THE ROLE OF THE POET IN PLATO'S IDEAL CITIES OF CALLIPOLIS AND MAGNESIA

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RESUMO *A atitude de Platão com relação aos poetas e à poesia tem sempre sido um ponto de debate, controvérsia e notoriedade, mas a maioria dos estudiosos não consegue ver seu papel central nas cidades ideais da República e das Leis, ou seja, Callipolis e Magnésia. Neste artigo, defendo que em nenhum dos dois diálogos Platão exila os poetas, mas, ao contrário, acredita que eles devem, como todos os cidadãos, exercitar a competência própria à sua profissão, permitindo-lhes o direito de se tornarem participantes com todos os direitos da classe produtora. Principalmente, se prestarmos a atenção devida em certos detalhes, veremos que Platão controla tanto os fatores positivos, como os negativos na poesia, para aproximar mais suas cidades ideais da realização prática. A meu ver, o estatuto do poeta e de sua habilidade, nesse contexto, foram raramente estudados.*

Palavras-chave *Platão; Poesia; Poetas; Mímesis; Mitos; Demiurgo; Callípolis; Magnésia.*

ABSTRACT *Plato's attitude toward the poets and poetry has always been a flashpoint of debate, controversy and notoriety, but most scholars have failed to see their central role in the ideal cities of the Republic and the Laws, that is, Callipolis and Magnesia. In this paper, I argue that in neither dialogue does Plato "exile" the poets, but, instead, believes they must, like all citizens,*

exercise the expertise proper to their profession, allowing them the right to become full-fledged participants in the productive class. Moreover, attention to certain details reveals that Plato harnesses both positive and negative factors in poetry to bring his ideal cities closer to a practical realization. The status of the poet and his craft in this context has rarely to my knowledge been addressed.

In Homer and Hesiod, the bards or singers (*aoidoi*) are classified as *demiourgoi*, that is, as "public" or "professional" craftsmen (*Odyssey* 17.383-85; *Works and Days* 26). Nonetheless, there is no doubt that such bards thought themselves to be divinely inspired. As Hesiod notes, the Muses taught him the art of aoide, that is, the art of singing in verse (*Theogony* 22) in order to reveal and celebrate the truth (*alethea*, 28) both past and future (32).[1] The notion that the wisdom of the poets was due to divine inspiration was a traditional belief in ancient Greece. Even the atomist Democritus was a strong believer in poetic inspiration, and it was, as he notes, precisely this that enabled Homer to build a *kosmos* of varied verse (DK68B17, 18, 21). Democritus was in fact the first to employ the word *enthousiamos* to characterize the poetic phenomenon – a word that Plato subsequently uses on numerous occasions.

It is important to note that over time poetry began to loose its connection with divine inspiration. During the late fifth century, and largely under the influence of the sophists, people began to think of a teachable poetic craft without religious associations. The sophist Gorgias (c.483-375) formulated this position, most notably in his *Encomium of Helen*, in which he uses examples of poetry[2] and magic spells to show that speech or *logos* can have the same power over the soul as drugs on the body. The famous medical analogy will be used also by Plato, who likens myth to a charm or incantation, calling

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1 But to complicate matters, there is the notion, as Hesiod famously notes, that the Muses (and thus poets) can speak both truth and falsehood (*Theogony* 24-28; see also Homer, *Odyssey* 19, 203). Ironically, this is a passage that Plato never quotes. However, when he contends in the *Laws* (719c) that when the poet is seated on the tripod of the Muse, he is no longer master of his wits, he may have this passage in mind. I will return to this proverb below.

2 Gorgias characterizes poetry as "speech with meter" (*Encomium of Helen* 9).

it an effective tool to educate or tame the *hoi polloi* (see Brisson 1998, 75-85). Plato, like Gorgias, is well aware that poetry can shape the souls of those it encounters.[3]

But where Plato sees the element of divine inspiration, Gorgias sees only an art of "conscious" deception. This attitude is, in turn, reflected in Plato's dialogue, the *Gorgias*. In his confrontation with Callicles, Socrates identifies both poetry and rhetoric as "demagoguery," as pandering to the crowd, as making them worse rather than better (*Gorgias* 501d-503b).[4] The link between the poet and the Muse is thus broken in the *Gorgias*, since the "creativity" of the poet is reduced to adapting words to the beliefs or infantile tastes of the auditors.[5]

In Aristophanes' *Frogs*, we also find the *poietes* or "poet" as a practical, purposive "maker," in full control of his material, and standing on the same technical footing as other craftsmen (see Halliwell 1998, 10). The word of choice to reflect this craft is *techne*.[6] In the contest between the two tragedians in the *Frogs*, when Aeschylus asks Euripides the qualities he looks for in a good poet (1000), Euripides replies: "technical skill and he should teach a lesson and make people into better citizens". However, the *Frogs* also recognizes, as does Socrates in the *Gorgias* that the poet, clever with words, may use his techne to deceive and indeed to make people worse. In a like manner, in the anonymous sophistic treatise, *Dissoi Logoi* (composed shortly after the end of the Peloponnesian war), the author states that "the poets do not write their poems with truth in mind, but to pander to the pleasures of men" (3.17: trad Dillon).

Plato was as ambivalent toward the poets as he was toward the myths they created. Sometimes, he is critical, even contemptuous (*Gorgias* 501d-503b); at other times, he gives the poets high praise, and even grants them quasi-philosophical status (*Symposium* 210d-e). The respect that Plato has for the poets, at least in some dialogues, is premised on his conviction that the great poets such as Homer and Hesiod were indeed inspired by the Muses. Plato seems explicit about this: without inspiration, without the madness that is the gift of the Muses, a man will be no more than a poet manque (*Phaedrus* 245a). Still, a major problem Plato wrestles with is that inspiration does not equal

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3 There is a similarity here with Democritus' notion that education can create a "second nature" (DK68B242).
4 The passage is reminiscent of Plato's description of the "theatrocracy" in *Laws* 3, 700d (see below).
5 I will discuss in different contexts below.
6 Aristophanes employs the term *techne* in this sense numerous times (e.g., *Frogs* 93, 762, 766, 770, 780 etc.) and ,in a similar vein, he employs *sophia* and its cognates (e.g., 766, 776, 780, 872 etc.).

knowledge: lacking a *techne*, that is, expert knowledge or a teachable craft, the poets can explain neither the meaning of their poems nor the process by which they were produced. Thus, although the works of "true" poets have an eminently positive didactic value (consider the *Symposium* and the *Phaedrus*), without *techne*, poets in general contribute little of value to the social and political good of a community. But Plato's position on poetic *techne* is far more complex than generally recognized.

