

DRAFT

The Truth of Poetry in Plato's *Republic*

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A canonical interpretation of the *Republic* finds its account of philosophy most prominently on display in books 6-7, where philosophy is depicted as a hierarchical ascent to authoritative knowledge.¹ For many readers, this ascent – to knowledge of the forms or *eide* – is staged, by way of the allegory of the cave and the divided line, as a series of victories by philosophy over various “others.” Philosophy’s mode of knowing – intellection -- trumps imagination, sense-perception, and understanding; it subjugates eros or appetite; and, when enthroned politically via the rule of philosopher-kings in the perfect city in speech, philosophy ousts the authority of poets, sophists, laws, and convention, to say nothing of fathers. The aim of this essay is to interrogate this narrative of philosophical triumphalism and its politics of authority, and to do so in terms offered by the dialog itself.

¹ I have used translations of Plato's *Republic* by Allan Bloom (New York: Basic Books, 1968); G.M.A. Grube, rev. C.D.C. Reeve in *Plato's Complete Works*, ed. John M. Cooper (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1997); and Paul Shorey (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1935); along with the Greek text and commentary by James Adam (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1902); and translations of other dialogs in *Plato's Complete Works*, ed. John M. Cooper (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1997).

One could stage this interrogation in relation to any of philosophy's so-called others. Of particular concern to me here is poetry, its affiliated knowledge, and its politics. I focus on poetry for a number of reasons, contextual, textual, and substantive. In 5th century B.C.E., poets were the paramount authorities in the lives of the Greeks, the sources of conventional wisdom and popular morality. The conversation the *Republic* depicts is staged in the last decades of the 5th century, as poetic authority is undergoing a shift.² That poetry continues to have a broad reach is made plain in the opening books of the dialog setting up the central topic of justice and its virtues: in book 1, Cephalus cites Sophocles on moderation (329b-c) and Pindar (331a) on courage; Polemarchus cites Simonides on justice (331d); in book 2, Adeimantus, in particular, but Glaucon too, reprise the approach to justice defended by Thrasymachus in book I by repeated recourse to these poets and others; Socrates recites Homer time and time again throughout the dialog. That poetic authority is undergoing a shift is modelled by the differences in kind and degree of quotation of the poets between father and sons. As Peter Euben notes, “[v]irtually everything Cephalus says is spoken in the voice and on the authority of poets.”³ By contrast, his son Polemarchus recites only Simonides on justice. Cephalus quotes poetry for guidance about living well. By contrast, Glaucon and Adeimantus, marked as sons too (though not of Cephalus but “of Ariston, godlike offspring of a famous man” (368a)⁴), quote poetry for guidelines they would like to reject as vicious.

² Andrew Ford, *The Origins of Criticism: Literary Culture and Poetic Theory in Classical Greece* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), Part III.

³ J. Peter Euben, *The Tragedy of Political Theory: The Road Not Taken* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), 241.

Do these differences signal a “separation of generations”? Have “the sons already left their fathers”?⁵ Is poetic authority dead? Maybe. And maybe not. After all, Polemarchus recurs to Simonides to vouchsafe his father’s account of justice; the words of the poets continue to attract Glaucon and Adeimantus; and an ongoing theme of the dialog is the agon between poetic authority and that of philosophy. By inviting readers to attend to the changing status of poetry between generations, the dialog orients inquiry to the relation between “what is old, traditional, and inherited and what is new, innovative, and chosen,” which is to say, to the topic of authority itself.⁶

Now commentators broadly agree that the aim of the *Republic* is to replace the authority of poetry with that of philosophy.⁷ There are good grounds for this interpretation. Certain kinds of poetry are excised from the education of the warriors in *Republic* 2-3; mimetic poets are banished from the ideal city of *Republic* 5 (398a); and *Republic* 10 opens with Socrates returning to that verdict of ouster, now, it appears at least, backed by the elaborated metaphysics, ontology, epistemology, and psychology of books 4-9.⁸ All these together seem to put justice decisively on

⁴As Socrates puts it, quoting Glaucon’s lover.

⁵ These phrases are taken from Euben, *Tragedy of Political Theory*, 242.

⁶ Euben, *Tragedy of Political Theory*, 271.

⁷See, for example, Stanley Rosen, *Plato’s Republic: A Study* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), chap. 13; Ford, *Origins of Criticism*, 209; Julius Moravcsik, “Noetic Aspiration and Artistic Inspiration” in *Plato on Beauty, Wisdom, and the Arts*, eds. Julius Moravcsik and Philip Temko (Totowa, NJ: Rowman & Littlefield, 1982), 29-46; *Plato on Poetry: Ion, Republic 376e-398b, Republic 595-608b*, ed. Penelope Murray (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 23-24; Susan B. Levin, *The Ancient Quarrel between Philosophy and Poetry Revisited: Plato and the Greek Literary Tradition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), chap. 5.

the side of philosophy and against poetry. Indeed, the scholarly consensus is that in the “old quarrel between philosophy and poetry” (607b), poetry, in book 10, is, as one scholar puts it, “overcome.”⁹

The text is less definitive, however. If the arguments of book 10 constitute, in Stephen Halliwell’s words, “a ‘defense speech’ for the earlier banishment of mimetic poetry from the ideal city,” they also, as he notes, invite poetry to defend itself against those arguments.¹⁰ As Socrates puts it, “we would be glad to receive [poetry] back from exile” (607c), if the poets themselves (or if “lovers of poetry” speaking “in prose on its behalf”) can show “that poetry not only gives pleasure but is beneficial both to constitutions and to human life” (607d). Allan Bloom suggests, further, that it may not only be poetry that is on trial in the *Republic* but philosophy. He says this because, after repeating and affirming the earlier verdict excluding mimetic poetry (595a), Socrates asks Glaucon, his interlocutor in book 10, not to “denounce” him “to the tragic poets and ... other imitators” (595b). Perhaps then, as Bloom observes, it’s the poets who constitute the “tribunal before which [Socrates and his] philosophy [are] tried.”¹¹

⁸ Challenging the alleged embeddedness of book 10 in books 6-7, Stephen Halliwell, *The Aesthetics of Mimesis: Ancient Texts and Modern Problems* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), 58, observes that *Rep.* 10 “repeatedly refers back to earlier parts of the dialogue ... but provides no direct cross-references to the metaphysics of the middle books.”

⁹ See G.R.F. Ferrari, “Plato and Poetry,” in *The Cambridge History of Literary Criticism 1: Classical Criticism*, ed. G.A. Kennedy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 92-148, 120. See also Martha Nussbaum, *The Fragility of Goodness: Luck and Ethics in Greek Tragedy and Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), chap. 5, 7.

¹⁰ Stephen Halliwell, “Antidotes and incantations,” in P. Destrée & F.-G. Herrman, eds., *Plato and the Poets* (Brill, Leiden, forthcoming 2009).

¹¹ Bloom, *Republic*, 426-27.

