IMAGES AND IMAGINATION IN PHILOSOPHY AND POLITICS:
A STUDY OF PLATO’S DIVIDED LINE

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Abstract

Images and imagination are both epistemologically and politically significant in the image of the divided line that Plato has Socrates present at the end of Book VI of the Republic (509d1-511e6). I argue that the twofold nature of images and imagination on the divided line sheds insight into Plato’s theory of the forms. And I argue that, according to Plato, images play an important role in the initial formation of ethical and political outlooks. This implies that the divided line as an image itself is being offered by Plato in an attempt to alter our ethical and political imaginations, and turn us away from the dream-like state wherein images are all that exist in politics, and towards the idea of the good as the model for our judgments.

Les images et l’imagination sont épistémologiquement et politiquement importantes à l’image de la ligne divisée que Platon fait présenter par Socrate à la fin du livre VI de la République (509d1-511e6). L’argument développé ci-dessous avance que la double nature des images et de l’imagination permet de révéler certains aspects de la théorie des formes de Platon. L’argument soutient aussi que, selon Platon, les images jouent un rôle important dans le processus de formation initial des idées et opinions éthiques et politiques. Ceci implique que la ligne divisée en tant qu’image elle-même est offerte par Platon en guise de tentative d’alterer nos idées (c’est-à-dire nos ‘impressions’) éthiques et politiques, et de nous pousser à quitter l’état de somnolence rêveuse dans lequel nous nous imaginons que les images sont tout ce qui existe en politique, vers l’idée de bien comme modèle à suivre lors de nos jugements.
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I. INTRODUCTION

The divided line is a central image that is presented by Socrates in attempt to explain the idea of the good (hē tou agathou idea) to his interlocutors in Book VI of Plato’s Republic (509d1-511e6).\footnote{All citations of Plato’s Republic, unless otherwise noted, come from Plato, The Republic of Plato, Second Edition, trans. Allan Bloom (New York: Basic Books, 1991). All in-text citations of page numbers refer to the Stephanus page numbers indicated in the aforementioned edition.} In brief, Socrates describes a line divided into four parts – two of them are visible (horatos) and two of them are intelligible (noētos) (509d1-6). Within the visible, first there are images, which, Socrates notes, refer first to shadows (skias), then to the appearances (fantasmata) in water and on such close-grained, smooth, and bright things, and all things such as this (509e1-510a2).\footnote{Notably, these are all natural images: they are produced by the light of the sun or materials found in nature that possess reflective qualities. Some argue that Socrates is referring to a limited kind of image that does not include man-made images such as artistic creations (paintings, poems, statues) (such a reading is proposed by Linda Viktoria Andersson, “Plato’s Political Imagination,” [M.A. Thesis, McGill University, 2006], 18). However, in just a few lines Socrates’ offers the image of the cave in which humans are carrying artifacts that produce shadows on the wall of the cave (514b7-10). This shows that the apparent naturalness of the images in this first segment of the line does not disqualify images of human creations from being included. Examples of such human creations include images such as shadow-paintings (skiagraphian), which are a kind of rough sketch, designed to produce an effect at a distance.\footnote{Adeimantus mentions shadow-paintings earlier in Book II regarding his appearance of virtue (365c3). This implies that abstract concepts such as virtue can be put into images. Further, it is necessary to include images of writings or letters (eikōnas grammatōn) that appear in water or in mirrors that Socrates brings up in Book III in a direct reference to the divided line (402b5-6).\footnote{The idea that writing is an image of thought is proposed in other of Plato’s works – namely, in the Phaedrus and in Plato’s Letters. Images of letters (grammata), however, have a special place in the Republic: Socrates first justifies the project of the Republic by comparing big letters to a city, in contrast to little letters and a soul (368d-369a). This comparison leads him to suggest the construction of a city in speech (logos) (369a5-6), which comprises the rest of the dialogue. Hence, in addition to natural artefacts, man-made creations, shadow-paintings, and letters and writings, images in speech also belong in the first segment of the divided line.\footnote{In general, then, it is best to not leave out any kind of image from this first segment based on certain qualifications (i.e. apparent naturalness) that Socrates gives. While these qualifications are important to recognize, they do not necessarily limit the kinds of images that belong to this segment.}}}

Second in the realm of the visible are the...
things that the images are like (to hōi touto eoiken) (510a4-6). In the intelligible realm, the two segments describe two kinds of investigations done by the soul. The first represents that in which the soul, using as images the things previously imitated, is forced to investigate from hypotheses (hypothesis). From this, it proceeds to an end (teleutēn) and not to a beginning (archē) (510b). The second and final segment of the divided line is where the soul starts out from hypotheses and makes its way to the beginning (archē) that is free from hypotheses (anupotheton) and images. It then investigates by means of the forms, through the forms (510b-c). As Socrates explains to Glaucon, this segment is where speech or reason (logos), by the use of dialectic (dialegesthai) and hypotheses as steppingstones and springboards, grasps the first principle or beginning (archē) (511b).

3 This is rather obscure, at least to Glaucon, so Socrates uses the example of mathematicians to make his point more easily comprehensible. Mathematicians such as geometers and calculators make certain assumptions in their work. They assume, for example, the truth of numbers, the existence of odd and even, the geometrical figures, the different kinds of angles, and so on. They treat these as known and use them as hypotheses. And so, without giving a further account of their hypotheses (which Socrates' notes disapprovingly), they proceed with their investigations and reach their intended ends (510c). On top of this, they use visible forms such as drawings and moldings of squares, triangles, diagonals, and other shapes. These shapes that they mould and draw are the original material things from the visible realm. They are now used by mathematicians as images to make their arguments about the original intelligible objects (510d-e). For example, a drawn square is used for the sake of examining the form of the square itself, which is a purely intelligible object. They do this in seeking to see those things that one can see in no other way than with thought (dianoia) – i.e. forms. However this form of the intelligible poses a limitation to the soul’s investigations because, by using hypotheses, it cannot go beyond these hypotheses towards a beginning.

4 In other words, through the use of reasoning and dialectic, assumptions can be questioned and shed in order for us to grasp the beginning – first principle, cause, ruler – which is free from assumption and is the starting-point of all. Following from this, once the true beginning has been grasped, reason can depend on this beginning and proceed back down (katabainē) again to the end – using nothing sensible (aisthētos), but with the forms themselves, through them, to them, and ending in them.
Corresponding to these four segments are four affections (*pathêma*) arising in the soul (511d6-8). Starting from the lowest, these are imagination (*eikasia*), trust or faith (*pistis*), thought (*dianoia*), and intellection (*noêsis*) (511d8-511e2). These states and their related segments are arranged in degrees of truth and clarity, ranging from lowest and most obscure to the truest and clearest. Hence, the line can be represented in the following way:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Realm</th>
<th>Objects</th>
<th>Methods of investigation</th>
<th>Affection of the soul</th>
<th>Power/ability of the soul</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Intelligible</td>
<td><em>Idea of the good/archê, then forms</em></td>
<td>Dialectic</td>
<td>Intellection/Knowledge</td>
<td>Intellection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Intelligible objects, forms</td>
<td>Hypotheses</td>
<td>Thought</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visible</td>
<td>Visible Objects</td>
<td></td>
<td>Trust</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Images, shadows, reflections</td>
<td></td>
<td>Imagination</td>
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The divided line is a brilliantly constructed image. The passage in which this image is presented has long been viewed as one of the key passages in which Plato attempts to explain his theory of the forms. However the divided line itself, as a unique depiction of ontology and epistemology, has long been puzzled over.
by scholars and commentators. As Plutarch curiously inquired of Plato, “What, then, did he have in mind when he cut the whole into unequal segments?”

Rather than seeking, like Plutarch, to determine what exactly Plato had in mind, this study explores the role of images and their corresponding state of the soul, imagination, as depicted on the divided line. There are two questions that guide this study: first, how do images, as represented by the lowest segment of the line, relate to philosophy and the study of the good, of which the divided line is an image? Second, how does the divided line, as an image, relate to the political project of the Republic? Or, in starker terms, what is (or ought to be) the relationship between philosophy and politics according to Plato, and how does an image such as the divided line help us to understand this relationship?

I shall argue that images are not pernicious hindrances to philosophic thought, as some – including Socrates, when he describes the old quarrel between philosophy and poetry in Book X of the Republic (607b5) – may want to suggest. Rather, images can be used as aids to philosophic thought. Plato gives us perfect examples of this when he uses images such as the sun, the divided line, and the allegory of the cave, to express the idea of the good and the necessary philosophical education towards it. Images such as these appear vividly in our imaginations and are memorable. And, as these images illustrate, images can be

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used to express philosophic content that might otherwise have been too abstract to grasp.

On the divided line in particular, images play an important epistemological role. The divided line shows how to grasp what images are and how they relate to their originals. I argue that this relationship needs to be seen in terms of both similarity and difference. Grasping this allows us to further see how the visible realm relates to the intelligible realm. In Book V, Socrates establishes different degrees of reality between the sensible world of the many and the intelligible world of the forms (476e7-480a13). He then further elaborates on these issues in the divided line in Book VI with the analogy of images. Grasping the role of images on the divided line can help us to further grasp an aspect of Plato’s theory of the forms.

Understanding the role of images can also help us understand the state of the soul of imagination (eikasia), which is the state of the soul that corresponds to the images found in the bottom segment of the line. Imagination, I shall argue, is not mistaking an image for an original, as some commentators have it; that is what Socrates calls dreaming (476c). Instead, imagination is visual double-seeing of an image as an image and as an image of an original. In other words, it is seeing both visible likenesses and distinctions between an image and its original. A similar kind of double-seeing also occurs in thought – though instead of seeing visible similarities and difference, in thought we can “see” those that are invisible. In other words, imagination is both similar to and different from thought when it comes to double-seeing visible or intelligible relations.
Images and imagination also play an important role in the political sphere, according to the argument of the Republic. Images first shape our worldviews and form the first basis of our moral judgments. Plato makes this clear through the actions and expressed beliefs of Cephalus in Book I (330d-e), and the preliminary outlooks of Glaucon and Adeimantus that they articulate at the beginning of Book II (358e-367e). The education of the guardians in the constructed city-in-speech also gives prime of place to images as the first factor that shapes the moral character of the guardians (377a-e). And, as shown through the allegory of the cave, political life largely consists of debating about different images – images of justice, or images of goodness – that are shown by the puppeteers (514a-515c). But, as Plato shows with images such as the divided line, this need not be all that inform political life. Instead, by asserting that there is an objective moral standard in the idea of the good, and by showing education towards the good, Plato shows how there can be more to political and ethical life that just debating images and shadows. In other words, Plato actually uses an image – the divided line – to teach his readers something about the necessity of starting with images for education and politics, and about the potential dangers these images can pose to these very practices.

