

## POETRY IN REPUBLIC BOOK 10

## WHAT WE LEARN FROM BOOK 10

1. It explains Plato's objections to imitative poetry, renewing and deepening the arguments of books 2 & 3.
2. It is an example of how the *Republic's* epistemology, metaphysics, and psychology can be used to offer a sophisticated analysis of a specific practical problem.
3. It gives a more detailed examination, by example, of the principal source of ethical error and corruption—that is, of what explains the majority of people's ethical beliefs (i.e. ethical *eikasia*).

## THE STRUCTURE OF BOOK 10

PART ONE (595A–603A): an account of 'what imitation in general is', largely using the example of painting

The conclusion Plato wishes to reach in part one is that 'imitation is [A] an inferior thing that [B] consorts with another inferior thing to [C] produce an inferior offspring' (603B).

[A] The ontological [1] and epistemological [2–4] inferiority of imitations and imitator

596A–597E: [1] Hierarchy of Form of a couch, particular couch, & painting of a couch. Imitation produces something 'at a third remove from the truth', an image of an image of the Form.

597E–598D: [2] Apparent couch versus real couch. Certain properties of the real couch—like its shape or size—are misrepresented in perception, so this is an appearance of the couch, not the real couch. Imitators not only produce, but also *imitate* appearances. Imitators understand (or at least need to understand, in order to imitate) only appearances, not ordinary particulars, let alone Forms.

598D–601B: [3] The conclusion of [2] is tested with the example of the most renowned poetic imitator, Homer. A variety of arguments are given for the conclusion that he lacked knowledge of what he imitated.

601B–602C: [4] User–maker–imitator. The value of each thing is 'related to nothing but the use for which it is made or naturally adapted.' User knows (through use); maker has true beliefs (by consulting the user); and imitator has false belief (since he neither uses nor consults the user).

[B] That imitation affects a non-rational part of the soul

602C–603A: [5] Visual illusion argument. Similar to the book 4 partition arguments, but with opposing beliefs rather than desires. Appearances—and imitations, as one kind of appearance—invariably mislead our non-rational parts, since they lack the calculation needed to see through them.

The 'inferior offspring', [C], is false belief. Note that both [A] and [B] are required: without [A], imitations might have an edifying effect on our non-rational parts; without [B], we might not be taken in by imitations.

PART TWO (603B–608B): direct examination of imitative poetry, through an analysis of grief

603B–604D: [6] Another book 4 style partition argument. A decent man, following basic arguments, grieves quietly, but to do so he must hold back a desire to grieve excessively. The part that tends us towards excessive grief is a non-rational part; the part that 'follows calculation' is the rational part.

605A–C: [7] Short but important: imitation has difficulty representing a quietly grieving character, but easily represents excessive grief. Note: it represents it as how one *ought* to grieve. Thus, it appeals to the non-rational part of the soul that is attracted to excessive grief. (Compare [5].)

605C–606D: [8] The 'greatest charge' against imitative poetry: it corrupts even decent people. Two parts: first, a psychological account of why a decent person, who rightly disapproves of excessive grief, wrongly thinks it safe to enjoy poetic representations of such grief; second, an account of how poetry's false representation of how we ought to grieve corrupts us—it bypasses our more guarded rational part, goes directly to our more gullible non-rational part, and strengthens its passions so that it causes us, first, to act akratically and, next, to believe in accord with its passions.

606D–608B: [9] Concluding remarks