In no two works do I find Plato's attitude toward the poets and poetic *techne* more ambivalent than in the *Republic* and the *Laws*, that is, in the ideal cities of Callipolis and Magnesia. In this paper, I will argue, in opposition to many, that in neither dialogue does Plato "exile" the poets, although poetry has a more positive function in the *Laws* than in the *Republic*. If the poets are not to be banished, Plato believes they must exercise the expertise proper to their profession, which would necessarily become a part of the productive class. The status of the poet in this context is rarely to my knowledge addressed.[7] Moreover, attention to certain details will show poetry plays a central role in both political dialogues and that Plato recuperates positive and negative factors in poetry to bring his ideal cities closer to a practical realization. Let me begin with the *Republic*.

The opening of the *Republic* makes it clear that the poets will play a central role. Indeed, all the speakers in Book 1, with the exception of Thrasymachus, cite the poets in support of their respective accounts of justice and thus as a primary source of their respective education. Plato's own opening salvo is best summarized in his reaction to Polemarchus' contention that justice is what the poet Simonides observed: giving to each individual what they are owed (331e).[8] As Plato notes, this notion of justice can be interpreted in many ways and, thus, is nothing more than a riddle. In fact, many poets seem to speak in riddles (*einixatoi* 332b14) and so their texts should not be employed as guidelines for morality (Ford 2002, 213-14). It is clear that Plato is already

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7   There are, of course, many nuances on Plato's attitude toward "imitative" poetry. I agree with Asmis (1992, 350-51), Burnyeat (1997, 255ff.) and Levin (2001,158), for example, that Plato does not banish *all* imitative poetry, but not, for the same reasons.

8   The poets and poetry are in fact first introduced at the opening of the *Republic*, when Socrates asks the aging Cephalus his thoughts on what the poets call "the threshold of old age" (329e). The old and wealthy Cephalus then initiates the question of what justice is, in the context of an interpretation of poetry. In his exchange with Socrates, Cephalus contends that wealth is an asset for it enables him to appease the fear of death and the world below, as it is so vividly portrayed by the ancient poets (330d-e; 365e-366b). With wealth, a man can repay any outstanding debts to men and the gods and so avoid paying penalties in the afterlife for wrongs committed in this life. In sum, Cephalus is already implying that that the poets, Homer and Hesiod, suggest in their texts that the gods will accept sacrifices from good and bad and, in fact, often reward the bad and harm the good (365d-366d). This suggests that the life of injustice is superior to the life of justice.

implying that poets in general are lacking the credibility that comes with *techne*, that is, technical expertise – a sine qua non in his ideal state (see below).

Plato criticizes the poets (including Homer, Hesiod, Musaeus, Orpheus, Archilochus, Pindar, Simonides and Aeschylus) at the beginning of *Republic* 2 (363a-367a) and prior to the introduction of the ideal city for their tacit endorsement of justice only for the reputation, honour and awards it brings. Moreover, while the gods may not sanction injustice, the poets contend that the gods can be bribed (quoting Homer, *Iliad* 9.497-501). Although the poets are not the only ones targeted by Plato (the prose writers are also in his line of fire),[9] he alludes to their craftiness and insincerity (2.364a-366c) and thus provides a prelude to his more famous offensive and subsequent severe condemnation, if not censorship, of the traditional educators of Greece. In the *Gorgias*, poetry was associated with an art of "conscious" deception and the relationship between poetry and deception plays a major role in his condemnation of the poets in the *Republic*, in particular, in Book 10. In sum, if we can speak of a poetic *techne* or craft in the *Republic*, it is without any positive references to poetic inspiration, nor for that matter are there any to the Muses – both of which are positively represented in the *Laws*. It is instead the notion of "specialization" or *techne* that is the driving force for the realization of the ideal state.

In his inquiry into the definition of justice and its effects on the individual soul, Plato proposes to seek the principle behind the logical development of an actual state. Since individuals are not self-sufficient, it is agreed that the state originates and develops according to the principle of the natural division of labour, that is, the notion that each individual should perform a single task for which each has a natural aptitude (369b-370c). The strict adhesion to this principle, which also applies to the tripartition of the state and the soul of the individual, is at the foundation of justice in Plato's ideal state.

The need for poets and their assistants, including rhapsodes, actors and dancers – all of whom are characterized as "imitators" (*mimetai*, 373b) – is first mentioned at *Republic* 2.373b after the "healthy city," the so-called "city of pigs" is abandoned in favour of a "luxurious city," in which people have an insatiable appetite for the supposedly finer things in life.

The introduction of the luxurious city entails a certain number of professions that were absent in the more primitive city.[10] While some of these

9   In *Laws* 10, the prose writers appear more dangerous (see Naddaf 1992, 474-490).
10 The professions in the "city of pigs" would invariably fall under the "productive" class in the future "ideal" city.

new professions (see 2.373b-c) survive in Plato's ideal state (e.g., doctors),[11] others would not make the cut (e.g., craftsmen producing objects for the adornment of women, beauticians, speciality cooks).[12] One could note that any profession that did not initially exist in the "city of pigs" would be superfluous, including those of the philosopher kings and their auxiliaries. But what about the poets? According to Plato's principle of the natural division of labour, it should be assumed that the poets have a technical craft (or techne) for which they have a natural disposition – and the use of the term mimetai to characterize the poets at 373b does not, as we shall see, detract from this. As for the importance of the poets, with the exception of philosopher kings and their auxiliaries, the guardians, no profession receives more attention in the *Republic* than that of the poet.

