

giving rhapsodies but not commanding troops? Do you think Greece really needs a rhapsode who is crowned with a golden crown? And does not need a general?¹

ION: Socrates, *my* city is governed and commanded by you [by Athens]; we don't need a general. Besides, neither your city nor Sparta would choose me for a general. You think you're good enough for that yourselves.

SOCRATES: Ion, you're superb. Don't you know Apollodorus of Cyzicus?

ION: What does *he* do?

SOCRATES: He's a foreigner who has often been chosen by Athens to be their general. And Phanosthenes of Andros and Heracles of Clazomenae—they're also foreigners; they've demonstrated that they are worth noticing, and Athens appoints them to be generals or other sorts of officials. And do you think that *this* city, that makes such appointments, would not select Ion of Ephesus and honor him, if they thought he was worth noticing? Why? Aren't you people from Ephesus Athenians of long standing?² And isn't Ephesus a city that is second to none?

But *you*, Ion, you're doing me wrong, if what you say is true that what enables you to praise Homer is knowledge or mastery of a profession. You assured me that you knew many lovely things about Homer, you promised to give a demonstration; but you're cheating me, you're a long way from giving a demonstration. You aren't even willing to tell me what it is that you're so wonderfully clever *about*, though I've been begging you for ages. Really, you're just like Proteus,³ you twist up and down and take many different shapes, till finally you've escaped me altogether by turning yourself into a general, [542] so as to avoid proving how wonderfully wise you are about Homer.

If you're really a master of your subject, and if, as I said earlier, you're cheating me of the demonstration you promised about Homer, then you're doing me wrong. But if you're not a master of your subject, if you're possessed by a divine gift from Homer, so that you make many lovely speeches about the poet without knowing anything—as I said about you—then you're not doing me wrong. So choose, how do you want us to think of you—as a *man* who does wrong, or as someone *divine*?

ION: There's a great difference, Socrates. It's much lovelier to be thought divine.

SOCRATES: Then *that* is how we think of you, Ion, the lovelier way: it's as someone divine, and not as master of a profession, that you are a singer of Homer's praises.

ca. 390 B.C.E.

1. The memory of Athens' defeat in the Peloponnesian War (which ended in 404 B.C.E.) was perhaps still fresh in Plato's mind when he wrote this dialogue.

2. For most of the 5th century, Ephesus, an important center of trade founded by Ionian col-

onists on the west coast of Asia Minor, belonged to an alliance led by Athens against the Persians.

3. Son of Poseidon (Greek god of the sea), who had both the power of prophecy and the power to change shape; when he was held fast, he would answer questions (see *Odyssey* 4.385–570).

From Republic¹

From Book II

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'All right, then let's devise a theoretical education for these people,² as if we were making up a story and weren't worried about time.'

'Yes, that's a good idea.'

'How shall we educate them, then? Or is it hard to improve on the educational system which has evolved over a long period of time? This, as you know, consists of exercise for the body and cultural studies for the mind.'³

'Yes.'

'And shall we begin the cultural programme before the physical one?'

'Of course.'

'Cultural studies include literature, don't you think?' I asked.

'I do.'

'Aren't there two kinds of literature, true and false?'

'Yes.'

[377] 'Should we include both kinds in our educational system, and start with the untrue kind?'

'I don't understand what you're getting at,' he said.

'Don't you realize,' I asked, 'that we start by telling children stories which are, by and large, untrue, though they contain elements of truth? And stories precede physical exercise in our education of children.'

'True.'

'Which is why I suggested that cultural studies should be taken up before physical exercise.'

'It was a good suggestion,' he said.

'Now, do you appreciate that the most important stage of any enterprise is the beginning, especially when something young and sensitive is involved? You see, that's when most of its formation takes place, and it absorbs every impression that anyone wants to stamp upon it.'

'You're absolutely right.'

'Shall we, then, casually allow our children to listen to any old stories, made up by just anyone, and to take into their minds views which, on the whole, contradict those we'll want them to have as adults?'

'No, we won't allow that at all.'

1. Translated by Robin Waterfield. The numbers in square brackets are the Stephanus numbers used almost universally in citing Plato's works; they refer to the pages of a 1578 edition published by Henri Estienne.

2. At this point in *Republic*, the philosopher Socrates (469–399 B.C.E., Plato's spokesperson) and Adeimantus are discussing what education the future rulers (or 'guardians') of the perfect state should have. Socrates (speaking here) leads the discussion and Adeimantus follows (Socrates' other interlocutor in our selections from *Republic* is Adeimantus's brother Glaucon).

3. Nowadays we think of education, especially school education, in terms of information and

skills above all. But it is important to realize that the kind of education Plato is offering here, which is primarily education of character (though reading, writing, and elementary arithmetic would be covered by the *grammatistês*, the teacher responsible for literature, as it was in Athens), is *all* the education a contemporary Athenian child could expect: he would be taught by a *grammatistês*, a *kitharistês* (music and lyric poetry), and a *paidotribês* (physical exercise). Higher (i.e. intellectual) education of any kind was a novelty, introduced by the sophists (translator's note). Sophists: itinerant teachers of the 5th century B.C.E.; they were Greece's first professional teachers (see GORCIAS).

4. I.e. fiction or non-fiction (translator's note).

'So our first job, apparently, is to oversee the work of the story-writers, and to accept any good story they write, but reject the others. We'll let nurses and mothers tell their children the acceptable ones, and we'll have them devote themselves far more to using these stories to form their children's minds than they do to using their hands to form their bodies. However, we'll have to disallow most of the stories they currently tell.'

'Which stories?' he asked.

'If we examine the grander kind of story,' I said, 'that will give us insights into the more lightweight kind as well, because the same principle must be involved and both kinds are bound to have the same effect, don't you think?' 'That sounds fine to me,' he replied, 'but I don't even understand which stories you're describing as grander.'

'The ones which Hesiod, Homer,⁵ and their fellow poets tell us. In the past, it's always been the poets who've composed untrue stories to tell people, and it's no different nowadays.'

'Which stories?' he asked. 'And what's their defect, in your view?'

'There is no defect which one ought to condemn more quickly and more thoroughly,' I replied, 'especially if the lies have no redeeming feature.'

'Yes, but what is this defect?'

'Using the written word to give a distorted image of the nature of the gods and heroes, just as a painter might produce a portrait which completely fails to capture the likeness of the original.'

'Yes,' he said, 'it's quite right to find fault with that sort of thing. But how do they do that? What kinds of things do they say?'

'First and most important, since the subject is so important,' I said, 'there is no redeeming feature to the lies which Hesiod repeats, about Uranus' deeds and Cronus' revenge on Uranus. [378] Then there are Cronus' deeds and what his son did to him.⁶ Now, I think that even if these stories are true, they oughtn't to be told so casually to young people and people who lack discrimination; it's better to keep silent, and if one absolutely has to speak, to make them esoteric secrets told to as few people as possible, who are to have sacrificed no mere piglet,⁷ but something so large and rare that the smallest conceivable number of people get to hear them.'

'Yes,' he said, 'these stories are definitely dangerous.'

'And we must censor them in our community, Adeimantus,' I said. 'No young person is to hear stories which suggest that were he to commit the vilest of crimes, and were he to do his utmost to punish his father's crimes, he wouldn't be doing anything out of the ordinary, but would simply be behaving like the first and the greatest gods.'

'No, I absolutely agree,' he said. 'I share your view that these stories are unsuitable and shouldn't be repeated.'

5. Greek epic poet (ca. 8th c. B.C.E.) to whom the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* are attributed. Hesiod (active ca. 700 B.C.E.). Greek epic didactic poet.

6. Hesiod, *Theogony* 154-210, 453-506. Uranus (Heaven) hated his children and kept them packed in their mother Earth's womb, to her agony. One of the children, Cronus, was persuaded by Earth to castrate his father when he came to have sex with Earth. Cronus then became lord of creation. Cronus wanted to remain king, so he swallowed all of his children in case one of them might take over

'And that's not all,' I said. 'The stories which have gods fighting and scheming and battling against one another are utterly unsuitable too, because they're just as untrue. If the prospective guardians of our community are to loathe the casual quarrels with one another, we must take good care that battles between gods and giants⁸ and all the other various tales of gods and heroes coming to blows with their relatives and friends don't occur in the stories they hear and the pictures they see. No, if we're somehow to convince them that fellow citizens never fall out with one another, that this is wrong, then that is the kind of story they must hear, from childhood onwards, from the community's elders of both sexes; and the poets they'll hear when they're older must be forced to tell equivalent stories in their poetry. But we'd better not admit into our community the story of Hera being tied up by her son, or the episode when Hephaestus⁹ is hurled away by his father for trying to save his mother from a beating, or any of the battles between the gods which Homer has in his poetry, whether or not their intention is allegorical. The point is that a young person can't tell when something is allegorical and when it isn't, and any idea admitted by a person of that age tends to become almost ineradicable and permanent. All things considered, then, that is why a very great deal of importance should be placed upon ensuring that the first stories they hear are best adapted for their moral improvement.'

'Yes, that makes sense,' he said. 'But suppose we were once again to be asked, in this context as well, what stories we meant, how would we respond?' 'Adeimantus,' I said, 'you and I are not making up stories at the moment; we're founding a community. [379] Founders ought to know the broad outlines within which their poets are to compose stories, so that they can exclude any compositions which do not conform to those outlines; but they shouldn't themselves make stories up.'

'You're right,' he said. 'But that's precisely the point: what are these guidelines for talking about the gods?'

'They'd be something like this,' I said. 'Whatever the type of poetry—epic, lyric, or tragic—God must of course always be portrayed as he really is.'

'Yes, he must.'

'Well, isn't God good, in fact, and shouldn't he be described as such?'

'Of course.'

'And nothing good is harmful, is it?'

'I don't think so.'

'Now, can anything harmless cause damage?'

'No, of course not.'

'Can anything incapable of causing damage do anything bad?'

'Again, no.'

'And something which never does bad couldn't be responsible for bad, could it?'

'Of course not.'

8. For example, the war between Zeus and the Titans, who were his father's siblings, and the later revolt by the giants, defeated by all the gods and Heracles. The Gigantomachia was a popular subject for sculpture.

9. Greek god of fire and metalworking. According to one legend, he was lamed when Zeus cast him out of heaven for defending his mother, Hera, (translator's note).

queen of the gods (see *Iliad* 1.591-97). According to another myth, Hephaestus fashioned a throne for Hera with hidden chains, to punish her for rejecting him.

1. The Greek philosophers tend to talk equally of "God" and the "god"; there is a single Divine of which the gods are various manifestations (translator's note).

'Well now, is goodness beneficial?'

'Yes.'

'And it's responsible for doing good, then?'

'Yes.'

'So goodness is not responsible for everything: it's responsible for things that are in a good state, but bad things cannot be attributed to it.'

'Exactly,' he said.

'The same goes for God too, then,' I said. 'Since he is good, he cannot be responsible for everything, as is commonly said. He is responsible only for a small part of human life, and many things cannot be attributed to him—I mean, there's far more bad than good in the world. He and he alone must be held responsible for the good things, but responsibility for bad things must be looked for elsewhere and not attributed to God.'

'I think you're absolutely right,' he said.

'So,' I said, 'we shouldn't connive at Homer or any other poet making the stupid mistake of saying about the gods, "Two jars sit on Zeus' threshold: one is full of good destinies, but the other is full of wretched destinies", and that if Zeus mixes the two up together and doles them out to someone, that person "sometimes meets with bad, sometimes with good", whereas if he doesn't mix them up, but allots the pernicious ones to someone in an undiluted form, that person "is driven over the glorious earth by the evil of poverty".² Nor will we connive at them claiming that "Zeus is the dispenser of both good and evil".

