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The return of the exile: the benefits of mimetic art in the *Republic*

In *Republic* 10, though Socrates banishes all mimetic poets from the *Kalipolis*, he also leaves open the possibility of their return. If someone can make a defense of mimetic poetry, showing that it has beneficial effects, it may be admitted. Many attempts to meet this challenge have focused upon Socrates' dismissal of mimetic poetry based upon its low ontological level, placing particular attention on lines 596a-598d.¹ However, the charge Socrates himself portrays as more serious is that mimetic poetry corrupts the soul, and he presents arguments directly supporting this claim at 602c-603b, 603c-605c, and 605d-606d.² In the first of these three passages Socrates argues that imitation speaks to the part of the soul which is not provoked to calculation by apparent contradictions, or "summoners" (*παρκαλοῦντα*). In the other two passages he gives reasoning in support of his claim that mimetic poetry stimulates this part of the soul, thus disrupting balance between rational and irrational and making the soul less just.

I argue that apparent contradictions arising from Plato's treatment of mimesis in the *Republic* fit Socrates' description of summoners and provoke thought. This example of how mimetic literature can stimulate the intellect by presenting it with seeming contradictions is itself inconsistent with Socrates' reasoning at 602c-603b and "summons" the reader to construct a defense of mimetic literature, a defense which applies to poetry and philosophical writing alike. My argument has three stages: (1) I examine Socrates' discussion of summoners in Book 7 and show how it relates to the argument at 602c-603b, (2) I demonstrate that Socrates' banishment of the mimetic poets creates apparent contradictions which match Socrates' description of summoners, and (3) I show how the attempt to resolve these contradictions suggests a defense of mimetic

¹ One approach to defending the poets maintains that Plato supports a distinction between good and bad mimetic poetry based upon the ontological level of the object imitated, and good mimetic poetry imitates the forms. For representatives of this view, see Golden (1975, 121-124); Greene (1918, 34-35); Lodge (1953, 182); McKeon (1936, 14-15); Tate (1928, 21-22); and Verdenius (1949, 18). Gallop (1965) too endorses the idea that some mimetic writing, such as Plato's, imitates the forms, but he classifies this writing as philosophy rather than as poetry. For criticisms of this approach, see note 12 below.

² The most serious of his charges is that mimetic poetry corrupts the soul of decent people (605c).

literature which is consistent with the philosophical framework of the *Republic*.

1. The Role of Summoners in 602c-603b

In Book 7 Socrates discusses the importance of apparent contradictions in the learning process. After using the images of the Divided Line (509d-511e) and the Cave (514a-518d) in order to illustrate the process of human learning, at 521d he asks what subject draws the soul from the sensible to the intelligible realm, shifting its focus from sensible things to intelligible objects. His answer is number and calculation (*λογισμόν*)(522c7), though he says that no one uses it properly, that is, in a way which moves the soul toward being (522e). Explaining his meaning, Socrates says that the process of calculation used correctly involves the summoning process. He distinguishes perceptions that summon from those that do not: "The ones that don't summon the understanding are all those that don't go off into opposite perceptions at the same time. But the ones that do go off in that way I call *summoners*—whenever sense perception doesn't declare one thing any more than its opposite, no matter whether the object striking the sense is near at hand or far away" (523b9-c4).³ In 523b-524d, Socrates uses the example of fingers in order to illustrate his point. When I look at three fingers of different lengths, I notice that one appears to be both big and small. The perception of one object possessing opposite characteristics summons my intellect. In attempting to resolve this apparent contradiction, I separate the intelligible entities of bigness and smallness from my confused perception. In other words, one is summoned when the soul, content with its acceptance of sense perception as representative of reality, is confronted by a perception which appears to have contradictory qualities. The soul realizes that sense perception is no longer deemed adequate to understanding the world, and it is provoked to use thought, appealing to intelligible entities in order to solve the puzzle (524d-e). This leads the soul from *pistis* to *dianoia*.

Socrates' discussion returns to summoners at 602c. He provides examples of contradictory perceptions: (1) something that looks crooked in water but straight outside of it, and (2) something that looks both concave and convex because of its color. Like the example of the fingers, these perceptions provoke thought and lead the soul to use calculation. Socrates says: "And don't measuring, counting, and weighing give us most welcome assistance in these cases, so that we aren't ruled by something's looking bigger, smaller, more numerous, or heavier, but by calculation (*λογισάμενον*), measurement, or weighing?" (602d).

³ All translations are from Grube (1992), except for translations of the *Phaedrus* which are from Nehamas (1997).

