POETRY AND SKIAGRAPHIA IN REPUBLIC X:
A NEW ANALYSIS OF TRAGIC MIMESIS

INTRODUCTION

In Republic X Socrates accuses poetic “imitators” [μιμητικοί] of corrupting the soul (the psychological charge) and producing appearances that are far removed from truth (the metaphysical charge). The success of the psychological charge against mimetic poetry crucially depends on the success of the metaphysical charge; tragic poetry corrupts the soul by making images that are far removed from truth (that is, appearances of virtue and value). The dominant interpretive strategy cashes out the relationship between these two charges as follows: images corrupt the soul, because images are metaphysically inferior; all images are “far removed from truth” and hence potentially corruptive. Unfortunately, this strategy pits Book III against Book X; mimetic poetry forms the foundation of the guardians’ early education (in Book III), but mimetic poetry is corruptive (in Book X).

In this paper I defend an alternative strategy. I contend that the metaphysical charge should be interpreted narrowly, to encompass false and illusory appearances of virtue and value produced via skiagraphic techniques. I argue that Socrates’ critique of tragedy and Homeric poetry does not rest on dubious metaphysical claims about images per se, but rather on the plausible and interesting claim that tragedians and their leader, Homer, employ skiagraphic techniques – that is, the manipulation of temporal distances and the contrasting of fortune with misfortune and virtue with vice - in order to produce powerful illusions of virtue and value. Even the denier of the Forms must take this claim seriously. I conclude with some thoughts about good mimesis and the importance of poetry to the larger project of the Republic.

One of the greatest interpretive difficulties facing Republic X commentators is specifying what Socrates bans in Republic X. What is Socrates' target? At the outset of Book X Socrates
remarks that they were right to ban “imitative” [μιμητική] poetry in light of the tripartite theory of the soul; such poetry corrupts the soul (595a-b). Socrates next proposes to define “mimesis as a whole” [μίμησιν ὅλως], with a view to characterizing the imitative poet (595c). This proposal would be otiose, if Socrates had already defined 'mimesis as a whole' in Book III. While in Book III Socrates states that “to make oneself like someone else in voice or appearance is to imitate [μιμεῖσθαι] the person one makes oneself like” (393c4-5), this statement is not intended as a definition of 'mimesis as a whole.' Rather, impersonation is one type of mimesis, as evidenced by the fact that musical mode and meter also emerge in Book III as distinct forms of mimesis (399a-400a). Nor is impersonation the defining feature of imitative [μιμητική] poetry specifically. Whereas Socrates proposes to ban all imitative poetry, he does not ban all impersonation. In Book III and Book X Socrates permits impersonations of good men (397d, 607a). Thus, given that some mimesis and some impersonation escape the ban, whom does Socrates banish in Book X? My goal in this paper is to answer these questions through a new analysis of Republic X, which underscores Book X’s relation to the rest of the Republic, particularly Books III and IX. Drawing on Book IX, I argue that Socrates bans skiagraphic poets, particularly tragedians and their teacher, Homer. Tragedy and Homeric poetry utilize contrast and distancing techniques to produce false, corruptive appearances of virtue and value. Thus, Book X is consistent with Book III; some, not all, poetry is banned.

1 THE PROBLEM: WHY ARE MIMETIC APPEARANCES CORRUPTIVE?

Socrates defines the imitator [μιμητής] as one who produces appearances [φαινόμενα] of sensible particulars; the painter produces appearances of artifacts and craftsmen (597e-598c), and the poet produces appearances of agents and actions (599b). The imitator is like a man carrying a
mirror, who makes things appear (596d-e). In contrast, craftsmen produce an artifact “of like character as” [τοιοῦτον] its Form [τὸ ὅν], albeit not “completely” [τελέως] its Form (597a). Similarly, agents produce actions and deeds, rather than imitations thereof (599b).

It is not immediately obvious how this characterization of painting – as producing the appearances of sensible particulars – carries over to poetry. What is the poet's correlate of the painter's bed? According to some, the analogy with painting is deeply flawed; nothing corresponds to the painter's bed. The poet does not, in the manner of the painter, produce appearances of sensible particulars. Rather, the poet produces the general “look” or “feel” of agents in action, as well as appearances of goodness and badness (of said agents and actions).

This criticism is too quick. In Socrates' view, both poet and painter convey generalities through producing appearances of particulars. In books II-III Socrates claims Greek poetry produces “appearances” of particular historical events and persons – that is, historical events and persons as imagined by the poet. This is not to deny that poems about the ancient past are poems about virtue and value. As Socrates himself emphasizes, it is through portraying highly esteemed personages (that is, heroes or gods) that poems about the ancient past represent and recommend general ways of life (388d). Certainly, Homer's image of Achilles does not relate to an actually existing person in the same way that the painting of Socrates’ bed relates to Socrates’ bed. However, a painting of an imagined bed is parallel to the poetic representation of Achilles; each represents an imagined particular. A further parallel is this: like poems, paintings produce general images of goodness. According to Socrates, the painting of a carpenter or a cobbler is an appearance of good carpentry or cobblerly. In Socrates’ view, both poetry and painting communicate axiological ideas about what is worthwhile and agathological ideas what is good or virtuous. In other words, both poetry and painting express axiological and agathological
While in Books II-III Socrates suggests that Greek poets radically misrepresent the ancient past (and hence have no, or at least flawed, cognitive access to the past), he does not linger on this point. According to Socrates, even if Greek poets are correct about the ancient past (for example, Cronos really did castrate his father), their poems must be banned, lest they produce a corruptive appearance of how one ought to live (377e-378c). Given Socrates' focus on the psychological and behavioral effects of poetry, it is no surprise that Socrates sets aside the difficult epistemological question (addressed in the *Ion*) of whether and how the poet has cognitive access to the ancient past. Since the primary task of Book X is to demonstrate how tragedy and Homeric poetry corrupt the soul, Socrates focuses on tragedy's appearances of virtue and value, rather than tragedy's appearances of past particulars. The former – and not the latter – are immediately relevant to demonstrating how tragedy corrupts the soul.

However, well before Socrates accuses tragic poetry of corrupting the soul, Socrates denigrates the μιμητικός for producing appearances that are “far removed from truth” (598b4). Thus, the metaphysical charge that such appearances are far removed from truth is distinct from the psychological charge that tragic poetry corrupts the soul. Nevertheless, the success of the psychological charge against tragic poetry depends on the success of the metaphysical charge. This is because tragic poetry corrupts the soul “by making images that are far removed from truth” [ἐἴδωλα εἰδολοποιοῦντα τοῦ … ἀληθοῦς πόρρω πάνυ ἀφεστῶτα] (605b). Tragic poetry corrupts the soul by producing appearances of virtue and value. Thus, the success of the psychological charge depends on the success of the metaphysical charge.

How are tragedy’s appearances “far removed” from truth? After all, given that the imitator, including the tragedian, produces appearances of likenesses of Forms, aren’t mimetic
appearances relevantly related to truth? If, in producing appearances, the imitator simply mirrors sensible reality (as the mirror analogy suggests), then the imitator’s work is “trivial,” but certainly not corruptive.¹⁸ In addressing this problem, the dominant interpretive strategy has been to suggest that images corrupt the soul, because images are metaphysically inferior. In other words, the metaphysical charge is ordinarily interpreted very broadly, to encompass all images; all images are “far removed from truth” and hence potentially corruptive. Unfortunately, this strategy fails to account for the fact that in Book X Socrates targets tragedy and Homeric poetry specifically, permitting painting and even some poetry. Even worse, this strategy pits Book III against Book X; mimesis and poetry form the foundation of the guardians’ education in Book III, only to come under attack in Book X.