My approach to this study involves a close-reading of the text as well as a broader view of the dialogue as a whole. On the one hand, I think that it is important to closely follow what Plato has written and attend to the distinctions that he makes, rather than mixing categories that ought not to be mixed (my point about the difference between imagining and dreaming emphasizes this quite
strongly). On the other hand, I also freely draw on many different passages in the dialogue in order to demonstrate points about the divided line – for I also think that a reading of the divided line that only closely attends to what is written in the passage in Book VI misses important points that come from the larger context of the dialogue. Hence, a methodological approach that combines these two by attending to the text but also providing a wider context seems to be the best way to analyse the divided line, and this is what I have tried to do. I also look to other scholarly accounts of the divided line and the role of images in Plato’s philosophy, for my study of the divided line and the role of images therein is by no means the first. The literature on the divided line alone is vast, and I have attempted to make my study as comprehensive as possible. However, this must necessarily have certain boundaries so I have limited my research to two main kinds of scholarship: first, I have covered some of the seminal commentaries on the Republic, including those of Nettleship (1897), Adam (1902), Cross and Woozley (1966), and Annas (1981). Second, I have covered much of the literature on the divided line from the past century, particularly emphasizing articles that deal with the role of images and imagination on the divided line. Covering both kinds of scholarship has allowed me to engage in some of the major debates about the divided line, as well as with some of the canonical interpretations of the place of the divided line within the Republic. Again, I have found this to be an appropriate methodological approach for its attention to both the particular debates and issues of the divided line and the wider context of Plato scholarship.
In order to demonstrate the argument introduced above, this thesis will be divided into two chapters. In the first chapter, I address images and imagining. I survey previous scholarship on the question of the role of images on the divided line, dividing it into two main traditions of interpretation that either sees images as generally negative or positive in Plato’s philosophy. Following this, I present my analysis, which largely agrees with the second, more positive interpretation of images. I offer a detailed account of what makes an image an image and how perceiving this can help us better grasp their place on the divided line. I then show how the relationship between images and their originals corresponds to the relationship between visible originals and intelligibles by analysing the relationship between the second and third segments of the divided line. Moreover, by demonstrating that the activity of imagining involves a kind of double-seeing, I am then able to show how the notion of “double-seeing” also illuminates an important aspect of the activity of intellection.

In the second chapter, I discuss the divided line as a political image. I argue that the divided line is politically important as an image of the guardians’ education. On top of this, I show how the divided line, as an image, is inherently political according to the argument of the role of images in the Republic. I show that the divided line is, indeed, a multifaceted political image that Plato uses to alter our ethical opinions, how we think of political leadership, and how we conceive of the realm of politics as such.
II. What are images? What is imagination?

In this chapter, I re-evaluate the bottom segment of the divided line where Plato has Socrates place images (*eikōnes*) and imagining (*eikasia*). After assessing how others have interpreted the bottom segment of the line, I offer an interpretation that shows how imagination is used on the divided line to connect the visible realm to the intelligible realm of forms. To demonstrate the connection between imagination and thought, it will first be necessary to set down what it means for an image to be an image. I show that images are like their originals in a similar way that visible objects are like their intelligible forms. Hence the kind of apprehension that is done by imagination can be related to the kind of understanding that is necessary to move from sensation and perception to thinking and intellection. Second, I demonstrate that imagination has two roles with respect to images, based on the twofold nature of images themselves. On the one hand, imagining involves the perception of similarities, commonalities, and features that images share with their originals. On the other hand, imagining involves the perception of the difference between an image and its original. By showing the connection between images and forms, and by explaining the function of imagination when it comes to perceiving images in their double nature, I show that the bottom segment is of both metaphysical and epistemological importance in Plato’s thought. This claim will be furthered in the next chapter, where I shall show how Plato’s use of images works in the political realm.
Traditionally, there are two ways that interpreters of the divided line understand the first segment of the divided line. First, there are those who assert that Plato thinks images mask the truth and that they are problematic when it comes to knowledge and thought. Corresponding to this, the state of the soul that perceives and responds to images (i.e. imagination) is one of confusion, mistakenness, or illusion. This interpretation of images and imagination rests on equating the bottom segment of the line with the enchained prisoners in the cave, who know nothing but the shadows on the wall and hence believe that they are the truth (515c1-2). The images of the bottom segment of the divided line are equated with the shadows of artificial things, and imagination is equated with the prisoners’ state of confusion or ignorance about the truth.

This interpretation of the bottom segment of the divided line was established by early twentieth-century scholars such as Nettleship (1897), Adam (1902), and Boyd (1902). It was taken up by later scholars including (but not limited to) Cross and Woozley (1966), Hamlyn (1958), Murdoch (1977), and Annas (1981). By presenting a brief synopsis of each scholar’s account of the bottom segment of the divided line, it should be clear that all of these authors have a common reading of images as problematic in some specific way, and a common view of imagination as a state of confusion.

Nettleship (1897) claims that, “The most superficial view of the world, that which conveys least knowledge of it, is called by Plato εἰκασία.”⁶ In this

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state, according to Nettleship, one does not have knowledge. Rather, he thinks that imagining is making guesses about the appearances being perceived. It is necessary to guess or imagine because perceptions are unclear. In order to fill in the gaps in missing or unclear data, or (in other words) in order to make sense of one’s perceptions, a bit of guesswork is needed. Thus, according to Nettleship, imagination describes a state of conjecture about perceptions. Corresponding to this state of conjecture, Nettleship draws attention to the unclear and uncertain nature of the objects being perceived. He writes, “Why does [Plato] describe this lowest group of objects as shadows and reflections? Shadows, images, and dreams are the most obvious types of unreality.”

Nettleship wants to establish that not only is the state of the soul uncertain as it is guessing, but the reason for this is the unclear, uncertain, and unreal nature of the objects being perceived. Hence, the bottom segment, according to Nettleship, is limited to uncertain perceptions of uncertain things. This leads one to accept that images are the things themselves (rather than just images of them). Nettleship writes that, “The moment a man knows that a shadow is only a shadow, or a picture only a picture, he is no longer in a state of ἐικασία in that particular respect.”

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7 Nettleship, Lectures, 242. In this quotation, Nettleship includes dreams where Plato did not. This is important because in Book V Socrates admits that “dreaming is believing a likeness to be not a likeness but rather the thing itself to which it is like” (476c). This makes it clear that dreaming is a certain state of confusion or mistakenness. However, I don’t think Socrates ever equates dreaming to imagining. Later in Book VII Socrates compares dreaming to being inside of the cave and fighting over shadows (520c-d). Hence, if we take the bottom segment of the divided line to correspond to the prisoners in the cave (which many scholars such as Nettleship do), we could equate dreaming and imagining. However, it’s not clear that Socrates ever makes this equation. I argue in the next chapter that the prisoners are dreaming not imagining based on the argument about imagining I make later in this chapter.

8 Nettleship, Lectures, 243.
for Nettleship, imagination only occurs when one perceives images and conjectures about them as if they were real things and not just images. This is not done in a way that leads to the realization that the image is of something, but in a way that takes the image as the original and forms beliefs based on this. Hence imagination according to Nettleship is a state of uncertainty that deals with unreal things.

Along the same lines, Adam (1902) asserts in his commentary on the divided line passage that,

> We may regard it as the normal condition of the average uneducated mind. εἰκασία is the state of mind in which εἰκόνες are held to be true. Here again, if εἰκόνες are strictly limited to images of ὑποτά, εἰκασία must be similarly confined in its scope, and loses all metaphysical interest and importance. But since the εἰκόνες are a lower grade of δοξαστά, εἰκασία should be understood as a lower variety of δόξα [...] viz. the state of mind which accepts as true that which is a copy of a copy (τρίτον πρὸς ἀλήθειαν)\(^9\)

This also takes imagination to be a simple and uneducated state, where one perceives images and thinks they are true. It is a passive state: there is no inquiry or spark of thought; rather, one just accepts the image which one passively receives as true. Notably, Adam argues that images are not limited to visible images, which is one of the claims that I argued in favour of in the previous chapter. Rather, images include other types of opinable objects, of a “lower

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\(^9\) James Adam, *The Republic of Plato* (Cambridge: University Press, 1902), accessed July 7, 2012, http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.04.0094%3Abook%3D6%3Asection%3D511E. It is interesting that, in the following sentence, Adam notes that, “In this sense εἰκασία (with a play on εἰκόνες) is a new coinage of Plato's.” Based on a bit of further investigation, it appears that eikasia is not a common or familiar word in ancient Greek: it is used mostly after Plato, by writers commenting on the divided line. This leads me to think that perhaps Plato invented the word or, as Adam suggests, at least coins a new meaning for it.
variety” (though he doesn’t give us examples of these). It follows, for Adam, that imagination is the epistemological state of opinion in which one holds metaphysically lower objects (i.e. images, pictures, myths, stories – the lower variety of opinables) to be true.

Boyd (1902) claims a similar pernicious role for images and the imagination as Nettleship and Adam. In his brief comments on the divided line, Boyd writes that the bottom segment “comprises the shadows and copies of actual things and even the things themselves only superficially known: the knowledge of these things is referred to a faculty of imagining or conjecture.”

Again, there are unreal shadows and superficial guesswork. Boyd goes so far as to call this a state of confusion and ignorance. This is inaccurate given that he has just noted that images and imagination are part of “the world of opinion,” and it has already been established that opinion is distinct from both ignorance and knowledge. Despite this inaccuracy, it is clear that Boyd holds a similar view as Adam and Nettleship on image and imagination: that they are of slim to no metaphysical and epistemological importance given that they provide superficial knowledge of superficial things.