Socrates goes on to suggest that mimetic art is bad because it prevents the summoning process. His argument in 602c-603b is as follows:

- (1) Some appearances are deceiving (e.g. things seen close at hand appear larger than they do at a distance, a straight stick appears bent in water, and color can make something appear to be both concave and convex).
- (2) *Trompe le' oeil* painting and trickery make us believe deceptive appearances.
- (3) Measuring, calculating, and weighing indicate that these deceptive appearances are false.
- (4) It is contradictory for the soul to simultaneously hold opposite views about the same thing at the same time.
- (5) The part of the soul that weighs and calculates is separate from the part of the soul that believes deceptive appearances.
- (6) The part of the soul that calculates is the rational and the best part.
- (7) Thus the part of the soul that believes deceptive appearances is the inferior part.
- (8) Imitation makes us believe deceptive appearances.
- (9) Imitation consorts with the inferior part of the soul.

Socrates says that "imitation is an inferior thing that consorts with another inferior thing to produce an inferior offspring" (603b4) and specifically applies this conclusion to mimetic poetry (603b6-8).

Socrates here rejects mimetic art because it makes the soul less inclined to be provoked to thought. Calculation arises when the soul notices contradictions, such as the same thing looking concave and convex, and sets about offering an explanation.⁴ Since art encourages the soul to remain content with these apparent contradictions and continue to trust perception, it makes the soul less able to be summoned. Though Socrates does not claim that mimetic poetry provides us with an equivalent of optical illusions, he believes that it, like painting, strengthens the part of the soul that resists summoning in general (603b). And, if the soul cannot be summoned, it cannot learn.

2. Possible Summoners in the *Republic*

In the *Republic* Plato seems to believe that apparent contradictions play a vital role in the learning process, and in this same dialogue he presents us with what appear to be two blatant contradictions arising from the discussion of mimesis. First, contrary to Socrates' banishment of the mimetic poets from the

⁴ Note that Socrates uses the same terms for "calculation" in both passages: λογισμόν (522c5-6), λογισάμενον (602d), and λογιστικού (602e).

Kallipolis in Book 10, he endorses in Books 2 and 3 the use of mimetic poetry in childhood education.⁵ Second, though Socrates makes six arguments condemning mimetic poetry in Book 10, Plato presents these arguments through a mimetic literary medium.⁶ I argue that we should consider these inconsistencies as possible summoners because they function in the same way. By presenting a puzzle to the soul, they make one realize the insufficiency of one's account and the limit of one's "knowledge". As they do this, they engage the soul in active thought as it attempts to solve the puzzle.

Mimesis

Since both puzzles involve mimesis, I will begin by explaining the meanings he assigns to the term in the *Republic*. Though there is some controversy concerning its etymology and its general use during Plato's time,⁷ it is clear that, in the *Republic*, Plato uses "mimesis" in two different senses. Initially, in Book 3, Socrates predominantly uses "mimesis" terminology in a narrow sense to refer to making oneself like the character one represents through dramatic enactment. Later, though, in Book 10, he uses it more broadly to cover all representation in poetry and painting. For example, in Book 3, describing dramatic representation, Socrates says: "But when he makes a speech as if he were someone else, won't we say that he makes his own style as much like that of the indicated speaker as possible?" (393c1-3). He continues: "To make oneself like someone else in voice or appearance is to imitate the person one makes oneself like" (393c5-6). In contrast, "mimesis" in Book 10 is used more broadly. Rather than limiting the term's use to imitation through impersonation, Socrates relies heavily upon an analogy with painting in order to explain what he now means by "mimesis". Just as an artist creates an image in paint of a sensible thing, the tragedian creates images of human action in words (596a-597e, 601a-c).

⁵ The apparent inconsistency between Book 10 and Book 3 has been much debated in the secondary literature. See, for example, Collingwood (1938, 47-48); Cross and Woodley (1966, 273, 277-79); Greene (1918, 50); Grube (1958, 185-197); Havelock (1963, 11 n.29); Janaway (1995, 106-107); Levin (2001, 152); Naddaff (2002, 2); Nehamas (1982, 48-54); Tate (1928, 16); and Urmson (1982, 128-9).

⁶ This problem has been noted often within the secondary literature. See, for example, Moravcsik (1982, 29-36); Golden (1975, 121); Naddaff (2002, 3); and Gallop (1965, 114-131).

⁷ For an insightful discussion of this matter, see Halliwell (15-22). Influential studies include Else (1958); Else (1986); Koller (1954); and Sörbom (1966). Also see Keuls (1978, 9-25). Halliwell (2002, 51 n. 35) points out that Socrates occasionally uses the broader sense of "mimesis" in his critique of mimetic poetry in *Republic* 2 and 3.