In what follows I shall outline an alternative strategy, concluding with what is wrong (and what is right) with the dominant interpretive strategy. I contend that the metaphysical charge should be interpreted narrowly, to encompass the false and illusory appearances produced by skiagraphia. While I do not deny that all images are, in some sense, “removed from truth,” I maintain that only skiagraphic images of virtue and value are removed from truth in the relevant way – that is, in a potentially corruptive way. For this reason, only skiagraphic images of virtue and value are banned, and Books III and X are consistent.

2 FALSE APPEARANCES AND SKIAGRAPHIA: CORRUPTING THE SOUL

Although Socrates sets out to define “mimesis as a whole,” he does not ban all mimesis. For this reason, we should expect Socrates to differentiate banned mimesis from mimesis in general. And indeed, after characterizing all imitators and all mimesis in terms of the mirror analogy (so as to show that all imitators produce images), Socrates “distinguishes” [διορίζει] imitating
sensibles “as they appear” [οἷα φαίνεται] and “as they are” [οἷα ἔστιν] (598a2). According to Socrates, Greek painters and poets imitate sensibles as they appear, not as they are. Socrates explains:

- Now, tell me this about the painter. Do you think he tries in each case to imitate the thing itself in nature or the works of craftsmen?
- The works of craftsmen.
- As they are or as they appear [οἷα ἔστιν ἢ οἷα φαίνεται]? For you must yet distinguish this [τοῦτο γὰρ ἐτί διὸρισον].
- How do you mean?
- Like this. If you look at a bed from the side or the front or from anywhere else is it a different bed each time? Or does it only appear different, without being at all different? And is that also the case with other things?
- That's the way it is – it appears different without being so.
- Then consider this very point: What does painting do in each case? Does it imitate that which is as it is [τὸ ὄν, ὡς ἔχει], or does it imitate that which appears as it appears [τὸ φαινόμενον, ὡς φαίνεται]? Is it an imitation of appearances [φαντάσματος] or of truth [ἀληθείας]?
- Of appearances [φαντάσματος].
- Then imitation [μιμητική] is far removed from truth [τὸ ἀληθοῦς], for it touches only a small part of each thing and a part that is itself only an image [εἴδωλον]. And that, it seems, is why it can produce everything (597e8-598b6).

How should we interpret this “further distinction?” Commentators emphasize that Socrates distinguishes μιμητική (from mimesis more generally) as the practice of “copying” appearances, as opposed to merely producing appearances. The practitioner of μιμητική, the μιμητικός, is unique in that she imitates appearances. On this reading, Socrates targets mimesis that imitates appearances. The μιμητικός is “two removes from truth,” in virtue of reproducing appearances of likenesses of Forms.

Of course, this cannot be the entire story. While I agree that the μιμητικός produces appearances, I deny that the μιμητικός is in the business of reproducing any and all appearances. I will argue that Socrates’ attention to skiagraphia suggests that the μιμητικός is a skiagraphic artist, who utilizes popular skiagraphic techniques to reproduce false or illusory appearances. One prima facie advantage of this interpretation is that it connects Book IX to Book
X. In Book IX Socrates compares mixed pleasures to skiagraphia, only to extend this analogy to tragedy and Homeric poetry in Book X. By juxtaposing pleasure with pain, mixed pleasures produce the false appearance of great intensity (583b, 584a, 586a-c). In Book X Socrates further develops this analogy with skiagraphia: by imitating varied ποικίλα characters (and their varied fortunes and misfortunes), tragedy produces false appearances of the magnitudes of goodness and badness.

Not only does my interpretation have the benefit of preserving continuity between Books IX and X, it has the added benefit of harmonizing Books III and X; both books attack false poetic images, not images per se. In Book III Socrates refers to Homer, Hesiod and other censored poets as “making an image” [εἰκαζεῖν] of what heroes and gods are like (377d9), with an important caveat: such poets construct their images “badly” [κακῶς], in that their images are not at all like [ὁμοια] what they purport to be images of. In other words, μιμητικοί like Homer reproduce false images. Book X goes beyond Book III in articulating how such images corrupt the soul. Moreover, although Book X critiques tragedy, Socrates explicitly targets Homer, qua “leader” of the tragedians (595b-c). This is because tragedians draw on Homer to produce mimetic appearances, and Book X is concerned with the production and reception of mimetic appearances, rather than the mimetic impersonation of particular characters.

My analysis will proceed as follows: first, I will say a word about the content of banned poetry, characterizing the kinds of illusions such poetry produces. Next, I will turn to the techniques of the μιμητικοί, where my focus will be on the methods μιμητικοί employ to produce poetic illusions. Attention to the latter will reveal that Socrates does not attack poetic images per se, but rather false, skiagraphic poetic images. Finally, I will return to versions of the dominant view, pointing out what is right and what is wrong with these analyses. I will conclude with some
thoughts about good mimesis, the place of Book X in the larger project of the Republic and an important consequence of my interpretation: even the denier of the Forms must take Socrates’ critique of tragic poetry seriously.

2.1 *Poetry and Axiological Illusion*

According to Socrates, tragic and epic poetry produce agathological and axiological “illusions” [φαντάσματα, είδωλα]. Poetic images of revered heroes lamenting the loss of external goods (fame, fortune, family, etc.) create the illusion that a “noble man” [κάλος] suffers horribly and that lamentation is a “worthy” [ἄξιον] response to such “terrible” [δεινόν] loss (387d-e, 388d). In truth, however, only the loss of internal goods (virtue or soul health) is terrible for a human being. What is more, a truly noble man is not excitable, irritable and “variable” [ποικίλος]. Rather, he is “most self-sufficient in living well” (387d11) - which is to say, for the noble man, “living well” is an outward expression of his internal excellence (rather than the outward possession of external goods). In contrast to Achilles, a man of true virtue quietly endures disenfranchisement, dishonor and even death, lest violent lamentation corrupt his soul. Because his tame emotions and desires follow reason’s stable and unified vision of the good, the man of virtue is not variable but “remains pretty well the same” (604e1).

Also, μιμητικοί produce the appearance that their poems are fine or beautiful [καλά], which creates the illusion that the poet is knowledgeable about that which he imitates (that is, virtue and value). In effect, the poem’s appearance of fineness intensifies the axiological and agathological illusions therein. Socrates remarks at 601e4-b5:

Then shall we conclude that all poetic imitators [ποιητικος μιμητας], beginning with Homer, imitate images of virtue [ειδολων άρετης] and all the other things they write about and have no grasp of truth? As we were saying just now, a painter, though he knows nothing about cobblerly, can make was seems to be [δοκοηντα] a cobbler to those who

8
Just as the painter makes what seems to be a cobbler, the imitative poet makes what seems to be a virtuous man. Furthermore, the apparent fineness or beauty of the artwork supports and sustains the artwork’s illusions. Crucially, medium informs content. xxviii Μητικοί use music and meter to dress up their work, such that it falsely appears to reflect real ethical expertise. Similarly, the “bloom of youth” [ἄνθος] dresses up the inherent ugliness of a boy, such that he falsely appears beautiful (601b).

2.2 Skiagraphia: Painting

What is skiagraphic painting [σκιαγραφία]? In the absence of extant examples of skiagraphia, art historians and archaeologists have wrangled over the exact nature of the practice. Drawing on a dearth of textual evidence, most scholars have postulated that skiagraphia essentially involved juxtaposing colors and shades to produce the optical illusion of three-dimensional reality. xxix However, others have hypothesized that skiagraphia is a form of divisionism or a means of intensifying colors through the juxtaposition thereof. xxx In the absence of any extant Greek skiagraphia, it has been difficult to settle the debate.