From very different interpretative perspectives, Bloom and Halliwell take seriously the judicial imagery that frames Book 10. To them, it expresses “the idea of an unfinished series of trials and retrials, as well as the possibility of accuser and accused changing places.” From this perspective, the central question is: “Who exactly is on trial [in the Republic] – poetry for its power to harm the soul, or Socrates ... for seeming to repudiate such a fundamental component of Greek culture ...?”¹²

Halliwell and Bloom depart from the standard triumphalist reading of the dialog when they maintain that the mimetic poets and the philosopher both stand accused. And they’re right, I think. But I want to shift things even further. For, from the perspective of my reading of the dialog’s engagement with authority, poetry and philosophy are on trial for the same thing: both are interrogated because they invite deference to authority. If, then, the *Republic* puts both philosophy and poetry on trial that’s because it seeks to cultivate an awareness of the perils of authority of all kinds. Acquiescence to authority, when unchecked, can pass into tyranny, which, as we know, is a central philosophical and political concern of the dialog, one whose importance is underscored by the fact that Plato stages the *Republic* in the shadow of the Thirty Tyrants brought to power in Athens by Sparta at the end of the Peloponnesian War, a good 30 years or more before he authored the dialog.¹³

¹²These are Halliwell words, “Antidotes and incantations.” Bloom, *Republic*, 427, puts it this way: “However Book X attempts to reverse this situation. Socrates begins by making an apology to the poets and ends by opening the way for them to make an apology to him. Socrates does not wish to destroy poetry; he only wishes to judge it and reform it, rather than be judged by it.”

¹³G.R.F. Ferrari, *City and Soul in Plato’s Republic* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 11, among others, notes that the *Republic* is set in the “shadow of the Thirty.” As Debra

If poetry is important for the dialog's engagement with authority for such contextual and textual reasons, it is of substantive significance as well because, as I read it at least, the philosophy of the dialog as a whole is most fully modeled by and understood by way of the dialog's poetry. This includes the allegory of the cave and the analogy of the divided line, of course, though I will not discuss these here. For the purposes of this essay, I am more interested in what I call the structural mimetics of the dialog as a whole.¹⁴

Opening with these words, "I went down to the Piraeus yesterday with Glaucon...," (327a), the *Republic* is Plato's recounting in Socrates' voice of the events that occasioned the conversation that is the dialog and also of the conversation itself. Representing a narrated conversation, the text depicts Socrates speaking in his own person and in the persons of his interlocutors, in turns. It thus exemplifies the mimetic features characteristic of ancient Greek poetry: representation and/through self-likening or impersonation.¹⁵

These structural mimetics effect a series of displacements of identity and authorship that

Nails, *The People of Plato: a Prosopography of Plato and other Socratics* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2002), 324-26, points out, it is difficult to pinpoint the precise dramatic date of the dialogue because evidence points to 424 or 421 as the dramatic date of Book I, and to "after 411" as the dramatic date of Books II-V. Dating the dialogue as a whole, "as we have it," to 408/7, she concludes that the dialogue takes place "throughout the Peloponnesian War."

¹⁴ For important treatments of poetry and narration in the *Republic*, see Arlene Saxonhouse, *Fear of Diversity: The Birth of Political Science in Ancient Greek Thought* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 133-145; Euben, *Tragedy of Political Theory*, 260ff.

¹⁵ On the "concept of mimesis as dramatic representation or impersonation," see Halliwell, *Mimesis*, 52. Aristotle included "Socratic conversation" as a kind of poetry (*Poetics* 1447b11). For discussion, see *Republic*, trans. Shorey, xiii, and references therein; Ludwig Edelstein, "Platonic Anonymity," *American Journal of Philology* 83 (1962): 1-22, 11; and Myles Burnyeat, "Culture and Society in Plato's *Republic*," *Tanner Lectures on Human Values* 20: 217-324, 269, n. 25.

have fascinated scholars through the ages. Much ink has been spilled, for example, over the question of whether Plato's representations of Socrates are true to the real-life Socrates. This question relates to another, namely whether Plato's dialogues present the philosophy of Plato or that of Socrates.¹⁶ In my view, this referential orientation in the scholarship – who is the real Socrates and whose philosophical views do the dialogues present – while important, also however misses the ways in which the *Republic*, via its poetry, subjects to scrutiny not only the authority of poetry but, indeed, its own philosophical authority and authorship. For by impersonating Socrates and having the impersonated Socrates impersonate Cephalus, Polemarchus, Cleitophon, Thrasymachus, Adeimantus, and Glaucon, Plato embeds all the participants in the dialogue, himself most especially, in a way that invites readers to lose sight of who is truly speaking.¹⁷ Who is the poet? Who is the philosopher? Plato is the author, to be sure. But Plato, the author, is silent and anonymous and, in this way, refuses to offer any “authoritative guidance” about how the dialogue is to be read or whose truth it authorizes. Thus, the *Republic*, as I read it, orients inquiry away

¹⁶For examples of these approaches to the study of Plato as well as an overview of the literature, see the first four essays in *The Cambridge Companion to Plato*, ed. Richard Kraut (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992): Richard Kraut, “Introduction to the study of Plato,” 1-50; T.H. Irwin, “Plato: The intellectual background,” 51-89; Leonard Brandwood, “Stylometry and chronology,” 90-130; Terry Penner, “Socrates and the early dialogues,” 121-69. For discussion and additional references, see Ruby Blondell, *The Play of Character in Plato's Dialogues* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 11-14.

¹⁷An invitation issued in other dialogues as well, notably the *Crito* in which Plato represents Socrates speaking in the voice of the laws, in the *Symposium* in which Plato has Apollodorus, via Aristodemus, represent Socrates “reporting” a lengthy speech by Diotima, and in the *Menexenus* in which Plato represents Socrates offering Aspasia's funeral oration. For valuable treatments of this feature of Plato's dialogues, see Ludwig Edelstein, “Platonic Anonymity,” *American Journal of Philology* 83 (1962): 1-22; Paul Plass, “Philosophic Anonymity and Irony in the Platonic Dialogues,” *American Journal of Philology* 85 (1964): 254-278.

from the pursuit of the factual identity of an author (“Plato or Socrates”), away from authorial intent, and toward a politics of authority, a questioning of authority and its grounds.