Following these three early twentieth century Plato scholars, there have been several more recent interpreters who have read the bottom segment of the

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11 Boyd, An Introduction to the Republic, 90.

12 See previous chapter, Book V of the Republic, and Boyd’s own exposition of the passage on knowledge, opinion, and ignorance (72-77).
divided line similarly in terms of the philosophical limitations posed by images and imagination (i.e. that images are superficial and unreal and lead to confusion and mistaken understanding of reality). This similarity is why I have grouped them together, but it is important to note that there are also differences in their interpretations (detailed below) where later scholars correct the earlier scholars’ interpretations.

Cross and Woozley’s (1966) commentary on the Republic also supports the traditional view that imagination is the state of accepting images at face value and not realizing they are not entirely true. In their defence of this interpretation, they appeal to Plato’s description of dreaming at 476c: that dreaming is taking a likeness for the original. They argue that because mathematicians are said to be “dreaming about being” (533c), and because the segment of the line that represents mathematical studies is related to the lowest segment of the line, “this suggests that as the mathematician in some sense takes likeness for original, not realising that it is a likeness, so the man in the state of eikasia does the same.”

However, with this interpretation of imagination (as ignorantly mistaking an image for reality), Cross and Woozley argue against the earlier reading of imagination as guessing about the original through the images. They think that such conjecture implies recognizing that the image is an image of something and

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13 As I noted above, Nettleship also equates imagination with dreaming. But where he simply assumes the parallel without argument, Cross and Woozley do offer an argument for it. It is still notable that Socrates himself never explicitly makes the parallel and that even Cross and Woozley’s argument for it depends on a number of potentially tenuous connections.

this recognition, they insist, does not occur in imagination. Imagination is solely concerned with images, and accepts them at face value as reality. Cross and Woozley also draw a parallel between imagination and the state of mind of prisoners in the cave. As an example, they compare the unquestioning acceptance of shadows of justice and goodness that are offered by rhetoricians, sophists, and politicians to the state of imagination. Again, they claim that no questioning or guesswork happens in such a state. Imagination is simply the mistaken state of accepting images for their originals.

In his article on imagination in the *Republic*, Hamlyn (1958) builds on Nettleship, Adam, and Boyd. He adds that imagination can also be seen as an aesthetic worldview – aesthetic in the Greek sense of the word, meaning sense-perception. To this end, he asserts that imagination can be thinking that perceptions (and its currency of images and sensations) are what compose reality. He explains, “εἰκασία does not consist [...] merely in taking images as if they were realities in their own right, but in taking reality to consist only of what we would call ‘images.’ [...] εἰκασία, is in any case not merely the taking of images for originals, but the taking of what we call ‘images’ as all that there is.”¹⁵ This reading of imagination, which actually leads one to deny the existence of external reality, makes it a base state of the soul, according to Hamlyn. It is out of this base state that philosophic education leads us. Hamlyn does assert that this base state of imagination is the necessary starting point for education. But he also emphasizes that it is necessary that the enlightened person be freed from

It is through education that one recognizes that images are images of things – either dispelling confusion or forcing one to reject that perception of appearances is reality. In sum, Hamlyn adds a new way of interpreting the bottom segment of the line that is distinct from Nettleship, Adam, and Boyd who simply saw imagination as the mistaking of an image for its original, and hence as a hindrance to philosophy. For Hamlyn, imagination does lead to a certain kind of mistakenness but it can also be the first step in education. Thus he maintains a low epistemological value for images, but his reading is more ambiguous towards images than the strictly negative readings of previous commentators.

Murdoch (1977) argues that Plato condemns images and imagination as confusing and dangerous. She describes imagination as “the lowest and more irrational kind of awareness [...] a state of vague, image-ridden illusion.”\(^\text{17}\) Such a description echoes Nettleship’s earlier claims that both the state of the soul and its objects are vague and uncertain, and that this state is one of vagueness and illusion. But Murdoch goes further to assert that art and images are falsehoods that intentionally cause delusion and hinder knowledge. Art can be seen as dangerous to philosophy because it offers falsehoods as truths (or might even trivialize the idea that truth exists), and is able to delude men into thinking they possess knowledge and truth. She claims that Plato’s recognition of this danger

\(^{16}\) “It was an essential part of Plato’s view of education [...] without it there would be nothing from which to be freed” (Hamlyn, “Eikasia”, 23).

\(^{17}\) Iris Murdoch, \textit{The Fire and the Sun: Why Plato Banished the Artists} (Oxford: University Press, 1977), 5
led him to object to art and relegate it to the mental level of eikasia.\textsuperscript{18} However, despite the lengths she goes to argue that Plato was distrustful of art and images as untrue and dangerous, she does not deny that Plato saw a place for art in education. She writes that, “In fact Plato’s view of art as illusion is positive and complex. Images are valuable aids to thought; we study what is higher first in images. But images must be kept within a fruitful hierarchy of spiritual endeavour.”\textsuperscript{19} To Hamlyn’s notion of the imagination as a starting point for education, Murdoch adds the notion that they can also be valuable aids to thought. Nonetheless, in Murdoch’s reading of Plato they still must be left behind and recognized for what they are in the course of education. This is why Murdoch, though more favourable to the arts herself, belongs with this first category of divided line interpreters: she maintains that Plato thinks images are dangerous illusions that must ultimately be abandoned.

Lastly in this interpretive group is Annas (1981), who depicts the lowest segment of the line as of low philosophical value. She claims that images are philosophically dangerous (which makes her a member of the first group of interpreters) but also potentially useful and suggestive for the young and immature.\textsuperscript{20} But, she goes further than previous scholars in her cautioning and

\textsuperscript{18} Murdoch, \textit{The Fire and the Sun}, 65.

\textsuperscript{19} Murdoch, \textit{The Fire and the Sun}, 41.

\textsuperscript{20} Evidence for this is found as Annas writes (about the arts in general): “[Plato] thinks of the arts as being essentially marginal, and of use only in educating the young and immature” (Julia Annas, \textit{An Introduction to Plato’s Republic}, [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981], 100). This basic educational value is akin to the role given to images by Murdoch (see above). Further concerning the educational value of art, she writes, “Indirect knowing is associated with shadows and images, which are suggestive and often highly useful, but which do not give us exact or complete
criticisms of imagination. She writes, “the lowest stage of the Line, eikasia, is not a significant state in its own right. How much time do we spend looking at images and reflections, and how interesting is this? [...] the lowest stage, eikasia, seems not to correspond to anything significant in our lives.”21 This clearly shows that Annas does not think that imagination is a state that is worth much. In contrast to the authors above from this group, for whom imagination is tempting and dangerous to philosophy, Annas does not even see this danger in imagination because it seems so obviously insignificant. But why, then, is it even included in the line? Annas’ answer is that Plato places it there for the sake of illustrative symmetry. Images and their relationship to originals are there to help show 1) the relationship between mathematics (dianoia) and philosophy (noēsis), and 2) the relationship between the visible (images and originals) and the intelligible (math and philosophy) that is carried over from the image of the sun.22 But to read too far into the image of the sun and line, and to attempt to relate them to the cave, is philosophically futile according to Annas. She states, knowledge” (281). Again, this gives some value to images, but claims that images still leave us in a state of incomplete knowledge (in other words, imagination is a state of incomplete and indirect knowledge).

But Annas also notes the danger of images, or, more specifically, “the dangers in the philosophical use of images” (256). She asserts that, because true philosophic thought and knowledge is only done without the use of any images, the use of images in philosophy runs the risk of logical incoherence and imprecision. This analysis leads her to writes, “as often happens with Plato, his eagerness to use analogy and images to illustrate a point leads him into intellectual unclarity” (249). This is a harsh and it seems a bit unfair: it seems unlikely that Plato was simply eager to use images because this suggests some sort of unawareness on Plato’s part of how and why he was using images. It seems more prudent to think that Plato was well-aware of his use of images and their effects, and then try to understand them ourselves.


22 Annas, An Introduction, 249-250.
Sun, Line, and Cave are philosophically frustrating; they point us in too many directions at once. Their power has always lain in their appeal to the imagination, and the harsh forceful contrast they draw between the life content with appearance and superficiality, and the richly rewarding life dedicated to finding out the truth. Their appeal is so strong that interpreters are perennially tempted to try to harmonize them in a consistent philosophical interpretation, despite Plato’s own warnings on the limits of the kind of thinking that is guided by images and illustrations.

This quotation makes Annas’ interpretation manifest: it is futile to seek true philosophic answers from Plato’s images and anyone attentive enough to recognize Plato’s own warnings about images ought to realize this. Hence, it is quite clear that Annas belongs in this first group of interpreters who are skeptical of the value of images beyond anything slight.

Despite the changes and corrections which the latter four (Cross and Woozley, Hamlyn, Murdoch, and Annas) make to the earlier three interpretations (Nettlship, Adam, Boyd), all of these scholars are unified by their view of images as superficial things that are not of great value to thought. This way of interpreting the images and imagination does highlight a number of important and true points. For example, the danger of mistaking the image for reality can be seen in the claims Glaucon and Adeimantus confront Socrates with at the beginning of Book II (358e-367e). On top of this, the allegory of the cave makes it quite clear that the prisoners accept the shadows at face-value (515c1-2) and punish anyone who disagrees (517a5-7). And it seems clear by Book X that Socrates wants to make it well understood that there is an old quarrel between philosophy and poetry because of poetry’s dangerously enchanting effects.
However, there are several errors made by some of those who interpret the bottom segment of the line in this way. First, it is not the case that images are unreal, as Nettleship claims.\textsuperscript{23} In Book II, Socrates makes the point that tales (\textit{muthoi}) are, as a whole, false, though there are true things in this (377a4-5). He then describes the creator of such tales as one who imagines (\textit{eikazē}), and he compares this poet/tale-teller to a painter who paints likenesses (377e1-3). From this, we can conclude that images are like tales: as a whole false, but also containing some true things. As such, the state of the soul that corresponds to them (imagination) is not a state of ignorance, as Boyd claims,\textsuperscript{24} but a state of opinion – which falls between trueness and falseness, being and non-being, ignorance and knowledge. Second, it is not the case that imagination is the state in which images are accepted as truth and all that there is, as claimed by Hamlyn.\textsuperscript{25} According to Socrates, such a state corresponds to dreaming: the state of “believing a likeness to be not a likeness but rather the thing itself to which it is like” (476c). Exemplars of those who are in a state of dreaming are the men in the cave who fight over shadows (520c). Nowhere does Socrates equate dreaming with imagining, and there seems to be no reason to imply it or read it into his arguments and images. It seems better to observe that, if the men in the cave who fight over shadows are dreaming, they are not imagining, and so imagining is something other than mistaking images for reality. It is still

\textsuperscript{23}Nettleship, \textit{Lectures}, 242. See page 13 above for my discussion of Nettleship.