   The role of the poets is introduced in the context of the education of the guardians. The guardians, for their part, were initially introduced as a necessary profession to conquer the territory of neighbouring states to fulfil the needs of the luxurious state and to protect the state from similar aggression (2.373d-374a).[13] The question soon arises as to what sort of education – and it is first and foremost a moral education that Plato has in mind – would enable individuals with the "natural disposition" for guardianship to become good guardians according to the principle of the natural division of labour based on "specialization" (376d). The answer focuses on "traditional" education or *paideia*, which consists of two things: *mousike* for the soul and gymnastics for the body. *Mousike* is first and foremost poetry, especially the learning and recitation of epic and dramatic poetry. Since Plato is convinced that a child's character is molded from the earliest age, he begins with a discussion of a child's early education, beginning with "stories" (*logoi*). According to Socrates in the dialogue, these are of two kinds, one true, the other false (376e12).

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11 Doctors and medicine figure prominently in *Republic* 3 (see, in particular, 405a-410b). Indeed, with the exception of poetry, Plato spends more time discussing medicine than any other "craft". The accent remains that the soul should rule the body. This explains why Alclepius is understood as treating the body with his soul (408d-410a).

12 The eventual purging is connected with Plato's general theory of the arts with the eradication of certain kinds of poetry (401a-d).

13 Annas (1981, 76) is correct to argue that the "first" city is not as many scholars contend the "true" city, a sort of description of the "Golden Age". But she seems to contend that if Plato moves from the first city to the second, it is associated with the fact that "people will always go on to demand unnecessary gratifications; and the ideally just state is developed from a realistic theory of human nature rather than an impossible ideal" (1981, 77). However, this is not necessarily the case as we see in Plato's more realistic development of the state in *Laws* 3.667bff. Plato contends that there are ideal conditions when there is neither too much wealth nor too much poverty. These "ideal" conditions are found in both instances of the more "primitive" states. What is missing is *sophia* (see *Laws* 679c). Ironically, *sophia* and/or the rule of reason or philosophy develops in a more sophisticated and thus "corrupt" society.

Fictitious *logoi* are called muthoi (377a5) and it is to these that children are first exposed. Now, since a child cannot yet distinguish fact from fiction with respect to *muthoi*, the first business of education is to supervise the production of *muthoi* (*tois muthopoiois*, 377b11-c1), that is, to determine which *muthoi* are suitable and which are not. Socrates adds that most *muthoi* currently related by mothers and nurses are unsuitable. Queried by Adeimantus as to which *muthoi* he is referring, he replies, to those of Homer and Hesiod. They must be rejected and/or reformed because they grossly misrepresent the true nature of the gods and heroes (377e). Indeed, the poets portray the gods as jealous, vengeful, quarrelsome, adulterous etc. (377e-378d), whereas it is imperative that the "first stories" that a child hears be those that will encourage virtue of the highest order (378e).[14] In this discussion, Plato leaves no room for allegoresis. The young are simply not in a position to distinguish deeper than surface meanings.

When queried by Adeimantus as to what these *muthoi* should be, Socrates replies that they are imagining themselves to be founders of a city (*oikistai poleis*) and, as such, are not required to produce stories (*poieteon muthous*), but only to provide the molds or *tupoi* for those who do, that is, the poets (*poietai*, 378e7-379a4). Following this, Socrates provides the molds (*tupoi*) that the poets must follow when producing myths (*muthoi*) relative to the gods (*peri theologias*). The tupoi are those that the founder of the city or philosopher would have arrived at following his contemplation of the intelligible world. Indeed, when Plato tells us that the *tupoi* must represent God as he really is, (379a7-9), he means that the traditional/poetic gods must conform to an "ideal model," that is, an "intelligible form".[15] This may explain why these *tupoi* are later called laws (*nomoi*, 380c5, 7, d1, 383c7), laws from which the poets must not deviate. Plato provides two examples: first, God is absolutely good and therefore can only be the cause of good things; second, God is absolutely perfect and therefore is immutable.[16]

In conjunction, Plato immediately cites a number of examples from the iconic poets Homer and Hesiod and the great tragedians Aeschylus and

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14 It is worth remembering that the reason for which Plato is so preoccupied with the moral and "theological" side of the poets, is because they provide the ordinary Greeks with their moral and "theological" concepts. The "poetic" gods were seen (or could be seen) as the models to follow, and this is precisely the problem he wants to address.

15 I would like to stress this point because many scholars suggest that Plato's theory of forms is absent in the initial criticism of the poets and poetry. For more details, see Naddaf in Brisson 1998, xxix-xxxxiii.

16 As Johansen (2004.65) correctly notes these attributes explain why the god (or the gods) could not inspire traditional *mythologia*. God could never tell false stories and he would never find such falsehoods useful. Such stories are purely human fictions – although some poetic fictions, as in the case of the myth of the metals, can be useful to humans.

Euripides (379d-393c) that would have to be excised because they violate these two laws or principles. Indeed, the passages in question support the view that injustice is superior to justice (*Republic* 2.364b-368b). In such examples, and we learn in large part through examples, the gods, heroes, daemons and the underworld (the essential subjects of *muthoi*, 392a) are characterised in such a way that to believe in these entities from the traditional poetic perspective could only discourage the youth from becoming pious, courageous, self-controlled, just and wise – the essential cardinal virtues on which Callipolis will be founded.[17]

While Plato insists that the poets must be compelled to follow the models prescribed by the founders (e.g. 391d), he still suggests that some dramatic poetry would be acceptable (386b; see also 468d-469a; 466d). Other passages that do not conform to his *tupoi* would have to be deleted. In fact, he indicates, that recitation of a reformed and closely supervised poetry (386b) would appear to benefit people, especially the very young. At this stage in Plato's argument, even though the poets are to be kept under the thumb of the founders, and passages in Homer's epics suppressed, there is nothing to indicate that the poets are to be banished from the city.

