

The Place of Book X in Plato's *Republic*

Willie Costello

I. INTRODUCTION

At the end of Book IX of Plato's *Republic*, Socrates seems to have answered the text's central questions, having shown what the just life is and why it is better and happier than the unjust life. Thus it is somewhat unclear why the dialogue should then turn to a discussion of the harmful effects of poetry in Book X. This apparent discontinuity in the dialogue has led some scholars to dismiss Book X as a tacked-on addendum with little relevance to the main focus of the text.¹ I, however, find no reason why we should be forced to accept such interpretations. That Book X is difficult to interpret is certain; that we should thus reject it as gratuitous is hardly reasonable. As Eric Havelock writes, "[a]n author possessing Plato's skill in composition is not likely to blunt the edge of what he is saying by allowing his thoughts to stray away from it at the end."² Thus the challenge for anyone writing on Book X is to articulate just how Plato's thoughts accord with the rest of the text in this book. The goal of this paper is to do just that: to present an interpretation of Book X that incorporates it as a vital part of

Willie Costello graduated this spring from the University of Pittsburgh with a double major in Philosophy and Linguistics. In the fall, he will be entering the University of Toronto's Philosophy PhD program, where he plans to focus primarily on ancient philosophy, and specifically on Plato. His other philosophical interests include Kant, German idealism, Wittgenstein, the philosophy of language, and epistemology, as well as broader methodological issues throughout the history of philosophy.

the complete text, rather than viewing it as an unnecessary addition to a nine-book work.

The typical way scholars go about situating Book X in the context of the rest of the *Republic* is to relate it back to passages from Books II and III, where Socrates first discusses the role and censorship of the poets. The outcomes of such comparisons are diverse. Some view Book X as completing ideas anticipated in Book III; others consider the two books to be saying essentially the same thing; still others see the two arguments as impossible to reconcile with one another. I will not offer my opinion as to which of these assessments is correct, for my solution is to avoid this comparison entirely and rather to relate Book X to the central focus of the *Republic*, the defense of justice.

To be sure, the argument against poetry in Book X does not add to the defense of justice in the strictest sense; it does not tell us more about what justice is (other than that the just life is one free of most poetry) or why the just life is better and happier. I will argue that what it does instead is to comment on the *Republic's* defense of justice itself, showing us why we should believe that defense and how we should react to it. To some, this interpretation may still seem to present Book X as playing an auxiliary role with respect to the rest of the text. This reasoning only holds, however, insofar as one takes Plato to be concerned in the *Republic* solely with presenting his account of the truth about justice and human virtue. I do not support this reading. The arguments in Book X show that Plato's ambitions extend beyond mere explication. He is also concerned about how his account will be received, and Book X is his attempt to ensure that it is both accepted and followed. Thus we cannot neglect its arguments as irrelevant; indeed, we have reason to give them extra attention, as they are about how *we* are to respond to the text. That is what this paper aims to accomplish: to show how an argument about poetry is really an argument about us.

II. THE METAPHYSICAL CHARGE AGAINST POETRY

The first part of the argument against poetry, the metaphysical charge, challenges the popular conception of the poets by reveal-

ing the true nature of popular poetry. To this end, Socrates argues that such works of poetry are in fact imitations, and in particular, that they are imitative in their portrayal of human excellence, or virtue. This point is significant because popular opinion holds that works of poetry present the truth in this regard, whereas Socrates wants to show that their presentations fall far from the truth. What we have yet to see, however, is how these qualities of popular poetry are a direct result of its being imitative. That is, what is it about being an imitation that makes the presentation of human excellence in these works not only so far from the truth but also convincing to the majority of people?

To answer these questions we must get a better grasp of the concept of imitation as Socrates defines it. His own explanation of the word's meaning relies on a three-tiered taxonomy of being: first, a thing as it truly is; second, something which is like the first thing, but is not it; and third, something which gives the appearance of the second thing. For ease of reference, I will call the first kind of thing the reality, the second its likeness (*eikōn*³), and the third an appearance (*phantasma/eidōlon*⁴); imitations fall into this third group of appearances.

