

The Socratic Narrative: A Democratic Reading of Plato's Dialogues

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Abstract

Plato wrote dialogues. While there has been attention to the dramatic elements of Plato's dialogues by a number of scholars, there has been much less attention to the narrative style of the dialogues. I argue that we should consider whether the dialogues are recited or presented like dramatic works with each character speaking his own words—or as a mixture of these narrative forms. By employing this interpretive tool to read the *Republic*, I illustrate how paying attention to the narrative style enables us to see a democratic Socrates who undermines readings of the *Republic* famously offered by Karl Popper and Leo Strauss. Plato appears then as neither a defender of the “closed society” nor an advocate of the elite rule of the wise over the many.

Keywords

Plato, *Republic*, Socrates, narrative

The Narrative and Dramatic Forms

Plato wrote dialogues, which means that all Plato's writings (except the letters) speak in the voice of the characters that inhabit his works. Sometimes the dialogues are written in dramatic form, where each character speaks for himself. The *Crito* is one such dialogue. Socrates begins: “Why have you come so early. . . . I am surprised the warden was willing to listen to you.”

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Crito responds: “He is quite friendly to me . . . I have been here often and have given him a little something.” Thus, we learn from Crito himself about his successful bribes. Or in the *Gorgias*, also written in the dramatic form, we watch Callicles clam up; the dialogue is no longer direct and Socrates is forced to propose answers for Callicles so that the discussion can proceed. Then there are other dialogues where the discourse is narrated by one character, often Socrates as in the *Charmides*, but not always.¹ There is also the *Theaetetus*, which complicates the typology by being direct and indirect. Euclid and Terpsion introduce the dialogue, which is then read by Terpsion's slave as direct dialogue with the caveat from Terpsion that he did not write the discussion down

. . . in the form which Socrates repeated it to me, with him doing all the talking, but as a dialogue between him and those who took part in the discussion . . . I wanted to avoid the nuisance of all the bits which Socrates had to insert about himself for explanation, like “And I said” or “and I remarked,” or about the interlocutor, like “He agreed” or “He disagreed.” (143bc)

This is the choice in the *Theaetetus*. But it is not the choice in other dialogues. The *Symposium* begins with direct discourse between Apollodorus and an unnamed companion; it then turns to Apollodorus reporting the story of the symposium at Agathon's home as told by “a certain Aristodemus of Kudetheneum, tiny and always unshod” (173b). The result is not only the inclusion of the “And I said's” dismissed in the *Theaetetus*, but the “He [Aristodemus] said he said's” throughout the rest of the dialogue, a bane to most translators of the dialogue, but perhaps part of Plato's intention in this dialogue recalling a dinner party shrouded in myth.²

Not so long ago the dramatic qualities of the dialogue were (with some important exceptions) ignored, and the significance of the drama for understanding the philosophic content was left untapped; that is not the case anymore, though the degree to which settings and personalities and events within the dialogues impinge on interpretations varies greatly. I would argue, however, that there has not yet been adequate attention to the narrative style of the dialogues, though there have been some forays in this direction by scholars such as Anne-Marie Bowery, Jill Frank, Ruby Blondell, and Dorrit Cohn.³ Blondell, in her book on *The Play of Character in Plato's Dialogues*, helpfully remarks on the various forms the dialogues take, but she does not explore the significance of these differences for the content of the specific

dialogues beyond the important point that “all these strategies draw attention to the non-identity of the author, narrator, and character thereby further distancing Plato as author from the voices of his characters.”⁴ Attentive to the issue of authorial control, Blondell alerts us to the peculiar “honesty” of the narrated dialogues, “insofar as they remind us that the account is shaped by a voice other than that of the participants. This in turn serves to remind us of the author who stands behind the narrator, not necessarily to agree with him, but (necessarily) to create and control him.”⁵ Bowery’s work is particularly helpful in identifying how Socrates’ narrative highlights erotic themes in certain dialogues, suggesting that “his narrative frame should direct our attention to the other emotional responses Socrates includes in his narrative: blushing and laughter.”⁶

My concern, however, is not the authorial stance nor the emotional condition of Socrates and his interlocutors, but whether attention to the narrative style of a particular dialogue can enrich our understanding of that dialogue. My argument is that in the case of the *Republic* it does. Given the diversity of narrative styles for his dialogues, Plato consciously chose how to frame the dialogues and I argue that that choice relates to the content of the dialogue just as much as the dramatic elements do. Using this approach to analyze the *Republic* in this essay, I illustrate how the narrative style contributes to our reading of the dialogue and most particularly to the political content of the work, giving it specifically a seldom acknowledged democratic orientation.⁷

The *Republic* is a narrated dialogue. The dialogue begins with Socrates’ name and is followed by ten long books of Socrates’ speech.⁸ When one reads silently through the *Republic*, one must remember that Socrates is reciting everything—all the speeches of all the characters.⁹ As narrator, Socrates can introduce the frequent interjections into the dialogue explaining his reactions to the events taking place during the dialogue. Thus, famously we hear him remark about Thrasymachus’ entrance into the discussion: “I was astounded when I heard him, and looking at him, I was frightened.” Using language meant to make us think of werewolves, he continues: “I think if I had not seen him before he saw me, I would have been speechless” (336d).¹⁰ Just a bit later we hear Socrates narrating his verbal victory over Thrasymachus:

Now Thrasymachus did not agree to all of this so easily as I tell it now,¹¹ but he dragged his feet and resisted, and he produced a wonderful quantity of sweat, for it was summer. And then I saw what I had not yet seen before—Thrasymachus blushing. (350d)

For sure, a skilled author such as Plato could have communicated Thrasymachus’ blush or the violence of his entrance into the conversation through the language of the dramatic form, but by using the narrative form here we watch Socrates gloating over his victory.¹²

With a dialogue structured like the *Protagoras* where there is a mixture of form so that the dialogue begins in the dramatic form and then moves to the narrative form, we know to whom the story of the dialogue is being told. In the *Protagoras*, the story is recited to a salacious companion who begins by questioning Socrates about his pursuit of Alcibiades. One might ask how the discussion in the *Protagoras* responds to the companion’s expressed interest in Socrates’ sexual relation with Alcibiades. With the *Republic* we do not know who the audience is for the long, long speech of Socrates. It certainly must be someone willing to listen to all ten books without apparent stop. Xanthippe? The dialogue begins with Socrates saying that he went down to the Piraeus the day before for the sake of seeing the festival of the goddess Bendis. He then explains how he got waylaid by a group of young men, brought against his will to the house of Cephalus, and then spent the rest of the evening discussing the nature of justice and why we should care about it. Is the *Republic* the long answer to his wife’s question: “Where were you last night?” What would it do to our reading of the dialogue if we read it as a sheepish excuse for a long night of carousing?¹³

I ask this question to point out an issue often noted in dramatic readings of the Platonic dialogues, namely that Socrates speaks differently to different characters.¹⁴ The dialogue form requires such attention; insofar as one focuses only on the logic of the interchanges, this aspect of the works is lost. Socrates’ interchanges with the pompous Protagoras and the proud Gorgias, the arrogant Nicias and self-assured Euthyphro, are quite different than those with Crito or Plato’s brothers. In attending to the dramatic quality of the dialogues, we notice those differences and mark them in our interpretations. Similarly, we should think not only of speech *within* the dialogue, but also to whom Socrates speaks when he narrates the dialogue—the companion of the *Charmides*, the salacious interlocutor at the beginning of the *Protagoras*—or perhaps the pesky wife. Once we acknowledge these differences, we must also question how speaking to one person rather than another affects what is said and how it is said. I do not in this essay attend to the significance of the addressee in the *Republic* or try to assess whether it is indeed Xanthippe. Instead, I focus on how the narrative structure of the dialogue informs our reading of the dialogue and may undermine the vision of political unity articulated in the tale Socrates tells, whoever the listener may be, offering us a democratic Socrates who stands in sharp contrast to the city he founds in

speech. It is the narrative style chosen by Plato for this dialogue that highlights, I argue, this democratic Socrates and thus serves to undermine the city that Plato has Socrates propose.