Indeed, in light of this politics of authority and in connection with the dialog’s concern with tyranny and its interest in/as poetry, I read the *Republic* as effecting a redistribution of authority, away from the poets and other conventional sources of authority. But to what? In my view, these traditional authorities are not replaced by the authority of philosophy. Instead, I think that the *Republic* seeks to restore authority to those who invest these figures and institutions with authority in the first place, namely, the people of Athens. On trial in the *Republic*, then, are not only the mimetic poets and philosophy, but also and perhaps more fundamentally, the people of Athens themselves. The charges? Alienating to others the authority for the formation of their souls and city.¹⁸ If, as many have argued, poetry is partly responsible for this state of affairs, I demonstrate in what follows that poetry must also be part of its remediation. For this reason, and with a view to the changing status of poetic authority in the late fifth century, I read the *Republic* as, among other things, both a “criticism and a refounding” of the poetic and dramatic tradition.¹⁹

I make the case for this interpretation in four parts. The first part – “The Justice of Poetry” – examines Socrates’ engagement with Polemarchus in book 1 to lay the ground for the dialog’s challenge to poetic authority and to establish its interest in redistributing authority to

¹⁸ I read the *Republic* as continuous, then, not only with the *Phaedrus* but also with the *Ion* whose “subtext,” Halliwell argues in *Mimesis*, 41, “is an attack on culturally widespread but unexamined, or insufficiently substantiated, claims for the authority and wisdom of the poets.” Grace Ledbetter, *Poetics before Plato: Interpretation and Authority in Early Greek Theories of Poetry* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), 82, argues that Socrates “attempts to wrest from the poets the authority traditionally attributed to them.”

poetry's auditors and interpreters. The second part – “The Knowledge of Poetry” – explores what this redistributed authority might look like by attending to what Socrates' exchanges with Glaucon in book 10 show and tell about the epistemic conditions of poetry. More specifically, I find in these exchanges dealing with the knowledge of both poets and their auditors a counter-authoritarian model of authority, one that cultivates self-limitation on behalf of its practitioners and rejects deferential acquiescence on the part of its subscribers. To demonstrate the political and philosophical salience of this mode of authority for the dialog's account of justice, the third part – “The Silence of Poetry” -- focuses on Thrasymachus, the only character in the dialog who makes no recourse to the poets and who is depicted as tyrannical. I close in part 4 – The Logos of Poetry -- with some reflections about the payoff of my approach.

1. The Justice of Poetry

The dialog of the *Republic* takes place at Cephalus' house, where Socrates, accompanied by Glaucon, has been brought for conversation by Cephalus' son Polemarchus, and Adeimantus, among others. Socrates speaks first with Cephalus but when he begins to interrogate Cephalus about justice, the older host departs to make sacrifices to the gods.²⁰ Taking things from there, Polemarchus enters the conversation by invoking Simonides, the fifth-century poet as the source

¹⁹As does Euben, *Tragedy of Political Theory*, 271, from whom I have taken that language.

²⁰For excellent treatments of Cephalus, the first two of which are especially attentive to the relations between fathers and sons, see Harry Berger, Jr., “More Than a Talking Head: Socrates and Cephalus in *Republic I*,” ms on file with author; Euben, *Tragedy of Political Theory*, 241-44; and Peter Steinberger, “Who is Cephalus?” *Political Theory* 24 (1996): 172-99.

for his definition of justice.²¹ When pressed by Socrates to say what “Simonides said about justice that you assert he said correctly,” Polemarchus answers: “That it is just to give to each what is owed” (331e). A series of twists and turns guided by Socrates reconfigures Simonidean justice into “a certain art of stealing.” When he is confronted with this possibility, Polemarchus is horrified and disavows it (334b).

Commentators tend to read Socrates’ treatment of Simonides in these exchanges as Plato’s opening salvo in the dialog’s larger project of usurping poetic authority. They maintain that the exchanges reveal Simonides’ ignorance, and hence that Socrates’ opening description of the poet as a “wise and godlike man” whom it “isn’t easy to disbelieve” (331a) is ironic.²² But that conclusion is troubled by the similarity between the initial definition of justice attributed by Polemarchus to Simonides – giving to each what is owed – and the one that Socrates endorses in *Republic* 4, namely, “the having and doing of one’s own and what belongs to one” (434a). It is also troubled by the movement of Socrates’ exchange with Polemarchus.

Recall that Socrates offers a series of reformulations of Polemarchus’ initial attribution which he checks one by one with Polemarchus, asking again and again: can this be “what Simonides means”? “Yes,” says Polemarchus each and every time (331e, 332a, 332b, 332c,

²¹ For discussions of Simonides’ controversial reputation as wise poet or greedy poet-for-hire and also of his appearances in Plato’s works, see Marcel Detienne, *The Masters of Truth in Archaic Greece*, trans. Janet Lloyd (New York: Zone, 1999), 107-16; H.S. Thayer, “Plato’s Quarrel with Poetry: Simonides,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 36 (1975): 3-26; Anne Carson, *Economy of the Unlost: Reading Simonides of Kleos with Paul Celan* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999).

²² See Ford, *Origins of Criticism*, 213-14; *Republic*, trans. Shorey, 331e, comment d. Contra Ledbetter, *Poetics before Plato*, 117.

332d). Socrates' repeated question underscores that Simonides' words don't speak for themselves but require interpretation. By focusing Polemarchus on "what Simonides means," Socrates appears to be referring to Simonides' intention the practice of interpreting the poet's words. But this quickly proves futile because, as Socrates' reformulations, affirmed by Polemarchus, demonstrate, that practice of interpretation can accommodate multiple conflicting meanings.²³ It may be possible to say what Simonides said. But the exchange between Polemarchus and Socrates suggests that it is not possible for them, not being Simonides, to say what he meant. And because Simonides is dead, they can't ask him. And even if they could, he'd probably be of no help: as Socrates says in Plato's *Apology*, when they're asked to explain what their poems mean, the poets are unable to give an account (22b-c; see also *Prot.* 347e).

Nearly halfway through the discussion, Polemarchus' response to yet another question by Socrates about "what Simonides means" changes. Socrates asks: "Does Simonides mean then that justice is doing good to friends and harm to enemies?" "I think so," Polemarchus replies (332d), now referring the poet's meaning to his own opinion. In so doing, Polemarchus appears to move authority away from the poet and to himself. And, indeed, for the next series of

²³ In *Protagoras*, 347a-348a, after offering an account of what he thinks "was going through Simonides' mind when he composed th[e] ode" under discussion, Socrates says: "when a poet is brought up in discussion, almost everyone has a different opinion of what he means, and they wind up arguing about something they can never finally decide." Reading Socrates' claims here about the undecidability of poetic interpretation as demonstrating that "no truth of any importance concerning how one ought to live" can emerge from discussion about poetry, Roslyn Weiss, *The Socratic Paradox and Its Enemies* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 41-43, takes this to represent a rejection of poetry for the sake of philosophy. I see it instead as a critique of establishing the sense of the poem by reference to authorial intent, of a piece with the critique, just discussed, offered by Socrates in his exchange with Polemarchus in *Rep.* 1. Ledbetter, *Poetics before Plato*, 109, says the same.

exchanges, Simonides disappears from the conversation. But if we remember that the standard formulation of justice in early Greek ethics is “doing good to friends and harm to enemies,” then we can see that Polemarchus’ response represents not his own independent viewpoint. Instead, he simply replaces Simonides’ say-so with that of conventional morality.²⁴ By ending the brief discussion which follows with an account of justice as “the art of stealing” “for the benefit of friends and the harm of enemies” (334b), the dialog poses its initial challenge to the authority of convention as a standard of justice.

