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Plato's Ban:
Why the Poets are Exiled

by

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ABSTRACT

Plato's Ban:
Why the Poets are Exiled

Seth Gerberding

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This thesis examines Plato's ban of poetry in the *Republic*. In particular, I draw a link between Plato's method for finding the truth, dialectic, and his banishment of the poets. There are three parts to this thesis. First, I analyze dialectic as a process, understanding what the science searches for and how it does so. Second, I analyze poetry and its metaphysical standing and how that influences psychology. Finally, I argue that the design of dialectic has an inherent weakness, a weakness that allows poets and rhetoricians to corrupt former students of dialectic. In Plato's perfect state, there is no way to prevent this degradation: there will inevitably be those who become disaffected by dialectic. If the poets are permitted in the state, they will take advantage of these former students and use their powers to undermine the state. Therefore, Plato's only option is exile and banishment.

KEYWORDS: Plato, censorship, dialectic, poetry, rhetoric

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INTRODUCTION

One striking feature of Plato's *Republic* is the outright ban of poetry.¹ This ban does not apply only to poems in the contemporary sense: poetry, for Plato, encompasses theater, literature, or anything telling a fictional story. In Book II, poetry is censored, where the only stories allowed are those that conform to Socrates' ethical standards. Later, in Book III, Socrates criticizes poetical imitation, but permits imitations of virtuous characters. Then in Book X Socrates changes the focus: he focuses squarely on the imitative practices, saying "Of the many excellences which I perceive in the order of our state, there is none which upon reflection pleases me better than [...] the rejection of imitative poetry."² Poetry, Socrates says, is "ruinous to the understanding of the hearers, and that the knowledge of [its] true nature is the only antidote to them."³ The problem with poetry, it seems, stems from its imitative nature, and it is because of that nature that it must be banned. The discussion that follows this accusation centers around imitations and the metaphysical and psychological characteristics that imitations have. But there is one glaring fact: while Socrates bans poetry, he says little to nothing about the other forms of imitation in his perfect society. Painting, which is the prime example that Socrates uses, is not prohibited from the ideal state. Indeed, Socrates says little about the other kinds of imitation and their political status. Only poetry has been singled out.

This curious observation leads to one ask why poetry is banned in the first place.

¹ For interpretations, I will be using C.D.C. Reeve's translation of the *Republic* for Chapter 1. For Chapters 2 and 3, I use Jowett. Reeve, I think, better translates the literal Greek, especially the terms crucial for Plato's metaphysics. For the other two chapters, I have compared the two translations and find the differences to be negligible. I do occasionally use Reeve, but only when a particular word can be misleading in Jowett.

² 595a1

³ 595b3

The policy of banishment in Book II does not seem to prohibit poetry as an art, only specific content that could be in a poem. Book X and its analysis of imitations does not seem to offer many clues since other kinds of imitation are left alone. Yet it is precisely because it is an imitation that poetry is targeted. Still, being an imitation, it seems, is not grounds for exile. Painters, as far as we know, are left in the state. So why is poetry banned?

Past work has suggested that Plato's ban stems from the "problem of the irrational part."⁴ As most readers know, Plato distinguishes between three parts of the soul: the appetitive part, the spirit, and the rational part. Poetry, other work argues, undermines the rational part of the soul and leads to an unethical and unruly populace. While I do believe there is plenty of merit to this case and it is a necessary part of the explanation, I do not believe it is sufficient to understand why Plato bans poetry. My objection to this theory and others is that it does not properly account for a key line from Book X: "the knowledge of [poetry's] true nature is the only antidote to them." In a vacuum, this passage may seem to have minor interpretative worth. But this is a drastic misreading of the passage, and indeed, Book X as a whole. Most importantly, from this passage, it seems if we can truly understand poetry, we can protect ourselves against it. More importantly, in the context of the ideal state, if the populace is educated against the threats of poetry, then they will not be vulnerable. Put more succinctly, if the people are properly educated, then their souls will not be corrupted by poetry.

If that is indeed the case, then a ban appears unnecessary, even unjustified.