However, the relatively recent discovery of Macedonian tomb paintings provides support for the view that skiagraphia essentially involved the modulation of shade and light so as to create the illusion of depth. Breaking conventional outlines and, in some cases, violating
traditional tetrachromy, these wall paintings use tone mixtures and shadowing to produce the illusion of a three-dimensional reality, when viewed at a suitable distance (Plantzos, 172-9). Plato associates the practice with juxtaposition (584a, 586a-c; Philebus 42b-c), distancing (523b; Parmenides 165b-d; Theaetetus 208e; Philebus 42b-c), and deceptive illusion (365c, 583b, 586a-c; Laws 663b; Phaedo 69b; Theaetetus 208e; Philebus 42b-c). The dialogues presuppose a shared knowledge of popular skiagraphia, frequently appealing to the practice in order to explain ethical illusion.

Why suppose Book X targets skiagraphic painting, as opposed to painting entire? The best clues come at 602c-d, where Socrates claims that the μητικοί appeal to a part of the soul that forms beliefs on the basis of the following sorts of optical illusions:

Something looked at from close at hand doesn’t seem to be the same size as it does when it is looked at from a distance. … And something looks crooked when seen in water and straight when seen out of it, while something else looks both concave and convex because our eyes are deceived by its colors [χρώματα], and every other similar sort of confusion is clearly present in our soul. And it is because they exploit this weakness in our nature that skiagraphic painting [σκιαγραφία], conjuring, and other forms of trickery have powers that are little short of magical.

Remarkably, the μητικοί appeal to a part of the soul that forms beliefs on the basis of skiagraphic painting and optical illusions of size and shape, which manipulate colors and distances to deceive our eyes. Here, Socrates invokes the very techniques Plato and others associate with popular skiagraphic painters – that is, distancing and manipulation of color or light to produce illusions of size and shape. If Socrates had intended to target traditional, two-dimensional painting, why would he claim that the mimetic painter appeals to a part of the soul that is susceptible to optical illusions produced via coloring and distancing techniques? Why would he actually employ the term “skiagraphia” (above)? Another indication that Socrates confines his critique to popular skiagraphia occurs earlier in the argument, at 598b-c:
... we say that a painter can paint a cobbler, a carpenter, or any other craftsman, even though he knows nothing about these crafts. Nevertheless, if he is a good painter and displays his painting at a distance, he can deceive children and foolish people into thinking that it is truly [ἀληθῶς εἶναι] a carpenter.xxxiv

Again, realistic, skiagraphic mural paintings fit Socrates’ description, in that they would have produced the illusion of three-dimensional reality when viewed at a distance.xxxv

What does skiagraphic painting have to do with poetry? Poetry does not produce the illusion of three-dimensional reality. Here it is important to take a cue from Republic IX, which offers a schema for how to interpret Socrates’ skiagraphia analogies. Tragedy and Homeric poetry are analogous to skiagraphic painting not so much in the kind of illusion it produces (though there are some parallelsxxxvi), but more in how it produces its illusion; namely, through distancing and contrast techniques. In the next section, I examine how Socrates develops the skiagraphia analogy with respect to pleasure (in Book IX) and poetry (in Book X). I argue that Socrates’ critique of tragedy does not rest on dubious metaphysical claims about images, but rather on the plausible claim that tragedians manipulate temporal distances and contrast fortune with misfortune and virtue with vice in order to produce agathological and axiological illusions. Even the denier of the Forms must take this claim seriously.

2.3 Skiagraphia: Pleasure, Poetry and Poikilia

I now turn to Socrates’ skiagraphia analogies. First, I examine skiagraphic pleasure in Book IX. Next, I turn to Book X, with a view to articulating the sense in which tragic poetry is skiagraphic. Book X’s comparison of tragedy to skiagraphic painting and emphasis on deceptive contrasting and distancing techniques (familiar to us from Book IX’s skiagraphic analysis of pleasure) strongly suggest that tragedy and its predecessor, Homeric poetry, are problematically skiagraphic.
In Book IX Socrates explicitly invokes skiagraphia at 586b7-c1, summarizing his analysis of ‘mixed pleasures’ (that is, pleasures arising from the cessation of pains\textsuperscript{xxxvii}) as follows:

Then isn’t it necessary for these people to live with pleasures that are mixed with pains, mere images and skiagraphia [ἐσκιαγραφημέναις] of true pleasures? And doesn’t the juxtaposition [ἀποχραινομέναις\textsuperscript{xxxviii}] of these pleasures and pains make them appear intense, so that they give rise to mad erotic passions in the foolish … ?

Mixed pleasures are like skiagraphia’s color mixtures; both produce illusions through juxtaposition or contrast. However, in Book IX Socrates is less interested in skiagraphia’s illusions of three-dimensional reality and more interested in skiagraphia’s illusions of color intensity.\textsuperscript{xxxix} Consider another color parallel at 584e6-585a5:

It is any surprise, then, if those who are inexperienced in the truth have unsound opinions about lots of other things as well, or that they are so disposed to pleasure, pain, and the intermediate state that, when they descend to the painful, they believe truly and are really in pain, but that, when they ascend from the painful to the intermediate state, they firmly believe that they have reached fulfillment and pleasure? They are inexperienced in pleasure and so are deceived when they compare pain to painlessness, just as they would be if they compared black to grey without having experienced white.

In effect, Socrates tightens the analogy with skiagraphia, for the purposes of explicating hedonic illusion. Both skiagraphia and mixed pleasures achieve their illusions through juxtaposition. The neutral hedonic state (cessation of pain and pleasure) appears pleasurable to those in pain and painful to those in pleasure (583d-584a). It is important to note that the illusion in question is not an ontological illusion; there really is a color or a hedonic state. The illusion is an illusion of magnitude, produced in virtue of a contrast. The analysis of mixed pleasures in the \textit{Philebus} illuminates this point:

Well then, in the case of sight, seeing things from too near at hand or from too great a distance obscures their real sizes and causes us to have false opinions; and does not this same thing happen in the case of pains and pleasures? … Because they [mixed pleasures] are seen at various and changing distances and are compared with one another, the pleasures themselves appear greater and more intense by comparison with the pains, and
the pains in turn, through comparison with the pleasures, vary inversely as they. … They both, then, appear greater and less than the reality. Now if you abstract from both of them this apparent, but unreal, excess or inferiority, you cannot say that its appearance is true, nor again can you have the face to affirm that the part of pleasure or pain which corresponds to this is true or real (41e10-42c3).\textsuperscript{xl}

Both contrast and distance condition our perception of the felt magnitudes of pleasure and pain; distancing and contrasting produce hedonic illusion. The experiencer’s pleasures and pains are genuine hedonic states, but when contrasted and brought close, they appear and feel greater than they really are. Ultimately, such illusions are effective because their subject is positioned far from truth in the following sense:

Therefore, those who have no experience of reason or virtue, but are always occupied with feasts and the like, are brought down and then back up to the middle, as it seems, and wander in this way throughout their lives, never reaching beyond this to what is truly higher up, never looking up at it or being brought up to it, and so they aren’t filled with that which really is and never taste any stable or pure pleasure. Instead, they always look down at the ground like cattle, and, with their heads bent over the dinner table, they feed, fatten, and fornicate. To outdo others in these things, they kick and butt them with iron horns and hooves, killing each other, because their desires are insatiable. For the part that they’re trying to fill is like a vessel full of holes, and neither it nor the things they are trying to fill it with are among the things that are (585e5-586b4).

Because the subject is far from Forms (and the pure and stable pleasure of knowing Forms), she cannot dispel hedonic illusions. Just as skiagraphia’s ontological illusions are effective so long as the viewer beholds the work in a place that is distant from the painting, so too mixed pleasures’ illusions are effective so long as the experiencer regards such pleasures in a place that is distant from Truth.