'Moreover, we'll disapprove of the attribution of Pandarus' perjury and truce-breaking to the agency of Athena and Zeus,³ and of the gods' quarrel and its resolution to Themis and Zeus;⁴ [380] and we'll not allow the younger generation to hear the idea which Aeschylus⁵ expresses as "When God wants to visit utter ruin on a household, he implants the cause in men." No, if plays are composed (such as the one these lines are from) about Niobe's afflictions, or about the trials and tribulations of the descendants of Pelops,⁶ or about the Trojan War, the playwrights must either be prohibited from saying that God was responsible for these events, or if they do attribute them to God, they have to come up with an explanation which approximates to the one we're looking for at the moment, and say that what God did was right and good, in the sense that the people in question were being punished and therefore benefited; but poets should be prohibited from saying that these people were in a *bad* way as a result of being punished and that this was God's doing. The claim that the sinners were badly off because they were in need of punishment, and that in punishing them God was benefiting them, is permissible; but the claim that God, who is good, is responsible for any instance of badness is to be resisted as forcefully as possible by anyone who wants a well-regulated community, until it is never spoken and never heard

2. *Iliad* 24.527–32 [translator's note].

3. *Iliad* 4.20–72 [translator's note]. Pandarus: Trojan archer favored by Apollo. Athena: Greek goddess of wisdom and war and the patron god of Athens; in the passage cited, she takes on the form of a Trojan and persuades Pandarus to break the truce (as Zeus has bid her to do).

4. Perhaps *Iliad* 20.1–74 or 15.12–217 [translator's note]. Themis: Greek goddess of justice, wisdom, and good counsel.

5. Greek tragedian (525–456 B.C.E.); from his *Niobe* (a lost play). Because Niobe, wife of a legendary king of Thebes, boasted that she had more children than the goddess Leto, Leto's children, Apollo and Artemis, killed her six sons and six daughters (see *Iliad* 24.602–17).

6. I.e., the ill-starred Atreus, Agamemnon, Orestes, and Electra: see especially Aeschylus's *Oresteian trilogy* [translator's note].

by anyone, of whatever age, whether the tale is told in verse or in prose. And the reasons are that the voicing of these views is sacrilege, they do us no good, and they are inconsistent with one another.'

'I approve of this law,' he said. 'I'll be right behind you when you cast your vote for it.'

'So now we have the first of the laws and guidelines which pertain to the gods,' I said. 'Any spoken words or composed works will have to conform to the principle that God is not responsible for everything, but only for good.'

'Well, I'm certainly happy with it,' he said.

'All right, then. What about a second principle, as follows? Do you think that God is a sorcerer and can by exercising his will vary his appearance from time to time, sometimes by actually changing and transforming his appearance into a large number of forms, and at other times by deluding us into thinking that's what he's done? Or do you think he's uniform and extremely unlikely to abandon his own appearance?'

'I'm not in a position to say just at the moment,' he replied.

'Look at it this way. Isn't it inevitable that if anything sheds its form, the change is due either to itself or to something else?'

'Yes.'

'Now, really good things are extremely unlikely to be altered or moved by an external agent, aren't they? For instance, a human body is altered by food, drink, and exercise, and plants are altered by the heat of the sun and by wind and phenomena like that; but the more healthy and strong a thing is, the less likely [381] it is to be altered.'

'Of course.'

'And the more courageous and intelligent a mind is, the less likely it is that an external agent would disturb it and alter it?'

'Yes.'

'Moreover, the same principle applies universally even to manufactured items, such as utensils, houses, and clothes: things which are well made and are in good condition are less likely to be altered by time and other phenomena.'

'True.'

'So anything which is in a good state—whether that is due to nature or human skill or both—can hardly be changed at all by an external agent.'

'That sounds right.'

'But God and the divine realm are of course in all respects as perfect as anything can be.'

'Of course.'

'From this point of view, then, God is extremely unlikely to have at his disposal a large number of forms.'

'Yes, extremely unlikely indeed.'

'Would he, however, change and alter himself internally, by his own resources?'

'If he changes in the first place,' he said, 'then obviously this must be how.'

'Well, does he enhance and improve himself, or does he worsen and debase himself?'

'If he changes,' he said, 'then it must be for the worse, since it's unthinkable that God's goodness and excellence are anything less than perfect.'

'You're absolutely right,' I said. 'And, Adeimantus, in this context, do you

think that anyone—human or divine—deliberately makes himself deteriorate in any respect?

'That's impossible,' he said.

'It is equally impossible, then,' I said, 'for God to want to change himself. Since, as we have found, the divine nature is as perfect and as good as anything could be, then any god retains his own form in a uniform, direct fashion for ever.'

'I think that's absolutely inevitable,' he said.

'It follows, Adeimantus,' I said, 'that none of our poets is to say, "The gods travel around human habitations disguised as all sorts of visitors from other lands." Nor are they to tell lies about Proteus and Thetis,⁸ or present Hera in a tragedy or any other kind of poem in an altered form, as a mendicant holy woman begging alms "for the life-giving children of the Argive river Inachus,"⁹ or repeat the mass of other similar lies that have been told. Furthermore, we should neutralize the poets' influence on mothers, which makes them scare their children with terrible stories about how some gods tend to prowl around during the hours of darkness in a wide variety of unfamiliar human guises, so that we stop the mothers blaspheming against the gods, and at the same time stop them making their children too timid.'

'Yes, we should,' he said.

'But even if it isn't in the gods' nature actually to change,' I said, 'do they magically delude us into seeing them appear in all kinds of guises?'

'It's not inconceivable,' he said.

[382] 'Well, would God willingly mask the truth behind appearance and deceive us by his words or actions?' I asked.

'I don't know,' he answered.

'Don't you know that a true falsehood (if you'll allow me the phrase) is loathed by everyone, divine or human?' I asked.

'What do you mean?' he asked.

'I mean,' I said, 'that no one chooses and wants to be deceived in the most important part of himself and about the most important things. The presence of falsehood there is his worst fear.'

'I still don't understand,' he said.

'That's because you think I'm trying to make a high-powered point,' I said. 'But all I'm saying is that no one is at all happy at being lied to and deceived in his mind about the facts; no one likes being ignorant, and the existence and presence of falsehood there are extremely unwelcome to everyone; they particularly hate it there.'

'They certainly do,' he said.

'Well, I might have been perfectly correct when I described this state a moment ago as true falsehood—the state of misapprehension caused by falsehood in the mind. I mean, a spoken lie is a kind of copy and subsequent reflection of the mental condition, and no pure lie, don't you think?'

'Yes.'

'Now, a genuine lie is hated by men as well as gods.'

'I think so.'

'What about a spoken lie? Aren't there occasions and situations when telling lies is helpful and doesn't therefore warrant hatred? What about when we're dealing with enemies, or with people we count as friends, but who are trying to do something bad because they've gone mad or have somehow taken leave of their senses? Isn't telling lies helpful under these circumstances as a preventative medicine? Moreover, consider those stories we were discussing not long ago: we cannot know the truth about events in the past, so we make something up which approximates as closely as possible to the truth, and that helps us, doesn't it?'

'Yes,' he said, 'you're quite right.'

'Which of these reasons, then, makes telling lies helpful to God? Would he make up something which resembles the truth because he doesn't know the past?'

'That's a ridiculous suggestion,' he said.

'So there's nothing of the lying poet in God.'

'I don't think so.'

'Would he lie out of fear for his enemies?'

'Hardly.'

'Because his friends have taken leave of their senses or gone mad?'

'Anyone witless or insane is no friend of God,' he said.

'So God has no reason to lie.'

'No.'

'So it is not in the nature of deities or gods to deceive.'

'Absolutely not,' he said.

'Whether acting or speaking, then, God is entirely uniform and truthful. He doesn't actually change himself, and he doesn't delude others either, during their sleeping or their waking hours, in how he appears or in what he says or in the signs he sends.'

[383] 'Listening to you speak,' he said, 'I find myself agreeing with you.'

'So do you agree,' I said, 'that this is the second principle to which religious discussions and literature must conform—that the gods are not shape-shifting wizards and do not mislead us by lying in what they say or do?'

'I agree.'

'Although there is much to commend in Homer, then, we won't approve of the passage when Zeus sends the dream to Agamemnon.¹ Likewise, we won't approve of the bit of Aeschylus² where Thetis says that at her wedding Apollo "celebrated in song how happy my children would make me—how they wouldn't know sickness and would live for many long years—and went on and on about how lucky I was and how the gods smiled on me, until he made my heart glad. And since Phoebus³ is a god and abounds in prophetic skill, I expected his words to be true. But for all his singing, for all his sharing of our feast, for all these claims of his, it is he who has now killed my son." We'll come down hard on anyone who says anything like this about the gods; we'll refuse him a chorus and ban teachers from using his works to educate

1. Zeus sends a lying dream to Agamemnon that the capture of Troy is imminent in *Iliad* 2. Notice that Plato is not denying the existence of omens and portents, only that they can be false or that false ones can be sent by the gods; it is we who misinterpret the gods' messages [translator's note].

Agamemnon: king of Mycenae and commander of the Greek expedition against Troy.
2. From a lost play [translator's note].
3. Apollo, god of prophecy as well as healing and music.

7. *Odyssey* 17.485–86 [translator's note].
8. A sea nymph who was fated to bear a son mightier than his father; she married the hero Peleus and bore Achilles. Proteus: prophetic son of Poseidon, Greek god of the sea, who had the power to change shape.
9. Both a river and a river god. Argive: of Argos, a city-state on the Peloponnese. The "children" are presumably the river's tributaries with their "life-giving" water. The quotation is from *The Xanthiai*, a lost play by Aeschylus.

our children. Otherwise, our guardians won't grow up to be religious people, or to be as godlike themselves as is humanly possible.'

'I'm in complete agreement with these principles,' he said, 'and would want them enshrined as laws.'

From Book III

[386] 'All right, then,' I said. 'If people are going to revere the gods, respect their parents, and not belittle friendship with one another, then apparently those are the kinds of stories they should and shouldn't hear about the gods, from childhood onwards.'

'I'm sure we're right about this,' he said.

'What about if they are to be brave? Won't they also need stories which are designed to make them fear death as little as possible? I mean, don't you think that courage and fearing death are mutually exclusive?'

'Yes, I certainly do,' he answered.

'What about the idea that Hades⁴ doesn't just exist, but is terrifying? Do you think this goes with facing death fearlessly and with preferring death in battle to defeat and slavery?'

'Of course not.'

'So here's another aspect of story-telling for us to oversee, apparently. We must ask those who take on the job of telling stories not to denigrate Hades in the simple fashion they have been, but to speak well of it, because otherwise they'll not only be lying, but also not speaking in a way that is conducive to courage in battle.'

'Yes, we must,' he said.

'Then we'll start with the following lines,' I said, 'and delete everything which resembles them: "I'd rather be a slave labouring for someone else—someone without property, who can hardly make a living—than rule over all the spirits of the dead"; and "The vile, dank halls, which even the gods hate, might appear to men and gods"; and "Amazing! The soul, the likeness of a person, really does exist in Hades' halls, but it is completely witless"; and "He alone had consciousness, while the rest were darting shadows"; and "His soul flew from his body and went to Hades bewailing its fate, forfeiting courage and the glory of young manhood"; [387] and "Like a wisp of smoke, his soul went down to the underworld with a shrill cry"; and "As when bats flit about squeaking in the depths of an awful cave, when one of them loses its perch on the crowded rock, and they cling to one another, so the flock of souls went with shrill cries."⁵ We'll implore Homer and the rest of the poets not to get cross if we strike these and all similar lines from their works. We'll explain that it's not because the lines are not good poetry and don't give pleasure to most people; on the contrary, the better poetry they are, the more they are to be kept from the ears of children and men who are to be autonomous and to be more afraid of losing this freedom than of death.'

'Absolutely.'

'Now, we'd better get rid of all the frightening and terrifying names which crop up here. I mean names like Cocytus and Styx,⁶ ghost and wraith, and

so on—all the names which are designed to make everyone who hears them shudder. In another context, they may have a useful purpose to serve; but our worry is that this shivering might make our guardians too feverish and enervated.'

'It's a legitimate worry,' he remarked.

'Should we ban them, then?'

'Yes.'

'It's names which have the opposite effect that should be used in both prose and poetry, isn't it?'

'Clearly.'

'Shall we also remove the passages where eminent men weep and wail in mourning, then?'

'We have to,' he said. 'It follows from what we've already done.'