\textsuperscript{24}Boyd, \textit{An Introduction to the Republic}, 90. See page 15 above for my discussion of Boyd.

\textsuperscript{25}Hamlyn, “Eikasia,” 19-20. See page 17 above for my discussion of Hamlyn.
necessary to determine what imagining is, but it is clear that it is not the
pernicious state of mistakenness or ignorance that this tradition of interpretation
holds it to be.

The second traditional way of interpreting the lowest segment of the
divided line offers a reading of images that emphasizes their connection to their
origins. According to scholars such as Stocks (1911), Ferguson (1921), Klein
(1965), and Dominick (2010), imagination is the state in which we are able to
grasp images as images in order to achieve a better understanding of the
origins. Images act as guides towards the originals because they are derivative
of those originals. As such, imagination is not a state from which one needs to
escape but rather a state of understanding that serves as a necessary step towards
further understanding. According to such a reading, images are not
metaphysically significant in their own right (given that they exist from and for
the sake of their originals) but they can be epistemologically useful. The
justification for this interpretation rests on both the commonsensical notion that it
would be absurd for one to actually mistake a shadow for the thing of which it is
a shadow, and that, as part of the divided line, imagination must contribute in
some way to intellectual development.

According to Stocks (1911), imagination is the state in which we go from
confusion to insight, as we grasp an image that was previously unclear. He
writes,

a mind is faced with an image – fleeting and shifting as shadows and
reflections are wont to be – with an image which he knows to be an
image, but of which he does not know the original. He will be trying
continually, on the ground of imperfect evidence before him, to frame a reliable mental picture of that original. He will be in a state of conjecture. When he succeeds in seeing the thing over whose image he was puzzled, then conjecture gives place to certainty, εἰκασία to πίστις.  

Imagining is not simply confusion that we leave behind in order to gain understanding; rather, it is the first stage of understanding – that of conjecturing. This is distinct from Nettleship’s claim that conjecture always only amounts to our not recognizing an image as an image. Stocks claims that imagination is the state in which images are understood to be images. It is precisely because this is recognized that we are called to conjecture about the originals – apprehending that an image is an image leads to puzzlement and thus implies a kind of questioning. Hence, imagination is the first necessary step in philosophical inquiry according to Stocks.

Ferguson (1921) defines imagination (eikasia) as “inference from appearances [...] it is reading originals through their images.”  This is a slightly stronger claim than Stocks’. Whereas according to Stocks imagination is conjecturing about the originals, according to Ferguson imagination is used to study and draw inferences about the originals through their images. He writes, “The plain man does not say that he sees an image in the mirror; he says that he sees himself. So εἰκασία may be defined, not as a state which contemplates images, but as the illustrative state which studies originals through their natural

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images." It is clear that originals can be grasped in a certain way through their images. Just as imagination was the starting point for investigation in Stocks’ account, the study of images can lead to the originals for Ferguson.

Klein (1965) argues for a similar understanding of images and imagination in his commentary on the *Meno*. Images, as reflections or imitations, depend on their originals. Such a relationship of dependency, Klein says, denotes that images have a lesser degree of clarity, genuineness, and trueness than their originals. But the dependence of images on their originals evidently intimately connects the one (images) to the other (originals). When it comes to imagination, this intimate connection necessarily translates into seeing an image as an image of an original. Klein writes,

> Although, on occasion, we might not differentiate between them and the primary visible objects, we do not, as a rule, confuse an ‘image’ with an ‘original.’ On the contrary, we are able to see, and do see, images as images. It is this πάθημα of the soul, this faculty of ours, to see an image as an image that Socrates calls εἰκασία

Primarily, this quotation shows Klein arguing against those interpreters in the first tradition of interpretation who make the strong claim that imagination is confusing or mistaking a likeness for that which it is a likeness of. He claims that such confusion is not imagination; imagination is seeing and recognizing images as images. But he goes further in order to emphasize that because images

\[\text{[28] Ferguson, “Plato’s Simile of Light,” 145, italics in original.}\]

depend on their originals, seeing images also means seeing their originals. He writes,

The ‘state of the soul’ called ἐικασία necessarily presupposes the other one which consists in our responding to the familiar visible things around us with trust. For we see ‘through’ an image, as it were, its trustworthy original. Seeing an image as an image is a kind of ‘double seeing.’

Imagination as double seeing is both seeing an image as an image and seeing the original that the image is made in the likeness of. Imagination depends on and is linked to the faculty above it (i.e. pistis - trust, belief) just as images depend on their originals. Hence, according to Klein, the bottom segment of the divided line is not an independent state. Instead, it necessarily leads to the next segment. Once again, imagination is not an imprisoned state of confusion but a state that necessarily leads beyond it, at least to trust.

Most recently, Dominick (2010) has adopted this line of argument about seeing through images to the originals. He defends the notion that imagination (which he leaves untranslated as eikasia throughout) is the state of viewing an image as an image, which typically “involves the attempt to learn about some object through consideration of an image of that object.” He specifically aligns himself with Stocks, Ferguson, and Klein, against what he calls the ‘standard reading.’ He moderately defends imagination as a state of low clarity that may

30 Klein, A Commentary on Plato’s Meno, 115.


32 The standard reading is the traditional way of interpreting that I identified above. Dominick focuses on and argues against those authors who claim that imagination is the state of mistaking an image for an original. In the authors that I have covered above, the earlier ones (Nettleship, Adam, Boyd) belong to this same group against whom Dominick is arguing, though later ones
result in errors (i.e. one cannot know everything about an object through its image), but more importantly it contributes towards understanding. He writes, “The image that [Socrates] goes on to present in Book VI, of the city as a ship, helps his friends understand some real issues that confront philosophers and politicians. Understanding, rather than any image, is the goal of the philosopher, but images can help her reach that goal.” Dominick’s claim is that images and imagination need not hinder philosophy but can (and, as the example of Socrates shows, do) help lead up to its goal. This assigns an educational value to images that is greater than what is asserted by Stocks, Ferguson, and Klein. For them, images and imagination are tools for inquiry. Dominick goes farther than this and claims that images and imagination can also be useful tools for understanding. This makes his argument for the positive, educational value of images distinct from previous scholars. Despite this distinction, there remains a common thread to this group of interpreters: i.e. images and imagination are not just the base starting points for education that must be wholly left behind, but rather they can even play a role at the higher levels of education.

The tradition that runs from Stocks to Dominick clearly establishes an important epistemological value for the images that are found at the bottom of the divided line. The claim is that the use of the imagination allows us to recognize images and what they are images of. Though this gives an

such as Hamlyn (who claims imagining is mistaking images not for originals but for reality as such) are notably making a different argument. The reasons for my categorizing them together are also given above.

instrumental value for images and imagination in education, it is important to see that it still gives images a low metaphysical value. Seeing an image for its original implies that the original is of metaphysical interest – not the image. Imagination is valuable insofar as imagining allows us to see an image as an image of an original. The interpretative work of the imagination is done for the sake of recognizing the original.

Though this seems to be a harsh, reductionist way of reading images and the role of imagination, it captures the meaning of the bottom segment of the divided line more accurately. There are numerous examples from the text where Socrates uses an image to illustrate a point so that his interlocutors can better grasp what he is trying to explain. The divided line and its preceding image of the sun are offered by Socrates to help Glaucon and Adeimantus understand the good by means of images. And, for example, it seems to be true that the image of the sun is very useful in showing an important aspect of the idea of the Good, and that the sun’s value as an image comes from its ability to shed light on its original. On the other hand, it would be wrong to assign the sun, as an image, any value other than in relation to its original: it is simply not meant to have any other value in this context. Hence, the interpretation given by Stocks, Ferguson, Klein, and Dominick seems to be correct in its assessment of the useful role of images and imagination on the divided line.

However, there are a few important details about the relationship between images and originals that are not specifically covered by divided line scholars, but which provide support for assigning images and imagination an even stronger
value. In particular, I want to draw attention to the relationship of similarity and difference that images have to their originals, which sheds insight onto the relationship that visible objects have to their intelligible forms.\(^{34}\) Then, it will be shown that imagining is a kind of double-seeing of images in relation to their originals (as in Klein, 1965), which corresponds to the double-seeing of visible objects and intelligible forms (ex. a drawn triangle and the triangle itself) that occurs in thought (\textit{dianoia}, found in the third segment). But there is also a very important difference between these two kinds of double-seeing: imagining is seeing two visible things, while thought is seeing visible things in relation to invisible, non-sensible forms. This difference signifies the innovative turn that Plato makes in the \textit{Republic}: he uses visible language, imagery, and faculties to talk about the invisible and intelligible. This turn is the focus of the next chapter, where it is shown how Plato’s use of imagery changes the imaginative horizons of his interlocutors.

On the divided line, images include shadows and reflections. In the introduction I noted that this segment of the divided line includes other sorts of images as well: shadow-paintings, images of writings or letters, images in speech, and in sum all the kinds of images dealt with in the \textit{Republic}. From the divided line, it is also clear that images are likenesses of originals – those objects of belief (\textit{pistis}) that belong to the second segment of the line. As seen above, some take this relationship to simply mean that images depend on their originals,\(^{34}\)

\(^{34}\) Richard Patterson’s \textit{Image and Reality in Plato’s Metaphysics} (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1985) is an essential source for my discussion of Plato’s metaphysics.
and that the originals are the things of true interest (metaphysically, epistemologically). While it seems to be true that images depend on their originals, it is necessary to establish what is meant by likeness in the relationship of the image to original.