⁴ Sarah Jansen, "Audience Psychology and Censorship in Plato's *Republic*: The Problem of the Irrational Part," *Epoche* 19, no. 2 (2015): 205-215.

Education, not censorship or exile, is the proper antidote to poetry. The poets could be allowed into the state, and while there may be problems the whole the state would remain largely unaffected. Previous work, then, does not sufficiently explain why Plato bans poetry. The problem of the irrational part, while perhaps true, does not explain why poetry must be banned from the ideal state. A different interpretation of Book X and indeed of the *Republic* is therefore necessary in order to understand Plato's banishment.

In this thesis, I argue that Plato's ban is an attempt to protect dialectic (and philosophy) and the state that is structured around it. In the ideal state, it would seem that philosophy and education would protect the state against the psychologically corrupting effects of poetry. Thus, dialectic would seemingly protect the state against poetical corruption by properly educating the guardians, who in turn guide the state. However, what if poetry was somehow able to undermine dialectic as the scientific and ethical foundation of the state? Dialectic would no longer be able to protect the populace's souls from poetical corruption. If poetry was antithetical to philosophy, then education would do no good. Poets would, in essence, undermine the education, and once the protection was removed, corrupt with no resistance. In this context, banishment would appear reasonable since the poets would not even begin to undermine dialectic.

Indeed, this fact would explain why Plato is concerned almost exclusively about poetry as an imitation, while painting and other imitations are largely left alone. Furthermore, it would also help explain why Plato believes there is an ancient war specifically between poetry and philosophy, not imitation and philosophy.⁵

This is the theory I argue for in this thesis. Poetry has a unique ability to exploit a

⁵ 607b3

weakness inherent in dialectic. Dialectic, which is adversarial by design, can be frustrating and confusing. Poetry takes advantage of this fact by praising and flattering those who become frustrated and confused because of dialectic. Poetry does the opposite: it praises and confirms beliefs, bringing the listener pleasure. After learning gymnastics, music, mathematics, a student of dialectic becomes dissatisfied with philosophy, and would succumb to the temptations of poetry. With this power, the poets (and those who follow them) would not just disagree with philosophers and philosophy, but would intentionally try to erase them from society. Therefore, dialectic and education do not act as safeguards, and the poets must be banned to ensure that they do not weaken and undermine the state.

The justification for banning the poets, then, goes well beyond the corrupting effects of imitations. It is an attempt to protect the guiding force in the state, dialectic, from an art that can undermine and dispose of it.

I would like to make one thing clear before I continue. I am not endorsing any kind of censorship or banishment, especially of the arts. On the contrary, I firmly believe that free speech is an essential part to any free and prosperous society. Indeed, I further think that free speech is an important part of any truth-finding process, much in vein of John Stuart Mill. I believe that the truth will eventually reveal itself through an exchange of Ideas. It may not win in every argument, but after many arguments, the truth will remain standing.

That being said, it is important to understand thoroughly the arguments against one's beliefs. Plato provides a detailed and intricate case for censorship, one that cannot easily be dealt with by simply saying free speech is important for finding the truth. And

so, this thesis is an attempt to interpret and understand Plato's argument. For my part, I am interested in defending my own commitment to free speech by better understanding one of its critics. But beyond the free speech issue, this thesis shows how integrated Plato's philosophy is. I touch on nearly every field, from metaphysics, epistemology, psychology, and politics. Plato's argument is not contained to one area of philosophy: it jumps from one field to another, at times rather quickly. This thesis, then, is also a case study of the sheer complexity of Plato's thought.

There are three chapters to this thesis. Since dialectic is a key feature of my argument, I use Chapter 1 to do an in-depth analysis of dialectic: what the practice is, what it aims to do, and how it hopes to do it. These elements are important because they are essential to understanding why poetry and dialectic are opposed. To summarize briefly, dialectic searches for the famed Ideas, or things that are unchanging and eternal. Dialecticians search for Ideas by trying to simultaneously undermine and justify hypotheses. Once they reach a hypothesis that is self-justifying, or unhypothetical, then they have reached an Idea.