Beyond Popper and Strauss

Let me develop this point by setting my discussion within the framework of two familiar readings of Plato's *Republic*, first as a blueprint, in Karl Popper's famous language, for a closed society, and secondly in the reading of the dialogue often attributed to Leo Strauss as a proposal for the rule of the elite. Both Popper's and Strauss's readings of the *Republic* have been highly influential and they both find in Plato the antidemocrat. For Popper, this leads him to reflect that we should "break with the habit of deference to great men."¹⁵ He worries that the influence of "great men" may be "too rarely challenged" and continue

. . . to mislead those on whose defense civilization depends, and to divide them. The responsibility for this tragic and possibly fatal division becomes ours if we hesitate to be outspoken in our criticism of what admittedly is a part of our intellectual heritage. By our reluctance to criticize some of it, we may help to destroy it all.¹⁶

The force of Popper's concern with this deference comes from his finding in Plato the intellectual origins of the fascism from which the world had barely recovered by the time his book was published. He calls his two-volume work written in New Zealand during the war his "war effort."¹⁷ Attacking the intellectual sources of the horrors that his generation experienced, he hoped to save future generations from the atrocities his generation had just witnessed. Strauss too may see in Plato the model antidemocrat, but he does not "break with the habit of deference," as Popper urged. Strauss's detractors would argue that he finds in the *Republic* a model of elite rule over the many, a model worthy of emulation in these chaotic times. Whether this portrayal of Strauss is accurate or not,¹⁸ Strauss does not find in Plato the origins of totalitarianism as does Popper; rather, he finds resistance to totalitarianism in the resources provided there that are necessary to protect the liberal modern world from drowning the individual in the maw of mediocrity and unthinking lives.

Strauss arrives at his reading of Plato using a very different methodology than Popper. Popper read Plato straight-on, where the words of the dialogue put into the mouth of Socrates are those of Plato and reveal Plato's ideal

political system. In Popper's reading, the philosopher who grew up in democratic Athens argues for an antidemocratic society—one hostile to freeing the "the critical powers of man," one devoted to the principles of social engineering. One need only glance briefly at Plato's *Republic* to find ready support for such a view. To train the young warriors, Socrates censors the poets, restricts what one can eat and drink, how (or rather, whether) one can express grief, even whether one can laugh. The city with the beautiful name of Callipolis divides its people into three classes, with the small number born to be philosophers as rulers. No question, Socrates' city is profoundly antidemocratic, reserving political power for a few highly skilled individuals with access to a truth existing outside the daily world of political life.

In contrast, Strauss's methodology refuses to make the speech of the dialogues the philosophy of Plato. Attending to the examples of medieval Arabic authors commenting on Plato who emphasized the dialogic form of Plato's works, Strauss encouraged his own readers to read the dialogues by paying attention to the character of the interlocutors and to investigate how such attention reveals alternative ways of reading what is said; speech must be understood as emerging from the personality of the speaker. He also encouraged attention to the dramatic hints that should inform one's reading of the dialogues in ways totally alien to Popper's reading. Strauss's writings serve as a warning against equating what Socrates says and what Plato means to communicate. There is also, though, a political agenda behind Strauss's approach. Strauss's fascination with medieval political thought, the Talmud, the mystical writings of the Cabala, fostered the interest in the hidden meanings in texts and the theory of reading between the lines, suggesting that an examination of silences and contradictions barely noticeable to the casual reader might reveal hidden meanings in the texts. In *Persecution and the Art of Writing*, he claims that those who were genuine philosophers could not openly express their philosophical views without risking persecution,¹⁹ forcing them to write on two levels: an exoteric surface teaching to edify the "nonphilosophic" majority and an esoteric teaching gleaned from silences and obvious mistakes and directed to the philosophical few who could understand truths inaccessible to the many. In a period of repression, Strauss speculates, authors wrote with those two audiences in mind—those who could be lulled by pleasant stories and those who could face the harsher truths. Writing for two audiences meant a distinction between those who could and those who could not understand deeper meanings of texts—or, less generously, an antidemocratic elitism that presupposed a hierarchy of the wise and the not-so-wise.

While the elitism presupposed by a theory that relies on such distinctions between the few and the many may not appeal to modern democrats, I am nevertheless convinced by the power of seeing in Plato's dialogues a rich

layering of meanings that only become apparent when one notices the dramatic settings and the narrative style of the dialogue in relation to the content of the speeches. Instead of relying on Strauss's theory as an exclusionary theory that allows some—but not all—to capture the “true” meaning of the dialogues, I want to point to how the dialogue creates ambiguities in the readings and then suggest how this would change the politics of reading Platonic dialogues from the elitism that one might find following a Straussian reading to a far more democratic and egalitarian one—thus raising questions about how both Popper and Strauss understand the *Republic*.

The Narrative of the *Republic*

Perhaps the most powerful image to come from the whole Platonic corpus is that of the cave which Socrates tells us²⁰ he introduces to further explain the epistemology and educational theory he had expounded in Book 6. Socrates says that he asked the group with whom he was speaking to imagine a world of darkness where we only see the shadows that flicker on the walls of a cave—shadows caused by puppets behind us and a fire behind them. A dark and dreary place it is, with the sun shining outside of the cave. With this image, Socrates is also curiously referring to the setting in which, he told us at the beginning of the *Republic*, the long conversation took place. After Socrates had described how he was stopped from heading back to town, he reported on his arrival at the home of the metic Cephalus. Given the wealth of the host, it is hard to imagine that the guests sat there talking all evening in the dark. For sure, lamps were brought into the room—and shadows were cast on the wall. Thus, when Socrates asks us to imagine the ever-so-compelling image of the cave, he is reflecting as well the setting in which he and his interlocutors have been engaged in the search for justice. By this time in the conversation, were the claustrophobic darkness and shadows forcing the narrator to look for an escape from the cave? Whether this captures his own desire to escape, Socrates makes clear to whoever is listening to his narration that the conversation he narrates took place in an analogue of the cave with its flickering shadows. What does this do to our understanding of that conversation? Does Socrates only escape the cave when he returns to Athens and recites the story itself the next morning?