Likeness implies both resemblance and difference. On the one hand, for an image to be an image of something, it must be like it in some way. A visible image, for example, is similar to its original in terms of its visible appearance, which can include qualities such as shape, colour, size, and proportion. In other words, a visible image reflects the visible properties of the thing of which it is an image.

While an image shares important properties with its original, it is also markedly different from its original. Its difference, as Patterson points, rests on the metaphysical point that an image is an image and not the real thing:

The contrast between model and imitation (mimēma) or image (eikōn, eidōlon) is not that between perfect and more or less imperfect instance, as Patterson points out, according to the Oxford English Dictionary, ‘image’ used to be used in English to draw attention to the difference from an original, but modern usage has dropped this meaning in favour of emphasizing the resemblance of image to its original. Patterson proposes that this might explain modern readers’ overemphasis on resemblance to the neglect of contrast and difference when reading and interpreting Plato. And, if image for Plato more strongly signified difference than similarity (a hypothesis Patterson defends), then such an overemphasis fails to capture Plato’s meaning. (Patterson, Image and Reality, 21-22).

That visible images are similar in visible shape or form to their originals is a significant point that I return to below to discuss the image-original relationship in thought. Plato uses the Greek term eidos, which originally means the visual shape or form of a thing, to talk about invisible things that are not grasped by the senses such as sight. This presents a strong connection between images (and their corresponding imagination) and forms (and their corresponding thought).

Likewise could be said about other kinds of non-visible “images” – for example, music that imitates battle marches or birds’ songs must be similar to their originals in terms of their sound. I focus on the visible because of how images are described on the divided line even though I maintain that the image segment of the divided line contains more than just visible images (also myths, music, etc. as argued in the previous chapter).
or between unqualified and qualified exemplar, but between real or true or genuine \(F\) and something that is called “\(F\)” rather than “\(G\)” even though it is not a real or true \(F\).\(^{38}\)

Patterson makes it clear that an image shares in certain features of its original but it is not simply another original. An image of a dog is not another real, living, barking dog. What makes it an image is that it possesses a difference from the original precisely on the grounds that make the original what it is – in a sense, it is an image of the thing because it is not the thing itself. This is what marks the difference between an image and a copy: if it were the same as the original, it would be a copy because it would have the same claim to being as the original does. But an image is not a copy: it is a reflection of a key feature that allows it to be called by the same name without actually being the original. This falsity or unreality is the key difference between an image and original.

Hence, while an image is like its original by reflecting or sharing in the original’s visible form, it is distinct from its original by not being another original itself. An image of a dog must be of a dog and not a horse, but it cannot be another real dog if it is an image. The nature of image contains both the features of resemblance and of difference. Patterson advances that it is the latter contrasting principle that is more important to understand in relating images to their originals:\(^{39}\) that what Plato wants to express with images such as the divided line is the relationship of contrast between an image or imitation and the real or

\(^{38}\) Patterson, *Image and Reality*, 20.

This draws attention not to the similarity or likeness of the image and its original, but to their difference. This difference is important, he claims, because it denotes the metaphysical point that the image of a thing is not the real or true thing.

The text offers strong support that the image segment of the divided line ought to be interpreted with a view to resemblance and contrast, similarity and difference. When Socrates wants to clarify the epistemological relationship between images and originals, he emphasizes their different relations to truth. He says, “with respect to truth or lack of it, as the opinable is distinguished from the knowable, so the likeness is distinguished from that of which it is the likeness” (510a8-11). With this statement, Socrates indicates that despite their likeness, images and originals are distinct. Their distinction appeals to an argument that Socrates makes earlier in Book V regarding knowledge and opinion and their respective objects: knowables and opinables (476d-480a). There, Socrates establishes the difference between the opinable and the knowable (i.e. the objects of opinion and knowledge) in terms of degrees of reality: knowables are what is (477a2-4); opinables are both what is and what is not at the same time (478d3-9, 478e1-4). Here, Socrates says that we can also make

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41 More will be said about this below, as the metaphysical relationship between image and original parallels the metaphysical relationship between the sensible world and the intelligible forms.

42 In Book V Socrates also identifies the object of ignorance as what is not (477a10-11), though as I argued before there is no place for ignorance in the passage in Book VI about the divided line.
distinctions in the degrees of truth between opinables and knowables, on the one hand, and images and their originals, on the other. This distinction only makes sense because of what was established in Book V, where Socrates says that opinion is of opinables that are between being and non-being. Because he brings up the language of opinables and knowables again on the divided line, although he is talking about degrees of truth, we can also assume that he is talking about degrees of reality.\footnote{It is admittedly somewhat bizarre that Socrates is trying to demonstrate degrees of truth in different metaphysical objects (i.e. opinables, knowables, images, originals) rather than in epistemological states (i.e. opinion, knowledge, imagination, trust). But because he does this, we have to assume that the two are related.} We can see that images relate to originals in the same way that opinables relate to knowables: images are ambiguously true and false, real and not real. Hence it is incorrect to say that images are entirely untrue, unreal, and related to that which is not (which is how Socrates defines the objects of ignorance at 478c2-4). Rather, the nature of images, of likeness that implies resemblance and difference, means that images occupy the same ambiguous status as opinables do.\footnote{It should be noted that this conclusion closely resembles that of Klein, who referred to imagination as double seeing because looking at an image involves both seeing the image and its original (i.e. seeing the thing as an image and not as a real thing, and seeing its likeness to its original and hence seeing the visible form of the original).}

It has been established that images relate to their originals in two essential ways. First, images are like their originals – they are similar in terms of some key aspect, such as visible appearance. Second, images are distinct from their originals on the grounds that an image of a thing is not another real or true version of that thing. This double relationship, of similarity and difference, is
what makes Socrates comparison of images to opinables and originals to knowables (510a8-11) a sensible comparison.

The relationship of similarity and difference between images and originals is also found in the upper segments of the line. The third segment of the divided line depicts the soul’s investigations that are based on hypotheses and use visible objects as images of intelligible forms (510b5-7). This is the first segment of the intelligible section – the first step out of the visible and sensible world into the realm of thought. Given that it belongs to the intelligible sections, the soul’s investigations are intelligible in nature: they seek to see those things themselves that one can see in no other way than with thought (510e3-4). However, they do this by using visible objects as images – which means that they are both similar to and different from their intelligible originals.

Socrates explains that, in the investigations represented by the third segment, the soul uses those things previously imitated (i.e. the visible original objects) as images (510b5-6). He gives the example of mathematicians – men who work in geometry and calculation – and their assumptions of mathematical forms such as the odd and the even, the geometrical figures, the threefold form of angles. Socrates then says to Glaucon,

Don’t you also know that they use visible forms besides and make their arguments about them, not thinking about them but about those others that they are like? They make the arguments for the sake of the square itself and the diagonal itself, not for the sake of the diagonal they draw, and likewise with the rest. These things themselves that they mold and draw, of which there are shadows and images in water, they now use as images, seeking to see those things themselves that one can see in no other way than with thought (510d 5-510e4).
This passage explains that visible objects are used as images of intelligible objects – “those others that they are like [...] those things themselves that one can see in no other way than with thought” (510d7-510e4). Socrates emphasizes that the visible objects are originals, and have images (shadows, images in water) made in their likeness in the visible realm. But since they are now being used to understand intelligible objects, they are being used as images. Before when originals were compared to knowables and images to opinables, visible objects were truer and more real in comparison to the images; now the same visible objects must reflect this double nature in comparison to the intelligible objects they are used as images of.

The double nature of images here means that the originals must be both similar and distinct from the intelligible objects. The same similarity as before cannot apply here: the visible object as an image cannot be similar to its intelligible original in terms of visible appearance because the intelligible

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45 The examples of intelligible objects given here are mathematical – the square itself, the diagonal itself – in order to continue the mathematician analogy. Despite this, it seems reasonable to think that the intelligible objects dealt with in this segment are not limited to mathematical forms. A tremendous amount of scholarship has gone into the question of whether Plato intended the third segment to represent an intermediate metaphysical class between the sensible world and the realm of forms. In light of this, the following comments are only preliminary suggestions. Although it is undeniable that Plato holds mathematics in high regard and he presumably chose to use mathematicians as the sole exemplars of dianoetic thought for a reason, the passage suggests that they are simply an introductory example. From this, it seems reasonable to conclude that the third segment is not limited to them, but might include any other hypothesis-based, image-using investigative arts.

46 It is not clear if being used as images also implies that they are images. Socrates seems to suggest not: that being used as images does not change their status as the originals of images from the previous segments of the line. But that they are able to be used as images perhaps indicates that what seemed real in light of ambiguous images is also ambiguous in light of real intelligible objects. Whereas before, they appeared to have a singular nature in comparison to the double nature of images, perhaps this now shows that visible objects had a double nature all along.
original is not visible, but invisible and accessible only in thought (510e3-4). Instead, the similarity between visible object and intelligible original rests on their formal similarity: the drawn square and the square itself are alike in their both being squares; the drawn diagonal and the diagonal itself are alike in both being diagonals. This is where Socrates suggest the causal relationship that forms (intelligible objects, i.e. the square itself) have to the visible world – they are the essences of squares but are not themselves visible squares like their images in the visible realm. This is an important change that Socrates makes because he is using the image analogy and language of the visible that applied within the realm of the visible to refer to the invisible/intelligible. Visible objects as images have the same form (*eidos*) as their intelligible originals, but *eidos* no longer refers to visible shape or form. Instead, it refers to the essential properties that define a thing. Hence, again, the likeness of a visible object and its intelligible original is found in their similarity of form.