First Puzzle: Conflict Between Books 2-3 and Book 10

Socrates' banishment of all mimetic poetry in Book 10 appears to be inconsistent with his endorsement of some mimetic poetry in Books 2 and 3.⁸ In Book 2 Socrates discusses education in music and poetry (μουσική) and recommends certain patterns which acceptable songs and poems must follow. His discussion of patterns continues into Book 3 and is divided into three sections: content of stories (376e-392c), style of speech (392c-398b), and lyric odes and songs (398c-400a). When discussing the content of stories, he approves of some stories which are mimetic in the wider sense of representation.⁹ Though stories that represent inappropriate behavior of gods and heroes are banned, those that represent gods and heroes as virtuous are used in the education of future guardians.¹⁰ And, in Book 3, Socrates supports some poetry and storytelling which is mimetic in the sense that the author hides himself and speaks through other characters, as opposed to narrative in which the author assumes no persona but simply reports events. When reciting this kind of poetry, one speaks through a character and makes oneself like that character. Socrates raises the question of whether the future guardians should be imitators in this sense and decides that, in most cases, they should not. His two reasons are that it would violate the principle of specialization (394e-395b) and that taking on the roles of inferior characters would corrupt (395d). Mimesis is allowed, however, when the future guardians imitate the type of men they are trying to become: men who are courageous, pious, and self-controlled (395c-d). Socrates declares that a moderate man will be willing to imitate the words or actions of a good man (396c) and agrees with Adeimantus that they will admit "the pure imitator of a

⁸ Some scholars attempt to explain the contradiction by positing that Plato wrote Book 10 at a later date. See, for example, Shorey (1937, xxi); Nettleship (1901, 340-341); Cornford (1945, 321); and Annas (1981, 335). None of these authors, however, offer any support for this other than the awkwardness of Socrates' discussion of art in Book 10 and its apparent inconsistency with Book 3. With no further evidence, there is scant reason to accept this hypothesis. In addition, assuming that Plato is the one who put together the books of this dialogue (and there is no reason to assume otherwise), a later date for Book 10 does not explain why he allowed the contradiction to stand.

⁹ Clearly Socrates sees stories of the gods' behavior as representations of the gods' nature and action. For support of the claim that this discussion reflects the wider sense of "mimesis", see use of μιμήσασθαι at 388c3.

¹⁰ Socrates says: "we must first of all, it seems, supervise the storytellers. We'll select their stories whenever they are fine or beautiful and reject them when they aren't" (377b). Stories should not give bad images of the gods and heroes (377d-e), for example, they should not show gods fighting one another (379c), gods causing bad things to happen to people (380c), or gods altering themselves or deceiving others (382e-383a). Stories should not treat death as something to be feared (386b); thus they should contain no lamentations or pitiful speeches of famous men (387c-d). Stories shouldn't show people or gods overcome by laughter (388e), glorify immoderate behavior (389d), depict people criticizing rulers (389e-390a), or show heroes loving money or accepting bribes (390d). Instead, stories must demonstrate that the just life is superior (392b) and represent famous men as showing endurance in difficult situations (390d).

decent person" into the city (397d4–5). In contrast, Socrates begins Book 10 with the following comment:

our city has many features that assure me that we were entirely right in founding it as we did, and, when I say this, I'm especially thinking of poetry.

What about it in particular? Glaucon said.

That we didn't admit any that is imitative (595a1–5).

He reiterates this point in 607b when he says "we had reason to banish it from the city earlier" and then later declares that, until imitative poetry is successfully defended as being beneficial, only hymns to the gods and eulogies to good men will be allowed in the city (607a, 607c–d).¹¹

Second Puzzle: Banishment of the Poets and Plato's Use of Dialogue Form

Socrates' banishment of mimetic poets also seems inconsistent with Plato's use of dialogue form, for the arguments in support of banishing the poets are grounded in a more general critique of mimetic literary works. The breadth of Socrates' target in Book 10 is evident in several ways. First, Socrates begins the discussion by recalling that, in founding the city, they were correct in not admitting any poetry that was imitative (595a), and, in order to explain what he means, he launches a new investigation inquiring into the nature of imitation in general (595c6–7). So, we are alerted to the fact that though poetry is the focus of the following discussion, the nature of mimesis is under investigation, and it is because of its mimetic qualities that poetry is excluded. Second, the scope of Socrates' subject matter is displayed in his heavy use of the analogy with painting in his criticisms of mimetic poetry.¹² For example, in his first criticism, stated in 596a–598b, Socrates uses the example of three beds—the form of bed,

