

Culture and Society in Plato's Republic

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In memoriam J. C. W. Reith (1889-1971)¹

LECTURE I. COUCHES, SONG, AND
CIVIC TRADITION

THE TOTAL CULTURE: MATERIAL, MORAL, MUSICAL

Imagine, if you please, a stormy night in the North Sea. It is around 3:00 A.M. The first lieutenant is on watch on the bridge, his jaw jutting out firmly to defy wind, rain, and sea. Midshipman Burnyeat, being wholly untrained in the arts of navigation and seamanship, has nothing to do but make cup after cup of the navy's peculiarly strong recipe for cocoa. There is time to think, between bouts of seasickness. For some reason my mind turns to the actor Jack Hawkins, hero of many postwar films about braving storms and the like. How accurately he portrayed the jaw-jutting stance of men like this. Then inspiration strikes. It is the other way round. Whether he is aware of it or not, the first lieutenant learned that stance by watching Jack Hawkins in the cinema.

Such was my earliest thought on the subject of these lectures, even though at the time I had not yet read a word of the *Republic*, where Plato offers a theory about how art affects the soul and forms character in ways that people are often not aware of. If you are designing an ideal society, as Plato does in the *Republic*, and contrasting it with the corruptions of existing societies, as he also does in the *Republic*, then you need to think about much more than political institutions in a narrow sense. You need to think about all the influences, all the ideas, images, and practices, that make up the culture of a society.

I do not mean "high culture," but culture in a more anthropological sense —the sense my dictionary defines as "the total of the

¹ John Reith was the first general manager of the BBC, then managing director, and finally director general (1920-38); chairman of the New Towns Committee (1946); chairman of a Labour Party Commission of Enquiry into Advertising (1962-65), which I had the honour of serving as secretary.

inherited ideas, beliefs, values, and knowledge, which constitute the shared bases of social action.”² Even this definition is not broad enough, for it makes no mention of the material culture of a society —its characteristic artefacts, its buildings, even the kinds of landscape it creates. Plato did not forget the material culture. Here, to get us going, is what he has to say about it.

We start with a general principle arising out of a long discussion of poetry: “Good speech [εὐλογία], good accord [εὐαρμοστία], good grace [εὐσχημοσύνη], and good rhythm [εὐρρυθμία] follow upon goodness of character” (400de).³ In other words, style — style in all its manifestations —springs from, and expresses, the character of a person’s soul. This principle is now applied to material culture:

“And must not our youth pursue these qualities everywhere if they are to carry out their proper task [τὸ αὐτῶν πράττειν]?”⁴

“They must indeed.”

“Now painting and all crafts of that kind are full of them, I suppose, as are weaving, embroidery, architecture, the making of furniture and household utensils,⁵ and so too is the natural

² *The Collins Dictionary of the English Language*, 2nd ed. (London and Glasgow, 1986) *sv.* One of innumerable descendants of the definition with which E. B. Tylor, *Primitive Culture* (Boston, 1871), p. 1, founded anthropology as the systematic, holistic study of human society: “Culture, or civilization, . . . is that complex whole which includes knowledge, beliefs, art, morals, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society.”

³ Translations from the *Republic* are my own throughout, but I always start from Paul Shorey’s Loeb Classical Library edition (London and New York, 1930), so his phrases are interwoven with mine; despite numerous competitors, Shorey’s translation is in my opinion still the best. For passages dealing with music, I have borrowed freely from the excellent rendering (with explanatory notes) given by Andrew Barker, *Greek Musical Writings*, vol. 1: *The Musician and His Art* (Cambridge, 1984), pp. 128–40.

⁴ An allusion to the “one-man one job” principle which grounds the *Republic*’s definition of justice in terms of “doing one’s own” (374a ff., 433a ff.). The principle will be crucial to the rejection of tragedy and comedy in book III: see lecture II.

⁵ The word σκεύη is standardly used for household equipment in contrast to livestock: Liddell-Scott-Jones, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, 9th ed. (Oxford, 1940) *sv.* (cited hereafter as LSJ).

form of our bodies and of other living things. In all these there is grace or gracelessness. And gracelessness, bad rhythm, and disaccord are sisters of bad speech and bad character, whereas their opposites are sisters and imitations [μιμήματα] of the opposite — a temperate and good character.”⁶

“Entirely so,” he said.

“Is it, then, only the poets that we must supervise and compel to embody in their poems the image [εἰκόνα] of the good character, on pain of not writing poetry among us? Or must we keep watch over the other craftsmen too and prevent them from embodying the bad character just mentioned — licentious, mean, and graceless — either in images of living things or in buildings or in any other product of their craft, on penalty, if they are unable to obey, of being forbidden to practise among us?” (400e-401b)

Finally, Plato has Socrates describe the way grace and gracelessness in the material culture affect the soul:

“Our aim is to prevent our Guards being reared among images of vice — as it were in a pasturage of poisonous herbs where, cropping and grazing in abundance every day, they *little by little and all unawares* [κατὰ σμικρόν . . . λανθάνουσι] build up one huge accumulation of evil in their soul. Rather, we must seek out craftsmen with a talent for capturing what is lovely and graceful, so that our young, dwelling as it were in a salubrious region, will receive benefit from everything about them. Like a breeze bringing health from wholesome places, the impact of works of beauty on eye or ear will *imperceptibly* [λανθάνη] from childhood on, guide them to likeness, to friendship, to concord with the beauty of reason.” (401bd)

Since 1904 a number of new towns have been built in Britain on this principle that it makes a difference to your soul what kind of environment you grow up in. Ebenezer Howard's idea of the

⁶The word μιμήματα here is bound to evoke the preceding discussion of μίμησις in musical poetry (392c ff.). I return to this extension from musical to material culture in lecture II.

Garden City was to juxtapose industry, agriculture, and housing with gardens and greenery in a way that would be healthier for its inhabitants than the industrial slums. Healthier not just physically, but spiritually as well. Howard's vision of the future was also influential in the U.S.A. and Scandinavia. We can all celebrate a world in which

parks and gardens, orchards and woods, are being planted in the midst of the busy life of the people, so that they may be enjoyed in the fullest measure; homes are being erected for those who have long lived in slums; work is found for the workless, land for the landless, and opportunities for the expenditure of long pent-up energy are presenting themselves at every turn. A new sense of freedom and joy is pervading the hearts of the people as their individual faculties are awakened, and they discover, in a social life which permits alike of the completest concerted action and of the fullest individual liberty, the long-sought-for means of reconciliation between order and freedom —between the well-being of the individual and of society.⁷

That was written in 1898. It is a more populist Utopia than Plato's, but it shares his belief that an environment which is "bright and fair, wholesome and beautiful"⁸ will gradually, over time, have a good effect on everyone, without their necessarily noticing how and by what means it happens.

In Plato's advocacy of the idea, the key terms are gracefulness (*εὐσχημοσύνη*) and its opposite, gracelessness (*ἀσχημοσύνη*). Gracefulness can be seen both in inanimate things like buildings and furniture and in living things. In a person gracefulness can show in their physical movements, in their stance or the way they

⁷ Ebenezer Howard, *Garden Cities of Tomorrow*, ed. F. J. Osborn (London, 1945; repr. of revised ed., 1902 [1st ed., under different title, 1898]), p. 151. For an enthusiastic appraisal of Howard's work and influence, see Lewis Mumford, *The City in History: Its Origins, Its Transformations, and Its Prospects* (London, 1961), pp. 514ff.

⁸ Howard, *Garden Cities*, 111.

hold themselves, and also in their talk and how they think.⁹ If you are sympathetic to the idea that the material environment has effects on the soul (particularly, but not only, when you are young), that over time it influences your character and outlook in all sorts of ways you are not aware of, then gracefulness is a good example of a quality that can be taken in from the material environment and internalized as a quality of mind and spirit.

Gracefulness is *attractive*. It is a quality we welcome and would like to have ourselves. Certainly, it can be faked, an outer garment disguising an unjust soul (366b 4: *εὐσχημοσύνης κιβδήλου*). But true grace is the reflection of virtue in a harmonious soul (554e). This not a sleight of hand on Plato's part, or merely verbal stipulation. It is a substantive thesis of the *Republic* that beauty and goodness always go together. But that thesis lies a long way ahead." Meanwhile, consider negative descriptions like "a shabby house," "a cheerless room," "a desolate landscape," and how novelists like Dickens or Balzac use them to establish the moral atmosphere of a scene. To the extent that the moral overtones are brought alive for us, we sympathise with Plato's view that material culture and moral culture are continuous with each other.

The passage I was quoting from turns next to music:

"And is it not for these reasons, Glaucon, that music is the most decisive factor in one's upbringing? It is above all rhythm and attunement [*ἁρμονία*] that sink deep into the soul and take strongest hold upon it, bringing grace, and making one graceful, if one is rightly reared — but if not, it has the opposite effect. Secondly, someone who has been reared in music as they should will be the sharpest at spotting defects in things that are badly crafted or badly grown. Rightly disgusted by them, they will praise things that are fine, delighting in them and

⁹ Cf. 486d for a contrast between the grace of thought (*εὐχαρις διάνοια*) to be looked for in a potential philosopher and the misshapen nature (*ἀσχημῶν φύσις*) of a nonstarter.

¹⁰ Lecture III: "The Poet as Painter." I am indebted to Alexander Nehamas for discussion about the possibility of combining grace and evil.

welcoming them into their soul. With such nourishment they will grow up fine and good [καλός *TE* κάγαθός] themselves. Ugly things, by contrast, they will rightly decry and hate while still young and as yet unable to understand the reason. But when reason comes, someone brought up this way will greet it as a friend with whom their rearing had made them long familiar.” (401d–2a)

Music is decisive because of its influence on your sense of beauty — your taste, the eighteenth century called it — which in turn guides your response to other things in the environment. In this way, music is included in the same range as material and moral culture. And not only music in the narrow sense of rhythm and attunement. Plato’s word *μουσική* covers music and poetry together, because in the ancient world you usually hear them together, as song. Those rhythms and attunements convey verbal messages to the soul, and Plato is as concerned about their content as about their musical form. In an ideal city, the whole culture must be as ideal as possible, because all of it influences the character of the citizens.

FIRST GLANCE AHEAD: THE DIVIDED SOUL IN BOOK X

The cultural factors I have introduced so far fall into two broad classes, corresponding to our two most impressionable distance senses: sight and hearing. Poetry and music appeal to our ears; painting, architecture and furniture to the eyes. To explain why this broad classification will be important throughout the *Republic*, let me anticipate some Platonic theory from book X. And to motivate the theory, let me tell you the outcome of a wholly un-Platonic experiment.

Each time I have given this lecture I ask members of the audience to raise their hands if (1) they *do not* believe in ghosts, but (2) they *do*, nevertheless, get anxious or afraid when listening to ghost stories. Each time, plenty of hands go up.¹¹ I take this

¹¹ The experiment was tried at meetings in Brandeis University, Bristol, Cambridge, Eton College, New Orleans, Oslo, Oxford, Philadelphia, and Pittsburgh, as

as evidence —evidence independent of any theory, ancient or modern, psychoanalytic or cultural —that we can be affected emotionally in ways that bypass our established beliefs and the normal processes of judgment. Any sound philosophy of mind will need to take account of this phenomenon and give a theoretical explanation of it. Plato did not shirk the task.

Already in *Republic* IV we meet the well-known division of the soul into three parts: reason, spirit, and appetite. This division is grounded on cases of *motivational* conflict, as when someone both wants a drink, because they are thirsty, and wants not to drink, because they know it is bad for their health. Plato makes Socrates argue that the persistence of opposed desires can only be explained by locating them in separate parts of the soul. The thirst which does not go away when you think about your health is due to appetite. The concern for your health which keeps you struggling against the temptation to drink is due to reason. *Republic* X (602c–5c) adds a new division, grounded on cases of *cognitive* conflict in which the reasoning part of the soul appears to be at variance with itself.¹²

Consider an oar half submerged in water, or a picture done in a shadowing technique (*σκιαγραφία*) that gives an impression of depth when the painting is viewed from a distance (Seurat's *pointillisme* will serve as an approximate modern analogue),¹³ or

well as on the grand occasion at Harvard. Needless to say, I am grateful to these audiences for much more than their susceptibility to ghost-stories. Their discussion of earlier versions of these lectures helped to shape their final form; so did the reception of the very first version at the Courtauld Institute of Art in London.

¹² At 602e 4 *τούτω* must refer to the subject which did the measuring, which has already been identified as the reasoning part: it is *this* part that receives opposite appearances, hence this part that has to undergo division to avoid the contradiction. The same interpretation in Anthony Kenny, *The Anatomy of the Soul: Historical Essays in the Philosophy of Mind* (Oxford, 1973), p. 22; and Alexander Nehamas, "Plato on Imitation and Poetry in *Republic* X," in Julius Moravcsik and Philip Temko, eds., *Plato on Beauty, Wisdom, and the Arts* (Totowa, 1982), pp. 65–66.

¹³ Shorey and others mistranslate *σκιαγραφία* at 602d as "scene-painting." The Greek for perspectival scene-painting is *σκηνογραφία*, which Plato never mentions. The pictorial technique referred to as *σκιαγραφία* seems to have been one which

a large object which appears small when seen far off. We know, if necessary by measuring the real size of the object seen at a distance, that it is not small, just as we know that the oar is not actually bent. But this does not stop it *looking* smaller than it is, any more than our knowledge stops the oar *looking* bent or the picture *seeming* to have depth. There is a cognitive conflict which Socrates explains as a conflict between two opposed judgments, each located in a different element of the soul. One element in us evaluates the character of an object by the results of measurement, counting, and weighing; the other goes by how the thing looks to the eye from a particular point of view.

This cognitive division is neither the same as, nor inconsistent with, the motivational division of book IV. The new division is an addition, meant to work alongside the earlier one. For the earlier division is brought back in book X to supply a part of the soul to which tragedy appeals, by analogy with painting's appeal to the cognitive part that goes by visual appearances. This time Socrates promises to complete the book IV account by explaining things he missed before (603be).¹⁴ Thus book X has two divisions in play. Painting appeals to a cognitive part that goes by appearances, tragedy to an irrational motivational part which is best seen, I think, as an enlargement of book IV's appetitive part. For its nature is to desire (*ἐπιθυμῆν*) its fill of tears, it *hungers* for a satisfying cry (606a). This is new, but the process of enlarg-

depended on contrasts between light and shade to create the appearance of form and volume: see Plato, *Parmenides* 165cd, *Theaetetus* 208e. Further information in Nancy Demand, "Plato and Painting," *Phoenix* 29 (1975): 1–20; Eva Keuls, "Plato on Painting," *American Journal of Philology* 95 (1978): 100–127. I agree with Keuls, against Demand and others, that Plato's frequent use of *σκιαγραφία* as an image of the merely apparent (e.g., a pretence of justice: 365c; cf. 583b, 586b) does not indicate disapproval of it as a technique in painting itself.

¹⁴ N. R. Murphy, *The Interpretation of Plato's "Republic"* (Oxford, 1951), pp. 241–42, questions the legitimacy of the back-reference at 602e: "Did we not say that it is impossible for the same thing to make opposite judgements at the same time about the same thing?" True, it was not said in those words. But the examples subsumed under book IV's principle of opposites included assent and dissent (437b 1).

ing book IV's appetitive part beyond the basic desires for food, drink, and sex began already in book VIII. Among the numerous and varied appetites (*ἐπιθυμίας*) to which the democratic man grants equal indulgence are an appetite to do some philosophy, for fun, and another to play a while at politics (561cd).¹⁵

To sum up: book X's new bipartite division puts reason and sight in parallel to reason and appetite in the book IV division, which returns with the appetitive part already enlarged. The first division explains our susceptibility to visual illusion, the second our susceptibility to the auditory images of poetry (603b). The parallel demands that the middle part be less prominent (though notice the role of shame as ally of reason at 604a, 605e, 606c). But this is no excuse for supposing that book X replaces the earlier three-part division by a vaguer bipartite one.¹⁶ Still less should one adduce book X as evidence that Plato was not really serious about the tripartite division in book IV.¹⁷

However, as often with Plato, what begins as a parallel or analogy ends with one term dominating the other. The classic case is the analogy between city and soul. It begins in books II and IV as no more than a parallel. Once we know the social structure that makes a city wise or just, we can infer that a psychological realization of that same structure will give these virtues to the individual soul. But in *Republic* VIII–IX, where Socrates traces the decline of the ideal city through a series of worse and worse constitutions, in parallel to a series of worse and worse individual personalities,

¹⁵ For a valuable discussion of how such desires can be appetites, not desires of reason, see John M. Cooper, "Plato's Theory of Human Motivation," *History of Philosophy Quarterly* (1984): 3–21.

¹⁶ So, most recently, Stephen Halliwell, "The *Republic's* Two Critiques of Poetry," in Otfried Höffe, ed., *Platon: Politeia* (Berlin, 1997), pp. 329–30.

¹⁷ So Terry Penner, "Thought and Desire in Plato," in Gregory Vlastos, ed., *Plato: A Collection of Critical Essays*, vol. 2: *Ethics, Politics, and Philosophy of Art and Religion* (Garden City, 1971), pp. 111–13. Penner makes much of 606d 1, where anger (*φύμῶς*) is treated as an appetite or very like one, not assigned to the middle part. But in context it is the desire to indulge anger or grief that Socrates is discussing, not anger and grief as such.

city and soul are increasingly fused. The city side of the analogy takes over. The soul is depicted in ever more vividly political terms, as if it were a city in which the three parts struggle for dominance over each other. One example out of many is the image of a mob of appetites seizing the “acropolis of the soul” (560b). The climax of the process comes at the end of book IX, where Socrates declares that what a philosopher must guard most carefully is the constitution (*πολιτεία*) of their soul (591e). That constitution is the psychological realization in the philosopher’s soul of the city laid out in the pages of the *Republic* (592ab).¹⁸

A similar move, on a smaller scale, fuses the two divisions of the soul in book X. To explain how tragedy sets up a bad constitution in the soul, Socrates takes visual language appropriate for the cognitive part to which painting appeals and applies it to the motivational part to which tragedy appeals. In the presence of images (*εἶδωλα*) fashioned by the poet, this part “is unable to distinguish the greater from the less, but calls the same thing now greater, now less” (605bc). I shall have more to say later about Plato’s transferring the idea of perspectival illusion from visual to tragic appearances.¹⁹ At present it is enough to know that in book X we will meet a Platonic theory according to which the poetry and music of tragedy create their own kinds of cognitive illusion, which are just like visual illusions in the way they persist and maintain their hold on us despite the opposition of our better judgment. Eyes and ears offer painter and poet an entry through which their images can bypass our better judgment and infiltrate the soul.

Already in *Republic* V (475d–76d) Socrates had contrasted two types of thought (*διάνοια*). On the one side, there is the

¹⁸ Compare Plato’s *Cratylus*, where the name-tool analogy ends up defining names as tools (for teaching), and *Statesman*, where the ruling-weaving analogy ends in a conception of ruling as itself a kind of weaving. This heuristic device is what *Statesman* 277a–79a labels “example” (*παράδειγμα*).

¹⁹ Lecture III, “Back to the Divided Soul.”

sense-based thinking cultivated by lovers of sights and sounds who enthusiastically rush around the countryside to view the plays put on at the Rural Dionysia, “as if they had farmed out their ears to listen to every chorus in the land” (475d) ; on the other side, the philosophical mode of thinking cultivated by those who are awake to the distinction between the many beautiful sights and sounds and the single Form, Beauty itself. When Socrates speaks of thought (*διάνοια*) in this passage, he clearly has in view not isolated, occurrent thoughts (“What a pretty picture that is!”), but a style of thinking which pervades one’s life and structures one’s outlook on the world.²⁰ Book X confirms what we should have suspected all along, that sense-based thinking is at work in each and every embodied soul. Hence Plato’s concern to make sure that only graceful appearances meet our eyes, only the appropriate kinds of musical poetry come to our ears. He must make the whole culture ideal. Not only because, as I said just now, all of it influences character, but also because of the *way* it does this: by a gradual, often unnoticed accumulation of images that come in at a level below, and relatively independent of, reason’s activities of judgment, evaluation, and belief-formation.

It is easy for a modern reader to misunderstand this, just as it is easy to mistake Plato’s motivational division for the now familiar distinction between reason and desire. In the divided soul reason has desires and pleasures of its own, while appetite has conceptions of what is pleasurable and can reason how to get it; the middle, spirited part is devoted to honour and has a network of beliefs about what that requires.²¹ What distinguishes reason from

²⁰ Note ζῆν 476c, 476d, and the *διάνοια* shaped by good character at 400e 3 (cf. 403d 7). For the philosopher’s *διάνοια*, cf. also 486a, 486d, 500b. Tragedy threatens the philosopher’s *διάνοια* because it appeals to a lower part or mode of *διάνοια* (595b, 603bc).

²¹ Julia Annas, *An Introduction to Plato's "Republic"* (Oxford, 1981), pp. 125–31, is an excellent introduction to this topic—except that she finds only one division in book X, so that *appetite* “appears as the part which unreflectively accepts visual appearances” (p. 131). On my picture, reason is the superior part in both

the other motivational parts is its concern for the overall, long-term good in one's life; appetite just longs for that drink, regardless of consequences. Similarly, in the cognitive division, reason has no monopoly on judgment, evaluation, and belief-formation. Its specialty, as the part bent on knowing the truth of things in every sphere (581b), is to weigh up all the evidence, so that we are not ruled by misleading appearances (602d) ; it ensures that we are not often taken in by objects that look small far away. But for Plato the misleading appearance already involves judgment.²² Throughout the *Republic* perception is treated as a judgment-maker independent of reason, but much less reflective.²³ A modern Idealist philosopher wrote: " 'Sense-perception' is a form of 'knowledge,' a 'cognizant experience,' in which the mind *thinks sensuously*. There is 'thought' in sense-perception, but not thought free and explicit —not 'thought' which the percipient controls, or of which he is even aware *as* 'thought.' "²⁴ With much of this Plato could agree. Especially the last clause.

A TALE OF TWO CITIES

But let us stay a while longer with material culture. If there is a problem about ensuring it is graceful rather than ugly, the existence of such a problem is a kind of luxury. A society faced with a choice in the matter must have resources beyond those needed for survival. As Aristotle will put it (*Politics* I 1, 1252b 29–30), it is a society which, having come into existence for the sake of life, now exists for the sake of the good life. To mark this distinction Socrates describes two cities: the first confined to the economic

divisions, for it desires both truth and the good; the lower parts are different in the two cases, identified by the ways they differ from reason.

²² Explicitly stated at 602e-3a and more formally theorized in Plato's *Sophist* (263d–64b).

²³ See especially 523a–25a.

²⁴ Harold H. Joachim, *Logical Studies* (Oxford 1948, from lectures given in 1927-35), p. 83 (italics mine). The context is an attack on the Empiricist search for a *datum* in sense-perception, The next page cites *Rep.* 523a–25a.

necessities of city life in the fifth century B.C.,²⁵ the second enjoying all the pleasant “extras” of ancient Greek civilization —including that wonderful architecture, which Socrates speaks of as “houses and clothing beyond the requirements of necessity” (373a 5–6).²⁶ And to make the contrast vivid, he tells us (with a good deal of irony) how in each city —the primitive city at subsistence level and the “luxurious” city with a surplus —the citizens will enjoy the high point of ancient social life, the feast or communal meal.

We start with the uncouth simplicity of the first city:

“For their nourishment they will prepare barley-meal and wheat flour: the latter to bake, the other to knead. The barley-cakes and wheaten loaves²⁷ they will throw on some rushes or fresh leaves and, reclining on beds [κατακλιθέντες ἐπὶ στιβάδων] of strewn bryony and myrtle, they will feast [εὐωχῆσονται]²⁸ with their children. Afterwards, they will drink their wine with garlands on their head and sing hymns to the gods. They will enjoy sex with each other without begetting offspring beyond their means, lest they fall into poverty or war.” (372bc)

So far the feasting has involved nothing more elevated than bread and wine (drunk, as was customary in ancient Greece, *after* the

²⁵ For an illuminating analysis of the economic base, see Malcolm Schofield, “Plato on the Economy,” in Mogens Herman Hansen, ed., *The Ancient Greek City-State*, Acts of the Copenhagen Polis Centre, vol. 1 (Copenhagen, 1993), pp. 183–96.

²⁶ I follow the construal in Shorey’s note *ad loc.*,

²⁷ The text alternates barley and wheat in a double chiasmus. For culinary clarification I quote J. Adam’s edition of the *Republic* (Cambridge, 1902), *ad loc.*: “Only the wheaten meal was (as a rule) baked (πέσσειν or ὀπτᾶν) into loaves (ἄρτοι); the barley-meal was kneaded into a simple dough (μάσσειν, whence μᾶζα), dried in a mould, and moistened with water and eaten. . . . μᾶζαι made of barley meal was the staple food of the common Greek: the wheaten loaf was a luxury.” Adam’s notes will guide my translation in the sequel.

