6</sup> An example of this is criticism of fundamentalism for hanging on to a narrow understanding of religious testimony that is contradicted by scientific theories, e.g. when people refuse to accept the theory of evolution because it is contradicted by the Bible.

On the other hand, if it is accepted that a particular work is a good example of art, both its creation and engagement in it from either a performer or spectator point of view, are usually thought to be valuable. A simple reason for listening to Beethoven's music, exploring Picasso's pictures and watching plays by Shakespeare seems to be that they are taken to be examples of good music, painting and literature. To criticize art as such, rather than particular works seems to entail questioning its historical and present place and value. Arguments claiming that the value of listening to music, watching plays or painting pictures is overrated or even harmful, and that people should rather preoccupy themselves with something else could reflect this kind of criticism. Certain parts in Plato's criticism of poetry may indicate that the Republic holds this view.<sup>7</sup> In its closing stages (596A-598C) a claim seems to be made that poetry is imitative by nature and therefore inferior to the sources of its creation, real things and characters. This distinction is developed further and used to criticize the authority of Homer (599AC-600E).

However, this particular part of Plato's text may not reflect the view of the Republic as a whole as artistic works seem to have an important role in Plato's ideas about education (e.g. 401A-402A). These ideas do not seem to be compatible with art being trivial or harmful. As both the position and function of artistic works has evolved throughout history, Plato's criticism of art within his historical context, such as what he says about ideas and imitation, could well have wider connotations than the various classifications of art today have.<sup>8</sup> Before addressing this and other topics regarding Plato's criticism of art in the Republic, a closer look at Plato's treatment of art is applicable.

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<sup>7</sup> Plato himself uses poetic methods when he creates his philosophic dialogues and his own creations also seem to include some of the methods criticized in the Republic such as personification and imitation. L.A. Kosman discusses this aspect in the essay *Silence and imitation in the Platonic dialogues*.

<sup>8</sup> The debate about what art is and how it should be classified is an extensive issue that falls outside the scope of this essay. Our question rather involves whether or not Plato had a negative view of artistic practices, which in turn would make him critical of art as such.

# CHAPTER 1: A SUMMARY ON PLATO'S DISCUSSION OF ART IN THE REPUBLIC<sup>9</sup>

## 1.1 INDIRECT CRITICISM OF POETRY AND ITS ROLE IN BOOKS I AND II

When the Republic's actual discussion of poetry starts in book II, it has already received an indirect treatment. Our next step will be to address the central parts of that discussion.

### *1.1.1 SOCRATES' DISCUSSION WITH CEPHALUS AND POLEMARCHUS (BOOK I)*

At the beginning of the Republic Cephalus, Socrates' interlocutor draws a parallel between the advantages of being wealthy and able to be carefree in old age. From Cephalus' assessment Socrates concludes that Cephalus believes justice consists of telling the truth and paying one's dues (331CD).<sup>10</sup> Polemarchus, Cephalus' son tries to defend this definition of justice by claiming that this view was also held by the poet Simonides (331D). Socrates maintains that Simonides was a wise man and inspired by the gods. However, Socrates states that he does not fully understand the meaning of the definition (331E). When the argument shows that the theory does not hold (332A-335E),<sup>11</sup> Socrates concludes that a wise man like Simonides couldn't have had this kind

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<sup>9</sup> My approach is to interpret the arguments given by the character Socrates within the Republic and the conclusions reached by him and his interlocutors as the position of the work. More attention could have been given to the literary factors of the Republic by showing how Plato's criticism is reflected by his choice of characters. This interpretation is chosen due to the limited scope of this essay and the general nature of the topic of discussion. Examples of different ways to interpret Plato's dialogues can be found in the papers of James Ariati, J. Angello Corlett, Philip Merlan and Michael Frede, cited in the bibliography.

<sup>10</sup> According to Cephalus the main reason for being just is fear of acquiring the destiny which the poets describe in their discussion of Hades (330D-331A). He believes the main advantage of being rich is to make it easier for people to fulfill the obligations of telling the truth and being without debt to others (331AB). Then it is less likely that people will be filled with worries of the descriptions of Hades in old age (330D-331A). He supports his claim by quoting a poem of Pindar (331A). Later in the work the histories about Hades are discussed again and criticized for promoting fear of death (386B-387C).

<sup>11</sup> One of the conclusions that Socrates draws from the definition is that the righteous man is both good at preserving money and stealing it. Socrates suggests that Polemarchus may have learned this from Homer who praises Atolikus, the brother of Odysseus' mother, for excelling in thievery and sorcery. He then asks Polemarchus if he himself, Homer and Simonides, think that justice is some kind of art of stealing which benefits one's friends but harms one's enemies (334B).

of belief (335E).<sup>12</sup> The underlying reasoning seems to be that Simonides' wisdom is not compatible with his ideas about the nature of justice.<sup>13</sup>

### *1.1.2 THE POETIC MESSAGE USED TO PRAISE INJUSTICE (BOOK II)*

In book II examples from the works of the poets are used as an argument against the Republic's main idea – that justice leads to happiness and injustice to wretchedness. Socrates' interlocutors, Glaucon and Adeimantus, use the works of the poets to support the view that injustice is more rewarding than justice. Glaucon claims that Aeschylus' description of a just man, not only wanting to seem to be just but also wanting to be just (361B), is better suited to defend injustice than justice. According to Glaucon, Aeschylus' just man is more preoccupied with appearances than the unjust person that does not want to seem to be unjust, only to be unjust (361B-362A).<sup>14</sup>

Adeimantus cites the poets Hesiod, Homer and Musaeus in order to show that justice is not an end in itself but rather a means for rewards from the gods (363AB). He points out that the rich can persuade the gods to help them and amend their own transgressions by worshipping the gods with celebrations and festivities. According to the poets, the wealthy can harm their enemies by investing in sorcery and witchcraft (364BE).<sup>15</sup> Adeimantus concludes by saying the poets suggest that one should be unjust and bribe the gods by using some of the ill gained wealth to avoid punishment (365D-366A).

Adeimantus also considers the effect of what poetry says about virtue and sin on the souls of the young. He takes an example from Pindar, which he interprets as declaring that it is better to appear to be just than to be so in real life. Thus, appearance is the key to contentment where the easiest way to become happy is to look virtuous when one truly

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<sup>12</sup> "You and I shall fight as partners, then, against anyone who tells us that Simonides, Bias, Pittances, or any of our other wise and blessedly happy men said this (335E)."

<sup>13</sup> Socrates' praise of Simonides seems to be ironical and his discussion of Simonides' theory reminds of a well-known passage in the Apology. There Socrates says that when the poets were asked to explain the meaning of their poems they were unable to do so. He concluded that the poets are alike seers and prophets; they say many fine things without any understanding of its content. He also claimed that because of their poetic abilities, the poets consider themselves to be wise in other respects. However, Socrates does not consider this to be the case (22AC). A similar description of poetry is given in Phaedrus (245A), where it is claimed that the muse's madness rather than reason is the source of poetic creation. The Symposium (209A) on the other hand seems to forward a different view where it is suggested that poetry can be a source of virtue and prudence.

<sup>14</sup> Plato himself agrees with the idea, which Glaucon criticizes Aeschylus for maintaining, that a good man not only wants to seem to be good but also to be good.

<sup>15</sup> This is supported with examples from Hesiod that show how easy the vices are, and Homer's about how men can influence the gods (364CE).

is greedy and a cheat (365AC). Adeimantus' answer to the objection that it could be hard to get away with unjust action is that it may be done with help of poetry, political bargaining and rhetoric.<sup>16</sup> By forming secret societies, using propaganda and sophism, it would be possible to do what one wants, either by the use of force or persuasion (365 CD).<sup>17</sup>

## 1.2 THE ROLE OF MUSIC IN THE EDUCATION OF THE GUARDIANS (BOOKS II AND III)

The discussion between Socrates and his interlocutors, Glaucon and Adeimantus, starts in book II and continues throughout the work. Socrates describes the attempt to form an ideal state as an attempt to educate a class that he claims to be the key to the realization of such a state, the class of the guardians<sup>18</sup> (376D).<sup>19</sup> He further says that their education should begin with physical training for their bodies and music for their souls (376E).<sup>20</sup> The criticism in the treatment of music here is mainly directed at the works of Homer.<sup>21</sup>

### 1.2.1 THE AIM OF MUSIKE

The discussion of the role of *musike* emphasizes a strong relation between what nowadays is usually thought of as moral and aesthetic norms.<sup>22</sup> Socrates talks about

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<sup>16</sup> In book X there is another passage (600E-601B) which seems to emphasize the similarities between poetry and sophistry.

<sup>17</sup> Ruby Blondell (p. 97-112) argues that according to Plato's dialogues there are parallels between the methods used by the sophists in their teachings and the methods of the poets, e.g. the use of long authoritative speeches. She also analyses the difference between Plato's and the sophists' pedagogic methods.

<sup>18</sup> The guardians will later become the rulers of the ideal state. They are divided into two classes; those who are meant to be guardians receive military education, and those who excel the others go on to become philosophers, the rulers of the ideal state.

<sup>19</sup> Socrates argues that a good guardian has keen senses, speed, strength, courageousness, a gentle and spirited soul and a philosophical nature. He is to be a lover of learning and wisdom (374E-376C). Adeimantus accepts Socrates' claim that understanding of how these men could be educated would help their investigation of the nature of justice in a city state. Socrates replies in the following way: "Come, then, and just as if we had the leisure to make up stories, let's describe in theory how to educate our men (376D)."

<sup>20</sup> Eyjólfur Kjalar Emilsson points out (Ríkið I, p. 203. fn. 32) that the music Socrates talks about here has a wider reference than today's music. The word could be used about various things, which belonged to the goddesses of education, the *Muses*, but in particular it applied to poetry that was sung accompanied with playing of instruments. The term both referred to the rhythm and the content of the poems.

<sup>21</sup> Almost forty examples from Homers poetry are discussed from 378D to 393A. Only three of them are said to have a positive message (398E and 390D). In comparison, only two examples from Hesiod (377E and 378A) and three from Aeschylus (380A, 383B, 391E) are discussed and criticized. Other poets are not mentioned in the discussion of *musike*.

<sup>22</sup> A later example is Socrates' question to Glaucon in book VI "Haven't you noticed that opinions without knowledge are shameful and ugly things (506C)?"

ugliness and lack of rhythm and harmony as parallels to distorted speech and character while the opposite condition is imitation of austerity and goodness. As a result, he claims that in addition to the poets, painters and craftsmen should also imitate the nature of goodness in their works. It is considered important to find craftsmen who can discover the nature of beauty and grace so graceful works may strike the eyes and ears of the youth, like a breeze that brings health from a good place, leading them from childhood on to resemble the beautiful and to be in harmony with it (401AD).

It is claimed that *musike* plays an essential part in education as its rhythms and scales can penetrate the soul. Right use of *musike* can make the soul graceful while wrong use has the opposite effect (401DE).<sup>23</sup> A person well educated in *musike* is said to know intuitively about lack and distortion, both in things and in nature. He learns to avoid ugliness while he is still young and unable to use reason. *Musike* enables him to appreciate reason, which he is drawn towards because of the kinship between its beauty and reason (401C-402A).<sup>24</sup> The fundamental role of *musike* within Plato's ideal state may be seen from Socrates' description of the consequences, which a change of the rules that apply to it is bound to have both for the individual and for society as a whole (424CE).<sup>25</sup>

The Republic defines a real liar as someone who is ignorant in the soul and who lives in deceptions while lie in words is an imitation of this state of the soul and therefore not a pure falsehood (382BC). However, in the circumstances when a lie turns people towards the good, like a medicine, it may be so helpful that it no longer is despicable<sup>26</sup> – for example when it is used to correct a friend who errs in his judgment or to deceive an

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<sup>23</sup> 411AC provides an example of how *musike* can influence both in a positive and negative way.

<sup>24</sup> In book VII (522A), at the start of a discussion about which academic subjects could help the philosophers attain knowledge, the role of *musike* is explained. It should educate the guardians through habits. Its harmony is said to give the guardians certain harmoniousness, not knowledge. Its rhythms are said to give rhythmical quality, and its stories cultivate other habits akin to these.

<sup>25</sup> “Then it seems, I said, that it is in music and poetry that our guardians must build their bulwark.

At any rate, lawlessness easily creeps in there unnoticed.

Yes, as if music and poetry were only play and did not harm at all.

It is harmless — except, of course, that when lawlessness has established itself there, it flows over little by little into characters and ways of life. Then, greatly increased, it steps out into private contracts, and from private contracts, Socrates, it makes its insolent way into the laws and government until the end it overthrows everything, public and private (424CE).”