¹¹ Attempts to avoid inconsistency include the following. Greene (1918, 29–31, 55–56) and Grube (1958, 189) hold that the city being founded in Book 3 is very similar to good Greek cities, but, the city mentioned in Book 10 is an ideal one which Plato knew would never be realized. Though mimetic poetry has no place in a perfect city, it may play a positive role in an actual one. This approach fails because the city for which Socrates recommends education through mimetic poetry is the same city from which he later banishes all mimetic poetry. See, for instance, 595a1–3. Nehamas (1982, 53) and Havelock (1963, 14–15) attempt to establish consistency by arguing that Book 3 and Book 10 are directed at different audiences. Socrates allows mimetic poetry a role in childhood education in Book 3 and bans it for adult consumption in Book 10. However, Nehamas admits that, due to Socrates' statement at 607b1–3, "we cannot totally avoid the conflict between Books 2 and 3 on the one hand and Book 10 on the other" (53). Tate (1928, 21–2), Golden (1975, 121–124), and McKeon (1936, 14–15) argue that Socrates intends to ban only bad mimesis in Book 10, and good and bad mimesis are distinguished by the objects they imitate: good mimetic art imitates the forms and bad imitates appearances of sensible things. However, Tate's arguments have been successfully refuted by Janaway (1995, 114–117), Nehamas (1982, 59–60), and Annas (1982, 22), who note, for example, that an artist working in a sensible medium cannot imitate non-sensible forms, and that, if an artist imitated a form, he would produce an instance rather than an imitation.

¹² Obviously, if Socrates is arguing that mimetic poetry has certain harmful qualities by analogy with another mimetic art form, his claims about mimesis are applied beyond the genre of poetry.

the particular bed built by a craftsman, and the painter's representation of a bed—to show that mimetic works are inferior due to their distance from the forms. Whereas the craftsman bases his production on the form, the imitator merely produces an imitation of the craftsman's product. Socrates concludes that all imitators are “by nature third from the king and the truth” (597e6-8). He utilizes the analogy again in 601c-602b for his criticism that the imitator has neither knowledge nor true belief of the subject he imitates. Socrates says that, for each thing, there are three crafts, one which uses it, one which makes it, and one which imitates it. His example is reins and a mouth-bit: the horseman is the user of the reins and mouth-bit and has knowledge of them, the maker listens to the horseman and has true belief, and the imitator, who has neither knowledge nor true belief, merely paints the appearance of them. In his criticism at 602c-603b, citing the influence of *trompe l'oeil* painting on the irrational part of the soul, Socrates concludes mimetic poetry prevents the soul from being summoned. Since Socrates' criticism of poetry in these three passages is based on an analogy with representational painting, we have reason to assume that his conclusions extend beyond the genre of mimetic poetry.

Third, though Socrates specifically targets mimetic poetry in two of his criticisms and does not draw broader conclusions to be applied to other art forms,¹³ these criticisms apply equally well to mimetic literature in general. At 603b-605c, Socrates argues that mimesis acts on the inferior part of the soul and morally corrupts. Since the poet chooses to imitate irrational men, due to the fact that they are easier to represent and more entertaining to audiences, the audience's identification with characters has a morally corrupting influence.¹⁴ In lines 605c-606e Socrates argues that mimetic poetry corrupts even decent people. Though a decent person guards against irrational emotions in both self and others, aesthetic distance makes this person relax his or her guard and unwittingly take on the perspective of the character. These criticisms have to do with the subject matter of mimetic literature and the influence it has over its audience. Thus, the criticisms, which are not here tied to verse, apply to mimetic prose works, such as dramatic dialogues, just as well.

Plato's dialogues are mimetic in both the wider and narrow senses of the term.¹⁵ The dialogue is mimetic in the more general sense of creating a representation. Leon Golden writes: “The dialogue is a representation of men in

¹³ Since the criticism at 598d-600e is based on an example from mimetic poetry, it may appear to fall into this category. However, Socrates expands his conclusion to cover all imitators.

¹⁴ In *Republic* 4 a just soul is one in which reason, with the aid of spirit, rules the appetites. When the appetites are strengthened and take charge, the soul is corrupted. Socrates does not mention the spirited part of the soul in his Book 10 discussion of mimesis but instead focuses on the opposition between reason and appetite.

¹⁵ For discussions of ways in which Plato's dialogues share characteristics with mimetic poetry see Friedlander (1958, 108-125); Partee (1970, 219-221); Nightingale (1995); Rutherford (1995, 10-16); and Golden (1975, 121, 124-130).

action, sharing many important qualities with dramatic literature."¹⁶ The *Republic* imitates dialectical discourse, or, the practice of philosophy. Within representation of this greater activity, we also see imitations of personal actions and behavior. For instance, in the *Republic* characters attend the festival of Bendis, meeting afterward at Polemarchus' house. During the subsequent conversation, the interlocutors' characters are represented by the way they interact with Socrates and one another (as for example the way Thrasymachus reveals himself in his explosive response to Socrates' questioning). Plato's imitation is not limited to human action, though. He uses images of the sensible world in order to represent metaphysical and epistemological views.¹⁷ For example, the images of the divided line and the cave represent the world's ontological hierarchy and how we know each 'level', the image of the *Kallipolis* represents justice, the image of Glaucon represents the embodied soul, and the complex web of imagery in the Myth of Er represents a view of the afterlife.