²⁸ This verb can be used of animals as well as humans; not so the verb ἐστιάομαι, which Glaucon sniffily substitutes at 372c 3. εὐωχέομαι evokes the quality consumed, ἐστιάομαι the sociability of the occasion. At 586a the noun εὐωχία evokes gluttony and worse.

meal is over),²⁹ hymn-singing, and (responsible) sex. No details are given to clarify the sexual arrangements, but if, as seems clear, the children's mothers eat, drink, and then have sex with the men, this does not reflect contemporary Greek practice at all. It looks as though Socrates is sketching a primitive anticipation of the arrangements he will propose for the ideal city, where the family is abolished in favour of communality of women and children, and the breeding festivals (which include feasting and hymn-singing) are carefully regulated to keep the size of the population steady (459-60a). No wonder Glaucon breaks in to complain:³⁰ " 'No relishes [ὄψον] apparently,' he said, 'for the men you depict at dinner [τοὺς ἄνδρας ἐστρωμένους]' " (372c).

What Glaucon wants is a proper, male-only dinner-party of the kind he is used to, with meat or fish to accompany the bread.³¹ But Socrates keeps up his teasing:

"True," I said, "I forgot that they will also have relishes—salt, of course, and olives and cheese, and country stews of roots and vegetables. And for dessert [τραγήματα]³² I suppose we will serve them figs and chickpeas and beans, and they will toast myrtle-berries and acorns at the fire, while they sip wine in moderate amounts. In this way, living out their life in peace and health, they will no doubt survive to old age and, on dying, bequeath a like life to their offspring." (372cd)

Glaucon is still not happy: "That's just the fodder you would provide, Socrates, if you were founding a city of pigs."

²⁹ That is the force of the prefix in *ἐπιπίνοντες*: Adam, *ad loc.* The practice itself can be observed in Plato's *Symposium* (176a).

³⁰ In the *Republic*, a switch from Adeimantus to Glaucon typically marks a move to a higher level of discussion: see my "First Words: A Valedictory Lecture," *Proceedings of the Cambridge Philological Society* 43 (1997): 13–14.

³¹ *ὄψον* means anything to accompany the bread, but especially meat or fish; Socrates will ironically insist on the wider meaning.

³² *τραγήματα* (things chewed alongside the wine) are not part of the meal but accompaniment to the drink.

Do not be misled here by thinking of pigs as greedy. This is our culture's stereotype. For the ancient Greeks, the pig was an emblem rather of ignorance (so *Rep.* 535e). "Any pig would know" was the saying.³³ What Glaucon means is, "You describe the feasting of people who do not know how to live. It is *uncivilized*."

Socrates asks, "Then how shall I feed them?" Glaucon replies —and this is the motif I have been leading up to: "In the customary way [*ἄπερ νομίζεται*]: they must recline on couches [*κλίνας*], if they are not to be uncomfortable,³⁴ and dine from tables,³⁵ with the relishes and desserts that people have nowadays" (372de). The list of requirements for civilized feasting is soon enlarged, in terms that make it clear that in the second city the men have wives, whom in the usual Greek fashion they leave at home. There will be couches, tables, and other equipment (sc. for dining), unguents, incense, girls (*ἑταῖραι*, "courtesans"), and pastries —all sorts of them, plus painting (sc. to decorate the pottery and, for the rich, wall-paintings in the dining room), embroidery, gold and ivory, and similar adornments (373a). This list defines the "luxurious" or "inflamed" city (so called at 373e), which Socrates and his interlocutors will purify step by step (as becomes explicit at 399e). By removing objectionable features, like tragedy and comedy, the family and private property, they will gradually fashion the ideal city, where life will be moderately austere —as in the "city of pigs" —but civilized. Couches and tables are not removed.³⁶ They remain at the top of the list of equipment for civilized, cultured life.

³³ See Plato, *Laches* 196d and scholium *ad loc.*

³⁴ So Shorey, but Glaucon may intend *ταλαιπωρεῖσθαι* in its stronger meaning: "suffer distress or hardship."

³⁵ Note the *TE . . . Kai*, which links couches and tables as the basic unit, so to speak, of civilization.

³⁶ The rule of commensality in Spartan-style *ξυσσίτια* (416e, 458c, 547d) implies couches and wine-drinking after the meal (see the quote from Alcman below). Glaucon's demand for *ἄψον* as is conducive to physical fitness (559ab— I owe thanks for this reference to Susan Sauvé). In general, austerity is preserved

HISTORICAL INTERLUDE : GREEK COUCHES

A bit of history is in order here, to establish the cultural resonances on which Plato draws when he talks of the couch. It is not a psychoanalyst's couch, let alone a casting couch; nor a chaise longue in an elegant château. It is dining room furniture.

Both the word *κλίνη* and the practice of reclining³⁷ to feast are unknown to Homer. Homeric heroes sit on chairs to feast, as gods and goddesses continue to do in classical times. Reclining derives from the Near East —for the Greeks, a place of luxury. The first evidence of the practice there is in the Bible: a tirade by the prophet Amos in the eighth century B.C. against luxurious feasting and drinking (*Amos* 6, 4–7). The practice, and the word *κλίνη*, were established in Greece by the seventh century.³⁸ The couch, and the knowledge of how to use it, was a feature of “polite society,” as is clear from a scene in Aristophanes where Philocleon, an old man from the plebeian classes, has difficulty learning how to recline gracefully at an imaginary feast.³⁹

BDELYCLEON. No more of that: but lie down there, and learn To be convivial [*ξυμποτικός*] and companionable.

PHILOCLEON. Yes; how lie down?

BD. In an elegant graceful way [*εὐσχημόνως*].

PH. Like this, do you mean?

by a sensible diet (403e–4e, 416d), by not allowing the Guards to drink from silver or gold cups (417a), and by not giving them money to pay for courtesans (420a). Incidentally, 468e does not imply that they sit on chairs to dine and drink: the word *ἕδραις* is part of a line from Homer (*Iliad* VIII 162 et al.), whom Socrates is keen to follow in the matter of honouring the valiant (420cd), and Homeric heroes do not recline to feast (see below).

³⁷ Our word “recline” is cognate with the Greek *κλίνη*.

³⁸ This is the standard view, based on the lines of Alcman quoted below. A subtle argument for back-dating to the eighth century may be found in Oswyn Murray, “Nestor’s Cup and the Origins of the Greek *Symposion*,” *Annali di Archeologia e Storia Antica* ns. 1 (1994): 47–54.

³⁹ Cf. Rep. 420e, where the image of the potters reclining on couches to feast is meant to be as grotesque as that of farmers dressed up in finery and surrounded by gold.

BD. No, not in the least like that.

PH. How then?

BD. Extend your knees, and let yourself
With practised ease subside along the cushions;
Then praise some piece of plate; inspect the ceiling;
Admire the woven hangings of the hall.
Ho! water for our hands! bring in the tables!
Dinner! after-wash! now the libation.

PH. Good heavens! then is it in a dream we are feasting?

(*Wasps* 1208–18; tr. Rogers)

All in all, couches and tables are items well chosen to mark the transition from primitive to civilized social intercourse. They initiate the material culture of a society which no longer has to make do with reclining on beds of leaves in the open air⁴⁰ to eat country vegetables and roasted acorns together. It can *choose* not only its menus, but also, more importantly, whether the evening's post-prandial entertainment shall focus on singing-games, which Philocleon is made to practise, or some more improving pursuit.⁴¹ We shall see, indeed, that couches and tables are the setting for a *continuing* series of cultural choices, which do much to determine over time the character and development of the culture of a society. The social gathering with couches and tables is as good a place as any to localize the overall choice which is the main theme of the *Republic*, the choice between living well and living badly.⁴²

⁴⁰ The phrase *κατακλιθέντες ἐπὶ στιβάδων* (372b 5) in Socrates' description of the primitive feast would suggest to ancient readers a picnic, with beds of leaves (or mattresses stuffed with them) in place of couches.

⁴¹ Compare, again, Plato's *Symposium* 176e.

⁴² This is the point at which to acknowledge my debt to some of the fascinating literature which has grown up around issues of sympotic culture: J. M. Dentzer, *Le motif du banquet couché dans le Proche-Orient et le monde grec du VIIe au IVe siècle avant J.C.* (Rome, 1982); E. L. Bowie, "Early Greek Elegy, Symposium, and Public Festival," *Journal of Hellenic Studies* 106 (1986): 13–35; François Lissarague, *Un flot d'images: Une esthétique du banquet grec* (Paris, 1987; Eng. trans. Princeton, 1990); Oswyn Murray, ed., *Sympotica: A Symposium on the Symposium* (Ox-

We have just looked ahead to the passage in book X where painting becomes the paradigm for understanding the perspectival illusions fostered by tragic poetry. The example chosen to start the book X discussion is a painted couch (596e). Book X also posits Platonic Forms of Couch and of Table (596b). But in these contexts scholars all too often translate κλίνη as “bed,” an item which has a more restricted resonance than the couch.⁴³ Bed and table do not go together. Couch and table do — and together they promise poetry.

Κλίνας μὲν ἑπτὰ καὶ τόσαι τράπεζαι, sang the seventh-century poet Alcman: “Seven couches and as many tables laden with poppy-seed loaves and linseed and sesame, and chrysocolla in (full?) bowls”⁴⁴ That was not a lullaby to bring on sleep, but a drinking song for Spartans reclining on bare wooden couches (without the coverings and cushions usual in other cities). It is also the first extant occurrence of the word κλίνη.

Again, Aristophanes in the fifth century has a herald announce a feast with a long list of attractions: “Κλίνας, τράπεζαι — couches, tables, cushions, covers, garlands, unguents, sweetmeats; the whores [πόρναι] are there; sponge-cakes, flat-cakes, sesame-cakes, wafer-cakes; and dancing girls — ‘beloved of Harmodius’ — lovely ones. Hurry, as fast as you can.” (*Acharnians* 1090–94). I will explain the phrase “beloved of Harmodius” shortly. For the moment my point is that, if the couch is furniture for the dining room, a painted couch will be something you see in a picture of eating and drinking. And this is relevant to poetry in a way that beds are not, because feasting and symposia were typically occasions for poetry.

ford, 1990); William J. Slater, *Dining in a Classical Context* (Ann Arbor, 1991); Pauline Schmitt Pantel, *La cité au banquet: Histoire des repas publics dans les cités grecques* (Rome, 1992); Oswyn Murray and Manuela Tecusan, eds., *In Vino Veritas* (Rome, 1995).

⁴³ But Shorey got the translation right long ago.

⁴⁴ Translation and text in David A. Campbell, *Greek Lyric*, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, Mass., and London, 1982), V 2: 410–11. Chrysocolla is a dish made of honey and linseed.

Beds are for sex and sleep, couches for food, drink, sex — and poetry, A Greek reader would find it entirely natural that in *Republic* II feasting is the prelude to a long discussion of poetry.

In the pious simplicity of the “city of pigs,” they sang hymns to the gods. In the civilized Greek world reflected in our surviving literature, both epic and lyric poetry were regularly performed at social gatherings such as festivals, sacrifices, feasts, and symposia.⁴⁵ Aristophanes’ phrase “beloved of Harmodius” is a joke rewriting of a drinking-song (*σκόλιον*) in praise of the famous lovers, Harmodius and Aristogeiton, who were celebrated in Athenian folk memory for slaying the tyrant.⁴⁶ The song began (in one of its versions), “I shall carry my sword in a spray of myrtle, like Harmodius and Aristogeiton when they killed the tyrant and made Athens a city of equal rights [*ἰσονόμους*].” The response was, “Beloved Harmodius, No, you cannot be dead . . .”⁴⁷ Without changing a letter of the Greek, Aristophanes rewrites “Beloved Harmodius, No” (*φίλταθ’ Ἀρμόδι’, ου*) to get “Beloved of Harmodius” (*φίλταθ’ Ἀρμοδίου*), thereby suggesting that Harmodius loved girls!

Aristophanes, however, was having fun with something serious. The song celebrates Harmodius and Aristogeiton for making Athens a city of equal rights (*ἰσονόμους*). *Ἰσονομία*, equality before the law, was the buzzword of Athenian democracy. Symposia and feasts are among the most important places where the culture is transmitted from one generation to the next. Singing the Harmodius song is like singing the Marseillaise with its bloodthirsty chorus, “Aux armes, citoyens!” It is at once a celebration and a confirmation, each time it is sung, of a foundational civic tradi-

⁴⁵ Symposiasts might also recite speeches from tragedy: Aristophanes, *Clouds* 1353–76, has the symposiasts recite.

⁴⁶ Never mind that they killed Hipparchus, not his brother Hippias, who had succeeded their father, Peisistratus, as tyrant: every society needs its “noble lie.” To honour Harmodius and Aristogeiton, the city gave their descendants the privilege Socrates demands at Plato, *Apology* 36de: free meals in the prytaneion.

⁴⁷ Translation and text in Campbell, *Greek Lyric*, 5: 284–87.

tion.⁴⁸ The symposium (like pubs and cafés today) is a prime setting for the young to be socialized into that tradition.⁴⁹ The songs sung there become common currency.⁵⁰ At the symposium you hear stories about the gods and heroes from the near or distant past and acquire the group loyalties, values, beliefs, and knowledge which constitute, as my dictionary says, the shared bases of social action. And the main vehicle for this transmission is poetry, sung and performed after the food has been cleared from the tables and the party is reclining comfortably on their couches.

SELF-REFLECTIONS IN THE CAVE

Now look at Figure 1. The picture is by the Brygos painter, around 490 B. C.⁵¹ We see two of the couches, two tables (no food on them now) ; pipes and lyre for the music. We also see a cup of the very same shape (termed kylix) as the cup the picture is painted on. The picture of drinking is painted on a drinking cup. Such self-referential scenes are very common on the cups and mixing bowls used at symposia. So imagine yourself at a symposium using this cup. What you see on it is, in a certain sense, yourself and your companions.

Recall also Alcman's song, "Seven couches and as many tables. . . ." The archaeological remains of ancient Greek buildings confirm that seven was the minimum number of couches required

⁴⁸ It is the song the "demagogue" Cleon leads off with (in a different version) in the singing-game at the imaginary symposium cited above from Aristophanes' *Wasps* (1224–25).

⁴⁹ Reclining started at eighteen, but the vases show younger boys sitting or standing by: see Alan Booth, "The Age for Reclining and Its Attendant Perils," in Slater, *Dining*, 105–20; cf. Xenophon, *Symposium* 1.8. Aristotle, *Politics* VII 17, 133Gb 20–23, uses "the age of reclining" as his criterion for when boys should be allowed to watch comedy.

⁵⁰ Example: "I'm sure you've heard people at drinking parties singing that song in which they count out as they sing that 'to enjoy good health is the best thing; second is to have turned out good looking; and third . . . is to be honestly rich'" (Plato, *Gorgias* 451e; tr. Zeyl).

⁵¹ British Museum E 68=ARV² 371.24.

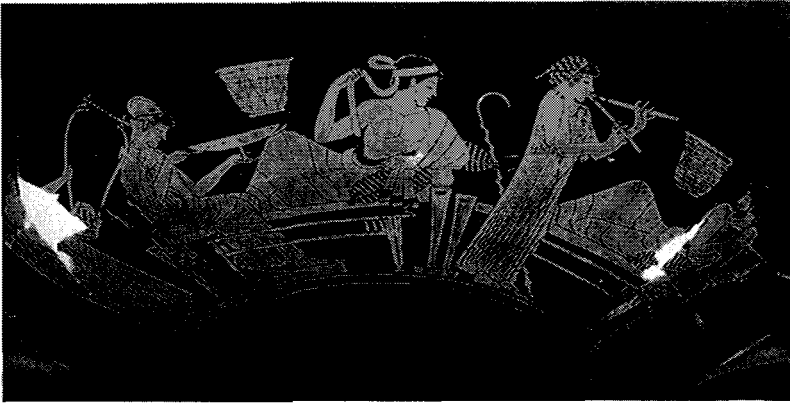


FIGURE 1. Courtesy of the British Museum.

for a symposium.⁵² Alcman's poem is a song to be sung at a symposium about the symposium it is sung at. As with the cups and vessels, self-reference of this kind is common in Greek lyric poetry. An example familiar to students of ancient philosophy is fragment 1 of the sixth-century poet-philosopher Xenophanes:

For now the floor is clean, and everybody's hands
 and cups; a servant garlands us with wreaths;
 another offers fragrant perfume from a dish;
 the mixing bowl's set up, brimful of cheer,
 and further jars of wine stand ready, promising
 never to fail —soft wine, that smells of flowers.
 The frankincense sends out its holy scent all round
 the room; there's water, cool and clear and sweet;
 bread lies to hand, gold-brown; a splendid table, too,
 with cheeses and thick honey loaded down.
 The altar in the middle's decked about with flowers;
 festivity and song pervade the house.
 The first thing men of sense should do is sing of God
 in words of holiness and purity,
 with a libation and a prayer for means to do
 what's right [*Th δίκαια*]; that's more straightforward, after all,

⁵² The alternatives were eleven or fifteen. A couch might be occupied by one person or two.

than crimes. Then drink what you can hold and still get home unaided (if, of course, you're not too old).
 Applaud the man who proclaims noble deeds in his cups,
 so that there may be memory and striving for virtue:
 don't be relating wars of Titans or of Giants
 or Centaurs, fictions of the men of old,
 or strife and violence. There's no benefit in that.
 No, always keep the gods duly in mind.⁵³

Xenophanes sings about good order at the symposium (drink as much wine as allows you to get home without a servant's assistance), and then he turns to appropriate subjects for the singing. The right accompaniment to the wine is tales of noble deeds, whose memory will inspire those present now to emulate their ancestors by striving for virtue themselves. Then Xenophanes tells the symposiasts, as Socrates will tell Adeimantus in *Republic* II, not to sing about battles and disputes among the gods; such stories are dangerous fictions (*πλάσματα* in Xenophanes, line 22; *μύθους πλαοθέντας* in *Rep.* 377b). Imagine yourself at a symposium where this song is sung. In a certain sense, you are hearing about yourself and your companions, and how you should spend the evening together.

In quite what sense you see or hear about yourself is a complicated question, to which I will return. Meanwhile, I should like to connect these cups and poems with a significant detail in Plato's famous image of the Cave in *Republic* VII. You will remember that the prisoners are chained in such a way that they see only the shadows cast by firelight on to the back of the cave by a variety of objects carried along a low wall behind them. The wall is com-

⁵³ I follow the text of M. L. West, *Iambi et Elegi Graeci ante Alexandrum Cantati*, 2nd ed. (Oxford, 1992), vol. 2, which is different in crucial respects from that familiar to students of ancient philosophy from Hermann Diels and Walther Kranz, *Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker*, 6th ed., 3 vols. (Berlin, 1951–52); note, for example, that West prints *ὡς ἦ* at the beginning of line 20. The translation is borrowed from M. L. West, *Greek Lyric Poetry*, translated with introduction and notes (Oxford, 1993), but with my own version of lines 19–20.

pared to the screen above which a showman displays his puppets, so the people manipulating the objects are rather like puppeteers. The first thing Socrates says about the chained prisoners is that they have seen nothing *of themselves or each other* save the shadows on the back of the cave (515a). What does that mean?⁵⁴

The most literal approach would suppose that the shadows of themselves are cast by the prisoners' bodies, which must therefore (despite the wall) be within the light beam of the fire higher up in the cave. But consider: their bodies are immobile, chained since infancy at the neck and legs (514ab). Do the prisoners think of themselves and their companions as inactive and stationary in a world where everything else is moving? The shadows cast by the puppet like objects (models of people, animals, artefacts) carried along the wall certainly move. Some prisoners are honoured by the others for memorizing sequences of shadows so successfully that they can predict what will turn up next (516cd). If none of the prisoners move, predictions about shadows cast by the statuettes of humans (514c: *ἀνδρῶντας*) will always concern *other* human beings, never the prisoners themselves. But who are these other human beings? Why, and in what sense, do the prisoners who are good at predicting their behaviour hold power over the rest (516d 4: *ἐνδυναστεύοντας*) ?

Again, Socrates sums up the sorry state of the prisoners by saying that the only things they consider real are the shadows of the puppets (515c: *τὰς τῶν σκευαστῶν σκιάς*). Do they not count themselves as real too? If the shadows of themselves are cast by their own immobilized bodies, not by the statuettes of humans carried along the wall, they will get no closer to the truth about themselves when they are forced to turn round towards the wall and look at "the things whose shadows they saw before" (515cd).

⁵⁴ I owe deep thanks to Jacques Brunschwig for asking me this question, seldom discussed in the scholarly literature, and for subsequent debate about our conflicting answers. His answer, "Un détail négligé dans la Caverne de Platon," will appear in a *Festschrift* for Bernard Rousset.

They will only be looking at some of the things whose shadows they saw before. So literal an interpretation brings insuperable difficulties.

Let us start again. The Cave is introduced as an image for our condition in regard to *παιδεία* and its opposite, *ἀπαιδευσία* (514a-15a). The Greek word *παιδεία* means both education and culture, because culture is what educates and forms the soul. After describing the cave, prisoners, and puppets, Socrates adds that some of the puppeteers speak, their voices echoing back from the bottom of the cave in such a way that the prisoners suppose it is the shadows that speak the words; other puppeteers remain silent and produce visual effects alone (515ab). Just so, painters do not speak, but poets and dramatists do. I propose that among the shadows the prisoners are looking at and listening to are their culture's images of themselves and their companions —just like the drinker with the cup and the audience of sympotic poems. Both painters and poets are among the people who manage the show over the wall behind the prisoners to make the sights and sounds that flit before them. They play a key role in shaping the culture and educating the citizens.

On this interpretation, the Cave image shows the prisoners unaware that their values and ideas are uncritically absorbed from the surrounding culture. They are prisoners, as we all are to begin with, of their education and upbringing. When Socrates introduces the point that they have seen nothing of themselves and each other save the shadows on the back of the cave, he is explaining (515a 5: *γάρ*) what he means by saying the prisoners are “like us.” He means they are like us in respect of the education and culture we were brought up in.

Imagine people listening to Xenophanes' poem or drinking from the Brygos painter's cup. They do not think, “That's me — Glaucon, son of Ariston.” They think, “That's us, that's how we do or should behave; that's how to drink together.” In the theatre they do not think, “That's Pericles,” but “That's how a resourceful

leader gets his way —he's the sort to vote for.” It is the generic characterisations that matter to their conception of themselves and each other, not the actual details of each individual life. One of the very few scholars to comment on the shadows “of themselves and each other” has this to say:

They have never observed the genuine facts of human nature in themselves or in others. They think that they have a clear idea of their own character and relation to their neighbours, but really the image which does duty in their mind for such an idea is a mere phantasm projected by a false light of sentiment or association.⁵⁵

All I would add is that these sentiments and associations are fostered by poet and painter and any other puppeteers who make and manipulate the surrounding culture. It is the culture from which we derive our “self-image.”

I am tempted to include orators on the list of culture-makers. As he develops the Cave simile, Socrates emphasises the difficulty a philosopher who has seen the Form of Justice will encounter when debating, in the lawcourts and elsewhere, about shadows and puppets of justice (517d_e). The orator who appears before juries, assemblies, and other large gatherings has a formative influence on people's sense of themselves and their companions. A famous example is Pericles' Funeral Oration in Thucydides, which could well be described as giving the Athenians a powerful image of themselves —an image that Plato took the trouble to satirize at length in the *Menexenus*.

Socrates opens the *Menexenus* by saying that funeral orations always make him feel great. By the time the speaker has finished praising the dead and their ancestors and all the glorious deeds they did (plus some they did not really do), he feels himself to be taller and nobler and more handsome than he has ever been, while the city he lives in seems even more wonderful than before

⁵⁵ Bernard Bosanquet, *A Companion to Plato's Republic* (London, 1895), *ad loc.*

(234b–35c). The speech he then recites (allegedly borrowed from Pericles' mistress, Aspasia) gives a radiant picture of Athenian history up to (and after) his own day. Even the civil war to oust the Thirty Tyrants comes across as the ideal civil war to have if you have to go through such a thing: the two sides were so kind to each other (243e).

This is not just flattery to boost the survivors' self-esteem. The idea is that the audience will be inspired to greatness themselves, in emulation of their predecessors. For after the history come exhortations to valour and virtue (246d ff.). Never mind that Plato contrives to write a healthy dose of Socratic moral philosophy into this part of Aspasia's speech. She gives a fine illustration of what Xenophanes called for: "memory and striving for virtue."

But it is not just the prisoners' self-image that is constructed (as we now say) by the surrounding culture. It is also their image of the world around them. Besides the statuettes of human beings, there are puppets of animals and artefacts casting shadows from the wall. Of these too the prisoners have seen nothing but the shadows (515b 2).⁵⁶ In book X, where the puppeteer's art returns, alongside shadow-painting, as one of the creators of visual illusion (602d 3-4),⁵⁷ we will be told that the couches and cups in a pic-

⁵⁶ To read the antithesis *πρῶτον μὲν ἑαυτῶν . . . τί δὲ τῶν παραφερομένων* (515a 5-b 2) as contrasting the prisoners' immobilized bodies with the puppets generally would take us back to the difficulties of the literal approach. Better, therefore, to read it as a contrast between human statuettes and the others, between "ourselves" and "everything else"; similarly, outside the cave, reflections of people contrast with reflection of other things (516a 7). An alternative would be to take a subset of the human statues as the ones whose shadows the prisoners identify with and contrast them with other humans (foreigners, perhaps also women) as well as other things: Us vs. the Other.