The difference between the visible object and the intelligible form is that the visible object is not the real thing: the drawn square is not truly the square itself. This difference reaffirms an important metaphysical point that Socrates established at the end of Book V: the intelligible objects are real and true in comparison to their visible forms.47 Carrying through with the image analogy from the visible realm, the distinction between the visible forms and the

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47 At the end of Book V, where the discussion of ignorance, opinion, and knowledge occurs, Socrates gives the example of many fair things that are the objects of opinion, and the fair itself, which is the object of knowledge. Socrates repeats this distinction (between the many visible objects and the intelligible forms) on the divided line where, as discussed above, it also sheds light on the relationship between images and their originals.
intelligible objects of which they are images is comparable to the distinction between opinables and knowables (510a8-11). In comparison to intelligible forms, the visible forms concern becoming and are in between what is real and unreal. Likewise, in comparison to the visible forms, intelligible forms exist and have being: they are what is real. This difference is further heightened by the fact, noted above, that they exist in two different realms: the one visible, and the other intelligible. Once again, Socrates is asserting that the visible realm contains objects in between what is and what is not, while the intelligible realm contains those that are.

In sum, the third segment of the divided line clearly shows that the image analogy from the first two visible segments (between images and originals) carries over into the intelligible (between the second and third). As images are similar to and different from the originals that they portray, they are real and unreal versions of those originals. This gives them the relative status of opinable. Visible originals are also similar to and distinct from their intelligible originals. This makes the visible objects real and unreal versions of intelligible reality. The epistemological analogy remains the same: the visible objects are shown to be in-between objects of opinion in comparison to the true, intelligible objects of knowledge. This helps to support the claim that images have a notable role to play on the divided line – their role in the visible realm shows how visible objects then relate to the intelligible realm. A quick look at a point Socrates makes in the final divided line passage – when he refers to the divided line once
more in Book VII of the *Republic* – will further show the relationship of similarity and difference between images, originals, and intelligible objects.

In Book VII, when Socrates refers back to the image of the divided line he described in Book VI, he makes a few new distinctions and explicitly draws parallels between certain segments of the line. The distinction that he makes that is relevant to the purpose at hand is that the states of the soul in the visible realm are acceptably called opinion. He states, “Then it will be acceptable, just as before, to call [...] the latter two [trust and imagination] taken together, opinion” (533e4-534a1). It is necessary to assume that the objects of these two states of the soul are also the objects of opinion (i.e. opinables), so that both images and their visible originals are the objects of opinion. This corresponds to the conclusion reached above: the use of visible objects as images of intelligible forms demonstrates that they (the visible objects) have the twofold/in-between nature of images and opinions. Hence, Socrates’ assertion, that the two lower segments of the line taken together are opinion, comes as an unsurprising claim.\(^{48}\) In contrast to the two lower segments as opinion are the two higher segments that are called intellection (534a1-2).\(^{49}\) So, again, the parallel can be

\(^{48}\) In light of the above analysis, this move by Socrates is unsurprising. The divided line shows different degrees of opinion/opinables: images and originals are both objects of opinion by relative comparison (images to their originals; originals to the intelligible). There seems to be no reason to change the epistemological status of images to something other than lower degree of opinion in light of the originals relation to intelligible objects. The latter relation simply indicates that the originals are also opinable. If anything, this goes to affirm that there are different degrees of opinion.

\(^{49}\) Socrates’ terms have changed slightly, as noted before. The final segment he calls knowledge instead of the previous intellection. And instead of contrasting opinion to knowledge, he contrasts opinion to intellection. In other words, he uses knowledge and intellection interchangeably. Following the argument as to what intellection is on the divided line, this use is perfectly sensible: intellection (the fourth segment) is non-hypothetical, non-imagistic access to real,
drawn between image and original, opinable and knowable/intellection, and the visible and the intelligible. All along – from the end of Book V to this passage in Book VII – Socrates is pointing to the ambiguity of the visible realm in contrast to the clarity and reality of the intelligible realm of forms. This ambiguity is represented by the relationship between images and originals.

Key passages about the divided line have shown that understanding the relationship between images and originals can help us further understand how the visible realm relates to the intelligible realm. Images are both alike and different from their originals. In the visible realm, this is a likeness of visible form/appearance, and a difference of reality (i.e. an image of a dog is not a real dog). In the move up to the intelligible realm, the likeness is also formal – but forms take on the new meaning of essential features; and the difference is also one of reality (i.e. a visible square is not the square itself), which is marked by the different realms. The similarities and differences between images and originals, on the one hand, and originals and forms, on the other, shows that recognizing and understanding images can contribute to understanding how Plato’s theory of the forms gives an explanation of the world.

With respect to the image segment of the divided line, there is one final aspect to account for: the state of the soul that corresponds to the lowest segment, the state of imagination (eikasia). It can be generally stated that imagination is the state in which we receive and respond to images: the activity of the state of

unchanging, intelligible objects. These are the same objects of knowledge. Hence, it seems fine to use knowledge and intellection interchangeably.
imagination is imagining. Two general characteristics of this state of the soul have already been established: first, it relates to the visible realm and, as such, has to do with senses and perceptions of visible things; second, it relates to the realm of opinion, defined as being in between what is and what is not. Based on these qualifications and the nature of images analyzed above, imagining is best understood as the perception of images in their similarity to and difference from their originals.\(^{50}\)

The perception of the similarity that images have to originals clearly emphasizes likeness, kinship, and commonalities. This perception is what allows one to see an image as of an original – it is what allows one to recognize the common features between an image of something and the thing itself. When presented with an image, imagining is used in this sense to notice how the image resembles its original in terms of visual appearance. For example, earlier in Book VI, Socrates offers an image of a ship as an image of a city (488a7-489a2). In the image, there is an unskilled ship owner whose favor the sailors try to capture by persuading, begging, trickery, fighting, etc so that they can control the ship. The man skilled in such manipulation is said to be the ‘skilled sailor,’ ‘pilot,’ and ‘knower of the business of ships.’ The sailors are meant to represent the citizens of the city, while the so-called ‘skilled sailors’ are the rhetoricians, sophists, and politicians. Standing apart from these is the man who knows the art

\(^{50}\) I still largely agree with the interpretative work done by the second group of scholars I discussed in the first part of this chapter (Stocks, Ferguson, Klein, Dominick). My claim is distinct by basing itself on the analysis of images I’ve done with the help of Patterson’s work. However, my definition of imagining as perceiving the twofold nature of images can easily be related to, for example, Klein’s ‘double-seeing.’
of piloting, and who understands what is necessary to navigate a ship (e.g. attention to the seasons, winds, heavens, stars, etc.). Such a true pilot does not take part in the manipulative games in an attempt to control the ship. In fact, the pilot’s skill and the skill of manipulating control into one’s own hands are held as mutually exclusive by the sailors. Given that their attention is turned to controlling the ship and what it takes to do so among the other sailors, the pursuits of the truly skilled pilot are said to be useless. The true pilot represents the philosopher in the city, whose pursuit of wisdom is seen as useless in the realm of politics, where the concern of the people is to gaining favour and support in order to rule. Presented with such an image, it is by imagining the image and original that we can see the similarities between the two. Hence Socrates comments to Adeimantus, “I don’t suppose you need to scrutinize (exetazomenēn) the image to see that it resembles the cities in their disposition towards the true philosopher, but you understand what I mean” (489a4-6).

Simply imagining – and not scrutinizing or closely examining – is able to reveal the resemblance that Adeimantus sees between the ship (image) and the city (original). Imagining is used to recognize commonalities, patterns, and shared qualities so that an image can be sensibly understood as an image of an original. And so when Socrates presents other images such as the sun as an image of the child of the good, or the likeness between justice in the city and justice in the soul, imagining can be used to interpret these by seeing the resemblance that the image has to its original.
The ability to recognize the resemblance of an image (to see how the image is similar to its original or to the thing that is being imaged) is clearly a crucial part of perceiving an image. Failure to see the resemblance between an image and what it is an image of is, in a sense, a failure to perceive the image as such – given that images are always of something else and simply do not exist on their own. Such a failure, if it can be considered a state of its own, would be a state of incomprehension – perhaps of merely perceiving sense data without seeing it as an image. Imagining replaces this incomprehension with a sort of apprehension because it is by imagining that we see how an image is an image by recognizing its resemblance to an original. Though this is clearly an important aspect of imagining, placing too much emphasis on resemblance runs the risk of confusing an image for its original. This is the danger that was pointed to by the commentators such as Nettleship, Hamlyn, and Cross and Woozley in the first part of this chapter. By overemphasizing similarity, one can miss the differences that exist between an image and an original. As has been shown, there are differences (the key one being that an original is a real thing, while the image is not another real version of the original) between images and originals. Not recognizing them can lead to thinking there is no difference between the two and that the image is exactly the same as the original thing: in a word, that it is a

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51 Even if one imagines a unicorn, which has no corresponding original in the visible realm, it is still necessary for me to apprehend it as composed out of two originals – a horse and the horn of other animals, which I have seen.
perfect copy of it. A state of confusion would be the obvious result.\textsuperscript{52} And it would be a state that is distinct from imagining: for mistaking images for copies can no longer be considered as a case of imagining.

Perceiving the difference between an image and its originals is the other essential part of imagination. This aspect emphasizes how we perceive the distinctiveness of images: how, as images, they are unlike their originals. In other words, it is recognizing an image as an image that is separate and distinct from the real thing. This is what scholars such as Klein point to in their commentaries, with which I agree. For example, Klein writes, “Seeing an image as an image is a kind of ‘double seeing.’ Our response to an image cannot help reproducing the very mode of being of what we call ‘images’ (εἰκών): ‘image’ is uniquely that which is not what it is.”\textsuperscript{53} This suggests the double nature of images described above: an image is both the same as and distinct from its original. To state a clear example: an image of the good is of the good, but is not the good. Klein’s point in noting this is that, because images are twofold in this way, our soul’s response to images, cannot help but follow. Hence, imagining is both perceiving what the image is (i.e. of a bed), as well as what it is not (i.e. a real bed). Again, this is the perception of the similarity and the difference that an image has with its originals.