Plato's criticism of the educational value of stories (*muthoi*) is not, as we all know, limited to their content but extends to their style or *lexis* as well (394c). In Plato's eyes, poetry containing indirect speech or narrative (*diegesis*) – and thus poetic content strictly speaking – is bad enough, since a child cannot distinguish fact from fiction. But imitation or representation (*mimesis*), that is, direct speech (392d) is even worse. As Cornford (1941, 80) notes, the Greek schoolboy, when reciting Homer "was expected to throw himself into the story and deliver the speeches with the tones and gestures of an actor". This isn't simply a matter of mimicking a character, for the schoolboy went so far as to *represent* or *embody* the character as we see vividly portrayed in Plato's *Ion*.[18] Diegesis is less harmful than *mimesis* because it maintains a distinction, a boundary, between the narrator and the narration (393d-394b). *Mimesis* collapses the distinction, crosses the line: the narrator delivers a speech *as if he were someone else*. Through his expression (*lexis*), he assimilates himself to the character he personifies (*mimeisthai*) in both thoughts and feelings (395cff). Compounding the problem is that traditional poetry and myth telling

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17 For an interesting analysis on how the various examples match up with the cardinal virtues, see Dorter (2006, 74-81).

18 In the *Ion* we see that there is an emotional fusion both between the narrator and the poet and between the listener and the hero (535e).

engage in "multiple representations" (*polla mimeisthai*, 395a2). Since Plato assumes that one can *become* the character(s) one represents, then the effect on the future guardians of taking part in such a multiplicity of representations would be dire, for multiplicity of *mimesis* entails that a single man can embody many characters. Such multiplicity would undermine the state's reliance on the natural division of labour, according to which each citizen should perform one and only one job to do it well. Consequently, the only way to avoid the disastrous outcome – short of banning poetry altogether – would be to require that the "poets" in their craft adopt a plain style of expression and represent only men of good character (398b).[19]

Of course Plato does not eliminate *mimesis* completely: after suggesting that there is no place for the poet and storyteller in his state he continues: "But, for our own good, we ourselves should employ a more austere and less pleasure-giving poet and storyteller, one who would imitate the speech of a decent person and who would tell his stories in accordance with the patterns we laid down when we first undertook the education of our soldiers." (398b: trans Reeves)[20] In sum, the poet and his *techne* still have a useful function.

But Plato does not stop here. Since poetry is always "sung poetry" in ancient Greece, which largely explains its connection with performance, Plato turns to the connection between poetry and music (398c-403c). Instrumental music does not exist independent of words. And since it is the function of the poet to reinforce metrically the mode of discourse or psychological states, the harmony and rhythm connected with the instrumental music will be dictated by the poetic meter.[21] Plato, of course, wants to restrict the number of emotional states and thus the number of musical modes (or harmonies) and rhythms to those that will correspond to the virtues of moderation and courage, that is, the principles of rational order and goodness. As Plato notes at 401c: "we must look for those craftsmen (*tous demiourgous*) who by the happy gift of nature (*tous euphuos*) are capable of following the trail of beauty and grace"

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19 But the question arises: how would the guardians, not to mention the citizens in the productive class, be able to distinguish good character from bad character if they were *only* exposed to the former? While Plato is quite emphatic about how one is to speak about gods, heroes, daimons, and things in Hades, humans are another matter (392a). Humans could and should be portrayed in situations during poetic performances that would enable the future guardians/citizens (at a requisite age!) to endorse communally the good and to ridicule communally the bad (396a and below). Ferrari (1989, 124-125) and Murray (1996, 177) seem to leave no room for this since the guardians must not have direct experience of this type of behaviour.

20 It is not only poets who must be supervised and compelled to make an image of a good character in their poems, but *all* craftsmen must exhibit the same characteristics in their work (401b). (see Naddaf 1998, xxix).

21 As Herington (1985, 103) notes, what is fascinating about Greek poetry is that it "is able to carry and metrically reinforce every mode of discourse".

from which the young men or guardians will benefit. Are we to assume here that the poet will also set to music the verses he will have composed following the founders' *tupoi* or models? There are certainly examples going back to the mid-seventh century (see Herington 1985, 19 citing Heraclitus Ponticus on Terpander of Lesbos). Or would this be restricted to a different "specialization" or techne found with such musical theorists as Damon, who is explicitly mentioned in this context at 400b-c (see also 424c).[22] The accent meanwhile is again on reform, not banishment. In sum, the poets have technical knowledge, but only the philosophers know the "ethical dimensions of the technicalities" to borrow an expression from Ferrari (1989, 115).[23]

We can now see why, at this stage, Plato stops short, indeed far short, of banishing the poets from the ideal city. The poets offer indispensable *techne*. They have expertise about meter, rhythm, and melody, that is, about the mnemotechnical procedures, the sine qua non of poetry (Brisson 1998, 48). If the poets were banned, then the founders of Callipolis, that is, the philosophers, would not only have to provide the *tupoi* that poetry must follow but also to compose the *muthoi* themselves. They would be responsible for the content (*logos*), the form (*lexis*) and the accompanying music corresponding to the *muthoi*. But would this be part of the philosopher-king job description according to the natural division of labour? Is composing poetry and everything it entails, part of the one thing they are expected to do well (contra Naddaff 1992, 7-8 for example)? This question is rarely addressed.

In conjunction, Plato contends that it is sometimes necessary for men to tell falsehoods (*pseude*, see 376e-379b) and then institutionalize them. The myth of the metals, [24] to which the children are to be exposed from the earliest age, serves to convince the inhabitants that Callipolis is autochtonous and, thus, one and indivisible, even though it is in fact made up of three distinct groups – the rulers are introduced at 412a-c, according to the natural division of labour (3.415a-d). Continued reliance on this fiction strongly suggests that the dramatic enactment, the *mimesis*, of such poetry will continue in Callipolis.[25] But is it the job of philosophers to be directly involved in the staging of

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22 At *Laws* 802b, Plato seems to distinguish between poes and musicians.

23 Plato discusses this relation in more detail in *Laws* 2 (653d-654a; 664e-665a; 672c-d; 673c-d and see below).

24 He moves in this direction with the myth of the metals in *Republic* 3 (414c-415c), which is a perfect paradigm of an "origin" myth, which by definition is meant to be performed. In fact, Plato insists that an "oracle" will be added to say that the city will be ruined if there were ever to be a bronze guardian (415c). The myth of the metals thus becomes a "sacred" story.