⁵⁷ The word used for puppeteering, *θauματοποιία*, can refer to all sorts of illusionistic performances, and in Plato's *Sophist* (235b; cf. 224ab) it appears as the genus which subsumes sophists as well as other image-makers. If I do not include sophists among the manipulators behind the wall in the cave, this is for two reasons. First, because in the *Republic*, the real sophist is the multitude; those who ask a fee for their teaching are small fry, who merely echo the opinions of that great beast (492a-93e). Second, the *Sophist* strikes me as designed to surprise and instruct by capturing the sophist in a network of ideas familiar to the reader from the *Republic's* discussion of art and illusion; on this, see further Noburu Notomi, *The Appearances of the Sophist* (Cambridge, forthcoming).

ture of drinking are at third remove from the truth and reality of the Forms (597e). So too are the images put before us by Homer and the tragic poets (599d, 602c).⁵⁸ This matches exactly the status of the shadows in the Cave: they derive from the puppets carried along the wall, which are themselves likenesses of the real people, animals, and things outside the cave. The shadows are at third remove (Greeks count inclusively) from the real things outside, which represent the Forms. Book X gives a metaphysical restatement of the understanding of poet and painter I have proposed for the Cave.

True, it is only in retrospect that this interpretation is confirmed. Equally, it is only in retrospect that we learn that the Cave has to do with mathematics as well as cultural values (532bc). This is not the place to wonder how two things which seem so disparate can fit together in one simile.⁵⁹ I shall simply say that there are other passages in the *Republic* which gain further significance later, from a retrospective filling out of meaning. My next example is Socrates' account of the feasting in the "luxurious" city.

TWO TYPES OF IMITATOR

Besides couches and tables, luxurious feasting requires every available kind of hunter (because Glaucon insists on meat and fish), and many types of imitator (373b). Lots more skills are needed too: wet-nurses, chefs to prepare the relishes, beauticians, barbers, swineherds, and others (37%). But the extra that interests me here is the imitators (*μιμηταί*).

Imitators are people who make the likenesses by which the culture is transmitted. *μίμησις* or likeness-making will become the

⁵⁸Detailed discussion of these claims must wait for lecture III.

⁵⁹For some suggestions, see my "Platonism and Mathematics: A Prelude to Discussion," in Andreas Graeser, ed., *Mathematics and Metaphysics in Aristotle* (Bern and Stuttgart, 1987), 213-40, and "Plato on Why Mathematics Is Good for the Soul" (forthcoming).

key concept of Plato's critique of art in books III and X. In book II, where he first introduces the concept, Socrates confines himself to distinguishing two main types of imitator, corresponding (as already mentioned) to our two most impressionable distance senses, sight and hearing.

Some imitators make likenesses of things in shapes and colours; they will be visual artists such as painters, sculptors, embroiderers. Others are sound-artists, who make likenesses in music, where "music" covers the entire range of poetic or theatrical performance. The sound-artists mentioned are the poets, who composed the music (in our narrower sense of the word) as well as the verse, and their assistants —rhapsodes, actors, chorus-masters, contractors,⁶⁰ all of whom contribute to the performance on the day.

We have now moved from couches and tables to the theatre. But we have not changed the subject, only the size of the social gathering. Athenian tragedy and comedy happened at a civic and religious festival which brought the whole citizen body together. The tragedies usually enacted new versions of the citizens' shared religious and heroic myths; the comedies played with themes from their shared social and political life. This is cultural transmission at its most intense, with the whole society present (even if represented only by the males), with a parade of tribute from the empire, and the god Dionysus presiding —the god of community joy and wine, madness and violence. When Plato talks about the theatre, the question he is asking is still, How can the total culture be as ideal as possible?

So couches and tables are about a good deal more than appetites for food, drink, and sex.⁶¹ Plato agrees with modern anthro-

⁶⁰ For an example of contractors (*ἐργολάβοι*), who were required to engage performers and provide for them during the festival, see the Euboean law quoted and discussed by Sir Arthur Pickard-Cambridge, *The Dramatic Festivals of Athens*, 2nd ed. revised by John Gould and D. M. Lewis (Oxford, 1968), 281–82, 306–8. Plato ends his list with a sneer at the intrusion of commerce.

⁶¹ *Pace* Charles Griswold, "The Ideas and the Criticism of Poetry in Plato's *Republic*, Book 10," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 19 (1981): 143–45, followed by Nehamas, "Imitation," 73, n. 32 (c).

polology that food, drink, and sex are as much part of the culture as song and dance. Hence the question how to use couches and tables in the ideal city is part of a larger question: How to shape the culture to have the best possible influence on the souls of its citizens, especially when they are young. The cave is not abolished in the ideal city, only purified. That is where the philosophers return to rule: to “*that cave again*,” as Socrates will put it later (539e 3). All the young and most of the grown-up inhabitants of the ideal city spend their lives in the condition of the chained prisoners, accepting uncritically the values of their culture.⁶² The ideal city is ideal because its entire culture —material, moral, and musical — is pervaded by the right values, thanks to the philosopher-rulers’ understanding of the Forms, including the Forms of Couch and of Table. Book X’s positing of these two Forms indicates that Plato wants to claim there is an objectively correct answer to the question how the city should make use of couches and tables and all the other apparatus of civilized gatherings.

SECOND GLANCE AHEAD: THE FORM OF COUCH IN BOOK X

By an objectively correct answer I mean one that is rooted in human nature, so that in the ideal city human nature achieves the best cultural expression it can aspire to. A Platonic Form is in the first instance what is specified by an objectively correct definition. The definition of the Form of Couch would be an account of the couch as an instrument for the education and cultural fulfillment of human nature, in much the same way as Plato’s *Cratylus* defines the Forms of Shuttle and Name. The shuttle is an instrument for

⁶² The Cave as we read it contains an unmistakable allusion to the fate of Socrates, killed for trying to release prisoners from their chains by engaging them in dialectic (517a). This would not happen in the purified cave of the ideal city, for two reasons. First, conversion begins with mathematics (521d, 524d–25a, 526e) and dialectic is postponed until the age of thirty (537d–39d). Second, each stage of the curriculum is restricted to the select few who have proved their worth, both moral and intellectual, at the previous stage (537d, 540a).

weaving, the name of something is an instrument for teaching. The correct way to design and use a shuttle is determined by its function, to help turn thread into cloth. The correct way to design and use a couch is likewise determined by its function, to help turn the impressionable young into worthy citizens. There are constraints in both cases: you need a sound knowledge of the material you have to work with (the potential and limitations of woollen thread and human nature), and a clear understanding of the end-product you are aiming for (high-quality cloth, high-quality citizens). These constraints make it possible to give an objective account of what a shuttle or couch is and how best to use it. The long discussion of musical poetry in *Republic* II-III can be read as Plato's account of the objectively best way to use couches and tables for the education and cultural fulfillment of human nature. *Republic* X confirms that "the excellence, the beauty, the rightness of every implement, living thing, and action are determined solely by reference to the *use* for which each has been made or grown" (bold). The use of a couch is not just reclining. It is reclining to participate in a culturally intense social gathering.⁶³

I said that a Platonic Form is *in the first instance* what is specified by an objectively correct definition. The second main feature of Platonic Forms is that they are eternal, uncreated, and independent of the sensible world. But in *Republic* X the Form of Couch is made by God (597b). This novelty has caused much knitting of scholarly brows. Many refuse to take the statement seriously. What I think it means is that Forms such as Couch, Shuttle, and Name have a rather different status from Forms like Beauty, Justice, and the Good. I have a speculation to offer about what that status is, but this will be a digression from the main line of my argument.

⁶³ One of the differences between Platonic and Aristotelian teleology is that Plato tends to go for the highest purpose a thing can achieve. Eyes are for astronomy, ears for harmonics (530d); both organs are given to us for the improvement of our intellectual understanding (cf. *Timaeus* 46e-48e). At a lower level, the human liver is for divination (*Tim.* 72b).

The clue I want to follow up is the agri-cultural imagery invoked to describe God's making of Couch. He made it grow: *φυτεύειν*, *+οἰέειν* (597cd). He is the *φυτουργός* of Couch (597d), its Planter or Grower, and his product is repeatedly described as "the Couch in nature" (597b 6, c 2, d 3, e 3-4, 598a 1). Glaucon approves the title *φυτουργός*, saying, "At any rate, it was by means of nature *{+ἴ(TEL) ye}* that God made this [the Form of Couch] and everything else [*sc.* everything else he made]" (597d 7-8).⁶⁴ The remark should encourage us to think about Plato's view of nature.

The Greek word for nature, *φύσις*, which is the reason we call the study of nature "physics," originally meant "growth." Plato's physics is to be found in his discourse on nature, the *Timaeus*. In the *Timaeus*, the Divine Craftsman is directly or indirectly the source of good order in nature, or "growth," throughout the sensible world. The best part of human nature, the rational soul, is his own handiwork. The human body and the nonrational parts of the soul are produced at his command by the imperfect efforts of the lesser (created) gods, who are the Sun and other intelligent heavenly bodies responsible for seasonal growth and decline. By supplying the rational soul with a body and nonrational desires, the lesser gods set the arena of challenge and choice within which the embodied rational soul is enjoined by the Demiurge to achieve

⁶⁴ The puzzlement this sentence has provoked is evident from the variety of translations it has been subjected to: "by the natural process of creation He is the author of this and of all other things" (Jowett, 2nd ed., 1875), "it is by and in nature that he made this and all other things" (Shorey, 1930), "his making of this and all other things is nature's making of them" (Lindsay, 1935), "all his works constitute the real nature of things" (Cornford, 1941), "all his creations are ultimate realities" (Lee, 1955), "by nature he has made both this and everything else" (Bloom, 1968), "he made the true nature of this and everything else" (Grube, 1974), "he is by nature the maker of this and everything else" (Reeve, 1992), "it is by nature that he has made both this and all other things" (Halliwell, 2nd ed., 1993), "he has made this and everything else that exists in nature" (Murray, 1996). The older translators are clear that *φύσει γε* is an instrumental dative. Of the versions quoted which acknowledge this, some allow the reader to think it may be a reference to God's own nature; but that does not suit the reservation *γε*. My prize for the best rendering goes to Jowett.

justice, virtue, and salvation (41e-42d). On this picture, God sets the goal for which human nature is designed, and himself makes the part of our soul which is able —and duty-bound —to achieve it. Platonic physics is anything but value-neutral.⁶⁵ The moral end, and the agent who is to attain it, belong to the divinely arranged order of nature.⁶⁶ God is thereby responsible for there being objective standards of correctness for the agent's use of the instruments of salvation, among which couches and tables have an important role to play.⁶⁷

The picture in the *Republic* is much less detailed, without the distinction between the Demiurge (mentioned at 530a) and the lesser gods, between direct and mediated creation. But one of the first things the young will be taught by the poetry they hear in the ideal city is that God is not responsible for everything in human life, good and bad, only for the good (379ac; cf. *Tim.* 42de, 68e). If God is ultimately responsible for the good in human life, then he is responsible for there being objective answers to the ques-

⁶⁵ Even in the section devoted to the “necessary” or automatic consequences of the Demiurge's construction of the four elements, 60a singles out wine, “which warms the soul together with the body” (this must be the natural fermentation, prior to human attempts to produce a pleasant drink), and 60e salt, “beloved of the gods.” From the Demiurge's point of view, all these are “subservient causes” which help realize the goodness of his grand design (68e).

⁶⁶ It is perhaps worth mentioning that many of the created items in the *Timaeus* are kinds or forms of some sort, not individuals. The created individuals include the cosmos itself, the intelligent heavenly bodies (the lesser gods), and individual souls. But besides these we read of created *γένη* (e.g., the four elements: 53bc) and *εἶδη* (e.g., the nonrational soul: 69cd), and *ἰδέαι* (e.g., lungs and liver: 70c, 71a). Presumably, the Sun and the other lesser gods do not intervene to make Jones's liver one day, Smith's the next; rather, they make the course of nature run in such a way that, in general, humans are born with a liver. But this is not the place to explore the ontological implications of Plato's creation story.

⁶⁷ When Aristotle, *Metaphysics* XII 3, 1070a 18–19, reports Plato as saying there are Forms for (sc. and only for) such things as exist by nature, we should distinguish Aristotle's understanding of the thesis, in terms of his own contrast between nature and art, from the meaning Plato would have intended. For Aristotle, artefacts necessarily fall outside the realm of nature; for Plato, they do not. See *Sophist* 265e: “I will lay it down that the products of nature, as they are called, are works of divine art, as the things made out of them by man are works of human art” (tr. Cornford).

tion how this human nature he has devised can best fulfil itself — individually, socially, and culturally. Forms are involved, because the answers set standards which are independent of actual societies (past, present, or future). But unlike Beauty, Justice, and the Good, they are Forms that presuppose the existence of human life in the sensible world.⁶⁸ They are contingent upon God's sowing our souls (if I may borrow another agri-cultural image from the *Timaeus*: ἔσπειρε, 42c) into the flux of time, to pursue justice, virtue, and salvation on our own responsibility.

End of digression on the ontological status of the Forms of Couch and Table. For my main line of argument, it is enough that these Forms exist. That ensures, uncontroversially, that Plato believes there is an objective answer to the question before us: How can the total culture be made as ideal as possible? But before coming to Plato's answer, I would like to sketch some modern parallels to his question. For I believe that his question is of more lasting importance than his answer.

MODERN ANALOGIES

In our world, poetry and drama have become minority, often elite pursuits —although we should not forget the role of poetry, song, and story in transmitting a *counter-culture* in divided societies like Ireland, Communist Russia, Greece under the dictators. The visual arts now fall under the limiting rubric "high culture." The things Plato would focus on if he were asking his questions today —and here I take my lead from Julia Annas and Alexander Nehamas⁶⁹ —would be the recorded music (both popular and classical) with which we are surrounded at home and in public places; popular magazines; radio, film, and TV; and the images in

⁶⁸ We might think that Justice presupposed human life. Not so Plato, for whom Justice is an abstract order exemplified in the heavens as well as in cities and souls, and even healthy bodies: *Rep.* 592ab, *Tim.* 81e ff.

⁶⁹ Annas, *An Introduction to Plato's "Republic"* 94; Alexander Nehamas, "Plato and the Mass Media," *Monist* 71 (1988): 214–34.

advertisements. These are the universal media of cultural transmission today.

It is not surprising, then, that advertisements, film, and TV provoke in us the very same concern as Plato has in the *Republic*. Are their effects on the souls of the citizen body, especially when young, harmful or beneficial? Plato's question "Shall we banish Homer, tragedy, and comedy?" is an ancient version of the question we would be asking if we stopped to wonder whether, if we had known or suspected at the outset what we now know or suspect about TV and its influence, we should have let it go ahead. Would life without TV, or without advertising, be spiritually better? But Plato's focus is interestingly different from ours.

First, sex and violence are less important to him than moral and religious values more generally. Take castration. When Socrates bans Hesiod's story of the violence done by Cronos to Ouranos and Zeus to Cronos, the reason he gives is that this is not how *gods* behave, and it sets a bad example to *sons* (377e–78b). Violence as such is not to the fore. When he objects to the story of Zeus, overcome with desire for Hera, wanting sex at once in the open air, he couples it with a quote from Odysseus about the enticements of food and wine. At such moments, neither Zeus nor Odysseus encourages the young to practise temperance and self-control (390ac); gluttony is as bad as sexual passion.

Another contrast with popular debate today about sex and violence on the screen is that our newspapers are obsessed with the idea of cause and effect, where cause and effect are understood in terms of individual events: the showing of a film on Tuesday, followed by a rape or murder on Wednesday. Does the first cause the second? Some conservatives would like to be able to say yes. The liberals protest that no causal link has been proved. Modern professional studies of media influence are of course more subtle than that.⁷⁰ So is Plato.

⁷⁰ For a useful evaluation of their results, see Sissela Bok, *Mayhem; Violence as Public Entertainment* (Reading, Mass., 1998).

In a famous passage, Socrates says he is convinced that innovations in music must not be allowed in the ideal city, because “the modes of music are never disturbed without unsettling of the most fundamental political and social conventions” (424c). Plato does not mean to say, “The Beatles and Mick Jagger sang — as a direct result, the sixties began,” On his account the causal influence is more gradual — and more insidious:

“Contravention of established custom [*παρανομία*] in this sphere [music],” ⁷¹ Adeimantus said, “all too easily insinuates itself *without people being aware* of what is happening [*λανθάνει παραδνομένη*].”

“Yes,” I said, “because it is taken to be nothing but a form of play, which does no harm to anyone.”

“Naturally enough,” ⁷² he said, “because all it does is to make itself at home little by little [*κατὰ σμικρόν*], until it overflows ever so quietly [*ἡρέμα ὑπορρέει*] into people’s character and pursuits. From these it emerges, grown larger, into their dealings and associations with one another,⁷³ and from dealings and associations it proceeds against laws and constitutions (so great, Socrates, by this stage is its insolence), till it ends up overthrowing everything in private and public life.” ⁷⁴ (424de)

We have already met the idea that music is the basic source of people’s sensibility in other spheres, not least in morals. What this

⁷¹ The word *νόμος* means both “law, convention” and, in music, “mode.” Hence *παρανομία* is a pun: contravening the established musical modes is tantamount to contravening the established rules of life generally.

⁷² *οὐδέ γάρ* explains the supposition, not the thing supposed.

⁷³ “Dealings and associations” translates the single Greek word *ξυμβόλαια*, the range of which is illustrated at 333ad and 554c–55a.

⁷⁴ An unusually substantial contribution by Adeimantus, at which Socrates seems a bit surprised, for the text continues: “‘Well, well,’ I said, ‘Is that really so?’ ‘I think it is,’ he said.” Plato has already made Socrates acknowledge that the basic thesis about the drastic consequences of innovation in music is borrowed from Damon (424c). Adeimantus thereupon says that he too is one of those whom Damon has persuaded. I suspect that the further elaboration of Damon’s thesis is put into the mouth of Adeimantus, rather than Socrates, because the whole thing is originally due to Damon. A rare case of Plato accepting someone else’s theory without qualification or modification.

passage adds is a powerful description of the gradual, unnoticed way in which music infiltrates people's souls and affects their way of life.⁷⁵ Gradual, unnoticed influence was the theme of the passage I began from about gracefulness in the material environment. Gradual, unnoticed influence again is the reason for spotlighting couches and tables, where the shared symbols of society are confirmed evening after evening and passed on to successive generations. This seems to me a more convincing, less hysterical approach than we find in the newspapers today.

Let me illustrate with a visual parallel from our own world. Instead of the hotly disputed impact of explicitly pornographic magazines, think about the more subtle influence over time of the increasing levels of nudity and eroticism in contemporary advertising. This surrounds everyone everywhere, but causes much less anxious discussion than pornography at the corner store. Or consider the fashion magazines which lie around in the most respectable homes. The models in the clothes ads get thinner and thinner every year. On a recent visit to Ireland, I noticed that the models in the magazines there seemed almost portly; in my youth they would have looked elegantly slim. Question: do the advertisers' images of feminine beauty have an influence on men's attitudes to women and women's sense of themselves and their companions?⁷⁶ If they do — and various movements for the defence of larger women declare that it must be so — then it can only be in the way Plato describes, by a gradual, unnoticed infiltration of images into the soul. In which case, the best means of defence would seem to be by the same process. Put up posters from Rubens all over town.

Popular magazines are a good field in which to broach the complexities of the question I set aside earlier: In what sense are the

⁷⁵ A similar emphasis on the gradualness of music's influence at 411a (concerned only with the individual): Socrates distinguishes the short-term and the long-term effects of letting too much soft music pour in through your ears, then the short-term and the long-term effects of exercising too much in the gym.

⁷⁶ An influential discussion of this issue is Naomi Wolf, *The Beauty Myth* (London, 1990).

shadows in front of the prisoners images of *themselves and their companions*? A straightforward example is the “embarrassment” column in a magazine called *Sugar*, read by girls aged nine to thirteen (though nominally marketed at older teenagers). You learn that other girls’ parents do embarrassing things too. It is a comfort to know this, and it confirms the rightness of your own feelings. Very different from the pictures in fashion magazines, which do not show how you and your companions actually look, but how you might dream of looking. Men are vulnerable too: “To be on the cover of a muscle magazine,” says a letter in *Muscle Media*, “was always one of my dreams, and now I’ve done it.”

These examples illustrate two opposite extremes. At one end, images of what you are at your most mundane and embarrassing. At the other, images that focus hopes, aspirations, or fantasies — these two are part of what you and your companions are. In between there is room for a variety of relations between image and reader. Those fashion adverts also provide factual news about the clothes you will be able to buy in the stores this season. A *Sugar* story about one girl’s promiscuity (“I slept with 40 boys . . .”) prompted a question in Parliament, but my daughter said, “The girl didn’t think it was a good idea.” In their context, such stories prepare young girls for problems that await them in the future. Besides the kitchen of your dreams in the latest number of *House and Garden*, there is the kitchen you can realistically hope to have if you work hard and succeed. In general, advertisements offer information as well as temptation. They provide both a mirror of the present and a promise for the future. In other words, the appeal of popular magazines is as varied and complicated as the human soul. But some appeal to the soul there has to be. Magazines must sell, in fairly large numbers, to make money and survive. And this has implications for our understanding of gradual, unnoticed influence.

It cannot be a simple, one-way process of cause and effect. We should think rather of a continuing interaction over time, as in a

marriage, where each party is influenced by the other. In ways neither need be aware of, each is gradually adjusting to the other's expectations while at the same time each is gradually changing what the other's expectations are. London and New York have adjusted to slimmer models than Dublin. Häagen-Dazs does not promote its ice-cream in Ireland by pictures of naked couples licking it off each other. The culture there is not ready to respond.

Marriage is a useful model also for appreciating that individual episodes of influence are connected with developments in the culture as a whole. Changes in the divorce rate show that any given couple's experience — whether wonderful, disastrous, or consolingly in between — belongs to a wider pattern, woven by historical and social factors they neither know nor can control. Similarly, no one magazine, no one film or TV programme, can be held responsible for the rise in teenage pregnancies, their lack of interest in ballroom dancing, the fashion for body piercing, or any of the other things that older generations deplore.

Plato saw this very clearly, I think. He is sometimes accused of siding with those who claim that advertising and TV implant in people desires and attitudes they would not otherwise have had. Aristotelian katharsis is hailed as the sane view, in contrast to Plato's so-called infection theory of art. The infection theory is as implausible as the opposite view that advertising and TV do no more than give the public what they (already) want; besides, many diseases are powerless without a patient who is run-down or otherwise susceptible already. But the famous passage just quoted, on the consequences of innovation in music, describes a long drawn-out *communal* process, in which everybody is involved. When the Beatles and Mick Jagger sang, change spread gradually in ever-widening ripples throughout the society (Plato's water imagery is most apt). We all took part, in different ways, without realizing it. We all share in the responsibility. That is why Plato put his question as one about making the *total* culture as ideal as possible. That is why for him the rulers' most important risk is to guard the

culture against *unnoticed* change for the worse (424b 4: *μὴ λάθῃ διαφθαρέν*).⁷⁷

We are now ready for Plato's answer.

LECTURE II. ART AND THE MENACE OF MIMESIS

PLATO'S PROGRAMME

Plato is famous for having banished poetry and poets from the ideal city of the *Republic*. But he did no such thing. On the contrary, poetry —the right sort of poetry —will be a pervasive presence in the life of the society he describes. Yes, he did banish Homer, Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides, and Aristophanes —the greatest names of Greek literature. But not because they were poets. He banished them because they produced the wrong sort of poetry. To rebut Plato's critique of poetry, what is needed is not a defence of poetry, but a defence of the freedom of poets to write as, and what, they wish.

No big problem, you may think. But suppose poetry was not the minority pursuit it has become in Britain and the U.S.A. today. Suppose it was the most popular form of entertainment available, the nearest equivalent to our mass media. As I explained in lecture I, that is not far from the truth about the world in which Plato wrote the *Republic*. The Athenian democracy, audience for much of the poetry Plato objected to, accepted that it was their responsibility to ensure the quality of the poetry funded by the state. In modern terms, they thought that democracy should care about whether the mass media encourage the right sorts of values. Do

⁷⁷ For a more psychoanalytic treatment of several themes of this lecture, compare Jonathan Lear, "Inside and Outside the *Republic*," *Phronesis* 37 (1992): 184–215. I would find it hard to say at which point in this very brilliant essay I begin to disagree, but I am suspicious of his handling of the process he calls "exteriorization," especially in books VIII–IX; we certainly disagree about the poets, whom I discuss in lecture II.

we want Rupert Murdoch to determine the overall quality of the culture? Should money decide everything? If not, what can we do about it?

Plato was no democrat, and had no qualms about proposing Soviet-style control from above, by those who know best. But democrats who reject such authoritarian solutions may still learn from Plato's disturbing presentation of the problem. What he is chiefly talking about is the words and music by which the culture is transmitted from one generation to the next. Tragedy and comedy were performed before a crowd of 14,000 people at the Great Dionysia and other civic festivals. We hear of 20,000 people attending a recital of Homer. Then there are hymns sung at religious ceremonies and songs at feasts or private symposia. Forget about reading T. S. Eliot to yourself in bed. Our subject is the words and music you hear at social gatherings, large and small. Think pubs and cafés, karaoki, football matches, the last night of the proms. Think morning service at the village church, carols from King's College Cambridge, Elton John singing to the nation from Westminster Abbey. Think popular music in general and, when Plato brings in a parallel from the visual arts, forget the Tate Gallery and recall the advertisements that surround us everywhere. Above all, think about the way all this is distributed to us by television, the omnipresent medium at work in every home. What Plato is discussing in the *Republic*, when he talks about poetry, is how to control the influences that shape the culture in which the young grow up. How to ensure that what he calls the ethos of society¹ is as ideal as possible. Even as adults, none of us is immune.