\textsuperscript{52} Plato acknowledges such a state of confusion as a possibility (hence providing some support for Nettleship et al), but only for those with limited mental capacity: “by painting a carpenter and displaying him from far off, [a good painter] would deceive children and foolish human beings into thinking that it is truly a carpenter” (598c2-4). It is clearly not the case that most people mistake the image for the real and true thing. As such, when most people perceive images, they use their imagination to see the image in its double nature: as both real and unreal.

\textsuperscript{53} Klein, \textit{A Commentary on Plato’s Meno}, 115, emphasis in original.
The state of imagining is a state of recognizing similarity and difference, reality and unreality, due to the nature of images. This is clearly in the realm of opinion, in between truth and falsehood. It is necessary to recognize this duality in imagining, and not overemphasize one aspect over the other. Doing so can result in being carried away and deceived by images, or underestimating the role of images by considering them to be mere falsehoods. Maintaining a more complex view of images, of what they are and are not, allows us to see how they fit onto the divided line.

With such a balance, then images can be useful tools for developing thought. On the one hand, being trained in imagining can help us recognize similarities in both the visible and intelligible realms. This is why a musical rearing – in its broadest sense that includes both style (rhythm and harmony) and content (myths and stories) – of children that develops an affinity or likeness for fine things (and a distaste for the un-fine) is necessary for eventually doing philosophy. As Socrates states, “He would blame and hate the ugly in the right way while he’s still young, before he’s able to grasp reasonable speech. And when reasonable speech comes, the man who’s reared in this way would take most delight in it, recognizing it on account of its being akin” (402a1-5). Recognizing the similarity here is the result of musical training, for the fineness and truth that exists in music and images is similar to that which is grasped by reason (though they are also different: images, music, and sensible/visible things are also mixed with untruths). On the other hand, being trained in imagining can also help us recognize difference in the visible and the intelligible realms.
Perceiving differences is what allows us to see through images – for we can see that an image cannot also be the real thing. In relation to thought, we use double-seeing that is analogous to imagining to “see” the similarities and differences between, for example, a visible triangle and the intelligible form of the triangle itself. Hence images are useful devices not only to mould our souls according to good models or to provide an easily comprehensible account, but also because the perception of images (imagining) teaches skills necessary to recognize patterns, make distinctions, and see through appearances so that we can grasp the real things.

This chapter has shown that accounts of the first segment of the divided line that relegate images and imagining to a base state of mistakeness, ignorance, and confusion are incorrect. Instead, an accurate depiction of the first segment must take into account the twofold nature of images: that is, how likeness or resemblance also implies difference. The recognition of this dual nature of images was then shown to provide insight into the relationship between visible objects and forms. Lastly, it was shown that the state of the soul that perceives image in their likeness and difference helps to form intellectual skills.

With this analysis of the bottom segment of the divided line in mind, it is necessary to examine how images and imagining fit into the broader political context of the Republic. More specifically, we shall look at how Plato employs

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54 A principle that, as mentioned in the previous chapter, underlies logic: the same thing won’t be willing at the same time to do or suffer opposites with respect to the same part and in relation to the same thing (436b8-10). The principle of non-contradiction leads us to see (that is, see in thought – not in visible appearances) that something that appears to contain opposites cannot do so intrinsically, and thus that unique properties can be isolated and identified.
images such as the city, the ship, the sun, and the divided line. We shall also explore why images and imagining are particularly necessary in the political realm.
III. THE DIVIDED LINE AS A-political image

In this chapter, I extend my analysis of the divided line and the role of images therein to the political context of the Republic. I argue that the divided line is politically important with respect to its purpose and with respect to its nature as an image. On the one hand, the purpose of the divided line within the city-in-speech is to depict the ascent to the idea of the good, which is the greatest study of the philosophers who will be kings in the beautiful city in the Republic. This captures the nature of objective knowledge and intellection that puts the philosophers in a position from which they are able to organize the city, passing judgments, and making decisions. On the other hand, the divided line, as an image itself, is a device that Plato uses to make a political statement. Key examples from the Republic show how political life takes place through images. I argue that Plato offers an image such as the divided line in order to speak to and alter the level at which political decisions, judgment, and possibilities are first formed: the imagination.

The divided line depicts knowledge as objective and accessible in its entirety and purity through reasoning and dialectic. This is what the fourth and final segment of the line represents, as the intelligible segment that “argument itself grasps with the power of dialectic” (511b4-5). Such knowledge is what the true philosopher or desirer of wisdom, as opposed to the lover of sights or the lover of hearing, strives after (475b8-475e4). And the possession of such objective knowledge is what makes the philosophers the necessary rulers of the
just city – as Socrates expresses with his controversial “third wave” of the argument in Book V:

Unless the philosophers rule as kings or those now called kings and chiefs genuinely and adequately philosophize, and political power and philosophy coincide in the same place, while the many natures now making their way to either apart from the other are by necessity excluded, there is no rest from ills for the cities, [...] nor I think for human kind, nor will the regime we have now described in speech ever come forth from nature, insofar as possible, and see the light of the sun (473c11-437e2)

Only when philosophers rule will the city have rest from ills because only by doing philosophy can one grasp what is always the same in all respects (484b2-3). In other words, only philosophers have knowledge of true justice in its unchanging, intelligible form. It follows from this that only knowing true justice allows one to establish an imitation or reflection of it in the city with certainty and stability.  

The argument, in detail, goes as follows: philosophers are those who know the forms of things like moderation, courage, liberalty, magnificence, and all their kin (402b-c), and who are able to grasp the idea of the good, the beginning itself, and the reason for the being of each thing (533c, 534b-c). Knowledge of the forms (and idea of the good) enables philosophers to recognize their manifestations in the visible realm. In fact, Socrates claims that only when forms are intelligibly known can they truly be recognized in the visible realm (402b-c). Being able to recognize, for example, a just act as just – i.e. one that

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55 Through luck, justice institutions could also appear without prior knowledge of the just forming them. But only knowledge of the just would be able to assure that such institutions are truly just (even if such knowledge is acquired after the fact, and the institutions also judged after the fact). Hence the city will have no rest from ills or no stable just institutions by only depending on luck. Rather, to do so must come from knowledge.
participates in the form of justice – calls for knowledge of the just. Without knowledge, claims regarding the nature of an act, event, institution, etc. might simply be hypothetical, assumed, or uncertain claims: knowledge is what enables one to give an account (logos) of the nature/form of a thing.

In addition to the ability to recognize things for what they are, knowledge enables the philosophers to create institutions, laws, etc. that reflect or imitate the forms. This is how the philosophers in the city are like painters who use the divine pattern (500e3): the philosopher sees and contemplates things that are set in a regular arrangement and are always in the same condition [i.e. universals, forms] – things that neither do injustice to one another nor suffer it at one another’s hands, but remain all in order according to reason – he imitates them and, as much as possible, makes himself like them (500c2-7)

With knowledge, the philosopher tries to make himself like the forms (i.e. as an image is like its original), and can also try to make the city like the forms.

Accordingly, Socrates later states that those who have been educated in the city to be rulers – whose education culminates in beholding the good itself – are compelled “to use it [i.e. the good itself] as a pattern for ordering city, private men, and themselves” (540a9-540b1). The form or idea, once known, can be used as an organizing principle in the political (and private⁵⁶) realm. Further in

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⁵⁶ Whether Plato intends the city-in-speech to be relevant to the political life of cities or whether he intends the Republic to speak more pertinently to the individual soul is up for debate. In light of the passage that I cite next in the paragraph – the well-known ending of the ninth book – I am inclined to see the city-in-speech as more pertinent to the individual, but still relevant to politics. That said, however, it is also undeniable that the dialogue speaks to political life (especially an image like that of the cave). And, to consistently follow the argument about the relationship between an image and its original, if the city is an enlarged image of the soul, it follows that the arguments made regarding certain properties (e.g. visible or otherwise) apply to both image and original.
the dialogue Socrates repeats the same notion: that, with knowledge, one can model things in the political (or more generally visible) realm to reflect the forms. At the end of Book IX he attests, “in heaven, perhaps, a pattern is laid up for the man who wants to see and found a city within himself on the basis of what he sees” (592b2-4). This is of course a hesitant claim (“perhaps”), but the point is that, if the forms do exist, one can use them as blueprints in the sensible (earthly, as opposed to the heavenly) world. Appealing to heaven recalls the image of the sun, wherein the sun was the lord in heaven that imitates the good. Again, this posits that knowledge not only allows one to recognize how the forms are reflected in the visible realm but also allows one to imitate and create reflections of the forms.

Being able to both recognize visible participation in the forms and model things in the visible world after the forms is why it is through philosophic rule alone that a city can be truly just. Only the philosopher can recognize a just institution and create a city and its laws, institutions, offices, etc. to reflect justice itself. The divided line depicts the ascent to true knowledge of the idea of good, as in:

that which argument itself grasps with the power of dialectic, making the hypotheses not beginnings but really hypotheses – that is, steppingstones and springboards – in order to reach what is free from hypothesis at the beginning of the whole. When it has grasped this, argument now depends on that which depends on this beginning and in such fashion goes back down again to an end; making no use of anything sensed in any way, but using forms themselves, going through forms to forms, it ends in forms too (511b74-511c2)

When this passage is understood in the context of Plato’s larger teaching about how the philosopher’s grasp of the forms and the idea of the good allows him to
order himself and the city, it then becomes clear that the philosopher who goes up and back down the segments of the line via forms does this, in part, so that the forms of justice, moderation, etc. can be instantiated in the visible, political realm.