Chapter 2 turns to imitations and poetry. Book X of the *Republic* deals primarily with imitation and why Socrates considers it to be problematic. In the first section, I explain the metaphysical and psychological qualities of poetry, while in the second section focuses primarily on poetry and rhetoric and why the two are considered imitations. The third and final section shows how poetry corrupts the soul. Chapter 2 is necessary because imitations, specifically poetical imitations, do pose a psychological problem, namely that they can cause the irrational part of the soul to rule the whole. Furthermore, it contrasts poetry with dialectic. Dialectic, as Chapter 1 shows, searches for

unchanging and eternal Ideas, whereas poetry and imitations present appearances which are varied and changing. In particular, poetry imitates virtue, presenting it as a variable thing, whereas philosophy says virtue is a single, stable state of being.

Chapter 3 takes dialectic and poetry and shows how the two are incompatible in the state. To do so, however, requires a discussion of flattery, so I spend the first part of the chapter looking at the *Gorgias* and explaining why rhetoric (and by extension, poetry) constitutes a flattery. Finally, I show how the persuasive power of poetry and rhetoric are able to corrupt former students of dialectic, even in the ideal state. More dangerously too, the poets would use this new-found power to undermine not just dialectic but to kill its practitioners.

By the end of this thesis, I will have limned a perspective on censorship, literature, education, and science that displays the interconnections between truth, psychology, and politics. I will have covered Plato's metaphysics, primarily focusing on dialectic and imitations, part of his psychology relating to poetry, his theory of flatteries, while connecting all of these seemingly unrelated topics. What emerges is both an understanding of Plato's ban and an appreciation of the complexity and precision of his philosophy.

CHAPTER 1: DIALECTIC AND THE SEARCH FOR TRUTH

If dialectic is connected to Plato's banishment, then it is essential to understand what Plato's dialectic is. In particular, if there is a weakness, we must be able to pinpoint where that weakness is and what exactly makes it a weakness. Therefore, we must grasp dialectic as a whole. Plato sometimes seems to define it as simply the art of asking and answering questions.⁶ But this reference is not enough to grasp fully what dialectic is and what precise intellectual work goes into it. This chapter is thus dedicated to dissecting dialectic. To do so, I begin in the *Republic*, where Glaucon wants to know more about dialectic.

In Book VII, Glaucon says to Socrates, "So, tell us then, in what way the power of dialectical discussion works, into what kinds it is divided, and what roads it follows."⁷ Unfortunately, Socrates does not answer this question directly, saying instead that "You won't be able to follow me any farther, my dear Glaucon, though not because of any lack of eagerness on my part."⁸ Instead of a clear answer, Socrates gives a rather lengthy and obscure answer, filled with comparisons and contrasts. I shall now go through Socrates' response, unpacking every comparison and characterization, painting a larger picture of dialectic.

But first, one thing is clear: dialectic is how Plato hopes to find truth. Socrates is quick to remind Glaucon that "the power of dialectic alone can reveal" the truth.⁹ What is "the truth" is also unclear, but I shall address that as well when I discuss Ideas. After this reassurance, Socrates goes on to the rough outline.

⁶ 534d5

⁷ 532d5

⁸ 532e1-5331

⁹ *Ibid.* Jowett

He begins by noting that the arts are about opinion,¹⁰ dealing with production and creation. Next, he discusses mathematics, saying that while they have “some apprehension of true being,” they cannot grasp reality because the mathematical hypotheses are left unexamined.¹¹ Plato gives two examples of non-dialectical things first, I believe, because it reflects the path of rising to truth in the Analogy of the Cave from earlier in Book IIV. But more on those later.

The first major clue that Socrates gives regarding dialectic comes at 533c: “dialectic is the only investigation that, doing away with hypotheses, journeys to the first principle itself in order to be made secure.”¹² So it appears that something about hypotheses that makes them a liability, preventing the hypothesizer from grasping reality. What exactly that liability is also remains unknown and I will return to it. The second clue comes a few lines later in the form of a question, where Socrates asks Glaucon if he agrees that the dialectician is the one who “is able to grasp an account of the being of each thing.”¹³ Putting these two clues together, dialectic appears to be something which does not rely upon hypotheses, and for that reason, is able to comprehend the true being of something.