Books II–III of the *Republic* present Plato's proposals for reforming the culture in a carefully arranged sequence of stages.

¹ The English word "ethos" transliterates the Greek ἦθος, meaning "character." Plato holds that different societies have different ἦθη (435e 2, 545b 3-4), which derive (in complicated ways) from the character of individuals in those societies (435e-36a, 544de). More often, the *Republic* names the specific character traits of different cities, their virtues and vices.

The first stage concentrates on the content of musical poetry, the last on its material and social setting —with special reference (I will suggest) to the symposium or drinking party. In between come various other elements of poetic performance. The sequence of stages is not a sequence of independent topics. Each should be thought of as one layer among others in the analysis of a single cultural phenomenon: the performance of poetry with music (and sometimes dance as well).

From time to time the discussion touches on a nonmusical topic, be it nursery tales or the content of the visual arts. But the central thread is the performance of musical poetry at a social gathering.² This for Plato is the main vehicle of cultural transmission. This is what he is trying to get right when he designs a musical education for the warrior class in the ideal city —the Guards, as they are called³ —from whose ranks a select few will go on to become philosopher-rulers. All else is subordinate.

One further preliminary. Plato is well aware that what he has to say will shock and appal his readers, then as now. His proposals for the ideal city amount to a complete reconstruction of Greek culture as it existed in his day. What motivates the proposals is his profound understanding of the many subtle ways in which the ethos of a society forms the souls who grow up in it. If you shudder at the authoritarianism of his programme, remember that shudder when the newspapers next debate whether bad behaviour

² One of the many merits of G. R. F. Ferrari's superb essay "Plato and Poetry," in George A. Kennedy, ed., *The Cambridge History of Literary Criticism* (Cambridge, 1989), pp. 92–148, is to have insisted more strongly than previous scholarship that Plato is talking about the performance of poetry, not reading it to oneself in private, in the schoolroom, or on a journey (as Dionysus reads Euripides' *Andromeda* to himself on deck in Aristophanes, *Frogs* 51–52).

³ The standard translation of φύλακες as "Guardians" is too kindly. Socrates' jailor at *Crito* 43a is a φύλαξ, while the φύλακες of the ideal city are not just warriors for defence against enemies attacking from outside: they also have internal police duties, to stop anyone disobeying the law (415e, *Timaeus* 17d), especially in cultural matters (424bd, leading up to the passage about innovation in music quoted in lecture I). (I am indebted to Malcolm Schofield for opening my eyes to the error of the standard translation.)

in schools is the fault of parents or teachers. As if parents and teachers were anything but a tiny facet of the total culture of our time. Either grasp the nettle of devising democratic alternatives to Plato's authoritarianism, or stop bleating.

STAGE 1 OF THE REFORM: CONTENT

A performance of musical poetry is an act of communication between two parties, the performer(s) and the audience. At stage 1 of the reform Plato concentrates on the Guards as audience. What should be the content of the performances they hear? From Stage 2 onwards he concentrates (I will argue) on how Guards themselves perform, where performance includes writing and producing drama. How does such performance affect the soul? Only in book X does he come back to the effects of musical poetry on the audience.

Plato's first charge, and perhaps the most shocking to ancient readers, is that, from Homer onwards, poetry has been full of lies about the gods. The entire religious and mythological tradition stands condemned for blasphemy.⁴ It is like someone today proposing to ban the Bible and all reference to biblical stories, on the grounds that the Bible presents a wrong picture of divinity. None of the stories of God's dealings with humankind can be true, and even if some of them were true, they are morally unsuitable for the ears of the young (cf. 378ab).

And what is unsuitable for ears is unsuitable for eyes as well. Stories it is wrong to sing, like the battle of gods and giants, must not be represented in embroidery (378c). This is no joke. Plato's readers would think at once of the colossal embroidered robe (*πέπλος*) carried in procession at the festival of the Panathenaea. The robe showed the battle of gods and giants, spotlighting the

⁴ The verb *βλασφημείν* is used at 381e.

victory of Athena over the giant Enceladus.⁵ A ban on such embroidery is a stake through the heart of Athenian religion and Athenian civic identity. Though Socrates does not stop to mention it, the censorship of embroidery will inevitably extend to painting and sculpture. The battle of gods and giants will be removed from the carved metopes of the Parthenon (currently on display in the British Museum). In the ideal city, the religious content of the visual arts will be as restricted as the religious content of poetry and music.

How much of the Greek literature you know would survive enforcement of the following norms (τύπτοι, νόμοι) ? (1) Divinity, being good, is not responsible for everything that occurs, only for the good. So gods never lead mortals into crime (379a–80c). (2) Divinity is simple, unchanging, and hates falsehood and deception. So gods never appear in disguise to mortals, never send misleading dreams or signs (380d–83a). (3) Hades is not the dreadful place the poets describe. So a good man finds no great cause for grief in the death of himself, his friend, or his son (386a–87c). (4) Heroes are admirable role-models for the young. So they never indulge in lamentation, mirth, or lying (save for high purposes of state), impertinence to their commanders or arrogance toward gods and men, sexual passion or rape, longing for food and drink, or greed for wealth; nor, *mutatis mutandis*, should any such thing be attributed to the gods (387c–91e). Finally, (5) the moral argument of the *Republic* itself, when completed, will prove that it is justice, not injustice, that makes one happy. So no poet may depict a happy villain or a virtuous person in misery (392ac). Under this regime very little of the Greek litera-

⁵ Cf. Plato's *Euthyphro* 6ac, where the robe figures alongside representations of strife among the gods in poems and temple paintings; Socrates finds them all repellent (I am indebted to the notes *ad loc.* in Burnet's edition [Oxford, 1924]). For a detailed account of the Panathenaea, see H. W. Parke, *Festivals of the Athenians* (London, 1977), pp. 33–50.

ture we know would remain intact,⁶ and much of the art would disappear.⁷

Nearly all the poetry cited in the *Republic* so far will be banned.⁸ Many of the themes of the earlier discussion came from poetry, because poetry articulates the values and beliefs of the culture. In book I, Cephalus recounts how, when old age comes and death is near, one takes seriously, in a way the young do not, the stories (*μῦθοι*) about Hades and the terrors it holds for wrongdoers (330de). In a society with no Bible or canonical sacred text, the chief source for these stories is poetry. Conversely, it is poets like Pindar who hold out the rope of a nice afterlife for those who have lived in justice and piety (331a). On the other hand, a major theme of the speech of Adeimantus at the beginning of book II (362d ff.) is the way the poets instill in the young a wrong attitude towards justice, because they praise it for its contingent consequences rather than its intrinsic value. Justice, the poets say, is a real sweat in this life, much harder and less pleasant than injustice (provided you can get away with it). It is only in the very long run that justice pays: the poet Musaeus, for example, promises the righteous that their afterlife will be an unending symposium, as if the ultimate reward for virtue was eternal intoxication (363cd). But at the same time his teaching is that the wicked can always bribe the gods with sacrifices and festivals to let them off (364e–65a).⁹ None of this is compatible with the norms that Socrates has now put before us.

⁶ I have heard it suggested that the *Odyssey* would still be a good story after Platonic censorship. It is true that the bulk of the quotations in *Rep.* II–III are from the *Iliad*, but the *Odyssey* is not neglected (381d, 386d, 387a, 389d, 390b, 390c, 390d). If Plato's main target is the *Iliad*, this is in part because he is discussing the education of the warrior class. In any case, the narrative of the *Odyssey* is driven by the anger of Poseidon and by Athena's countervailing help for Odysseus, to whom she appears in several different disguises; none of that is admissible by Plato's norms. Note that Aristotle, *Poetics* 4, 1448b 38–49a 2, sees both *Iliad* and *Odyssey* as akin to tragedy.

⁷ Example: vase-painters loved the story excised at 378d about Hephaestus being hurled from heaven.

⁸ A point well observed by Halliwell, "Two Critiques," pp. 314–15.

⁹ Cf. the remarks of Cephalus at 331b.

To begin with, however, Socrates speaks as if he is merely purging the culture of certain objectionable features. He asks Homer and the other poets not to be angry if he and Adeimantus expunge all the passages that breach the norms (387b). He takes the scissors to Aeschylus (380a, **Bid**, 383b, 391e), but implies that tragedy (cleaned up by himself) will still be performed (379a, 381d, 383c). At this stage, Plato is concerned only with the *content* of the arts, especially their religious content. Like many later (and earlier) religious reformers, he will have his new orthodoxy, utterly different from traditional Greek religion, rigorously enforced throughout the society. It is the next stage of the discussion, concerned with the *manner* of poetic performance, that will justify a total ban on tragedy and comedy (and ultimately, Homer too).

But already it is clear that the norms for art in the ideal city will reshape the whole culture. Students of Plato are sometimes told they need not be shocked by the censorship advocated in *Republic* II–III, because its target is the education of young Guards, and any responsible parent today keeps watch on the entertainment and reading-matter of young children.¹⁰ Certainly, the proposals are made for the sake of the young. But Plato's insight is that if you are concerned about the souls of the young, it is no good simply laying down rules for parents and teachers, or agreeing to keep sex and violence off the TV screen until after 9:00 P.M. His conclusion: for the sake of the young, the entire culture must be purged.¹¹

The text makes this quite plain. The stories which must not be told to very young children by nurses and mothers (377c; cf. 381e) should not be heard anywhere in the city (378b;

¹⁰ Nehamas, "Imitation," pp. 50–53.

¹¹ So Halliwell, "Two Critiques," pp. 316–17. This is not quite the same as treating adults as though they too were children (paternalism as diagnosed by Annas, *Introduction*, pp. 85–86). Better to say (with Ferrari, "Plato and Poetry," pp. 113–14) that Plato is concerned for the childlike element that lives on in the adult soul.

cf. 378d) —or if at some ritual they have to be told, the audience should be kept as few as possible (378a).¹² Conversely, once we have the right kind of stories for the very young, we will compel the poets to tell them the same kind when they grow older (378d). The norms about the representation of divinity apply to all poetry, whether epic, lyric, or tragic (379a) : epic and tragic metres are primarily used for public occasions, while lyric is for smaller group gatherings like the symposium. And things that must not be said in verse must not be said in prose either,¹³ must not be said or heard by anyone in the city, young or old (380bc). They are not fit for the ears of boys *or men* (387b; cf. 390de). Such things are not merely false, but impious (378c, 380c, 381e, 391a), and therefore harmful for anyone to hear (391e). The one mention of schoolteachers is a sharp passage at the very end of book II, referring to some objectionable lines of Aeschylus: “When anyone says such things about the gods, we shall be angry with him, we will refuse him a chorus, and we will not allow teachers to use him for the education of the young” (383c). Nothing is to be put on in the theatre unless it is fit for classroom use afterwards. Plato’s message is that culture (*παιδεία*) should be taken seriously for what it is: education.

Yet telling false, blasphemous, immoral, and passionate stories is not the worst thing a poet can do, in Plato’s opinion. Such stories corrupt the young by filling their minds with wrong ideas about matters of great moment. But a more enlightened, grown-up mind, with the aid of philosophy, may come to reject the community’s religious narratives, as Socrates does in the *Euthyphro*.¹⁴ Stories as such are something a rational mind can resist, question, and reject. With visual images and likenesses in sound and music,

¹² I take the reference to ritual from Adam’s note *ad loc.*

¹³ For the combination “prose or verse,” cf. also 390a, 392ab.

¹⁴ Not just at 6ac, cited above in n. 5. The entire argument is a philosopher’s critique of traditional religious ideas and (towards the end) practices: see my “The Impiety of Socrates,” *Ancient Philosophy* 17 (1997) : 1–12.

resistance is not so easy. The manner of poetic performance is more insidious than the content. Even the best philosophical minds are at risk (605c). To explain why, I must move on to the second stage of Plato's discussion of poetry and try to say what I think Plato means by mimesis.

STAGE 2 OF THE REFORM: MIMESIS AND THE
MANNER OF PERFORMANCE

The advanced industrial countries of the West have fewer occasions for community singing than traditional societies, but one that survives is Christmas:

Once in Royal David's city
Stood a lowly cattle shed,
Where a mother laid her baby,
In a manger for his bed.
Mary was that mother mild,
Jesus Christ the little child.

This carol is third-person narrative, all the way through. Listeners *hear about* the birth of Jesus. But when someone reads the Lesson from the Gospel and their voice modulates to express kindness or anger in words that Jesus speaks in the first person or when Bach in his *St. Matthew Passion* has Jesus sing his words in recitative — then it is mimesis. We do not merely hear about the son of God. In a certain sense, we hear *him*. We hear him in the same sense as we see him on the cross in a picture of the Crucifixion.

I have already mentioned that in book X painting is the paradigm that Plato uses to explain the meaning, and the menace, of poetic mimesis. His example is a painted couch, and the point he emphasises is that the picture shows only how the couch appears when viewed from a particular angle — from the side, the front, or some other perspective (598ab). In Figure 2, a symposium by Douris,¹⁵ the couches are seen in two such perspectives: sideways

¹⁵ British Museum E49=ARV² 432.52.



FIGURE 2. Courtesy of the British Museum.

and end-on. Of all the objects that turn up in ancient Greek paintings, it is probably couches (along with cups) that are most often seen from different angles, in a fixed perspective. Christ on the cross is also seen in a fixed perspective. But that does not stop us saying we see him there. Such language is equally appropriate for Douris's symposium.

Its date is 490-80 B.C., a good hundred years before the writing of the *Republic*. It is not particularly naturalistic, and it is certainly not *trompe-l'œil*. You would not, for example, see immediately that the tables have three legs, not four (less wobbly on rough floors). I do not agree with scholars who claim that Plato is concerned only with recent illusionistic painting of his own day.¹⁶ For already at the beginning of the fifth century we encounter pictures —hundreds of pictures, by the Brygos painter, Douris, and many others— in which we see a couch and see it

¹⁶ Annas, *Introduction*, pp. 336–40; contra, Nehamas, "Imitation," n. 60 (with references to the large literature on the topic); Ferrari, "Plato and Poetry," pp. 127–28.

from a particular point of view. We do not of course see a real couch. But anyone who looks at such a picture will be happy to say, "I see couches and tables, a group of people enjoying a party."

It is the task of the philosophy of art to explain what grounds this way of speaking, why it is not only possible but the correct thing to say in the presence of a wide range of representational painting. My interest here is in what happens when we transfer the same way of speaking to the likenesses of poetry and music.

Back to the *St. Matthew Passion*. As in a rhapsode's recital of Homer, there is a narrator (the Evangelist) to tell the story, and speeches sung in recitative by the different characters. There is also a Chorus, which plays two roles. It is both the jeering voice of the crowd hostile to Jesus and, in the Chorales, it is the voice of the Congregation reacting to the events with sorrow and repentance for what humanity did to the son of God. This dual role expresses rather well the idea I think is fundamental to mimesis, that the audience—in this case, the Congregation—is actually present, in a certain sense, at the events depicted. In a Greek tragedy the Chorus has a similar dual role, both participating in the drama and voicing the audience's reactions. The Athenians did not merely hear about Antigone's conflict with Creon. In a certain sense, they witnessed it.

We may find it easier to speak of seeing Jesus in a picture than of hearing him in Bach's music. Plato relies on the analogy with painting to make his point vivid. But he did not invent the analogy: "Painting is silent poetry, poetry painting that speaks" is a saying of the poet Simonides that Plutarch loved to cite (*Moralia* 17f, 58b, 346f, 748a). And no help is needed when we move to opera, which began as Monteverdi's and others' attempt to recreate the multimedia experience of ancient Greek tragedy, where speech (for the iambic verse) alternated with flute-accompanied recitative (*παρακαταλογή*) or lyric choruses sung and danced. In opera we do not merely hear the characters as we do in the *St. Matthew Passion*. We also see them. We see them moving, dancing, fighting,

dying; not motionless as in painting and sculpture. Another contrast with the *St. Matthew Passion* is the absence of a narrator. Tchaikovsky's *Eugène Onegin* cuts out the narrator whose ironic commentary is crucial to Pushkin's poem, and shows us Tatiana herself in the intimacy of her bedroom, writing the fateful love-letter. Afterwards we see and hear Onegin crushing her hopes. At the end we see and hear Onegin declare his love —too late. It would be ridiculous to refuse to describe the opera-goer's experience in these terms; absurd to insist that all we see and hear are singers playing their parts. As Stanley Cavell said in reply to a parallel suggestion about film, "You might as well tell me that I do not see myself in the mirror but merely see a mirror image of myself."¹⁷

It is this sense of being present at the events enacted on stage, not merely at the theatrical event of enacting them, that Plato aims to capture, I believe, when he introduces the concept of mimesis. Mimesis is the production of visual and auditory likenesses which give us that sense of actual presence. Let me now display the textual basis for this interpretation.

For the second stage of the discussion of the Guards' musical education in *Republic* II–III (392c ff.), Socrates turns from the content of poetry to the manner of its performance.¹⁸ He introduces a distinction, which at first Adeimantus is slow to grasp, between mimetic and nonmimetic storytelling. I take Adeimantus's initial slowness (392cd, 393d; cf. 394b) as Plato's signal to his readers that the distinction will be new to them. "Mimesis" is of course an ordinary Greek word, meaning "imitation," but the distinction between mimetic and nonmimetic storytelling cuts across

¹⁷ Stanley Cavell, *The World Viewed: Reflections on the Ontology of Film*, enlarged ed. (Cambridge, Mass., 1979), p. 213. I borrow his words despite the fact that he is talking about how different film is from other arts.

¹⁸ But the norms governing content are not to be forgotten. They are reaffirmed when the norms governing performance are joined onto them (398b), and when Socrates reaches the norms for attunement and rhythm (398d). The norms are built up layer upon layer, with those regulating content as the foundation.

the more familiar classification by poetic genres. The distinction is probably Plato's innovation.¹⁹

Nonmimetic storytelling is third-person narrative, as in "Once in Royal David's city" and ancient dithyrambic choral singing (394c).²⁰ The *Iliad* starts out that way, but at line 17 Chryses, the Trojan priest of Apollo, addresses Agamemnon, Menelaus, and the Greeks, imploring them to release his daughter. The address is in direct speech: "you" and "I" replace the pronouns "they" and "he" of the preceding narrative. Here is how Socrates describes the difference:

You know then that up to these verses,

". . . and he made prayer to all the Achaeans,

But especially to the two sons of Atreus, the marshallers of the host," the poet himself is the speaker. He makes no attempt to divert our mind into thinking that someone other than himself is speaking. But the following verses he delivers as if he were himself Chryses, and he tries his best to make it seem that the person speaking is not Homer but the priest, an old man. (393ab)

Much more is packed into the concept of mimesis here than results from the change of pronouns. When I read the *Iliad* to my children at home and came to the words of prayer at line 17:

"Sons of Atreus and the rest of you strong-greaved Achaeans,
May the gods who dwell on Olympus grant
That you sack the city of Priam and return safe to your homes;
But release my dear daughter to me, and accept the ransom,
Out of awe for Zeus's son Apollo, who strikes from afar"

¹⁹ Contrast Adeimantus's familiarity with the work of Damon at 424c (lecture I, n. 74). Contrast also Plato's *Ion*, which does not call it mimesis when Homer speaks the lines of his characters (537ac, 538b, 538e-39b).

²⁰ [Aristotle], *Problems* XIX 15, 918b 13–29, speaks of dithyramb becoming mimetic at a later stage in its development. The change can be observed already in the fifth century (Bacchylides), yet Plato harks back to the purely narrative, original form. This confirms that he is not just targeting "degenerate" artistic developments of his own day.

I did not put on a quavering voice to make it seem an old man was speaking. Evidently, Socrates has in view a performance of some kind, not just reading aloud to an audience. A performance that involves impersonating an old man or some other character-type.²¹

The performer Socrates talks about is Homer, the poet himself. But he is long dead. What Socrates and Adeimantus are actually familiar with is rhapsodes reciting at the festival of the Panathenaea from the official Athenian text, fixed a hundred years earlier by order of the tyrant Peisistratus. The rhapsode Ion is about to do just this in the dialogue Plato named after him (*Ion* 530b). But the message of that dialogue is that Ion is a mere mouthpiece for the poet. The poet's voice speaks through his, as the Muse speaks through the poet. There is a chain of inspiration, which Socrates compares to a chain of iron rings suspended one after another from a magnet, through which the divine power pulls the audience's emotions this way or that (533d–35a, 535e–36d). So when Ion speaks, it is the divinely inspired Homer we hear.

From this point of view, while the rhapsode is not an actor on stage, he is akin to one (cf. *Rep.* 395a, *Ion* 532d 7, 535e 9–36a 1). In the *Ion* he is pictured in terms that bring to mind a modern pop-singer: up on a dais in extravagant clothes before a festival audience of over 20,000 people, he chants the verse, melodiously and dramatically, with tears in his eyes during the sad bits (535c). The innovation in the *Republic* is Socrates' stress on the way "Homer" modulates his voice or diction (λέξις) so that it becomes like that of an old man praying (39%). The poet-performer "hides himself" (393cd) and does everything he can, within the

²¹The emphasis at 393b 2 (*πρεσβύτην ὄντα*) makes it fairly clear that the object of impersonation is an old man, or an old priest, not the individual Chryses, whom the audience has never encountered. It is not only the manner of delivery that changes when mimesis starts: so also does Homer's vocabulary and other aspects of style, interestingly investigated by Jasper Griffin, "Homeric Words and Speakers," *Journal of Hellenic Studies* 106 (1986): 36–57.

constraints of the genre,²² to make it seem that Chryses is present to your ears.

From this introductory example Socrates proceeds to a generalisation that covers visual as well as auditory likenesses. It is mimesis, Socrates says, if the poet likens himself to someone else *either* in voice *or* in *σχῆμα* (393c; cf. 397b). *σχῆμα* can refer to gesture, posture, or movements (393c; cf. 397b), including the movements of a dance.²³ This extends the concept of mimesis to the silent miming (as we still call it) of Jean-Louis Barrault in *Les enfants du paradis* or to the dance and music of modern ballet. For a case fulfilling both clauses of the disjunctive generalisation, imagine a performance where not only the rhapsode's voice, but also his gestures, posture, perhaps even some movements, are like those of an old man's supplication. He goes down on his knees (rather stiffly) and stretches out his hands.²⁴ Chryses seems to be present to our eyes as well as to our ears.

The generalisation still does not provide a definition of mimesis, only a sufficient condition. Socrates will not offer a general explanatory account of mimesis until book X.²⁵ We have to catch

²² Epic is not the only genre to mix narrative with mimesis (394c). Lyric would be another.

²³ LSJ *s.v.* Clear examples of the word extending to movement or action at Aristophanes, *Wasps* 1170–71; Xenophon, *Memorabilia* III 10.5; Plato, *Sophist* 267ac, *Laws* 815a. For dance movements, see *Wasps* 1485, *Laws* 654e ff. Note that *σχῆμα* is, and should be felt as, the base root of *ἐύσχημοσύνη*.

²⁴ Difficult to do if he is accompanying himself on a lyre. But rhapsodes are also shown on vases with a staff instead of a lyre. See Hesiod, *Theogony* 30 with 95.

²⁵ Compare οὐ *κατὰ* *ὄψιν* at 392θ with *ὄλωστ* 595ζ. But book X's general account is a metaphysical explanation (597e: the imitator is the maker of a product at third remove from truth and reality), adding nothing to the conditions for mimesis. At *Sophist* 267a, discussed in lecture III, the conditions given here appear to be necessary as well as sufficient for poetic mimesis. This has interesting implications for the question whether Plato's own dialogues are mimetic. They have been regarded as mimetic since Aristotle, *Poetics* 1447b, 11 (for discussion, see Proclus, in *Platonis rempublicam commentarii* 14.15–15.19, L. A. Kosman, "Silence and Imitation in the Platonic Dialogues," in *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy*, supplementary vol. 1992: *Methods of Interpreting Plato and His Dialogues*, ed. James C. Clagge and Nicholas D. Smith, pp. 73–92). But they would meet 393c's criterion for mimesis only when read aloud in a way that made the individual speakers sound

on piecemeal as he adds in new types of example. Next comes tragedy and comedy, which are entirely mimetic, without any narrative in the poet's own voice (394b). Yet he continues to speak of the poet as the imitator. Just as Homer speaks through Ion, so in drama it is the poet who tells the story —through his characters' speeches (394d, 397ab, 398ab; cf. 388c). It is as if the actors, like the rhapsode, are mere conduits for the poet's own voice. Euripides speaks the words of Medea, his voice modulating like a ventriloquist's into that of the (male) actor playing the part.²⁶

This way of thinking about actors as extensions of the poet is taken further when Socrates goes on to say the Guards should not imitate neighing horses, lowing bulls, the noise of rivers, the roar of the sea, thunder, hail, axles and pulleys, trumpets, flutes, pan-pipes, and every other instrument, or the cries of dogs, sheep, and birds (396b, 397a). Is he talking about some crazy pantomime, in which people mimic everything under the sun, including axles and pulleys? Or about the dramatist's use of sound-effects? I suggest the latter. In Aristophanes' *Frogs* the Chorus croak "Brekekekex, koax, koax" —after all, they are a chorus of frogs. And in the *Laws* (669d), Plato decries "programme" music that imitates the sounds made by wild animals, *machinery*, and other things. If the imitator is taken to be the poet-composer rather than the actors or musicians, then it is Aristophanes himself who makes frog noises, his voice that modulates into the accompanying music or rumblings from the thunder-machine offstage.²⁷

differently. They were so read at Roman symposia, according to Plutarch in a passage (*Moralia* 711bc) bursting with allusions to *Rep.* III (e.g., ἀμονσίαν καὶ ἀπειροκαλίαν echoes 403c). This implies that the plain text, unperformed, would not be mimetic. I suspect the dialogues were written for the mind's eye, not for physical ears. Would Plato wish to count himself a practitioner of the art of imitation (ἡ μιμητικὴ τέχνη), alongside painters, poets, and sophists? He is careful not to say that of God (lecture III, n. 31). Certainly, a philosopher is one who imitates (assimilates their thought to) the Forms (500c). But that is not done by exercising an *art*.