In the hedonic case, only the unique epistemic and hedonic situation of the subject determines the particular contrasts and distances that condition her experience of pleasure and pain. The painting and poetry cases are importantly different, in that the skiagraphic painter or poet determines the contrasts and distances that condition a spectator’s experience of the work.\textsuperscript{xli}

In addition to Socrates’ comparison of tragic poetry to skiagraphic painting, his focus on
“poikilia” (in connection with tragic poetry) suggests that skiagraphic contrasts are essential to his conception of popular tragedy and Homeric poetry. Greek metallurgy (toreutics and jewelry), weaving and painting produced poikilia-type artifacts, including skiagraphia. Commonly characterized by color contrasts, such poikilia involved the inlaying or meshing of varied substances, shapes and/or color threads, so as to create a contrastive, brilliant and striking effect. Greek literature frequently associates the seductive power of poikilia with their complexity and extends the concept to wily, enchanting and variable Gods and heroes (Grand-Clemént, 407 & 411-16). Despite the popularity of poikilia, Plato harbored a deep suspicion of poikilia – a suspicion borne out in his characterization of popular poetic mimesis as “ποικίλη” (Grand-Clemént, 415-16).

According to Socrates, the popular poet imitates the “excitable and multicolored character” [τὸ ἀγανακτητικόν τε καὶ ποικῆν ήθος]. The ποικῆν character is easy to imitate and readily recognizable by “a crowd consisting of all sorts of people” (604e-605a). The ποικῆς man is the democrat, whom Socrates describes in Book VIII:

And so he lives on, yielding day by day to the desire at hand. Sometimes he drinks heavily while listening to the flute; at other times, he drinks only water and is on a diet; sometimes he goes in for physical training; at other times, he’s idle and neglects everything; and sometimes he even occupies himself with what he takes to be philosophy. He often engages in politics, leaping up from his seat and saying and doing whatever comes into his mind. If he happens to admire soldiers, he’s carried in that direction, if moneymakers, in that one. There’s neither order nor necessity in his life, but he calls it pleasant, free, and blessedly happy, and he follows it for as long as he lives. … I also suppose that he’s a complex man, full of all sorts of characters, fine and multicolored [ποικῆν], just like the democratic city, and that many men and women might envy his life, since it contains the most models of constitutions and ways of living (561c5-e6).

Socrates likens the democratic city to poikilia; in particular, to a garish “coat embroidered with every kind of ornament” (557c4). Most people erroneously judge the coat to be most beautiful, because they are bewitched by its color contrasts (557c5-7). As we saw in Socrates’ analysis of
mixed pleasures, color and pleasure contrasts intensify the contrasted members. Similarly, variability in the democrat’s actions and character create contrasts that amplify aspects of her action and character, such that she and her actions appear finer than they really are. What is more, ποικίλα characters and actions appear most fine to the majority. Thus, in imitating the democratic character and mode of life, the poetic imitator is “imitating sensibles as they appear” (to the democratic majority), rather than as they are. These imitated appearances are skiagraphic illusions, insofar as they arise from contrasts.

Notably, tragic mimesis takes on the character of what is imitated; the mimesis is itself multicolored [ποικίλη] (604e1). Poetic images of good and bad and virtue and vice comingle to create agathological and axiological illusions. Consider the tragic, Homeric hero Achilles, the poetic representations of whom Socrates most severely censers.\textsuperscript{xlv} The character and life of Achilles contain dazzling contrasts and, as a result, great skiagraphic illusion. The mercy Achilles shows Priam in returning Hector’s corpse only appears intensely noble when juxtaposed with Achilles’ prior, violent treatment of Hector’s corpse. Similarly, Achilles’ bravery in battle only appears spectacularly noble when juxtaposed with Achilles’ former, petulant refusal to join the war efforts. What is more, Achilles’ misfortunes – in particular, the death of his beloved Patroclus and his own eventual death in battle – appear all the more terrible in contrast to Achilles’ previous glory and good fortune. Thus, it is no wonder that skiagraphic poets like Homer imitate Achilles and other poikila characters; such characters and lives contain the very sorts of skiagraphic contrasts that amplify illusory appearances of virtue and misfortune and, by extension, the audience’s problematic emotional engagement with tragedy, which nourishes the “pitying part” of the human soul (606b). In short, tragedy deals in skiagraphic contrasts. It buys its great illusions and great emotional power with the currency of poikilia. This, I take it, is a
main pillar of Socrates’ critique of tragedy. The other pillar of Socrates’ critique is beyond the scope of this paper; namely, an analysis of how, exactly, tragedy’s ethical illusions enlarge and corrupt the appetitive and spirited parts of the soul. Nevertheless, unlike mere ‘images of sensible particulars’, ethical, skiagraphic illusions are a much better candidate for being the kind of thing that can plausibly corrupt the soul.

Finally, tragedians also manipulate temporal distances in order to magnify human good and bad. To see this, consider how “rational calculation” dispels the illusion of tragic misfortune:

First, it isn’t clear whether such things will turn out to be good or bad in the end; second, it doesn’t make the future any better to take them hard; third, human affairs aren’t worth taking very seriously; and, finally, grief prevents the very thing we most need in such circumstances from coming into play as quickly as possible … . Deliberation. We must accept what has happened as we would the fall of the dice, and then arrange our affairs in whatever way reason determines to be best. We mustn’t hug the hurt part and spend our time weeping and wailing like children when they trip. Instead, we should always accustom our souls to turn as quickly as possible to healing the disease and putting the disaster right, replacing lamentation with cure (604b8-d1).

Whereas the skiagraphic painter positions his painting far from the viewer, the skiagraphic poet positions human good and bad close to the audience. This closeness is a temporal closeness, in that it conveniently deletes the future, failing to capture a complete human life, within which the true sizes of goods and bads may be calculated. But there is another sort of closeness at issue here – one that should recall Socrates’ caustic remarks about the blind pursuer of mixed pleasures (585e5-586b4). Unable to occupy the timeless vantage point of intelligible Truth, which properly captures the cosmic insignificance of human beings, the hedonist embroils herself in “human affairs” - feeding, fattening, fornicating and killing others in her blind pursuit of false pleasures. Hence, by positioning his audience so temporally close to human calamities, the tragedian effectively distances his audience from the vantage point of intelligible Truth, not unlike how the intense experience of mixed pleasures distances one from true, pure pleasures.
In sum, tragedians are analogous to the skiagraphic painter in that they employ contrast techniques and manipulate distances in order to create and sustain skiagraphic illusions. Tragedy’s illusions are agathological and axiological in nature; through contrasting good and bad and manipulating temporal distances, Greek tragic drama (which draws heavily on Homer) constructs a false reality concerning value (for example, that the noble Achilles undergoes a terrible misfortune). In like manner, the skiagraphic painter contrasts colors and manipulates spatial distances in order to create and sustain illusions of color intensity and a false reality concerning ontology (for example, that the painting of a bed is truly a bed). This interpretation of Socrates’ analysis of tragedy receives support from Socrates’ focus on skiagraphia and poikilia in the latter books of the Republic. In addition, it has the added benefit of making Plato’s views on tragedy more intelligible. The idea that tragic drama relies for its power on contrasts is an interesting one, as is the suggestion that such contrasts create ethical illusions – illusions that have the potential to corrupt the human soul. Moreover, we are now in a position to appreciate why imitative poetry corrupts the soul by producing images. Such poetry utilizes skiagraphic techniques to produce ethical illusions; and, unlike images of sensible particulars, ethical illusions can plausibly corrupt the soul.

I will end by examining other interpretive strategies and situating Socrates’ critique of poetry within the larger context of the Republic.

3 THE DOMINANT INTERPRETATION

The dominant interpretive strategy locates poetry’s allegedly corrupting nature in the intrinsic deceptiveness of images; by their very nature, images mislead or distort. Poetry corrupts audiences by producing images of virtue and value, which, due to their metaphysical status qua
images, necessarily deceive viewers about virtue and value.