This explanation, however, just displaces our problem. We can now say that popular poetry presents merely the appearance of a likeness of genuine human excellence, but this does not show any better the connection between being an imitation, being far from the truth, and being convincing. Comparison with another case of imitation will help elucidate this point at this stage. Socrates himself draws an analogy with painting for just this purpose in Book X, but I want to avoid this comparison, as it fails to exemplify those imitative qualities we are most interested in.⁵ What we need to look at is a form of imitation that is clearly both far from the truth of what it imitates and convincing to its audience, and for this purpose I find good reason to look somewhere new, to a passage not often considered in discussions of Book X: the allegory of the cave.⁶

First, consider Socrates' taxonomy of being as applied to the different things in the allegory. The first kind of being, or reality, corresponds to the world above the cave, where things

themselves exist in nature. The likenesses of this reality are the artifacts carried in front of the fire—"statues of people and other animals, made out of stone, wood, and everything else."⁷ These things are like the things above the cave but are decidedly not the same; they exist as representations of the things that truly are. The appearances of these likenesses are, of course, their shadows, the images that go flittering by in front of the eyes of the prisoners. Thus the shadows in the cave are imitations—in Book X's sense of the word—of the actual things in the world above.⁸

To understand what makes the shadows far from the truth, we must consider how they are produced. We have seen that the shadows are classified as being appearances of statues, but we should not think of them as faithful reproductions of their likenesses; in fact, appearances by their very nature are distorted representations. As Socrates notes, if one walks around a bed and views it from different angles, the bed will appear different each time without ever being different itself—it is always the same bed.⁹ Likewise, a statue will appear different as it is rotated and tilted, while always remaining one and the same statue. And if the statue were held in front of the light of a fire, one could easily produce many different shadows by simply turning and moving the statue around, as the shadow of a cylinder can look like a circle from one angle and a rectangle from another. A shadow is precisely this kind of appearance, only capturing how its statue variously appears and not how it actually is. It presents a two-dimensional silhouette of its statue, devoid of any color or texture; thus a shadow can hardly be said to be like its statue at all. In this way, an appearance is hardly like its likeness, and like all forms of imitation, "touches only a small part of each thing."¹⁰ Imitations capture things only as they appear, not as they are, and this is why imitations are so far from the truth.

The next aspect to look at is what makes the shadows convincing to their audience, and for this purpose we must consider how they are perceived by the prisoners inside the cave. That the prisoners find the shadows convincing is clear: they "believe that the truth is nothing other than the shadows,"¹¹ to

the extent that they cannot even recognize reality for what it truly is. Unless unchained, they never catch a glimpse of the world behind them; they wholeheartedly believe the world of shadows they see before them to be all there is. Their belief is not due, however, to the shadows' fidelity to reality; indeed, it cannot be, as the shadows are in fact far from the truth, as shown above. Rather, their belief is caused by their own ignorance of the world outside the cave and of what reality truly is. For their entire lives, the prisoners have seen nothing other than the shadows; thus *reality* to them is nothing other than the shadows. In their ignorance, they cannot see the shadows as we do. They would never even think of them as *being* shadows, as they do not possess our distinction between shadows and reality. From their point of view, the shadows *are* the reality, and it is of great importance to keep their perspective in mind. In this way, imitations appear to be the truth to those who are ignorant, and this is why imitations are so convincing to their audience—not because they are intrinsically convincing, but because their audience has never encountered the truth.

We are now ready to return to the case of popular poetry and see just how its imitations work. To begin, consider the taxonomy of being as applied to the case of poetry and human excellence. The first kind of thing, or the reality, would be the virtue itself as its Form: Justice, Courage, Temperance, what have you. This virtue's likeness would be a person exhibiting excellent behavior, an instance of the virtue but not the virtue itself. The third kind of thing would be the appearance of such a character in both senses of the word: a distorted portrayal of what excellent behavior is truly like that is nevertheless convincing to its audience.¹² Socrates contends that popular poetry presents just such an appearance.