<sup>26</sup> A later example of such use of poetry is the discussion of the political role of the noble lie within the ideal state e.g. 414B – 415C. It presents a story, which is meant to strengthen the feeling of togetherness within the ideal state by making the citizens believe they are all brothers, regardless of the class they belong to.

enemy (382CD). Socrates talks about the noble lie in connection with stories about events that happened in the past, where direct sources are not available. He concludes that a lie may become useful if it imitates the truth as much as possible (382D). In this instance it seems reasonable to understand the emphasis on imitating the truth as a demand to imitate a soul who is good by nature as truth and falsity are said to belong to the soul (382BC). The argumentation is followed up by underlining the distinction between poetry and knowledge, claiming the gods do not engage in poetry and that the divine is devoid of all lies. As a result, the noble lie can only be useful to humans. It is useless to the god who does not need imitation of a past he already knows (382DE).<sup>27</sup>

Socrates talks about the necessity to supervise and compel both poets and other craftsmen to make an image of the good character in their work. Forbidding them to represent a character that is vicious, unrestrained, slavish and graceless, whether in pictures, buildings or any other works (401B).<sup>28</sup> The argumentation of the Republic as a whole indicates that the craftsmen that are supposed to be able to discover the nature of beauty and grace (401C) are the ones that will govern the ideal State, the Philosopher Kings. If these craftsmen are found the result is said to be:

[T]hat our young people will live in a healthy place and be benefited on all sides, and so that something of those fine works will strike their eyes and ears like a breeze that brings health from a good place, leading them unwittingly from childhood on, to resemblance, friendship and harmony with beauty and reason ... (401CD).

The Republic also claims it is up to the rulers of the state, the philosophers as shown by later discussion, to keep an eye on the poets and to stop them when they break the rules applying to poetry. Although they are the only ones allowed to use poetry as a noble lie<sup>29</sup>, either to deceive the enemies or to help the city (389BC) they themselves are not supposed to make poetry (379A).<sup>30</sup> Seemingly their guidance is supposed to secure an

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<sup>27</sup> This may be interpreted as an indirect criticism of former claims (331E) that the poet Simonides was both wise and inspired by the gods. The claim seems to be that godly wisdom and poetry do not go together.

<sup>28</sup> It is probably not a coincidence that the other two professions, than poetry, mentioned here are painting and carpentry. Book X uses these same professions to exemplify its arguments against poetry.

<sup>29</sup> The reason for this, according to Socrates, is that for a private citizen to lie to a ruler would be just as bad a mistake as for a sick person or an athlete not to tell the truth to his doctor or trainer about his physical condition (389BC)

<sup>30</sup> To engage in poetry as well as being a ruler does not fit the principle that every man is to have one profession in accordance with his natural abilities (370B, 394E). Another reason could be that the same applies to them and the gods (382DE). In that case, since the rulers possess true knowledge they have no use for poetry.

acceptable end result as they both control what is expressed (rules of content) and how (rules of musical scales and rhythm). The rulers are in fact the only one's allowed to express themselves through poetry, as the role of the poets seems mainly to adhere to the rules applying to their conduct.

### *1.2.2 RULES OF CONTENT*

Socrates' main argument for censorship in the Republic is to prevent harmful influences on the souls of children (377B). He claims it is difficult to eliminate views absorbed by the young person (378CE). Therefore it is necessary that children hear stories that strengthen their characters and it is also important to stop the poets from creating indecent stories (378D-379A). He claims that stories about the gods being at war against each other are similar kinds of misrepresentations as a painting that does not resemble its subject at all (377D-378C).<sup>31</sup> Even though such stories may have allegorical meanings they should not be allowed in an ideal state because children are not able to judge what is allegorical and what is not (378DE). Stories including lies and blasphemy<sup>32</sup> will have to be stopped as they encourage the youth to do evil (391DE).

Socrates also warns about two other dangers, when poetry promotes fear of death<sup>33</sup> and when it shows noble men acting indecently (387D-388D). If the young guardians get used to these kinds of representations they are likely to act accordingly, such as by grieving and pitying themselves shamelessly in times of misfortune (388D). It is concluded that representations should not be made of worthwhile people or the gods being overcome by laughter because a violent change of mood is likely to follow (388E-389A).

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<sup>31</sup> In this connection the Republic cites descriptions from Hesiod about horrific things that the gods have supposedly done (378A). It is also specified that it is not allowed to have woven embroideries of warfare between the gods (387C). Homer's description of Hera being tied up by her son and Hephaestus being thrown out by his father when trying to defend himself while his father was beating him, are two examples of what Plato considers to be deformation of the gods (378D).

<sup>32</sup> The central rules about how the gods should be described within the ideal state are the following:

- A) The god is good in his nature and should be described accordingly. The good is useful and innocent of all evil. Therefore god should not be portrayed as the cause of evil things but only good ones (379B, 380AB, 390E-391E).
- B) Because the god is indivisible he does not take on another appearance than his own. He does not deceive by changing the way he looks (380D). A change from a perfect state can only be for the worse (381BC).
- C) It is wrong to show the god lie by claiming he deceives humans, either in words or in deeds (383A).
- D) Following a ban of the guardians accepting gifts or being greedy (390C) it is prohibited to tell stories which claim it is possible to bribe kings or gods with gifts (390E).

<sup>33</sup> Socrates criticizes the poets' stories about Hades in this regard (386B-387C).



Socrates underlines the importance of austerity for the general public, which according to him consists in obeying the rulers and controlling elementary desires such as those for wine, sex and food (389DE). He then points out examples in poetry that encourage indecent behaviour (389E-390D). Stories portraying just men having misfortune while the unjust prosper are banned and the poets are ordered to write stories about the opposite state of affairs (392CB).

### *1.2.3 SHOULD IMITATION BE ALLOWED?*

Socrates distinguishes between three different ways of relating a story. Firstly, there is the case of narration where the author talks without using personification. Secondly, there is imitation where personification is used. Finally there is a mixture of the two approaches (392D-393D).<sup>34</sup> Socrates considers tragedies and comedies to be examples of pure imitations; he says that narration is found most of all in dithyrambs while epic poetry uses both methods (394C). He claims that in an ideal state it is not compatible to be both a guardian and an imitator because human capacities will be best employed if one focuses on one type, on one occupation instead of many (394DE). He further claims that the guardians must be kept away from all other crafts if they are to become the craftsmen of the city's freedom, and exclusively do nothing except what contributes to it. If they are to imitate, they must imitate from childhood what is appropriate for them. They should imitate people who are courageous, self-controlled, pious, and free, and their actions. This is supported by repeating the former claim that imitations practiced from youth become part of nature and settle into habits of gesture, voice and thought (395BD).<sup>35</sup>

Here it seems reasonable to conclude that the ban against the guardians becoming imitators is in fact a ban against them becoming poets. Having guardianship as an occupation seems to involve different kinds of things than being a poet and because of the premise of the ideal state that a person should focus on one type of things rather than many (394E) it does not seem possible that these two can go together. On the other hand the conclusion about what kind of imitations the guardians should practice seems to

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<sup>34</sup> Socrates illustrates the difference between direct speech and imitation by giving an example of imitation (the opening passage of Homer's Iliad) and changing it into direct speech (393D-394B).

<sup>35</sup> A similar claim made previously is that it is difficult to change views acquired while one is young (378CE).

explain what it is that the guardians are allowed to imitate or interpret by playacting. As it seems, they are only allowed to portray characters that possess similar kinds of virtues that they themselves are supposed to emulate in their own lives (395C).<sup>36</sup>

According to Socrates the speech of the good man consists of direct speech and imitation but the part of the imitation is small (396E). He then sketches the difference between the good character and the character of the imitator who shamelessly imitates everything, such as the wind, thunders, instruments and animal noises. In contrast to the good character his speech mainly consists of imitation (397AB). Socrates concludes that the imitative poet, who is liked by the many, is not suitable for the ideal state. Within the ideal state everyone should focus on one occupation only instead of many. To allow a person who imitates different kinds of characters and phenomena would be similar to allowing the citizens of the ideal city to simultaneously practice different kinds of occupations requiring various different skills.<sup>37</sup> That kind of a character is not suitable for the ideal state.<sup>38</sup> The ideal state is supposed to use single-minded poets that imitate the speech of the good character and follow the rules applying to poetry previously discussed in relation to the education of the guardians (397D-398B).

#### 1.2.4 THE CENSORSHIP OF MUSICAL SCALES, INSTRUMENTS AND METRICS

Socrates does not view music as an independent phenomenon but as belonging to *musike* where it creates a whole together with the story it accompanies. Accordingly, the role of the music is to illustrate the story (398D). Socrates believes lamenting music scales should be banned, as there is no need for lamenting tales. Because drinking, softness or laziness is not suitable for the guardians, the musical scales inducing this kind of

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<sup>36</sup> Socrates concludes that a moderate man is willing to report the words of a good man when he is acting in a faultless and intelligent manner. That he is less willing to do so when the good man is upset by passion, drunkenness or some other misfortune. He would be unwilling to make himself seriously resemble an inferior character – except perhaps for a brief period in which he is doing something good. He would be ashamed of doing something like that because he can't stand to shape and mould himself according to a worse pattern, unless it is just done in play (396CD).

<sup>37</sup> Socrates says that being an imitative poet is similar to being a cobbler and a captain, a farmer and a juror, or a soldier and a money-maker (397E).

<sup>38</sup> "It seems, then, that if a man, who through clever training can become anything and imitate anything, should arrive in our city, wanting to give a performance of his poems, we would bow down before him as someone holy, wonderful, and pleasing, but we should tell him that there is no one like him in our city and that it isn't lawful for there to be (397E-398A)." Another passage emphasizing the danger of poetic ability when the content of the poems is meant to be harmful is the following: "We'll ask Homer and other poets not to be angry if we delete these passages and all similar ones. It isn't that they aren't poetic and pleasing to the majority of hearers but that, the more poetic they are, the less they should be heard by children or by men who are supposed to be free and to fear slavery more than death (387AB)."

behaviours and the ones used at Symposium should also be banned (398E). On the other hand, scales imitating the voice and pitch of the brave man (399AB) and a man working peacefully (399B) should be allowed. Socrates also allows a music scale imitating a man in control, reacting with reason and austerity when someone tries to change his mind (399B). Finally, he allows the musical scales best suited to imitate the voice of the moderate and courageous (399C).

Multistringed instruments that span all music scales are banned, especially the flute, the most “many stringed” of all instruments. Socrates’ concludes it is sufficient for the city to have two instruments, the lyre and the cithara; while the country should have some sort of pipe for the shepherds to play (399CD). The rhythm should be adapted to the tune and words of those who live a well-ordered and courageous life. Socrates cites the musical expert Damon in supporting that the metrics best suited for the ideal state are the same as those characterizing military marches (399E-400C).

### **1.3 DISCUSSION OF ART IN BOOKS IV - IX**

Formal treatment of *musike* (poetry) finishes after book III and resumes in book X when it is taken up again. Art is not a central theme of the discussion of books IV-IX. However, Plato uses various examples from painting and poetry to illustrate his arguments which may give ideas about the role assigned to them. He continues to cite the works of the poets but in a more neutral way. Unlike the former discussion of *musike*, Plato both criticizes and praises the poetic works.

#### *1.3.1 MUSIKE*

Before the discussion of Homer is resumed in book X he is quoted several times. Homer is either praised or quoted in a neutral way. His words are used in support of a distinction, which Socrates makes between the better part of the soul, which calculates, and the worse part that gets angry without calculation (441BC).<sup>39</sup> He is also applauded in a discussion of how those who excel in warfare should be awarded. It is claimed that according to Homer such rewards are appropriate. He also seems to be made into some

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<sup>39</sup> “He struck his chest and spoke to his heart (441B).” Socrates had previously praised Homer for these words in the discussion of *musike* (390D), for exhibiting endurance.

kind of an authority on appropriateness of rewards when referring to his example on how this should be done (468CD).<sup>40</sup>

A description is given of how the philosophers look toward virtues such as justice, beauty and austerity and how they imitate these values by creating them in human beings. The outcome is said to be similar to what Homer called the “divine form and image” when it occurs among humans (501B). Later on an example from Homer, which had previously been criticized (386C), is used as an illustration, as it seems, in a neutral way (516D).<sup>41</sup> Homer is also cited at the start of the discussion of the decline of the ideal state in book VIII. Socrates asks his locators if they should act like Homer and pray to the muses to tell them how civil war first broke out.<sup>42</sup> He then suggests that the Muses speak to them in tragic tones as: „if they were in earnest, playing and jesting with us as if we were children (545DE).”<sup>43</sup> Socrates then speaks as if he was under the muses’ spell as he starts to describe the gradual fall of the ideal city from aristocracy into tyranny (546A-547A).