I raise this image and this question to highlight the uncertainty around how we are to interpret the city that Socrates calls *Callipolis* (527c)—is it the beautiful city that Plato suggests we should strive to imitate in our political organization giving rise to the accusations of totalitarianism by readers like Popper? Or is it, as Strauss claims, a city so opposed to our natures that

it is impossible to create, leading Strauss to claim in the concluding sentences to his chapter on the *Republic* in *The City and Man*:

Socrates makes clear in the *Republic* . . . of what character the city would have to be in order to satisfy the highest need of man. By letting us see that the city constructed in accordance with this requirement is not possible, he lets us see the essential limits, the nature, of the city.²¹

The founding of that city is, of course, as Socrates tells us, to serve as an aid for looking for justice in the soul and the narrative of that founding begins in Book 2 when Socrates asserts: “‘Well then,’ I said, ‘a city, as I believe, comes into being because each of us isn’t self-sufficient but is in need of much. Do you believe there is another beginning to the founding of the city?’” (369b). From need, Socrates reports he moved to specialization, and summing up his initial suggestion he said: “‘Come now,’ I said, ‘let’s make a city in speech from the beginning. Our need, as it seems, will make it’” (369c). And so the tale within the tale begins. Socrates’ narration becomes for the next several books the narration of the founding of the city according to need, which in turn is the story of specialization that arises to satisfy those needs. The story of the founding, though, is not as obvious as Socrates presents it. He reports, for example, the story Glaucon told that justice (and the city) emerge when the weak fearing harm come together to restrain the strong (358e-359a). Or there is the myth of the hero Theseus, who for the sake of protection, consolidated the small villages across the Attica to found Athens. Or Thucydides, similarly thinking in terms of external threats, wrote of the emergence of cities by those seeking protection against the sea-faring pirates (I.7). Yet, Socrates tells us he got his interlocutors to agree to a story of need that led to the affirmation of a necessary division of labor and the specialization that goes along with that division with each member of the community performing only one task. Thus, the tale Socrates tells of the founding of the city is marked by a theory of specialization in sharp contrast to the practice of Athenian democracy which eschewed the specialization of Callipolis, where the sailors on the boats also sat in the Assembly and the farmers from the countryside sat on the juries. I will say more about this below.

Socratic Censorship

One of the first institutions Socrates introduces after asserting the strict division of labor—and one of the most galling to Popper and modern liberal sensibilities—is the censorship of poetry. After comparing the warriors to

philosophic puppies, Socrates reports that he began his exploration of “how exactly they [will] be reared and educated by us” (376c). And so, reminding us that he is a character in his own narrative, he says to his interlocutors: “Come, then, like men telling tales in a tale and at their leisure, let’s educate the men in speech” (376d). Creating his own story within his storytelling, he reports how he would excise from the poetry of Homer and Hesiod all those stories that could adversely affect the souls of the young, since the poetry that the young hear puts a “stamp” on them. Thus, as a teller of “tales in a tale” he censors the poetry or tales that mothers and nurses are allowed to tell to the young (377c).

After Socrates reports telling Adeimantus: “We must do everything to insure that what they hear first, with respect to virtue, be the finest told tales for them to hear,” Glaucon wonders what sort of tales these are to be. Socrates demurs, saying: “You and I aren’t poets right now but founders of a city. It is appropriate for founders to know the models according to which the poets must tell their tales” (378e-379a). As the teller of the tale that is the *Republic*, Socrates is the “poet,” even if he claims not to be one within the story he tells.²² Instead, he explains how the characters in the story he creates will have to censor the poets, taking away from them (but not from himself as storyteller) any tale that might portray the gods as less than a perfect unity or cause of good and any hero troubled by fear, gluttony, grief, eros, or laughter. As the one who describes the proposed censorship, he recites all those tales about the gods that show them castrating their fathers, binding their sons, fighting with one another, changing form, lying, and being the source of evil as well as good (377e-383c). Likewise, he as the narrator of the story within a story can report on the excesses of Achilles’ grief, his blasphemy, his eagerness to do battle with a god (391ab); he can recite the “terrible rapes” that Theseus “eagerly undertook,” (391d), and even the laughter of the gods (388e). He can speak of the gods’ hatred of the lie, and yet insist that the founders of the city in the story he is telling lie about the gods for “the benefit of the city in cases involving enemies or citizens” (389b). He censors the characters in his story while not censoring himself, while revealing to his readers and interlocutors what cannot be revealed to the inhabitants of Callipolis. He—the teller of the story—lives well outside the city he and his interlocutors found.

To censor the poetry, Socrates must interpret the poems, and interpret he does as he excises one passage after another—those that describe the pleasures of drinking, as well as those that portray tables filled with enticing foods or warriors enjoying the company of courtesans. Socrates reports that he was especially harsh on Homer’s portrait of Achilles, criticizing the poet

for portraying Achilles’ greed, his disdain for gods and humans (391a-c), his lamentations at the loss of Patroklos “taking black ashes in both hands and pouring them over his head . . . rolling around in dung” (388b). All such passages, Socrates reports, he read as harmful to the souls of the young, encouraging a lack of moderation, fostering instead intemperance and irreverence. Socrates recounts how by excising the offensive passages, he transformed Achilles into a hero of moderation. Socrates reports that he worried that the sections of the poems describing gift-giving showed the heroes and gods as “lovers of money” (390d). Thus, Socrates reports that he would excise the speech of Phoenix to Achilles because it “advis[ed] him [Achilles] to come to the aid of the Achaeans provided he gets gifts, but failing gifts not to desist from wrath” (390e).

Missing in this proposal for censorship is the whole story of the *Iliad*, not so much the tale of the anger of Achilles, but what is entailed in the construction of a political community, how “gifts” may not be the response to “greed,” but evoke the issues of respect on which a community functions and serve as markers to clarify relations between individuals. When he excises the story of Hephaestus’ binding of Ares and Aphrodite, Socrates sees only the sexuality of the two lovers, but does not see in this story the power of the craftsman who with the skillful weaving of his fine metal net can control the passions of others, or even as a story of the artist displaying the beauty of a craft that he as craftsman can practice despite his bodily deformities. It is a story that could have supported Socrates’ subsequent story of the independence of the philosopher from the sickly body (496bc). At this point in his own story, though, Socrates shows himself as reading poetry as concerned only with the passions and the moderation of those passions. Using the poems only with a view to what the young must not hear, he ignores the depth that those stories supply for a fuller understanding of human nature, human communities, human potential. He portrays himself as ignorant of the richness of the creations of the epic poets.

For Socrates to read the poems as he does, Socrates must look only to the surface of such poetry, removing from it any multiplicity of meaning, any ambiguity, any multilayered quality. Each passage that is to be excised has only one dimension, only one meaning. Like the inhabitants of the city created at the very first, the poems are specialized, satisfying only one need. As the farmer cannot be a weaver, neither can the poem tell more than one tale—that of beauty and gluttony, of heroism and arrogance, of love and dependence. Interpretation and the censorship that follows from this interpretation become in the many-layered story Socrates tells processes of flattening the texts under consideration. Achilles’ anguish at Patroklos’ death is interpreted only as the expression of forbidden passions, not as, for example, the exploration

of the meaning of friendship between two warriors, as a study of dependence of one soul on another, as a portrait of the depth of commitment one can experience for another human being, or even as a portrait of the foundations or undermining of community with others. It is not an investigation of the range of human emotions that contribute to our humanity and enable us to be part of the human community. It does not tell in its excessiveness the challenge that all heroes face in isolating themselves from the community in which they live. It is Socrates' flat-footed reading; it tells only of the tears of the warrior, not what lies behind those tears. It is only a negative portrait of the expression of grief rather than offering a portrait of the multifaceted role that grief plays in our lives. Socrates, who in telling his own tale presents, for example, Thrasymachus whose brilliance must vie with his arrogance so we recognize the character in his fullness, does not allow such narratives in Callipolis. He excises his own brilliance as a storyteller who so enralls his auditor that he (or she) is willing to sit through the whole ten books.