The first criticism of popular poetry is that it is far from the truth of what it imitates. In other words, popular works of poetry only capture a small part of excellent behavior, just as a shadow only captures the outline of its statue from one angle. Though both forms of imitation resemble their corresponding likenesses in a certain respect, they fail to resemble them in

countless others. Just as a shadow distorts its statue's color, texture, and three-dimensionality, poetic works distort the true nature of excellent behavior (as it is presented in the *Republic*): rational thought and deliberation.¹³ The heroes of popular poetry, rather, are full of inner conflict, being pulled in various directions by their myriad desires. They overreact and become emotional over their tragic misfortunes. They are "excitable and multicolored,"¹⁴ exaggerated and bombastic, exactly the sort of personalities we would call "dramatic" or "theatrical." These sorts of portrayals, fundamental to all the kinds of poetry that concern Socrates, do not at all capture what excellent behavior is truly like.

Yet these sorts of appearances are no less convincing to the members of their audience, who are ignorant of the truth about excellent human behavior. It is excitable and exaggerated heroes that we expect and demand from our poetry. They are the types of characters we find most believable; they are the characters which to us *appear to be* excellent.¹⁵ Socrates comments that:

A rational and quiet character, which always remains pretty well the same, is neither easy to imitate nor easy to understand when imitated, especially not by a crowd consisting of all sorts of people gathered together at a theater festival, for the experience being imitated is alien to them.¹⁶

Socrates is here saying that the genuinely excellent character is out of place in the world of popular poetry. His or her appearance on stage would be odd and disorienting, but most of all unsatisfying. The piece would be looked upon as a poor and "unrealistic" work of art, when in fact it is closer to reality than anything normally presented by the poets. A similar phenomenon occurs inside the cave: if a prisoner were freed and compelled to look at the statues behind him, "he'd believe that the things he saw earlier [the shadows] were truer than the ones he was seeing now."¹⁷ Given the ignorance of the common people,

it is no surprise that they mistake the distorted portrayals of excellent behavior for the truth—they simply do not know any better. They believe in only what they are accustomed to seeing and thus are unreceptive to seeing anything different. Popular opinion only attributes so much wisdom to the poets because of the public's own ignorance of what the truth is actually like.

This is the push behind the metaphysical charge against poetry. In arguing that popular works of poetry are in fact imitations, Socrates asserts the essential triviality of popular poetry, which, in the context of the discussion, is no trivial point. He is arguing against the popular opinion that poets know all about human virtue and that popular works of poetry give us insight into the truth. By revealing the actual triviality of popular poetry, Socrates destroys this very belief. He shows that the things most people consider to be the truth are actually mere appearances that are far removed from what the truth really is. Or, in more familiar terms, the point is that up to now we have only been looking at shadows in the cave, and like the prisoners there, we are convinced of the truth of what we are seeing. The discussion of poetry in Book X is what Jonathan Lear would refer to as an “aha!-experience,” in which we say to ourselves, “So *that's* what the allegory of the cave is really about!”¹⁸ It takes the allegory of the cave and makes it real, showing us the hollowness in the common conception of human excellence.

This point is essential to the argument of the *Republic* and begins to explain the placement of Book X in the text. The defense of justice presented in the first nine books is framed in contrast with the popular opinions of the time. Thus after the true nature of justice has been explained and illustrated—that is, after Book IX—important questions still remain, questions any contemporary of Plato would have been likely to ask: Why should we doubt what we have always taken to be the truth? Why should we abandon what we, along with our fellow citizens, have believed since childhood in favor of the radical opinions of some philosopher? The metaphysical charge, especially when read alongside the allegory of the cave, directly addresses these questions. It shows that appearances can be deceiving, that what

we have always assumed to be the truth can in fact be far from it. By identifying popular works of poetry as imitations of human excellence, the argument shows that the truth of the matter need not look anything like the popular "wisdom" we glean from the poets. Rather, the truth about human excellence can be something that seems foreign and even implausible—something, perhaps, like the defense of justice that fills the pages before Book X. In this way, the metaphysical charge is indispensable to the overall argument of the text, showing why we should believe a philosophical account that runs counter to everything we have hitherto believed—that is, why we should believe the argument of the *Republic*.