'Let's see whether or not we're right to remove them,' I said. 'We can agree that one good man will not regard death as a terrible thing for another good man—a friend of his—to suffer.'

'Yes, we can.'

'So a good man won't mourn as if the other person had suffered something terrible.'

'No.'

'Moreover, we can also agree that a good man is preeminently capable of providing himself with a good life entirely from his own resources, and is absolutely the last person to need anyone or anything else.'

'True.'

'So he'd be the last person to be overwhelmed by the loss of a son or a brother or some money and so on and so forth.'

'Yes, definitely.'

'He'll also be the last person to mourn, then, when some such disaster overtakes him: no one will endure it with more equanimity than him.'

'Very true.'

'We'd be right, then, not to have famous men mourning. We can allow women to do that (as long as they aren't admirable women) and any bad men there might be, [388] so that the people we claim to be training for guardianship of our land find all that sort of behavior distasteful.'

'That's right,' he said.

'So we have a further request to make of Homer and the rest of the poets. We'll ask them not to portray Achilles, who was the son of a goddess, "at one point lying on his side, then later on his back, and then on his front; and then getting to his feet and sailing, crazed with grief, over the sands of the bitter sea", or as "pouring handfuls of filthy ashes over his head";⁷ or generally as weeping and wailing to the extent and in the fashion that the poet portrays him. And we'll ask them not to have Priam, a close relative of the gods by birth, "begging and rolling in the dung as he calls out to each man by name".⁸ We'll be even more forceful, however, in our request that they don't portray the gods lamenting and saying things like, "Oh, poor me! How wretched I am to have borne the noblest of children!"⁹ or at the very least they ought to stop short of giving such an inaccurate portrait of the greatest of the gods

4. The Greek underworld.

5. Quoted from, respectively, *Odyssey* 11.489–91, *Iliad* 20.64–66, *Iliad* 23.103–4, *Odyssey* 10.495, *Iliad* 16.856–57, *Iliad* 23.100–101, and *Odyssey*

24.6–9 [translator's note].

6. Two of the rivers of Hades—Lamentation and Hatred [translator's note].

7. *Iliad* 24.10–13, 18.23–24 [translator's note].

8. Achilles: the greatest of the Greek warriors at Troy and the central figure of the *Iliad*.

9. *Iliad* 22.414–15 [translator's note]. Priam: the

last king of Troy, descended from Zeus.

9. *Iliad* 18.54 [translator's note]. The speaker is Thetis.

that they have him saying, "Alas! The man I now see being chased around Troy is dear to me, and my heart grieves", and "Alas that Sarpedon, the dearest of men to me, is destined to fall at the hands of Patroclus the son of Menoetius."

"The point is, my dear Adeimantus, that if the young men of our community hear this kind of thing and take it seriously, rather than regarding it as despicable and absurd, they're hardly going to regard such behaviour as despicable in human beings like themselves and feel remorse when they also find themselves saying or doing these or similar things. Instead, they won't find it at all degrading to be constantly chanting laments and dirges for trivial incidents, and they won't resist doing so."

'You're quite right,' he said.

'And what we've just been arguing, in effect—and at the moment no one's come up with a better argument, so we should stick to this one—is that we must prevent this happening.'

'Yes, we must.'

'Now, they'd better not be prone to laughter either. I mean, the stronger the laughter, the stronger the consequent emotional reaction too—that's almost inevitable.'

'I agree,' he said.

'We should, therefore, refuse admittance to any poetry which portrays eminent humans as being overcome by laughter, and [389] do so even more vigorously if it shows gods in that state.'

'Yes, indeed,' he said.

'So we'll also reject the lines of Homer where he says about the gods, "Unquenchable laughter arose among the blessed gods as they watched Hephaestus bustling about the house."² According to your argument, we should disallow this type of passage.'

'Yes, if you want to attribute the argument to me,' he said. 'At any rate, we should disallow it.'

'Next, they must rate honesty highly. You see, if we were right in what we were saying a short while ago, and the gods really have no use for falsehood, although it can serve as a type of medicine for us humans, then clearly lying should be entrusted to doctors, and laymen should have nothing to do with it.'

'Clearly,' he said.

'If it's anyone's job, then, it's the job of the rulers of our community: they can lie for the good of the community, when either an external or an internal threat makes it necessary. No one else, however, should have anything to do with lying. If an ordinary person lies to these rulers of ours, we'll count that as equivalent in misguidedness, if not worse, to a patient lying to his doctor about his physical condition, or someone misleading a ship's captain, with respect to his ship or crew, by telling him lies about his own state or that of one of his fellow crewmen.'

'You're absolutely right,' he said.

'So if anyone else is caught lying in our community—"any artisan, whether diviner or healer of ills or carpenter"³—he is to be punished on the grounds

that he's introducing a practice which is just as liable to wreck and ruin a community as a ship.'

'Yes, it would,' he said, 'if what people did was influenced by what he had said.'

'Now, won't the young men of our community need self-discipline?'

'Of course.'

'And aren't the most important aspects of self-discipline, at least for the general rank and file, obedience to those in authority and establishing one's authority over the pleasures of drink, sex, and food?'

'I think so.'

'So I'm sure we'll approve of the kind of thing Homer has Diomedes say—"Sit down, shut up, and listen to me"—and related passages, like "Exuding an aura of courage, the Greeks advanced in silence, respecting their leaders", and so on and so forth.'

'Yes, we will.'

'Well, what about lines like "You're groggy with wine, you have the eyes of a dog and the heart of a deer"⁶ and the next few lines? Are they all right? [390] And what about all the other impertinent things people have said to their rules in works of prose or poetry?'

'We won't approve of them.'

'That, I suppose, is because they don't encourage self-discipline in their audience, though they may well be enjoyable from another point of view. What do you think?'

'I agree,' he said.

'What about having your cleverest character saying that in his opinion the best thing in the world is when "The nearby tables are laden with bread and meat, and the steward draws wine from the mixing-bowl, brings it, and pours it into the cups"? Do you think this is the right material for a young man to hear if he is to be self-controlled? Or "There is no death worse than death by starvation, no more wretched fate to face"⁷ And then there's the passage where, while everyone else—mortal and immortal—is asleep, Zeus stays awake to do some planning, but in no time at all it is driven completely out of his mind by his sexual desire, and he is so overwhelmed by the sight of Hera that he doesn't even want to go to their room, but wants to have sex with her there and then, on the ground, and he says that he's feeling more desire for her even than the first time they slept together, "without our parents knowing".⁸ And the story of how Hephaestus ensnared Ares and Aphrodite for similar reasons is equally inappropriate material for them to hear.'

'I couldn't agree with you more,' he said. 'It's quite unsuitable.'

'On the other hand, I said, it's worth their paying attention to the portrayal

4. *Iliad* 4.412 [translator's note]. Diomedes: a lord of Argos who was one of the best Greek fighters at Troy.

5. A combination of *Iliad* 3.8 and 4.431 [translator's note].

6. *Iliad* 1.225; Achilles is insulting his leader Agamemnon by calling him a lecherous, cowardly drunk [translator's note].

7. *Odyssey* 9.8–10 [translator's note]. The lines are spoken by Odysseus, who is often described as clever or scheming.

8. *Odyssey* 12.342; the point is that this sentiment encouraged Odysseus's men to steal the Sun-god's cattle [translator's note].

9. *Iliad* 14.294–351; quotation, 296 [translator's note].
1. *Odyssey* 8.266–366 [translator's note]. When Hephaestus learned that his wife, Aphrodite, the Greek goddess of love and beauty, was committing adultery with Ares, the god of war, he fashioned a metal net and caught the pair in bed.

clus: the best friend of Achilles.

2. *Iliad* 1.599–600 [translator's note].

3. *Odyssey* 17.383–84 [translator's note].

1. *Iliad* 22.168–69 [Hector is being chased by Achilles].

2. *Iliad* 16.433 [translator's note]. Sarpedon: a son of Zeus who fought with the Trojans.

on stage or in writing of occasions when famous men express, by their words or actions, resistance to all kinds of temptations. For instance, there are the lines, "He struck his breast and spoke sternly to his heart: 'Patience, heart—you've put up with worse in the past.'"²

'Absolutely,' he said.

'Then again, we shouldn't let them be mercenary or avaricious.'

'Of course not.'

'So they shouldn't repeat the verse "Gifts win over even gods and magnificent kings".³ And we won't compliment Achilles' attendant Phoenix on his restraint in advising Achilles to accept the gifts he was being offered and help the Greeks in their fight, but not to refrain from his "wrath" unless he was bribed. It will also go against our wishes and our convictions for Achilles himself to be mercenary enough to accept Agamemnon's gifts and to refuse to release a corpse [391] until he'd been given a ransom.'⁴

'Yes, it would be wrong to approve of that kind of behavior,' he said.

'Now, the fact that it's Homer makes me hesitate,' I said, 'but I'm not sure it's not actually sacrilegious for us to say things like this about Achilles and accept them when others say them. The same goes also for when Achilles says to Apollo, "There's no god more baneful than you—you with your aloofness. You misled me, and I'd pay you back if I could."⁵ We shouldn't believe that he refused to obey the river-god either, and was ready to fight him, and that he said of his hair, which was dedicated to another river, the Spercheus, "I hereby give my hair to the hero Patroclus: may he take it with him,"⁶ when Patroclus was dead—we shouldn't believe that he did this. And we'll deny the truth of the stories that he dragged Hector around Patroclus' tomb and slaughtered prisoners on his funeral pyre.⁷ And we won't allow our citizens to believe that Achilles—the child of a goddess and of Peleus (who was himself a model of self-discipline and a grandson of Zeus) and tutored by the sage Cheiron—was so full of turmoil that he suffered from the two conflicting diseases of mean-spirited avarice and disdain for gods and men.'

'You're right,' he said.

'Moreover,' I went on, 'we won't believe or tolerate the story about those horrific kidnap projects by Theseus and Peirithous, who were respectively the sons of Poseidon⁸ and Zeus; and in general, we find it unthinkable that anyone with a god as a parent, or any hero, would be unscrupulous enough to do the terrible, sacrilegious things people falsely attribute to them. No, we should force the poets to deny either that the heroes did these things or that their parents were gods, but not to say both; and they should also be forcibly prevented from trying to persuade the young men of our community that the gods are the source of evil and that the heroes are no better than

ordinary people. We demonstrated earlier the impossibility of bad things originating with the gods; so, as we said then, these stories are not only sacrilegious, but also false.'

'Of course.'

'And they have a pernicious effect on their audience as well, in the sense that no one will find his own badness reprehensible once he's been persuaded that these things are and always have been done by "immediate descendants of the gods, close relatives of Zeus, people whose altar to Zeus, their father-protector, is high on Mount Ida, above the clouds" and "in whom the blood of deities is still fresh".⁹ That's why we must put an end to stories of this nature: if we don't, they will engender [392] in the young men of our community a casual attitude towards badness.'

'I quite agree,' he said.

'Now,' I said, 'if we want to distinguish what in literature should be allowed and what should be censored, there's one further type of writing we should still look at, isn't there? I mean, we've discussed how gods must be portrayed—and deities, heroes, and the dead.'

'Yes.'

'So wouldn't we be left with writing which has human beings as its subject?'

'Yes, obviously.'

'In fact, though, we can't evaluate this kind of writing at the moment.'

'Why not?'

'Because what we'd claim, I imagine, is that poets and prose-writers misrepresent people in extremely important ways, when—as they often do—they portray immoral people as happy and moral people as unhappy, and write about the rewards of undiscovered immorality and how morality is good for someone else, but disadvantageous to oneself. I suppose we'd proscribe assertions of that kind, and tell them that their poems and stories are to make the opposite points, don't you think?'

'I'm certain we would,' he said.

* * *

'It follows, then, that good use of language, harmony, grace, and rhythm all depend on goodness of character. I'm not talking about the state which is actually stupidity, but which we gloss as goodness of character; I'm talking about when the mind really had equipped the character with moral goodness and excellence.'

'Absolutely,' he said.

'And shouldn't the young people of our community take every opportunity to cultivate these qualities, if they are to do their jobs?'