Still, this outline is only a rough sketch: what exactly dialectic is remains cloudy at best. The brief discussion in Book VII referred to earlier leaves us with two primary questions. I will answer them in turn. First, what is the “true being” of something?¹⁴ Two questions in particular continue to exist: what is the “being,” of something, and how does

¹⁰ *Doxa*, in Greek, means something akin to common belief or popular opinion. It does not constitute knowledge (*epistêmê*), and the two are often contrasted with one another.

¹¹ 533b1-5, Jowett

¹² 533c5

¹³ 534b2

¹⁴ Jowett translates it as “essence.”

dialectic, by removing reliance on hypotheses, achieve understanding of an essence?¹⁵

This chapter is dedicated to answering these two questions. The first section investigates “essences,” while the second section investigates the “how.”

Section 1: Ideas—the “truth,” or something different?

In the *Republic*, truth becomes a central topic, surrounding other matters like education, leadership, and politics. Plato frequently refers to the “true being,”¹⁶ but what constitutes true being (or absolute truth for Jowett) is murky. To clear up the matter, we turn to 476c where Socrates gives some important information: he who “does believe in the beautiful itself, is able to observe both it and the things that participate in it, and does not think that that participants are it, and that it is not the participants”¹⁷ is awake and in reality.

Plato is making a distinction between the pure form of something, the “thing itself,” and things which have that quality, or participate in it. Socrates later elaborates on this theory:

There are many beautiful, many good, and many other such things, thereby distinguishing them in words. [...] We also say there is a beautiful itself and a good itself. And so in the case of the things that we then posited as many, we reverse ourselves and posit a single form belonging to each, since

¹⁵ Essence being Jowett’s translation, “being” and “itself” being Reeve’s.

¹⁶ 484c5; Reeves translates “absolute truth” to “each thing that is” instead. “Each thing that is” refers to something of the highest level of being or reality. In either case, Plato is referencing things that are the highest form of reality, the highest level of existence.

¹⁷ 476c2-4

we suppose there is a single one, and call it what each is.¹⁸

Furthermore, the Idea of something cannot be seen: “the once class of things is visible, but not intelligible, while the forms are intelligible but not visible.”¹⁹ (One thing to quickly mention: Form, as used above, and Idea both translate from the Greek *eidōs*. While Reeve uses Forms, I will use Ideas, but they mean the same thing. I choose to use Ideas over Forms because they exist in the intelligible world, and forms have physical meanings whereas Ideas are not physical). Thus, the Idea of something, such as Beauty, is something that is grasped intelligibly: it is not a physical entity. Beautiful things, on the other hand, can be physical.

Here we get a better understanding of what is meant by Idea. The Idea of Beauty, for example, is not any particular object that a person might call beautiful. A red rose, *Phantom of the Opera*, *The Last Supper*, or *Pride and Prejudice* might all be considered to be beautiful in their own right, but they only partake in the Idea of Beauty. They all take part or participate in beauty, they are not beauty itself. Rather they are unified by the essence or the Idea of Beauty. The Idea of Beauty is therefore the highest being of beauty: there is nothing “above” it, so to speak, that gives it its properties.

While beauty might be the focus in this instance, the theory can be applied to many other things. Justice, courage, and strength are all their own Ideas, and have particulars that participate in them. Now we have a basic understanding of what dialectic is searching for. Dialectic is searching for these Ideas which unify things. However, this is still just basic: much more nuance is required, particularly how these Ideas relate to the rest of the world and why they are considered the highest degree of reality.

¹⁸ 507b1-2

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

Let us return to beauty. A red rose is beautiful, but it is not Beauty. Why? What prevents a red rose from being Beauty? The answer, which we find at 477a, is that red rose has a degree of not-beauty in it. In all matters, “if there be anything which is of a such a nature as to be and not to be, that will have a place intermediate between pure being and the absolute negation of being.”²⁰ In the case of a rose, since it is not Beauty, it has to have an element of non-beauty to it. We can better understand what is meant by this by turning to the *Symposium*.