III. THE ETHICAL CHARGE AGAINST POETRY

Book X's criticism does not end with the metaphysical charge. In addition, it presents an ethical charge against popular poetry, showing that it, by its very nature, harms the souls of its listeners. In this way, the argument against poetry continues the discussion begun in Books VIII and IX of the various ways in which the soul can be corrupted.¹⁹ Popular poetry is shown in Book X to draw us away from virtuous behavior, instead encouraging us to act in shameful ways. Moreover, the corrupting influence of poetry is not limited to those who are ignorant of what excellent behavior is truly like; as we will see, it is just as capable of harming those who know better.

First, however, we must understand what it is about popular poetry that makes it so ethically harmful to begin with. We know from the metaphysical charge that poetry is imitative in its portrayal of excellent human behavior. To clarify just how imitative poetry works its ethical harm on its audience, Socrates considers the specific example of how it portrays human behavior in matters of misfortune. First he examines how we ourselves react to misfortune and recognizes that in such instances there are most often "two opposite inclinations in a person,"²⁰ one that tells her to control her grief and another that tells her to give in to it. The former is the voice of the rational part of her soul and on the side of "reason and law;"²¹ the latter is the voice of her non-

rational part. The urgings of the rational part point towards “the best way to deal with misfortune,”²² telling her to keep quiet and not get excited or overly emotional, so as to be able to deliberate over the best way to cope with the situation. The non-rational part, on the other hand, exhorts her to lament over her sorrows, until she is “weeping and wailing” like a child.²³

As we saw above, the characters of imitative poetry are excited and exaggerated personalities that weep and wail over their misfortunes—that is, characters that act on the urgings of the non-rational part of the soul. The real danger of popular poetry, however, comes from what happens when we watch these kinds of characters. Socrates explains:

When even the best of us hear Homer or some other tragedian imitating one of the heroes sorrowing and making a long lamenting speech or singing and beating his breast, you know that we enjoy it, give ourselves up to following it, sympathize with the hero, take his sufferings seriously, and praise as a good poet the one who affects us most in this way.²⁴

What we appreciate and enjoy most about works of poetry is their ability to move us emotionally, to bring us into their dramatic world and make us feel their characters’ sorrows. In other words, watching characters weep and wail on stage makes us weep and wail ourselves, provided the poet is a good one. By presenting characters that act on the urgings of their non-rational part, imitative poetry makes *us* act on the urgings of *our* non-rational part. *We* weep, *we* wail, *we* become emotional. Imitative poetry encourages us to disregard the bidding of our rational part and rather to act as our non-rational part wants us to act. Thus the imitative poet “arouses, nourishes, and strengthens this part of the soul and so destroys the rational one.”²⁵ Imitative poetry rewards the lesser part and neglects the better part of us, and in this way it “puts a bad constitution in the soul of each individual.”²⁶ This is why popular poetry is ethically harmful.

It may be thought, however, that the ethical danger of popular poetry can be removed if we know the truth about human excellence. In other words, if one recognizes that the characters in poetry are not acting in the truly best ways, one will have no reason to applaud, admire, or sympathize with them, and thus one will avoid any possible ethical harm. Socrates even seems to suggest something of the sort at the beginning of Book X, when he says that imitative poetry is "likely to distort the thought of anyone who hears it, unless he has the knowledge of what it is really like, as a drug [*pharmakon*] to counteract it."²⁷ However, it is a mistake to assume that this *pharmakon* is simply the account presented in the metaphysical charge, namely that poetry is imitative in its portrayal of human excellence. This is certainly part of the *pharmakon*, but it is not all there is to it. Socrates says later that imitative poetry is "able to corrupt *even decent people*,"²⁸ which I take to mean that poetry is capable of harming even those who know better, those who know the truth about human excellence. This means, of course, that there is another part of poetry's nature that even decent people fail to recognize and which, if not recognized, is capable of doing harm to one's soul. Thus we must consider how these people, who know that poetry does not present the truth, still manage to be corrupted by poetry's influence.