Time-crunched readers may skip section 3 and proceed to the conclusion on p. 23.

3.1 The Incompleteness Interpretation

I shall dub the first version of this interpretive strategy the “Incompleteness Interpretation” (II). According to II, images are inherently deceptive insofar as they are “incomplete” and hence “deficient.” Consider again the following passage:

- Now, tell me this about the painter. Do you think he tries in each case to imitate the thing itself in nature or the works of craftsmen?
- The works of craftsmen.
- As they are or as they appear [ὄια ἔστιν ἢ ὑα φαίνεται]? For you must yet distinguish this [τοῦτο γὰρ ἐπὶ διόρθωσιν].
- How do you mean?
- Like this. If you look at a couch from the side or the front or from anywhere else is it a different couch each time? Or does it only appear different, without being at all different? And is that also the case with other things?
- That's the way it is – it appears different without being so.
- Then consider this very point: What does painting do in each case? Does it imitate that which is as it is [τὸ ὀν, ὡς ἔχει], or does it imitate that which appears as it appears [τὸ φαινόμενον, ὡς φαίνεται]? Is it an imitation of appearances [φαντάσματος] or of truth [ἀληθείας]?
- Of appearances [φαντάσματος].
- Then imitation [μιμητική] is far removed from truth [τοῦ ἀληθοῦς], for it touches only a small part of each thing and a part that is itself only an image [εἴδωλον]. And that, it seems, is why it can produce everything (597ε8-598b6).

On the basis of this passage, one might reasonably infer that mimetic images are “two removes from truth,” because they are incomplete and hence deficient. Indeed, in the Cratylus Socrates insists that images are incomplete of their very nature; if an image of Cratylus presented every detail of Cratylus, it would be a Cratylus duplicate, not an image of Cratylus (432b-d). Thus, necessarily, mimetic appearances do not present truth in its entirety. A mimetic appearance only provides a single perspective (that is, an “incomplete view”) of that which it imitates. The painting only presents one angle of the couch; similarly, the poem only presents one angle on virtue. Insofar as foolish audiences suppose that poems supply them with a complete picture of
virtue, they are deceived. II not only specifies the sense in which mimetic images are “less true” than that which they imitate; it also explains why imitative poetry corrupts the soul. To the extent that “foolish people” suppose that incomplete appearances of virtue and value represent the entire truth about virtue and value, they develop a superficial and ultimately damaging conception of how to live. Hence, II nicely ties the ontological inferiority of appearances (that is, their being “incomplete”) to their capacity to mislead audiences about virtue and value.

However, II does not capture the structure of Socrates’ argument. Socrates seeks to establish that Homer is a μιμητικός by demonstrating that he lacks both knowledge and correct opinion about that which he purports to imitate; namely, “what ways of life that make people better in public or private” (599d3-4). If II were correct, then the structure of Socrates’ argument would likely be very different; having defined μιμητικοί as producers of something incomplete, Socrates would have next pointed out that poetic μιμητικοί produce incomplete representations of virtue and value (epistemological arguments aside). Instead, Socrates argues that poetic μιμητικοί are completely ignorant about virtue and value, for which reason they employ skiagraphic techniques to produce illusory images of virtue and value. Moreover, such images are not incorrect in virtue of their incompleteness, but in virtue of their skiagraphic nature. And indeed, the Cratylus sharply distinguishes between the incompleteness of an image and its correctness or incorrectness; whereas all images are incomplete, only some lack correctness [ὀρθότης] (432b-c).

3.2 The Multiplicity Interpretation

How can the painting of the couch misrepresent the couch, in the way that Homer's poetry misrepresents virtue and value? The “Multiplicity Interpretation” (MI) addresses this question. According to MI, images necessarily misrepresent or distort sensible particulars in the same way
that sensible particulars misrepresent or distort Forms. Just as the many perspectival appearances of the couch are “varied, changing and contradictory” with respect to the single sensible couch (of which they are appearances), the many sensible couches are “varied, changing and contradictory” with respect to the Form of the couch. Similarly, just as a sensible couch is “stable, uniform and consistent” with respect to the many perspectival appearances of it, the Form of the couch is “stable, uniform and consistent” with respect to the many sensible couches.\footnote{1}
The Divided Line seems to support this interpretation; sensible particulars are to Forms as sensible particulars are to images, with regard to truth (510a-b). In short, an image is removed from truth in the same way that a sensible particular is removed from truth; presumably, by being varied, changing and contradictory with regard to the relatively stable, uniform and consistent object to which it is related. Further support for this interpretation may be found in the fact that the poets portray the “multicolored” [ποικίλον] and “excitable” [ἀγανακτητικόν] character, whose various representations are changing and contradictory (604d-605a). Thus, poetic imitations of virtue are varied and changing with respect to their relatively uniform, stable and consistent object; namely, the good and rational character, who remains the same. As such, poetic imitations of virtue necessarily mislead (and hence corrupt) ignorant audiences, who are led to mistake multiple mimetic images of a good character for the real thing. Additionally, in Book III Socrates criticizes the poets for being “multiply imitative” – that is, for imitating in voice and body many different things (395a), as opposed to singly imitating the good person (397d). Quite possibly, Socrates also faults the poets for producing competing and contradictory images of virtue and value.\footnote{ii}

Despite MI’s initial attractiveness, the central assumption – namely, that sensible particulars are “removed from” Forms in the same way that skiagraphic illusions are removed
from sensible particulars - is, I think, mistaken. This assumption stems from supposing that there is no relevant difference between the mimetic artist’s skiagraphic illusions \([\varepsilon \iota \omicron \omega \lambda \alpha]\) and the images \([\varepsilon \iota \kappa \omicron \omicron \varsigma]\) that occupy the bottom section of the Divided Line. However, for Socrates, a sensible instance of justice, courage, or temperance is *like* the Form of Justice, Courage, or Temperance (respectively). However, as I have argued, an incorrect skiagraphic appearance of justice, courage, or temperance radically misrepresents and is fundamentally unlike that which it purports to be an image of (even if it bears certain similarities to the original). Censored poets are censored precisely because they construct their images such that they are not at all *like* \([\omicron \mu 
abla \alpha]\) their originals (that is, gods and heroes) (377d9). In other words, MI makes no room for the crucial distinction that sits at the heart of Socrates’ argument; namely, the distinction between correct and incorrect images. Skiagraphic appearances of virtue and value corrupt the soul, because skiagraphic appearances of virtue and value are incorrect. In contrast, correct images of virtue and value actually improve the soul, as evidenced by their prominent role in the education of the young (and, for that matter, in Plato’s dialogues more generally).

A secondary problem with MI is this: If the relationship between Forms and sensibles and sensibles and images were one of radical distortion (as MI suggests), we should expect the kallipolis to be constructed very differently. First, the guardians would be banned from consuming any images of virtue, in poetry or otherwise, lest they come to accept misrepresentations of virtue. Second, a philosopher-king's knowledge of the Forms would not qualify him or her to rule in the sensible realm, since knowledge of F would not necessarily enable one to identify a sensible instance of F (the latter being a radical distortion or gross misrepresentation of the Form of F). However, the kallipolis is not structured in this way. Consumption of correct images of good characters (in the form of poetry) is an integral part of
the guardians’ early education. Also, the philosopher-king's knowledge of the Forms uniquely qualifies him or her to rule in the sensible realm. A final passage nicely illustrates the point that sensible particulars and images [εἰκόνες] are likenesses of truth:

… am I not right in saying that neither we, nor the guardians we are raising, will be educated in music and poetry until we know the different Forms of moderation, courage, frankness, high-mindedness, and all their kindred, and their opposites too, which are moving around everywhere, and see them in the things in which they are, both themselves and their images [εἰκόνας] … (402c1-6).