Hesiod is indirectly criticized as his proverb that somehow “the half is worth more than the whole” is said to apply to a guardian that strives for happiness that is incompatible with his role (466BC). But his poetry also receives a more positive treatment when used as a kind of a noble lie – to give an idea of what people should be made to believe about the destiny of the philosopher after his death (468E-469A).<sup>44</sup> Aeschylus is cited twice to illustrate Socrates’ points without going deeply into the

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<sup>40</sup> “Indeed, according to Homer too, it is just to honour in such ways those young people who are good, for he says that Ajax, when distinguished himself in battle, “was rewarded with the long cut of the backbone.” And that’s appropriate honour for a courageous young man, since it will both honour him and increase his strength.” Socrates then adds that it is right to follow Homer, at least in these matters (468CD).

<sup>41</sup> In a discussion of the social role of the philosopher it is said that he would rather choose what Homer describes as “[working] the earth as a serf to another, one without possessions” and go through sufferings, than share the life and opinions of others (516D). Here the context of Homer’s words is different than previously when they were criticised as a theory about human destiny in the afterlife (386C). Another example from Homer used without a positive or negative judgement about its content is found at (566CD).

<sup>42</sup> Homer’s Iliad starts with this kind of appeal to the Muses who are asked to reveal the reasons for the wrath of Achilles and its horrific consequences.

<sup>43</sup> Another example of Socrates making a plea to the Muses is found in Phaedrus (237A-238C), at the beginning of a story illustrating the relationship between reason and desire.

<sup>44</sup> The following believes about the destiny of philosophers should be held:  
“Sacred demons living upon the earth,  
Noble spirits, protectors against evil, guardians of articulate mortals?(469A)”

essence of what he says.<sup>45</sup> Finally, Euripides, the tragic poet, is criticized for claiming “tyrants are wise who associate with the wise.” Socrates claims that both Euripides and some other poets idolize tyranny as something godlike. He concludes that the tragic poets will not be admitted into the ideal city (568AB).

Besides citations in the works of the poets, *musike* is not the centre of attention from book III until the discussion of it is resumed in book X. However, at 411A-412A, Socrates stresses the importance of harmony between music and physical training in the guardian’s education. *Musike* is used in a metaphorical way or to illustrate points made by Socrates. An example of this is found at 431E-432A where moderation within the ideal state is likened to all its citizens, the weakest, the strongest and all those between, singing the same song together. Another example of *musike* being used as a metaphor is the claim that the philosopher always cultivates the harmony of his body for the sake of the consonance in his soul (591CD).

### 1.3.2 PAINTING

Painting is often used as a metaphor for the works of the philosophers. Socrates compares constructing a prosperous state to painting a statue where each part should be painted in the right colour in order for the whole to become beautiful (420CD). He answers doubts regarding the realization of justice, described in the ideal state (472E) with the following comparison between painting and the undertakings of himself and his locators:

Do you think that someone is a worse painter if, having painted a model of what the finest and most beautiful human being would be like and having rendered every detail of his picture adequately, he could not prove that such a man could come into being?

No, by god, I don’t.

Then about our own case? Didn’t we say that we were making a theoretical model of a good city?<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> At the beginning of Socrates’ description of the degeneration from Timocracy to Oligarchy, he says it is time to tell of “another man ordered like another city (550C).” Phrases from Aeschylus are later used to exemplify in a similar fashion (563C).

<sup>46</sup> This refers back to the start of the discussion of music (376DE). The conclusion of the speculations about the possibility of an ideal state city being realized is that it can be an ideal in heaven for the one who wants to see it and

Certainly (472DE)

While Socrates discusses the necessity of the guardians being keen-sighted he compares those sightless regarding the nature of things around them with blind men, unable to look towards what is true and make reference to it. Unlike those who look to what is most true, make constant reference to it and study it as exactly as possible, in the manner of painters (484CD). Socrates also draws a parallel between constructing a metaphor and bringing together elements of different origins, like painters do when they paint goat-stags by combining features of different things (488A).

Socrates claims that if the majority realizes the noble nature of the philosopher they would neither oppose his rulership nor mistrust him when he says the city will never find happiness, until its outline is sketched by painters who use the divine model (500DE). He then describes metaphorically how the philosophers' vocation is similar to how a painter works. The philosopher is said to govern the state and the characters of his subjects like a painter who uses a sketching slate. First by whipping it clean. Then by erasing one thing and drawing another until they have made characters for human beings whom the gods would love as much as possible (501AB).<sup>47</sup>

#### **1.4 THE CRITIQUE OF POETRY RESUMED (BOOK X)**

The discussion of poetry is resumed in book X under the context that the arguments in the middle books have showed that the former criticism of poetry was well due.

According to Socrates the division between the parts of the soul has made it clearer that imitative poetry should not be allowed (595A).<sup>48</sup> He claims the tragic poets and other imitative poets deform the minds of those who do not have the remedy of knowing what it really is as a drug to counteract it (595B). He adds that his own admiration for Homer;

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construct his life accordingly (594AB). This description seems to entail that the city can be an ideal for individuals regardless of the society they live within. Unlike many others, this description of the ideal state does not include a reference to painting.

<sup>47</sup> Socrates claims this is a difficult task (501A). It seems reasonable to see this as a demand of ordering the factors that are most influential in forming a state, that is, its education and culture. Criticism of the education and culture of Plato's contemporaries by comparison with the ideal state seems to be one of the central objectives of the Republic. It seems that the philosophers will not accept to take charge without these factors being cleansed. The philosophers are said to be different from other lawgivers as they are not willing to take authority over individuals, a state or create laws unless they arrive at a clean slate or that they are allowed to do the necessary preparations themselves (501A).

<sup>48</sup> Books VIII and IX talk about a relationship between different kinds of souls and different kinds of government as they describe the decline from the rule of philosophers to tyranny. Aristocrati, Thymocracy, Oligarchy, Democracy and Tyranny thereby correspond different types of souls.

the first teacher among the poets and their leader, has restrained him regarding this subject. Then again, it would not be right to honour one man over the truth (595BC). This is followed by a discussion of the nature of imitation where painting is used as a paradigm for the imitation Socrates believes the poets (especially the tragic ones) perform.<sup>49</sup>

#### *1.4.1 PAINTING IS IMITATIVE*

Plato's criticism of painting is intervened with a presentation of his theory of ideas.<sup>50</sup> It is suggested that each group of objects has its own form (596B).<sup>51</sup> This is used to make a distinction between making objects, like the carpenter does when he makes a bed or tables, and making imitations, like the painter does when he paints these objects and other ones. The conclusion is that there exist three kinds of beds. A bed made by a carpenter, a bed made by a painter and the original bed – an idea god has created (596E-597B).<sup>52</sup> God is said to be the real creator of bed and all other things. The carpenter is said to take part in the creation of the bed by making it while the nature of imitation is said to consist in imitating what the others have created.<sup>53</sup> Socrates accuses imitation

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<sup>49</sup> Stephen Halliwell (p 98-117) argues that key elements of Plato's message and his portrayal of the Socrates character are meant to be a contrast to tragedy and the view of life it portrays.

<sup>50</sup> The theory of ideas has previously been constructed in books V-VII concurrently with discussion of subjects such as the nature of true knowledge and the role of philosophy within an ideal state. The discussion starts with Socrates' claiming that the same applies to beauty and ugliness, justice and injustice, good and evil. That these are ideas and as such unchangeable although different circumstances where they are to be found make it look like they are variable. This is followed by claiming that the lovers of sights and sounds, colors and desire and everything made form these things are unable to see the nature of true beauty and enjoy it. Socrates claims that very few can advance to the truly beautiful and see it for what it is (475E-476B).

<sup>51</sup> Plato's theory of ideas has been quite influential within the history of art, see e.g. Erwin Panovsky's book. *Idea*.

<sup>52</sup> Miles Butnyeat (pp 233-236, 245-246) points out that it was common to use couches/beds in gatherings where poetry was performed. He claims that the couch was a symbol both for poetry and ideas about the good life. According to Burnyeat an underlying reason why Plato chooses to talk about a picture of a couch instead of a picture of another object is that within the ideal state the use of couches and ideas about the good life are to be substantially different from what they were among Plato's contemporaries.

<sup>53</sup> Here it is specially pointed what it will entail if the tragedian turns out to be an imitator. According to Socrates he will then by nature be third from the king and the truth like all other imitators (597DE).

both of being deceptive and shallow.<sup>54</sup> He claims it can be preformed simply by using a mirror (596D).<sup>55</sup>

Painting is accused for showing things from one perspective only. It imitates that which appears as it appears and only touching upon the surface of things instead of revealing their real essence (598AB).<sup>56</sup> If a painting was viewed from a distance, a skilled painter painting a carpenter would be able to deceive children and ignorant people into thinking that the carpenter in his picture was real, if the painting was viewed from a distance (598C). On these grounds it is concluded that those considering the imitator to be wise cannot distinguish between knowledge, lack of knowledge and imitation (598CD). Socrates then points out that it is necessary to consider tragedy and “its leader” Homer. The reason is that according to some people the poets know all crafts, all human affairs concerned with virtue and vice and all about the good as well. These people also maintain that if a good poet produces fine poetry, he must have knowledge of the things he writes about, or else he wouldn’t be able to produce his poetry. It is therefore necessary to examine whether the people who think this have been deceived and don’t realize that the works of the poets can be produced easily without knowledge. Or whether there is something in what they say, and good poets really do have knowledge (598DE).

#### *1.4.2 IMITATION AND REAL WORK – HOMER CRITICIZED FOR NOT LEAVING A REAL LEGACY BEHIND*

Socrates sets out to explore whether or not Homer had true knowledge of the most important topics he addressed: war, military command, politics and education (599AC).

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<sup>54</sup> In Phaedrus (275DE) painting is also used as a parallel in a criticism generally directed at the written language. Writing and painting are said to have it in common that they are unable to explain their own meaning. Therefore they end up with repeating the meaning, which has been given to them. Another danger of writing according to the Phaedrus is that once a text has been written it is equally available to those it is appropriate for and others who should not read it.

<sup>55</sup> Here Socrates says to Glaukon: “Don’t you see that there is a way in which you yourself could make all of them? ... It isn’t hard: You can do it quickly and in lots of places, especially if you were willing to carry a mirror with you, for that’s the quickest way of all. With it you can quickly make the sun, the things in the heavens, the earth, yourself, the other animals, manufactured items, plants, and everything else mentioned just now (596DE).”

<sup>56</sup> Irwin Panofsky (p. 4 – 7) thinks that Plato had Egyptian art in mind when he criticizes the art of his contemporaries. “Plato contrast undisciplined Greek art with the “law-bound” art of the Egyptians ... Egyptian painters and sculptors who not only seemed to adhere eternally to firmly established formulas but also abhorred any concession to visual perception.”



He concludes that Homer did not excel in any of these fields. If Homer and Hesiod had been truly able to educate men and make them better they would have acquired companions<sup>57</sup> that loved and honoured them. And they would have clung to them rather than roaming about rhapsodizing (599D-600D). Socrates concludes that all poetic imitators, beginning with Homer, imitate images of virtue and that all the other things that they say have no grasp of truth. He claims that although the poet knows nothing he imitates in such a way that others who judge by words and are as ignorant as he will think he speaks extremely well. The great natural charm of poetry is its musical colourings, meter, rhythm and harmony. But if these parts are stripped from the poets work they would resemble faces of young boys who are neither fine nor beautiful after the bloom of youth has left them (600E-601B).

Socrates then develops further the distinction between imitation and other crafts by comparing the difference between the horseman (the user), the carpenter that makes tools for riding (the producer) and the painter (the imitator) in the case of horsemanship. He concludes that the user has knowledge and the carpenter has a true belief because of the advices he receives from the user. As the painter has neither of these he does not know about the virtues or deficiencies of what he imitates (601C-602A).

### *1.4.3 POETRY APPEALS TO THE LOWEST PART OF THE SOUL*

It is claimed that the that the art of imitation uses the same weakness in human nature that causes objects to seem bent or broken when viewed under water (602C). According to Socrates, the remedy is measurement, counting or weighing, qualities belonging to the rational part of the soul (602D). Errors of this kind are not limited to painting and sight as they also apply to poetry and hearing (603B-605B). Socrates refers to previous discussions of the divisions of the soul<sup>58</sup> and the good man, who was better equipped than others for enduring misfortune, such as loosing a son, because of his ability to restrain his grief (603E).<sup>59</sup> When pain tells him to moan, reason helps him fight the temptation on the account of the law saying that in times of hardship it is best to keep

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<sup>57</sup> In an ironical way Plato names the Sophists, Protagoras and Prodicus, as example of educators that have acquired followers. They are said to be able to convince anyone who associates with them that he wouldn't be able to manage his household or city unless under the supervision of their education (600CD)

<sup>58</sup> The previous discussion starts at 436A and continues to the end of book IV at 445E.

<sup>59</sup> Previously discussed at 387DC

calm. Sobbing, on the other hand, prohibits rationally evaluating what has happened and mending it (604AD).