Nicholas Smith (1996) advances an argument of this kind, which I think is true of what happens within the city-in-speech and which represents a typical way of arguing for philosophers as rulers which I have articulated in brief above. Smith argues that the relationship between knowledge and opinion that is depicted by the divided line makes a political statement. He explains that knowledge of intelligible objects is and must be related to what exists in the sensible or visible (and political) realm. As explained in the previous chapter, the relationship between the intelligible and the visible is exemplified by the image-original relationship found in the lower segments of the line, which are themselves compared to opinion and knowledge. But the relationship between knowledge and opinion is a necessary relationship, Smith claims, according to the political argument of the city-in-speech of the Republic: the philosophers’ knowledge of intelligible objects of the upper segments of the divided line must enable them to make good judgments in the visible realm of the lower segments of the line if they are to have some sort of advantage over other political actors. As Smith puts it,

it is an essential feature of Plato’s metaphysical and epistemological project, and, hence, his political project, to argue that the sensible can in some way or to some degree be made intelligible. If this were not true, Plato’s philosopher-rulers would gain no political advantage from their acquisition and development of knowledge, which Plato tells us is
knowledge of intelligibles. Plato’s argument that his philosopher-rulers will be superior to ordinary rulers cannot be based upon the fact that they have access to intelligibles unless this access gives them some plain and reliable advantage in making judgments in the grubby empirical world of politics – after all, they will not rule over Forms, they will rule in the realm of empirical images. Plato’s argument is that only those who understand that the political world is a world of images – only those who have the knowledge of originals and know how to apply that knowledge in judging images – will be qualified to create and sustain a truly noble state.57

Smith’s claim is that the divided line shows the connection between the intelligible realm and the empirical/visible realm, and that the philosophers’ access to the intelligible gives them an advantage in the political, which is where they will be ruling. This advantage comes from being able to make judgments based on knowledge and rule in the visible/empirical realm with knowledge. In other words, philosophers are better qualified for such a political role because they have knowledge of the good, the just, etc. and so can distinguish and identify the images and reflections in the political realm that will instantiate and inculcate true justice and those that will not. Such better qualification is clearly understood to be an advantage for just ruling. Hence the divided line’s depiction of the visible and intelligible realms, and the image-original, opinion-knowledge relationship that exists between them, also shows how the philosophers’ knowledge makes them better qualified to rule.

Smith’s analysis demonstrates an important aspect of the political nature of the divided line. He shows how the divided line sheds insight onto the nature of the relationship between politics and philosopher, by arguing that the

connection between the visible and intelligible realms of the divided line reveals the philosophers’ advantage in ruling based on knowledge. Smith’s interpretation gives a good account of one aspect of the political importance of the divided line, but the divided line has further political relevance due to its nature as an image, and this is what I intend to show in the final section of this chapter.

According to the account given in the Republic, political life is affected by images insofar as images, (role) models, and symbols shape the conceptual possibilities we see in the world and the way we make sense of and organize the world.58 This is evident throughout the dialogue. For example near the beginning of the dialogue, in establishing the basis of the inquiry into the just life, Glaucon and Adeimantus describe just and unjust men, polishing them up “just like a statue” (361d6), based on the traditional moral outlook the poets have passed down to them (358b1-367e5). The images of the just and unjust men capture the symbolic moral order (orthodoxy) that Glaucon and Adeimantus are familiar with, and, as such, reflect the boundaries of the possible for them that are about to dramatically change over the course of the dialogue. Another example of the importance of images in shaping worldviews can be seen in the

58 In this section, I draw heavily on Danielle Allen’s article, “Envisaging the body of the condemned: The power of Platonic symbols,” Classical Philology 95:2 (Apr., 2000), 133-150. She does not specifically discuss the divided line, but her analysis of images, symbols, symbolic orders, ideologies, imagination, and the cave provide an excellent framework for viewing the function of the divided line in Plato’s political philosophy. Her main argument is that the Republic teaches one “how to work inside the cave by (trying to) revolutionize a culture through the use of images and symbols capable of effecting the rhetorical displacements of a reigning ideology and their simultaneous replacement with a comprehensive new ideology” (134). I agree with this entirely and want to show how the divided line is one of the images used to alter previously held conceptions about what is real and true.
early musical education of the guardians of the city regarding the stories to be
told to children. Socrates repeatedly emphasizes that the formation of the souls
of the young through images is of utmost importance because formation provides
the foundation for the rest; images enter into the innermost part of the soul and
become deeply psychologically engrained; and the young are particularly
malleable and plastic and relatively easy to mould (377a-381e). The
psychological power of images expressed by such claims affects the individual.
If we apply the analogy of the city and soul, we can also see that images affect
the political community. In particular, images are able to transmit ethical and
political ideas (such as what makes a good role model or political leader) directly
into the soul (or into the individuals who compose the soul of the city) and shape
their moral and political outlooks. Hence, the education of the youth with the
right images is a central political concern.

The most obvious example from the text of how images affect political
life is the allegory of the cave, which depicts a realm wherein political life is not
merely affected by images, but images are all that exists in political life. The
allegory of the cave is, as Socrates tells us in the first lines of Book VII, an image
of our nature in its education and want of education (514a1-2). This is the same
education that starts in the influential realm of images, and ascends from there, as
in the case in the divided line, to the idea of the good. In brief, Socrates
describes the prisoners in the cave as a political community that is like ours
(515a5), where a fire casts shadows of artifacts and statues on a wall (514b2-
515a2), the truth is held to be nothing other than the shadows of artificial things
(515c1-2), and those shadows are discussed (515b5) and judged (516e8) by the community.\(^{59}\) That the image and the prisoners are like us indicates that there are both similarities and differences between us and the prisoners.

An obvious difference between us and the prisoners is that we do not actually live in a cave. We are not actually enchained prisoners who are compelled to look at images and shadows that are cast by a fire. There are several plausible similarities between the prisoners and us. These include: that political and ethical life takes place in the realm of images, such as Glaucon and Adeimantus exemplify at the start of the dialogue; that political communities, in their dispositions, are hostile towards philosophers (517a), as shown through the image of the city as a ship that Socrates offers in Book VI (487e4-489a2); that without a turning of the soul towards truth perhaps everyone is bound to hold shadows as truth (515c1-2). The last similarity is the one Socrates proposes in response to Glaucon’s incredulity at the image in the first place, and it is the one that is prominent in many interpretations of the divided line. Many interpreters assert that such holding shadows and images as truth is the state of the soul represented by imagining on the divided line.\(^{60}\) But this is not the case: without turning around, the prisoners can look only at shadows and are in a state of dreaming, which is distinct from imagining.

\(^{59}\) Evidently, my brief snapshot of the allegory of the cave includes a few ideas from Socrates’ account of the cave that I think are important to demonstrate the point I am trying to make. As such, my account of the cave is neither a comprehensive nor complete account.

\(^{60}\) See my discussion in the previous chapter on the interpretations of Nettleship, Adam, Boyd, Cross and Woozley, Hamlyn, Murdoch, and Annas.
Imagining, as argued in the previous chapter, is perceiving an image as both an image and an image of the original. As Klein argues, imagining is a kind of double-seeing of both the image and original. Hence imagining depends on and presupposes the second segment of the line, where the originals are found. So Klein writes,

while πίστις can be had without εἰκασία, εἰκασία cannot come into play without πίστις. The prisoners in the cave, described in Book VII of the Republic, do not manifest any εἰκασία before they are able to turn their heads [...] The subsection which corresponds to the εἰκόνες and to εἰκασία cannot be taken by itself: it is characterized by its dependency on, and its relation to, the subsection which corresponds to the primary visible objects and to our trust in them.61

Having only the images and shadows to observe on the wall, the prisoners in the cave cannot be in a state of imagining that also implies trust. Rather, those who fight over the shadows are in a state of dreaming (520c7-520d1), where they mistake likenesses for things themselves of which they are like (476c5-7). Such a state evidently gives images great power: in dreams, we can be persuaded to believe that images are true. And, as Socrates affirms, this is true of the state of the prisoners who have nothing to look at but images: they hold the truth to be nothing other than the shadows on the wall of the cave (515c1-2). If the same holds true for political actors, as Socrates suggests by saying that the prisoners are like us, then images also have a tremendous influence in the political realm.

Since political life is so affected by images, as shown by the examples of the statues of the just and unjust men, the city as a ship, and the allegory of the cave, then the presentation of the image of the divided line is a political act

61 Klein, A Commentary on Plato’s Meno, 115, emphasis in original.
insofar as it alters and expands the imaginative horizons of Socrates’ interlocutors and Plato’s readers. What I mean is that the use of an image, such as the divided line, is inherently political because images work on the level on which political decisions are made and political judgments are first formed (as children, by stories) and first changed, reformed, and manipulated by rhetoricians and poets.

As an image the divided line alters the political landscape because, along with its adjacent images of the sun and the cave, the divided line expresses the idea that images and visible objects that are found in the visible world are images of a true, intelligible reality (and that they are, in fact, caused by the highest expression of reality, the idea of the good). This challenges ontological and epistemological positions, such as those exemplified by the sailors on the ship and the prisoners in the cave. It proposes that there are higher levels of reality and knowledge that can (and ought to) contribute to political decision making and judgment formation. By suggesting that political life as it is does not adequately access such higher levels, the images of the sun, line, and cave encourage us to question what we held to be true about politics and to think about politics in new ways. For example, rather than thinking that ruling is simply about gaining favor with the ship-owner or thinking that good judgment is just about remembering and being able to identify images, these three images propose that political and ethical life ought to be led in light of the idea of the good. This provides an objective standard for ruling and judgment. Such an idea challenges the way we think about politics and opens up new possibilities for us.
By presenting such an idea through images, such as the sun, line, and cave, Plato makes the idea accessible to the political imagination. Accepting that political life takes place in part, through the discussion and contestation of images, Plato fashions his ideas into images as well so that they can speak to this aspect of political life. As Allen (2000) aptly puts it,

Plato […] shared a similar view about the power of images and narratives to put things before the eyes, to make abstract principles conceivable, and thereby to change mental topography and to revise the realm of the imaginary in which concepts undergirding cultural systems of value do their work.\(^{62}\)

The use of images is necessary to make an abstract, foreign idea imaginatively possible, as well as believable – since, as we know from the examples of Cephalus, Glaucon, and Adeimantus, our most strongly entrenched beliefs come from the images we are given in childhood. Plato’s use of images such as the divided line works to change what we think is possible in politics on the exact level where possibilities first exist: in the imagination. Hence we can finally conclude that the divided line is a political image due to its nature as an image, which enables the idea that it captures – that what we thought is reality is a reflection of the idea of the good – to take hold of our imaginations and alter the way we think about reality, knowledge, education, politics, decision-making, judgment, and the good life.

\(^{62}\) Allen, “Envisaging the Body of the Condemned,” 147.
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