²⁶ The same picture in book X, 605cd, quoted in lecture III.

²⁷ If you find it grotesque, this picture of the poet sprouting extensions of himself and his voice all over the theatre, Plato will be well pleased. By the grotesquery

This interpretation makes it easier to follow the argument. When the issue is raised whether in the ideal city poets should be allowed purely mimetic storytelling, as in tragedy and comedy, Socrates professes not to be sure; he will follow whichever way the argument takes him (394d). Then he asks whether the Guards themselves should be imitative (394e: μιμητικοί). This may sound like a digression away from tragedy and comedy into the Guards' daily life. But it is not a digression if Socrates, as I contend, means to ask whether it would be permissible for the Guards themselves to do what a dramatist does, imitate a multiplicity of characters, *in the way the dramatist does it*. This is not the question whether the Guards should indulge in mimicry at parties, but whether, when free of military duties, they should engage in the poetic "performance" of writing and producing tragedy or comedy, which would involve them in imitating many different characters with no narrative interludes (394e 8–9, 395b 5) in front of a large audience (397a).²⁸ No doubt Socrates also means that the Guards should not be mimics at a party, nor enjoy acting in plays. They should not imitate any unworthy character, let alone a whole variety of them (395c–96b); they should imitate only characters they wish to emulate in their own lives. But the primary focus of the argument is on the Guards as themselves mimetic storytellers, impersonating many characters both good and bad. Only later does Socrates raise the prospect of a professional dramatist arriving from abroad and seeking admittance (397c–98a).

This interpretation explains why the premise used to outlaw tragedy and comedy is the "one man—one job" principle. In the ideal city each man is to devote himself to the practice of one craft

is anticipated by Aristophanes, *Thesmophoriazusae* 130ff., where the tragic poet Agathon assumes in all seriousness the habit and the habits of the women he portrays; at line 156 he calls this mimesis. Note that the disjunctive generalisation has now been extended to cover imitating the sounds of nonhuman things, animate or inanimate; originally it meant imitating people, as is shown by the masculine pronoun at 393c 6.

²⁸In ancient Athens the poet was also the producer, as we would call it—in Greek, the διδασκαλος or teacher of it, because he trained the chorus.

only.²⁹ No craft or skill is needed to sit and watch a play. Some skill is needed for reciting a speech from Euripides. But much more is required to write and produce a play yourself. The Guards' sole job (395a 2: ἐπιτήδευμα), their special craft (395b 9: δημιουργία), is defending the freedom of the city (395bc). Hence they must not even to do what cultivated Athenians often did, combine their main pursuit with the writing of tragedies (395a 1-2).³⁰ (In real-life Athens, Sophocles did it the other way round: he served twice as general.) If it is true, as Socrates claims, that no one can successfully combine two imitative crafts, either as a poet of both tragedy and comedy or as an actor in both (395ab), a fortiori no one can successfully combine an imitative craft with a military career (395bc). The argument turns on the exclusive demands each craft makes on its practitioners. It is dramaturgy as a craft, much more than amateur theatricals, that Socrates wants the Guards to avoid, so that they concentrate on developing and practising the skills appropriate to their proper task.³¹

²⁹ But what makes a craft *one* craft rather than several? Some painters also made the pots they painted. Are they in breach of the "one man—one job" principle? It is a weakness of the *Republic* that this question is not addressed, even though the Guards' job is a novelty, not a profession already recognized in current nomenclature. The question is not taken up until the *Statesman*.

³⁰ Aristotle's *Poetics* was written for such people.

³¹ The only scholar I know to have countenanced the possibility that dramaturgy is Socrates' primary target, rather than reciting, acting in, or watching plays, is H. Koller in his fascinating, yet frustrating, book *Der Mimesis in der Antike: Nachahmung, Darstellung, Ausdruck* (Bern, 1954), p. 17; in the end, he leaves the question open. Halliwell, "Two Critiques," pp. 321–22, asserts that 394de makes an abrupt transition from poet to audience. The objection is that nowhere in the *Republic* is it said or hinted that watching a play is or involves imitation. Even when book X speaks of the audience identifying with a character on stage, the imitator is the poet, not the audience (605cd, quoted in lecture III). Christopher Janaway, *Images of Excellence: Plato's Critique of the Arts* (Oxford, 1995), p. 96, wants it both ways: "You would take in Homer's depiction of Achilles either by seeing a rhapsode declaim the part on stage or by reciting and thereby enacting the part yourself." The objection still holds. A better view is that of Ferrari, "Plato and Poetry," p. 116: "The Guardians are to *perform* this poetry; imitation is as much what they do as it is what the poets do." My interpretation changes the emphasis. Imitation is first and foremost what the Guards would do *as dramatic poets*. Their reciting speeches from Euripides is of secondary importance, banned by implication rather than the main line of argument.

In itself, this is not an argument for banning tragedy and comedy altogether. There are lots of things the Guards must not do which, nevertheless, someone in the ideal city has to have the skill to do: pottery and painting, for example. But the “one man—one job” principle can be reapplied to block the suggestion that, provided he made tragedy or comedy (not both—395ab) his specialty, a professional dramatist could be admitted into the city. The ideal city is like a symphony orchestra, in which each member plays just one instrument, so that together they create a beautiful whole called “Kallipolis” (527c). The dramatist is a walking-talking-singing-trumpeting-thundering subversion of the “one man—one job” principle responsible for this happy result. Not only must no Guard produce plays, but if a professional dramatist turns up at the city gate and asks to present his works, he will be treated as if he were a one-man band at the street corner asking to join the Berlin Philharmonic. It is not even lawful (*θέμις*) for such a multiplex personality to grow up within the ideal city, let alone for one to be let in (398a).

POETRY AND POLITICS

You may object that a professional dramatist does not really exhibit the multiple personality disorder Socrates ascribes to him. He only seems to do so. Plato knows this very well; in book X he will insist on it. But he also knows that “imitations, if continued from youth far into life, settle down into habits and [second] nature in one’s body, voice, and thought” (395d). In John Banville’s novel *The Untouchable*, a young recruit to the British Secret Service MI 5, out on his first assignment and moving in to detain the spy for questioning, “narrows his eyes as the thrillers had taught him to do”;³² by the time he retires, that eye-movement will be second nature to him (thereby proving the realism of the next generation of thrillers). Nothing is easier than to fall into the atti-

³² John Banville, *The Untouchable* (London, 1997), p. 370.

tudes and outlook, even the accents, of one's friends and associates. Imitation may indeed have consequences. It is not a thing to take up lightly, still less to make a profession of. Some film stars have been said to lack a stable self of their own, to live only in the public appearance of a bundle of different roles. Given Plato's conceit of the actors as so many extensions of the poet, for him it is the dramatist who is like that. Not a person who will contribute to the austere civilized life of Kallipolis.

At this stage, then, Plato's objection is to the dramatist rather than to the drama. His ban on dramaturgy (amateur or professional) is not primarily due to concern about what will happen to the souls of Guards who recite speeches from Euripides or act in his plays, nor to worries about Euripides' effect on the souls of his audience; this will be discussed in book X. In book III the decision is political. Euripides is an undesirable character to have around; so are politicians and military men who write plays in their spare time.³³ Plato here is like someone who would ban rock music not because of its heavy beat and racy words, but because of the singers' life-style. Or the French laws which until 1789 refused actors the right to legal marriage and burial in hallowed ground.³⁴ And beware of politicians (like Tony Blair and Bill Clinton) who play a musical instrument.

Contemporary readers would be sensitive to the political dimension of Plato's decision. Athenian tragedy and comedy were intensely democratic institutions, both in ways they were organized and in their physical presence. During the Great Dionysia, 1,200 citizens — 700 men plus 500 adolescents — took part in the choral singing and dancing of the various competitions (tragedy, comedy, dithyramb). Under Pericles' cheap ticket scheme, even the poorest of the rest could join the audience, which was further

³³ Plato's kinsman, the tyrant Critias, wrote tragedies.

³⁴ See M. Barras, *The Stage Controversy in France from Corneille to Rousseau* (New York, 1933), pp. 10, 174–85; wider vistas in Jonas Barish, *The Anti-Theatrical Prejudice* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London, 1981). The impropriety of acting is a major theme in Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park*.

swollen by visitors from the empire and abroad, reaching a total of between ten and fourteen thousand people. A big event, for which ultimate responsibility lay with the Assembly.³⁵ Only living poets could enter the competitions. But after the death of Aeschylus, the Assembly voted —it was an exceptional honour —to allow his plays to be produced, outside the competition, by anyone who wished. On a later occasion, the political advice in the “parabasis” of Aristophanes’ *Frogs* of 405 B.C. so pleased the Athenians that the Assembly passed a decree of commendation, awarding him a wreath and instructing the archon to grant a chorus to anyone who wished to produce the play a second time.³⁶ This too was exceptional, but it is worth noting that the *Frogs* is itself the staging of a debate, before the assembled people of Athens, about whether Aeschylus or Euripides would benefit the city most if one of them could be brought back from Hades. It was only in the fourth century that the restaging of old, now “classic,” plays became common, and that required a deliberate political decision to enlarge the festival.

Thus concern for the quality of poetry sponsored by the state was not a new and dastardly idea of Plato’s. It was a concern shared by the Athenian democracy. And their decisions could be savage. When Phrynichus presented a tragedy about the Persian capture of Miletus in 494 B.C., the audience was so upset by this vivid reminder of the recent misfortunes of their friends that they fined the poet and forbade any future performance of his play (Herodotus VI 21). In oligarchic Sparta, on the other hand, there were choral festivals but no theatre. Plato would see this as the better political choice. If the link between theatre and democracy is not explicit in book III of the *Republic*, elsewhere the connection is loud and clear.

³⁵ A comprehensive account of the management of the various dramatic festivals may be found in Pickard-Cambridge, *Dramatic Festivals*, part II.

³⁶ For the evidence and its interpretation, see Kenneth Dover, *Aristophanes’ Frogs*, edited with introduction and commentary (Oxford, 1993), pp. 73–75.

Book VI includes a discussion of what is likely to happen if, in a nonideal state like Athens, a truly philosophic nature is born, capable of becoming one of the philosopher-rulers of the ideal city. Would the young man escape the corrupting influence of the culture under which he grows up? The chances are small, says Socrates (492ad). Think of the impression made on a really talented soul by the applause and booing of mass gatherings in the Assembly, the courts (an Athenian jury was not twelve good men and true, but several hundred and one), *theatres*, or military camps. Is not the young man likely to end up accepting the values of the masses and becoming a character of the same sort as the people he is surrounded by? A democratic culture does not nurture reflective, philosophical understanding. Mass gatherings set the standards of goodness, justice, and beauty, in painting, in music (where “music” includes poetry and drama), and in politics (493bd). Plato knows all about democratic control of the general quality of the culture; in the *Laws* (701a) he will call it “theatrocracy.” His vitriolic denunciation of the mass media of his age argues for rejecting democratic control in favour of his own, authoritarian alternative.

Even stronger is the claim at the end of the *Republic* VIII that tragedy both encourages and is encouraged by the two lowest types of constitution, democracy and tyranny (568ad). Note once again the interactive model of cultural change. As in a bad marriage, playwright and polity bring out the worst in each other. Each indulges the other’s ways.

So what occasions for the performance of poetry will remain in the ideal city, after the dramatists have been turned away at the gate? The Guards’ musical education will include dance (412b), which usually implies singing too. They will eat, as if they were permanently on campaign, in common messes;³⁷ this Spartan practice implies sympotic drinking after the meal and much singing of lyric poetry. The famous warning against innovation in music

³⁷ Lecture I, n. 36.

makes it clear that new songs are allowed, provided they are in the same old style (424bc).³⁸ Delphi will be invited to prescribe rules for religious ceremonies (founding temples, sacrifices, burials, etc.: 427bc, 540bc), all of which in the Greek world would involve singing hymns and other poetry. Hymns are an important element also in the ideal city's annual breeding festivals. "Our poets" will compose verse and music appropriate to the forthcoming unions (459e-60a). Again, at sacrifices and "all other such occasions" there will be hymns (i.e., songs of praise) to honour men and women who have distinguished themselves in battle (468de). Like Heroes of the Soviet Union, the good will be constantly extolled in public —to reward them and hold up models for everyone else.

This list is enough to show that poetry — the right sort of poetry — will be a pervasive presence in the life of the warrior class. *Republic* X sums it up as "nothing but hymns to the gods and encomia for the good" (607a), yet the occasions for these will be plentiful enough to keep the poets of the ideal city busy. In book II Adeimantus complained that no poet has yet sung adequately of justice as the greatest good a soul can have within it (366e). Perhaps the poets of the ideal city will manage better. Although it is often said that Plato banished poets and poetry altogether, this is simply not true.³⁹ For the most part, however, the list just given is merely a list, which I have put together from scattered remarks. No detail is given about how the various ceremonies will proceed, nor about their frequency (the Athenians had around 120 festival days a year).⁴⁰ Worse, phrases like "hymns to

³⁸ At least, I think it is clear, *pace* Nehamas, "Imitation," n. 21. Besides, encomia of the good (see below) will require new songs for the deeds of each generation.

³⁹ The reasoning behind this widespread view is countered in lecture III. Meanwhile, the references in the previous paragraph are enough to refute the claim of Nehamas, "Imitation," p. 53 with n. 22, that after books II–III there is no reference to poetry as a component in the life of the ideal city. Book III ends at 417b; my list extends into IV and V.

⁴⁰ A festival with animal sacrifice is the main occasion for eating meat, which the Guards must do (559ab, cited in lecture I, no. 36). This is a world without

the gods” may suggest the wrong sort of detail to a modern reader. The Greek ὕμνος covers a variety of forms more interesting than the hymns we are used to. The *Homeric Hymn to Hermes*, for example, is an engaging narrative, nearly 600 lines long, with lots of mimesis, about the birth and impudent tricks of the robber god. Equally, any Greek reader would expect “encomia of the good” to include tales of their noble deeds, as recommended by Xenophanes. Adventure stories will often be the order of the day.

One of the occasions for poetry does receive fuller treatment — the symposium.⁴¹ Book III’s discussion of poetry reaches its climax with a set of norms for the symposium. This has not been noticed, partly because Plato expects readers to recognize the familiar setting without being told. Another reason is that in the past scholars have preferred not to wonder why the discussion of poetry ends by imposing austere limits to homoerotic sex.

But of that, more shortly. We are still in the second stage of the discussion of poetry, dealing with the manner of poetic performance. Drama is not all the Guards are deprived of. Their epic recitals will be very unlike those the ancients were used to. No rhapsodic display, and much less speechifying than in the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*. The story will be mostly plain narrative,⁴² interrupted by the occasional stretch of mimesis. The mimesis will be largely restricted to auditory and visual likenesses of a good person behaving steadfastly and sensibly (396cd: ἀσφαλῶς τε καὶ ἐμφρόνως).⁴³

refrigerators: the whole animal is consumed immediately, by a large gathering of people.

⁴¹ Hymns to a god are appropriate there too: Xenophanes, frag. 1 (quoted in lecture I), Plato, *Symposium* 176a.

⁴² As illustrated by Socrates at 393d–94a. Being no poet, Socrates speaks in prose, but Dennis Feeney points out to me that Plato and his readers would recall Achilles’ poetic version of the same narrative at *Iliad* I 365 ff. That is Homer imitating Achilles narrating. Socrates’ narrative of the events, however, because it is prose, should not in my view (*pace* Ferrari, “Plato and Poetry,” pp. 115–16; Kosman, “Silence,” pp. 76–77) be read as Socrates imitating Homer. No one listening would say that Homer seemed to be present to their ears, as he is when narrating *in propria persona*.

⁴³ Note the disjunction “speech or action” (λέξιν τινὰ ἢ πράξιν) at 396c 6.

The impressiveness of this steadfast, sensible behaviour will be reinforced by the speaker's even delivery (λέξις). There will be little variation in his voice, and the accompanying music will stick to a single mode and a single rhythm (397bc).⁴⁴ Even good people are struck down by disease, fall in love, or get drunk, but mimesis of such events is to be very sparing. The other side of the coin is that a villain may do the odd good deed: mimesis of that is admissible, but it is not likely to happen often. The final exception is that poets may imitate bad characters in jest, to scoff at them (396de).

Thus far, Chryses' prayer would survive, but not Agamemnon's angry, unrelenting response at line 26:

Old man, let me not find you by the hollow ships,
 Either lingering now or coming back later —
 You may find that your staff and the god's ribbons will not
 protect you.
 The girl I will not give up; sooner will old age come upon her
 In my house at Argos, far from her fatherland,
 Plying the loom and sharing my bed.
 Now go, don't rile me, and you will go more safely.

Already it seems that the *Iliad* will have to stop as soon as it has started. But Plato delays until book X the shocking news that Homer will be banished as well as the dramatists.

But remember that book II implies that a purged tragedy will still be allowed. Tragedy and comedy are not explicitly banned until book III. Plato deals out the pain in measured doses, allowing his readers to get used to one shock as preparation for the next.⁴⁵ No objections have been raised to mimesis or to poetry in themselves. There will in fact be lots of poetry in the ideal city,

⁴⁴ Plato here anticipates the third stage of the discussion of poetry: that is the stage where I shall comment on the meaning of "mode" in Greek music.

⁴⁵ Already at 394d 7 (quoted at the beginning of lecture III) Socrates drops a hint that more is at risk in the discussion of mimesis than tragedy and comedy.

some of it mimetic. The shock is, how little of it is to be mimetic; and how thoroughly edifying it all has to be.

STAGE 3 OF THE REFORM : MUSICAL TECHNIQUE

The third stage of the discussion deals with the nonvocal side of music: the modes, instruments, and rhythms which make the music in our narrower sense of the word. Socrates' norms in this department are as austere as the norms governing content and performance. Some Bach might scrape by; certainly not Beethoven, Mahler, or Stravinsky.

This is where Plato gives examples of the kinds of mimesis to be permitted. The examples remove all doubt about the answer to the question "What does Plato think is so bad about mimesis?" Nothing—*provided* it is mimesis of a good and temperate (*σώφρων*) character, the character (we later discover) of which gracefulness in architecture and bodily movement is also a likeness. On the contrary, mimesis has a formative educational role to play in the culture. What you imitate regularly is what you become, so from childhood on the Guards must imitate appropriate models of courage, temperance, and other virtues. These things must become second nature to them (395cd). Just as gracefulness in architecture and bodily movement has a gradual unnoticed influence on the soul of those who grow up in their presence, so too do the mimetic likenesses of the poetry Plato allows for the Guards. The examples to be quoted are designed to illustrate the permitted modes of music, but appropriate words are taken for granted. In the songs sung at social and sacred gatherings, both music and verse will imitate the way persons of good character deal with the ups and downs of fortune; in book X we meet the contrasting case of bad mimesis, the way a tragic hero reacts to misfortune.

The musical modes (*ἁρμονίαι*) under discussion are the ancient alternative to our musical scales. A mode is an attunement—a way of tuning the instrument to certain intervals—which lends a certain character to the tunes that can be played with it. When

Socrates bans all but two modes, the Dorian and Phrygian (398d-99a; cf. 399c), it is somewhat as if he had said, "Scrap all the minor keys, but leave just two of the major keys." Here are Socrates' examples of good mimesis:⁴⁶

"Leave me that mode [*ἀρμονία*] which would fittingly imitate the tones and cadences of a brave man engaged unsuccessfully in warfare or any other enforced endeavour,⁴⁷ who meets wounds, death, or some other disaster but confronts it steadfastly with endurance, warding off the blows of fortune. And leave me another mode for a man engaged in unforced, voluntary activities of peace. He may be persuading someone of something or entreating them, either praying to a god or teaching and admonishing a human being. Or, contrariwise, he may himself be attending to another's entreaty, teaching, or attempt to change his opinion. In either case he does what he is minded to do without arrogance, acting throughout and accepting the outcome with temperance and moderation.⁴⁸ Just these two modes, the one enforced, the other voluntary, which will best imitate the tones of brave men in bad fortune and of temperate men in good — leave me these." (399ac)

If it was always these two types of song that we heard when we turned on the radio or went out to a social gathering, our culture would be very different. Rut not necessarily boring. Nothing stops a poet weaving the permitted types of mimetic display into a gripping third-person narrative, short or long; nothing stops a story including the imitation of more than one good character. A narrative of comradeship and dignified courage before death in a concentration camp could well satisfy Socrates' norms for what he calls "enforced endeavour." We might even be sympathetic to the

⁴⁶ My translation of the extraordinary syntax of the passage is guided by Adam's note *ad loc.*, especially on the chiasmus at the end.

⁴⁷ By "enforced," Socrates means that, unlike actual Greek states, the ideal city will not go to war unless it is necessary and unavoidable. The contrast "enforced"—"voluntary" reappears in Aristotle's discussion of the voluntary at *Eudemian Ethics* II 8.

⁴⁸ ΤΕ . . . καί shows that the adverbs modify both participles.

idea that it would be indecent to give the Nazis any significant speaking parts.

The second type of permitted mimesis is for “voluntary” activities. In Oliver Sachs’s *Awakenings* a doctor persuades the hospital authorities to let him try a new treatment on patients sunk in a permanent catatonic trance. They are unable to react to people or the world around. This treatment brings the patients to life again, but only for a while. The doctor accepts the outcome with temperance and moderation. He did what he could; medical science made a modest advance. It is an engaging, sympathetic story. But if you want more action, Plato has nothing against adventure stories. Heroism in military and civil life is exactly what this education is designed to promote.

So do not think of the artistic culture of Plato’s city as boring. Austere, yes; an even-toned, calm expressiveness prevails. Plato’s word for it is “simplicity” (404be, 410a, 547e: ἀπλότης). Growing up in such a culture would be like growing up in the presence of sober people all of brave and temperate character.

STAGE 4 OF THE REFORM: THE MATERIAL AND SOCIAL SETTING

But the ideal city already ensures, so far as is humanly possible, that the young grow up in the presence of sober people all of good and temperate character. Why worry about likenesses, the cultural icons, if kids are already surrounded by the real thing in flesh and blood? Plato’s answer is that, even in the ideal city, where the family and private property have been abolished, the people you know are only one part of the culture. When the influence of human role models is at odds with the predominant cultural icons, there is a risk of change. It is not just that multiplicity and variety are bad in themselves. That is indeed at the heart of Plato’s objection to Homeric epic and Athenian drama, which revel in variety and the clash of different characters. But the main point is that change from the ideal is change for the worse (cf. 380–81c). To

avoid change as long as possible, the entire culture must be in harmony both with the people you meet in life and with those you know from poetry. That is why the discussion of musical poetry leads into the passage I began from about gracefulness in architecture, clothing, and everything that craftsmen make. A graceful material environment will ensure that the young are always and everywhere in the presence of likenesses (401a: *μιμήματα*) of the same good and temperate character as the human beings whose lives and stories they know.⁴⁹ The entire culture unites in harmonious expression of the best that human beings can be.

A musical education which forms a sensibility able to recognize gracefulness, and respond to it as an image of good and temperate character, also lets you recognize, and respond to, other images of good character —images of courage, liberality, high-mindedness (402ac).⁵⁰ A Guard so educated, and old enough to apprehend at least some of the reasons why these are images of goodness (cf. 402a),⁵¹ is ready to fall in love. His education will ensure that the younger male comrade he favours has beauty of character to match the beauty of his physical appearance. Love (*ἔρως*) of such a person is the goal and consummation of musical education. Socrates' last word on poetry in book III is a summons to erotic desire: "Music should end in the love of the beautiful" (403c).⁵²

⁴⁹ There is no need to suppose that the craftsmen who make the various artefacts are themselves persons of sobriety. They work to the orders of the rulers, who are the users (in the sense of book X, 601d) of the material culture. The rulers use everything to educate the young and maintain the ethos of the ideal society.

⁵⁰ High-mindedness (*μεγαλοπρέπεια*) in a young Guard prefigures the high-mindedness which distinguishes the thought (*διάνοια*) of the philosopher-ruler who contemplates all time and all being (486a; cf. 503c).

⁵¹ The analogy at 402ab with learning one's letters implies that "the coming of reason" (402a) is a fairly low-level achievement, far removed from a philosophical understanding of the Forms; that only comes years later, to a select few. I agree with Ferrari, "Plato and Poetry," pp. 120–22, and others that the *εἶδη* of temperance, courage, etc., at 402c are not transcendent Platonic Forms.

⁵² Curiously echoed in an etymology at Plato, *Cratylus* 406a: the Muses and music in general are so called from *μῶσθαι* (to desire, pursue) and search and philosophy.