With his proposals for censorship Socrates portrays in himself a blindness to interpretive richness; the censorship planned for Callipolis becomes a countermodel to the multiplicity of levels of interpretation to which the Platonic dialogues drive us. On one side we have a complexly structured Platonic dialogue—with its dramatic setting, the varied personalities of its assorted characters from the initially violent Thrasymachus to the enthusiastic Glaucon—that invites a multiplicity and richness of interpretations standing in sharp contrast to the internal Socratic demand for a simplicity of expression that allows for no such richness. Socrates as a participant in the dialogue he is narrating undermines the interpretive model Plato uses in writing the dialogue; he censors the levels of interpretation implicit in the narrative structure and dramatic style of Plato's dialogues.²³

Originating in Glaucon's city of pigs, Callipolis is founded on the principle of simplicity with Nature granting just one skill to each of us. Socrates does not question whether the farmer may also have skills in weaving, or whether the house builder might be a cook as well. This is a city without choice: one man, one job. That simplicity is the ground rule from which the rest of the city is built and applies as well to the reading of poetry such that each poem and each passage from each poem has only one meaning, just as the individual has only one role. If we are to search in the city for justice, Socrates implies, the way must not be muddled by the complexities of choices that would make justice complex, never giving precise answers as to what is due or what is owed for an injury or benefit. Reducing the poems so as to eliminate all multiplicity, Socrates makes them reflect the simplicity of lives without choice, of the individuals with only one skill with which he populates his Callipolis.

While we often think of choice as a product of freedom, it is also the source of tragedy, not knowing which is the right choice—or even if there is a right choice. If we are citizen and parent and the choice is between defending the city and preserving the family, which is the right choice? The *Iliad's* portrayal of Hector on the battlements with his wife and child vividly brings home the tragedy of that choice.²⁴ In Socrates' city there is no choice and there is no tragedy; his warriors are warriors by birth; his philosophers are philosophers by birth; and his artisans are artisans by birth. Through his censored poetry, Socrates shows himself continuing the process he began in Book 2 when he transformed the gods into a simplicity and unity. He applies the same principle to those individuals who are to inhabit Callipolis, molding them into uniform and identical creatures lacking all personality or differences. Socrates, who in the other dialogues and even in this dialogue (compare the interchanges with Thrasymachus and Glaucon) speaks in a different voice to the different characters, transforms the objects of his Callipolis' poetry so that in their identity the poet (and guardian) can speak to them all in only one voice.

Through Socratic censorship the *Iliad* becomes a unidimensional piece of literature with only one reading; the hearers of the poems are to be unaware of possible multiple readings of the work and of any choices to be made: whether to indulge in women and food or to restrain themselves, whether to yield the desire for vengeance as Ajax urges Achilles or affirm justice by punishing those who caused one harm as Achilles tries to do to Hector—or whether to read the poem as the tale of the heroic Achilles or (as Simone Weil does) as a “poem of force.” Everything in Socrates' Callipolis is easy and uniform. Indeed, what Socrates does with the poetry of Homer is debase it, depriving it of all its potential to speak in many voices to many people. I shall consider Socrates' transformation of the *Iliad* in the section below on the “Critique of Homer,” but first I turn to the challenge posed to this simplicity by the narrative form used in this dialogue.

The Simplicity of Imitation

Socrates reports that once he had proposed the excision of the offensive Homeric passages from what mothers and nurses will sing, he adds another dimension to this censorship; he rejects the imitation of any character except the noble human being.²⁵ We can only imitate the perfect human being for whom there would be no choices and no tragedy. We often casually say that Thrasymachus says that justice is the interest of the stronger and the character of Thrasymachus has become part of our vocabulary to describe political cynicism. But of course it is not Thrasymachus who says this; it is Socrates *as if* he were Thrasymachus. It is

Socrates again who gives Thrasymachus' speech in praise of tyranny and injustice. It is Socrates who gives Glaucon's speech on the contractual origins of justice as well as Adeimantus' speech claiming that the poets praise justice only for the advantages it can bring and not for its own sake.

This point is evident from the very first moment of the dialogue when we hear Socrates begin his narrative, but Plato brings this point sharply back to us when, as the author behind the dialogue, he has Socrates in the middle of Book 3 reflect about the differences between speeches that are direct—unmixed, as he calls them—where the poet describes in his own voice all that he wishes to include and those in which the poet or the one who recites the poems imitates the voice of another, taking on the character of another and mixing narration with imitation. To illustrate this point, Socrates says he turned to the beginning of the *Iliad*. The person reciting Homer's poem must imitate the old priest of Apollo weeping at the loss of his daughter. Through this recitation of the father's words, the reciter becomes the grieving father.²⁶ In Callipolis there can be no grieving father, no expression of grief, and with a community of wives and children, there will be no attachments to a particular child. But there also cannot be the grieving father through *mimēsis*. More important than the worry that by imitating the priest we might become what cannot be in Callipolis is that by imitating the father we become more than the one person we are. By reciting the speech of others, we can become a multitude of people and even a multitude of sounds: neighing horses or roaring rivers or booming thunder (396b) or axles and pulleys (397a). Previous readings of these passages have focused on the moral and psychological aspects of this provision where Plato's/Socrates' concern about mimesis "highlights . . . the psychological influence of poetry."²⁷ I want to emphasize that through imitation we become complex. Rather than imitating the priest, Socrates would have the rhapsodes say:

The priest came and prayed that the gods give them the capture of Troy . . . and that they, honoring the god, receive the ransom and release his daughter. . . . Agamemnon became angry, ordering him to leave at once . . . The old man hearing this was frightened and went away in silence, and while going away . . . prayed that the Achaeans pay for his tears with the god's arrows. (393c-394c)

As Socrates drones on in this style, we observe the lost immediacy of a father's suffering. It has been neutralized though the speech of the poet.