To begin, Socrates notes that the sort of overemotional behavior seen in popular poetry is not at all what we would deem proper in our own lives.²⁹ In our own behavior, the actions we value and praise are nothing like the actions we applaud in poetry. When we ourselves experience misfortune, we know we should control our emotions, not give in to them. In other words, in our own actions we recognize and strive towards genuine human excellence, while in our reactions to poetry we want to see the kinds of actions that are far from what is best and are in fact what is worst. Socrates then raises the obvious question:

Then are we right to praise [imitative poetry]? Is it right to look at someone behaving in a way that

we would consider unworthy and shameful and to enjoy and praise it rather than being disgusted by it?³⁰

His answer to this question is an emphatic “no.”

Socrates is here taking issue with an experience common to us all: enjoying things we know are not respectable. When it is time for dessert, we enjoy most the cake that is supremely decadent, even though we know it is not what is best for the body. The situation is the same in the case of imitative poetry: in our private misfortunes, we pride ourselves on our ability to control the non-rational part of our souls. Yet this is “the very part that receives satisfaction and enjoyment from poets,”³¹ and we admire and enjoy the poetic works that satisfy us most in this way.

From this example, it may seem that the temptation of poetry lies in its strong appeal to our non-rational desires, and without a doubt, this is part of the explanation: our emotional desires are naturally drawn towards the poet’s dramatic portrayals. But this is not the crux of the argument. The point is that when we listen to poetry, our rational part is willing and even thinks it beneficial to indulge the desires of the non-rational part. Thus it is not that we *can’t* resist the allure of poetry – rather, it is that we *don’t*.

Socrates contends that we act in this way out of ignorance. Not having been “adequately educated by either reason or habit,”³² the rational part thinks that “there is no shame involved for it in praising and pitying another man who, in spite of his claim to goodness, grieves excessively.”³³ The rational part makes the mistake of relaxing its guard when watching someone else’s actions, whereas it would not relax itself in the case of its own. This, however, is a fatal mistake, for whether one is responding to one’s own actions or to another’s, one is always responding with one and the same soul – *one’s own*. The soul that we allow to take pleasure in the shameful actions of others is the same soul that will be in control in our own actions. The non-rational part, “if it is nourished and strengthened on the sufferings of others, won’t easily be held in check when we ourselves

suffer.”³⁴ By allowing the non-rational part to enjoy itself when listening to poetry, we are relinquishing the control the rational part has over our soul and our actions, which is an effect that will last even after the performance is finished.

This is why imitative poetry can corrupt even those who know better than to act like the characters in tragedies or epics in their own lives. Even though these people know that the behavior of such characters is shameful, they do not recognize that the enjoyment of such behavior is also shameful; indeed, they deny this fact. They view poetry as a harmless diversion, and a pleasurable one at that; this is what makes poetry so tempting to them. They believe that poetry affords them the opportunity to gratify their non-rational desires without the risk of real harm, when in truth they are doing themselves the greatest harm—corrupting the state of their very souls.

Poetry may bring us into its fictional world of actors, but we as audience members are never pretending. The way our souls react to poetry is as real and as genuine as actual experience. If it is shameful to weep over one's misfortunes in one's own life, it is just as shameful and, moreover, harmful to weep over a character's misfortunes in a work of poetry. This is the fact that even decent people fail to recognize, and this is why imitative poetry can corrupt even them. Anyone who recognizes this final element of the ethical charge will not be willing to indulge in the shameful enjoyment of poetry any more than he would be willing to behave in such shameful ways in his own life. In other words, only now, at the end of the ethical charge, do we arrive at the aforementioned *pharmakon*—the knowledge of what imitative poetry in all its aspects is really like and the knowledge that ultimately prevents such poetry from doing us harm.³⁵

We can now see the full extent of the ethical charge against poetry. First, we are shown that poetry, by drawing us into its dramatic world, strengthens the lesser part in us and thereby does harm to our souls. Second, we are shown why even the best of us fail to avoid this danger by failing to recognize the

very real harm the enjoyment of poetry brings. The conclusion is that no good can come from popular poetry, and thus the virtuous life is one devoid of popular poetry.