Socrates claims that the irrational part of the soul cowardly longs for representation of pain and suffering (604D). It allows various kinds of imitation and is easy to imitate. Alternatively, it is hard to imitate the wise and quiet type and this kind of imitation is not easily understood by the many, nor is it popular in the theatre where the crowd gathers (604E). In order to please the crowd the poet is naturally inclined towards the lower drives of the soul. By use of imitation the poet is like the painter, creating things that are worthless compared to the truth. The imitative poet is therefore a creator of shadows that are far removed from the truth. By doing so, he also creates a bad constitution within the human soul (605AB).

#### *1.4.4 THE MOST SERIOUS CHARGE*

The most serious charge towards poetry is that it can corrupt the noble. Even the noble like to listen to tragic tales, see the hero suffer and praise the poetic genius for being able to move them. By doing so they are not true to themselves because if and when tragedy struck their own lives they would be ashamed of acting in the same way as shown in the theatre. In those circumstances it is most important to keep calm rather than to lose control (605CD). As the experience is directed at the suffering of another, reason loses its guard. Therefore, the shame of being taken in by the story's hero does not arise, resulting in pity and joy instead of contempt (605E). Even though they may disdain the work as a whole they think themselves benefited by the enjoyment it brings.<sup>60</sup> Socrates stresses that gaining pleasure from other people's sufferings affects one's own life as it becomes harder to control pity towards oneself when the feeling has been nourished in pity towards others (606AC). Comedies are criticized on similar grounds, for promoting harmful emotions with acceptance towards behaviour contrary to one's own standards. As

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<sup>60</sup> The grounds for this criticism are different from the previous discussion of the poets portraying the gods and good men in an unworthy way (388CD). The former criticism emphasizes the harmful effects of immoral poetry on the development of consciousness in cases where moral consciousness is not necessarily fully developed, e.g. with children. The point here is rather that poetry can have harmful effects even if the moral consciousness is fully developed. C.D.C Reeves (p. 230) points out in this regard that both Plato's and Freud's view of art is related to repression. That both of them stressed that art enables us to satisfy without reproach or shame the very desires we must repress in real life.

an example of this Socrates criticizes people who allow themselves to enjoy jokes which they would be ashamed of telling (606C).

### **1.5 THE CONCLUSION ABOUT IMITATIVE POETRY**

The Republic's conclusion is that poetry nurtures the parts of the soul that should be dried up and vice versa (606D). Socrates admits that Homer is the most poetic of poets and the first of the tragedians, but only the parts of his poetry that praise the lords and noble men can be admitted into the ideal State. If the pleasure-loving muse would be admitted, whether in lyric or epic poetry, pleasure and pain would become kings of the city instead of law or reason (607A).

Socrates cites a former quarrel between philosophy and poetry<sup>61</sup> but refuses that this is the cause for poetry's discharge from the ideal state. He claims reason gives him and his interlocutors no other choice. If imitative poetry can justify its existence within a well-governed state he at least would be glad to accept it. Socrates says his own upbringing and that of his locators has nourished them with love towards this sort of poetry (607B-608A).<sup>62</sup> But while convincing arguments for poetry's usefulness have not been provided, the reasoning of their own conversation should function as remedy against it. He claims that it is important to keep in mind that poetry does not represent the truth and the way it is loved by the masses is dangerous. One should fear for the constitution in one's own soul and remember the criticism of the discussion as a countercharm to the spell of poetry (608AB).

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<sup>61</sup> As an example of this Eyjólfur Kjalar Emilsson points out that the philosophers Herakleitos and Xenofanes had before Plato criticized the poets for immoral views and that there is satire of philosophy in the works of the poets Pindar and Aristophanes. *Ríkið*, II p 352-3, fn. 21

<sup>62</sup> Socrates says in this context that it would be profitable if the lovers of poetry could provide a defense for it, whether in lyric or any other meter, which showed that poetry was not only pleasant but also beneficial (607D).

## CHAPTER 2: IS THE DISCUSSION OF ART WITHIN THE REPUBLIC COHERENT?

### 2.1 THE CRITICISM OF ART IS FIRST AND FOREMOST DIRECTED AT POETRY

The previous discussion indicates that Plato's criticism is primarily directed at poetry, as addressed in the books I-II of the work.<sup>63</sup> A discussion of the role of *musike* in the guardian's education also relates first and foremost to poetry because the division between poetry (the tale) and music (rhythm and musical scale) assumes that music is ruled by the tale it follows and interprets (398D).<sup>64</sup>

The discussion of art in books IV – IX emphasizes painting and poetry. This is also the case in book X. The treatment of painting, as a paradigm for philosophy<sup>65</sup> and imitative poetry,<sup>66</sup> seems to suggest that Plato uses different approaches within painting to make a distinction between the two. Philosophy is portrayed in a positive way when described as a painting that makes heavenly beauty its ideal.<sup>67</sup> In contrast, imitative poetry is said to be like a painting that is only able to imitate appearances and that it deceives those unable to distinguish between, knowledge, lack of knowledge and imitation (598C). Therefore the argumentation against painting in book X (596A-605B) seems to be meant as criticism of imitative poetry and its faults rather than being directed as painting as such.

Before evaluating whether or not the Republic criticizes poetry the coherency of Plato's criticism should be addressed as it affects this paper's main concern. Julia Annas has maintained that the criticism of book X is not coherent with the role poetry has in books II and III. Next we examine her ideas on this particular matter in light of Plato's text.

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<sup>63</sup> Previously discussed p 11 – 13.

<sup>64</sup> The discussion of how *musike* should be censored (p 16-18) shows how Plato thinks that music underscores the content of the poems by imitating its character types and actions e.g. the tone and pitch of a brave man (398A) or someone who engaged in a peaceful action (399B).

<sup>65</sup> Previously discussed p. 21 – 22.

<sup>66</sup> Previously discussed p. 23 – 24.

<sup>67</sup> It entails looking to what is true and making a constant reference to it (484CD). In accordance to this it is concluded that the prosperity of the city is depended on its outlines being sketched out by painters using the divine model (500E). That is the philosophers who would be the only ones capable of making such a picture.

## 2.2 JULIA ANNAS' VIEW ON THE REPUBLIC'S TREATMENT OF ART

Julia Annas claims there is an incoherency between books III and X – book III holds poetry to be important while book X indicates that it is trivial and unable to grasp truth and knowledge.<sup>68</sup> Annas also sees an internal contradiction within book X where the argument on how poetry corrupts good people (605C-606B) is incompatible with the criticism that draws upon parallels between painting and poetry (595A-605C).<sup>69</sup> A third discrepancy, according to Annas, concerns the conclusion of book X. She maintains that although its discussion (605C-608B) bears similarities to the topics of book III, where the dangers of poetry are emphasized, the conclusion of book X is more stringent and forbids all poetry.<sup>70</sup>

Annas believes the Republic's inconsistency regarding poetry is a consequence of incompatible views held by Plato about this subject. According to Annas, Plato considered poetry as an important force and also something which could not be controlled by censorship. As a result in book X Plato did not trust poetry, or art in general, to take on the moral role, which they had previously been given. Annas does not think the permission in book X to use poetry to praise the gods and noble men (607C) as contradicting her assessment. According to her Plato did not consider this kind of praise to be real poetry.<sup>71</sup> Her paper suggests that within the Republic there are at least four aspects, which have to be taken into account when evaluating if the Republic criticizes art as such: First, the general view that morality is what distinguishes good art from bad art. Second, contradictory conclusions between book III and book X in the discussion of poetry. Third, internal inconsistencies within book X between argumentation which according to her treats art as superficial and trivial (595A-605C), and argumentation which treats it as dangerous and important (605C-608B). Fourth, if Annas is right that

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<sup>68</sup> Julia Annas. "Plato on the Triviality of Literature", *Plato: Critical Assessments*. p. 274.

<sup>69</sup> Annas p. 280 – 281

<sup>70</sup> Annas p. 281. She does not go thoroughly into what it is that book X prohibits which book III allows only claims (p. 282) that book III tries to tame the classics of poetry while book X at times, as in the third argument (605C-606B) discards them totally.

<sup>71</sup> In order to support her claim that Plato thought poetry was important Annas points out (p. 288) that it is treated in this way in some of the other dialogues such as *Ion*, *Menon* and *Phaedrus*. In footnote 44 she claims that the following passage from *Phaedrus* (245A) indicates that Plato thinks that real poetry cannot be regulated. "If anyone comes to the gates of poetry and expects to become an adequate poet by acquiring expert knowledge of the subject without the Muses' madness, he will fail, and his self-controlled verses will be eclipsed by the poetry of men who have been driven out of their minds."

the passage 595A-605C treats art as it were trivial and superficial, in opposition to how it is generally viewed in the work, then this passage seems to be a criticism of art as such.

### *2.2.1 MORALITY AS A YARDSTICK ON GOOD AND BAD ART WITHIN THE REPUBLIC*

Annas believes the discussion of book II and III applies to art in general and not only to poetry. She points out that 400E-402D indicates the importance of art for educational purposes<sup>72</sup> – that although Plato mostly talks about poetry he holds that good art mediates morally good ideas. This applies equally to poetry and other arts. Because of the central place given to poetry Annas finds it problematic to determine standards to judge other arts as it does not seem likely that the standards of poetry could apply to them. She asks about the relevance of the distinction between imitation and direct speech (392D-394C) for other arts than poetry and claims that Plato does not raise this question. That we are left thinking that there is a distinction between beneficial and harmful pictures, rugs and buildings, but without an idea of what this difference may entail.<sup>73</sup>

A closer examination of the text suggests that Annas' claims are problematic, as the Republic seems to indicate a distinction between good and bad in the case of other arts as well as poetry. However, these standards are not described in detail. The same passage which Annas cites, supporting that the Republic has a general theory about art (400E-402D) claims that for poets, painters and craftsmen to produce the image of the good character in their works (401B) it is necessary to seek out craftsmen who are by nature able to pursue what is fine and graceful (401C). It is implied that the philosophers should use their powers to ensure that artists and other craftsmen imitate the good character instead of the bad one. The existence of good art and craftsmanship is therefore made dependent on the rule of the philosophers.<sup>74</sup> Good art, according to the Republic, is art that mediates positive moral ideas but in order to fulfil such a role it seems that it has first to be subjected to the rule of philosophy.

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<sup>72</sup> Annas (p 283-286) compares Plato to Tolstoy and Chernyshesky who also thought that art should primarily be valued according to moral rather than artistic standards. She states that books II and III of the Republic are compatible with their views while book X is not as they could not have accepted its message and conclusion. That poetry was trivial and should be banned.

<sup>73</sup> Annas p. 275

<sup>74</sup> In the case of poetry this can be seen by how it is meant to fall under the rule of philosophy, which is meant to control what is said and how it is done. For instance by using in order to communicate noble lies that the citizens should believe in as previously discussed in the chapter about the role of music. Previously discussed p. 14-15.

What does the assumption that art cannot be fully good unless it is under philosophical sovereignty entail? The censorship of books II and III do not leave much room for poetic creativity.<sup>75</sup> If Annas is right about book X's conclusion the difference between the two has to be further examined. One focal point in the treatment of books II and III of poetry is the description of truth and lie. At the end of book II it is claimed that a genuine lie is the state of a soul that lives in deception and that a lie in words is an imitation of this state (382BC). Accordingly, real truth is not apart of things having to do with the external world such as words and actions. It rather seems that these kinds of things have value relative to the soul of the one who speaks or acts. The words and deeds of a good person therefore seem to become an imitation of the good soul while the opposite is the case about the bad person. It seems to be in this spirit that Socrates talks about stories being beneficial when they imitate the truth as far as possible (382D). In order for stories to become helpful it seems that they should imitate the good character in the right kind of way.

For this reason, the role of the poets and craftsmen within the ideal state involves imitating this kind of truth under the supervision of the philosophers (401AD). Their products are described as lies, although useful, not because their stories are implausible or because they contradict actual state of affairs. They are lies because the nature of truth is such that it cannot be put into words. As the artistic object is poorer than what it is meant to imitate, that is the good soul, attempts to honour the truth in a work of art always involves a kind of deception.

Actual knowledge, as is defined within the Republic, and the philosophers' unique position within the ideal state, suggest that the role of philosophy in relation to art is quite dominant. The importance of philosophy for art in books II and III both seems to consist of being a premise as well as its guardian.<sup>76</sup> A premise, because in order to imitate the good, the good has to be known.<sup>77</sup> A guardian, because of the philosopher's

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<sup>75</sup> Previously discussed p. 13 – 19.

<sup>76</sup> Maybe also subject matter, because if truth is defined as a state of a soul it seems rational that creating the image of goodness entails imitating the best kind of soul which would probably be the soul of a philosopher.

<sup>77</sup> This seems to be suggested in the claim that if the guardians are to be brought up among images of gracefulness craftsmen able to discover the nature of the good and noble must be sought out (401BC).

role of setting rules and making sure they are followed (378E-379A), as implied in the regulation and censorship in books II and III.