25 On the continued role and importance of the poet in the *Republic*, see 459e where Plato notes that the "poet" will write songs for the festivals concerning the marriage and procreation of the guardians. In the

such deceptions? Prior to invoking the myth, Plato insists that, to determine who among them is most resistant to deception, the potential future guardians will from childhood be tested with different forms of deception (412e-413e) including magic (*goeteia*), possibly in the form of the most potent magical spell of all: "imitative poetry" (413d; 607c-608a). This could suggest that the poets would be requested by the state officials to create deceptive plays for the children of the guardians to see if they are conforming to the appropriate models. A position he seems less inclined to endorse in *Republic* 10.

When we turn to *Republic* 10, we encounter a much harsher assessment of imitative poetry. By this time we have a better idea of what Plato understands by the role of philosophers in the "ideal" city, and of how the three parts of the soul are distinguished from each other. We can now also contrast the difference between a traditional education and a philosophical education. From an epistemological perspective, the poet is three or four degrees from reality. He does with words what a painter does with colours; a painter does not even paint the image of a particular bed, let alone the form of a bed, but only a particular bed as it appears from different perspectives (596e-598c).[26] Such an imitator has neither knowledge nor right opinion. The poet, like the painter, has no direct knowledge of his subject matter.

Plato argues that all imitative poetry, in particular the tragic poetry of Homer, should be excluded from the city. Homer has no *techne* to teach us. There is nothing in his work that guides us toward political and moral excellence. There is nothing in Homer that will make citizens better (10.600c). At best, Homer can imitate what he thinks will appear beautiful to the multitude (601b-602c). Indeed, contrary to someone who is a user of a thing or a maker of a thing, the imitator of a thing has neither knowledge, nor right opinion, but can only imitate what he thinks will appear seductive to the multitude, that is, those who are ignorant of the things themselves. The poetic craft uses trickery and magic (602d). The poet is first and foremost clever (605a); he makes a citizen worse not better by arousing, nourishing and strengthening the inferior part of the soul (605b). Indeed, imitative poetry pertains to people whose behaviour is dominated by their passions (603b-605c; see also *Republic* 3). Moreover, Plato suggests that such poetry is "intentionally" deceptive (602c). There is

ideal city of the *Laws*, there are to be festivals and thus poetic competitions *every* day of the year (see below).

26 For Plato, as Halliwell notes (1998, 23), *muthoi* and images are both products of mimesis and are thus closely analogous products.

thus no room again for allegoresis; no room for any respectful attitude toward poetic inspiration – indeed, there is no reference to inspiration at all.

Plato's comments in *Republic* 10 echo the *Gorgias*, where poetry is seen as pandering to the crowd, as using deception, trickery, magic and insincerity (602d). It is demagoguery at its best. In both works, Plato appears obsessively fearful of the dramatic power of poetry. Indeed, it is so powerful, he contends, that it can even corrupt "good men" (605c), who can be seduced by its emotional spectacles.[27] By its very nature such poetry creates a bad *politeia* (constitution/government, *kake politeia*, 605b8) in the soul. Consequently, if Homer, the most poetic of the tragedians, did indeed educate Greece (10.606eff), then this would explain why there will be no respite from evils until philosophers govern (5.473c-e).

Although there is no indication in *Republic* 10 that the poets or their interpreters successfully defend "dramatic poetry" as traditionally practised, this does not mean that Plato banishes all poetry and the poets from the state of Callipolis. This extreme position is defended by a number of scholars (for example by Murray 1996, 185; 224; Naddaff 2002, 2, 8; Nehamas, 1982, 267). Quite simply, this would be rash. To banish *all* poetry would be akin to claiming that *all* song, dance and music must be eliminated and these are clearly part of the human condition, as we see in the *Laws*. Indeed, there are several passages in the *Republic* where the poets continue to play an important role independent of the present arguments (459e-460a; 468d-469a; 465d and 540b-c). More important, it is unclear if Plato even intends to banish all imitative poetry from his ideal city again, a point many commentators endorse. In my view, Plato's position in *Republic* 10 is not that different from that found in *Republic* 3. In conjunction, if there is to be poetry in the state then, as Plato noted in *Republic* 3 and reiterates here, it must be a dramatic poetry that represents gods, heroes and good men as they are, that is, as the philosopher rehabilitates them (607c). This is the spirit, in my view, of Plato's contention

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27 The example employed by Plato is when we hear Homer "imitating" one of the heroes (605c). Numerous examples of such behaviour in the Homeric heroes were given in *Republic* 3. 386aff. Plato contends that such behaviour causes even decent people to side with the hero. Indeed, the "good" poet is the one who is seen as affecting us the most (605d); whereas, Plato continues, when we lose one of our own, we pride ourselves in containing our emotions (605d-e). Plato's opposition to this is similar to the position he held in *Republic* 3, where even a good person, if not properly educated, will find pleasure in another person's suffering and eventually begin to imitate it (606a-b). The same argument is made with regard to telling jokes, that is, acting like a buffon (606c; see also *Republic* 3. 389a). The *Laws* moves in a similar direction: we can watch comic performances under certain conditions, but we are not allowed to participate in them. The addictive effect of imitative poetry is reiterate in *Republic* 10 when Plato notes that "we must keep repeating like an incantation (*epoidoi*) the argument against seduction of poetry or, being only human, we shall slip back into that childish passion for poetry that the majority of people have" (608a). In many respects, it is the seductive nature of poetry that Plato will find most useful in both of his ideal cities.

at *Republic* 607a that "we can admit no poetry into our cities save only hymns about the gods and praises of good men" (*humnous theois kai egkomia tois agathois*, 607a4-5).[28]

What does Plato understand by this limited kind of poetry and does it include an "imitative" nature? To what degree if any, is it contrary to what we saw in *Republic* 3? And, once again, would this kind of poetry be composed by a class of individuals with a specialized *techne* that Plato would characterize as "poets"?