Plato the author—not living in Callipolis and not censored by his character Socrates—does not let his dialogues suffer from such loss of passion. Socrates

the narrator in the *Republic* imitates through direct speech all the characters in the *Republic*, performing each of their speeches, those expressed in anger as Thrasymachus' or what I would read as the mock deference of Cephalus and the merely deferential Polemarchus. We hear him, as well, recite before he excises it all the poetry he censors, quoting Homeric descriptions of the tables laden with sumptuous meals and Achilles' explosion of grief when he learns of the loss of Patroklus. Socrates becomes *all* the characters he portrays and, unless he is reciting the *Republic* in a perfect monotone, expresses their emotions as well. In other words, because of the mixed narrative style of this dialogue, Socrates becomes multifaceted, taking on multiple tasks rather than following the principle of simplicity that he reports having presented as the foundation stone of the city of dreams. Telling the story of his evening at Cephalus', performing the multiple roles of this elaborate dialogue, Socrates becomes the countermodel to the regime he proposes. He reports that he told his cofounders:

A man who is able by his wisdom to be all sorts of things and imitate everything, if such a man arrives in our city wishing to display his poems, we would adore him as someone sacred and wondrous and pleasing, but we would say that there is no such man among us in the city and that it is not lawful that there be such a one, and we would send him away into another city. . . . We ourselves would use a more austere and less pleasing poet. (398ab)

Given the narrative style of the dialogue, Socrates has imitated "everything," perhaps not pulleys and thunder, but the elderly Cephalus, the young Polemarchus, even the returned-from-the-dead Er. His speech succeeds precisely because he can imitate all, because he can be multifaceted. The Socrates as written by Plato would exile himself. What are we to make of this disjunction between Socrates the narrator who becomes so multifaceted, playing so many roles in the dialogue, and the style of poetry required for the city that Socrates is founding? I see an internal undercutting of the content of the text by the very style in which it is written to set the principles of Callipolis in opposition to the democratic city in which Socrates and Plato lived. I consider the significance of this tension between style and content after a brief look at the return of Homer at the end of the dialogue.

The Critique of Homer, Continuing the Interpretive Task

When Socrates suddenly revisits the issue of poetry in Book 10, it is imitation that again intrigues him.²⁸ Remarking that they spoke particularly well when

“reflecting on poetry” they did not admit “any part of it that is imitative” (595a), he tells us that he brought the young men to a reexamination of imitation, with the epistemological parts of the dialogue that had introduced the forms (the *eidē*) behind him. He claims he told his audience at first that he was worried about offending Homer and the tragic poets, though the form of imitation that he first attacked was that of the painter whose product is, he explained, three times removed from what is the true form. The issue here is not an individual taking on a multiplicity of shapes as it had been in Book 3 when the narrator enacts the speech of others. Indeed, the issue is just the opposite—flattening out the true form of the object so that it is unable to incorporate all its fullness. Artists of the ancient world working well before the emergence of cubism painted the object from only one perspective; as Socrates makes clear they simply did not/could not include the many-sided nature of the objects they drew. Their distance from the forms entailed their inability to incorporate an object’s multidimensionality.

The true couch-maker, the artisan-like god, makes the form of the couch, but, Socrates explains to the somewhat befuddled Glaucon, “if he should make only two, again would come to light the form of which they in turn would both possess, and that, and not the two, would be the couch that *is*” (597c). The form incorporates within itself all the multiplicity of what it is to be a couch—the one in the doctor’s waiting room or in my living room. Rather than seeing the form of the couch in its grand simplicity we should see it as encompassing the vast complexity of *all* couches. The craftsman who creates the couch on which I sit can only create a limited couch with particular qualities, meant to fit into a particular space of specific proportions and peculiar decorations and purposes. It fails to incorporate in itself all the elements of all possible couches. The problem with the particular couch is that it cannot include that complexity within itself. And the problem with the painter of that couch is that he reduces even more that couch created by the craftsman who can only incorporate part of what the form of couch is. The painter is unable to capture the fullness of even this particular couch. “Does a couch,” Socrates tells us he asked Glaucon,

if you observe it from the side, or from the front, or from anywhere else, differ at all from itself? Or does it not differ at all but only look different . . . Toward which is painting directed . . . toward imitation of the being as it is or toward its looking as it looks? . . . imitation is . . . far from the truth . . . because it lays hold of a certain part of each thing and that part is itself only a phantom. (598a-b)

The partiality of the imitation of the couch itself and then of the picture of the couch offends Socrates. Whereas the warriors needed to cast off large parts of who they were to become part of Callipolis, in Book 10 Socrates condemns the crafts for their inability to create that which is complete and says that those creations, because they are partial, are far from the truth. The warriors created earlier in their simplicity are “far from the truth.”

Curiously, Socrates changes from the imitation of an object like a couch to the imitation of the couch-maker, but the point is the same: the imitation of the couch-maker like the imitation of the couch is false because the painter only portrays an aspect of the couch-maker, not the whole couch-maker or what it is to be a couch-maker.

. . . the painter . . . will paint for us a shoemaker, a carpenter, and the other craftsmen, although he doesn’t understand the arts of any one of them . . . nevertheless, if he is a good painter, by painting a carpenter and displaying him from far off, he would deceive children and foolish human beings into thinking that it is truly a carpenter. (598bc)

The painter, it seems, flattens whatever artisan he is painting, unable to capture the depth of what it is to be an artisan, not knowing anything about the craft the artisan practices, just as Socrates had flattened the poetry he interpreted in Book 3. Considering it from only one angle, he read the passages in Homer as only the portrayal, let’s say, of what one saw of Achilles’ anguish—the rolling around in the mud and the dung—and not the multiple tales of what lies hidden within that anguish. He thus did not capture the many meanings that inform the most powerful the poetic tales. Beyond this failure of the painter and the artisan is the failure to comprehend the good and the bad as well. Hammering home the critique, he condemns the artist who “will imitate, although he doesn’t know in what way each thing is bad or good” (602b).

This critique of the painter who cannot capture the artisanship of the artisan in his paintings is applied next to Homer who, though working in a different medium, can portray the artisan, the doctor, the shipbuilder, but does so superficially without capturing the multitude of information and skills entailed in the performance of his art. He captures only appearance, the simplicity of the external world, not the multidimensionality of the form of the shipbuilder. Unable to portray the truth but only a part, Homer failed to improve others and the cities in which they lived. To bring home his point, Socrates reports that with Glaucon as his witness he challenged Homer to show that he was more than an imitator and creator of phantoms and if he has knowledge of “what sorts of practices make human beings better or worse in

private and public,” he should tell us which cities were “better governed thanks to you . . . what city gives you credit for having proved a good law-giver . . . Will he have any to mention?” Glaucon responds: “I don’t suppose so” (599de). Insofar as he imitates but does not understand the whole form, Homer is no teacher or legislator or general; imitating a part of an art, using “names and phrases to color each of the arts” (601a) but not capturing that art in all its multiplicity, he cannot benefit others.

Though many of the studies of this section of the *Republic* and the quarrel between philosophy and poetry have focused on the conflict between the emotions stirred up by poetry, its “psychological power to ‘main’ or ‘impair’ the soul of even the good,” what Halliwell calls its “psychological-cum ethical influence,”²⁹ in contrast to philosophy’s exhortations to have reason rule the soul, the critique of Homer also addresses issues I have raised about Socrates’ use of the narrative style in the dialogue. Socrates is doing more than just adding ammunition to the earlier critique of poetry; he is suggesting what he can accomplish by narrating the dialogue as he does. By taking on the personas of a multitude of characters he captures more than just one side of the discussion. He gives it the depth that would be missing if he portrayed it as a simple observer, similar to describing in monotone the anguish of the priest trying to recover his captured daughter.