In sum, in addition to failing to make room for Socrates’ distinction between correct and incorrect images, MI also commits its adherents to an independently implausible interpretation of the Republic.

That said, II and MI do get something right, which explains their initial plausibility. Images are incomplete and multiple, and these very features distance them from truth or the Forms. However, the same can be said of sensible particulars. Just as the incompleteness and multiplicity of images presents a danger (insofar as images are mistaken for truth), the incompleteness and multiplicity of sensible particulars presents a danger (insofar as sensibles are mistaken for truth). The Lover of Sights and Sounds exemplifies this danger, insofar as she mistakes a sensible instance of F for the Form of F (476e). For example, Polemarchus mistakes a single just action (that is, giving someone what is owed to him) for justice entire (331e-332a). However, this just action is incomplete and multiple. Being incomplete (that is, representing only one aspect of justice), it provides no guidance in some cases; and being “multiple” or “variable,” it is unjust in one application (for example, giving weapons back to a madman) and just in another (for example, returning money to a sane person). Immersed in the world of likenesses, the lovers of sights and sounds (Polemarchus included) love poetry. Poetic likenesses present an equal danger to the lover, insofar as she sets up a likeness as the criterion for truth. Like sensible
particulars, poetic likenesses are incomplete and multiple, in virtue of the fact that images, qua images, do not reproduce all and only the features of the original. Hence, a likeness is a likeness in some respects and not in others, just as a sensible particular is a likeness of a Form in some respects and not in others.

However, the educational system of the kallipolis protects against the danger of conflating likenesses and originals, insofar as it is specifically designed to teach students to distinguish between images, sensibles and Forms. For example, a guardian’s education in mathematics and dialectic is intended to prompt her to exit the “cave” of likenesses and to enter the world of Forms, where she will recognize sensibles and their images for what they really are; namely, mere likenesses. Hence, in the kallipolis poetic likenesses (that is, correct images) do not pose a danger and so are not banned. Thus, while II and MI correctly capture some potentially deceptive features of likenesses, these features do nothing to explain Plato’s banishment of the μητικοί.

CONCLUSION
This paper has centered on Republic X and a notion of μητική developed therein. But Republic VI introduces another kind of mimesis; namely, that of the philosopher rulers:

No one whose thoughts are truly directed towards the things that are, Adeimantus, has the leisure to look down at human affairs or to be filled with envy and hatred by competing with people. Instead, 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 [μιμείσθαι] them and tries to become as like them as he can [μάλιστα ἀφομοιοῦσθαι]. … And if he should 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 [ὁμοιοργόν] of moderation, justice, and the whole of popular virtue? – He least of all. And when the majority realize that what we are saying about the philosopher is true, will they be harsh with him or mistrust us when we say that the city will never find happiness until its outline is sketched by painters who use the divine model [οἱ τῷ θείῳ παραδείγματι χρώμενοι ζωγράφοι]? …
And I suppose that, as they work, they’d look [ἀποβλέποιεν] 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 (500b7-501b6).

The philosopher king or queen is not unlike the demiurge of the *Timaeus*, who, in crafting the cosmos, imitates the “divine model” (that is, the Forms). I do not deny that mimesis of the Forms (with a view to producing sensible particulars) is a kind of “good mimesis,” analogical to (albeit distinct from) the concept of ‘mimesis’ developed in *Republic* III and X. What I deny is that such mimesis is the *only* form of good mimesis. The poetic mimesis of sensible particulars “as they are” - with a view to producing *correct* images of goods and bads - also constitutes good mimesis. Such “philosophic” mimesis would be careful to avoid deceptive contrasts that amplify goods and bads and would position human goods and bads in their rightful cosmic context.

However, philosophers are not in the business of composing poetry, despite their special cognitive access to the Forms. Possessing genuine knowledge of virtue and value, they devote their time to fine deeds rather than poetic images thereof (599a-b). Nevertheless, they supervise the poets, communicating to them correct opinions about virtue and value. So, Socrates declares at 379a:

> You and I, Adeimantus, aren’t poets, but we *are* founding a city. And it’s important for the founders to know the patterns on which the poets must base their stories and from which they mustn’t deviate. But we aren’t actually going to compose their poems for them (379a).

Thus, unsurprisingly, in *Republic* X Socrates anticipates the possibility of imitative painters consulting the makers of artifacts, so as to gain correct opinion regarding fine artifacts (601e-602a). Similarly, it seems, the kallipolis poets would consult the “craftsmen of the city’s freedom,” the philosopher kings and queens, who would communicate correct opinions about
virtue and value. Thus, knowledge of the Forms is not required of the good poet. To be sure, in an important sense, good poetic mimesis is grounded in the philosopher’s knowledge of the Forms, to the extent that philosophers supervise poets. Nevertheless, even if we depart with Plato on this point and insist that the good poet’s correct opinion need not be acquired through consultation with genuine “knowers of Forms,” Plato’s distinction between good and bad poetic mimesis still stands. It is not anchored to the theory of the Forms; it requires only that there be an objective sense in which an image can be said to be correct or incorrect. In other words, whether or not you believe in Forms, you can believe that skiagraphic techniques produces false appearances. Likewise, whether or not you believe in the Forms, you can believe that mixed pleasures produce hedonic illusions, in virtue of juxtaposing pleasure and pain. To be sure, you will only find these argument compelling so long as you think there is an objective answer to questions about goodness and badness, virtue and vice or pleasantness and painfulness; however, such a commitment to objectivity does not commit one to the theory of Forms. This focus on Forms has unfortunately obscured Plato’s compelling critique of tragedy as skiagraphic.

Why should we care about Socrates’ critique of poetry in Republic X, especially given that Republic X is commonly treated as a mere “excrescence” of the Republic proper. The critique of Greek poetry in Republic Book X is absolutely integral to the entire project of the Republic, which is not only to define justice and injustice but also to show how justice and injustice come about in cities and souls. The Republic’s constant preoccupation with the latter (and the role of poetry therein) is evidenced by both the drama and dialectic of the Republic itself: Socrates’ mildly menacing assailants on their way to a festival featuring poetic performances; Adeimantus’ complaint that Greek poets persuade the youth that justice is only instrumentally good; the guardians’ revisionist education in music and poetry; the place of poetic
images in the Cave analogy; the critique of Greek poetry in Book X; and finally the Myth of Er, which arguably operates as a kind of psychically beneficial “rewriting” of Homeric poetry.\textsuperscript{viii}

\textit{Republic X}, as I have interpreted it, clarifies the nature of Plato’s preoccupation with poetry in the \textit{Republic}. Images do not pose a threat to justice; rather, false, skiagraphic appearances of virtue and value do, so long as they are permitted to freely circulate in the culture. Although we are bound to disagree with Plato’s authoritarian solution to this problem, we can surely appreciate the problem itself – even if we, like the Lovers of Sights and Sounds, deny the existence of the Forms.