Now in the "ideal" city of Callipolis, as we saw, traditional poetry is as severely restricted for epistemological as for moral reasons (although the former appear to reinforce the latter). Plato's primary opposition is based on the notion that the primary entities in myth: gods, heroes, daimons, events in Hades,[29] were seen as the models of human behaviour in traditional poetry. In the passage cited above, Plato appears to limit poetry to "hymns to the gods" and "encomia of good people." Let's look more closely at these. As Ford (2002, 12, 259) correctly notes the Greek word *humnos* – the etymology of which is still a matter of debate – originally meant just "song". Of course, all songs are poetic! Thus we find the expression, "to sing a song" (*humnon aeidein*) in Hesiod's *Works and Days* (662). It was in fact Plato in the Laws who initiated *humnos* as a term to designate a precise genre that is, "songs (or poems) to gods", which were always sung to the accompaniment of a lyre (*Laws700b2*; see also 669c; 700b-701a; 801d-e more on these below.[30] This occurs in one of his many criticisms against the musical decadence of his time. Plato contends that in the old days there were unmixed forms of pure song. One of these was the humnos that consisted solely of "song-prayers to gods" (*euchai pros theous*, 700b2), although at 802a Plato mentions hymns and encomia in honour of certain men.

Plato, as Aristotle, meanwhile seems to suggest that poetry arose naturally (*poietai egignonto phusei men poietikoi, Laws* 700d4; see Ford 2002, 260n29). In his summary of the origins and evolution of Greek poetry in *Poetics* 4 (1448b5-1449a30), Aristotle contends that poetry was due to two causes

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28 Some commentators contend that the "poetry" to which Plato alludes here, is not real poetry. Thus Annas (1981 344): "such productions are not real poetry". See also Havelock (1960, 15). Ferrari (1989, 141), for his part, argues that what many would call "the very greatest poetry" is banished (Ford 2002, 259 also seems to suggest this). For a position similar to mine, but with different arguments, see Levin (2001, 164-167).

29 Humans behaving in an extraordinary way – or represented as such – in extraordinary situations, would also fall into this category. But such humans would then, I assume, be characterized as "heroes".

30 For *humnos* in the *Laws*, see Brisson (2006, 306n.62); for *humnos* in the *Republic*, see Levin (2001 161-162).

both of which are connected with human nature: the natural propensity for imitation (*mimesis*) and the natural delight in the works of imitation. Not only is this similar to Plato's contention in the *Republic* (e.g., 395d, 475d-e) and the *Laws* (e.g., 667c),[31] but both Plato and Aristotle also see harmony, rhythm and music as natural to humans. These, in turn, lead to metrical adaptation, which is a primary condition of poetry and precisely what poets excel in (*Poetics* 1448b20-24; *Laws* 653e-654a; 664e-665a). In fact, both Aristotle and Plato associate hymns and encomia as one of the initial stages of poetic evolution (*Poetics* 4.1448b25-27; Plato *Laws* 810e; 801e; 829c; 700aff.).[32]

The evidence suggests that hymns and encomia fall into the domain of imitative poetry from which we can benefit. In conjunction, there is the famous passage in Plato's *Protagoras* (325e326a) where children are made to learn by rote poems in which they find "many admonishments, many narratives and eulogies and encomia of good men of old (*enkomia palaion anthron agathon*)". The aim, as Burnyeat correctly notes (1997, 309), "is to get the boys to emulate (*mimeisthai*) these heroes of the past".[33] And in the same passage, we are told, that "all human life requires a high degree of rhythm and harmony" as found in poetry, which requires "teachers" who have a special *techne* (326b).

Encomia, as Aristotle notes in the *Rhetoric*, are only bestowed on men who have actually performed deeds worthy of praise. In sum, good birth and education are not enough – although they may make the story more credible (1367b). Hence it is only when a man has already done something impressive that we bestow an *encomium* upon him. Plato uses the term *encomia* and *humnos* in a similar context in the *Laws* (for the term *encomia*, see 801e1, 3, 9; 802a1; 822b5; 829c4; 958e9). I will make reference to these later. But let us first examine what is the finest example of encomiastic poetry in the context of the *Republic*. I am thinking of the famous Atlantis story that identifies Socrates' ideal citizens in the *Republic* with ancient Athenians. It is a perfect example of encomiastic history of a city (*ten polin egkomiasai*, 19d2) such that Socrates requests from his three interlocutors: Critias, Timaeus and Hermocrates (*Timaeus* 20a). Moreover, the story is celebrated during a

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31 For the list of correspondences between Plato and Aristotle, see Halliwell (1986, 332-333).

32 Aristotle notes in *Poetics* 4. 1448b5 that one advantage the man has over the lower animals is that he is not naturally imitative and the most imitative creature, but it is through imitation (*mimesis*) that man first learns. Moreover, he contends that poetry was created out of the initial improvisations connected with imitation, but soon moved in opposite directions: one representing the noble and the other the base (1448b25ff). For a discussion, see Halliwell (1986, 332).

33 As Nagy notes in his comment on this passage of the *Protagoras*: "the most important aspect of *paideia* is to acquire skill in performance and interpretation of poetry" (1989, 74).

festival the importance of which cannot be underestimated, and meant to challenge Homer on his own terrain (see *Timaeus* 21d and Naddaf 1998 in Brisson xxvi-xxxiii; and more recently, Johansen 2004, 31-32).[34]

It is story said to be "absolutely true" (*Timaeus* 20d9; 26e1) that was related to the poet and statesman Solon by an Egyptian priest about the great and marvellous deeds that were performed in pre-historic ancient Athens (19e1-2; 20e-21a), which is modelled on that of Callipolis.[35] Socrates would like to hear the story of the "real" city corresponding to the theoretical description brought to life, and shown as fitting into the "concrete world of war and negotiations" (*Timaeus19b*-c). Because of civil conflict at home, Solon was not able to commit the entire story to verse, causing the political interpretation to take precedence over the poetic, as indeed it should in Plato's eyes. But would Solon not have been more effective had this epic about the "real" Athens been put into verse so it could be performed over and over until the Athenians of Plato's time "could perfectly mime" the good men of old and, hopefully, become as "godlike" as these "original" ancestors? We would then have a chorus of citizens exhibiting courage, self-control, piety and freedom (*Republic* 395c), that is, the characteristics appropriate to the *tupos* of the "good man" in the *Republic*. But there is also a pressing question here. Could such an encomiastic history be accomplished without the poet's *techne*? At *Critias* 108b4-5, Socrates likens Timaeus, Critias and Hermocrates to poets in a theatre and their respective poems are not only understood as "divinely inspired" (the Muses are invoked: 108c4, d2), but celebrated as *humnos* (108c5), in which *mimesis* or imitation is a sine qua non (107b-c). This could give the impression that such encomiastic history could dispense with poetic verse. But this would suggest that prose would be more effective than song and performance in educating citizens to emulate virtuous men.[36] Plato's *Laws*, as we shall see, clearly shows the contrary. Moreover, in the "ideal" city of Callipolis as in ancient Athens the natural division of labour is still in effect; indeed, it is the sine qua non (or one of them) of the realization of the city