Offering his critique of the imitating Homer who cannot portray the arts of the artisan in their fullness or perform the heroic deeds of his warriors, Socrates is critiquing himself, only able to offer in his narration a partial view of all that happened the evening before. He condenses and edits as he narrates, not giving the speeches of the silent audience. Thus he is removed from the truth of the evening at Cephalus’ house, presenting only a phantom to whomever may be listening.³⁰ In the midst of Book 10’s discussion of imitation, Socrates says he asked: “Do you suppose that if a man were able to make both, the thing to be imitated and the phantom, he would permit himself to be serious about the crafting of the phantoms?” Of course, Socrates here is “crafting” his own “phantom” in telling the story of the *Republic*. As is Plato. Socrates presents a portrait limited by what he himself may have heard. Perhaps Niceratus and Lysias were having side conversations; perhaps others spoke. Nevertheless, like Homer he incorporates more than just one perspective within his narrative. To the degree that the Socrates within the narrative questions the poetry of Homer, he exposes the limits of the Socrates who creates him in the narrative of the *Republic*. The narrator Socrates practices the same art as the poet Homer and is subject to the same critique. The narrative style they both employ lets him move just a bit beyond and give a depth to their creations, though it may still leave them far from the fullness the created Socrates craves.

Rather than seeing this internal Socratic critique of himself as narrator as a fault in the argument, we should recognize it as an intentional exhortation for us to reflect on the limits of the individual perspective which cannot see the fullness of what one observes, the “true” couch existing beyond the apprehension of the painter and couch-maker. This tension exists as well between the narrative style and the content, between the form of the work and the arguments offered within the work. In the final section, I propose what might be gained by reflection on these apparent contradictions.

The Democratic Narrator

By exploring the implications of these internal contradictions I am responding to a Straussian injunction to find tensions within the text that might indicate that the surface meaning may not be the final statement of the author. This reading of the text, however, need not lead to the sort of elitism often attributed to Strauss where there is a myth for the unwise and a “truth” for the wise. Instead, the story that emerges from this disjunction between the narrative form and internal critique undermines the Popperian model of Callipolis as the closed, authoritarian society with a democratic model that values the multiplicity of our lives and recognizes the diversity of human experience as a core part of any political foundation. If I am right, we find in the *Republic* Plato creating a democratic Socrates playing a multitude of parts to present the most undemocratic regime imaginable, where no one performs multiple roles and choice (freedom) is excised from the regime. The contradiction between narrative style and the content leads to reflection on the tensions between the two models of political organization—and the tragedies we face if forced to choose one or the other.

Democracy is a term that evokes its own multitude of connotations, from self-rule to rights to community participation and on and on. I am using the word in the context of Athenian practice and I call Socrates a democratic character in the *Republic* because like the Athenian democrat of the fifth and fourth centuries, he takes on multiple roles. The practices of Athenian democracy depended on the citizen’s capacity to perform a multiplicity of roles, from attending the assembly, to serving as a juror, to being chosen by lot to serve as port magistrate or as tax collector or supervisor of weights and measures or any one of the multitude of other official positions that an Athenian might fill merely by the fact of being a citizen.³¹ The distribution of offices according to lot assured that citizens would not do only those tasks for which they were best suited. They performed all sorts of tasks—just as Socrates does in his narration of his night in the Piraeus. The citizen who may have

been the farmer and executioner one year is also sitting in the assembly forty times a year, playing many parts, just as Socrates plays many parts and becomes many different people through mimesis.

Because of the narrative style of the *Republic*, he is violent as is Thrasymachus, he is hesitant as is Adeimantus, he is eager as is Glaucon. He attacks justice and he defends it; he does the jobs of all the characters in the book, giving their speeches as well as all their “yes’s” and their “no’s.” Athenian democracy demanded that its citizens be multidimensional, sharing in rule with everyone performing multitude tasks. In contrast, Callipolis required the unidimensional man, the philosopher or the warrior, the artisan or the warrior. These unidimensional creatures are like the painted objects where we see only one perspective, not the many parts that belong to a couch or a couch-maker. Book 10’s critique of imitation alerts us to what Socrates did when he created the flattened creatures that were to inhabit Callipolis. In contrast, the democratic man has not been flattened and is rich in his multiplicity.

When we become democratic, when we achieve the fullness not allowed the Callipolitan, we are confronted by conflicting demands that draw out the tragic nature of our lives: Achilles the Homeric hero is son, friend, warrior, Achaean, and human being. The demands of such a multitude of roles force him to make choices between commitments to each of these roles. For the uniform creatures of Callipolis, choice had been eliminated along with tragedy. Socrates the narrator of the dialogue retained the democratic multiplicity of playing many roles and kept himself in a world of tragedy even as he explored within the narrative the creation of a world without it.

Relatively late in the *Republic*, Socrates discusses regimes that appear when Callipolis allows births to take place that should not have. In that context he describes the democratic regime and the democratic man—a regime and a soul characterized by freedom. In the democratic regime we find a multiplicity of forms and roles—indeed a delightful and gentle enjoyment of the many. Socrates calls this regime beautiful and compares it to a many-colored cloak admired by the young and women. This does not mean that there are no problems with the multiplicity Socrates finds in the freedom of the democratic regime and soul. There are many. Mostly, the incapacity to identify limits and make choices means that we do not or cannot distinguish between citizen and slave, human and animal, condemned man and innocent citizen.³² In turn, the democratic soul plays too many parts. He is “at one time drinking and listening to the flute, at another downing water and reducing; now practicing gymnastics; and again idling and neglecting everything; and sometimes spending his time as though he were occupied with philosophy” (561cd).

And yet, the individual who most closely resembles the democratic man is the Socrates who narrates this dialogue—at one moment defending justice, at another attacking it, at one moment defending moderation, at another attacking it. Performing the multitude of tasks and eager in the beginning of the dialogue to return to the city of Athens, the Socrates created by Plato is the embodiment of the democratic citizen. Plato, however, uses this Socrates to give expression to a regime hostile to all the premises of the regime built on the simplicity that he introduces at the founding of Callipolis. Plato’s dialogic form builds on complexity, not simplicity. He composes tales within tales, narratives within narratives. One need only think of Socrates reporting what Glaucon said when Glaucon told the story of Gyges, or Socrates describing his telling of the story told of Leontius enacting the speech of the thumotic man who curses his own eyes (440a).

This should not vitiate the portrait of Callipolis where the philosophers ascending to a knowledge of the Good bring that vision back down to their rule in the city, but the mixed narrative style of the *Republic* gives us a character arguing against *mimesis* who, to make this argument, practices *mimesis*. This self-undermining quality raises questions about the uniform message that Popper picks up from Plato’s works. Plato is not the forerunner of totalitarian views nor is he the advocate of a coterie of philosopher kings who might rule authoritatively. Rather, reading the *Republic* in what I would call a democratic fashion—one that allows the richness of Socrates performing with his one being many aspects of the evening’s conversation and interactions, one that resists the unitary form Popper and so many other readers want to put on it—we find in Plato an author more open than closed, looking to multiplicity and multidimensionality.³³ Socrates appears as the democratic man, a complete human being in the way that Athenian democracy demanded, one who is not planed and flattened like those citizens with whom he populates his Callipolis. As he makes his proposals for Callipolis, he presents himself as the counterexample to where his speech leads. In this fashion, Socrates becomes a far more interesting character, and in the process of reading the dialogues in the way that I have suggested, leads us to practice a democratic politics taking on the characters and experiences and emotions of others. Instead of becoming a champion of the closed society or the spokesperson for an elite band of philosophers who understand what the ignorant masses cannot (as the caricature of Strauss’s readings suggests), Plato becomes an author who pushes his readers to a commitment to democratic principles of ambiguity and diversity that explore our multiple capacities for human fulfillment and the self-rule that comes from the freedom to make choices between the models of human life we experience through the practice of mimesis and democratic politics.