'Yes, they should.'

[401] 'Now, painting and related arts, and weaving, embroidery, architecture, and the manufacture of utensils in general, and also the physical structures of creatures and plants, are all pervaded by these qualities, in the sense that they may display grace or inelegance. And inelegance, lack of rhythm,

9. Both passages are from the *Niobe* of Aeschylus; Niobe is talking about her father Tantalus, a notorious criminal whose father was Zeus [translator's note]. Tantalus cooked his own son, Pelops, and served him to the gods.

1. Glaucón.

2. *Odyssey* 20.17–18 [translator's note].

3. A proverb, possibly originating with Hesiod [translator's note].

4. Achilles accepts Agamemnon's gifts at *Iliad* 19.278–81; Priam brings him gifts to release Hector's body at *Iliad* 24.469–595 [translator's note].

5. *Iliad* 22.15, 20 [translator's note].

6. The river Scamander in *Iliad* 21.211–382; the river Spercheus, *Iliad* 23.151. The river was supposed to guarantee Achilles' safe return from the war; because it has failed to do so, Achilles tells it off and bitterly re-dedicates his hair to his dead

companion Patroclus. It was a primitive Greek practice to dedicate your hair to a river; the fact that hair grows makes it an external manifestation of one's life-force, so in dedicating your hair, you are dedicating yourself [translator's note].

7. *Iliad* 24.14–18, 23.175–77 [translator's note].

8. Greek god of the sea. Theseus: legendary hero and king of Athens, who was assisted by his friend Peirithous both in carrying off Helen and in attempting to retrieve Persephone from the underworld.

and disharmony are allied to abuse of language and a corrupt character, whereas their opposites are allied to and reflect a disciplined and good character.'

'Absolutely,' he said.

'Is it only the poets we should oversee, then, and compel to choose between imbuing their composition with the image of goodness of character or not practising their art in our community? Don't we also have to oversee artisans in general and stop them imbuing their portraits of animals, their edifices, and whatever else they may produce, with corruption, lack of self-restraint, meanness of spirit, and inelegance, and punish failure to comply with a ban on working in our community? Otherwise, during their upbringing our guardians will be surrounded by the pernicious pasturage of images of badness, which will be so common that they'll often be nibbling and feeding on them, day in and day out, a little at a time, until without realizing it they'll amass badness in their minds. No, we must look for craftsmen who have the innate gift of tracking down goodness and grace, so that the young people of our community can live in a salubrious region where everything is beneficial and where their eyes and ears meet no influences except those of fine works of art, whose effect is like a breeze which brings health from favorable regions, and which imperceptibly guides them, from childhood onwards, until they are assimilated to, familiar with, and in harmony with the beauty of reason.'

'Yes, that would be an outstandingly fine upbringing for them,' he said.

'Now, Glaucon,' I said, 'isn't the prime importance of cultural education due to the fact that rhythm and harmony sink more deeply into the mind than anything else and affect it more powerfully than anything else and bring grace in their train? For someone who is given a correct education, their product is grace; but in the opposite situation it is inelegance. And isn't its importance also due to the fact that a proper cultural education would enable a person to be very quick at noticing defects and flaws in the construction or nature of things? In other words, he'd find offensive the things he ought to find offensive. Fine things would be appreciated and enjoyed by him, and he'd accept them into his mind as nourishment and would therefore become truly good; [402] even when young, however, and still incapable of rationally understanding why, he would rightly condemn and loathe contemptible things. And then the rational mind would be greeted like an old friend when it did arrive, because anyone with this upbringing would be more closely affiliated with rationality than anyone else.'

'Yes,' he said, 'to my mind those are the kinds of reasons for cultural education.'

'It's analogous to the process of becoming literate, then,' I said. 'We weren't literate until we realized that, despite being few in number, the letters are fundamental wherever they occur, and until we appreciated their importance whether the word which contained them was great or small, and stopped thinking that we didn't need to take note of them, but tried hard to recognize them everywhere, on the grounds that literacy would elude us until we were capable of doing so.'

'True.'

'And we won't be able to tell which letters are which when they're reflected

in water or a mirror either, until we can recognize the letters themselves, will we? It takes the same expertise and training, doesn't it?'

'Absolutely.'

'Then this is incredibly similar to what I've been saying. We won't be cultured either (and this doesn't apply only to us, but to the people we're claiming to educate for guardianship) until we recognize the types—self-discipline, courage, generosity, broadness of vision, and all the qualities which are allied and opposed to them—wherever they occur, and notice instances of their presence, whether it is the qualities themselves or their reflections that we are noticing, and don't underestimate them whether the situation in which they're occurring is great or small, but bear in mind that it takes the same expertise and training. Right?'

'Definitely,' he said.

'Now,' I went on, 'imagine a situation where someone combines beautiful mental characteristics with physical features which conform to the same principle and so are consistent and concordant with the beauty of his mind. Could there be a more beautiful sight for anyone capable of seeing it?'

'Hardly.'

'And the more beautiful a thing is, the more lovable it is?'

'Naturally.'

'Therefore, the more people are of this type, the more a cultured person will love them. If they're discordant, however, he will not love them.'

'No, he won't,' he said, 'if they have a mental defect; but if their flaw is physical, he'll put up with it and not refuse his affection.'

'I appreciate what you're saying,' I said. 'I know you are or were in love with someone like that, and I concede the point. But answer me this: can self-discipline and excessive pleasure go together?'

'Of course not,' he said. 'Pleasure deranges people just as effectively as distress.'

'Can excessive pleasure partner any of the other virtues?'

[403] 'No.'

'What about promiscuity and dissoluteness?'

'Yes, they're its chief partners.'

'Can you think of any pleasure which is greater and more intense than sexual pleasure?'

'No, I can't,' he said, 'and I can't think of any pleasure which is more manic either.'

'And authentic love is a disciplined and cultured love of someone who is restrained as well as good-looking. Yes?'

'Definitely,' he said.

'Authentic love should have no involvement, then, with anything manic or anything which bears the trace of dissoluteness, should it?'

'No, it shouldn't.'

'Doesn't it follow, then, that lovers and their boyfriends who love and are loved authentically should have no involvement with this pleasure and should have nothing to do with it?'

'That's right, Socrates,' he said. 'They most certainly should not.'

'So you'll apparently be making a regulation in the community we're founding to the effect that although a lover can (if he can persuade his boyfriend

to let him) kiss and spend time with and touch his boyfriend, as he would his son—which is to say, for honourable reasons—still his relationship with anyone he cares for will basically be such that he never gives the impression that there is more to it than that. Otherwise, he'll be liable to condemnation for lacking culture and moral sensibility.

'Exactly,' he said.

'Now, do you join me in thinking that we've completed our discussion of cultural studies?' I asked. 'At any rate, we've reached a good place to finish: I mean, it's good for cultural studies to lead ultimately to love of beauty.'

'I agree,' he said.

* * *

From Book VII

[514] 'Next,' I said, 'here's a situation which you can use as an analogy for the human condition—for our education or lack of it. Imagine people living in a cavernous cell down under the ground; at the far end of the cave, a long way off, there's an entrance open to the outside world. They've been there since childhood, with their legs and necks tied up in a way which keeps them in one place and allows them to look only straight ahead, but not to turn their heads. There's firelight burning a long way further up the cave behind them, and up the slope between the fire and the prisoners there's a road, beside which you should imagine a low wall has been built—like the partition which conjurers place between themselves and their audience and above which they show their tricks.'

'All right,' he² said.

'Imagine also that there are people on the other side of this wall who are carrying all sorts of artefacts. These artefacts, human statuettes, and animal models carved in stone and wood [515] and all kinds of materials stick out over the wall; and as you'd expect, some of the people talk as they carry these objects along, while others are silent.'

'This is a strange picture you're painting,' he said, 'with strange prisoners. They're no different from us,' I said. 'I mean, in the first place, do you think they'd see anything of themselves and one another except the shadows cast by the fire on to the cave wall directly opposite them?'

'Of course not,' he said. 'They're forced to spend their lives without moving their heads.'

'And what about the objects which were being carried along? Won't they only see their shadows as well?'

'Naturally.'

'Now, suppose they were able to talk to one another: don't you think they'd assume that their words applied to what they saw passing by in front of them?'³

'They couldn't think otherwise.'

'And what if sound echoed off the prison wall opposite them? When any of the passers-by spoke, don't you think they'd be bound to assume that the sound came from a passing shadow?'

'I'm absolutely certain of it,' he said.

'All in all, then,' I said, 'the shadows of artefacts would constitute the only reality people in this situation would recognize.'

'That's absolutely inevitable,' he agreed.

'What do you think would happen, then,' I asked, 'if they were set free from their bonds and cured of their inanity? What would it be like if they found that happening to them? Imagine that one of them has been set free and is suddenly made to stand up, to turn his head and walk, and to look towards the firelight. It hurts him to do all this and he's too dazzled to be capable of making out the objects whose shadows he'd formerly been looking at. And suppose someone tells him that what he's been seeing all this time has no substance, and that he's now closer to reality and is seeing more accurately, because of the greater reality of the things in front of his eyes—what do you imagine his reaction would be? And what do you think he'd say if he were shown any of the passing objects and had to respond to being asked what it was? Don't you think he'd be bewildered and would think that there was more reality in what he'd been seeing before than in what he was being shown now?'

'Far more,' he said.

'And if he were forced to look at the actual firelight, don't you think it would hurt his eyes? Don't you think he'd turn away and run back to the things he could make out, and would take the truth of the matter to be that these things are clearer than what he was being shown?'

'Yes,' he agreed.

'And imagine him being dragged forcibly away from there up the rough, steep slope,' I went on, 'without being released until he's been pulled out into the sunlight. Wouldn't this treatment cause him pain and distress? [516] And once he's reached the sunlight, he wouldn't be able to see a single one of the things which are currently taken to be real, would he, because his eyes would be overwhelmed by the sun's beams?'

'No, he wouldn't,' he answered, 'not straight away.'

'He wouldn't be able to see things up on the surface of the earth, I suppose, until he'd got used to his situation. At first, it would be a shadows that he could most easily make out, then he'd move on to the reflections of people and so on in water,⁴ and later he'd be able to see the actual things themselves. Next, he'd feast his eyes on the heavenly bodies and the heavens themselves, which would be easier at night: he'd look at the light of the stars and the moon, rather than at the sun and sunlight during the daytime.'

'Of course.'

'And at last, I imagine, he'd be able to discern and feast his eyes on the sun—not the displaced image of the sun in water or elsewhere, but the sun on its own, in its proper place.'⁵

'Yes, he'd inevitably come to that,' he said.

'After that, he'd start to think about the sun and he'd deduce that it is the source of the seasons and the yearly cycle, that the whole of the visible realm

4. The stage of looking at reflections and so on outside the cave does not differ in terms of objects from the stage of looking at the effigies in the cave. But it differs in that it is now more difficult for one

to return to the safety of convention [translator's note].

5. The sun in the allegory is, of course, goodness [translator's note].

2. Glaucón.

3. In Platonic terms, this shows the extent of the

prisoners' delusion, since our words really refer to types [translator's note].

is its domain, and that in a sense everything which he and his peers used to see is its responsibility.'

'Yes, that would obviously be the next point he'd come to,' he agreed.

'Now, if he recalled the cell where he'd originally lived and what passed for knowledge there and his former fellow prisoners, don't you think he'd feel happy about his own altered circumstances, and sorry for them?'

'Definitely.'

'Suppose that the prisoners used to assign prestige and credit to one another, in the sense that they rewarded speed at recognizing the shadows as they passed, and the ability to remember which ones normally come earlier and later and at the same time as which other ones, and expertise at using this as a basis for guessing which ones would arrive next. Do you think our former prisoner would covet these honours and would envy the people who had status and power there, or would he much prefer, as Homer describes it, "being a slave labouring for someone else—someone without property",⁶ and would put up with anything at all, in fact, rather than share their beliefs and their life?'

'Yes, I think he'd go through anything rather than live that way,' he said.