The discussion of ways of relating a story<sup>78</sup>, which focuses on whether or not imitative poetry should be allowed within the ideal state, gives a further clue about what imitation of the good entails. It is claimed that the guardians should only imitate what is appropriate for their own position (395C) and it is concluded that the speech of the good man consists of imitation and direct description but the part of the imitation is small in comparison to direct description (396C). Plato then makes a contrast between the good man and the imitator, which uses little direct speech and mostly relies on imitation. According to Plato this type imitates everything, even the most disgusting things (397AB).

The question whether or not imitators should be admitted into the ideal state is answered by claiming that only single-minded poets that imitate the speech of a good man and follow the rules applying to poetry are allowed (379D-398A). This is in agreement with the rules applying to the guardians discussed above (395C). It seems that the central objective of books II and III is to analyze the preconditions which have to apply to poetry in order for it to do its job in the education of the guardians. The official purpose of the discussion between Socrates and his interlocutors, starting in book II, is also to educate the guardians, the class that is said to be crucial if the ideal state is to be realized (376DE). If Annas is right about books II and III containing a general theory about art this may suggest that all art within the ideal state should be fitted to the needs of one social class. If this is the case it is difficult to see what kind of “real poetry” book X forbids but books II and III allow, as Annas seems to claim.<sup>79</sup>

The contrast between the good man (396E) and the imitator (397AB) also raises the question whether or not it is confusing to claim that the Republic discusses art at all. It is implied that the Republic assumes a strong connection between the works of poetry and its authors. Both the description of the imitator (397AB), the way imitating different kinds of people is said to be similar to taking on different kinds of jobs (e.g. being

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<sup>78</sup> Formerly discussed p. 17-18.

<sup>79</sup> Annas p. 290. If we on the other hand assume that real art is dependent upon creativity and freedom of expression the strongest textual examples supporting that such art would be forbidden in the ideal state is possibly found in book III rather than in book X. See previous discussion of 397D-398A and 387AB in footnote 38 p. 18.



simultaneously a shoemaker and a captain or a farmer and a judge), and the way the poet who imitates different kinds of things is rejected entrance into the ideal state (398A). All this seems to suggest that Plato's criticism is directed at the psyche of the imitator and not only his works.

If Plato's criticism was first and foremost aimed at a particular type, the poetic imitator rather than poetry itself, it would be confusing to say that he criticized art. Although the person of an author can be involved in discussion and interpretation of works of art such discussion has to be rooted in the works themselves and their qualities. If Plato's criticism is directed at a particular psyche or character it can only be a criticism of art in an indirect way. At this point it can be noted that the Republic itself provides various examples and cites passages of poetry, which are thought to have harmful effects. Even though the focus on the author's psyche may not rule out that the Republic criticizes art, it may possibly consider poetry to be some kind of imitation of the soul of its author and that this was an important reason for its harmful effects. This point will be discussed more in detail later on.

### *2.2.2 THE ALLEGED CONTRADICTION BETWEEN THE CONCLUSIONS OF BOOK III AND BOOK X (605C-606B)*

Annas' claim that Plato's argumentation (605C-608B) is directed at poetry and its harmful effects rather than art in general seems plausible.<sup>80</sup> However, the reason for the criticism seem to be that Plato attacks what nowadays is sometimes referred to as the aesthetic distance, the distinction between the reality of artistic work and everyday life. As previously discussed, Plato considers the fact that even good men enjoy seeing Homer and other tragic poets imitate a hero express its anguish (605CD) the greatest danger of poetry.<sup>81</sup> This is described as bad faith because these persons would be ashamed to react in such a way if tragedy struck their own lives. The relationship between the poetic work and real life is underlined by pointing out that it is harder not to give into the temptation of feeling pity towards oneself when this feeling has been nourished by pitying others. Plato's criticism of comedy seems to be based on a similar

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<sup>80</sup> Annas p 280-281.

<sup>81</sup> The most serious charge against poetry according to Plato is previously discussed p. 26.

attitude, as he stresses that one should not laugh at jokes which one oneself would be ashamed of telling.<sup>82</sup> This suggests that Plato's attitude is of a general nature that is not restricted to poetry and its content. His main emphasis seems to be that people should not allow themselves different reactions to words and deeds of others than those compatible with their own principles.<sup>83</sup>

To act unworthily according to Plato is to give into emotions which reason should control. On the other hand this does not exclude the possibility that poetry can nourish good emotions. The conclusion of book X – that poetry's role should be limited to praising the good (607A) – actually seems to reflect the conclusion of book III in this matter. Book III concludes by claiming that the poets should only imitate one kind of character, the good one. As pointed out previously, not only poetic works but also the works of the craftsmen are supposed to imitate the image of goodness (401B). One of the central issues in the discussion leading to the conclusion of book III is how the good should be portrayed in poetry.<sup>84</sup> Therefore it is not likely that book III allows poetry, which does not praise the good.

The bond between book III's conclusion and the discussion of poetry in book X are also underlined in the text. When the argumentation is reopened in book X it is claimed that the middle books' discussion of the soul made it clear that it had been right not to admit imitative poetry into the ideal state (595A). This suggests that the imitative poetry that emulates various characters and objects is already banned in book III and the discussion of the soul has strengthened the grounds for the ban. However, book X's discussion of poetry does not indicate a ban on poetry that is admitted in book III (397D-398B). If Annas is right in that Plato did not consider the poetry allowed in book X as real poetry then there is nothing that suggests that he thought differently about the poetry allowed in book III. She does not explain specifically the difference between the two

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<sup>82</sup> According to Plato this is caused by the part of the soul that reason holds back, because of fear of being thought a buffoon, is released (606C)

<sup>83</sup> The right reaction to seeing good men acting unworthily is to feel disgusted instead of enjoying and praising it (605E).

<sup>84</sup> It is, for example said to be irrational that the perfect gods would want to change his appearance (380D). And it is prohibited to show weeping and lamentation of heroes or someone indulging in violent laughter (387E-389E).

chapters, e.g. what it is that book III admits and book X bans and why. Therefore, her claim that book X bans all real poetry<sup>85</sup> in opposition to book III is not convincing.

Perhaps Annas is right in that Plato's restrictions seem so tight that the art that it allows would not be considered as real art today. If this is the case it seems probable that the work as a whole holds this view. But the arguments about the dangers of poetry and the dismissing of Homer (605C-608B) do not seem to include a general criticism of poetry or art. The focus of the criticism is to point out the relationship between fiction and reality. The message is that, by giving into the harmful emotions poetry evoke, one's own soul can be harmed. Although the emphasis of book X (605C-608B) is somewhat different from the discussion in books II and III<sup>86</sup> there is nothing to indicate that the general guidelines about what is to be allowed and what should be forbidden are not the same. Therefore Annas' claim about discrepancy between the two does not seem plausible.

### 2.2.3 ANNAS' MOST SERIOUS CHARGES

Annas' criticism concerning Plato's argument about the parallels between painting and poetry (595A-605C) includes three points. Firstly, a criticism of Plato's argumentation. Secondly, Plato's claim that the poets lack knowledge is criticized. And thirdly, the view that poetry appeals to the lowest part of the soul is condemned. Annas considers Plato's description as purporting that poetry here to be stupid rather than dangerous. She believes that Homer's works are being treated as trivial or silly.<sup>87</sup> She considers this to be in opposition to the Republic's general view about poetry – being perceived as important and dangerous. She believes that this passage tries to trivialize art. If this is right, this is likely a criticism of the value of art as such. I shall argue that Annas' view is not plausible, as the passage in question seems to hold a similar view towards art as our discussion has indicated so far. It should therefore neither be interpreted as a criticism of

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<sup>85</sup> Annas p. 290

<sup>86</sup> Book X discusses the dangers that poetry poses to the human soul and its ontological standing in relation to knowledge while books II and III focus on the preconditions that have to be fulfilled if poetry is to become useful for the education of the guardians.

<sup>87</sup> Annas maintains (p. 286) that Plato makes all poetry look so trivial and silly that it falls beneath the scope of moral concern. She thinks that even the works of Homer are described here as they were utterly stupid. According to her: "it is as if [Plato] regarded them all as something like the product of a mass culture like TV shows, something so essentially banal that it is hard to see what could be distinctively worth about having a good specimen."

art as such nor should it be seen as being in conflict with the other argument about art in book X (605C-608B).

*IS PLATO'S ARGUMENTATION ABOUT THE PARALLELS BETWEEN PAINTING AND POETRY SERIOUSLY FLAWED?*

The parallels Plato draws between painting and poetry (595A-605C) entail that poetic imitation is limited to simulating the outer surface of things. Annas claims that Plato views the work of the painter as limited to thoughtless imitations of appearances and, that he transfers this view and applies it to Homer and the tragic poets. She says that it amounts to declaring that regardless of art form, all artists create without knowledge of their product.<sup>88</sup> She finds this unconvincing because she thinks it is unclear how Plato's description of painting applies to imitative poetry. She points out how Plato talks about the use of reason to rectify the flaws of perception when discussing painting and claims that mending errors of perception and guarding against harmful emotions, which seems to be the role of reason towards poetic influences, are two different things.<sup>89</sup>

It is, however, likely that Plato was fully aware of the differences between painting and poetry in this regard. The fact that imitative poetry and imitation in painting seem to be quite different may even be the reason why he contrasts them with each other. Maybe Plato is trying to show the resemblance between Homer and the poetic tradition, which his contemporaries considered to be good art, with phenomena that were not at all regarded as art. As previously mentioned, the discussion of poetry in book X may be considered as an antithesis to the comparison drawn between philosophy and painting in the Republic's middle books, where philosophy is compared to painting that has true beauty as an ideal.<sup>90</sup> In contrast, in book X the imitative poet is compared to a painter who only imitates how things appear.

However, Plato does not seem to suggest that everything that applies to painting also applies to poetry. When Annas points out the difference between painting, as described in book X and the works of composing poets like Homer, one could just as well point out the difference between painting and governing an ideal state — the two things that are

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<sup>88</sup> Annas p. 276

<sup>89</sup> Annas p. 278-279

<sup>90</sup> Previously discussed p. 28.

contrasted with each other in middle books. The key issue in the comparison between the poet and the painter is that the poet is said to lack knowledge, regardless of how talented he may be as a poet. Because he does not know the real nature or essence of things, his creations can only imitate how they seem to be. This position seems to be the same as before, art will not become really good unless it is under the sovereignty of philosophy – those in possession of real knowledge. The comparison between painting and poetry therefore seems to be in harmony with the claim that within an ideal state knowledge shall provide the guidelines for art. Even though Plato often uses metaphors in his arguments Annas seems to overstate her point. Her mistake may be a result of her not being aware of the connection between the talk of philosophy and poetry in the middle books to the comparison in between poetry and painting in book X. This seems a likely reason for her treating Plato’s metaphorical descriptions as if they were meant to be analytical arguments.<sup>91</sup>

As a whole, Plato’s metaphors seem to indicate that there are at least two kinds of painting, the philosophers’ and the imitators’. Ruby Blundell’s description of the role of painting for Plato’s contemporaries suggest that it largely consisted of imitating what was thought to be good and noble. This bears similarities to Plato’s proposed role of art.

Painting ... aimed at an ideal beauty, eschewing idiosyncrasies in favour of making, for example, a person’s hair the “right” colour of hair (i.e. black). Conversely just as works of art beautified their subjects, so beauty of real persons might be praised by likening them to a work of art, especially a statue of a god. Sculpture and painting do not just portray a generalized idea of human beauty and superiority, but become tokens for it.<sup>92</sup>

The understanding of Plato’s contemporaries about the qualities that a good painting should have has strong similarities to Plato’s metaphorical description of how the philosophers themselves will paint. Philosophy is praised by comparing it to a good painting trying to create the ideal while poetry is compared to the opposite – painting that

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<sup>91</sup> Annas points out herself (p. 276 fn. 17) passages where painting is described in a more positive way than in book X, including passages that have been discussed previously here 420C, 472D, 484C, and 500D-501B. On the other hand she does not seem to see the connection between them and the treatment painting receives in book X.

<sup>92</sup> Ruby Blondell, *The Play of Character*, p 61. Blondell also points out that Plato breaks the common ethical and aesthetical standards by the way his leading character, Socrates, is described in many of his dialogues. By enhancing Socrates’ natural ugliness and describing his shabby clothing and shoelessness Socrates’ lack of natural beauty and his ignorance of external appearance become symbols of his inner beauty and intellectual supremacy contrary to the common idea that external and internal beauty were connected to each other (p 71-73).

copies instead of aiming for beauty.<sup>93</sup> Is it possible that art forms other than those criticized by Plato would be excluded from his criticism if they adhered to similar guidelines in their creation as the painter – philosopher does?

This does not seem to be the case. The imitations made by the philosophers are based on their insight into the world of ideas and the knowledge they draw from them.<sup>94</sup> According to the Republic, neither poets nor other artists can acquire such knowledge, which means that art without the supervision of philosophers seems to result in imitation at the same level as imitative poetry. This is in agreement with book III (401AD) where the existence of philosophers is a presupposition to the construction of good art and to craftsmanship in general. Contrary to Annas' opinion, Plato's comparison between painting and poetry in book X therefore seems to reflect his previous views.