What, in the meantime, has happened to the poets? Checking his reconfiguration of justice as the art of stealing with Polemarchus at the end of the series of exchanges from which Simonides has been absent, Socrates asks: “Justice, then, seems, according to you and Homer and Simonides, to be a certain art of stealing, for the benefit, to be sure, of friends and the harm of enemies. Isn’t that what you meant” (334b)? There is a lot packed into this question: first, Socrates not only calls Simonides back into the conversation, but he redoubles Simonides’ authority by pairing him with Homer. Second, and at the same time, by presenting Polemarchus and Homer and Simonides as equals, Socrates underscores that a redistribution of authority has, indeed, been effected. Notice finally, that by charging Polemarchus, in his own person, with ultimate responsibility for the understanding of justice associated up to that point with the poets

²⁴See, for discussion of this conventional account of justice, Mary Whitlock Blundell, *Helping Friends and Harming Enemies: A Study in Sophocles and Greek Ethics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989). Euben, *Tragedy of Political Theory*, 244, notes as well that by showing Polemarchus to “decide” (which Euben encloses in scare quotes) “on the traditional definition” he is shown to not be deciding with understanding at all.

and/or with convention, Socrates also inaugurates a redistribution of a different kind when he presses Polemarchus with: “Isn’t this what *you* meant? [my emphasis]”

Polemarchus, speaking exclusively on his own behalf for the very first time, demurs: “No, by Zeus,” he says. Borrowing *Homer’s* authority, Zeus, to underwrite his own authority, Polemarchus rejects the say-so of Socrates’ Homer and Simonides. Inaugurating a different relation to the poets, he follows his disavowal with the words: “But I no longer know what I did mean” (334b). This statement may seem like an abdication from the scene of argument. And it may be. But it may also suggest the opposite. By his admission of ignorance, Polemarchus marks the emptiness of his earlier claims to know what the poets meant, his recognition that what matters is what he knows, and also his awareness that he doesn’t know a whole lot. That admission, here, as in so many other dialogs (Meno’s slave (84a); *Theat.* 210b-c; *Ap.* 21b-23b; *Tim.* 72a, *Soph.* 2230b-c; *Charm.* 164d), displays the self-knowledge – the sense of self-limitation -- that is a necessary condition of philosophy.²⁵ And, indeed, it is what stages the dialog’s philosophical investigation of justice, which begins in the very next sentence, with Socrates’ introduction of the distinction between being and seeming (334c).

By attributing to Homer and Simonides the understanding of justice that Polemarchus has taken as his own from conventional morality, Socrates not only produces a definition of justice as the art of stealing; he also, and not too obliquely, accuses Polemarchus of theft. Neither that

²⁵See Daniel E. Anderson, *Masks of Dionysos: A Commentary on Plato’s Symposium* (SUNY: University of Albany Press, 1993), 128. Polemarchus provides other necessary conditions for the practice of philosophy in the dialog: as Euben, *Tragedy of Political Theory*, notes, he “brings the interlocutors together and thus makes dialog possible” (245). He also introduces the contrast between the power of numbers, or force, on the one hand, and the power of reasoning, which is distinctive of philosophy (245).

definition nor the others that Socrates has come up with over the course of the conversation, and that Polemarchus has happily appropriated, ever belonged to Polemarchus in the first place. Polemarchus' "no," his rejection of justice as theft, is also his denial of Socrates' accusation of theft. It opens the way to, though in no way guarantees, a coming into his own, and models a different possible understanding and practice of justice than any that has yet been put forward: the having and doing of one's own and what belongs to one, which is the definition of justice Socrates offers in *Republic 4*.²⁶

Notice that the exchange between Polemarchus and Socrates about poetic authority tells us nothing definitive about what Plato thinks about the wisdom of the poets and nothing at all about what the poets know. On the contrary, what Simonides may have known remains an open question. In *Republic 2*, another fragment (365c) generally agreed by scholars to belong to Simonides is cited, this time by Adeimantus and without attribution.²⁷ Displacing anew questions of authorship to open the way to a consideration of authority, the dialog thus replays the "Plato or Socrates" question as the "Plato or Socrates or Simonides" question. It thereby underscores that what matters is not who is the poet but how poetry's auditors take up the poet's words. Poetic authority, in other words, lies not with the poets but with their auditors and interpreters.

Another exchange in book 1 supports this reading.²⁸ Polemarchus initially enters into discussion with Socrates by interrupting his father. Assuming Cephalus' argument, Polemarchus

²⁶See also Ledbetter, *Poetics before Plato*, 117.

²⁷See Ford, *Origins of Criticism*, 97, on this fragment as belonging to Simonides.

²⁸Thanks to Bonnie Honig for insisting on the importance of this exchange.

appears to reinforce a pattern of authority by which the son inherits from the father. Cephalus happily “hands down the argument” to Polemarchus, who accepts the inheritance, claiming to be the “heir of what belongs to” Cephalus, who, in turn, agrees that Polemarchus’ inheritance is due, laughs, and leaves (331d). This exchange effects the transition to Socrates’ discussion with Polemarchus and prefigures it in telling ways.

When Polemarchus takes up Cephalus’ argument by interrupting him, is he assuming an inheritance that is his due or is he stealing it? Cephalus, after all, is not dead yet. And when Polemarchus shores up Cephalus’ account of justice by recourse to Simonides, is he authorizing his father by underwriting Cephalus’ say-so with that of the poet or is he deauthorizing his father by displacing his paternal authority with poetic authority? Polemarchus exemplifies both possibilities: deference and usurpation; he exemplifies them at the same time; and he exemplifies them in relation to paternal authority, to poetic authority, and also to convention. His relation to conventional authority comes to light first when, as we have seen, after denouncing justice as the art of stealing, he nonetheless cleaves to the conventional formulation of justice, helping friends and harming enemies (334b). Taking the conventional account as his own, Polemarchus only sets it aside to appropriate Socrates’ formulation of justice. To Socrates’ statement that a just man harms no one, Polemarchus responds: “In my opinion, Socrates, what you say is entirely true” (335d).

From father to poets to convention and, now, to Socrates, Polemarchus moves from theft to deference and back again as he exchanges one authority for another. Flip sides of the same coin, these movements gesture toward a third way of relating to authority, one by which Polemarchus may take up his varying inheritances – patrimonial, cultural, political -- not by

blind appropriation or by theft but by his own authority. To do this, he must acknowledge their sources, and see that, though they may belong to him as a matter of fact, he must make them his own through understanding. Only by making his inheritances his own in this way, which also opens the possibility of refusing them, can he take them up justly. Which is to say, only by having and doing what is his own can he claim that what belongs to him is owed to him or due.

That this sort of authority is somehow bound with poetry is suggested by the fact that Polemarchus' insight into his own ignorance comes, as we have seen, via his exchanges with Socrates about poetic interpretation. That connection is confirmed in the Socrates' last exchange with Polemarchus in book I. Bringing the poets back in to help destabilize convention for a second time, Socrates says: "If anyone tells us, then, that it is just to give to each what is owed and understands by this that a just man should harm his enemies and help his friends, he isn't wise to say it, since what he says isn't true... ." (335e). This is generally read as an indictment of Simonides who, after all, it was claimed, first asserted that it is just to give what is owed to each man. But, as we have seen, it was Polemarchus not Simonides who took that to mean "that a just man should harm his enemies and help his friends," which is the conventional formulation of justice. What Simonides said and/or understood remains an open question. Indeed, in the very next sentences Socrates underscores that he is not calling into question the wisdom or truthfulness of the poet when he allies with Simonides (and Bias and Pittacus, two of the Seven Sages and both, among other things, poets²⁹) against those who would put such untruths into the mouths of the poets. Then, offering Polemarchus another opportunity to take up philosophy with

²⁹On Bias and Pittacus, see Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, Vol. I (Cambridge, MA: Loeb Classical Library, 1925), trans. R.D. Hicks, Book 1.

the poets, Socrates invites Polemarchus to be his partner in the “battle” against untruth (335e). This time Polemarchus says, “I am ready” (335d). Is he? Or is he simply repeating his earlier error of siding with a set of authorities rather than seeking, and speaking in, his own voice? Because Polemarchus is never again in the dialog Socrates’ primary interlocutor, we cannot know for sure.