\footnotesize{
\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{1} Unless otherwise noted, I use the following translation of Plato’s \textit{Republic} throughout: G.M.A. Grube (trans.) and C.D.C. Reeve (rev.), \textit{Republic} (Hackett, 1992). I depart with Grube and Reeve in translating “σκιαγραφία” as “skiagraphia,” rather than “trompe l’oeil.”
\item \textsuperscript{iv} In Book X Socrates declares that only “hymns to the Gods” and “eulogies to good people” are permitted in the kallipolis (607a2-4). As Burnyeat points out, Greek hymns include long “engaging narratives” with “lots of mimesis,” and encomia would likely include adventure stories. See M. Burnyeat, ‘Art and Mimesis in Plato’s \textit{Republic},’ in A. Denham (ed.), \textit{Plato on Art and Beauty} (Palgrave, 2012), 54-71.
\item \textsuperscript{v} The \textit{Republic} itself is further proof that Plato approves of some forms of literary mimesis. C. Meinwald, ‘Reason v. Literature in Plato’s \textit{Republic: Does the Dialogue Rule Itself Out},’ \textit{AP} 31.1 (2011), 25-45 argues that the \textit{Republic} meets its own criteria for good mimesis.
\item \textsuperscript{vi} Socrates does not explicitly limit the subject matter of painting to artifacts and craftsmen. However, he describes the painter as painting artifacts and craftsmen in order to preserve the analogy with poetry; painters represent craftsmen producing artifacts, and poets represent agents “producing” actions. See especially 599b.
\item \textsuperscript{vii} Cf. \textit{Rep.} 603c and 604d-e. The poet also produces appearances of characters through representing agents in action.
\item \textsuperscript{viii} According to Socrates, the carpenter’s bed is a “dark affair” [ἀμφότερον τι] compared to the “truth” – i.e., the Form of the bed.
\item \textsuperscript{xii} Moss, \textit{What is Imitative Poetry and Why is it Bad} compellingly argues this point.
\item \textsuperscript{xiii} I emphasize this point, because a common caricature of Plato goes something like this: Plato defends the view that poetry and painting imitate sensible particulars, not intelligible reality (e.g., J. Perry, J. and K. Taylor, ‘Poetry as}
\end{itemize}
}
Determining the nature of the imitative poet’s cognitive access to ancient events is not immediately relevant to Socrates’ project, which is to show how imitative poetry corrupts the soul. However, even if the Muses give imitative poets cognitive access to the past, the imitative poets, lacking knowledge of human value and virtue, nevertheless misinterpret ancient events. See C. Collobert, ‘Poetry As Flawed Reproduction: Possession and Mimesis’, in P. Destrée and F. Herrmann (edd.), Plato and the Poets (Brill, 2011), 41-62 and, more recently, P. Murray, ‘Poetic Inspiration’, in P. Destrée and P. Murray (edd.), A Companion to Ancient Aesthetics (Wiley, 2015), 158-74. Murray argues that, for Plato, the passive nature of inspiration makes it incompatible with knowledge possession.

While Socrates targets epic and comic poetry as well, he does so by drawing quick analogies between them and tragedy. See especially Rep. 598d and 606c. For a fuller defense of this point, see Moss, What is Imitative Poetry and Why is it Bad? and Belfiore, Plato’s Greatest Accusation Against Poetry. A. Nehamas, Plato on the Triviality of Literature argues that imitative poetry cannot corrupt the soul (despite Socrates’ statements to the contrary), because imitative poetry copies the look of sensible particulars and is therefore “trivial.”

Here I diverge from Grube and Reeve 1992, which translates “τοῦτο γὰρ ἐτὶ διόρισον” as “you must be clear about that.” What is the nature of the distinction between imitating the bed “as it is” and “as it appears”? The temptation is to suppose that imitating the bed “as it is” is to imitate the Form of the bed. But Socrates clearly asks of the works of craftsmen whether or not they are imitated “as they are” or “as they appear.”

The mirror analogy brings out this general feature of all mimesis – i.e., that it produces appearances, rather than artifacts. In other words, the mirror analogy is not really an essential part of Socrates’ critique of the tragedians, and with good reason. For if tragedians are like men with mirrors, then their work is trivial, not corruptive.


C. Shaw, ‘Poetry and Hedonic Error in Plato’s Republic’, Phronesis 61 (2016), 373-96 argues for a strong continuity between the two books. According to Shaw, Republic X completes Book IX’s analysis of pleasure by examining a mixed pleasure of the soul; namely, “tragic pleasure.” In Shaw’s view, tragic pleasure involves the juxtaposition of painful grief with the dual pleasures of admiring the hero and appreciating the formal elements of the poem. While I agree with Shaw’s claim that juxtaposition is key to the experience of tragedy (as Socrates understands it), I deny that the experience of tragedy is that of tragic pleasure (as Shaw understands it). I also deny that Book X, like the Philebus, is in the business of classifying a mixed pleasure of the soul. In my view, the central experience of tragedy is that of pleasurable lamentation, and the relevant juxtapositions are those of the hero’s virtue and vice and fortune and misfortune. In effect, I am arguing for a weaker continuity between Books IX and X:

Socrates imports the skiagraphia analogy from Book IX (where it is applied to pleasure) and applies it to tragedy in Book X.

Book III is concerned with mimetic impersonation, whereas Book X is concerned with the production of mimetic appearances. This should come as no surprise, given that Book III addresses the guardians’ education, which would have involved reciting and performing poetry (as was common educational practice in ancient Greece).

The terms “εἰςδοξα,” “φαντάσματα” and “φαντασμα” often denote deceptive or spurious images (Janaway, Images of Excellence: Plato’s Critique of the Arts, 110-11 and Halliwell, Republic X with Translation and Commentary, 118-19).

These points about variability will become important later, in developing the skiagraphia analogy.

I use the Greek term “μιμητικοί” throughout (rather than “imitators”), in order to keep clear my earlier point that Socrates does not target any and all imitation. Μιμητικοί are practitioners of a deceptive “τέχνη of imitation,” as


See respectively E. Keuls, Plato and Greek Painting (Brill, 1978) and E.G. Pemberton, ‘A Note on Skiagraphia’, AJA 80.1 (1976), 82-4.

The expansion of the traditional color palate was also important in this transition to representing reality as it appears. See H. Brecoulaki, ‘Greek Painting and the Challenge of Mimesis’, in P. Destré and P. Murray (edd.), A Companion to Ancient Aesthetics (Wiley, 2015), 223-31.

The Philebus passages never use the term “skiagraphia”; however, the technique described at Phil. 42b-c matches perfectly with skiagraphia as it is described at Rep. 584-586. What is more, both texts apply skiagraphia to an analysis of mixed pleasure. For Plato’s suspicion of skiagraphia, see M.M Sassi, ‘Perceiving Colors’, in P. Destré and P. Murray (edd.), A Companion to Ancient Aesthetics (Wiley, 2015), 262-73 and Brecoulaki, Greek Painting and the Challenge of Mimesis.

Plantzos, Wall- and Panel-Painting claims skiagraphia was popular and blames the lack of extant skiagraphia on the fact that it commonly adorned walls and panels, which, unlike Greek sculpture and vase-paintings, disintegrated with the buildings it once decorated.

There is a long history of debate over what Socrates means by “is truly” [ἀληθῶς εἶναι] a carpenter. The Greek is consistent with either an ontological or veridical interpretation of “ἀληθῆς εἶναι.” So, Socrates could be referring to skiagraphic painting so as to make the point that foolish people mistake the painting of a carpenter for a real life carpenter. See Halliwell, Plato: Republic with Translation and Commentary, 119-20 and Janaway, Images of Excellence: Plato’s Critique of the Arts, 134 for this “ontological” interpretation. Alternatively, Socrates could be making the point that foolish people mistake the painting of a carpenter for a correct representation of a carpenter. See Belfiore, Plato’s Greatest Accusation Against Poetry, 40-50 and Moss, What is Imitative Poetry and Why is it Bad?, 422-23 for this “veridical” interpretation. My own suspicion is that Socrates intentionally trades on this ambiguity, in order to develop the analogy with poetry. Poetry involves veridical deception, because the audience is deceived into believing that Homer correctly represents virtue.

In the literature the temptation has been to invoke the Sophist’s distinction between φανταστική and εἰκοστική. Whereas the latter produces an actual likeness of the object, the former “abandons truth” and produces an apparent likeness of the object (235c-236c). See especially N. Notomi, ‘Image-Making in Republic X and the Sophist’, in P. Destré & F. Herrmann (edd.), Plato and the Poets (Brill, 2011), 299-326. However, not only does the Sophist never mention skiagraphia, the technique of the phantastic artist is different – i.e., distorting the proportions of the original in order to accommodate the perspective of the viewer, who is situated far below the artwork.