*DOES PLATO CRITICIZE ART BY SAYING THAT IT CREATES WITHOUT KNOWLEDGE?*

Annas also maintains that by claiming the poets to create without knowledge (595A-606C) Plato tries to trivialize the value of art.<sup>95</sup> This raises the question about what kind of knowledge it is that the poets lack and their works are unable to give? The Republic answers this in two respects, by describing the conditions that have to be fulfilled in order to acquire knowledge,<sup>96</sup> and by describing knowledge as something eternal, unchangeable and independent of perception (477A-480D). It is difficult to see how the poets criticized by Plato could have fulfilled the necessary requirements, as the nature of true knowledge seems to be such that it will not be learned from poetry or other kind of art that is dependent on perception.<sup>97</sup> Thus the claims about art being unable to mediate

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<sup>93</sup> Painting is not only used to praise philosophy in the middle books and criticize poetry in the final book of the Republic it is also used to give an indication of what bad poetry is when Plato compares giving a bad image of gods and heroes to a painting which has no resemblance with that which it is a painting of (377DE)

<sup>94</sup> An example of this is a description of how the philosophers imitate the ideas by constructing the nature of the citizens of the ideal state by creating the "finest sketch" (501AC).

<sup>95</sup> Annas p 275 - 276

<sup>96</sup> The work indicates that only the philosophers are able to attain real knowledge. The presuppositions of becoming philosophers are various, such as physical and mental abilities, the right kind of education and the right kind of society, which encourages the philosophers to take charge.

<sup>97</sup> As previously discussed, the role of poetry within the ideal state is to be in the service of philosophy e.g. by preparing the guardians in their quest for knowledge where the beauty of *musike* is to make them more receptive to reason because of the kinship between the two (401D-402A). The real quest for knowledge, on the other hand, begins later (522A).

knowledge can hardly be viewed as criticism of art, considering how knowledge is defined in the work.

The well being of the state is in the philosophers' hands. All occupations, not only the arts, seem to depend on the philosophers mediating the relevant knowledge to their subjects. This is suggested in the passage where different kinds of knowledge regarding horsemanship are outlined.<sup>98</sup> It is suggested that the user alone possesses knowledge and that the virtue and excellence of each manufactured item, living creature or action is solely related to the use for which it is made or naturally adapted (601CD). It seems probable that, within the ideal state those under philosophical rule will have to follow their commands like the carpenter does but unlike the painter in the example above.<sup>99</sup> Although the imitative painter is used to exemplify someone outside the hierarchical structure of the ideal city, the metaphor is generic but not specific. The same criticism seems to apply to him as a cobbler, a carpenter or any other craftsman that neither receives advice from the philosophers nor listens to them. The true belief of the craftsmen in Plato's example seems to depend on the philosophers (the users), that is those who possess knowledge. This suggests that if one considers the Republic to criticize painting and poetry by claiming that they lack knowledge, like Annas does, one could also say it criticized every kind of work, which is not under the supervision of wise philosophers.

The way book X addresses the imitative arts actually seems to be a logical conclusion of how they are looked upon, as imitation, in book III (382BC), and therefore of a lower status ontologically than that which is imitated. This goes against Annas' claims about art receiving a different treatment in book X than in the earlier parts. On the other hand Plato's discourse about the relationship between objects and imitations seems to apply equally to other kinds of today's mediation and not only to art. From this perspective we can think about common phenomena that did not exist in Plato's time e.g. a televised

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<sup>98</sup> Previously discussed p. 25.

<sup>99</sup> Annas (p. 277) criticizes this analogy and maintains that the distinction between, the producer and the imitator, does not sufficiently explain the subject matter, the relationship between forms and knowledge. Annas points out that forms are not used as the example indicates according to her. However it may be more plausible that Plato is not talking about forms but rather showing what the rule of the philosophers over the producers entails. The use in this passage would then not primarily be a use of ideas but rather of people, e.g. that the philosopher uses the carpenter (the producer) when he governs the ideal state. The use could, for instance, consist in giving orders about what the carpenter should make, how much and when.

broadcast from mass demonstration. According to Plato's premises the way television imitates by manifesting copies of appearances seems to be a similar kind of imitation as that which the painters in book X are accused of performing. Also, simultaneously imitating many people of different characters seems to be very dangerous. Generally speaking both written language and pictorial language seem largely to be imitations of imitations according to Plato's terminology. If this is correct, Plato's framework is too extensive to be understood as a criticism of art only although the works and the poets that his criticism is directed against are acknowledged as having made important contributions to its history.<sup>100</sup>

*DOES PLATO CRITICIZE ART BY CLAIMING THAT IT APPEALS TO THE LOWEST PART OF THE SOUL?*

Annas' also criticizes Plato's claims that poetry appeals to the lowest part of the soul (595A-606C).<sup>101</sup> Before determining if Annas is correct on the issue, the lowest part of the soul and what it is to appeal to it, according to the Republic, must be clarified. Secondly, it has to be made clear if there is an agreement between books II and III and book X poetry appeals to this part of the soul.

In order to get a fuller picture about what it entails to appeal to the lowest part of the soul according to Plato, we must look at how the soul is divided into different parts, (reason, temperament and desire) and how they relate to the Republic's corresponding virtues. Book IV talks about the central virtues as being wisdom, courageousness, moderation and justice (427E). Wisdom is described as the main virtue of the rulers, the smallest class. Furthermore it is said that the city as a whole becomes wise because of them governing it (428E-429A). Courage, the virtue of the guardians, is said to consist in the power to preserve the belief about what things are to be feared, according to the ruler's instructions (429BC). The main virtue of other citizens is moderation, consisting in control over one's needs and desires (431E). The desires of the many should be

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<sup>100</sup> As pointed out previously the criticism is mostly directed at the works of Homer, Hesiod and Aeschylus. See fn. 21 p. 13.

<sup>101</sup> Annas considers (p. 286) the treatment of these arguments in book X, which claim that poetry appeals to the lowest part of the soul to be a belittlement of poetry in general. According to Annas the possession here is that to indulge in poetry is to display a weakness of character and superficiality. Annas claims that according to these arguments poetry, both in producer and consumer, appeals to the lowest part of the soul, the part that should be ruled by reason and not allowed autonomous development.



controlled by the wisdom and desires of the superior few as only few people are born with the best nature and receive the best education (431C).

The internal relationship between the three virtues is then described by saying that courage and wisdom make the city courageous and brave, although they only belong to parts of it, while moderation is the natural harmony, between the better and the worse, regarding who shall govern both within the city and in each man. A metaphorical description of how it functions in the city as a whole is that it makes everyone sing the same song regardless of their rational capabilities, physical strength, wealth or anything else (431E-432B). The fourth virtue, justice, is said to consist in the rule that everyone must practice one of the occupations in the city for which he is naturally best suited (433A).

According to book three the central objective of poetry, painting and craftsmanship seems to be to create moderation. Socrates says, for instance, that music should promote harmony and make the good nature its ideal. As a result fine works will strike the eyes and ears of young people like a breeze from a good place that leads them to resemble, friendship and harmony with the beauty of reason (401AD). This seems to be in accord with the description of moderation in the city as a whole where there is an agreement between those naturally worse and naturally better as to whom of the two shall rule both in the city and in each one (431E-432A).

Book III describes *musike* (poetry) both as a cultivating force<sup>102</sup> and as having inherent dangers (e.g. 424DE). It can help make the soul graceful but also have the opposite effect (401E). This suggests that *musike* may unrattle the lowest part of the soul as well as creating harmony within it. The concluding remarks about imitative poetry in book III, suggesting it should only imitate the good character (398B) and follow rules about how a story is to be told, is an example of constructive art according to the Republic. In contrast, the art created by the imitator (379AB) only creates chaos within the soul. We shall now take a closer look at the division of the soul to appreciate how it may be affected by these two different kinds of imitations.

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<sup>102</sup> The musical scales allowed within the ideal state (previously discussed p 18) seem to emphasize both courageousness and moderation, the central virtues of the guardians and the producers. It is likely that being moderate and courageous is meant to be a part of the philosopher's wisdom. However there does not seem to be anything in *musike* that could mediate being wise in a similar way as seems to be suggested of the other virtues.

The Republic describes the soul in a general way, which seems to suggest that each citizen has all the three parts although they may differ in regards to which is strongest. It is suggested that people learn with one part, get angry with another, and desire<sup>103</sup> with the third (436A). Hunger and thirst are the clearest examples of the desiring part (437D) while reason, the best part of the soul, enables people to acquire knowledge. The nature of knowledge is that it can be differentiated; for instance, the knowledge of building a house is specific for architecture (438CD).<sup>104</sup> Thirst on the other hand is not specific in the same way, as it is neither large nor small, good nor bad. The soul of a thirsty person only wishes to drink (439AB). According to the Republic people can restrain this desire with the use of reason, thus reason can control the desires of the soul (439CD). The third part of the soul, temperament, is described as being in conflict between reason and desire, having to take sides with the one or the other (440AB).

It may be accepted that art does not provide knowledge that can be distinguished the way Plato describes. However, it does not seem right either that they only appeal to the desires. Does not the perception of artistic works, such as watching a play in the theatre appeal to reason and emotions respectively, for example by thinking about how the story progresses, interaction between characters, the meaning of the work in light of one's own views and values? In addition, there is the emotional reaction, that one feels excited, relief, sadness or pity. Although Plato believed a more critical approach towards the art was needed, especially of poetry (e.g. 605C-608B), it does not follow that he thought that people did not contemplate its content. Insight into the multiplicity of human existence is regarded as one of the central merits of art today – that it allows a view from another perspective than our own. It is not unlikely that similar reasons underlie Plato's scepticism towards art. In the poetry he wants to promote only one perspective seems to

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<sup>103</sup> The desire in this case is specified as a desire for the pleasures of food, drink, sex and others akin to them (436A). This seems related to a previous description of moderation where it is claimed that the most important aspect of moderation for the majority of people is to obey the rulers and to rule the pleasures of drink, sex and food for themselves (389DE).

<sup>104</sup> This may seem to be in opposition with the distinction made between knowledge, true belief and imitation (601C-602A), where it is claimed that knowledge is correct use. However, this may not be a contradiction since knowledge about how to perform specific tasks does not have to entail knowledge about how such ability should be implemented. As an example, the ability to build houses does not entail that one is good at organizing how a city is to be structured.

exist, a praise of the good.<sup>105</sup> Thus the role of poetry seems to be closer to a kind of meditation or a religious act than poetry or art known today.<sup>106</sup> By letting art and craftsmanship mediate the image of goodness, the ideal city as a whole seems to be designed with the purpose of directing the thoughts and desires of its citizens towards the one right thing instead of multiplicity that might lead to anarchy as the description of the imitator's personality (397AB) suggested.

#### 2.2.4 HOW BOOKS II, III AND X SEEM TO COMPLEMENT EACH OTHER

On a general level Annas' arguments regarding differences between the Republic's former and the latter treatment of poetry does not take into account that the function of the two discussions is somewhat different. The poetry discussed and censored within book II and III shows the kind which is to be allowed within the ideal state and meant to exist under the rule of the philosophers. In this light the discussion of book X may be considered as a description of the harmful effects poetry may have when such guidance is not available.<sup>107</sup>

The discussion of books II and III is incomplete as far as it assumes the control of philosophy over poetry (379A) before discussing what it entails to be a philosopher and what kind of knowledge they will have to possess in order to govern the city. Books IV-IX provide answers to these questions as well as defence for justice against the thesis that injustice leads to happiness and justice to unhappiness, which was supported with examples from poetry.<sup>108</sup> Book X therefore builds on premises regarding philosophy and knowledge, which the previous discussion of poetry presupposes. It goes deeper into the former claims by showing how poetry can be harmful and how it affects the soul. It

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<sup>105</sup> Plato is probably right in that this kind of poetry is not likely to become popular and it would be difficult to compose (604E). It is difficult to see how a poet is supposed to make a story interesting and exciting when multiplicity and interaction of different perspectives are banned.

<sup>106</sup> Irish Murdoch (p. 13, 65) claims in this context that Plato's criticism of art and human nature has religious overtones.

<sup>107</sup> For instance when it is claimed that the tragic poets and the other imitative poets deform the minds of those who do not know the true nature of things (595B) and in the argumentation which maintains that the art of imitation uses weakness of perception which reason can amend (602B-605B).