Socrates has now moved from the material environment to the social setting for musical poetry. The symposium is not the only gathering where musical poetry is performed, but it is the one most relevant to love. Among the musical modes banned earlier, at stage 3 of the reform, were certain soft “symptotic” modes, which encourage drunkenness (398e); in the ideal city, as in Sparta, drunkenness is forbidden (403e). But the rule presupposes they will drink wine. No Greek equated sobriety with abstinence. After the meal in their Spartan-style common messes (*ξυσίτια*), the Guards will drink in convivial moderation, like the inhabitants of the primitive city of book II. (We have actual figures for Spartan wine consumption: Sparta was famous for its sobriety, yet their daily ration was well over our driving limit.)⁵³ And the symposium is the main social occasion for dalliance: the couch is wide enough for two.⁵⁴ In the ideal city, the lover is permitted “to kiss and be with” his beloved, and “to touch him as if he were a son, for honourable ends, if he persuade him” —but nothing further, on pain of being stigmatized for being “unmusical and unable to enjoy beauty properly” (403bc). The combination of wine, music, and homoerotic love at the symposium was widely used in the Greek world (not only in Sparta) to forge bonds of loyalty and comradeship among those who fight for the city. Plato is adapting this institution to the austere controlled ethic of Kallipolis.

Later, when readers have recovered from the shock of being told in book V that in this city women, too, are to be warriors and rulers, equally with men, they learn that those who distinguish themselves on campaign (which would include symposia in camp on beds of leaves)⁵⁵ will exchange kisses with everyone else. Indeed, they will have an unrefusable right to kiss anyone they

⁵³ Oswyn Murray, “War and the Symposium,” in Slater, *Dining*, 91; his source is the amount the Athenians agreed to allow for supplying the Spartans trapped on Sphacteria during the Peloponnesian War (Thucydides IV 16).

⁵⁴ Cf. Plato, *Symposium* 175a–76a.

⁵⁵ Cf. lecture I, n. 40 on *σπιβάδες*.

desire (*ἔρωσιν*), male *or female*,⁵⁶ and they will be given more frequent opportunities to t h e part in the breeding festivals (468c). The better you are, the more you can breed. Heterosexual desire, like homosexual, is harnessed to the ends of the city.

RETROSPECT ON THE REFORM IN BOOKS II–III

Looking back over this long discussion of musical poetry, we should be struck by how widely it ranged. Starting with religion, ending with sex, taking in architecture and embroidery by the way, Socrates has broached numerous issues that affect the ethos of society. All were woven around the central thread of musical poetry, precisely because this for Plato is the main vehicle of cultural transmission, the main determinant of the good or bad character of the city.

In recent years, we have seen the ethos of British society go through a quite dramatic change as a result of the Thatcher years. The change was not planned in every detail from above. But there was a deliberate, concerted effort by the Conservative government to purge the prevailing values and substitute the values of “enterprise” and the spirit of the free market. In the political arena, whether national or local (including universities), it became increasingly difficult to appeal to the idea that the better-off should contribute to the welfare of the disadvantaged for the overall good of the community. This attack on the values of community was pursued in every area of life, even in areas (like universities) where talk of “the market” is at best a metaphor. Metaphors and images, as Plato knew better than anyone, are potent weapons, especially in the wrong hands. If there are lessons for today in Plato’s discussion of musical poetry in books II–III, the unit of comparison I would propose is not the details of censorship in the

⁵⁶ This extra rule is contributed by Glaucon, whose keen interest in homoerotic relationships is remarked upon at 402e and 474d–75a. Another distinguishing feature of Glaucon is his knowledge of music (398e 1; cf. 548e 4–5). In the light of 403c, just quoted, we may see his being *ἔρωτικός* and his being *μουσικός* as connected: a compliment from Plato to his older brother.

carefully guarded, closed world of the ideal city, but Plato's concern for what he calls the ethos of society. Plato, like Mrs. Thatcher, saw this as a prime political responsibility. Democrats can only undo the damage done to our society by the excesses of market ideology if we find democratic alternatives for fostering a better ethos in society at large.

Most of us do not share Plato's confidence that objectively correct answers to these questions exist, and that, given the right education, men and women of talent can come to know what the answers are. Even if we did have that confidence, we would not think it right to impose our answers on everybody else. Democracy, both ancient and modern, puts a high value on individual choice and autonomy. That complicates the task. A further complication is that our culture values innovation and originality: after the initial shock, we welcome the new ways of seeing and hearing brought to us by a Picasso or Stravinsky; we enjoy the sparkle of sophisticated advertisements. But none of this relieves us of responsibility for thinking about what we can do to improve the world in which our children grow up.

LECTURE III. FAREWELL TO HOMER AND THE HONEYED MUSE

THE REFORM RESUMED IN BOOK X: HOMER AS THE FIRST TRAGEDIAN

"We must agree whether to let our poets imitate when they tell a story, or imitate for some parts of the story but not for others (in which case we must agree where they may imitate and where not), or whether we should not let them imitate at all.

"I divine," said Adeimantus, "that you are considering whether or not to admit tragedy and comedy into the city."

"Possibly," I said, "but possibly I have in mind even more than these. I don't myself know yet, but we must go wherever the wind of the argument blows us." (394d)

Already in book III Socrates hints that the discussion of mimesis may go beyond a ban on tragedy and comedy. There may be more pain to come.¹ But it is not until *Republic X* that Socrates braces himself² to denounce Homer openly as “the first teacher³ and instigator of all these beauties of tragedy” (595bc). If Homer is the master of tragic mimesis, he too should be expelled.

Socrates is sorry the argument has carried him so far. He has loved and revered Homer since boyhood. But, he says, a man should not be honoured above the truth (595bc). This is often taken as a personal statement of regret by Plato.⁴ I see it as Plato's warning that the most enlightened philosopher (Socrates) will still carry what Zeno, founder of Stoicism, called the “scars” of his upbringing in an ordinary, nonideal city.⁵ He will feel the spell of Homer even after he has foresworn him for good (607ce). “Great is the struggle, dear Glaucon, greater than it seems” (608b). That struggle is enacted in the first half of book X,⁶ where Socrates explains why in existing cities like Athens it is dangerous, even for the most morally secure individual, to attend the theatre, or Ion's performance of Homer at the Panathenaea. The mimesis you witness there is a threat to the constitution (*πολιτεία*) of your soul (605bc, 608ab).

The work we are reading is not a *Republic* in any antiroyalist sense of the word; still less is it the German *Die Staat*. The title

¹ Cf. Jowett and Campbell's edition (Oxford, 1894), *ad loc.*: “an anticipation of the condemnation of epic poetry in Book X.” Adam's vehement denial of this view (*ad* 394d and 595a) is mere assertion. Shorey's comment is: “This seems to imply that Plato already had in mind the extension of the discussion in the tenth book to the whole question of the moral effect of poetry and art.”

² Note the emphatic “I must speak out” (595b, 9, repeated 595c 3: *ῥητέον*).

³ Besides its ordinary connotation, “teacher” (*διδάσκαλος*) is also used for the poet as producer of his play (lecture II, n. 28). Both meanings should be felt here.

⁴ So Adam *ad loc.*, and numerous others.

⁵ Seneca, *De Ira* I 16.7: “As Zeno says, the soul of the wise man too, even when the wound is healed, shows the scar. He will feel certain hints or shadows of emotion, but will be free of the emotions themselves.”

⁶ The first 13 Stephanus pages down to 608b. From 608c to the end is almost exactly another 13 pages.

πολιτεία means “constitution.” An ancient reader would at first be put in mind of works like *The Constitution of the Spartans* by Plato’s kinsman, the tyrant Critias. But Plato’s *πολιτεία* is not the constitution of any people or any actual place. It is the ideal constitution, or better: constitutional order as such, which may be realized in souls as well as cities. This was not apparent when musical poetry was discussed in books II–III. It became apparent when the parallel between tripartite city and tripartite soul was developed in book IV. It was reinforced later by the fusion of city with soul in books VIII–IX.⁷ In between came Sun, Line, and Cave, the grand epistemological and metaphysical theories of books V–VII. The structure of *Republic* II–X is, in broad outline, a ring composition: poetry/city and soul/Forms/city and soul/poetry.⁸ This should help us see that book X does more than vindicate the earlier decision to ban tragedy and comedy (595a). By returning to discuss musical poetry in the light of the psychological, epistemological, and metaphysical theories introduced since book III, it shows that those theories have a practical significance even if the ideal city is not founded in our lifetime. They provide the antidote (595b: *φάρμακον*) or counter-charm (608a: *ἐπωδή*) to mimesis. A proper understanding of what mimesis is, and what it does, can safeguard the constitution of a philosopher’s soul. If Homer endangers the social order of the ideal city, he is no less of a threat to the psyche of an individual who aspires to virtue and wisdom.

Accordingly, my strategy with book X will be to read it as continuing book III’s discussion at a higher level. Socrates in book X appears both as censor, adding more poetry to the proscription lists, and as a theoretician concerned to set the entire programme for reforming the culture in a higher, more philosophical perspec-

⁷ On the fusion of soul with city, see lecture I: “First Glance Ahead: The Divided Soul in Book X.”

⁸ Here I am indebted to Reviel Netz. Book I stands outside the structure as “prelude” (357a) to the whole.

tive. But readers should be warned that this is a controversial approach.⁹ It is often held that book X's treatment of mimesis is different from, even consistent with, book III's. Two main questions arise. Does book X ban more mimesis than book III? Is book X's concept of poetic mimesis different from book III's? Most scholars nowadays answer "Yes" to both questions. I shall answer "No." But I shall accept that book X bans more poetry than books II–III—more than is usually recognized. To defend these views, I shall need more scholarly exegesis than before, more wrestling with the text. Plato's discussion is so provocative that it can be hard to keep a cool head and read him accurately.

DOES BOOK X BAN MORE MIMESIS THAN BOOK III?

Banning Homer is obviously banning more poetry than book III. But, as just seen, the ban is the making explicit of a shocking proposal already prepared for there. Once Homer is cast as the first maestro of tragic mimesis, no further justification is needed. Socrates says (595ab) he will vindicate book III's decision by showing the damage (λάβη) that poetic mimesis does to the thought (διάνοια) of its audience.¹⁰ This promises a new and different justification from before.¹¹ But putting Homer under the same ban

⁹ Annas, *Introduction*, 335, describes book X as "an excrescence . . . full of oddities"; Halliwell, "Two Critiques," p. 325, echoes earlier scholars' description of it as a "coda" or "appendix" to the main work. A tiny point of grammar confirms that book X was written to be read as part of the main body of the work: the very first line (595a 1) contains a pronoun, *αὐτῆς*, whose reference lies in book IX. It has to be traced back via *ταύτης μόνης* (592b 4) = *αὐτήν* (592b 1) = the city founded in this discussion (592a 10–11). Had book X been conceived as a distinct, appendix-like unit, Plato would surely have written *περὶ τῆς πόλεως*, not *περὶ αὐτῆς*, which the next line clarifies as *τὴν πόλιν*. We happen to have inherited the *Republic* in ten books, but an arrangement in six books is also recorded, and there is no ground for tracing either division back to Plato himself: see Henri Alline, *Histoire du Texte de Platon* (Paris, 1915), pp. 14–18.

¹⁰ On the meaning of "thought" (διάνοια), see lecture I: "First Glance Ahead: The Divided Soul in Book X."

¹¹ I argued in lecture II ("Poetry and Politics") that book III's ban on tragedy was not motivated by its effects on the audience.

(595bc) does not imply that any new *kind* of mimesis is proscribed. To give a different justification is not the same as justifying a different rule.

The question to ask is whether book III's good mimesis is still allowed —the imitation of a virtuous person behaving steadfastly and sensibly in good fortune or bad. Socrates reminds us of this when he brings back the contrast between enforced and voluntary endeavour (603c).¹² In book III he talked about imitating the right way to respond to good and bad fortune,¹³ here he will discuss imitations of the wrong way to respond. If he has nothing further to say about good mimesis, the obvious explanation is that his view of it is unchanged. But scholars have seized on a single passage at the very beginning of book X, claiming that it bans all mimesis, even mimesis of good characters. Looking back on the long argument about justice and happiness, completed at the end of book IX, Socrates says:

“There are a great many things about the city¹⁴ which assure me that we gave it a sound foundation, and especially, I think, in the matter of poetry.”

“What do you have in mind?” said Glaucon.

“Our refusing to admit such poetry as is imitative [*ποιήσεως . . . ὄση μιμητική*]. Now that we have distinguished the different parts of the soul, it has become even clearer that, quite definitely, it should not be admitted.” (595a)

Book X goes further than book III if, *but only if*, the phrase “such poetry as is imitative” covers all *individual* mimetic utterances, including the good ones permitted before. In logical symbolism, Socrates' statement is of the form

(*x*) If *x* is poetry & *x* is mimetic, away with *x*!

¹² Reading, with Burnet, Ast's *ἦν* at 603c 7: “Did we find anything else but these?” (Shorey; many translators ignore the past tense).

¹³ Lecture II: “Stage 3 of the Reform: Musical Technique.”

¹⁴ In context, just after the reference at the close of book IX to the philosopher founding in his own soul the city laid up in the heavens (592b), this means the city in that soul as well as the ideal city.

What is the range of the variable ?

There are two ways to avoid concluding that the phrase covers every individual mimetic utterance. First, you can fix on the word “imitative” (*μιμητικός*) and say that in book III (394e-95a) it meant “multiply imitative.” It applied to people who impersonate many different characters, good and bad — as Euripides and Homer do, but not an author who only goes in for good mimesis. On this understanding of *μιμητικός*, the passage bans nothing that was allowed in book III.¹⁵

Or you can fix on the range of the variable and say that the word “such” picks out kinds or species of poetry — poetic *genres*. In the divisions of the *Sophist* and *Statesman* one finds *ὅσος* (in the singular) used to mark off a particular part or species of some wider genus.¹⁶ If “such poetry as is imitative” means “such *kinds* or *genres* as are imitative,” the phrase fits precisely the poetry discussed and banned in book X: tragedy (now including Homer) and comedy. Lyric is not a mimetic kind, even though some songs are wholly mimetic¹⁷ and others include mimetic passages. If book X’s discussion of mimesis deals only with intrinsically mimetic genres, it is consistent with book III’s allowing mimetic interludes in storytelling where the narrator imitates a good character.

Consistency is not just a desirable feature which the principle of charity directs us to seek. Plato himself keeps implying that book X is written to confirm, in the light of the psychology of book IV, the rightness of his earlier norms for poetry. There are numerous back-references: to the psychology of book IV (595a,

¹⁵ So Elizabeth Belfiore, “A Theory of Imitation in Plato’s *Republic*,” *Transactions of the American Philological Society* 114 (1984): 126–27; Ferrari, “Plato and Poetry,” pp. 115, 117, 125, followed by Nehamas, “Mass Media,” p. 215 with nn. 3, 4.

¹⁶ *Soph.* 219a, 10, 221e 6, 225b 13, *Polit.* 263e 9, 226a 1, 303e 10; cf. *ἡ τῆς ποιήσεως μιμητική* at *Rep.* 603c 1.

¹⁷ How many of these you count depends on how often you take the pronoun “I” to introduce a voice other than that of the poet. Theognis 257, “I am a beautiful, prize-winning mare . . .,” is clearly mimetic. Some more subtle decisions in Bowie, “Early Greek Elegy,” pp. 14–21.

602e–3a, 603d), to the norms governing poetic content (603e), to the banishment of drama in book III (595a, 605b, 607b), to the contrast between enforced and voluntary endeavour (603c). Plato is not usually so insistent on making his readers recall earlier parts of a discussion. Book III did not merely allow, it positively encouraged mimesis of good characters in enforced and voluntary endeavour; such performances, we are told, will be beneficial (398b). If this good mimesis has now become bad, the author of book X ought to alert us to the discrepancy and give some reason for the change. Yet he proceeds as if nothing had changed at all. The onus of proof is on those who would charge him with inconsistency.

There is in fact a perfect match in book III for the phrase *ποιήσεως . . . ὄση μιμητική*: “such poetry as is imitative.” At 394bc (referring back to 392d) Socrates said *ποιήσεως τε και μυθολογίας ἢ μὲν διὰ μιμήσεως ὅλη ἐστίν*: “Of poetry and storytelling one kind is entirely through mimesis.” The contrast is with stories told in the narrative voice “of the poet himself” (e.g., dithyramb) and with stories told in the mixed style of epic and other genres. In the context *ποιήσεως . . . ἢ μὲν διὰ μιμήσεως* refers specifically to tragedy and comedy. It seems reasonable to propose that book X’s phrase *ποιήσεως . . . ὄση μιμητική* picks up tragedy and comedy again by reference to the way they were characterized in the earlier three-part division.¹⁸ There is no reason (yet) to suppose that book X bans more mimesis than book III.

UNDERSTANDING MIMESIS

I said that a proper understanding of what mimesis is, and what it does, can safeguard the constitution of a *philosopher’s*

¹⁸ For this suggestion I am indebted to Mary-Hannah Jones, “Tragedy and Book X of Plato’s *Republic*” (unpublished); it fits well with my suggestion that the variable ranges over genres. She argues against the Ferrari solution that at 394e–95a *μιμητικός* was applied to *people* who are prone to imitation, not to types of poetry; but this becomes less of an objection if I was right (lecture II) to interpret that passage as about whether the Guards could be dramatists.

soul. Only a philosopher, or someone sympathetic to Plato's philosophy, can benefit from the antidote or counter-charm provided by the theories of books IV–IX. This suggests that the arguments before us will not be aimed at persuading everyone, no matter what opinions they bring to their reading of book X. The arguments aim to convince philosophers and people like Glaucon, who have been persuaded by everything Socrates has said since book II. Plato would be quite unmoved to learn that most readers are outraged by book X. That is what he would expect.

Throughout the *Republic*, Plato tailors his arguments and images to the type of soul they are meant to persuade, in accordance with the rules for a philosophical rhetoric laid down in the *Phaedrus* (271e–72b). Consider the two parallel deductions in book VI, one for Glaucon and one for Adeimantus, of the virtues that will make a philosopher the best person to rule the city. With Glaucon, Socrates proceeds from the high-level, definitional premise (first laid down in book V, 474b–75c) that a philosopher is someone whose passion (*ἔρως*) is to learn the truth about all unchanging being (485b–87a). Such a person will not care about wealth or other things that corrupt ordinary rulers. The more down-to-earth Adeimantus¹⁹ interrupts to say that this lofty description hardly fits the philosophers we know, most of whom are cranks or rascals (487d). True enough, says Socrates: what you need is an image (*εἰκῶν*) —and he launches the image of the Ship of State (487e ff.) to show how different a genuine philosopher would be. That done, he repeats the argument for the virtues of the philosopher-ruler, in terms more suited to Adeimantus's understanding (489e–90e).

The same procedure is used to persuade the multitude to accept philosophic rule (499e–502a). There is hardly any metaphysics, just vague talk (with a suitably devout reference to Homer at 501b) of the philosopher as a semidivine figure, who like a painter will wipe clean the tablet of the city and its people and

¹⁹ On the relative levels of Glaucon and Adeimantus, see lecture I, n. 30.

then sketch a new social order with his eye on a divine model.²⁰ Or take the well-known argument in book V to persuade the lovers of sights and sounds that their mode of thought (*διάνοια*) cannot be knowledge. It is carefully based on premises that even they will accept.²¹ Most important of all, the main ethical argument about justice and happiness is addressed to Glaucon and Adeimantus as sympathetic critics who, unlike Thrasymachus in book I, would *like* to be persuaded that justice makes a better life than injustice (358d, 367b, 368ab).

Some arguments in the *Republic* are designed to persuade a philosophical soul. A good example is the argument in book VII to convince the philosophers that it is just for them to take their turn at ruling, because they owe a debt to the city which provided their privileged education (520ae). This will only work with someone who finds the requirements of justice compelling. So too, I suggest, the arguments about mimesis in book X are guided throughout by the Theory of Forms and will only work with a Platonic philosopher, or with someone like Glaucon who is sympathetic to his brother's philosophy. And for Socrates (whatever the case with Glaucon), the Theory of Forms is not just a set of premises. The Forms are the goal of a passionate desire for abstract, general knowledge. To a mind whose whole outlook and mode of thinking (*διάνοια*) is shaped by that craving for generality, the insubstantial images of poetry ought to seem an irrelevant distraction. If they still retain a certain allure, that is because Socrates and Glaucon contracted a rival passion (*ἔρως*) from the culture they grew up in.²² Only philosophical theory can provide a counter-charm to the mimesis they adored and save them from slipping back into the childish loves of the multitude (607e–8a).

²⁰ Compare the more philosophical version of the painter analogy given to Glaucon at 484c.

²¹ This was established by J. C. Gosling, "Δόξα and Δύναμις in Plato's Republic," *Phronesis* 13 (1968): 119–30.

²² Mimetic poetry is imaged as a sex object at 603b 1 (*ἑταίρα*, courtesan) and 608a 5 (*παιδικόν*, boyfriend).

The other side of the coin is that philosophical theory will only help people like them, not anyone and everyone.

The Platonic Theory of Forms makes its first appearance in the *Republic* at 475e, prefaced by the remark that it would be difficult to explain to anyone but Glaucon. Fittingly, Glaucon is the interlocutor for the metaphysical discussion of poetry in book X, Adeimantus for the less theoretical discussion in books II–III (until Glaucon takes over at stage 3 for the more technical aspects of music). The two together form the intimate audience to whom Socrates addresses the argument of book X (595b: *ὡς μὲν πρὸς ὑμᾶς εἰρησθαι*) ; he is not trying to win over the type of person who would denounce him to the tragedians and other imitative poets. Glaucon will end by agreeing with everything Socrates has said about poetry; so would anyone—*provided* they accept the premises (608b: *ἐξ ὧν διεληλύθαμεν*).

Imagine telling book V's lovers of sights and sounds that what enraptures them is at third remove from the truth, because truth and reality reside in transcendent Forms. They will be bemused (cf. 476bc). So will anyone who has not devoted their time to dialectical discussion outside the cave. It is through dialectic that the conviction grows on one that Forms are more real than sensible things. Glaucon agrees: "That is how it would seem to those who are versed in this kind of reasoning" (597a). And if Forms are more real than sensible things, they are far more real than images of sensible things.

We are now ready for book X's account of mimesis:

(1) To imitate is to make something which is "third from the king and the truth." (597e 7)

This is Socrates' and Glaucon's agreed answer to the question "What is mimesis in general?" (595c 7, 597d 10), their definition (599d 3–4: *ὠρισάμεθα*). But who or what is "the king"?²³ The

²³ Solutions to the mystery are canvassed by Adam *ad loc.* with appendix I. The phrase confirms that this discussion is not designed to persuade all and sundry.

“third from nature” (597e 3–4) is not much easier. Only a philosopher familiar with lofty metaphysics could understand such a definition. Only a philosopher well versed in “our customary method” (596a) would believe it.

In context, as any reader can see, this definition results from a survey of makers, each of whom is responsible for a product of different metaphysical status (597de). God makes the Form of Couch, the carpenter makes a particular wooden couch, so the artist who paints a couch in a picture makes a product which is at third remove (by the Greeks’ inclusive reckoning) from the truth and reality of the Form. If we set aside the Theory of Forms and the difficult idea of God making the Form of Couch,²⁴ what remains of the definition is this:

(2) To imitate is to make a likeness or image of something.

(2) uses terms we can all understand to state conditions for anything to count as mimesis. What (1) adds to (2) is a metaphysical perspective on things that satisfy those conditions; it does not strengthen the requirements for mimesis itself.²⁵

(2) is more general than the disjunctive sufficient condition we met in book III (393c): likening oneself to another in voice or *οχημα*.²⁶ To do that is *one* way to make a likeness, turning your body or voice into a likeness of some other person or thing. But another way is to paint a picture of something. This parallel between poetry and painting will be crucial to the argument of book X.

IS BOOK X’S CONCEPT OF MIMESIS DIFFERENT FROM BOOK III’S?

It is not new to treat the painter as an imitator alongside the poet. That has been his status since he joined the “luxurious” city

²⁴ Discussed in lecture I.

²⁵ Cf. lecture II, n. 25.

²⁶ Lecture II, n. 23.

in book II (373b). The cultural norms of book III extend to painting and embroidery, sculpture and architecture, which must be full of graceful likenesses (*μιμήματα, εἰκόνες*) of a good and temperate character (400e–401d). But the analogy between such likenesses and those of the poets is left unexplained. Book X explains in detail, working from painter to poet.

The painter is introduced, somewhat mischievously, as a wizard craftsman who can make anything and everything he chooses. He is compared to a man who carries a mirror around to manufacture the entire contents of heaven and earth. Just as this “craftsman” is *in a way* the maker of everything, though in another way he is not, so the painter is *in a way* the maker of a couch (596ce). Glaucon is not deceived. He insists that, just as the people and animals made by the mirror-carrier are only apparent, not real, so all the painter makes is an apparent couch, not a real one (596e 4, 11). Socrates seems to approve (596e 5). But the next time Glaucon denies that the painter is the maker of a couch (that role belongs to the carpenter), Socrates puts up the curiously worded question, “Then what will you say he is of a couch?” (597d 11–13). Answer: imitator of a couch. The painter is the imitator of what the other two (God and carpenter) are makers of (597e 2: *μιμητῆς οὐ ἐκεῖνοι δημιουργοί*). This is the cue for Socrates to introduce the idea that the painter’s product is at third remove from the truth.