Even here there are parallels. As I have said, skiagraphic painting and imitative poetry both produce illusions of fineness; for example, the painter produces the illusion of fine artifacts (601b-602a). Moreover, as we will see, both skiagraphia and tragedy produce illusions of intensity or magnitude.

The analysis of mixed pleasure is interesting, in that Socrates initially categorizes such “so-called pleasures” as mere “relief from pain” (584c). However, the remainder of the analysis tacitly acknowledges that such pleasures are pleasures, albeit “less true” than unmixxed pleasures. The Philebus echoes and even sharpens this point, especially at 42b-c (which I will consider shortly).

Notice, Plutarch also uses “ἀποχράτινο” to describe skiagraphia. See footnote 28.

See Keuls, Plato and Greek Painting, who argues that skiagraphia produced illusions of color intensity.


This is not to deny that the audience has an active role in constructing such illusions, but rather to point out that,
in the tragedy case, the artist also has an active role in constructing illusions. See Harte, Republic X and the Role of the Audience in Art.


xliii Grand-Clemént writes of poikilia: “… the fine play of colors and patterns intrigues and makes one wish to uncover the secret of its making. That is what lies behind the expression *thauma idesthai*. Wonder springs from the knowledge that beyond the apparent confusion there is order and rules, thought up by a skilful demiurge whose heroic or divine prototype could be Daedalus, Hephaestus, or Prometheus. The effect of *poikilia* induces an entrapment of the eye caused by the interplay of chromatic contrasts animating the patterns” (‘Poikilia’, 413).

xliv The tragedian also appeals to a part of the soul whose character is *ποικίλον*. Again, this points to the spectator’s role in constructing agathological and axiological illusions. See footnote 40.

xlv From Republic 379d to 391e there are sixteen references to Achilles or his speeches, fourteen of which are critical. A. Hobbs, Plato and the Hero (CUP, 2000) emphasizes this point. However, she sees Achilles as the exemplar of the timocratic character.


xlvii The tragedian produces a mixed pleasure in his audience; namely, the mixed pleasure of lamentation.


† The primary defender of MI, Jessica Moss, is not explicit about the sense in which sensibles or appearances are “changing, varied and contradictory” (What is Imitative Poetry and Why is it Bad?). Are sensibles and appearances “changing, varied and contradictory” with respect to other sensibles and appearances (respectively) or with respect to themselves (or both)?


lii See V. Harte, ‘Plato’s Metaphysics’, in G Fine (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Plato* (OUP, 2008), 191-216 for an argument against the view that sensibles distort or misrepresent the Forms. If Harte is right about this (and I think she is), then MI loses even more traction: mimetic appearances are not false in virtue of distorting their originals in the same way that sensibles distort Forms.

liii Asmis, Art and Morality suggests that Plato promotes reformed poetry comprised of “likenesses” [*eikóνες*] of virtue. “Poet-technicians” (who follow the prescriptions of others regarding virtue) and “poet-creators” (who discover true virtue themselves) produce reformed poetry. However, her analysis is a broad analysis of Plato’s works, rather than a focused analysis of Republic X.

liv Why isn’t mimesis of Forms (which involves producing sensibles, not images) included in Republic X’s discussion of mimesis, given that the stated aim of the discussion is to define “mimesis in general”? Strangely, Book X’s categorization of “makers” would classify both the philosopher king and the demiurge as “craftsmen” in contrast to “imitators.” Both look to the Forms with a view to producing sensibles. (In a similar vein, the carpenter looks to the Form of the couch with a view to producing the sensible couch.) Possibly, in setting out to define “μιμητικὴ δόλως” Socrates means to define what is “wholly” and “completely” mimesis. Certainly, the demiurge and philosopher king are mimetic in some respects, but (unlike the poet) they are genuinely “craftsmanlike” in other respects (i.e., in virtue of producing sensible artifacts reflective of Forms). So, they are not completely mimetic and hence fall outside of the Republic X discussion.

lv To be sure, a philosopher’s pleasures are superior because they involve being filled with Forms. However, importantly, the tyrant’s pleasures are not grossly inferior because they involve being filled with images, but rather because they are thoroughly *skiagraphic* and, as a result, hedonically *false*. This criticism of the tyrant’s pleasures survives, whether or not we accept Forms.

lv I might object that my interpretation fails to reconcile the differing accounts of “μιμητική” or “imitativeness” in Republic X and III. In other words, how does the practice of copying appearances (as articulated in Republic X) connect with μιμητική as it is defined in Republic III; namely, seriously impersonating (in voice and body) many different characters, both good and bad? (As I have noted on p. 2, impersonation is nonequivalent to μιμητική, because impersonation of good characters is permitted and even encouraged, whereas poetic μιμητική is banned. See Belfiore, A Theory of Imitation in *Plato’s Republic* for the view that μιμητική essentially involves being “multiply
imitative” – i.e., imitating everything and anything. Ferrari, *Plato and Poetry*, 118-119 helpfully develops Belfiore’s view, adding that μιμητική involves “seriously” [σπουδῇ] impersonating multiple characters – i.e., impersonating them in a non-satirical way. While more needs to be said about what constitutes serious impersonation, this interpretation has the benefit of explaining why Socrates permits unserious, “playful” impersonation of bad characters [396d4-e1, 397a3].) First, it must be noted that Book III is concerned with mimetic impersonation, whereas Book X is concerned with the production of mimetic appearances. This should come as no surprise, given that Book III addresses the guardians’ education, which would have involved reciting and performing poetry (as was common educational practice in ancient Greece). (See E. Havelock, *Preface to Plato* (HUP, 1963) for the nature of this common Greek educational practice, which involved impersonating poetry characters.) Thus, in Book III Socrates explores the effects of μιμητική on the μιμητικός – i.e., on the individual who, in reciting an performing poetry, impersonates various characters. The worry is that the μιμητικός becomes the multifarious, vicious characters she imitates. This difference in emphasis (between the two books) does not itself entail a splintering in in the concept of μιμητική.” Rather, impersonation and the production of appearances are two aspects of the very same practice. In “seriously impersonating” a tragic hero the actor (or poet) produces the appearance of a virtuous man undergoing terrible misfortune (603c). (In calling the poet an impersonator, Socrates is thinking about actors as extensions of the poet. Burnyeat remarks that Plato intends “this picture of the poet sprouting extensions of himself and his voice all over the theater” as grotesque [Art and Mimesis in Plato’s Republic, 61].) Put simply, impersonation is the medium through which performed or recited poetry produces its appearances. (This is not to say that imitative poetry communicates its appearances through impersonation exclusively, since Socrates recognizes musical mode and meter as distinct forms of mimesis [Rep. 399a-400a].) To be sure, more needs to be said about how “serious” impersonation departs from “playful” impersonation, such that the former (and not the latter) produces false appearances of virtue and value. However, there is no prima facie reason to suppose that such an explanation cannot be provided. In any case, the dominant interpretive strategy (i.e., PI and MI) shares the problem of unifying the discussions of μιμητική in Books III and X.


See Destreé, ‘Plato on Tragic and Comic Pleasures’, in A. Denham (ed.), *Plato on Art and Beauty* (Palgrave, 2012), 125-41. One exciting consequence of my interpretation is that it also removes an obstacle to understanding Plato’s dialogues as “good” or “revised” dramatic poetry. See S. Jansen, ‘Plato’s *Phaedo* as a Pedagogical Drama’, *AP* 33.2 (2013), 333-52 for the view that Plato intends the *Phaedo* as revised poetry. Interestingly, the *Phaedo* does exactly what my interpretation of reformed poetry predicts: it represents Socrates’ character as uniform