<sup>108</sup> In book I Thrasymakkos maintains that injustice is more prosperous than justice and this is also claimed in the interpretation of Glaucon and Adeimantus of poetry in book II. This is finally refuted in book IX which argues that the tyrant is the most miserable of all while the soul of the philosopher is the happiest (576A-580D). The second proof relies on a distinction between three parts of the soul where reason is strongest in the philosopher's soul and desire the strongest in the soul of the unjust man (580D-583A). The third proof makes a distinction between different kinds of pleasure for the just man and the unjust one (583B-587B).

thereby shows the necessity of applying a strict censorship on poetry, which the former treatment of poetry did contain. This suggests an internal consistency between the two parts and that they support each other.<sup>109</sup>

### 2.2.5 *HOW THE DISCUSSION IS COHERENT AS A WHOLE*

One more aspect that might suggest incoherency in the Republic's treatment of poetry is that some of its positive descriptions in the middle books might seem to be substantially different from its treatment elsewhere. This applies specially to Homer's poetry, the primary target of both the former and the latter criticism of poetry.<sup>110</sup> In book IV an example from Homer is used to illustrate how reason can restrain the temperament (441BC). In book V Homer is used as a source about how those who excel in warfare should be honoured (468CD). Finally, book VI cites Homer in an explanation about how the philosophers will mould the nature of others within the ideal city (501AB)

The relationship between the argumentation of the Republic and the discussion between the interlocutors within it is a likely explanation of how complements and criticism of poetry can go together. The work claims that philosophy leads to knowledge and poetry does not, therefore poetry must be controlled by philosophy. It is not suggested that Socrates or his interlocutors possess knowledge that would make them philosopher kings. However, in their discussion they draw the outlines of the ideal state like they themselves were its rulers.<sup>111</sup> The role given to poetry within such a state is to be morally beneficial (378D-379A). Most of the positive references to poetry in the middle part are also examples of how poetry can have such a role within the framework

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<sup>109</sup> Another example is to be found in book X when it is claimed that imitative poetry has distortions consequences for the individual soul as well as the whole city (606D). This is similar to the previous discussion of the consequences of not following the rules about poetry in book III (401D-402A). The conclusion is the same in both cases, if poetry is not tamed the consequences will be horrifying. It has also been pointed out that the framework suggested for poetry in book III (397D) seems to be similar to the conclusions of book X (607A).

<sup>110</sup> Most of the examples of poetry criticized in books II and III are from Homer (see fn. 21. p. 13 ). The criticism of book X is directed at the tragic poets and Homer, whom Plato considers to be their leader. It concludes with Homer being expelled from the ideal state.

<sup>111</sup> The following is an example: The framework given for the discussion itself, as an attempt to educate the guardians (376DE). As becomes clear later the philosophers are supposed to have control over education within the city. The declaration that the rulers should set and know the rules which the poets are supposed to follow and stop them if necessary (379A) is followed by a discussion of which framework should be followed. The discussion of poetry having the role of being a noble lie (382D) and that the rulers are only allowed to use poetry in this way (389BC) is followed up by giving examples of stories which could serve as such a lie. A notable exception is the rule that philosophers should not compose stories (379A) such as Socrates does several places within the Republic.

of an ideal state. The use of poetry includes examples about how Socrates and his interlocutors think they can make use of it as means to create noble lies.<sup>112</sup>

The emphasis on Homer in the discussion of poetry is probably a result of his central position in moral and religious matters among Plato's contemporaries (598DE). In the Republic Plato raises doubts about Homer deserving such a status. Plato also promotes ideas he considers better for education and prosperity. The Republic's argumentation therefore includes a comparison with Homer as a part of criticizing him e.g. in a discussion of how the god should be portrayed (379B-383A) where examples from Homer are used to illustrate how this should not be done (378D). The comparison with Homer is especially underlined in the discussion of the decline of the ideal state (545D-547A). It starts by a description of Socrates imitating Homer.<sup>113</sup> Socrates' declaration that one should not honour one man (that is Homer) more than the truth can also be regarded as an example. It seems reasonable to conclude that the ideal city is meant to possess a kind of truth that should be honoured more than the works of Homer, who was just a man.

The discussion between Socrates, Cephalus and Polemarchus in book I,<sup>114</sup> includes an indirect criticism of the status of poetry as well as the idea that the poets are wise. The presupposition for the criticism of the status of Simonides seems to be the idea supported later, that true knowledge is infallible.<sup>115</sup> Book X gives the final answer to the speculations of book I when it argues that poetry appeals to the lowest part of the soul (602B-605A) and by suggesting it is more honourable to engage oneself in real works than imitating them in poetry (599A-600E).

The part of book II where Glaucon and Adeimantus use examples from poetry in order to defend the merits of injustice is also related to the claim that poetry is not based on knowledge. In fact, the work as a whole argues for the opposite conclusion to the one Plato ascribes to poetry here – that justice leads to happiness and injustice to

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<sup>112</sup> The way Homer is quoted about the use of gifts to encourage soldiers (468CD) could possibly be interpreted as a demonstration of the power of philosophy over poetry within the ideal state. According to this reading Homer's poetry as used by Socrates becomes a useful lie. -- Another example is how lines from Hesiodos are used in order to praise philosophers that have died (468E-469A).

<sup>113</sup> Previously discussed p. 20

<sup>114</sup> Previously discussed p. 11 - 12.

<sup>115</sup> That knowledge is infallible is discussed (477A-480A). About Simonides it is claimed that he had been wise and therefore he could not have maintained false theories (335E)

wretchedness. It has already been concluded that Plato's treatment of painting in the middle part of the work and in book ten has two central objectives: to illustrate that poetry does not provide knowledge and that philosophy does. This points towards what seems to be the central claim of the work in relation to poetry: that it is unable to do its job properly if not under the guidance of wise philosophers who inform what should be composed and how this should be done. The discussion therefore suggests that the treatment of poetry and art within the Republic is coherent, contrary to Annas' opinion.

## CHAPTER 3: IS PLATO'S CRITICISM IN THE REPUBLIC DIRECTED AT ART AS SUCH?

It is important to take historical and cultural context into consideration when discussing whether Plato criticizes art. Especially as Plato's criticism of the poets may not be labelled as art criticism from a modern perspective. In his essay *Plato and Mass media* Alexander Nehamas considers that if Plato's historical context is taken into consideration it becomes clear that the criticism of book X is neither directed at poetry, as known today, or at art as such.<sup>116</sup>

Nehamas points out similarities between contemporary criticism of the harmful effects of television and Plato's criticism of the poets.<sup>117</sup> He believes the theatre in ancient Greece had more in common with our present popular entertainment than with art.<sup>118</sup> Members of all classes of society visited the theatre and the performances attracted large crowds.<sup>119</sup> The behaviour of the theatregoers was also more similar to the product of the entertainment industry than how art is commonly treated.<sup>120</sup> The vast productivity of many composers of plays<sup>121</sup> is according to Nehamas another factor, which bears more resemblance to entertainment than to art.<sup>122</sup> His central point is that the ancient

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<sup>116</sup> Alexander Nehamas p. 279

<sup>117</sup> Nehamas supports this with examples (pp 285-287) e.g. from Neil Postman who claims that television offers viewers a variety of subject-matters, requires minimal skills to be comprehended, and is largely aimed at emotional gratification resulting in spiritual devastation (286). This has similarities to Plato's description of imitative poetry in book X when it is claimed that poetry deals with various subject matters (604E), that it is easy to create (604E), and that it creates a bad constitution in the soul (605AB).

<sup>118</sup> One of the things Julia Annas is dissatisfied with in Plato's criticism of poetry is that he treats works of art like they were some kind of popular entertainment. See fn 87 p. 35.

<sup>119</sup> According to Nehamas (p. 287) large crowds, up to 17 thousand people could be packed into the theatre simultaneously.

<sup>120</sup> Nehamas p. 288. He does not give examples but seems to be talking about the difference between art and popular entertainment as traditions affecting the behaviour and expectations of the audience, e.g. the general difference between going to a rock concert or a football match on the one hand or going to the opera on the other.

<sup>121</sup> Nehamas points out in this context (p. 290) that the three great tragedians Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides composed approximately three hundred works.

<sup>122</sup> Nehamas p. 290. He does not give examples but one may think about the difference between a writer who writes manuscripts for episodes that run weekly on television and an author of novels. The former seems to be under more pressure and will have to produce more material than the latter. But if low demand for production is more likely to result in good art is a more complicated issue. Simon Davis (p. 15-17) points out that Bach's productivity was a result of him having to meet deadlines.

theatre had elements of realism shared by today's popular culture, instead of promoting interpretation on the part of the audiences, typical by the so-called fine arts.<sup>123</sup>

Nehamas has a point when he claims that art, poetry in particular, had another position in ancient Greece than today and it may be misleading to consider criticism of that kind of art as applying to today's art. A closer examination of the status poetry had in ancient Greece indicates, however, that Nehamas' claims about Plato's criticism being directed at entertainment rather than art may be misleading.<sup>124</sup> Erich A. Havelock points out that the poetry of Homer and Hesiod for ages served the purpose of orally preserving Greek culture<sup>125</sup> even after alphabetization of their language but before its use became general.<sup>126</sup> Common knowledge of the content of their poetry became important for this purpose. Poetry was recited and performed to preserve its content. According to Havelock poetry therefore acquired a central place, both in education and in the cultural life of the citizens.<sup>127</sup>

The central position that poetry seems to have had within ancient Greek society is probably more extensive than the role of art or popular entertainment today. In this context it may be helpful to look at the present distinctions between science, religion, politics and art – fields that, despite similar aspects, are considered as different categories where different standards apply. The poetry Plato criticizes seems to simultaneously involve all these things. As far as it was used for guidance in practical matters, such as warfare or sailing, it seems to take on the present role of science.<sup>128</sup> Regarding religion the poetic descriptions about the gods and ideals (e.g. found in description of the words and deeds of heroes) were looked upon as paradigms.<sup>129</sup> Havelock also points out that poetry had an important political role within the oral tradition. When laws and judgment

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<sup>123</sup> Nehamas p. 290

<sup>124</sup> It is also right to point out that attempts to draw a distinction between high and low culture is in many ways unfortunate as John Carey points out p 3 – 24.

<sup>125</sup> Havelock p 42 – 43.

<sup>126</sup> Havelock claims that the position of the oral tradition, which relied heavily on poetry in education, resulted in reading and writing taking long time to establish themselves among the Greek population. According to him the effects of alphabetization, takes between 700 and 650 b.c. (p. 115), start to have its full effects around the time Plato writes his dialogues (p. 41).

<sup>127</sup> Havelock p. 43-46.

<sup>128</sup> Another of Plato's dialogues, Ion, is full of criticism of this point, that the poet Homer has a paradigm position within other fields than poetry, such as sailing and warfare

<sup>129</sup> For instance the theological overview which is included in Homers poetry and how it is criticized in the Republic as previously discussed p. 16-17



had to be preserved orally a good memory and skill in formulating oneself in a way that would be engaging to hear and easy to remember were prerequisites for success.<sup>130</sup>

Although Havelock's description about the position and role of poetry runs counter to Nehamas' claim that Plato criticizes entertainment rather than art, there are some similarities between the two. Nehamas draws the following conclusion from how the behaviour of theatre goes in ancient Greece is described: "[It was] hardly a silent activity in its own right, unlikely to produce the quasi-religious attention required of fine-art today and more reminiscent of other sort of mass entertainments."<sup>131</sup> Havelock on the other hand claims that Plato introduces a new kind of mentality, which emphasizes the use of concepts instead of identification like poetry had done previously:

The mental condition is one of passivity, of a new sort perhaps. The poetic type of receptivity gained through imitation was an excited condition emotionally active. The new contemplation is to be serene, calm and detached. It is to be like the 'inspection' of a religious rite as opposed to participation in human drama. Plato has changed the character of the performance and has reduced us to silent spectators.<sup>132</sup>

Thus it may possibly be concluded that Plato is one of the fathers of the distinction between the fine arts with its silent spectators and entertainment that allows more room for engagement.<sup>133</sup> But even if that were to be true it would not be enough to conclude that Plato's criticism was not directed at entertainment rather than the fine arts.<sup>134</sup> The rules that apply to poetry in the Republic are general and the poetry which is the central aim of Plato's attack both seems to have had aspects of what defines present ideas about fine art and entertainment. As Nehamas points out poetry seems to have engaged both

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<sup>130</sup> Havelock p. 126

<sup>131</sup> Nehamas p. 288

<sup>132</sup> Havelock p. 271

<sup>133</sup> It is right to point out that Nehamas emphasizes that the Republic is a work of art as well as work of philosophy (p. 294). Havelock on the other hand describes Plato in a romantic way that reminds of descriptions sometimes used about famous artists: "He thinks the unconscious thoughts of his contemporaries. He can predict the thoughts which they will wish to think but which they do not yet know that they wish. We might say that he gives the intellectual current of his age their direction and drive (p. 277)."