The *Republic* is also mimetic in the narrower sense. First, the *Republic* involves miming characters. At first glance the *Republic* appears to be a combination of narrative alone and narrative through mimesis. Though Socrates narrates the dialogue, he periodically takes on the persona of other characters, speaking as if he were they. However, this dialogue is purely mimetic because its author, Plato, never speaks in his own voice. Plato assumes the voice of another, Socrates, in relating his tale.¹⁸ And, since the ancient Greeks read out loud, one would mime or dramatically imitate characters when reading the *Republic*.¹⁹

Similarity Between Above Puzzles and Summoners

Socrates' summoners in Book 7 present a contradiction by making one thing appear to have opposite qualities at the same time. The two above puzzles do this as well by making mimetic poetry appear to be both beneficial and harmful. Book 3 tells us that mimetic poetry can be beneficial. By habituating the emotions, it may shape the irrational soul in such a way that the soul is prepared to obey reason. Socrates, discussing how poetry will teach children to pursue and avoid the right things, explains:

And since he has the right distastes, he'll praise fine things, be pleased by them, receive them into his soul, and, being nurtured by them, become fine and good. He'll rightly object to what is shameful, hating it while he's still young and unable to grasp the reason, but having been educated in this way, he will welcome the reason when it comes and recognize it easily because of its kinship with himself. (401e3–402a4)

¹⁶ Golden (1975, 128).

¹⁷ See the discussion of Plato's use of imagery in Golden (1975, 125–27).

¹⁸ For support, see Kosman (1992, 72–87).

¹⁹ See Halliwell (2002, 52).

Plato's choice to write the *Republic* as a dialogue also suggests that mimetic literature in general improves the structure of the soul. The subject matter of the *Republic* is the importance of living a just life, and in the course of this work Socrates explains why having a just soul, a soul structured so that reason, with the help of spirit, rules the appetites, is beneficial. Also, he emphasizes the importance of education in creating just souls. The emphasis on virtue found in this and most other Platonic dialogues suggests that Plato is concerned with the health of the reader's soul. From this we may infer that Plato intends his work to lead to the improvement of the reader's soul and that he has chosen to write in dialogue form because he believes that it is somehow instrumental in bringing about this goal.²⁰ Since dialogue form is a type of mimetic literature, Plato's writing dialogues suggests that at least some mimetic literature may be beneficial.

In Book 10, however, Socrates stresses the harmfulness of mimetic poetry, and, by extension, mimetic literature. Not only does mimetic poetry speak to the irrational part of the soul, but in order to be popular it must imitate irrational behavior (605a). So, says Socrates,

An imitative poet puts a bad constitution in the soul of each individual by making images that are far removed from the truth and by gratifying the irrational part, which cannot distinguish the large and the small but believes that the same things are large at one time and small at another. (605b-c)

Because aesthetic distance makes us relax our guard over our emotions, and because mimetic poetry stirs up these emotions by imitating their effects in others, poetry upsets the proper balance between reason and the appetites. Socrates says: "in the case of sex, anger, and all the desires, pleasures, and pains that we say accompany all our actions, poetic imitation ... nurtures and waters them and establishes them as rulers in us when they ought to wither and be ruled ..." (606d1-5).

3. Solution and Defense of Poets

Plato's treatment of mimesis has created the appearance that mimetic poetry has opposite qualities: mimetic poetry is both harmful and beneficial. One way of avoiding this contradiction is to distinguish two different kinds of mimetic poetry, one which harms and the other which benefits.²¹ In *Republic* 10 Socrates gives reason to believe that such a distinction is a possibility. First, his

²⁰ If one does not accept this stronger claim that Plato wishes to benefit the reader, one should consider a weaker alternative: Plato does not intend to corrupt the reader. The weaker claim also creates a tension between Socrates' words in Book 10 and Plato's use of dialogue form.

²¹ My approach differs from that of Tate, Golden, and McKeon. Whereas I distinguish good from bad mimesis according to the instrumental value a mimetic work may have in shaping the soul, they base the distinction on the artist's ability to produce imitations of the forms which are valuable insofar as they have a higher ontological status on the Divided Line.

acceptance of some mimetic poetry implies that not all mimetic poetry is bad. At 607a Socrates says that the only poetry that will be allowed in the city is hymns to the gods and eulogies to good men, and this poetry, representing the actions of gods and men, is still mimetic.²² If all harmful mimetic poetry has been banned from the city, and some mimetic poetry has been allowed to stay, Socrates recognizes that not all mimetic poetry is harmful. Second, when discussing the banished poetry, Socrates refers to the “pleasure-giving Muse” (607a5) and “the poetry that aims at pleasure and imitation” (607c4-5), which suggests that he believes there is more than one possible aim. If there is both a good and a bad artistic mimesis, we can solve our two puzzles. Book 10 banishes only the bad mimesis, that which was previously excluded in Books 2 and 3. And, the *Republic* is an example of good artistic mimesis and beneficial to the reader.