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Notes

1. Anne-Marie Bowery, "Know Thyself: Socrates as Storyteller." *Philosophy in Dialogue: Plato's Many Devices*, ed. Gary Alan Scott (Evanston, IL, Northwestern University Press, 2007), 82-110, uses the terms "reported" and "enacted" to distinguish between the dialogues (p. 82). Harold Tarrant explores how this distinction might indicate how students and the public outside the academy might have had access to the dialogues given questions of what "reading" might entail in the ancient world, *Plato's First Interpreters* (London: Duckworth, 2000).
2. For a far more elaborate typology of the dialogic style of Plato's writings, see Holger Thesleff, *Studies in the Styles of Plato* (Helsinki: Societas Philosophica Fennica, 1967)
3. Bowery makes the same claim at the beginning of her essay: "[Plato's] skillful use of narrative framing techniques has not received significant scholarly attention. This omission is unfortunate" ("Know Thyself," 82). Bowery's focus, however, is the "narrative markers" that identify settings, such as Philus for the *Phaedo*, which connects that dialogue to the Pythagoreans; I see these as defining the dramatic setting, certainly critical for interpreting the dialogues, but different from considering whether the dialogue is "narrated" or "enacted." Jill Frank's essay "Outside Kallipolis: The Position of Poetry in Plato's Republic" is an important counterexample to my general claim and attends to some of the issues I raise, especially in her discussion of mimesis (American Political Science Association Meetings, Chicago, 2007), but see also Ruby Blondell, *The Play of Character in Plato's Dialogues* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002); Dorrit Cohn, "The Poetics of Plato's Republic: A Modern Perspective," *Philosophy and Literature* 24 (2000): 34-48. Bruce Rosenstock, "Rereading the Republic," *Arethusa* 16 (1983): 219-46, offers a wonderful analysis of the relation between Socrates the narrator and the concluding section where Socrates blends into Er's narration of his rebirth, highlighting the double narration at the dialogue's end.
4. Blondell, *The Play of Character*, 20 (italics added).
5. *Ibid.*, 44.
6. Bowery, "Know Thyself," 93. I would suggest that Plato was sufficiently skilled at writing the "enacted" dialogues that including such references to the emotions would have been easy, and that we must look beyond this explanation

to understand the role of the narrative form. Bowery considers what narration introduces to the dramatic framing of the dialogues, especially how it highlights the emotional Socrates giving the lie to Nietzsche's "tyrant of reason," and how narration enables Plato to indicate Socrates' "mind-set," illustrating how he acquires self-knowledge (*Ibid.*, 97 and 103). I am interested in showing that considering how a dialogue is narrated affects our reading of the dialogue. Thus, I am closer to the work of Blondell than Bowery.

The narrative style of the dialogues has surfaced also as a point of interest for scholars interested in dating the dialogues and putting the Platonic corpus into chronological order. See especially Holger Thesleff, *Studies in the Styles of Plato*, his *Studies in Platonic Chronology* (Helsinki: Societas Scientiarum Fennica, 1982), and his article "Platonic Chronology," *Phronesis* 34 (1989): 1-26; Thesleff proposes that the difference between dramatic and narrated (reported) dialogues distinguishes between those intended for publication and those written for a limited number of readers. Harold Tarrant goes so far as to measure the percentage of short phrases for "No" and "Yes" to assess the degree to which they are really "narrative" and how this may assist in ordering the dialogues chronologically, "Chronology and Narrative Apparatus in Plato's Dialogues," *Electronic Antiquity* 1 (1994). See, though, Rosamond Kent Sprague's charming review of Thesleff's 1967 book and her reflections on what is lost (humor and puns) in cataloguing the dialogues according to the frequency of responses from the interlocutors, *Classical Philology* 64, no. 2 (1969): 128-29.

7. Though there have been studies of the democratic Socrates, mostly the *Republic* has not been read as a "democratic work." See, however, Peter Euben, *Corrupting Youth* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997), chap. 2 on the democratic Socrates in the *Apology*, chapter 8 on the democratic Socrates in the *Gorgias*, and chapter 4 on the relation between Socrates' activities and Athenian democratic practices. Sara Monson in *Plato's Democratic Entanglements: Athenian Politics and the Practice of Philosophy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000) offers the most sustained argument connecting Plato (and not only Socrates) with the democratic environment of Athens. Also see David Roochnik, *Beautiful City: The Dialectic Character of Plato's "Republic"* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2003). Greg Recco, *Athens Victorious: Democracy in Plato's "Republic"* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2007), 1, argues that "far from advocating the authoritarian, if beneficent, rule of a naturally superior elite, Plato's *Republic* deliberately demonstrates the superiority of the democratic constitutions," supporting this claim by analyzing Book 8 and the place of freedom in the regimes described. John Wallach, *The Platonic Political Art: A Study of Critical Reason and Democracy* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2001) argues that readings of Plato's

political theory as “essentially antidemocratic” are “faulty” and proceeds to connect the skills involved in democratic deliberation to the justice of the *Republic* (pp. 278ff). He concludes his analysis of democracy in Book 8 writing:

For Plato, then, it seems that the problems of democracy do not reside in its diversity, its ethic of sympathetic toleration and equal respect, or its high regard for freedom . . . Rather, it results from the absence in democracy itself of any natural direction toward virtue or inherent respect for the law. (p. 294)

Gerald M. Mara focusing on deliberation describes his book as attempt to revise the view of Plato as “an enemy of democracy,” *Socrates’ Discursive Democracy: “Logos” and “Ergon” in Platonic Political Philosophy* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997), 7.