<sup>134</sup> John Carey's (p. 14) interpretation of the position of the work of art according to Kant's theories could suggest similarities between them and the Republic. According to Carey, Kant sees works of art as belonging "to a separate category, recognized and attested by certain highly gifted individuals who view them in a state of pure contemplation, and their status as works of art is absolute, universal, and eternal." If related to the Republic a likely conclusion seems to be that the philosophers alone would be able to recognize a work of art. Christopher Janaway's interpretation of Kant (p.20) on the other hand points in the opposite direction. He draws attention to similarities between Plato's description of poetic inspiration in *Ion* (533E-534B) and how Kant describes an Aesthetic Idea as: "[T]hat representation of the imagination which induces much thought, yet without the possibility of any definite thought whatever, i.e. *concept*, being adequate to it."

performers and spectators and appealed to the whole society. It also seems to have had a central place in education and in shaping moral ideas. A probable reason as to why Plato's discussion towards poetry might be hostile towards the so-called fine arts, in particular, is that the Republic strongly warns against both the poets and their works looked upon as role model on the account of aspects such as wisdom and creative ability. To take art seriously in this way generally seems to have more in common with present ideas associated with fine arts than entertainment.

As indicated earlier, Plato may have thought that the nature of poetry was to imitate the kind soul and character of its author. Now we shall address if this really was the case and, if so how it affects our question. The distinction of character types is a reoccurring theme within the Republic and may speak for such an interpretation.<sup>135</sup> In addition, the imitator clearly seems to be contrasted to the good man in book III as a character type in an argument that concludes that such a man should not be admitted into the ideal state. The personality of the imitator and his lack of morals are outlined by claiming that he would imitate even the foulest things, such as thunders, the wind, sounds of instruments and animal noises (397AB).

Miles Burnyeat further establishes the idea that according to the understanding of the ancient Greeks, poetry was considered to be a kind of imitation of its author. He claims that Plato's contemporaries thought of acting or interpreting a story as a rapshoder involved opening oneself up to the poet and his inspiration.<sup>136</sup> He also claims this applied to the work as a whole when performed in the theatre and the reason for Plato's criticism was the use of sound effects in the theatre. Even noises produced in that way, such as thunder noises, were considered to have its origins in the poet that first imitated them. So, when the sound of thunder is heard from the stage it is understood as having its origins in the poet.<sup>137</sup> According to Burnyeat Plato accepted this understanding of his

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<sup>135</sup> For example the distinction of character types within the ideal state in philosophers, guardians and producers and the description of the degeneration from aristocracy into tyranny (books VIII and IX), where each form of government is said to represent a specific character type.

<sup>136</sup> The passage (605 CD) is a possible example of this. Burnyeat says (p. 268) that a key element in the dialogue Ion is not only that the rapshode Ion is some sort of a mouthpiece of Homer, whose poetry he performs. But also that just as Homer speaks through Ion, the Muses speak through him. Therefore there exists a chain of sentiments where the feelings of the audiences are affected by a tale that is thought to have divine origin. If Burnyeat's interpretation is right then Plato attacks the source of these ideas, traditional thinking about the nature of the gods and the relationship between the gods and humans as we have previously discussed (*Rules of content* p. 17-18).

<sup>137</sup> Burnyeat p. 270

contemporaries about the nature of poetry, which suggested the poet himself rather than the actors, imitated different kind of noises and acted different characters. Burnyeat's interpretation fits well with the psychological description given of the imitator in book III and the reason given for not admitting him into the ideal state (397D-398B).

The presupposition that the poet is the real actor and imitation on stage is an imitation of him seems to lead Plato to the conclusion that imitative poetry is a kind of schizophrenia or manifestation of a split personality that simultaneously tries to do different kind of things that demand dissimilar skills (397E-398B). Plato's central point seems to be that one may identify with imitation, at least in poetry or acting and that the wrong kind of identification can be harmful. One should not make too strong distinctions between imitation in poetry and real life

It cannot, however, be claimed that Plato's criticism is only psychological and directed at the imitative poet as a type and the nature of his creativity. Firstly, because his criticism is largely directed at the content of what is said and its effect on those that hear it rather than the psychology of its creators and, secondly, because one kind of imitative poetry is allowed, the type that imitates the good character and obeys the rule set by philosophy (397D-398A). This opens up the possibility of looking at the framework of the Republic as a general criticism of all types of art that do not follow the instructions of philosophy.<sup>138</sup>

Another objection to the claim that Plato's criticism of poetry and other art forms is directed at art is that the kind of art, which the ideal state permits, is meant to be beneficial to the class of guardians, rather than all its citizens. This can be supported by pointing out that the discussion of the ideal city is an attempt to educate the guardians (376DE). And that the kind of imitation allowed (398AB) appears to reflect the ideals of this class rather than others (395C). This raises the question whether or not other rules could apply to poetry for people in general than for the guardians and, whether poetry is

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<sup>138</sup> It is right to point out that the Republic suggests it should be possible to portray bad characters. This is at least suggested with the ban against stories where unjust men prosper while the just ones get bad fortune. The poets are ordered to write about the opposite state of affairs (392B). Morally flawed characters are also morally dangerous, both their creation, that they are imitated in the theatre as well as the empathy and assimilation the audience may feel towards them. In this context Ruby Blondell points out that from book II Plato himself practices what his censorship on poetry preaches: "[B]y excluding negative character models both from the remainder of his own tale, and from the tales told by those represented within it (Blondell p. 233)."

primarily regarded as an instrument in the guardian's education but not beneficial to the majority of the citizens?

The construction of the ideal state does not support the latter, as it is strongly emphasized that the well being of the citizens is interrelated to the prosperity of the city as a whole (369C). The existence of the guardians is furthermore said to be the fundamental to the realization of the ideal state (374DE). According to the Republic the education of the guardians promotes the interests of other classes as well as their own. Furthermore, there does not seem to be anything to suggest that other rules could apply to poetry that was meant for others than the guardians. The rules on poetry are regarded as having a general necessity, which can be seen from the description of the horrifying consequences that would occur if they were not followed (424DE). The poetry within the ideal state is therefore meant to serve all its citizens rather than one of its classes.

The role given to poetry, as well as other arts and crafts, may indicate why it is misleading to claim that Plato's criticism is specifically directed at art. The precondition for moderation of the general public is that their desires serve the will and wisdom of the few noble ones. Simple desires, measured and directed by calculation in accordance with understanding and correct belief only belong to the best who have received the appropriate education (431C). This is similar to book III's discussion, indicating that existence of philosophers (401C) is a precondition for poets, painters and craftsmen doing their work properly (401A). These two passages maintain that the subjects of the ideal state, in a way, be created by the philosophers who mould people's works (401AC) as well as their souls (431C).<sup>139</sup> The passage where the role of the philosopher is said to consist of use (601C-602D) further indicates how the ideal state is meant to serve the will and wisdom of the philosophers.<sup>140</sup> They know best and are supposed to use the others in a way that is best for them and for society as a whole.<sup>141</sup>

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<sup>139</sup> This also seems to be Socrates' message in a discussion of how the philosophers are supposed to form the nature of men like a painter uses a sketching slate (500E-501C) previously discussed p. 21 – 22.

<sup>140</sup> Previously discussed p. 38 - 40

<sup>141</sup> An example of the paternalism of the Republic is the story Socrates tells about how poetry can be used to create noble lies (414B-415C). The story seems to be intended to strengthen moderation within the ideal state by increasing unity among the citizens (making them believe that they are all brothers) as well as making them aware of the natural differences between them (the difference between gold, silver and clay). The central message of the story seems to be to underline the importance of government being in the hands of the philosophers.

Previously it was pointed out that Plato's claims about the relationship between ideas and imitation (e.g. 596A-598B) could just as well apply to different kinds of mediation than that which is considered to be art or consisting of artistic practices today. From the overall discussion it seems plausible to conclude that one of the central objectives for arts and crafts within the ideal state is to mediate the values of the philosophers to the rest of the society.<sup>142</sup> This means that each and every art and craft is to mediate the ideas and values, which the philosophers consider appropriate. The rule that it is not possible to perform a job properly without the interference of philosophy seems to be general. The same seems to apply to the emphasis on censorship although censorship on poetry is mainly addressed.<sup>143</sup>

The Republic's emphasis on poetry is probably due to the fact that its main subject is education (376DE) and poetry of people like Homer played an important role in the culture and education of Plato's contemporaries.<sup>144</sup> The aim of Plato's criticism is to outline how poetry can be used for educational purposes as well as warning about its dangers.<sup>145</sup> Plato attacks claims that the poets possess knowledge<sup>146</sup> and that the gods inspire their works.<sup>147</sup> Poetry and other occupations allowed by the ideal state are meant to reflect the knowledge of the rulers of the state, something which Plato considers the poetry of Homer and other poets unable to do.

Although the paternalism of the Republic is not appealing, in light of modern ideas of individual freedom to mould one's own life, it makes sense in light of Plato's presuppositions; that the few of noble birth can with the right education attain higher understanding of reality and the nature of things while the mental condition of the many

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<sup>142</sup> Possibly by strengthening courage and moderation, the virtues that are of most importance for the guardians and the producers. It is right to point out that the musical scales accepted by Socrates seem to be meant to encourage these virtues, moderation (399B, 399BC) and courage (398A, 399C). The philosophers, on the other hand, do not seem to draw benefit from the art when they have become philosophers although it may be an important part of their education, e.g. when poetry makes them more open for the beauty of reason (401D-402A).

<sup>143</sup> It seems reasonable to assume that similar rules that apply to poetry also apply to other kinds of occupations within the ideal state although the work is not as specific about this issue. This is because it seems that the philosophers are supposed to control the central aspects of culture and how individuals live their lives (501AB).

<sup>144</sup> Gadamer (p. 47) says Homer's poetry had a central position, meaning it would be cited when someone wanted to support a claim to knowledge in a way similar to what the Christian scholars did later when citing their Bible.

<sup>145</sup> As seen from the treatment it receives in books II and III see p 13 – 19.

<sup>146</sup> Previously discussed p. 24-25.

<sup>147</sup> For instance by showing that the gods are portrayed in an irrational way in Homers poetry (379B) and by emphasizing that the gods do not need poetry (382DE)

is such that it is in their own interest to be controlled (431CD).<sup>148</sup> Plato's criticism of poetry in the Republic seems to be an integral part of the elitism of the work. It attempts to show that within an ideal state philosophy will be able to provide what is best for its subjects: a complete control over the development of their nature, views and roles. Rather than criticizing art Plato seems to criticize the fundamental position which poetry had for his contemporaries. A position that in many aspects seems to be similar to philosophy's role within the ideal state as a dominating force regarding education and values.

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<sup>148</sup> Influential scholars may even go as far as Eyjólfur Kjalar Emilsson who claims (Ríkið I, p 44) that Plato's political theory is marked by the arrogance of the aristocrat: "His opinion of ordinary people is similar to what a good peasant thinks of his sheep. He cares and looks out for them but he hardly thinks them capable to thinking or governing a city. Just as the peasant does not think the sheep are able to run the farm. This attitude marks all of Plato's political thinking and lessens its value."

## CONCLUSION

Initially, it was claimed that to criticize art as such could entail questioning its value or maintaining that the value of creating or engaging in art as a spectator was either overrated or harmful.<sup>149</sup> Clearly, Plato does not deny that the arts can be good and helpful (401AD). According to the Republic, they are only able to do so when used as tools in the hands of the philosopher rulers. Without the philosophers' guidance neither poetry nor other arts seems to deserve the fundamental position they had in Plato's day and age and still seem to have today.<sup>150</sup> But it is important to keep in mind that the same things seem to apply to other occupations within the ideal state that applies to art. Their role is, as it seems, also to be tools in the hands of the philosophers. If the elitism of the Republic is viewed as a whole, the question of whether or not Plato criticizes art becomes trivial since everything not under philosophical supervision becomes critic-worthy.

The idea about natural differences between people, where some but not all have the capacity to understand reality, underlies Plato's treatment of art. The role of art within the Republic is to be philosophy's tool. Its use is first and foremost educational, to mediate the right ideas and serve as a noble lie, such as by making people accept the place nature has given them within the hierarchy of the ideal state (414B-415C).

A central theme in Plato's work is the question about what kind of life it is best to live. He seems to think that unlike poetry philosophy can provide an answer to this question. It is possible that the role of art, especially poetry, was misplaced among Plato's contemporaries as Eric Havelock points out.<sup>151</sup> Despite historical and cultural differences between ancient Greece and our times this may also be the case today.<sup>152</sup> It is, however, right to keep in mind that Plato himself uses artistic methods in order to

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<sup>149</sup> Previously discussed p. 9 – 10.

<sup>150</sup> The influence of artistic practices is maybe best seen if we think about the influence of phenomena such as music, drama and dance et cetera have in people's lives regardless of whether or not they are classified as art, entertainment or something else.

<sup>151</sup> Havelocke p 44 – 46.

<sup>152</sup> This is one of the central themes in John Carey's excellent book *What Good are the Arts*.

mediate his thoughts and beliefs. Without their use he would not have been able reflect his ideas as fully and clearly as he does.



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