What we are offered in their exchanges in book 1 are two modes of relating to authority or to a set of given inheritances: deference and usurpation. Moving to a different register, books 2-3, which I discuss elsewhere, subject to scrutiny, again primarily by way of poetry, exactly what these inheritances are, asking, for example, what of mimetic poetry should be kept (book 2) and emulated (book 3) and what refused. Moving to yet a difference register, the register of judgment, book 10, I argue next, offers, by way of Socrates’ and Glaucon’s explorations of the epistemic conditions of mimetic poetry, an alternative to Polemarchus’ modes of relating to authority, one in virtue of which we are able to take up, refuse, and/or alter with understanding our varying inheritances.

2. The Knowledge of Poetry

Poetry’s auditors continue to be the primary target of the arguments of *Republic* 10. This is made plain when Socrates gives as his reason for underwriting the dialog’s earlier verdict against mimetic poetry that “it is likely to distort the thought of anyone who hears it.” Driving the point home, he announces that the verdict may be suspended when poetry’s auditors “possess, as an

antidote (*pharmakon*), knowledge of what mimetic poetry is really like” (595b).³⁰

It makes sense that mimetic poetry, in particular, would be a site and focus of the dialog’s engagement with the question of authority. As already noted, the characteristic features of mimesis are impersonation, which is to say, speaking in or taking up the voice of another, and representation, which is to say, taking one thing or person to stand for something or someone else. By exploring how mimesis works, the dialog makes available an understanding of these practices and thereby opens, though in no way guarantees, the possibility of claiming one’s inheritances justly and by one’s own authority.

So what is knowledge of mimetic poetry really like? Choosing as his example a couch, Socrates begins his investigation of mimesis with reference not to poetry but to painting (596e).³¹ Producing what is now a familiar hierarchy, he explains that there is the “idea” (*eidos*) of the couch, made by a god,³² the artifact of the couch, made by a craftsman based on god’s idea, and

³⁰It is to be noted that *pharmakon* signifies not only an antidote but a poison as well. For an important discussion of Plato’s use of this term in the *Phaedrus*, see Jacques Derrida, *La Dissémination*, 1972, trans. by Barbara Johnson in *Dissemination* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), pp. 63-171. See also Paul Allen Miller, *Postmodern Spiritual Practices: The Construction of the Subject and the Reception of Plato in Lacan, Derrida, and Foucault* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2007), 144-51.

³¹I agree with those for whom the analogy the dialog establishes between poetry and painting (597e, 601a, 605a-b) is legitimate. Curiously, the analogy is not infrequently discussed with reference to a Simonidean fragment: “painting is silent poetry; poetry paints the speeches.” See, e.g., Burnyeat, “Culture and Society in Plato’s *Republic*,” 265; and, especially, Carson, *Economy of the Unlost*, 46-62. On Socrates’ choice of the couch as his example, see Burnyeat, “Culture and Society in Plato’s *Republic*,” 231-36, 245-49. The resonance of Socrates’ example with Glaucon’s invocation of couches when he grows the city of pigs into the luxurious city, which, as noted earlier in this chapter, is populated also and for the first time by “poets and their helpers” (373b), is worth noting.

the imitation of the appearance of the artifact, made by the painter (597b). Glaucon seems to get to the heart of the matter when he claims that painted things “look like they *are*; however they surely *are* not in truth” (596e). Indeed, Socrates applauds Glaucon’s words (596e). But there is still more to it than that. It is not only that mimetic things look like they are but are not in truth. Rather, as only the “look” of an appearance, a mimetic thing is, more accurately, at a third remove from the idea it represents and, in *this* way, fails to be true (597e).³³

For most readers, this hierarchical account of being underwrites Plato’s contempt and dismissal of mimesis as all and only false. Judged by the standard of truth appropriate to the *idea* of the couch, the painted couch is false, to be sure. By that standard, the artifact of the couch, at a second remove from the idea, is, of course, false too (597a). But book 10 suggests that the *idea* may not be the *only* criterion of truth. After all, Socrates and Glaucon are pursuing knowledge about mimesis and their quest implies that there is a truth proper to mimesis. What might that be? Emphasizing that “the picture shows only how the couch appears when viewed from a particular angle (598ab),” Socrates suggests that the truth proper to the painted couch is the look of the artifact of the couch as it appears to the artist from where he stands when he paints it.³⁴ Having

³²For god as a kind of craftsman, see also *Timaeus* 31a. I leave to one side here a number of metaphysical issues, including: the relation between *eidos* used here to refer to an artifact and the theory of forms; and what Plato might have in mind when he has Socrates call the creator of that *eidos*, a god.

³³I take the term “look” from Ferrari, “Plato and Poetry,” 127. Harry Berger: “The idea or *eidos* of the couch may seem metonymically to condense the pleonexia inscribed in Couch City, in the speeches of Glaucon and Adeimantus, and in the rest of Socrates’ discourse. Perhaps ... the *eidos* of the couch is the *eidos* of injustice.”

³⁴See Myles Burnyeat, “Culture and Society in Plato’s *Republic*,” *Tanner Lectures on Human Values* 20: 217-324, 263.

knowledge of what mimesis is really like, then, is a matter of knowing that the mimetic product *is* all and only a “look.” To understand mimesis is to recognize the difference between mimetic truth, as a partial or perspectival representation – a mode of knowing that is limited by where one stands -- and the truth proper to ideas, and the truth proper to artifacts. If all of this seems obvious enough, Socrates’ discussions with Glaucon suggest otherwise.

Underscoring the importance of perspective and partiality to the truth of mimesis, Socrates switches standpoints in his very next exchange with Glaucon. From looking at what mimesis is really like, from the standpoint of someone with knowledge of its truth, Socrates moves to consider the standpoint of one who fails to see the mimetic thing and is deceived (598c-d), and then, switching perspectives once again, he reorients discussion to the sort of knowledge possessed by the mimetic artist, now represented not by the painter but by the poet.

Interrogating, in particular, Homer’s knowledge, Socrates asks: if the poet truly has knowledge of the things he imitates, won’t he use that knowledge to bring about benefit rather than merely imitating in words the things he appears to know? Homer’s poetry may tell of governance and laws and inventions and war, in other words, but the important question for determining what Homer knows is whether he has improved the administration of cities or changed practices of warfare (599a-f)? And the answer to that question is “no.” From this exchange Homer’s knowledge and, indeed, Homer himself, emerge as utterly useless (600b). And with this outcome, the *Republic*’s demonstration of the ethical and political bankruptcy of the poet is often taken to be complete and the verdict of ouster by philosophy fully justified.