8. Rosenstock notices that the only other dialogues narrated by Socrates in this direct way are the *Charmides* and the *Lysis*, “Rereading the *Republic*,” 221.
 9. This clearly takes stamina. Jacob Howland, though, admires more than Socrates’ stamina, remarking on Socrates’ impressive capacity for recollection remarking that the “narrative structure of the *Republic* . . . emphasizes Socrates’ appropriation of prior experience through recollection and calls attention to the steps he takes to cast this material into the unified form of a story” and how “the prodigious act of literal recollection by which Socrates preserves the dialogue . . . anticipates the theme of ‘recollection’ in an extended, philosophical sense,” *The Republic: The Odyssey of Philosophy* (Philadelphia: Paul Dry Books, 2004), 33.
 10. I use Allan Bloom’s translation of the *Republic* throughout: *The Republic of Plato*. (New York: Basic Books, 1968).
 11. This phrase alerts us to Socrates’ control of the narrative; he is editing his story, deciding what parts of the conversation he wishes to report and what parts he remains silent about.
 12. We see such a scene again in the *Protagoras* when Socrates describes the response of his interlocutor Protagoras the Sophist to his questioning: “At this point I thought Protagoras was beginning to bristle, ready for a quarrel and preparing to do battle with his answers. Seeing this I became more cautious and proceeded gently with my questioning” (333e; Guthrie translation, *Plato: Protagoras and Meno*, trans. W. K. C. Guthrie [London: Penguin Books, 1956]). We the readers can wonder whether Socrates is indeed “more gentle,” but he communicates his own reading of his interlocutor. In a dramatically structured dialogue such as the *Gorgias*, the tension between Callicles and Socrates must come from the dialogue itself and the portrait of the gloating Socrates must be gleaned from his comments to Callicles rather than to the reader.
13. Sprague remarks that in the *Charmides*, another narrated dialogue, there appears at 154b8 the phrase *ō hetaire* (O, companion) “indicating that the dialogue is being recounted to a particular listener rather than simply to ‘an unnamed audience’” (“Review of Thesleff,” 128), suggesting that it matters to our understanding of the dialogue who the object of the narration may be. Stanley Rosen is alone so far as I know in wondering to whom the *Republic* is recited. Comparing the *Republic* to Nietzsche’s *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, Rosen speculates that perhaps “we are meant to infer that the *Republic* . . . is a book for everyone and no one,” meaning that Socrates speaks as a prophet to everyone, thereby constituting the universality of its speeches, *Plato’s “Republic”*: A Study (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2005), 12. Bowery comments, “We do not know where he retells the story, nor to whom he speaks” (“Know Thyself,” 86). The reference to “having gone down yesterday” indicates that the narration takes place in Athens.
 14. See how powerfully this works in Jacob Klein’s reading of the *Meno*, *A Commentary on Plato’s Meno* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1965). Bloom’s “Interpretive Essay” is another obvious example, *The Republic of Plato*. One could now readily offer a long list of others who illustrate this approach including the essays that appear in Charles L. Griswold, Jr., ed., *Platonic Writings: Platonic Readings* (New York: Routledge, 1988). More recent examples: Roslyn Weiss, *The Platonic Paradox and Its Enemies* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006) and the chapters on Plato in Seth Benardete, *The Argument of the Action* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000).
 15. Karl Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies: The Spell of Plato* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1962 [1947]), 1:vii.
 16. *Ibid.*
 17. *Ibid.*
 18. I would argue it is not, but this is not the place for that debate. Rather, see Catherine and Michael Zuckert, *The Truth about Leo Strauss: Political Philosophy and American Democracy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006). Also, Steven B. Smith, *Reading Leo Strauss: Politics, Philosophy, Judaism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006).
 19. Leo Strauss, *Persecution and the Art of Writing* (Glencoe, IL: Free Press, 1952).
 20. I use the language of “Socrates reports,” and “Socrates tells us,” throughout this section to remind the reader how Socrates is always present, narrating the dialogue we read. The narrative role is not simply Socrates describing the highly dramatic moments such as Thrasymachus’ blush, but marks the entire work from the opening word to the final “we shall fare well” at the end. I disagree with Bowery who suggests that “the narrative commentary largely disappears after 449a” (“Know Thyself,” 87). The *commentary* giving the dialogue its dramatic qualities may “disappear;” the narration itself does not.

21. Leo Strauss, *The City and Man* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964), 138. The questioning by others, besides Strauss and Bloom in *Republic of Plato*, of the seriousness of Callipolis as a utopian model has a considerable bibliography. Some of the most prominent questioners include: Diskin Clay, "Reading the *Republic*." In *Platonic Writings, Platonic Readings*, ed. Charles Griswold (New York: Routledge, 1988), 19-33; Jacob Howland, *The "Republic": The Odyssey of Philosophy* (Philadelphia: Paul Dry Books, 2004); Greg Recco, *Athens Victorious: Democracy in Plato's "Republic"* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2007).
22. He is making a distinction between *poëtai* (makers) and *oikistai* (builders).
23. Ramona A. Naddoff, from a different perspective on the censorship proposal, sees a similar pattern of undercutting, writing: "If one views Plato as a self-subverting thinker, then the censorship of poetry becomes the locus for his performing dialectics on his own unexamined presuppositions, testing the limits of his philosophical arguments," *Exiling the Poets: The Production of Censorship in Plato's Republic* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 3.
24. Martha Nussbaum, *The Fragility of Goodness: Luck and Ethics in Greek Tragedy and Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 33-38, develops this theme in her discussion of Agamemnon's decision to sacrifice Iphigenia.
25. I build on my discussion of imitation in Arlene Saxonhouse, *Fear of Diversity: The Birth of Political Science in Ancient Greek Thought* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 141-45.
26. Stephen Halliwell notes that "Plato takes for granted normal Greek practices of reading aloud and reciting poetry, practices that effectively make the 'reader' into a kind of performer," *The Aesthetics of Mimesis: Ancient Texts and Modern Problems* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2002), 52. Socrates' argument, however, carries us from simply the performance to *being* the character that is the object of mimesis. The "performance" of a role retains the distance between the performer and the "performee" (to offer a neologism) and does not have the psychological power of what happens when we actually become that which we are imitating. For the purposes of my argument that difference will be important.
27. Halliwell, *The Aesthetics*, 53. See further discussion of this on pp. 74ff.
28. There is a vast literature on this section of the dialogue. For the best recent discussions, see especially Halliwell, *The Aesthetics*, chaps. 3 and 4, and Ramona Naddaff, *Exiling the Poets* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), chap. 3; also, Miles Burnyeat, "Culture and Society in Plato's *Republic*," *The Tanner Lectures on Human Values* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1999),

- 20:215-24, who explores whether there is a difference between the "impersonation" of Book 3 and the mimesis of making a likeness in Book 10. The significance of this difference will appear in my subsequent discussion. I focus on only the aspect of this discussion that relates to the points of multiplicity and unity as I am developing them in this article.
29. Halliwell, *The Aesthetics*, 112.
30. Halliwell reminds us that at *Timaeus* 19bc the *Republic* is referred to as a painting (Ibid., 130).
31. Mogens Hansen suggests that there were "just over 100 magistrates chosen not by lot but by election," *Athenian Democracy in the Age of Demosthenes: Structure, Principles, and Ideology* (Oxford, UK: Blackwell, 1991), 233-34. In the fifth century, mostly the military officers were elected; in the fourth century by the time Plato was writing and with establishment of new financial posts, those officers were also elected.
32. See the discussion of this point in my "Democracy, Equality and Eidê: A Radical View from Book 8 of Plato's *Republic*," *American Political Science Review* 92 (1998): 278-83.
33. Clay uses the language of openness in his wonderful reading of the *Republic* by attending to what he calls the conflict between the "inner" and "outer" dialogue, the internal questioning by the characters within the dialogue which are the "expression of Plato's intent to bring his reader to interrogate the adequacy of the arguments of the inner dialogue" ("Reading the *Republic*," 22). It is the "polyphonic" quality of the dialogue with its multiple characters that leads Clay to emphasize the regular reopening of arguments that thus create an "open dialogue," (pp. 22-23). Looking at different aspects of the dialogic form, we agree fundamentally that that form undermines the prescriptive reading of Socrates' proposals.

Bio

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