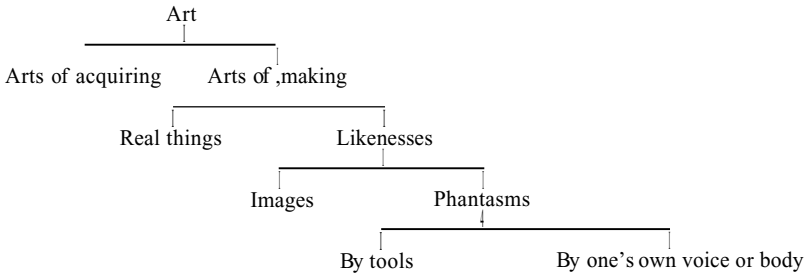
It is also the cue for many scholars to conclude that Plato has switched to a different concept of mimesis: mimesis as representation, which is different from book III’s understanding of mimesis as impersonation with one’s voice or body.²⁷ Certainly, painting a couch is not impersonating it. Yet both painter and dramatic poet make a likeness of something. Both satisfy the conditions laid down in (2).²⁸ Mimesis as impersonation by the poet is vividly evoked later, when Socrates discusses our experience in the theatre

²⁷ The subtlest version of this claim is Janaway, *Images of Excellence*, chap. 5.

²⁸ Here I am indebted to discussion with Heda Segvic.

(605cd). My conclusion is that (2) identifies a generic concept which subsumes painting and dramatic poetry as coordinate species. In which case we have no reason (yet) to suppose that *poetic mimesis* is to be understood any differently from before.²⁹

At the end of Plato's *Sophist* (265a-67b) we meet the following division:³⁰



This is one portion of a huge division designed to discover what a sophist is, but with a bit of explanation it can be a useful guide to Plato's thinking about mimesis.

First, the art of making likenesses (*εἰδωλοποιική*): this is also called *ἡ μιμητική*, the art of imitation (235c 3, 236b 1, 264ab).³¹ So everything in the division below “likenesses” comes under the heading of imitation. Second, the distinction between images and phantasms. Both are produced by artists, but when they make images (*εἰκόνες*) they reproduce the proportions of the original in all three dimensions, and its colours. When they make phantasms (*φαντάσματα*), they change the proportions so that from a particular perspective the imitation *seems* like the original (235d–36c). The example given is a colossal statue with its upper parts

²⁹ I shall argue later that 600e does not say, as commonly supposed, that all poetry whatsoever is mimetic. That *would* import a changed understanding of poetic mimesis.

³⁰ I omit, for simplicity's sake, God's making the real things of nature and their images (shadows, etc.), which complicates the division at 265c–66c.

³¹ *εἰδωλοποιική* takes over once divine image-making is included; it would not sound right to attribute *μιμητική* to God (cf. lecture II, n. 26).

enlarged so that they look the right size to a viewer on the ground. Phantasms, then, are perspectival likenesses. Next, phantasms are further divided into two species, only the first of which (phantasms made by tools) is appropriate to painting and sculpture. The second species, parallel to the first, is our old friend from *Republic* III: impersonation, making a likeness by one's own voice or body. And this, we are told (267a 8), is the part of phantasm-making (and hence of imitation or *μιμητική*) which is especially or most typically called mimesis (*μίμησις . . . μάλιστα κέκληται*). Impersonation is mimesis *par excellence*, but the making of visual likenesses in paint or stone is a parallel species of the same imitative genus.³²

One could hardly ask for a clearer analysis of the *Republic's* notion of mimesis. The parallel between poet and painter has been with us since book II. The generic concept identified in (2) fits both. Imitation is the art they both practice, one appealing to ears, the other to eyes. It may be helpful for some purposes to translate Plato's talk of imitation into the more modern idiom of "representation." But please do not call it a change of concept. Book X explains the concept that was left unexplained when the "imitators" (*μιμηταί*) first appeared.

Besides, if we let "representation" replace "imitation" altogether, we lose touch with the point that for Plato, in both *Republic* and *Sophist*, imitation is an art of *making*. To imitate a couch the painter makes a couch—not indeed a real couch, only an apparent one, a thing that looks like a couch when seen from the appropriate perspective. It is the couch we see in the picture that is "third from the king," not the wall or vase on which the picture is painted. That is an ordinary physical object. To imitate a couch is to make an imitation couch. Likewise, our word "poet" transliterates the Greek *ποιητής*, which means "maker." When Sopho-

³² And has been since the earliest uses of the *μιμησις* family: compare the Homeric *Hymn to Apollo* 163 (auditory) with Aeschylus frag. 17.7 Mette (visual). Plato, *Crazytus* 430b, takes it as obvious that pictures are *μιμήματα* of things, but in a different way from words.

cles wrote and produced *Oedipus Rex*, for Plato that means he made (himself into) a king and all the other characters we see on stage. Consequently, when Socrates and Glaucon discuss the question “What does the poet make? And what kind of knowledge goes into making it?” the answer “A play, or a poem, which requires literary and musical skills” would be irrelevant. Not because it is untrue: Homer is the supreme literary artist (607a). But this is beside the point if you are interested, as Plato is, in what *nonliterary* knowledge the poet needs to make such phantasms as King Oedipus and King Agamemnon.³³ “What knowledge do you need to make an imitation x ?” is not the same question as “What knowledge do you need to represent x ?” The parallel between poetry and painting is developed to answer the first question, not the second.

THE PAINTED CARPENTER

This interest in nonartistic knowledge explains why Socrates abandons the painted couch and starts talking about a painted carpenter (598b). You can see him in Figure 3, shaping a beam with his adze.³⁴ He could have been shown making a couch. In any painting of a craftsman, we will see the product as well as the producer. If the painter shows the producer in action, that intensifies the suggestion that he knows not only what the product is like, but also what goes into making it. So the question becomes: “How much knowledge of carpentry did the Carpenter Painter (as modern scholars call him) need to produce that picture?”

“Very little” is the expected reply. Analogy works by selecting some well-known feature of a familiar object and projecting it

³³ The word *φάντασμα*, used at 598b 3 for the appearance imitated, is transferred to the imitation product at 599a 2. Noting this, Nehamas, “Imitation,” pp. 62–63, speculates that Plato may be tempted to think of the painter as, in effect, lifting the imitated appearance off the object and transferring it into his picture. An engaging idea, but remember that the phrase “it looks like a couch” can be said both of an actual couch and of the furniture in figure 2.

³⁴ British Museum E 23=ARV² 179.1, dated 510–500 B.C.

onto the less-familiar thing we want to understand. (As the Sun analogy helps us to think about the Good in book VI.) People are convinced that poets must know a great deal about human life to make the wonderful phantasms they set before us (598e–99a). Novelists have a similar reputation in the modern world. It will take argument to dislodge that view. But Socrates offers no argument for his initial claim about painting: “A painter, we say, will paint us a leather-worker, a carpenter, other craftsmen, without himself having expertise in the craft of any of them” (598bc). No argument is given because none is needed. Those who protest at Plato’s low esteem for painting miss the point. What Socrates puts forward here is not an adverse judgment on the painter, but an obvious, familiar truth. It is dramatic poets, not painters, who are up for judgment, and to judge them we must first understand the source of their creativity. Is it knowledge or not? It is certainly not expertise in woodworking that produced the delightful picture of a carpenter in figure 3. Or to make a modern point, the



FIGURE 3. Courtesy of the British Museum.

TV producer making a film of a heart-operation did not need to qualify as a surgeon before taking on the commission.

The sentence just quoted is part of a longer statement, which has been widely misunderstood :

A painter, we say, will paint us a leather-worker, a carpenter, other craftsmen, without himself having expertise in the craft of any of them. But, nevertheless [ὅμως], if he was a good painter, he might have painted a carpenter which he displays at a distance, and he might deceive children and foolish persons by its seeming to be a real carpenter [τῷ δοκεῖν ὡς ἀληθῶς τέκτονα εἶναι].” (598bc)

The standard view, which gets written into the translations, is that these children and foolish persons are deceived into thinking that the painted carpenter is a real carpenter, from whom you could order a new set of couches for the dining room. Shorey’s translation is typical:

A painter, we say, will paint us a cobbler, a carpenter, and other craftsmen, though he himself has no expertness in any of these arts, but nevertheless if he were a good painter, by exhibiting at a distance his picture of a carpenter, he would deceive children and foolish men, and make them believe it to be a real carpenter.³⁵

I offer three objections.

First, “nevertheless” (ὅμως) implies a contrast with what immediately precedes, to the effect that the *painter* (not that the painted carpenter) knows neither carpentry nor the other crafts he shows in action. If, nevertheless, children and foolish persons are deceived, this is what they should be deceived about. They should come to believe the contradictory of what has just been

³⁵ Janaway, *Images of Excellence*, pp. 133–34, is a rare case of someone struggling, within the standard view, to credit Plato with a sensible argument. More hostile critics do not mind leaving Plato looking as foolish as the people whose deception he describes.

said, mistakenly supposing that the *painter* (not the painted carpenter) does know carpentry. Why do they suppose this? Because the painted carpenter seems to be a real one, not in the sense that they think he *is* a real carpenter but in the sense that he *looks* to them just like a real carpenter looks: he is shown doing just what a carpenter in their (inadequate, superficial) experience would do to make a couch or shape a beam. Ergo, the painter knows what a carpenter needs to do to make a couch or shape a beam. On this reading, the clause “by its seeming to be a real carpenter” does not express the content of the deception, but the means by which it is effected: “. . . because it looks just like a real carpenter, he might deceive children and foolish persons [*sc.* into thinking he did know that craft].”³⁶

Second, a closely similar passage in Plato's *Sophist* (234b) — so close that it amounts, in its context, to a reminiscence of the paragraph before us — expressly says that the painter's likenesses (*μιμήματα*), when displayed at a distance,³⁷ leave foolish young children with the impression that the painter could produce anything and everything *in full reality* (*ἔργῳ*), not just in the medium of imitation. In both dialogues the painter is someone who presents himself as an all-purpose producer (cf. the mirror analogy at *Rep.* 596ce): the picture we are to think of shows a couch, whether or not it also shows a carpenter. In both dialogues the painter is the visual analogue to someone whose deceptive likenesses come in through the ears: the tragic poet in the *Republic*, the sophist in

³⁶ Compare the back reference to our sentence at 600e 6–7: “As we said just now, the painter will make a leather-worker who seems to be a real one [*σκυτοτόμον . . . δοκούντα εἶναι*].” The grammar here offers no subject to cast as someone who thinks the object in the painting *is* a real leather-worker. The seeming leather-worker is better understood as *looking* like a real one.

³⁷ *πῶρρωθεν*, as at *Rep.* 598c 3. But distance is relative: too far away and you will not see the detail clearly enough to be deceived about anything. Besides, most painting would have been indoors, where the size of the room limits your retreat. All that is meant is that if you step right up close, you lose the impression of depth and volume. This is hardly true of perspective painting (*σκηνογραφία*), but it was true of the Seurat-like *σκιαγραφία* technique mentioned later at 602d 2 (references at lecture I, n. 13).

the later dialogue (cf. *διὰ τῶν ἄτων* at *Soph.* 234c 5). Not that sensible adults are deceived by the painter. On the contrary, it is because they are not deceived that he is a useful analogue to show up poets or sophists, by whom they are liable to be deceived. But foolish young children might ask Van Gogh to make them a bedroom chair like the one in his picture.³⁸ That is rather more plausible than the idea of their putting this request to the man in figure 3.

There is no suggestion, however, that the painter sets out to deceive. If that was his purpose, he would be a sorry failure, since the trick succeeds only with children and fools. No, like other craftsmen he wants to earn his living. He presents completed work to an audience, just as the tragedian produces on stage a play completed in time to be chosen at the first round of the competition. The painter does not leave his picture on view in a gallery while he turns to new work. He is with us here now, displaying his “carpenter” and (at *Sophist* 234a) offering to sell it cheap.³⁹

My third objection is based on the next paragraph (598cd), which starts the transition from painter to tragic poet and is carefully written in terms that fit both.⁴⁰ Socrates envisages someone announcing, in all seriousness, that they have come across a person who knows every craft as accurately as the individual craftsman know their own specialty. This simpleton (*εὐήθης*) has been deceived (598d 3: *ἐξηπατήθη*). The content of the deception is then specified: he has met an imitator and has been deceived into

³⁸ I am inclined to see the change from “children and foolish persons” to “foolish young children” as a well-advised correction on Plato’s part.

³⁹ Note the contrast between the present participle *ἐπιδεικνύς* and the past tense of *γράφας* in the *Republic*, *γεγραμμένα* in the *Sophist*.

⁴⁰ The transition may also perhaps be felt verbally in the choice of the *τέκτων*, rather than the leather-worker or other craftsmen mentioned at 598b 9: the poet is imaged as a carpenter in Pindar, *Pythians* 3.113–14, Cratinus frag. 70, Democritus frag. 21 (on Homer). At 600e the carpenter is replaced by the leather-worker to prepare the transition to the section on user-knowledge, where it will be his job to make reins for the horseman (bolc); that is why we must translate *σκυτοτόμος* “leather-worker,” not “shoemaker” or “cobbler.”

thinking *him* an all-round expert (*πάσσοφος*). That is what it is to be unable to tell the difference between knowledge and ignorant imitation. This surely confirms that, in the case of the painter, the deception was about the painter's competence in woodworking, not the competence of the painted carpenter.⁴¹

THE POET'S KNOWLEDGE

We now have a smooth lead into the all-important next section, on whether people are deceived about Homer and tragedy. Some people are deceived, Socrates argues, since they say that Homer and the tragedians know all the arts, including the arts most important to the city—generalship, legislation, educating the young. They know all about human virtue and vice. They are even knowledgeable about the gods (598de). On the interpretation of the painter just given, the content of the deception (598e 6: *ἐξηπάτηνται*) is exactly parallel: like the painter, Homer is an all-purpose expert. But this deception is dangerous, because sensible grownups, not just children and fools, are liable to regard Homer as the fount of wisdom in all things. Only genuine knowledge, they think, can explain his wonderful creations (598e).

The knowledge such people attribute to Homer is not of course philosophical knowledge of the Forms, but knowledge of practical arts and a deep understanding of human life. Homer, they say, has been the educator of Hellas. He is the leader to follow in the ordering and refinement (*παιδεία*) of human affairs. You should live all your life under his guidance (606e). But Socrates will argue that (nonliterary) knowledge is no more a prerequisite for Homer's mimesis than it is for the painter's. Poetic mimesis is the less obvious case to be illuminated by analogy with the obvious case of painting. The issue is whether to put Homer at second remove (599d 4: *δευτερος*) from the truth of the Forms, rather than third, where Socrates would place him.

⁴¹ Cf. the back-reference at 600e 6–7 again: the issue is whether the painter knows how to make leather goods, not whether the leather-worker in the picture does.

The notion of second-level knowledge needs clarification. Distinguish two questions: (1) Did the author of *Crime and Punishment* know as much about the criminal mind as a professor of criminology? (2) Did he have the very same body of knowledge as a professor has? Socrates argues strongly that if Homer really had the knowledge of the experts he brings into his stories —doctors, generals, educators —he would want to practise his expertise for real; even if he preferred writing to practice, other people would pester him to help in the real world (599a–600e). Imagine a supposedly brilliant surgeon who never performs an operation, preferring to write hospital dramas for TV. We surely would doubt his competence if he declined to help in a crisis. But is it really question (2)’s systematic, professional expertise that people have in mind when they speak of Homer’s or Dostoyevsky’s knowledge of life? Or some more imaginative, experiential understanding? Or do people fail to make the appropriate distinctions?

“My father,” says a young man in Xenophon’s *Symposium* (3.5), “being anxious for me to develop into a good man, made me get all of Homer by heart.” The father was the famous general and politician Nicias, with whom Socrates discusses courage in Plato’s *Laches*. Did Nicias seriously think that memorizing Homer would be enough to give his son the skills needed to win elections and battles? The son claims it was enough:

“You know, doubtless, that Homer, the supremely wise, has written about practically every aspect of human affairs. If any of you wish to acquire the art of a householder, a political leader, a general, or to become like Achilles or Ajax or Nestor or Odysseus, then it is my favour you should seek. I know all these things.”⁴² (Xen. *Symp.* 4.6)

But this is a boasting competition at a party, not safe evidence for standard Greek attitudes toward Homer.⁴³ Socrates in the *Republic*

⁴² *ἐπίσταμαι* here is neatly ambiguous between “I know them all” and “I know them all by heart” (for the latter use of the verb, see Plato, *Protagoras* 339a, *Republic* 392e).

⁴³ Though scholars often cite it as such, without regard for the comic context or for the intertextual relationship with Plato’s *Ion*, where the same passage of the

is careful to limit his attack to what “some people” say (598d 8–e 1: *τινων ἀκούομεν*),⁴⁴ Perhaps exaggerated claims of this sort were believed, even without the encouragement of wine. Socrates’ response is to pin them down to their literal meaning. If these people really think that Homer and the tragedians could not produce such wonderful images unless they had the very same knowledge as the generals and statesmen they imitate, that “inference to the best explanation” must apply to every expert a poet puts on stage. It is not enough for Sophocles to be a good general. He must be a good doctor as well, or he cannot write a part for Asclepius (cf. 599c). If the inference is sound, Homer must indeed know *all* the arts, so varied is the tapestry of his poems. But when Socrates and Glaucon look outside the poems for evidence of Homer’s expertise, they find nothing to prove he knows *any* art save the literary art of imitation (61a 6). The inference, they conclude, is not sound.

This conclusion leaves open the possibility that poets have a more imaginative understanding of what it is like to carry the responsibilities of a general or statesman. Never mind that in book III Socrates insisted that it is better to avoid experiential or empathetic understanding of some characters and some actions; let the Guards learn *about* them, in a wholly external way (395e–96a, 409ae). The question is, why should not poetic imitation itself be, and convey, a certain kind of understanding, of good characters as well as bad? Sir Philip Sydney’s reply to Plato was that it can:

Anger, the Stoics say, was a short madness: let but Sophocles bring you Ajax on a stage, killing and whipping sheep and oxen, thinking them the army of Greeks, with their chieftains Agamemnon and Menelaus, and tell me if you have not a more

Iliad is quoted to illustrate the point that Homer often speaks of practical arts such as chariot-driving (*Ion* 537a with *Xen. Symp.* 4.6). Greek didactic poetry, such as Hesiod’s *Works and Days*, did not hesitate to tackle practical arts —but of that, more shortly.

⁴⁴ They return as the hyperbolic encomiasts of Homer at 606e. But the son of Nicias, Niceravus by name, has been present throughout the discussion (327c).

familiar insight into anger than finding in the schoolmen his genus and difference. See whether wisdom and temperance in Ulysses and Diomedes, valour in Achilles, friendship in Nisus and Euryalus, even to an ignorant man carry not an apparent shining; and, contrarily, the remorse of conscience in Oedipus, the soon repenting pride of Agamemnon. . . .⁴⁵

But could a Platonic philosopher accept imaginative understanding as knowledge worthy of the name, even at the second level where craftsmen can be relied on to get things right all or most of the time? Can a good poet's imagination be relied on to the same extent? And what counts as the poet getting it right? Does anything count except its *seeming* right to an audience ignorant of the truth (599a, 601a)? Socrates is one who would like say, adapting Wittgenstein, "Whatever is going to seem right to them is right. And that only means that here we can't talk about 'right.'"⁴⁶ In which case we can hardly talk about knowledge either.⁴⁷

This discussion is vital to the *Republic's* project for reforming the culture. If a poet like Homer is allowed to be an authority on any of the matters he sings about, he becomes a rival to the philosopher-rulers. The norms laid down for musical poetry in books II–III lose their justification. Socrates launched those norms with the observation that Homer, Hesiod, and other poets told

⁴⁵ *An Apology for Poetry* (1595), cited from the edition by Geoffrey Shepherd (Manchester, 1973), p. 108. On the idea of imitation as itself a kind of understanding, an excellent treatment in Ferrari, "Plato and Poetry," p. 120 and *passim*.

⁴⁶ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, 2nd ed., translated by G. E. M. Anscombe (Oxford, 1958), § 258; the original has "to me," not "to them," because the context is Wittgenstein's famous argument against the possibility of a private language. Note Sydney's phrasing: "more familiar," "apparent shining."

⁴⁷ Aristotle's famous dictum that poetry is more philosophical and more serious than history because it speaks of "universals," what a certain *sort* of person is likely or bound to say or do (*Poetics* 9, 1451b 5–11), does not meet the difficulty: such universals can be false as well as true, as Aristotle concedes when he says that the poet, like the painter, must imitate things either as they were or are, or as they ought to be, or *as they are said or seem to be* (*Poet.* 25, 1460b 8–11, 1460b 32–61a 1, 1461b 9–15). For a salutary warning against the idea that the phrase "more philosophical" credits poetry with deep insights into the human condition, see Jonathan Lear, "Katharsis," *Phronesis* 33 (1988): 312–14.

false stories to people —and they are still telling them (377b), His first concern was the wrong picture of divinity these poets put into the minds of their audiences. Evidently, he agrees with the historian Herodotus (II 53) that it was Homer and Hesiod “who made a theogony for the Greeks and gave the gods their names, distributed to them their honours and skills, and indicated their outward appearance.” But much more is at stake than religion. The norms for musical poetry touch every aspect of life and morality. They need to be comprehensive, because the issue is whose voice is to shape the culture: the poet’s or the philosopher’s? In ordinary Athenian education, as described by the sophist Protagoras in the dialogue named after him, the young are made to learn by heart poems in which they find “many admonitions, many narratives and eulogies and encomia of good men of old”; the aim is to get the boys longing to emulate (*μίμεισθαι*) these heroes of the past (*Protagoras* 325e–26a). Similarly, the ideal city will have “hymns to the gods and encomia for the good” (607a) — meaning gods and heroes conceived in accordance with the radically new norms of Kallipolis.⁴⁸ Plato adapts traditional methods to philosophically approved ends.

THE POET AS MAKER

At no point in the preceding argument has Socrates suggested that poets themselves claim the second-level knowledge he denies they have.⁴⁹ It is other people who wrongly infer they must have it, in a way they do not do for the painter. That mistake rebutted, Socrates can return to the analogy between poetry and painting:

“Shall we, then, lay it down (a) that all the poets [*ποιητικούς*], beginning with Homer, are imitators —they produce imitative

⁴⁸ See lecture II: “Stage 1 of the Reform: Content.”

⁴⁹ Nor do the rhapsodes who perform Homer claim such knowledge on his behalf. Ion does not do so: what the *Ion* attacks is the rhapsode’s belief that his art enables him to judge when Homer speaks correctly about the arts (536e ff.). Homer’s followers in the rhapsodic guild known as the Homeridae do not mention any city that owes its laws to Homer as the Spartans owe theirs to Lycurgus (*Rep.* 599de).

images of virtue⁵⁰ and the other subjects of their making⁵¹ and do not get hold of the truth? Rather, we were saying just now, were we not, (b) that the painter will make a leather-worker who seems [looks] real in the judgment of⁵² those who understand as little about leather-working as he does himself, but who go by the colours and shapes?”

“Yes indeed.”

“Just so, I think, we will say (c) that the poet [*ποιητικόν*] too, understanding nothing but how to imitate, uses words and phrases to colour in the hues of each of the arts in such a fashion that, in the judgment of others equally ignorant, someone⁵³ speaking in metre and rhythm and attunement seems to speak exceedingly well, whether it is about leather-working, generalship, or anything else. So powerful is the natural spell of these adornments.” (600e–601b)

Unfortunately, part (a) of this passage is another misunderstood sentence of book X.

The standard view believes Socrates is saying here that all poetry whatsoever is mimetic. This connects with two ideas I have already rejected. First, if narrative and lyric poetry now count as mimetic, the concept of poetic mimesis must have changed from book III. Second, if all poetry is mimetic, all of it should fall to the ban on mimesis at the beginning of book X. This is not only

⁵⁰ Here I follow Lewis Campbell’s construal (Jowett and Campbell *ad loc.*): *μιμητὰς εἰδώλων* is the nominalization of *μιμείσθαι εἶδωλον*, where *εἶδωλον* is cognate accusative to the verb; cf. *τοῦτο μιμήσεται* at 602b 3–4, LSJ *sv. μιμέομαι*. Most translators have “All the poets are imitators of images of virtue,” *vel sim.*, thereby making the image the object of imitation, instead of its vehicle as hitherto. That would seem to require the poet to produce an image of an image!

⁵¹ Here I follow Bloom (1968); other translators have “the other things they write about,” *vel sim.*, which encourages the thought that mimesis now covers narrative as well as impersonation. The *περὶ* construction goes back to 598e 3–5 (cf. 600c 4–5) and recurs at 602a 4, 8, 12.

⁵² Here I follow Adam’s construal of the dative.