Good vs. Bad Mimesis

Socrates gives us examples of bad, or harmful, mimesis in his discussions of poetry in Book 2, Book 3, and Book 10. In contrast to his use of the painting analogy in Book 10 to disparage mimetic art, Socrates here uses the painter as a metaphor for the philosopher king in *Republic* 500e-501b. Socrates says that “the city will never find happiness until its outline is sketched by painters who use the divine model” (500e2-4). These painters would “take the city and the characters of human beings as their sketching slate, but first they’d wipe it clean” (501a2-3), and next they would “sketch the outline of the constitution” (501a9-10). Plato continues:

And I suppose that, as they work, they’d look often in each direction towards the natures of justice, beauty, moderation, and the like, on the one hand, and towards those they’re trying to put into human beings, on the other. And in this way they’d mix and blend the various ways of life in the city until they produced a human image based on what Homer too called ‘the divine form and image’ when it occurred among human beings (501b1-7).

This painter metaphor illustrates that good mimesis is the process of creating within the human soul an imitation of the forms. In contrast to an artist who works within a sensible medium, creating a work such as a painting, sculpture, or work of literature, the philosopher shapes the soul.²³ Immediately

²² Adam (1902, 416) and Tate (1928, 16) both make this point.

²³ The *Phaedrus*, a dialogue generally agreed to be written roughly within the same period as the *Republic*, may give us guidance in distinguishing the philosopher, the philosopher who writes, and the good poet. In 276a Socrates distinguishes legitimate discourse that is written “with knowledge, in the soul of the listener” (276a5-6) from written discourse, its image (276a). The philosopher engages in legitimate discourse: he “chooses a proper soul and plants and sows within it discourse accompanied by knowledge—discourse capable of helping itself as well as the man who planted it, which is not barren but produces a seed from which more discourse grows in the character of others” (276e6-277a3). The philosopher does this because he “thinks that a written discourse on any subject can only be a great amusement, that no

preceding his image of the philosopher as a painter at *Republic* 500e-501b, Socrates describes the philosopher: “as he looks at and studies things that are organized and always the same, that neither do injustice to one another nor suffer it, being all in a rational order, he imitates them and tries to become as like them as he can” (500c2-5). Continuing, he explains: “Then the philosopher, by consorting with what is ordered and divine and despite all the slanders around that say otherwise, himself becomes as divine and ordered as a human being can” (500c9-d1). In addition, the philosopher can shape others’ souls as well. Plato writes:

And if he should come to be compelled to put what he sees there into people’s characters, whether into a single person or into a populace, instead of shaping only his own, do you think that he will be a poor craftsman of moderation, justice, and the whole of popular virtue (500d4-8)?

This passage, along with Socrates’ vivid descriptions of the power of poetry to cause disintegration of the soul’s structure, reveals his standard for assessing the value of mimetic works. A well ordered soul, structured by the forms, has intrinsic value based on its resemblance to the forms, and mimetic activities are to be judged on the basis of whether they are instrumental toward achieving this end or are detrimental toward its realization.

Two Ways of Shaping the Soul

The *Republic* suggests two ways in which the soul may be beneficially structured. One way is through being conditioned so that the irrational portion is willing to be ruled by reason. In Book 3, Socrates explains how mimetic poetry may prepare the irrational soul for pursuit of philosophy by giving it the right preferences so that it is predisposed to obey reason. Imitations of good character have grace and harmony, and by engaging in this imitation by reading poetry, children take on these traits (395c-d, 400d-401d). For this reason, craftsmen who imitate good character “lead them [children] unwit-

discourse worth serious attention has ever been written in verse or prose” (277e5-8). Socrates goes on to distinguish the written discourse of the philosopher from those of other writers such as poets. If a writer composes his document with knowledge, can defend his writing, and can argue that his writing is of little worth, he may be called by “a name derived not from these writings but rather from those things that you are seriously pursuing” (278c7-d1), philosophy. On the other hand, “if a man has nothing more valuable than what he has composed or written, spending long hours twisting it around, pasting parts together and taking them apart” (278d8-e1), he should be called by another name, such as “poet”. So, a philosopher shapes souls, leaving behind philosophers, in contrast to a poet, who only leaves behind written works. If a man meets certain criteria in his writing, he may be called a philosopher only if he, in addition to writing, practices the soul-shaping work of philosophy. Likewise, in the *Republic*, philosophy is distinguished from poetry by its product: the philosopher leaves behind a soul shaped in imitation of the forms whereas a poet leaves behind poetry. I shall argue below, however, that the work of some poets may be used by the philosopher in order to shape souls, as may the written work of a philosopher. All in all, though, poetry and other mimetic literary works, even Plato’s dialogues, are imitations and as such are inferior to the activity of philosophy.