As Bloom observes, however, “a moment’s reflection makes one aware that these charges against Homer apply at least as well to Socrates.”³⁵ Indeed, Socrates’ uselessness, along with the more general uselessness of the knowledge characteristic of philosophy, and of philosophy itself, punctuate this dialog and others (*Rep.* 487e-489d; *Gorg.* 484c-486d). That the knowledge proper to the poet is, in its uselessness, akin to that of the philosopher and that, as counterexamples to Homer’s uselessness, Socrates invokes the activities of famed sophists (600c-d) and lawgivers (599d-e), who are not infrequently, in Plato’s dialogs, objects of humor and derision (*Rep.* 492a-d; *Gorg.* 515dff.; *Laches* 186b-d; *Laws* 858e; *Phaedr.* 258a-c, 278c; *Prot.* 315a-b, 343a), point to a kinship between poetry and philosophy and also to the inadequacy of any test of poetic and/or philosophic knowledge that takes utility as its standard.

Seeing this opens the possibility that, once again, as in book 1, the true subject of Socrates’ interrogation here is not the poet or what the poet knows. This is confirmed by the multiple references in these passages to what “is told,” what “the many say,” and what “is reported” (*ta legomena*) (598c, 600a, b, c), all of which indicate that what is under scrutiny is the knowledge of those who advocate utility as the test of the poet’s knowledge, namely, as in book 1, poetry’s auditors. What Homer may have known, like what Simonides may have known, remains an open question.

Insisting that “we must not leave things half said but see them adequately” (601c), Socrates stays with the question of use, maintaining that it is the user who has knowledge (601e). Hammering home that what truly matters is what poetry’s auditors know, and how, Socrates

³⁵Bloom, *Republic*, 430.

analogizes the knowledgeable user of a poem to a flute player who is the knowledgeable user of a flute and a horseman who is the knowledgeable user of a rein and bit (601c-e).³⁶ But answering in this way produces a bind: on the one hand, a poem's auditors are best positioned to judge the poem because, by Socrates' definition, as its users, they know it best (601e); on the other hand, as we have just seen, poetry's auditors often deploy the wrong test, judging a poem poorly because they judge it by its utility or material benefit. And for this reason, Socrates announces that poetry's auditors don't know anything at all (602b).

So are a poem's auditors its knowledgeable users or not? Well, it depends. Those who test poetry by its utility are, as we saw, and just for that reason, not knowledgeable users. By contrast, those who know that a poem, like any other mimetic thing, is third from the truth, a point Plato has Socrates repeat at precisely this juncture (602c), are knowledgeable users. Knowing that a mimetic poem is third from the truth, knowledgeable users don't mistake its representations for artifacts or for ideas: recognizing the difference between mimetic things and artifacts, they don't subject poetry to the test of utility (599d); and recognizing the difference between mimetic things and artifacts and ideas, they understand that what the poem says shouldn't be taken for the truth (proper to ideas or to artifacts) (602b). In a word, knowledgeable users are those who can tell the difference between truth and representation. This, it seems, is the

³⁶Elinor J.M. West, "Plato's Audiences, or How Plato Replies to Fifth-Century XXX Mistrust of Letters," in *The Third Way: New Directions in Platonic Studies*, ed. Francisco J. Gonzalez (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 1995) 41-60, 46, notes that "as early as Homer, the truth of a song was judged by those who had witnessed the events of which a bard sang, and since the Muses, as the daughters of Memory, are ever-present, it is they who breathe truth into the song of a blind bard, like Demodokos, who offers his voice to them as their instrument." The judge of the poem is the hearer as witness even if not as eyewitness. I'm not sure what to make of the shift

antidote that can safeguard against mimetic poetry's distorting effects (602c-605c).³⁷ It is also, as we will see next in the case of Thrasymachus, that without which there can be no self-limiting model of authority, which is to say, no antidote to tyranny.

3. The Silence of Poetry

Bursting in on Socrates' discussion with Polemarchus in book 1 (336b), Thrasymachus offers justice as the advantage of the stronger (338c).³⁸ In Roslyn Weiss' words, for Thrasymachus, justice "consists of the rules that the strong, those who have political power, impose on the weak, their subjects, who are then obliged to obey the rules, thereby advancing the interests of the strong."³⁹ Demonstrating his readiness to partner with Socrates, and mirroring a move Socrates had executed on him in their earliest exchange about poetic authority, Polemarchus reveals the inadequacy of Thrasymachus' definition by showing that it ends in incoherence: based on claims Thrasymachus has agreed to so far, Polemarchus says, "the advantage of the stronger would be no more just than the disadvantage" (340a-b).

from "excellence, beauty, rightness" (601d) to "beauty and badness" (602a).

³⁷With knowledge of mimesis amounting to partial knowledge of partial truth rather than knowledge of truth as such, it is possible, contra Halliwell, "Antidotes and incantations," to take the knowledge referred to at 595b to be partially contained in *Rep. X* itself.

³⁸If Thrasymachus' anti-traditional, power-based defense of convention looks *prima facie* quite different from Polemarchus' traditional defense of convention as popular morality, they share nonetheless substantial commitments.

³⁹Weiss, "Wise Guys and Smart Alecks in *Republic* 1 and 2," in G.R.F. Ferrari, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Plato's Republic* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 90-115, 93.

Cleitophon steps in to deflect Polemarchus' charge, insisting that what Thrasymachus said was "that the advantage of the stronger is what the stronger believes to be his advantage" (340b). Thrasymachus, however, rejects Cleitophon's representation (340c). For Thrasymachus, unlike for Cleitophon, it seems to matter whether the pronouncements of the powerful really work to the powerful's advantage. Speaking in the name of power intelligently exercised, Thrasymachus appears to stand for justice not as a matter of brute force or power alone but as an art or craft, *techne*, of power. With the authority of justice lying in the art of power, and the source of justice being that power made manifest in promulgated laws, there is, for Thrasymachus, "no justice besides the laws and conventions that the ruled are required by the rulers to observe."⁴⁰ To Thrasymachus, justice is all and only a creature of law (339b) and that makes him, in contemporary parlance, a legal positivist.⁴¹

Noting the difference between Cleitophon and Thrasymachus is important.⁴² It gives force to the claim put forward recently, on historical grounds, that Thrasymachus did not endorse an account of justice as force but was, instead, describing practices he associated with Athenian imperialism and deplored.⁴³ In real life a diplomat from Chalcedon who spoke out to "prevent harsh reprisals against his native city" after Chalcedon's unsuccessful revolt against Athens in

⁴⁰Weiss, "Wise Guys and Smart Alecks," 95.

⁴¹This is also Meletus' position in the *Apology* (24b-25a).

⁴²Thanks to Gerry Mara for bringing this difference to my attention.

⁴³See Stephen A. White, "Thrasymachus the Diplomat," *Classical Philology* 90 (1995): 307-27, cited approvingly in Nails, *People of Plato*, 289.