In this particular passage, the topic of discussion is beauty. Socrates describes the beautiful (or Beauty) as follows. It is something that

is everlasting, not growing and decaying, or waxing and waning; secondly not fair in one point of view and foul in another, or at one time or in one relation or at one place fair, at another time or in another relation or at another place foul, as if fair some and foul to others. [...] But beauty absolute, separate, simple, and everlasting, which without diminution and without increase, or any change, is imparted to the ever-growing and perishing beauties of all other things.²¹

This is Beauty itself, or the Idea of Beauty. It is the purest because it does not change, not with perspective, not with time, or in any other relation, and that makes it the purest form of beauty. The final line in particular is the key to our interpretation. All beautiful things take part in beauty, but they have these other properties, these non-beauty properties that

²⁰ 477a2; Jowett

²¹ 211a2-b4

cause it wax and wane or to change with perspective (to name a few). That is, beautiful things must have some element of non-beauty to them, something that prevents them from being Beauty itself, everlasting and unchanging.

Therefore, all of the particulars, like a red rose, *Phantom of the Opera*, or *Pride and Prejudice*, all contain some element of non-beauty. In this way, they are imperfect and incomplete. A red rose will wilt and die; *Phantom of the Opera* could be considered a horrible musical in a century; *Pride and Prejudice* may be laughed at as a work of literature. A painting naturally degrades and decomposes with time. All of these natural elements to beautiful things are not part of Beauty. Yes, the particulars do participate in Beauty, but they cannot be Beauty itself, since Beauty itself does not die, change with time, or vary with perspective. Beauty just is Beauty.

Ideas, therefore, are pure, perfect, and complete, whereas the particulars are impure, imperfect, and incomplete. A particular may partake in an Idea, but there is something that is not that Idea as well. These distinctions about perfection, along with the multiplicity to singularity relation, are what separate objects from Ideas, what make Ideas superior to them.

Now we have Ideas, which reside in the intelligible world, and their relationship to objects. Next, I further explore the relationship between Ideas and the rest of the world by looking at the “Good.” By doing so, we will understand Ideas come to be known, and what the source of knowledge is.

Back in Book VI, Plato brings up an interesting concept, called the Good, and explains it via the Parable of the Sun. He says that participants of an Idea can be seen, but the Idea itself can only be known. By using the senses, such as sight, hearing, and so on,

a person can observe the participants of Ideas.²² Then Plato makes a curious claim: without some other “nature,” sensation (sight in particular) cannot occur, that “unless a third kind of thing is present, which is naturally adapted for this specific purpose, you know that sight will see nothing and the colors will remain unseen.”²³ A person needs more than eyes to see. There has to be something else in order for sight to occur. That something is light:²⁴ light is the medium for sight.

In order to see, a person must have eyes, there must be an object to be seen, but there also must be light for the eyes to capture. Now, where does light come from; “whose is that light which makes the eye to see perfectly and the visible to appear?”²⁵ The answer, of course, is the sun. And the sun plays a key role for Plato in this parable. He says, “the sun is not sight either; yet as its cause, [...] it [is] seen by sight itself.”²⁶ The sun is more than the burning ball in the sky. Since it is the source of light, it causes both sight and visibility. The existence of an object, the reason why it can be seen and why a person see is because of the sun. To complete the parable, Plato compares the Good with the sun, saying “this is what I called the offspring of the good, which the good begot as its analogue. What the latter is in the intelligible realm in relation to understanding and intelligible things, the former is in the visible realm in relation to sight and visible things.”²⁷ With this parable in mind, a key quality of Ideas now can be deduced.

Just as the sun gives sight to objects in the visible realm and causes them to be

²² 507c1-5

²³ 507d5-e1

²⁴ 507e3

²⁵ 508a3; Jowett

²⁶ 508b4

²⁷ *Ibid.*

perceived, the Good gives the Ideas their ability to be known in the intellectual realm.

The Good is “what gives truth to things known and the power to the knower.”²⁸ Any truth that can be known comes from the Good. Just as the sun radiates light to an object, which can be then be seen, the Good radiates truth to an Idea. The Good acts as the medium which allows truth and knowledge to be transmitted from an Idea to the knower. Without the Good, an Idea cannot be known.