This point should not be lost on the reader of the *Republic*, for the ethical charge against poetry is just as important as the metaphysical charge to the overall argument of the text. It shows us that knowing the truth about human excellence alone will not put us in a much better position. In addition, we must actively live out this truth in our every action, and this message is a particularly relevant one at this stage in the dialogue. The first nine books of the *Republic* present the reader with the truth about justice and human virtue; Book X tells the reader that just being aware of this truth is not enough. That is, we should not think ourselves better for just having read the *Republic*. What truly makes us better is what we do after we finish reading, namely, living our lives according to truth and virtue. If we do not make such a change in our actions, the awareness we have of the truth gets us nowhere. Thus the effect of the ethical charge is a galvanizing one. It is Plato's attempt to spur his readers into (virtuous) action and a warning against thinking oneself able to act shamefully without consequence. It speaks to the need and urgency of virtuous behavior in all our actions, thus showing why we should adhere to the *Republic's* account of justice and human virtue.

IV. CONCLUSION

The importance and relevance of Book X can now be seen in all its manifestations. Its arguments reflect back on the *Republic's* central discussion of justice, showing why we should both accept and follow its account of virtue. In this way, Book X, ostensibly an argument about poetry, is in fact an argument about us and how we are to react to the text. Yet it may be suggested that Book X, strictly speaking, is not an argument for *us* but an argument for *them*, the original readers of the *Republic*. Certainly, it cannot be denied that the criticisms in Book X were a result of the historical moment in which Plato was writing. Poetry today is nothing like it was in that time, nor is there any one thing in our

own society with the ubiquity and influence of Ancient Greek poetry. This does not mean, however, that the *Republic* is limited by its historical and cultural context. More broadly speaking, Book X argues against the forces that prevent us from accepting and following the *Republic's* account of justice and human virtue, and these forces are just as much present in our contemporary society. The *Republic's* ideas of what the just life is and why it is best still sound foreign to even our modern ears, and we are certainly a long way from abiding by such principles in our own lives. Book X challenges us to ask ourselves just why that is.

NOTES

¹ Most notably Annas, who describes Book X as “gratuitous and clumsy,” “full of oddities,” “an excrescence,” “[the *Republic*’s] lame and messy ending,” and “added to a work essentially complete already” (Annas, *An Introduction to Plato’s Republic*, 335, 353).

² Havelock, *Preface to Plato*, 3.

³ cf. Plato, *Republic*, 401b.

⁴ cf. *Ibid.*, 598b.

⁵ Socrates, however, would disagree. He argues that painting is not only far from the truth in its imitative portrayal of (visual) reality but also convincing to some: “If [the artist] is a good painter and displays his painting of a carpenter at a distance, he can deceive children and foolish people into thinking that it is truly a carpenter” (Plato, *Republic*, 598c). This claim makes precisely the point I am looking for (that imitations are convincing to those who are ignorant of the truth), but I find its example too implausible and unconvincing to drive the point home.

⁶ As Harte notes, the question that marks the beginning of Book X’s argument (“Could you tell me what imitation in general is?” 595c) suggests “the initiation of a Socratic inquiry into the nature of *mimesis* [imitation]” (Harte, “*Republic* X and the Role of the Audience in Art,” 3). We can then read the metaphysical charge as explicating the essence of imitation, which is common to all its various kinds. Thus I find little cause for concern in considering one instance of imitation in favor of another, especially when the substitute better illustrates my point.