407, the Thrasymachus of the *Republic*, argues Stephen A. White, is best read not as a realist on a par with the Athenian generals in the Melian debate for whom “the strong do what they can and the weak suffer what they must” (*History*, 5.89), but “as an idealist” expressing “the outrage of a man disillusioned and embittered by the brutal realities of fifth-century power politics.”⁴⁴

Whether Thrasymachus is “a penetrating critic of contemporary political affairs who is dismayed by the triumphs of injustice” he is describing or is rather, like Cleitophon, aggressively prescribing such triumphs matters for an historical appreciation of Thrasymachus.⁴⁵ What matters more for my purposes is that Thrasymachus is presented in the dialog, and Socrates responds to him, in such a way that makes it hard to tell. By making it difficult to tell whether Thrasymachus is speaking descriptively or prescriptively the dialog presents him as modeling an erasure of the difference between how things are and how things ought to be. This erasure is underwritten by both approaches to justice as a matter of power, even when what is (the application of power) is apparently disengaged from what ought to be (the intelligent application of power). As Thrasymachus’ discursive practices make plain, when justice is understood as a matter of power that separation is difficult to maintain. Modeling justice as a *techne* of power and demonstrating the proximity of that practice of justice to justice as brute force, Thrasymachus, himself at times brash, bullying, and violent, offers to persuade Socrates to his way of thinking about justice by giving Socrates’ soul “a forced feeding” (345b).

⁴⁴For the sources of these quotes, in order, see Nails, *People of Plato*, 289; *The Landmark Thucydides: A Comprehensive Guide to the Peloponnesian War*, trans. Richard Crawley and ed. Robert B. Strassler (New York: Touchstone, 1996); White, “Thrasymachus the Diplomat,” 322.

⁴⁵White, “Thrasymachus the Diplomat,” 324.

When justice is a matter of power, intelligently exercised or not, might (what is) makes right (what ought to be). Justice, understood in that way, makes impossible Simonidean justice, “giving to each what is owed,” and it makes impossible Socratic justice, “the having and doing of one’s own and what belongs to one,” each of which presupposes a gap between how things are and how things ought to be that it is the job of justice to govern. In closing the gap between “is” and “ought,” or in collapsing them, Thrasymachus stands for the position that what is represented as true is true if it is powerful enough to secure acquiescence. He thus models an erasure of the difference between truth and representation.

The embodiment of words-as-authority, Thrasymachus occupies the position of the poem when it is treated, as it was by Polemarchus at the start of book 1, as blindly authoritative. Thus inhabiting the position of poetry in fifth-century Athenian culture, Thrasymachus, the only character in the dialog to make no recourse to poetry at all, displaces the poets, their poetry, and their authority. Thrasymachus’ ouster of poetry puts philosophy in peril. It endangers politics as well. Exemplifying a world in which self-standing authority backed by power replaces all other modes, Thrasymachus stands with the tyrants in the counterposition Socrates set up at the end of his exchange with Polemarchus in book 1 between the poets, with whom Socrates allies in the quest for truth about justice, and the tyrants, whom he holds responsible for the untruth of conventional morality (336a).

But wait. What distinguishes the authority I’m arguing the dialog seeks to restore to the people of Athens and the self-standing authority characteristic of Thrasymachus? What, in other words, distinguishes a politics of unalienated authority from a regime full of tyrants? I explore these questions next.

4. The Logos of Poetry

What distinguishes a politics of unalienated authority from a regime full of tyrants? The difference is that a politics of unalienated authority rests on knowledge whereas the tyranny of the many, like the tyranny of the one, rests on power. But doesn't giving pride of place to knowledge crown philosophy queen, and thereby establish the authority of philosophy, exactly contrary to my earlier claim? Not necessarily. For the knowledge that matters here is knowledge of mimesis which, by recognizing its own partiality and limited perspective, undoes the authority it simultaneously vests. Mimetic knowledge is, in this way, akin to Socratic ignorance, what in the *Apology*, is called human wisdom.

Not so fast. For any connection between poetry and knowledge, especially any synergistic connection like the one I've been proposing seems absolutely foreclosed by key passages in book 10 where Socrates explains the root of his worries about poetry's distorting effects. Being an inferior thing and consorting with an inferior thing, mimesis, he says, produces inferior offspring (603b). In other words, mimetic poetry appeals to the erotic part of the soul (602c) and so produces eros, which is opposed to knowledge (603a). And so, Socrates concludes: "We should at last be justified in not admitting [the mimetic poet] into a city that is well-governed, because he awakens [the inferior] part of the soul and nourishes it, and, by making it strong, destroys the calculating part..." (605b-c).

Appearing to fear the power of eros above all, this passage seems to come down decisively on the side of the ouster of the poets. I have more to say about eros elsewhere. Let me turn next and briefly to the sort of knowledge that is opposed to eros in this passage for it is quite different from the mimetic knowledge elaborated in the rest of book 10. And then, by way of

conclusion, I'll return to this central passage and to the soul/city analogy it invokes because Socrates' justification of the ouster of the poets depends in no small part on that analogy and a closer look at it shifts the picture once again.

The knowledge Socrates opposes to eros in this passage and which remains under consideration from here until the end of the treatment of poetry in *Republic* 10 is different from the knowledge of mimesis treated earlier. It is calculative (*logistikon*, 602d) knowledge, whose home is the part of the soul responsive to "argument (*logos*) and law (*nomos*)" (604b), and whose role it is to regulate the displays of pain and pleasure triggered and fostered by poetry (606b-d), and to keep them quiet.

Appearing to force a choice -- calculation or desire, law and argument or mimetic poetry-- Socrates announces: "if you admit the honeyed muse in lyrics or epics, pleasure and pain will jointly be kings of your city instead of law and that argument which in each instance is best in the opinion of the community" (607a). Socrates is, to be sure, warning against setting up pain and pleasure to rule any city, psychological or political. And he is, to be sure, associating the power of mimetic poetry with its impact on eros, which threatens to give unbridled rein to pain and pleasure as "kings." In my view, however, he is not, thereby, arguing in favor of calculation in the soul any more than he is arguing in favor of "law and arguments defended by common opinion" in the city.