'Here's something else I'd like your opinion about,' I said. 'If he went back underground and sat down again in the same spot, wouldn't the sudden transition from the sunlight mean that his eyes would be overwhelmed by darkness?'

'Certainly,' he replied.

'Now, the process of adjustment would be quite long this time, and suppose that before his eyes had settled down and while he wasn't seeing well, [517] he had once again to compete against those same old prisoners at identifying those shadows. Wouldn't he make a fool of himself? Wouldn't they say that he'd come back from his upward journey with his eyes ruined, and that it wasn't even worth trying to go up there? And wouldn't they—if they could—grab hold of anyone who tried to set them free and take them up there and kill him?'

'They certainly would,' he said.

'Well, my dear Glaucon,' I said, 'you should apply this allegory, as a whole, to what we were talking about before. The region which is accessible to sight should be equated with the prison cell, and the firelight there with the light of the sun. And if you think of the upward journey and the sight of things up on the surface of the earth as the mind's ascent to the intelligible realm, you won't be wrong—at least, I don't think you'd be wrong, and it's my impression that you want to hear. Only God knows if it's actually true, however. Anyway, it's my opinion that the last thing to be seen—and it isn't easy to see either—in the realm of knowledge is goodness; and the sight of the character of goodness leads one to deduce that it is responsible for everything that is right and fine, whatever the circumstances, and that in the visible realm it is the progenitor of light and of the source of light, and in the intelligible realm it is the source and provider of truth and knowledge. And I also think that the sight of it is a prerequisite for intelligent conduct either of one's own private affairs or of public business.'

'I couldn't agree more,' he said.

6. *Odyssey* 11.489 [translator's note]. In Homer, the comparison is between being a living slave and ruling over the dead—a passage that, according to

Republic 3.386c (see above), should be deleted. 7. As Socrates was killed (translator's note), found guilty of impiety and corrupting Athens' youth.

'All right, then,' I said. 'I wonder if you also agree with me in not finding it strange that people who've travelled there don't want to engage in human business: there's nowhere else their minds would ever rather be than in the upper region—which is hardly surprising, if our allegory has got this aspect right as well.'

'No, it's not surprising,' he agreed.

'Well, what about this?' I asked. 'Imagine someone returning to the human world and all its misery after contemplating the divine realm. Do you think it's surprising if he seems awkward and ridiculous while he's still not seeing well, before he's had time to adjust to the darkness of his situation, and he's forced into a contest (in a lawcourt or wherever) about the shadows of morality or the statuettes which cast the shadows, and into a competition whose terms are the conceptions of morality held by people who have never seen morality itself?'

'No, that's not surprising in the slightest,' he said.

[518] 'In fact anyone with any sense,' I said, 'would remember that the eyes can become confused in two different ways, as a result of two different sets of circumstances: it can happen in the transition from light to darkness, and also in the transition from darkness to light. If he took the same facts into consideration when he also noticed someone's mind in such a state of confusion that it was incapable of making anything out, his reaction wouldn't be unthinking ridicule. Instead, he'd try to find out whether this person's mind was returning from a mode of existence which involves greater lucidity and had been blinded by the unfamiliar darkness, or whether it was moving from relative ignorance to relative lucidity and had been overwhelmed and dazzled by the increased brightness. Once he'd distinguished between the two conditions and modes of existence, he'd congratulate anyone he found in the second state, and feel sorry for anyone in the first state. If he did choose to laugh at someone in the second state, his amusement would be less absurd than when laughter is directed at someone returning from the light above.'

'Yes,' he said, 'you're making a lot of sense.'

* * *

From Book X

[595] 'You know,' I said, 'the issue of poetry is the main consideration—among many others—which convinces me that the way we were trying to found our community was along absolutely the right lines.'

'What are you thinking of?' he⁸ asked.

'That we flatly refused to admit any representational poetry.⁹ I mean, its total unacceptability is even clearer, in my opinion, now that we've distinguished the different aspects of the mind.'

'How is it clearer?'

'Well, this is just between ourselves: please don't denounce me to the tragic playwrights and all the other representational poets. But it looks as though this whole genre of poetry deforms its audience's minds,¹ unless they have the antidote, which is recognition of what this kind of poetry is actually like.'

8. Glaucon.

9. Tragedy and epic; insofar as they are imitative, they are by definition removed from reality. The total ban here seems to contradict *Republic* 2 and

3, where Socrates encourages literary representation of behavior that is appropriate and good. 1. Poetry deforms minds in the sense that it feeds our lower mind and, by virtue of the fact that its

'What do you mean? What do you have in mind?' he asked.

'It's fairly clear,' I said, 'that all these fine tragedians trace their lineage back to Homer: they're Homer's students and disciples, ultimately. And this makes it difficult for me to say what I have to say, because I've had a kind of fascinated admiration for Homer ever since I was young. Still, we should value truth more than we value any person, so, as I say, I'd better speak out.'

'Yes,' he said.

'And you'll listen to what I have to say, or rather respond to any questions I ask?'

'Yes. Go ahead and ask them.'

'Can you tell me what representation basically is? You see, I don't quite understand its point myself.'

'And I suppose I do!' he said.

'It wouldn't surprise me if you did,' I said. 'Just because a person can't see very well, it doesn't mean that [596] he won't often see things before people with better eyesight than him.'

'That's true,' he said. 'All the same, I'd be too shy to explain any views I did have in front of you, so please try to come up with an answer yourself.' 'All right. Shall we get the enquiry going by drawing on familiar ideas? Our usual position is, as you know, that any given plurality of things which have a single name constitutes a single specific type.² Is that clear to you?'

'Yes.'

'So now let's take any plurality you want. Would it be all right with you if we said that there were, for instance, lots of beds and tables?'

'Of course.'

'But these items of furniture comprise only two types—the type of bed and the type of table.'

'Yes.'

'Now, we also invariably claim that the manufacture of either of these items of furniture involves the craftsman looking to the type and then making the beds or tables (or whatever) which we use. The point is that the type itself is not manufactured by any craftsman. How could it be?'

'It couldn't.'

'There's another kind of craftsman too. I wonder what you think of him.'

'What kind?'

'He makes everything—all the items which every single manufacturer makes.'

'He must be extraordinarily gifted.'

'Wait: you haven't heard the half of it yet. It's not just a case of his being able to manufacture all the artefacts there are: every plant too, every creature (himself included), the earth, the heavens, gods, and everything in the heavens and in Hades under the earth—all these are made and created by this one man!'

'He really must be extraordinarily clever,' he said.

'Don't you believe me?' I asked. 'Tell me, do you doubt that this kind of craftsman could exist under any circumstances, or do you admit the possibility that a person could—in one sense, at least—create all these things? I

mean, don't you realize that you yourself could, under certain circumstances, create all these things?'

'What circumstances?' he asked.

'I'm not talking about anything complicated or rare,' I said. 'It doesn't take long to create the circumstances. The quickest method, I suppose, is to get hold of a mirror and carry it around with you everywhere. You'll soon be creating everything I mentioned a moment ago—the sun and the heavenly bodies, the earth, yourself, and all other creatures, plants, and so on.'

'Yes, but I'd be creating appearances, not actual real things,' he said.

'That's a good point,' I said. 'You've arrived just in time to save the argument. I mean, that's presumably the kind of craftsman a painter is. Yes?'

'Of course.'

'His creations aren't real, according to you; but do you agree that all the same there's a sense in which even a painter creates a bed?'

'Yes,' he said, 'he's another one who creates an apparent bed.'

[597] 'What about a joiner who specializes in making beds? Weren't we saying a short while ago that what he makes is a particular bed, not the type, which is (on our view) the real bed?'

'Yes, we were.'

'So if there's no reality to his creation, then it isn't real; it's similar to something real, but it isn't actually real. It looks as though it's wrong to attribute full reality to a joiner's or any artisan's product, doesn't it?'

'Yes,' he said, 'any serious student of this kind of argument would agree with you.'

'It shouldn't surprise us, then, if we find that even these products are obscure when compared with the truth.'

'No, it shouldn't.'

'Now, what about this representer we're trying to understand? Shall we see if these examples help us?' I asked.

'That's fine by me,' he said.

'Well, we've got these three beds. First, there's the real one, and we'd say, I imagine, that it is the product of divine craftsmanship. I mean, who else could have made it?'

'No one, surely.'

'Then there's the one the joiner makes.'

'Yes,' he said.

'And then there's the one the painter makes. Yes?'

'Yes, agreed.'

'These three, then—painter, joiner, God—are responsible for three different kinds of bed.'

'Yes, that's right.'

'Now, God has produced only that one real bed. The restriction to only one might have been his own choice, or it might just be impossible for him to make more than one. But God never has, and never could, create two or more such beds.'

'Why not?' he asked.

'Even if he were to make only two such beds,' I said, 'an extra one would emerge, and both the other two would be of that one's type. It, and not the two beds, would be the real bed.'

'Right,' he said.

lato's note],

domain is appearance, does not feed that inner organ which can perceive truth and reality [trans-

2. That is, the Idea or Form.

'God realized this, I'm sure. He didn't want to be a kind of joiner, making a particular bed: he wanted to be a genuine creator and make a genuine bed. That's why he created a single real one.'

'I suppose that's right.'

'Shall we call him its progenitor, then, or something like that?'

'Yes, he deserves the name,' he said, 'since he's the maker of this and every other reality.'

'What about a joiner? Shall we call him a manufacturer of beds?'

'Yes.'

'And shall we also call a painter a manufacturer and maker of beds and so on?'

'No, definitely not.'

'What do you think he does with beds, then?'

'I think the most suitable thing to call him would be a representer of the others' creations,' he said.

'Well, in that case,' I said, 'you're using the term "representer" for someone who deals with things which are, in fact, two generations away from reality, aren't you?'

'Yes,' he said.

'The same goes for tragic playwrights, then, since they're representers: they're two generations away from the throne of truth, and so are all other representers.'

'I suppose so.'

'Well, in the context of what we're now saying about representation, I've got a further question about painters. [598] Is it, in any given instance, the actual reality that they try to represent, or is it the craftsmen's products?'

'The craftsmen's products,' he said.

'Here's another distinction you'd better make: do they try to represent them as they are, or as they appear to be?'

'What do you mean?' he asked.

'I'll tell you. Whether you look at a bed from the side or straight on or whatever, it's still just as much a bed as it ever was, isn't it? I mean, it doesn't actually alter it at all: it just *appears* to be different, doesn't it? And the same goes for anything else you can mention. Yes?'

'Yes,' he agreed. 'It seems different, but isn't actually.'

'So I want you to consider carefully which of these two alternatives painting is designed for in any and every instance. Is it designed to represent the facts of the real world or appearances? Does it represent appearance or truth?'

'Appearance,' he said.

'It follows that representation and truth are a considerable distance apart, and a representer is capable of making every product there is only because his contact with things is slight and is restricted to how they look. Consider what a painter does, for instance: we're saying that he doesn't have a clue about shoemaking or joinery, but he'll still paint pictures of artisans working at these and all other areas of expertise, and if he's good at painting he might paint a joiner, have people look at it from far away, and deceive them—if they're children or stupid adults—by making it look as though the joiner were real.'

'Naturally.'

'I think the important thing to bear in mind about cases like this, Glaucon, is that when people tell us they've met someone who's mastered every craft, and is the world's leading expert in absolutely every branch of human knowledge, we should reply that they're being rather silly. They seem to have met the kind of illusionist who's expert at representation and, thanks to their own inability to evaluate knowledge, ignorance, and representation, to have been so thoroughly taken in as to believe in his omniscience.'

'You're absolutely right,' he said.

'Now, we'd better investigate tragedy next,' I said, 'and its guru, Homer, because one does come across the claim that there's no area of expertise, and nothing relevant to human goodness and badness either—and nothing to do with the gods even—that these poets don't understand. It is said that a good poet must understand the issues he writes about, if his writing is to be successful, and that if he didn't understand them, he wouldn't be able to write about them. So we'd better try to decide between the alternatives. Either the people who come across these representational poets are being taken in and are failing to appreciate, when they see their products, that these products are [599] two steps away from reality and that it certainly doesn't take knowledge of the truth to create them (since what they're creating are appearances, not reality); or this view is valid, and in fact good poets are authorities on the subjects most people are convinced they're good at writing about.'