⁷ Plato, *Republic*, 514c.

⁸ Burnyeat also makes the connection between imitation and the cave: “[The metaphysical status of imitations] matches exactly the status of the shadows in the Cave: they derive from the puppets carried along the wall, which are themselves likenesses of the real people, animals, and things outside the cave. The shadows are at third remove (Greeks count inclusively) from the real things outside” (Burnyeat, “Culture and Value in Plato’s *Repub-*

lic," 243). But this is as far as he takes the analogy; I hope to fill in some of the details in what follows.

⁹ Plato, *Republic*, 598a ff.

¹⁰ Ibid., 598b.

¹¹ Ibid., 515c.

¹² Moss makes the keen observation that there are two senses in which 'apparent' can be used in English: "clearly visible or understood; obvious" and "seeming real or true, but not necessarily so." This distinction is also found in Greek: *phainesthai* with the participle yields the former sense ("that a thing manifestly is so and so"), *phainesthai* with the infinitive the latter ("that a thing appears to be so and so"). Moss points out that Plato uses the infinitive construction exclusively in the relevant passages of Book X, suggesting that we should understand 'appearance' in its latter, "ostensible" sense. (Cf. Moss, "What is Imitative Poetry and Why is it Bad?" 426, n. 19. The lexical citations come from the Oxford American Dictionary and Liddell & Scott, respectively.)

¹³ cf. Plato, *Republic*, 604c-d.

¹⁴ Ibid., 605a

¹⁵ Here I follow closely the interpretation presented in Moss, "What is Imitative Poetry and Why is it Bad?" 432-434.

¹⁶ Plato, *Republic*, 604e.

¹⁷ Ibid., 515d.

¹⁸ For more on "aha!-experiences", see Lear, "Allegory and Myth in Plato's *Republic*," 37.

¹⁹ This reading is also endorsed by Nehamas, who describes Book X as "a part of the long discussion of the perversions of the soul and of the city that begins with Book 8" (Nehamas, "Plato on Imitation and Poetry in *Republic* 10," 53).

²⁰ Plato, *Republic*, 604b.

²¹ Ibid., 604a.

²² Ibid., 604d.

²³ Ibid., 604c.

²⁴ Ibid., 605c-d. Note the use of the verb 'sympathize' in this passage. The Greek verb is *sumpaschein*, or literally 'to experience/

suffer along with'. According to the LSJ, this is a relatively rare word in the Greek corpus, and its earliest known usage is found in Plato's *Charmides*. There it is used in the sense of 'to have the same thing happen to one', as is evident from the passage in which it appears: "...the sight of someone yawning opposite causes people to be affected [*sumpaschousin*] in the same way" (169c). The only other instance of *sumpaschein* in Plato is in the passage from Book X quoted above, to which the LSJ (and also our translator) attributes the slightly different sense of 'to have a fellow-feeling, sympathize, feel sympathy'. However, given *sumpaschein*'s morphological roots and clear meaning in the *Charmides*, along with Plato's very possible coinage of the word, 'to sympathize' seems like a mistranslation, likely influenced by the related though not equivalent verb *sumpathein*, 'to sympathize'. Rather, we should read Plato here as saying that when we watch a poetic hero weep and wail over his misfortunes, the same thing happens to us—that is, we also weep and wail over his misfortunes.

²⁵ Plato, *Republic*, 605b.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 605b.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 595b.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 605c, emphasis my own.

²⁹ cf. *Ibid.*, 605d-e.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 605e.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 605a.

³² *Ibid.*, 606a.

³³ *Ibid.*, 606b.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 606b.

³⁵ For evidence that the conclusions of the ethical charge are indeed the *pharmakon* mentioned at the beginning of the chapter, see Socrates' comments at the end of the section: "We'll repeat the argument we have just now put forward like an incantation so as to preserve ourselves from slipping back into that childish passion for poetry which the majority of people have" (608a). Both '*pharmakon*' and 'incantation' have similar curative and therapeutic undertones that suggest these two passages are to be read together.

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