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34 Kathryn Morgan (1998, 101-118) is correct to observe that the occasion of the *Timeus/Critias* is a festival and such occasions "gave many professionals the opportunity to display their eulogistic prowess" (106-107). Festivals,in this context, will play a major role in Plato's ideal cities, a fact that most commentators ignore. Indeed, in Magnesia, there are to be festivals dedicated to gods *every* day of the year (*Laws* 828b) with the explicit aim of competing for the gods' attention as to who measures up the best to their representations.

35 I agree with Johansen (2004, 38) that "the story of Atlantis is true in the sense of what ought to be, not what actually is (or was)". For an excellent analysis of the story, see Johansen 2004, chapter 2, "The status of the Atlantis story" (24-47).

36 I agree with Johansen (2004, 35) that the Atlantis story is in line with the type of encomiastic speech that a "knowledgeable" person would deliver to a "knowledgeable" audience.

itself. Therefore, it is neither possible, nor desirable, for all classes to conform to, or impersonate the *tupos* of the "good man". Again, Plato moves in the opposite direction in the *Laws*.

The *Laws* presents a very different picture. In his last and longest work, the lawgiver is both the "poet" (e.g., 2.671c) and the "political" demiourgos par excellence (*Laws* 12.965b7-8);[37] in sum, the same term he uses to characterize Homer in *Republic* 10 (599d3). Moreover poetic performance and, thus, dramatic poetry, are the necessary conditions for educating the future citizens in a quasi "classless" society in which *all* without exception have as part of their "job" description the cultivation of virtue or excellence.

The twenty or so references to Homer and Hesiod in the *Laws* are overwhelmingly positive, in stark contrast to Plato's diatribes and offensive arguments in the *Republic*.[38] Indeed, with the exception of one reference in *Laws* 10 (886c) to the battle of the gods in Hesiod's *Theogony* – the literal interpretation of which the Athenian politely dismisses – the negative comments are exceptional.[39] Many references place passages from Homer or Hesiod in the context of historical narrative or, more importantly, treat them as examples of didacticism at its best (e.g., the reference to Hesiod in the *Works and Days* 287-92 on the price of virtue at *Laws* 4.718d-e; or the reference to Homer in the *Odyssey* 17.322-23 to the price of slavery at *Laws* 6.776e).

Even more surprising, if one considers the diatribes of the *Republic*, is the Athenian's admiring and unequivocal admission that a number of great poems have come down from the ancients. At *Laws* 7.802a the Athenian contends that we should not hesitate to select from them whatever is most appropriate and suitable for the society being established (802a6).[40] Censors (*dokimastai*, 802b1) of at least fifty years of age should be appointed to make the selection (7.802b). While some material, he continues, may be absolutely unsuitable, other less scandalous pieces may be revised and re-arranged using the creative talents of "professional" poets (*tais dunamesin tes poieseos*) – albeit following the direction of the legislator (7.802c). In sum, among the poems of the past, most, but not all, by Homer and Hesiod, there are some dramatic poetic

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37 See also *Laws* 818a; 769d-e; 632c; and Morrow (1953, 17).
38 For Homer, see *Laws* 1.624a; 2.658c; 3.680c-e; 3.681e; 3.682a; 4.706d; 6.777a; 7.803e; 9.858d-e ; 10.904e; 12.941b; 12.944a; 12.944a; for Hesiod, see *Laws* 2.658c; 3.677e; 3.690e; 4.718e; 10.886c; 10.901a; 12.941b). See also 668b5 and 802b3 for *poiemata*.
39 The only real negative reference is at 9.858d-e although 4.706d could also fall into the category. I am considering only the poetic works of Homer and Hesiod here.
40 The Greek reads: *polla estin palaion palaia peri musiken kai kala poiemata....hon oudeis phthonos eklexasthai tei kathistamenai politeiai to prepon kai harmotton* , 802a6-b1; see also 802b3).

texts that can be used as they are, others can be revised, and still others must be discarded.

This position is reiterated at *Laws* 810eff. The Athenian again states that the "traditional" poets have produced a lot of fine work – as well as a lot of rubbish. The Athenian states that, to separate the good from the bad, the poets (*poietai*) must follow models (*paradeigmata*) that emulate the new "laws" being composed (811c-e). These laws are indeed the mandatory paradigm of a "literary composition". The Athenian characterizes the discourse of the *Laws* as both "divinely inspired" (*ouk aneu tinos epipnoias theon*) and as resembling a poem (*poiesei*, 811c; see also 817a-d on the legislator as tragedian).

The Athenian seems to distinguish two kinds of poets in the *Laws* – contemporary poets who practice a teachable craft (e.g 669bff and above) and the inspired traditional poets, Homer and Hesiod (see 669b). Plato refers to professional poets on several occasions (656c; 662b; 802b; 811e; 816e; 935e; 936a). These poets, like the professional teachers and musicians with whom they collaborate, are explicitly stated to be salaried foreign employees of the state of Magnesia (e.g., *Laws* 7.811e; 858d; see also Morrow 1960, 326-327; 330-340). Such poets fulfil the expectation articulated in the *Frogs* by Euripides that poets possess both a teachable poetic craft and high moral standards. They do not include, however, the troupe of foreign "tragedians" who request, and are denied, admission to Magnesia to perform their own dramatic poetry (817a-d).