'Yes, this definitely needs looking into,' he said.

'Well, do you think that anyone who was capable of producing both originals and images would devote his energy to making images, and would make out that this is the best thing he's done with his life?'

'No, I don't.'

'I'm sure that if he really knew about the things he was copying in his representations, he'd put far more effort into producing real objects than he would into representations, and would try to leave behind a lot of fine products for people to remember him by, and would dedicate himself to being the recipient rather than the bestower of praise.'

'I agree,' he said. 'He'd gain a lot more prestige and do himself a great deal more good.'

'Well, let's concentrate our interrogation of Homer (or any other poet you like) on a single area. Let's not ask him whether he can tell us of any patients cured by any poet in ancient or modern times, as Asclepius³ cured his patients, or of any students any of them left to continue his work, as Asclepius left his sons. And even these questions grant the possibility that a poet might have had some medical knowledge, instead of merely representing medical terminology. No, let's not bother to ask him about any other areas of expertise either. But we do have a right to ask Homer about the most important and glorious areas he undertakes to expound—warfare, tactics, politics, and human education. Let's ask him, politely, "Homer, maybe you aren't two steps away from knowing the truth about goodness; maybe you aren't involved in the manufacture of images (which is what we called representation). Perhaps you're actually only one step away, and you do have the ability to recognize which practices—in their private or their public

3. Hero and god of healing (in the *Iliad*, a mortal).

lives—improve people and which ones impair them. But in that case, just as Sparta has its *Lycurgus*⁴ and communities of all different sizes have their various reformers, please tell us which community has you to thank for improvements to its government. Which community attributes the benefits of its good legal code to you? Italy and Sicily name Charondas in this respect, we Athenians name Solon.⁵ Which country names you?" Will he have any reply to make?

"I don't think so," said Glaucon. "Even the *Homeridae*⁶ themselves don't make that claim."

[600] "Well, does history record that there was any war fought in Homer's time whose success depended on his leadership or advice?"

"No."

"Well then, are a lot of ingenious inventions attributed to him, as they are to Thales of Miletus and Anacharsis of Scythia? I mean the kinds of inventions which have practical applications in the arts and crafts and elsewhere. He is, after all, supposed to be good at creating things."

"No, there's not the slightest hint of that sort of thing."

"All right, so there's no evidence of his having been a public benefactor, but what about in private? Is there any evidence that, during his lifetime, he was a mentor to people, and that they used to value him for his teaching and then handed down to their successors a particular Homeric way of life? This is what happened to Pythagoras:⁷ he wasn't only held in extremely high regard for his teaching during his lifetime, but his successors even now call their way of life Pythagorean and somehow seem to stand out from all other people."

"No, there's no hint of that sort of thing either," he said. "I mean, Homer's associate Creophylus⁸ cultural attainments would turn out to be even more derisory than his name suggests they are, Socrates, if the stories about Homer are true. You see, Creophylus is said to have more or less disregarded Homer during his lifetime."

"Yes, that is what we're told," I agreed. "But, Glaucon, if Homer really had been an educational expert whose products were better people—which is to say, if he had knowledge in this sphere and his abilities were not limited to representation—don't you think he'd have been surrounded by hordes of associates, who would have admired him and valued his company highly? Look at Protagoras of Abdera, Prodicus of Ceos,⁹ and all the rest of them: they can use their exclusive tuition to make their contemporaries believe that without them in charge of their education they won't be capable of managing

4. Traditional founder of the Spartan political, social, and legal systems.

5. Athenian statesman and poet (ca. 638–559 B.C.E.) who reformed the city's constitution. Charondas (6th c. B.C.E.), lawgiver of Catana and other colonies of Chalchis in Sicily.

6. The "guild" of people who claimed descent from Homer, in the sense of maintaining and perpetuating his poems, also claimed inside knowledge of all aspects of the poet's life and perpetuated a lot of apocryphal tales about him [translator's note]. *Homeridae* literally means "Sons of Homer."

7. Scythian prince (6th c. B.C.E.) who traveled widely in Greece and gained a reputation for wis-

dom; he was said to have invented the potter's wheel. Thales (6th c. B.C.E.) reputed founder of geometry and physical science, who calculated eclipses and discovered the solstice.

8. Greek philosopher and mathematician (6th c. B.C.E.).

9. Greek poet; his name literally means "meat-kin." Glaucon's meaning is that meat was a more important part of a coarse athlete's diet than a cultured intellectual's; and it would have been a sign of culture on Creophylus's part not to have neglected his mentor [translator's note].

1. Greek sophist, a contemporary of Socrates. Protagoras (5th c. B.C.E.). Greek philosopher, one of the most successful of the sophists.

their own estates, let alone their communities, and they're so appreciated for this expertise of theirs that their associates almost carry them around on their heads.² So if Homer or Hesiod had been able to help people's moral development, would their contemporaries have allowed them to go from town to town reciting their poems? Wouldn't they have kept a tighter grip on them than on their money, and tried to force them to stay with them in their homes? And if they couldn't persuade them to do that, wouldn't they have danced attendance on them wherever they went, until they'd gained as much from their teaching as they could?"

"I don't think anyone could disagree with you, Socrates," he said. "So shall we classify all poets, from Homer onwards, as representatives of images of goodness (and of everything else which occurs in their poetry), and claim that they don't have any contact with the truth? The facts are as we said a short while ago: a painter creates an illusory shoemaker, when not only does he not understand anything about shoemaking, [601] but his audience doesn't either. They just base their conclusions on the colours and shapes they can see."

"Yes."

"And I should think we'll say that the same goes for a poet as well: he uses words and phrases to block in some of the colours of each area of expertise, although all he understands is how to represent things in a way which makes other superficial people, who base their conclusions on the words they can hear, think that he's written a really good poem about shoemaking or military command or whatever else it is that he's set to metre, rhythm, and music. It only takes these features to cast this powerful a spell: that's what they're for. But when the poets' work is stripped of its musical hues and expressed in plain words, I think you've seen what kind of impression it gives, so you know what I'm talking about."

"I do," he said.

"Isn't it, I asked, 'like what noticeably happens when a young man has alluring features, without actually being good-looking, and then this charm of his deserts him?'"

"Exactly," he said.

"Now, here's another point to consider. An image-maker, a representer, understands only appearance, while reality is beyond him. Isn't that our position?"

"Yes."

"Let's not leave the job half done: let's give this idea the consideration it deserves."

"Go on," he said.

"What a painter does, we're saying, is paint a picture of a horse's reins and a bit. Yes?"

"Yes."

"While they're made by a saddler and a smith, aren't they?"

"Yes."

"Does a painter know what the reins and the bit have to be like? Surely

2. As effigies and images of the gods were carried through the streets during a ritual procession [translator's note].

even their makers, the smith and the saddler, don't know this, do they? Only the horseman does, because he's the one who knows how to make use of them.'

'You're quite right.'

'In fact, won't we claim that it's a general principle?'

'What?'

'That whatever the object, there are three areas of expertise: usage, manufacture, and representation.'

'Yes.'

'Now, is there any other standard by which one assesses the goodness, fineness, and rightness of anything (whether it's a piece of equipment or a creature or an activity) than the use for which it was made, by man or by nature?'

'No.'

'It's absolutely inevitable, then, that no one knows the ins and outs of any object more than the person who makes use of it. He has to be the one to tell the manufacturer how well or badly the object he's using fares in actual usage. A pipe-player,³ for example, tells a pipe-maker which of his pipes do what they're supposed to do when actually played, and goes on to instruct him in what kinds of pipes to make, and the pipe-maker does what he's told.'

'Of course.'

'So as far as good and bad pipes are concerned, it's a knowledgeable person who gives the orders, while the other obeys the orders and does the manufacturing. Right?'

'Yes.'

'Justified confidence, then, is what a pipe-maker has about goodness and badness (as a result of spending time with a knowledgeable person and having to listen to him), while knowledge is the province [602] of the person who makes use of the pipes.'

'Yes.'

'Which of these two categories does our representer belong to? Does he acquire knowledge about whether or not what he's painting is good or right from making use of the object, or does he acquire true belief because of having to spend time with a knowledgeable person and being told what to paint?'

'He doesn't fit either case.'

'As far as goodness and badness are concerned, then, a representer doesn't have either knowledge or true beliefs about whatever it is he's representing.'

'Apparently not.'

'How nicely placed a poetic representer is, then, to know what he's writing about!'

'Not really.'

'No, because all the same, despite his ignorance of the good and bad aspects of things, he'll go on representing them. But what he'll be representing, apparently, is whatever appeals to a large, if ignorant, audience.'

'Naturally.'

'Here are the points we seem to have reached a reasonable measure of agreement on, then: a representer knows nothing of value about the things

he represents; representation is a kind of game, and shouldn't be taken seriously; and those who compose tragedies in iambic and epic verse⁴ are, without exception, outstanding examples of representers.'

'Yes.'

'So the province of representation is indeed two steps removed from truth, isn't it?' I said.

'Yes.'

'But on which of the many aspects of a person does it exert its influence?'

'What are you getting at?'

'Something like this. One and the same object appears to vary in size depending on whether we're looking at it from close up or far away.'

'Yes.'

'And the same objects look both bent and straight depending on whether we look at them when they're in water or out of it, and both concave and convex because sight gets misled by colouring. Our mind obviously contains the potential for every single kind of confusion like this. It's because illusory painting aims at this affliction in our natures that it can only be described as sorcery; and the same goes for conjuring and all trickery of that sort.'

'True.'

'Now, methods have evolved of combating this—measuring, counting, and weighing are the most elegant of them—and consequently of ending the reign within us of apparent size, number, and weight, and replacing them with something which calculates and measures, or even weighs. Right?'

'Of course.'

'And this, of course, is the job of the rational part of the mind, which is capable of performing calculations.'

'Yes.'

'Now, it's not uncommon for the mind to have made its measurements, and to be reporting that x is larger than y (or smaller than it, or the same size as it), but still to be receiving an impression which contradicts its measurements of these very objects.'

'Yes.'

'Well, didn't we say that it's impossible for a single thing to hold contradictory beliefs at the same time about the same objects?'

'Yes, we did, and we were right.'

[603] 'So the part of the mind whose views run counter to the measurements must be different from the part whose views fall in with the measurements.'

'Yes.'

'But it's the best part of the mind which accepts measurements and calculations.'

'Of course.'

'The part which opposes them, therefore, must be a low-grade part of the mind.'

'Necessarily.'

'Well, all that I've been saying has been intended to bring us to the point where we can agree that not only does painting—or rather representation in

4. The meter of epics is dactylic hexameter (a 6-foot line based on the syllabic patterns long-short-short); iambic trimeter (a 3-foot line based on the syllabic pattern short-long) was the most common meter of dialogue and set speeches in tragedies.

3. Or 'flute player.'

general—produce a product which is far from truth, but it also forms a close, warm, affectionate relationship with a part of us which is, in its turn, far from intelligence. And nothing healthy or authentic can emerge from this relationship.'

'Absolutely,' he said.

'A low-grade mother like representation, then, and an equally low-grade father produce low-grade children.'

'I suppose that's right.'

'Does this apply only to visual representation,' I asked, 'or to aural representation as well—in other words, to poetry?'

'I suppose it applies to poetry as well,' he said.

'Well, we'd better not rely on mere suppositions based on painting,' I said. 'Let's also get close enough to that part of the mind which poetic representation consorts with to see whether it's of low or high quality.'

'Yes, we should.'

'We'd better start by having certain ideas out in the open. We'd say that representational poetry represents people doing things, willingly or unwillingly, and afterwards thinking that they've been successful or unsuccessful, and throughout feeling distressed or happy. Have I missed anything out?'

'No, nothing.'

'Well, does a person remain internally unanimous throughout all this? We found that, in the case of sight, there's conflict and people have contradictory views within themselves at the same time about the same objects. Is it like that when one is doing things too? Is there internal conflict and dissent? But it occurs to me that there's really no need for us to decide where we stand on this issue now, because we've already done so, perfectly adequately, in an earlier phase of the discussion,⁵ when we concluded that, at any given moment, our minds are teeming with countless thousands of these kinds of contradictions.'