tingly, from childhood on, to resemblance, friendship, and harmony with the beauty of reason" (401d1-3). Socrates explains at 401d6-402a4 why poetry should be the foundation of elementary education in the good city:

First, because rhythm and harmony permeate the inner part of the soul more than anything else, affecting it most strongly and bringing it grace, so that if someone is properly educated in music and poetry, it makes him graceful, but if not, then the opposite. Second, because anyone who has been properly educated in music and poetry will sense it acutely when something has been omitted from a thing and when it hasn't been finely crafted or finely made by nature. And since he has the right distastes, he'll praise fine things, be pleased by them, receive them into his soul, and, being nurtured by them, become fine and good. He'll rightly object to what is shameful, hating it while he's still young and unable to grasp the reason, but, having been educated in this way, he will welcome the reason when it comes and recognize it easily because of its kinship with himself.

Though poetry does not rationally engage the child's soul, it conditions its emotional reactions, establishing habits which cause the irrational element to make itself subordinate to the rule of reason, whether from others or from itself.

Second, as Socrates indicates in 500c-501c, the soul may be shaped through its own pursuit of philosophy. How, though, does one make the transition from being structured by external forces, such as elementary education through poetry, to actively structuring oneself by gazing upon the forms? Socrates establishes an analogy between eyesight and philosophical understanding in lines 507c-509b.²⁴ When the eye is turned toward the light it can see clearly. Likewise, when the soul turns toward the intelligible, the object it observes is illuminated by truth and the soul understands. When the eye turns away from light, its vision grows dim. Similarly, when the soul turns away from the forms and toward the sensible things, its vision dims and it only opines. Working from this analogy, he uses eyesight in his famous allegory of the cave in order to reveal the journey one must take to become a philosopher. The prisoner's journey out of the cave roughly represents the process of his education. Chained so that he can only see shadows, the prisoner's eyesight is dim and he mistakes shadows for reality. Forcibly freed from his bonds, the prisoner turns toward ever greater sources of light and is finally able to see and recognize objects in the world, stars and planets, and finally the sun itself.

This journey out of the cave is initiated by a forceful turning of the prisoner. The importance of this turning is emphasized in Socrates' conclusion to the cave allegory:

The power to learn is present in everyone's soul and ... the instrument with which each learns is like an eye that cannot be turned around from darkness to

²⁴ The connection between eyesight and knowledge is suggested earlier in Book 2 with the introduction of the city/soul analogy by comparison with viewing large and small letters. See 368c-369a.

light without turning the whole body. This instrument cannot be turned around from that which is coming into being without turning the whole soul until it is able to study that which is and the brightest thing that is, namely, the one we call the good. Isn't that right?

Yes.

Then education is the craft concerned with doing this very thing, this turning around, and with how the soul can most easily and effectively be made to do it. It isn't the craft of putting sight into the soul. Education takes for granted that sight is there but that it isn't turned the right way or looking where it ought to look, and it tries to redirect it appropriately (518c4-d7).

At 515a Socrates claims that the prisoners are like us. If the prisoners represent us, who or what performs the indispensable task of turning us away from the shadows and forcing us from the cave? Socrates says that the summoning process, present in calculation when it is performed as it should be, turns the soul (522c-524e).

Whereas summoners initially turn the eye of the soul, study of crafts such as geometry, astronomy, and harmony continue the process. Socrates introduces this part of his educational plan with the following words: "in every soul there is an instrument that is purified and rekindled by such subjects when it has been blinded and destroyed by other ways of life, an instrument that it is more important to preserve than ten thousand eyes, since only with it can the truth be seen (527d7-e3)." These subjects, with the help of dialectic, turn the soul from sensible to intelligible things. Socrates concludes his discussion in praise of dialectic: "And when the eye of the soul is really buried in a sort of barbaric bog, dialectic gently pulls it out and leads it upwards, using the crafts we described to help it and cooperate with it in turning the soul around (533d1-4)."