It would seem that the poetic technicians mentioned above would be made redundant by the famous "third" chorus, the chorus of Dionysus in *Laws* 2.670aff, who epitomize the actions of "good men". The members of this chorus are to be masters with a "higher" knowledge of music. Although a poetic technician needs to know about harmony and rhythm and the art of representation, he may not know "whether the representation is noble or ignoble" (2.670e). Such knowledge requires a higher music, one derived from the "actual Muses" (669c; 812b-c), beyond the reach of salaried functionaries. Nonetheless, there are too many references to these foreign technicians to think them expendable. It should thus be argued that these technicians have the technical skill and knowledge to convey to the young the paradigms of their Dionysian masters.

Plato is well aware, as was Xenophanes before him (DK21B18), that the Muses do not reveal everything to humans all at once; rather, by searching, people must discover and articulate what the Muses intend. Although Plato is clear from the opening of the *Laws* that divine "inspiration" was behind the Dorian law codes (624b), the Athenian's critique of Minos and Lycurgus

shows that their codes are limited, and that inspiration awaits further and better articulation. The older codes are thus precursors to "real" legislation. Plato's legislator is divinely inspired, but he works with a legislative *techne* that people have developed over the course of history. Such a *techne* is not only grounded in divine reason or nous but is also the result of chance and necessity, of trial and error, of social, environmental and technological factors. As the Athenian notes at the beginning of *Laws* 3, the purpose of investigation is to discover the cause of change in human affairs (676c; also Nightingale 1999, 299-325).

This need for progressive articulation also brings out a difference between the "historical" accounts of Homer and the law code Plato imagines to be the foundation of Magnesia. In *Laws* 3.682a the Athenian, in commenting on what Homer says about the foundation of Troy, states that under the inspiration of Muses divinely gifted poets "frequently hit on how things really happened".[41] However, poets are mysteriously inconsistent, sometimes hitting upon how things really happened and sometimes not. This does not a philosopher or legislator make. As the Athenian claims later on, there is an old commonly accepted proverb that states, "when the poet is seated on the tripod of the Muse, he is no longer master of his wits" (719c). Since the poet's art is an art of imitation or representation (719c5) by virtue of his "uncontrolled" thoughts, the poet depicts characters with contrasting personalities, who hold contradictory positions on the points in dispute; he cannot say which character's opinion is the true one (719c). The legislator, on the other hand, must never allow his law to say two different things on the same subject (719c-d). The key to consistency, of course, is "divine reason" on which *nomos* or law is founded.

Nonetheless, what Plato's Magnesian legislator does have in common with the traditional poet is his awareness that legislation must be one vast system of total persuasion – "the climatic fulfilment", as Morrow put it (1960, 242), "of the art of psychagogy".[42] And while there is no mention in the *Laws* of the poets having a deceitful *techne*, as we saw in the *Republic* and the

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41 Note that Plato uses the term *entheastikon* (682a3) which is his only recorded use of the term. Moreover, it is used synonymously with *enhousiastikos*, the primary term and its cognates in the context of poetic inspiration.

42 In the *Phaedrus* (261a, 271c), which was written *after* the *Republic*, Plato coined the word *psychagogia*, the art of leading souls, to characterize rhetoric which, if it is practised correctly, is now an exceptional art. In the *Laws* (909b2 and 909b3), the Athenian uses the verb *psychagogein* the only occurrences of the verb, in a similar sense. Martha Nussbaum (1988, 227) has contended that the *Phaedrus* "may be our first example of philosophical poetry that Plato has in mind". What seems certain is that poetry takes on a new meaning with Plato.

Gorgias, Plato does sees "poetic deceit" as a powerful tool in convincing the citizens of Magnesia to express the same opinion, to conform to the same paradigm. The Athenian notes after referring to the Phoenician myth of the sowing of the dragon teeth: "the myth shows the legislator that the souls of the young can be persuaded of anything; he only has to try" (*Laws* 663e).[43] To which he adds: "The legislator must think up every possible device to ensure that the entire community preserves in its songs, stories and doctrines an absolute and lifelong unanimity." (trans. Saunders 2.664a; see also 816d-e)[44] In the final analysis, this is the aim of the Magnesian lawcode in general.

Plato insists that the laws of Magnesia[45] must be set to music – a music that, like the laws themselves, must never be changed – and not only sung but also danced to in chorus with the accompaniment of the lyre (812a-e). And Plato insists on several occasions in the *Laws* that all *mousike*, including his own, is imitative and representative (e.g., *Laws* 668a6, b10; 669c; 802c-d;7; 803a-b; 854b). In other words, the laws must be poetized and set to music and therefore "performed" in a fashion reminiscent of "dramatic poetry".

This explains why, in refusing entry to the travelling troupe of foreign tragedians, the Athenian has the citizens of Magnesia say that they themselves are the greatest "tragedians," the greatest poets (*poietes*), the greatest "performers," and their laws the greatest "tragedy" (7.817a-d). If our lives must be modelled on the divine, what is a better way to communicate the divine, to imitate the divine, then through God's own divine plan: through singing and dancing the dramatic poetic tragedy of the *Laws*, the ultimate road to earthly virtue and happiness?

In the final analysis, if "dramatic poetry" was seen an addictive drug in the *Republic*, indeed, from the time of its inception, it seems that Plato has now channelled it toward a useful end. There can be no poetry in the ancient Greek tradition without singing and dancing. In fact, the mark of a well-educated man, as Plato contents in the *Laws* (644b) "is one that is able to sing and dance well". Since all music is a matter of "rhythm and harmony" (665 a), in which poets excel, along with "representation and imitation" (668 a-c), the models of which are provided by philosophers and legislators, we can now

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43 This myth, of course, has a number of analogies with another so-called Phoenician myth, the story of the three metals in the *Republic*. In both examples, the philosopher/legislator relies on "honourable" deceit to assure the victory of virtue over vice.

44 Plato makes it clear early in the *Laws* (665c) that *all* the inhabitants of the city will be included in the pursuit of virtue and happiness although not all at the same level.

45 The laws of Magnesia are "written" both to facility their memorization and to assure that their is no room for improvisation (772c, 789a-c; see also Naddaf 2000, 342ff.).

appreciate why the talent and skills of both groups must be amalgamated in order for Plato to realize his dreams.

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