'That's right,' he said.

'Yes,' I said. 'But that earlier discussion of ours was incomplete, and I think it's crucial that we finish it off now.'

'What have we left out?' he asked.

'If a good man meets with a misfortune such as losing a son or something else he values very highly, we've already said, as you know, that he'll endure this better than anyone else.'

'Yes.'

'But here's something for us to think about. Will he feel no grief, or is that impossible? If it's impossible, is it just that he somehow keeps his pain within moderate bounds?'

'The second alternative is closer to the truth,' he said.

[604] 'But now I've got another question for you about him. Do you think he'll be more likely to fight and resist his distress when his peers can see him, or when he's all alone by himself in some secluded spot?'

'He'll endure pain far better when there are people who can see him, of course,' he said.

'When he's all alone, however, I imagine he won't stop himself expressing

a lot of things he'd be ashamed of anyone hearing, and doing a lot of things he'd hate anyone to see him do.'

'That's right,' he agreed.

'Isn't it the case that reason and convention recommend resistance, while the actual event pushes him towards distress?'

'True.'

'When a person is simultaneously pulled in opposite directions in response to a single object, we're bound to conclude that he has two sides.'

'Of course.'

'One of which is prepared to let convention dictate the proper course of action, isn't it?'

'Can you explain how?'

'Convention tells us, as you know, that it's best to remain as unruffled as possible when disaster strikes and not to get upset, on the grounds that it's never clear whether an incident of this nature is good or bad, that nothing positive is gained by taking it badly, that no aspect of human life is worth bothering about a great deal, and that grief blocks our access to the very thing we need to have available as quickly as possible in these circumstances.'

'What do you have in mind?' he asked.

'The ability to think about the incident,' I replied, 'and, under the guidance of reason, to make the best possible use of one's situation, as one would in a game of dice when faced with how the dice had fallen. When children bump into things, they clutch the hurt spot and spend time crying; instead of behaving like that, we should constantly be training our minds to waste no time before trying to heal anything which is unwell, and help anything which has fallen get up from the floor—to banish mourning by means of medicine.'

'Yes, that's the best way to deal with misfortune,' he said.

'Now, our position is that the best part of our minds is perfectly happy to be guided by reason like this.'

'That goes without saying.'

'Whereas there's another part of our minds which urges us to remember the bad times and to express our grief, and which is insatiably greedy for tears. What can we say about it? That it's incapable of listening to reason, that it can't face hard work, that it goes hand in hand with being frightened of hardship?'

'Yes, that's right.'

'Now, although the petulant part of us is rich in a variety of representable possibilities, the intelligent and calm side of our characters is pretty well constant and unchanging. This makes it not only difficult to represent, but also difficult to understand when it is represented, particularly when the audience is the kind of motley crowd you find crammed into a theatre, because they're simply not acquainted with the experience that's being represented to them.'

[605] 'Absolutely.'

'Evidently, then, a representational poet has nothing to do with this part of the mind: his skill isn't made for its pleasure, because otherwise he'd lose his popular appeal. He's concerned with the petulant and varied side of our characters, because it's easy to represent.'

'Obviously.'

5. In *Republic* 4.439b–444a, where Socrates argues that each mind or soul is divided into three distinct and sometimes warring parts (the rational, the spirited, and the desiring).

'So we're now in a position to see that we'd be perfectly justified in taking hold of him and placing him in the same category as a painter. He resembles a painter because his creations fall short of truth, and a further point of resemblance is that the part of the mind he communicates with is not the best part, but something else. Now we can see how right we'd be to refuse him admission into any community which is going to respect convention, because now we know which part of the mind he wakes up. He destroys the rational part by feeding and fattening up this other part, and this is equivalent to someone destroying the more civilized members of a community by presenting ruffians with political power. There's no difference, we'll claim, between this and what a representational poet does: at a personal level, he establishes a bad system of government in people's minds by gratifying their irrational side, which can't even recognize what size things are—an object which at one moment it calls big, it might call small the next moment—by creating images, and by being far removed from truth.'

'Yes.'

'However, we haven't yet made the most serious allegation against representational poetry. It has a terrifying capacity for deforming even good people. Only a very few escape.'

'Yes, that is terrifying. Does it really do that?'

'Here's my evidence: you can make up your mind. When Homer or another tragedian represents the grief of one of the heroes, they have him deliver a lengthy speech of lamentation or even have him sing a dirge and beat his breast; and when we listen to all this, even the best of us, as I'm sure you're aware, feels pleasure. We surrender ourselves, let ourselves be carried along, and share the hero's pain; and then we enthuse about the skill of any poet who makes us feel particularly strong feelings.'

'Yes, I'm aware of this, of course.'

'However, you also appreciate that when we're afflicted by trouble in our own lives, then we take pride in the opposite—in our ability to endure pain without being upset. We think that this is manly behaviour, and that only women behave in the way we were sanctioning earlier.'

'I realize that,' he said.

'So,' I said, 'instead of being repulsed by the sight of the kind of person we'd regret and deplore being ourselves, we enjoy the spectacle and sanction it. Is this a proper way to behave?'

'No, it certainly isn't,' he said. 'It's pretty unreasonable, I'd say.'

'[606] I agree,' I said, 'and here's even more evidence.'

'What?'

'Consider this. What a poet satisfies and gratifies on these occasions is an aspect of ourselves which we forcibly restrain when tragedy strikes our own lives—an aspect which hungers after tears and the satisfaction of having cried until one can cry no more, since that is what it is in its nature to want to do. When the part of us which is inherently good has been inadequately trained in habits enjoined by reason, it relaxes its guard over this other part, the part which feels sad. Other people, not ourselves, are feeling these feelings, we tell ourselves, and it's no disgrace for us to sanction such behaviour and feel sorry for someone who, even while claiming to be good, is indulging in grief; and, we think, we are at least profiting from the pleasure, and there's no point in throwing away the pleasure by spurning the whole

poem or play. You see, few people have the ability to work out that we ourselves are bound to store the harvest we reap from others: these occasions feed the feeling of sadness until it is too strong for us easily to restrain it when hardship occurs in our own lives.'

'You're absolutely right,' he said.

'And doesn't the same go for humour as well? If there are amusing things which you'd be ashamed to do yourself, but which give you a great deal of pleasure when you see them in a comic representation or hear about them in private company—when you don't find them loathsome and repulsive⁶—then isn't this exactly the same kind of behaviour as we uncovered when talking about feeling sad? There's a part of you which wants to make people laugh, but your reason restrains it, because you're afraid of being thought a vulgar clown. Nevertheless, you let it have its way on those other occasions, and you don't realize that the almost inevitable result of giving it energy in this other context is that you become a comedian in your own life.'

'Yes, that's very true,' he said.

'And the same goes for sex, anger, and all the desires and feelings of pleasure and distress which, we're saying, accompany everything we do: poetic representation has the same effect in all these cases too. It irrigates and tends to these things when they should be left to wither, and it makes them our rulers when they should be our subjects, because otherwise we won't live better and happier lives, but quite the opposite.'

'I can't deny the truth of what you're saying,' he said.

'Therefore, Glaucon, I went on, 'when you come across people praising Homer and saying that he is the poet who has educated Greece,⁷ that he's a good source for people to learn how to manage their affairs and gain culture in their lives, and that one should structure the whole of one's life in accordance with his precepts, [607] you ought to be kind and considerate: after all, they're doing the best they can. You should concede that Homer is a supreme poet and the original tragedian, but you should also recognize that the only poems we can admit into our community are hymns to the gods and eulogies of virtuous men. If you admit the entertaining Muse of lyric and epic poetry, then instead of law and the shared acceptance of reason as the best guide, the kings of your community will be pleasure and pain.'

'You're quite right,' he agreed.

'So,' I said, 'since we've been giving poetry another hearing, there's our defence: given its nature, we had good grounds for banishing it earlier from our community. No rational person could have done any different. However, poetry might accuse us of insensitivity and lack of culture, so we'd better also tell her that there's an ancient quarrel between poetry and philosophy. There are countless pieces of evidence for this enmity between them, but here are just a few: there's that "bitch yelping and baying at her master"; there's "featuring prominently in the idle chatter of fools"; there's "control by a crowd of know-alls"; there are those whose "subtle notions" lead them to realize that they do indeed have "notional incomes".⁸ All the same, we

6. It is important to remember in this paragraph that Greek Old Comedy relied extremely heavily on very crude sexual humor [translator's note].

7. Herodotus said that Homer and Hesiod had described the form and function of the gods for the Greeks. In general, Homer was still in Plato's

day considered an essential part of one's education, not only as poetry, but as a source of wisdom, morality, and all kinds of information. This is the background to Plato's attack [translator's note].

8. We know the author of none of these snatches of verse [translator's note].

ought to point out that if the kinds of poetry and representation which are designed merely to give pleasure can come up with a rational argument for their inclusion in a well-governed community, we'd be delighted—short of compromising the truth as we see it, which wouldn't be right—to bring them back from exile: after all, we know from our own experience all about their spell. I mean, haven't *you* ever fallen under the spell of poetry, Glaucon, especially when the spectacle is provided by Homer?

'I certainly have.'

'Under these circumstances, then, if our allegations met a poetic rebuttal in lyric verse or whatever, would we be justified in letting poetry return?'

'Yes.'

'And I suppose we'd also allow people who champion poetry because they like it, even though they can't compose it, to speak on its behalf in prose, and to try to prove that there's more to poetry than mere pleasure—that it also has a beneficial effect on society and on human life in general. And we won't listen in a hostile frame of mind, because we'll be the winners if poetry turns out to be beneficial as well as enjoyable.'

'Of course we will,' he agreed.

'And if it doesn't, Glaucon, then we'll do what a lover does when he thinks that a love affair he's involved in is no good for him: he reluctantly detaches himself. Similarly, since we've been conditioned by our wonderful societies until we have a deep-seated love for this kind of poetry, [608] we'll be delighted if there proves to be nothing better and closer to the truth than it. As long as it is incapable of rebutting our allegations, however, then while we listen to poetry we'll be chanting these allegations of ours to ourselves as a precautionary incantation against being caught once more by that childish and pervasive love. Our message will be that the commitment appropriate for an important matter with access to the truth shouldn't be given to this kind of poetry. People should, instead, be worried about the possible effects, on one's own inner political system, of listening to it and should tread cautiously; and they should let our arguments guide their attitude towards poetry.'

'I couldn't agree more,' he said.

'You see, my dear Glaucon,' I said, 'what's in the balance here is absolutely crucial—far more so than people think. It's whether one becomes a good or a bad person, and consequently has the calibre not to be distracted by prestige, wealth, political power, or even poetry from applying oneself to morality and whatever else goodness involves.'

'Looking back over our discussion,' he said, 'I can only agree with you. And I think anyone else would do the same as well.'

* * *

ca. 375 B.C.E.

From Phaedrus¹

* * *

SOCRATES: Well, then, that's enough about artfulness and artlessness in connection with speaking.

PHAEDRUS: Quite.

SOCRATES: What's left, then, is aptness and ineptness in connection with writing: What feature makes writing good, and what inept? Right?

PHAEDRUS: Yes.

SOCRATES: Well, do you know how best to please god when you either use words or discuss them in general?

PHAEDRUS: Not at all. Do you?

SOCRATES: I can tell you what I've heard the ancients said, though they alone know the truth. However, if we could discover that ourselves, would we still care about the speculations of other people?

PHAEDRUS: That's a silly question. Still, tell me what you say you've heard.

SOCRATES: Well, this is what I've heard. Among the ancient gods of Naucratis in Egypt there was one to whom the bird called the ibis is sacred. The name of that divinity was Theuth,² and it was he who first discovered number and calculation; geometry and astronomy, as well as the games of checkers and dice, and, above all else, writing.