How the Republic Shapes the Soul

The *Republic* shares many qualities of the beneficial poetry described in Books 2-3, but I will only discuss a few. First, the dialogue's protagonist, Socrates, is a rational, good, and just man, and he presents the gods and heroes as virtuous beings. Second, the dialogue makes the reader desire what is good for him or her and wish to avoid what is bad. For example, Socrates' thorough argumentation for the superiority of the just life, makes readers desire to pursue virtue and avoid vice. Likewise, the moving images of the sun, divided line, and cave initiate a yearning for the forms and the life of philosophy. Third, though this dialogue is mimetic in the sense that the author, Plato, never speaks in his own voice, it is narrated in the voice of Socrates, thus positively influencing the reader through his or her dramatic representation of the work.²⁵

²⁵ Thrasymachus may appear to be a counter-example to my claim. However, since Socrates narrates the entire story, himself speaking the part of Thrasymachus, the reader is not

Not only does the *Republic* aid in conditioning the soul, it summons the soul to shape itself through practicing philosophy. If, as Socrates asserts in Book 10, mimetic works prevent the soul from noticing contradictions, the reader of the *Republic* would overlook inconsistencies in the text. However, as attested by this paper and a large body of scholarship, readers find their attention drawn to the puzzles of inconsistency between Books 2-3 and Book 10 and between Plato's banishment of the mimetic poets in Book 10 and his use of mimetic literature in the *Republic*. The argument at 602c-603b also has the potential to function as a summoner if the reader notices the opposition between his or her struggle to resolve contradictions in the *Republic* and Socrates' claim that mimesis stops one from becoming aware of inconsistencies.

These inconsistencies in the dialogue have a beneficial effect on the reader. The reader could easily, as a spectator of Socrates' conversation, fall into the position of passive observer, merely following the plot, listening to the conversation, and taking it for granted that Socrates is right. There is a real danger of the reader coming to believe that Socrates has put knowledge into his or her soul. When we, as readers, note apparent contradictions concerning Socrates' doctrine, however, we must stop and think for ourselves. If he makes inconsistent statements, we cannot simply accept them. In looking for an answer to puzzles in the text, we become participants in the dialogue rather than mere observers, and we practice philosophy instead of merely perceiving an imitation of it. By engaging in philosophy and using our reason, we make our souls more just.

4. Conclusion

Proving that the *Republic* summons readers accomplishes two important results. First, the dialogue's ability to summon proves Socrates' claim in 602c-603b false and counters the criticism that mimetic literature causes epistemological corruption. Second, the dialogue's power to summon, along with its positive representation of a good man and its strong endorsement of philosophy and the virtuous life shows that mimetic literature may shape souls in a way that morally benefits rather than corrupts. Since Socrates banished poetry in Book 10 based on the fact that it was mimetic, the accomplishment of proving some mimetic literature beneficial opens the door to the possibility of the poet's return.²⁶

directly acting the part of a bad man. Instead, the reader briefly voices Socrates' representation of Thrasymachus, which glorifies Socrates while revealing the bad character of his rival, then quickly sees the 'tamed' Thrasymachus become silent. Since the reader does not directly imitate a bad character, and the indirect imitation takes place within a context that clearly delineates the relative worth of both characters, I think that this aspect of the *Republic* would be acceptable to Socrates in Book 3.

²⁶ Some scholars, such as Gallop (1965, 113-131), Friedlander (1958, 118-122, and Partee (1970, 219) maintain that philosophical writing, not poetry, is admitted into the city. I dis-

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agree. First, since mimetic literature is a broader category containing both the genres of philosophical dialogues and of poetry and since the Book 10 criticisms are made on the basis of the mimetic rather than the metrical characteristics of poetry, I do not see any reason why the defense of mimetic literature would not extend to mimetic poetry. Second, Books 2-3 list patterns that, if followed, would purify mimetic poetry. Unlike Naddaff (2002, 93) I do not believe that Plato changed his mind between Books 3 and 10. *The Laws*, a later Platonic dialogue, contains content on this issue very similar to that in the *Republic* and grants the possibility that mimetic poetry may meet the standards of the city's censors (811b-e, 817d, and 801d). Let us consider a slightly different claim: only philosophers, not poets, are admitted into the city. Could it be the case that only philosophers are capable of writing mimetic literature that can shape the soul? I think not, because, as Levin (2001, 131-150) argues, the *Republic* depicts poets as lacking in knowledge, and even the creation of beneficial poetry requires only correct belief (2001, 148-150). How about mimetic literature that summons? Since summoners in nature, such as the three fingers, provoke thought even though they were not expressly created for that purpose, it seems possible that a work of literature could summon without its author's knowledge. In addition, we can easily imagine the scenario of someone creating a literary dialogue through imitating the philosophical conversation of others. In that case, the speaker may create summoners during verbal discourse which are later included by a non-philosopher in its written imitation. Although philosophy is a craft based on knowledge of the forms, creative writing appears to be a knack involving skill but not knowledge (for difference between a *techne* and *empeiria*, see *Gorgias* 462b-c).

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