To underscore the inadequacy of calculative knowledge, Socrates refers to its primary modes, "measuring, counting, and weighing," as "charming (*charieistatai*) helpers" (602d), using the same language he uses to describe the charms of the mimetic artist just lines before (*charieis*, 602a). These modes of calculation, in this dialog and others, are treated as improper

measures of things like “right and wrong, and noble and disgraceful, and good and bad” (*Euth.* 7b-d; *Rep.* 505a-c). The laws of a city, derived from these modes of calculation, may produce obedience but, as this dialog and others make plain, they don’t always produce justice (*Rep.* 380c-d, 383a, 403b-c, 417b, 459e, 461b, 468c, 471b; *Ap.* 32a-e). And the arguments defended by common opinion often, as in the test of utility examined earlier, fall short of truth. In the soul, as well as in the city, then, neither desire on its own nor calculation on its own is an adequate guide to the good (431c, 439d-441a).⁴⁶

Using the language of factional conflict or stasis (603d) to describe the relations between desire vs calculation in the soul and poetry vs law and argument defended by common opinion in the city, the choice Socrates appears to force leaves room for only one winner. Like most factional conflict, these oppositions leave out, as he puts it, “what is best in us.” Despite Socrates’ claim right at the end of book 10’s treatment of poetry, that “the argument (*logos*) determined us” to reach the verdict against poetry (607b) or, better, in the light of that claim and of the impoverished account of argument-as-calculation Socrates deploys to underwrite the verdict, I think we are meant to read Socrates’ announcement as posing false choices for the city and for the soul. What is best in us must somehow combine rather than oppose eros and knowledge, and if calculative knowledge is unable to do that then perhaps the failure lies with it. Oriented to neither the rule of law and argument nor the rule of pain and pleasure, what is best in

⁴⁶I agree with Burnyeat, “Culture and Society in Plato’s *Republic*,” 225, that “there is no excuse for supposing that book X replaces an earlier three-part division [of the soul] with a vaguer bipartite one.” In my view, what appears to be a two-part division via the opposition between calculation and appetite in *Rep.* 10, invites us to ask after the third part of *Rep.* 4, namely, *thumos*. For excellent work on this difficult topic, see Christina Tarnopolsky, “Power’s

us, it seems, educates to something that is both and neither, which is to say mimetic knowledge or what might be called a poetic practice of philosophy. On my reading that philosophy is not actualized in books 6-7 of the *Republic* with their hierarchical ascent to authoritative knowledge, for that would be to replace poetic authority with the authority of a kind of calculative or rationalist philosophy. Instead, it is actualized in a redistributed authority based on mimetic knowledge.

To see this, let us look again at the passage, quoted earlier only in part, by way of which Socrates is usually read as effecting the decisive ouster of the mimetic poets: “We should at last be justified in not admitting [the mimetic poet] into a city that is well-governed, because he awakens [the inferior] part of the soul and nourishes it, and, by making it strong, destroys the calculating part; just as in a city when someone, by making wicked men mighty, turns the city over to them and corrupts the better sort of citizen. Similarly, we’ll say that a poet puts a bad constitution in the soul of each individual by making images that are far removed from the truth and by gratifying the soul’s irrational part...” (605b-c).

Socrates says that mimetic poets put a bad constitution in the soul of each individual just as bad constitutions destroy cities. How exactly do bad constitutions destroy cities? And who is responsible for them? Who or what, in other words, is the political analog to the mimetic poet? To answer these questions, we must turn to the dialog’s account of constitutional change and decline in *Republic* 8, which, in any case, establishes its own relevance to the subject matter of *Republic* 10 when it offers Socrates’ opening analysis of constitutional deviation from the ideal

Passionate Pathologies,” and “The Logic of Thumos and Mimesis in Plato’s *Republic*,” presented to the 2006 and 2007 Annual Meetings of the American Political Science Association.

city in the voices of the Muses (545d-e). In an epic gesture to Homer (who regularly signals the introduction of difficult subject matter by invoking the Muses), Plato casts Socrates in a position analogous to Homer. Is Socrates, then, the political analog to the mimetic poet of *Republic* 10? Or is it Plato? Is it the Muses? Or is it Homer?

The answer, I think, is: none of the above. For none of these – not the Muses, not Homer, not Plato, not Socrates -- is the source or cause of bad political constitutions. What they do is tell of the origin and genealogy of those constitutions. And what they say, or what Plato has Socrates ventriloquize the Muses as saying, is that constitutional decline arises from faction, which itself arises owing to the failure of an artificial breeding technique. Without this technique, dubbed the “nuptial number,” the rulers of the ideal city are unable to judge well the quality of the guardians, and the result is a “chaotic mixing of iron with silver and of bronze with gold,” which breeds the civil war and hatred at the root of constitutional degeneration (547a).⁴⁷

Responsibility for bad political constitutions, it appears, lies with those holding political offices who can't tell the difference between truth and representation. It is they who are the political analog of the mimetic poet of *Republic* 10. Notice, however, that although their incapacity to judge well is responsible for deviation from the perfect city in speech (545d), it is not exactly the political rulers whom *Republic* 8 holds accountable for the bad constitutions. In Socrates' words (some of them Homer's), constitutions are born not “from oak or rock” (*Iliad*, XXII, 126; *Odyssey*, XIX, 163) but from “the characters of the people who live in the cities

⁴⁷It is noteworthy that both the “nuptial number” and the “mixing” (which refers back to the noble lie, a “Phoenician thing,” deriving its authority from the poets (414b-415d)), are truths of the Muses, which is to say, representations at a third remove from the truth of ideas.

governed by them, which tip the scales, so to speak, and drag the rest along with them” (544d-e).⁴⁸ The ways of life of the people living in the cities governed by the constitutions bring about the changes in them that give rise to bad constitutions (547b, 550d-551b, 555b-d, 562c-563d).⁴⁹ Thus the engines of the bad political constitutions depicted in *Republic* 8 are those who strengthen the office holders and surrender their cities to the vicious, namely, the people.

If the engines of bad political constitutions are those who empower the politicians by surrendering to them their actual cities, then, by the city/soul analogy invoked in this passage, the engines of bad psychological constitutions are not the mimetic poets, per se, but those who empower the poets by alienating to them their internal cities (592b, 608b), namely and in both cases, the people of Athens. Begun in *Republic* 1, the project of redistributing authority away from the poets and to those who invest the poets with authority in the first place, culminates, in my view, with this passage in *Republic* 10.

Socrates says: “we would be glad to receive [poetry] back from exile” (607c), if the poets themselves (or if “lovers of poetry” speaking “in prose on its behalf”) can show “that poetry not only gives pleasure but is beneficial both to constitutions and to human life” (607d). On my reading, the dialog – poetry and prose both -- offers this demonstration. Poetry is beneficial to constitutions and to human life not because it produces material benefit – that, as we have seen,

⁴⁸ Socrates invokes this same phrase in *Apology*, 34d, using it there to refer to the formation and development not of political institutions but of the human soul, specifically, his own.

⁴⁹ The *Republic* may at times appeal to the regime “as the most important political fact and the cause of all other facts” (Bloom, *Republic*, 414), and *Rep.* 8 may open with Socrates and his interlocutors maintaining that they will follow their plan and examine constitutions, as the

would be a misapplication of the standard of utility – but because it represents and so may cultivate the virtue of mimetic knowledge. And that is beneficial because it makes possible, without however guaranteeing, a mode of relating to authority and to practicing it based not on deference to what is already given (in the mode of Polemarchus), nor on appropriation by theft (in the mode of Thrasymachus), but on a kind of understanding and self-understanding that underwrites and limits authority at the same time. In this way poetic knowledge may offer to authoritarian politics and its injustice an antidote that was particularly urgent for the politics of the period in which the *Republic* is set and is no less urgent for us today.

engines of regime change first. But, as in the rest of the dialog, *Rep.* 8 depicts a more complex and bidirectional relation between soul and city.