Now the king of all Egypt at that time was Thamus, who lived in the great city in the upper region that the Greeks call Egyptian Thebes; Thamus they call Ammon.³ Theuth came to exhibit his arts to him and urged him to disseminate them to all the Egyptians. Thamus asked him about the usefulness of each art, and while Theuth was explaining it, Thamus praised him for whatever he thought was right in his explanations and criticized him for whatever he thought was wrong.

The story goes that Thamus said much to Theuth, both for and against each art, which it would take too long to repeat. But when they came to writing, Theuth said: "O King, here is something that, once learned, will make the Egyptians wiser and will improve their memory; I have discovered a potion for memory and for wisdom." Thamus, however, replied: "O most expert Theuth, one man can give birth to the elements of an art, but only another can judge how they can benefit or harm those who will use them. And now, [275] since you are the father of writing, your affection for it has made you describe its effects as the opposite of what they really are. In fact, it will introduce forgetfulness into the soul of those who learn it: they will not practice using their memory because they will put their trust in writing, which is external and depends on signs that belong to others, instead of trying to remember from the inside, completely on their own. You have not discov-

1. Translated by Alexander Nehamas and Paul Woodruff. The participants in the dialogue are the philosopher Socrates (469–399 B.C.E., Plato's spokesperson) and Phaedrus (ca. 450–400 B.C.E.), a Socratic philosopher. The numbers in square brackets are the Stephanus numbers used almost universally in citing Plato's works; they refer to the pages of a 1578 edition published by Henri Estienne.

2. Also known as Thoth, whom the Greeks identified with Hermes, the messenger of the gods. Naucratis: a Greek trading colony in Egypt. The following story, which reworks elements of Greek and Egyptian mythology, is probably an invention of Plato's.

3. Chief god of the Egyptians, identified by the Greeks with an aspect of Zeus.

ered a potion for remembering, but for reminding; you provide your students with the appearance of wisdom, not with its reality. Your invention will enable them to hear many things without being properly taught, and they will imagine that they have come to know much while for the most part they will know nothing. And they will be difficult to get along with, since they will merely appear to be wise instead of really being so."

PHAEDRUS: Socrates, you're very good at making up stories from Egypt or wherever else you want!

SOCRATES: But, my friend, the priest of the temple of Zeus at Dodona⁴ say that the first prophecies were the words of an oak. Everyone who lived at that time, not being as wise as you young ones are today, found it rewarding enough in their simplicity to listen to an oak or even a stone, so long as it was telling the truth, while it seems to make a difference to you, Phaedrus, who is speaking and where he comes from. Why, though, don't you just consider whether what he says is right or wrong?

PHAEDRUS: I deserved that, Socrates. And I agree that the Theban king was correct about writing.

SOCRATES: Well, then, those who think they can leave written instructions for an art, as well as those who accept them, thinking that writing can yield results that are clear or certain, must be quite naive and truly ignorant of Ammon's prophetic judgment: otherwise, how could they possibly think that words that have been written down can do more than remind those who already know what the writing is about?

PHAEDRUS: Quite right.

SOCRATES: You know, Phaedrus, writing shares a strange feature with painting. The offsprings of painting stand there as if they are alive, but if anyone asks them anything, they remain most solemnly silent. The same is true of written words. You'd think they were speaking as if they had some understanding, but if you question anything that has been said because you want to learn more, it continues to signify just that very same thing forever. When it has once been written down, every discourse rolls about everywhere, reaching indiscriminately those with understanding no less than those who have no business with it, and it doesn't know to whom it should speak and to whom it should not. And when it is faulted and attacked unfairly, it always needs its father's support; alone, it can neither defend itself nor come to its own support.

PHAEDRUS: You are absolutely right about that, too.

[276] SOCRATES: Now tell me, can we discern another kind of discourse, a legitimate brother of this one? Can we say how it comes about, and how it is by nature better and more capable?

PHAEDRUS: Which one is that? How do you think it comes about?

SOCRATES: It is a discourse that is written down, with knowledge, in the soul of the listener; it can defend itself, and it knows for whom it should speak and for whom it should remain silent.

PHAEDRUS: You mean the living, breathing discourse of the man who knows, of which the written one can be fairly called an image.

SOCRATES: Absolutely right. And tell me this. Would a sensible farmer, who cared about his seeds and wanted them to yield fruit, plant them in all seriousness in the gardens of Adonis⁵ in the middle of the summer and enjoy watching them bear fruit within seven days? Or would he do this as an amusement and in honor of the holiday, if he did it at all? Wouldn't he use his knowledge of farming to plant the seeds he cared for when it was appropriate and be content if they bore fruit seven months later?

PHAEDRUS: That's how he would handle those he was serious about, Socrates, quite differently from the others, as you say.

SOCRATES: Now what about the man who knows what is just, noble, and good? Shall we say that he is less sensible with his seeds than the farmer is with his?

PHAEDRUS: Certainly not.

SOCRATES: Therefore, he won't be serious about writing them in ink, sowing them, through a pen, with words that are as incapable of speaking in their own defense as they are of teaching the truth adequately.

PHAEDRUS: That wouldn't be likely.

SOCRATES: Certainly not. When he writes, it's likely he will sow gardens of letters for the sake of amusing himself, storing up reminders for himself "when he reaches forgetful old age" and for everyone who wants to follow in his footsteps, and will enjoy seeing them sweetly blooming. And when others turn to different amusements, watering themselves with drinking parties and everything else that goes along with them, he will rather spend his time amusing himself with the things I have just described.

PHAEDRUS: Socrates, you are contrasting a vulgar amusement with the very noblest—with the amusement of a man who can while away his time telling stories of justice and the other matters you mentioned.

SOCRATES: That's just how it is, Phaedrus. But it is much nobler to be serious about these matters, and use the art of dialectic.⁶ The dialectician chooses a proper soul and plants and sows within it discourse accompanied by knowledge—discourse capable of helping itself as well as the man who planted it, [277] which is not barren but produces a seed from which more discourse grows in the character of others. Such discourse makes the seed forever immortal and renders the man who has it as happy as any human being can be.

PHAEDRUS: What you describe is really much nobler still.

SOCRATES: And now that we have agreed about this, Phaedrus, we are finally able to decide the issue.

PHAEDRUS: What issue is that?

SOCRATES: The issue which brought us to this point in the first place: We wanted to examine the attack made on Lysias⁷ on account of his writing speeches, and to ask which speeches are written artfully and which not. Now, I think that we have answered that question clearly enough.

PHAEDRUS: So it seemed; but remind me again how we did it.

5. Pots or window boxes used for forcing plants during the festival of Adonis, a Greek mythological figure whose cult is associated with vegetation and fertility.

6. That is, use logic to investigate the nature of truth through critical analysis of concepts and hypotheses.

7. Athenian orator (ca. 459–ca. 380 B.C.E.), whose oration on love provides the occasion for the discussion in *Phaedrus*.

4. A sanctuary of Zeus in Epirus famous as the center of an oracle, which was said to speak through an oak tree (see *Odyssey* 14.327–28, 19.296–97; Herodotus 2.55.1).

SOCRATES: First, you must know the truth concerning everything you are speaking or writing about; you must learn how to define each thing in itself; and, having defined it, you must know how to divide it into kinds until you reach something indivisible. Second, you must understand the nature of the soul, along the same lines; you must determine which kind of speech is appropriate to each kind of soul, prepare and arrange your speech accordingly, and offer a complex and elaborate speech to a complex soul and a simple speech to a simple one. Then, and only then, will you be able to use speech artfully, to the extent that its nature allows it to be used that way, either in order to teach or in order to persuade. This is the whole point of the argument we have been making.

PHAEDRUS: Absolutely. That is exactly how it seemed to us.

SOCRATES: Now how about whether it's noble or shameful to give or write a speech—when it could be fairly said to be grounds for reproach, and when not? Didn't what we said just a little while ago make it clear—

PHAEDRUS: What was that?

SOCRATES: That if Lysias or anybody else ever did, or ever does write—privately or for the public, in the course of proposing some law—a political document which he believes to embody clear knowledge of lasting importance, then this writer deserves reproach, whether anyone says so or not. For to be unaware of the difference between a dream-image and the reality of what is just and unjust, good and bad, must truly be grounds for reproach even if the crowd praises it with one voice.

PHAEDRUS: It certainly must be.

SOCRATES: On the other hand, take a man who thinks that a written discourse on any subject can only be a great amusement, that no discourse worth serious attention has ever been written in verse or prose, and that those that are recited in public without questioning and explanation, in the manner of the rhapsodes,⁸ are given only in order to produce conviction. [278] He believes that at their very best these can only serve as reminders to those who already know. And he also thinks that only what is said for the sake of understanding and learning, what is truly written in the soul concerning what is just, noble, and good can be clear, perfect, and worth serious attention: Such discourse should be called his own legitimate children, first the discourse he may have discovered already within himself and then its sons and brothers who may have grown naturally in other souls insofar as these are worthy; to the rest, he turns his back. Such a man, Phaedrus, would be just what you and I both would pray to become.

PHAEDRUS: I wish and pray for things to be just as you say.

SOCRATES: Well, then: our playful amusement regarding discourse is complete. Now you go and tell Lysias that we came to the spring which is sacred to the Nymphs⁹ and heard words charging us to deliver a message to Lysias and anyone else who composes speeches, as well as to Homer and anyone else who has composed poetry either spoken or sung, and third, to Solon and anyone else who writes political documents that he calls laws: If any one of you has composed these things with a knowledge of the truth, if you can

defend your writing when you are challenged, and if you can yourself make the argument that your writing is of little worth, then you must be called by a name derived not from these writings but rather from those things that you are seriously pursuing.

PHAEDRUS: What name, then, would you give such a man?

SOCRATES: To call him wise, Phaedrus, seems to me too much, and proper only for a god. To call him wisdom's lover—a philosopher—or something similar would fit him better and be more seemly.

PHAEDRUS: That would be quite appropriate.

SOCRATES: On the other hand, if a man has nothing more valuable than what he has composed or written, spending long hours twisting it around, pasting parts together and taking them apart—wouldn't you be right to call him a poet or a speech writer or an author of laws?

PHAEDRUS: Of course.

SOCRATES: Tell that, then, to your friend.

PHAEDRUS: And what about you? What shall you do? We must surely not forget your own friend.

SOCRATES: Whom do you mean?

PHAEDRUS: The beautiful Isocrates.² What are you going to tell him, Socrates? What shall we say he is?

SOCRATES: Isocrates is still young, Phaedrus. But I want to tell you [279] what I foresee for him.

PHAEDRUS: What is that?

SOCRATES: It seems to me that by his nature he can outdo anything that Lysias has accomplished in his speeches; and he also has a nobler character. So I wouldn't be at all surprised if, as he gets older and continues writing speeches of the sort he is composing now, he makes everyone who has ever attempted to compose a speech seem like a child in comparison. Even more so if such work no longer satisfies him and a higher, divine impulse leads him to more important things. For nature, my friend, has placed the love of wisdom in his mind.

That is the message I will carry to my beloved, Isocrates, from the gods of this place; and you have your own message for your Lysias.

PHAEDRUS: So it shall be. But let's be off, since the heat has died down a bit.

SOCRATES: Shouldn't we offer a prayer to the gods here before we leave?

PHAEDRUS: Of course.

SOCRATES: O dear Pan³ and all the other gods of this place, grant that I may be beautiful inside. Let all my external possessions be in friendly harmony with what is within. May I consider the wise man rich. As for gold, let me have as much as a moderate man could bear and carry with him.

Do we need anything else, Phaedrus? I believe my prayer is enough for me.

PHAEDRUS: Make it a prayer for me as well. Friends have everything in common.

SOCRATES: Let's be off.

ca. 370 B.C.E.

8. Professional orators who recited poetry, especially that of Homer and the other epic poets.

9. In Greek mythology, goddesses of lower rank, often associated with aspects of nature (the ocean, trees, etc.).

2. Athenian orator, rhetorician, and teacher (436–338 B.C.E.), whose school attracted pupils from all over Greece and greatly influenced later methods of education.

3. Greek god of shepherds and flocks, usually depicted as part human, part goat; he is invoked because this conversation has taken place in the countryside.