⁵³ Translators vary in whether they treat *τις* as the poet or a character in the poem. The latter keeps a better parallel with the real-seeming leather-worker in a picture, but it makes little difference in the end, since the idea that the poet speaks the words of his characters is carried over from book III to book X (605cd).

inconsistent with book III, which allows narrative and good mimesis. It creates inconsistency within book X itself, which will soon welcome into the city “hymns to the gods and encomia for the good” (607a). No one should accept that Plato made such a mess of things without looking hard for an alternative interpretation.⁵⁴

“All the poets are imitators.” This is the climax of a long interrogation of the poets to determine whether they can make the originals they imitate as well as images of them (599a). The first question, which Socrates tactfully refrains from pressing, is about the poets’ knowledge of medicine. Did you ever make a sick person healthy, or train them to be a doctor? Or are you no doctor yourself, *only* an imitator of doctors’ speeches (599bc)? The question he does press is about Homer as educator. Did he really know how to make someone a better person, or was he capable *only* of imitating the process (600c)? I propose that, in context, the force of “All the poets are imitators” is that they are *only* imitators. They never make originals. For any value of x , what a poet makes is an imitation x , never a real x .

On this interpretation, part (a) of the passage is a straightforward generalization from earlier results. On the standard interpretation, it is a new thought, neither prepared for nor justified by what has gone before. Nor does the standard reading fit well with parts (b) and (c), which presuppose that the parallel is still between painter and poet as *makers*. Makers of mimetic images in the sense defined earlier. Narrative and lyric poets do not make anything in that sense, except when they change to another voice. So they are not under discussion. “All the poets” means all the poets we are talking about, the ones who make things at third remove from the truth.

⁵⁴ Nehamas, “Imitation,” pp. 48-54, looks, but admits to not being able to rid book X of all inconsistency. Annas, *Introduction*, p. 344, takes a bolder line: “Whether he is aware of it or not, there is no real inconsistency here [*sc.* within book X], for Plato is enough of a creative artist himself to know that such productions [*sc.* hymns to the gods and encomia for the good] are not real poetry.” So much for Pindar!

It may be significant that Plato avoids *ποιητής*, the normal word for “poet,” here. The word he uses for the poets he is talking about is *ποιητικός* (600e 5, 601a 4), an adjectival form that means “productive, capable of making.” It is as if Plato wants to revive in his readers’ minds the original meaning of *ποιητής* itself: “maker.”⁵⁵

To test the interpretation I am proposing, let us look at the example of Hesiod, who is scrutinized with Homer to see whether either of them educated any of their contemporaries to virtue (600de).⁵⁶ Socrates no doubt has Hesiod’s *Works and Days* in view. It is full of worthy precepts addressed to Perses, but did they make him a better person? The passage implies they did not. But is Hesiod a mimetic maker like Homer? Socrates does not explain, but we can look at the poem and see.

The *Iliad* and *Odyssey* have a narrative frame with lots of mimetic speeches in the story. The *Works and Days* does it the other way round: the stories of Pandora, the Five Ages of the World, and other narratives are set in a frame of direct speech. When Socrates pictures Hesiod rhapsodizing around Greece (600d 6), the performance he is imagining is a (public) display of advice to the poet’s brother: “To you, foolish Perses, I will speak good sense” (286). The audience does not see Perses, except in their imagination. What they actually see and hear is the poet assuming the role of advisor on morals and hard work, farming, how to choose a wife, and much else besides. “Few know that the twenty-seventh of the month is the best day for opening a wine jar” (814–15). The poet presents himself as an all-round educator. A fair case of impersonation, as can be seen from his advice on taking to sea in a ship. Plato would be delighted if his readers recall it:

I will tell you the rules [μέτρα] of the loud-roaring sea,
Though I have no skill in sea-faring nor in ships. (648–49)

⁵⁵ This is confirmed by the phrase *ειδάλων ποιητής, μιμητής* (601b 9).

⁵⁶ The inclusion of Hesiod sets the context for the phrase “beginning with Homer” in part (a): the phrase means “Homer, Hesiod, and their successors.”

At least Herman Melville had served in a whaler.

No doubt Hesiod is less mimetic than Homer and the tragedians, who are “imitative [*μιμητικούς*] in the highest possible degree” (602b 10). But his presence is not a sign that Socrates is now targeting all poetry whatsoever. The scope of the discussion here is just what it was at the beginning of book X: poetry which is mimetic in the sense of book III.

THE POET AS PAINTER

Now for parts (b) and (c) of the quoted passage. They start the fusion of poetry and painting I mentioned earlier,⁵⁷ The painter becomes the dominant paradigm: mimetic poetry is redescribed in terms of colours and shapes. Metre and music are the colours with which the poet paints pictures of each of the arts. Sensible adults do not attribute second-level knowledge to the painter. If they attribute such knowledge to someone they consider a good poet (598e 3), they are deceived. All the poet really knows is how to imitate the knowledge of others (61a 6). He may have an impressionistic flair for representing how experts talk and act, but he does not know, and does not need to know, what they know.

The next question is this. If what the poet makes is, as we have just seen, nothing but images of virtue, does he know, does he even have good reason to believe, that *virtue* is what they are images of? This question strikes much harder at Greek reverence for Homer. Even if we may doubt that many people looked on Homer as the authority on *practical* arts, it is clear that everyone found him a rich source of *ethical* ideas. When Socrates in book I (334ab) claims Homer's support for the paradoxical proposition that the just man is the best thief (a proposition he has derived from Polemarchus's definition of justice), he is mocking a common practice. On occasion, he takes Homer as a guide himself (468cd). Nonphilosophical readers will be outraged when in book X he

⁵⁷ Lecture I: “First Glance Ahead: The Divided Soul in Book X.”

declares that imitative poets like Homer and the tragedians know nothing about values (602b).

The key premise is that “the excellence, the beauty, the rightness of every implement, every living thing, and every action are determined solely by the *use* for which each has been made or grown” (bold). This principle goes back to book V, where the conventional notion that it would be disgraceful for women to exercise naked like men is dismissed on the ground that “the fairest thing that is said or ever will be said is this, that what is useful is fair [beautiful], what is harmful foul [disgraceful]” (457b). The standard (*σκοπός*) we should set up for beauty is that of the good (452e).

Consider, then, a painter’s judgment of the objects in his picture. Forget about what we call the (aesthetic) beauty of the picture itself. That is not even mentioned. The issue is whether the painter is any kind of authority on the “beauty” (in the strictly functional sense imposed by the premise), excellence, and rightness of the couches and tables, reins and bits, we see in his pictures.⁵⁸ Would we order a new kitchen table on the recommendation of the photographer who snapped it for the advertisement in *House and Garden*? Obviously not. But why not?

Well, even a carpenter who knows how to make tables has no idea what type of table we need or what would be the right size, shape, and height for our kitchen. It is the user who knows that (in an ordinary, second-level sense of “know”), the user who tells the carpenter when placing an order. The carpenter takes it on trust that the user knows what they need; his expertise is in making a table to the given specification. Readers of the *Republic* have had it drummed into them since book V (479a ff.) that in the

⁵⁸ Note that the opposite of *κάλλος* (beauty) in this passage is *πονηρία* (badness), not *αἰσχρος* (ugliness): 601e 8, 602a 9. We should also feel the kinship between *χοῆσθαι* and *χοηστός*. To those who are shocked by Plato’s seeming indifference here to aesthetic value, I recommend the thoughtful defence offered by Stephen Halliwell, “The Importance of Plato and Aristotle for Aesthetics,” *Proceedings of the Boston Area Colloquium in Ancient Philosophy* 5 (1989): 321–48.

sensible world where we live and prepare our meals, judgments of value are context-dependent. A table that is fine in one place, for one purpose, will be useless elsewhere for another. The photographer, however, *qua* photographer, has neither the user's knowledge of whether such and such a table will be good for its purpose, nor the carpenter's correct belief.

Equally, but less obviously, the poet has neither knowledge nor correct belief about the ways in which the characters in his story are good or bad. When he impersonates them, all he produces is words and deeds that "look fine" to the ignorant multitude (602b). He does not know (even in an ordinary, second-level sense), nor do they, whether it was a noble thing for Agamemnon to sacrifice his daughter for the Greek cause, or a useless crime. The poet's only knowledge is skill at imitating. So there is nothing worthwhile for us to learn from Homer and the tragedians, nothing they put before us that we should take seriously (602b).

Only a philosopher whose thought (*διάνοια*) was fixed on the truth and reality of the Forms could be satisfied with so simple an argument for such a shocking conclusion. This high-minded person is a "spectator of all time and all being," who has ceased to think human life is of great importance (486a), and who conceives the ordinary world we live in as itself a world of fluctuating appearances, where goodness is to be judged by referring each perspectival context to the unchanging Form of the Good (484cd, 520c, 534d). Without this reference to the Forms, the nonphilosopher's second-level knowledge of values is "knowledge" only by courtesy, better called opinion (*δόξα*). So how could philosophers expect to learn anything important from the third level images of painter or poet? Certainly, they will make sure that the culture of the ideal city is full of beautiful images — that is, images which make an educationally useful appeal to eye and ear. But this does not mean they will take those images seriously themselves. Their minds are elsewhere. In more ways than one, book X speaks to us from the viewpoint of eternity. From a position of deep spiritual elitism.

At the end of the argument about the poet as musical painter, Socrates exclaims, “By Zeus, this business of imitation is about something at third remove from the truth, isn’t it?” (602c). He reverts once more to the Theory of Forms. This is, to repeat, very much a philosopher’s view of art. If we are disturbed by the simplicity of the argument, and shocked by its conclusion, what that shows is that we are not Platonic philosophers. The argument does not appeal to our type of soul.

THE HONEYED MUSE

I have argued that the shocking conclusion is reached without abandoning book III’s concept of poetic mimesis, and without prohibiting more poetry than was explicitly (tragedy and comedy) or implicitly (Homer, Hesiod’s *Works and Days*) banned before. But it appears that the reform is not yet complete. For after the long justification of book III’s ban on drama (with Homer now explicitly included), Socrates says that no poetry is acceptable in the ideal city if it aims at pleasure for pleasure’s sake. Otherwise pleasure and pain will reign in the city instead of law and consideration of the general good (607a). He extends this rule to lyric as well as epic metres (607a 5–6: ἐν μέλεσιν ἢ ἔπεσιν).

Socrates does not mention mimesis here. In principle, a lyric or epic poem could aim at pleasure for pleasure’s sake even if it contains no mimesis, or only mimetic passages of the approved type. He condemns any poem, however enjoyable, which fails to be *beneficial* to constitution⁵⁹ and human life in general (607de).

This new development comes with Socrates’ final verdict on dramatic mimesis: even though Homer is the first and most poetic of the tragedians, it is wrong to hail him as the educator of Greece and take him as our guide in life (606e–7a). This conclusion is paired with ⁶⁰ a positive ruling on what poetry is to be welcomed

⁵⁹ Including the constitution of the individual soul (608b 1). Likewise, “city” at 607a 5–6 should include the city founded in the philosopher’s soul at the end of book IX. Cf. n. 14 above.

⁶⁰ Note the μέν . . . δέ construction.

into the ideal city: “nothing but hymns to the gods and encomia for the good” (607a 3–5). The ruling is a fair summary of the kinds of poetry explicitly allowed so far.⁶¹ But it is, in fact, the first time in the *Republic* that *Socrates* has specified the range of permissible poetry in positive terms. Previously, his emphasis was negative: this or that is *not* allowable. Now we know precisely which genres will remain after the “luxurious” city has been purged.

But we do not know *why*. Why only hymns and encomia? The norms for content and performance, the banning of tragedy, comedy, and Homer, leave it unclear how much epic and lyric is left. And these are the metres characteristic for hymns and encomia.⁶² The Homeric *Hymns* are in epic metre, but they frequently offend against the norms for representing divinity. So does the nontragic and minimally mimetic *Theogony* of Hesiod, in epic metre. Book III subjected lyric to the norms governing content at 379a, and took account of it in the discussion of mimesis at 394c. But this still does not define clearly what nontragic epic or lyric may do in the ideal city. To round off the reform of musical poetry, Plato needs a general criterion to eliminate everything but praise of gods and heroes —poetry whose beneficial subject-matter guarantees its moral fitness.

This, I suggest, is why *Socrates* introduces the figure of the honeyed Muse (607a 5: τὴν ἡδυσμένην Μοῦσαν) to represent poetry that is oriented towards pleasure rather than benefit (607c: ἡ πρὸς ἡδονὴν ποιητική). The greatest example is still Homer (607d 1), the originator of the mimetic genres banished in book III. These genres are still at the centre of attention. *Socrates* refers to them as the honeyed Muse when he says, referring back to book III, “it was reasonable for us to banish her then, such being her char-

⁶¹ See lecture II: “Poetry and Politics.”

⁶² Iambic is firmly associated with tragedy: 380a (cf. 379a). 602h. If Plato ignores the use of iambic in the lampooning invective of poets like Archilochus, this may be because he considers it too awful to merit discussion.

acter” (607b 2–3).⁶³ The poetry we banished then was mimetic drama, which we can now see is oriented towards pleasure rather than benefit.⁶⁴ The same idea is conveyed by the phrase “poetic imitation designed for pleasure” (607b 4–5: ἡ πρὸς ἡδονὴν ποιητικὴ καὶ ἡ μίμησις).⁶⁵ But the contrast between pleasure and benefit should in principle apply more widely. In which case book X goes beyond book III to ban all poetry that is not beneficial.⁶⁶

That is not at all the same as banishing poetry. On the contrary, the upshot of this discussion is that in the ideal city all musical poetry must be *beautiful*. This sounds simple, but to a non-philosophical ear it is very strange. The strangeness comes from taking usefulness as the criterion of beauty (bold); most people would think that social utility and beauty are importantly different values.⁶⁷ Only philosophers know that “the Good is the cause of all things right and beautiful” (517c).

BACK TO THE DIVIDED SOUL

That completes my account of the various problems of interpretation that have made it hard to read book X as a continuation

⁶³ αὐτήν at 607b 2 refers to the honeyed Muse, not (as in most translations) to poetry as such. Translate, with Shorey, “Let us, then, conclude our return to the topic of poetry and our apology, and affirm that we really had good grounds then for dismissing her from our city, since such was her character,” and take “her” as the honeyed Muse, who is the more dramatic antecedent. We did not banish all poetry then and we are clearly not banishing all poetry now, for we have just admitted hymns to the gods and encomia for the good. τοιαύτην οὖσαν refers to the grounds for banishing poetry that aims at pleasure: lest the city be governed by pleasure and pain.

⁶⁴ I explain this claim in the next section.

⁶⁵ Halliwell’s translation (1980); the singular αὐτήν in the next clause confirms that the two noun phrases are in hendiadys.

⁶⁶ The lines abusing philosophers quoted at 607bc to illustrate “the ancient quarrel between poetry and philosophy” are lyric. Their origin is unknown, but it would be rash to insist they must all derive from comedy: see Adam *ad loc.*

⁶⁷ One such is the rhetorician Polus in Plato’s *Gorgias* (474cd), who firmly rejects Socrates’ suggestion that the good (ἀγαθόν) and the beautiful/fine (καλόν) are the same. In retrospect we can see this identity at work already in books II–III: the fine/beautiful (καλόν) stories selected by the norms for content (377c, 378e) coincide with those told by the “more austere and less pleasing” poet, whose performance will be beneficial (398ab: ὠφελίας ἕνεκα).

of the discussion in book III. Book X, I have argued, is designed to be consistent with book III and to give a retrospective, theoretical commentary on its major claims. We can now turn, at last, to see how Socrates fulfils the promise made at the start of book X, to demonstrate the mind-damaging effects of dramatic mimesis. The damage is worked through a slow poison: pleasure.

Socrates does not object to poetry giving pleasure. He would gladly welcome Homer back into the city if someone composed a defence that showed how his poetry benefits the audience as well as enchanting them (607ce). What Socrates fears is the long-term, unnoticed effect of the pleasure we take in mimesis of actions we would not, and should not, want to do ourselves. Of course poetry should be enjoyable. But not at the price of damaging the soul.

Recall that the problem with uncontrolled mimesis, as Plato sees it, is not just the kind of likenesses it brings into our presence. It is how those likenesses insinuate themselves into the soul through eyes and ears, without our being aware of it. Unlike narrative stories, which tell us *about* something, the seeming presence to our senses of the imitated characters has a way of bypassing reason's normal processes of judgment.⁶⁸ To account for this phenomenon we should return to the painted couch.

When we look at a painting, or to recall another of Plato's examples, when we look at an oar half submerged in water, we know perfectly well that the painting is flat with no depth to it, that the oar is straight. But knowing this does not stop the oar *looking* bent or the painting *seeming* to have depth. How is the persistence of the false appearance to be explained? Socrates argues that it can only be explained on the supposition that there is some part of us, some level of the soul, which believes, or is tempted by the thought, that the oar actually is bent, that the painting does have depth. *We* are not inclined to believe it, but something in us is —just as something in the most sceptical person may shiver at a ghost story. At a certain level, we entertain many

⁶⁸ Lecture I: "First Glance Ahead: The Divided Soul in Book X."

beliefs, thoughts, and fantasies that run counter to our better judgment.

Similarly, when we sit in the theatre and witness Oedipus discovering who he is, we know very well we do not hear Oedipus's own voice. Not because Oedipus is a fiction (for the ancient audience Oedipus is no more a fiction than Agamemnon or any of the other heroes of their drama),⁶⁹ but because Oedipus is not really there, only a likeness of him. Just as there is no couch there in the picture, only the likeness of one. Yet knowing this does not stop us being affected by the appearances before us. Oedipus still seems to be on the verge of his terrible discovery. Even though we know they are only images, the false appearances persist, and stir our feelings. It is as if eyes and ears offer painter and poet entry to a relatively independent cognitive apparatus, associated with the senses, through which mimetic images can bypass our knowledge and infiltrate the soul.

In modern discussions of the influence of the media, it is often said that a normal, healthy individual is not unduly influenced by images they know are unreal. For Plato, the audience's knowledge is the source of his deepest anxiety about mimesis. Since normal, healthy individuals are undoubtedly influenced, all the time and in ways they are mostly unaware of, by the images that pervade the culture, that shows that knowing the image is only an image is no protection at all. Schools used to give lessons to make the young more aware of the wily tricks of the advertising industry. The advertisers had no need to protest. They knew that Plato has the better of the argument. A sexy jeans ad invites the viewer to notice its brazen appeal —and then go shopping.

Similarly, in the theatre,

“Even the best of us, you know, when we listen to Homer or some other tragedian imitating one of the heroes in a state of

⁶⁹ See Plato, *Apology* 41bc, for testimony to this point: Socrates presupposes that his audience regard the Homeric narratives as in some sense a record of distant history.

grief, delivering a long speech of lamentation, or chanting and beating his breast with the chorus,⁷⁰ we enjoy it and give ourselves up to it. We follow it all with genuine sympathy for the hero. Then we praise as an excellent poet the one who most strongly affects us this way. . . . And yet when the sorrow is our own, you notice that we plume ourselves on the opposite response, if we manage to stay calm and endure. The idea is that this is the conduct of a man, whereas the sort of behaviour we praised in the theatre is womanish.” (605cd)

In the theatre we enjoy, take pleasure in, emotions we would try to restrain in real life: grief, joy, pity, fear, erotic excitement, anger, scorn. (The point does not depend on our agreeing with Plato about when, and how far, or why such emotions should be restrained: anyone will accept that there are times when emotion should be restrained.) Worse, we deliberately allow ourselves to indulge these feelings. As Socrates puts it, in the theatre reason relaxes the guard it would maintain in real life (606a). There are two rather different ways, I think, in which the guard is relaxed.

One is what we now call suspension of disbelief. We do not keep reminding ourselves of what we know perfectly well, that the events on stage are not really happening there now. They may have happened in the past: compare Shakespeare's history plays and medieval mystery plays. But the events are not actually unfolding before our eyes and ears. We would be upset if we turned on the television one evening, watched what we took to be the end of a rather violent film, and then the announcer came on to say, “That's the end of the news.” The jolt would be vivid proof of how completely we had suspended our everyday processes of judgment about what is apparently taking place. Conversely, I recall a news commentator during the Los Angeles riots exclaiming in disbelief, “This is not a film; this is for real.”

But Plato worries more about our suspending *moral* judgment about what is apparently taking place. When we sympathize with

⁷⁰ On the switch from singular to plural, see Jowett and Campbell *ad loc*

a grieving hero, we not only allow ourselves to share feelings we would wish to restrain in real life. We also allow ourselves, as part of that emotional bonding, to share a while, at some level of our soul, the hero's belief that a great misfortune has happened. And here the mistake is not that no such event has happened, it is only a play. The mistake in Plato's eyes is allowing yourself to believe, even vicariously and for a short while, that an event like the death of your child would be a terrible loss, a great misfortune, if it really happened. The law in the ideal city is stern:

“The law declares, does it not, that it is best to keep as calm as possible in calamity and not get upset, (i) because we cannot tell what is really good and bad in such things, (ii) because it will do us no good in the future to take them hard, (iii) because nothing in human affairs is worthy of deep concern,⁷¹ (iv) because grief will block us from taking the necessary measures to cope with the situation.” (604bc)

The whole culture is set up to reinforce this law — remember the songs about calm endurance in adversity.⁷² The mimetic genres of poetry —Homeric epic, tragedy, and comedy —encourage people to suspend the moral principles they try to live by, so as to enter into the viewpoint of emotions which their better judgment, if it were active, would not approve. This is how the analogy with visual perspective carries over to the theatre. When we share an emotion with a character on stage, we enter (despite our better judgment) the moral outlook from which the emotion springs. The images created by theatrical mimesis are so sensuously present to eyes and ears that they lock the audience into a distorted moral

⁷¹ Believing this is a crucial part of the mind-set (*διάνοια*) of a Platonic philosopher (486a). I am inclined to think that *not* believing it is a crucial precondition for valuing the theory (or experience) of Aristotelian katharsis, which requires us to accept, outside as well as inside the theatre, that the loss of one's child would be a truly serious misfortune (see Lear, “Katharsis”). If this is correct, Aristotle's *Poetics* would fail to convince Plato that Homer could be safely welcomed back into the city.

⁷² Lecture II: “Stage 3 of the Reform: Musical Technique.”

perspective. Epic and drama encourage us to feel, and to some extent believe, against our better judgment, that the ups and downs of fortune are much, much more significant than they really are.

This is not the argument that showing a violent film on Tuesday brings about a rape on Wednesday. It is a more interesting claim about the longer-term influence of mimesis. By encouraging us to enter into the perspective of strong emotions, epic and drama will gradually erode the ideals we are attached to and still hope to maintain. Here is Socrates on comedy, claiming we will not notice the change:

“When you take intense pleasure in hearing things laughed at in comic mimesis, or for that matter in a private gathering — things you would be ashamed to joke about yourself — and you do not just detest the behaviour as bad, you are doing the same as when you pity a grieving hero. You let free the element in yourself you restrained, with the help of reason, from indulging its wish to scoff, for fear of a reputation for buffoonery. And once you allow it to turn into a cheeky youth, you won't notice [ἐλαθες] how often you get carried away into being a scoffer [literally: a comic poet] in your own life.”⁷³ (606c)

It is the *enjoyment* of other people's scornful laughter that does the damage, just as the sympathetic enjoyment (ἀπολαύειν) of other people's grieving in tragedy makes it harder to restrain grief in one's own life (606b).⁷⁴ The pleasure you allow yourself to feel in the theatre, thinking it harmless, reinforces aspects of your personality you would prefer to keep down.

This argument does not depend on the stern, other-worldly morality on which Plato's ideal city is founded. Let the prevailing

⁷³ Plato thinks of comedy as laughing *at*: in a lengthy analysis of the genre at *Philebus* 48a-50b, he explains that comedy appeals to the malice of its audience and invites them to enjoy the spectacle of people weaker than they are being brought to grief by their ignorance of their own failings. In the *Republic*, the failings it is appropriate to laugh at are those of people ignorant and bad (396de, 452d).

⁷⁴ The verb ἀπολαύειν connotes taking something in with enjoyment. At 395d 1 Socrates says the Guards should not imitate anything shameful, lest imitation be imbibed as reality (ἵνα μὴ ἐκ τῆς μιμήσεως τοῦ εἶναι ἀπολαύσωσιν).

morality be more relaxed, more humanistic: it will still include ideals we think we should live up to, and Plato will still caution us about mimesis. It is dangerous to enter feelingly and uncritically into viewpoints that our better judgment, if it were active, would not approve. That is why he would banish Homer, tragedy, comedy, and their modern equivalents.

Some writers have naively supposed they could defend Homer and imaginative literature generally against Plato's critique by claiming that literature enlarges the sensibility and makes us more feeling people, because it fosters empathetic understanding of all sorts of different characters, both good and bad. As if Plato did not know that. "Yes," he would reply, "That is what we need to prevent." Opposite conclusions are drawn from the same premise. What you cannot do, it seems to me, is accept that mimesis has the effects on which Plato and these critics are agreed and then argue that anything and everything can be allowed. If we agree with Plato about the power of mimesis (ancient or modern, epic and drama or advertising, film, and TV), but reject his authoritarian solution, then democratic politics has to take responsibility for the general ethos of society. Plato's problem is still with us. It needs a modern solution.⁷⁵

⁷⁵ Besides the audiences thanked at lecture I, n. 11, I want to thank Julia Annas and Alexander Nehamas for acting as commentators: their challenging criticism, so gracefully delivered, has led to much rethinking and (I hope) improvement. Useful suggestions came from Jerome A. Barron, Ed Floyd, Penny Murray, Amélie Rorty, Malcolm Schofield, and others who are thanked in the relevant note. Christoph Harbsmeier showed me interesting discussions of music, morals, and the social order in Chinese thought: would that I was competent to make use of them here. Finally, I am grateful to Ruth Padel for constant advice on style and content.