But there is a question: why is the Good the analogue to light, instead of a different Idea? One possible explanation, one that I adopt, is that one does not know something until they completely grasp the good that it does. A person does not truly know what Beauty is unless they understand the great things that beauty does and why Beauty does it. Similarly, one does not grasp the Idea of Justice until they can recognize the good that justice can do. Therefore, it is the Good that allows the mind to know and understand an Idea.

Plato, now, has several classes of things. There are the sensible objects, like roses; there are Ideas, like Beauty; and finally, there is the Good which imparts truth to Ideas. In the next part of Book VI, Plato puts all these pieces together with his famous Line. The purpose of the Line is to organize the classes and to establish a hierarchy among them.

He says:

Represent them, then, by a line divided into two unequal sections. Then divide each section—that of the visible kind and that of the intelligible—into the proportion as the line.

In terms of relative clarity and opacity, you will have as

²⁸ 508e1

one subsection of the visible images. By images I mean, first, shadows, then reflections in bodies of water and in all close-packed, smooth, and shiny materials, and everything of that sort.²⁹

The first part of the line, presumably the furthest to the left, consists of images, meaning shadows, reflections, and polished bodies. I have not included prior evidence regarding images, so at this point it is a new class to be added to objects and Ideas. However, this is not a concern: reflections, sculptures, and shadows require no argument for their existence. Next to this section, the higher subdivision of the lower section, is comprised of “the originals of these images—that is, the animals around us, every plant, and the whole class of manufactured things.”³⁰ Basically, the things which can be reflected or imitated into a sculpture or painting reside in this portion of the line. These two lower section of the line comprise the visible world: anything a person could sense, whether it be by sight, hearing, or otherwise, resides in this section.

The second, higher part of the Line encompasses the intelligible world. The lower of its two subdivisions “is forced to base its inquiry on hypotheses, proceeding not to a first principle, but to a conclusion.”³¹ This segment of the line is difficult to grasp. There has not been a reference to hypotheses being their own kind of class, like objects or Ideas. Again, like the shadows, Plato injects them into the line without much prior discussion, at least not like the discussion relating to Ideas, objects, or the Good. To tease out what he means by hypotheses, Plato discusses mathematics.

²⁹ 509d3-510a1

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ 510b3

A hypothesis, in short, is something that is assumed to be true. They often appear in conditional, or “if, then” statements. If A, then B. To prove this kind of statement, a person assumes A to be true, then deduces in some way B. But A does not have to be true. In these instances, A is called the hypothesis, and it is a powerful mode of analytical thinking. Plato discusses mathematics because mathematicians often use hypotheses (indeed, it could be argued, as Plato does, that that’s all they use). They stipulate certain assumptions, and then proceed to deduce other conclusions. For example, “if A is a square, then A is a rectangle.” The object A is assumed to be a square. Since a square has four ninety-degree angles, it is a rectangle. Thus, A is a rectangle. These kinds of objects, these “mathematical” objects, are placed in this section of the Line. For now, all we need to know is that hypotheses are placed at this level of reality. I return to them again in greater detail in the second section.

Finally, the last, smaller segment of the intelligible section is where

Reason itself grasps by the power of dialectical discussion, treating its hypotheses, not as first principles, but as genuine hypotheses (that is, stepping stones and links in the chain), in order to arrive at what is unhypothetical and the first principle of everything. Having grasped this principle, it reverses itself and, keeping hold of what follows from it, comes down to a conclusion, making no use of anything visible at all, but only of forms themselves, moving on through forms to forms, and ending in forms.³²

³² 511b1-c1

The use of “principle” and “forms” are indicators that dialectic plays in this area of the intelligible world. Now, there is question which arises from the specific wording. Are Ideas and first principles the same thing? I am inclined to say yes. I do not argue this position entirely in this thesis, but I will say a few things. Recall that Ideas are things that are pure being. That is, they do not participate in any other thing. The Idea of Beauty, for example, does not participate in Justice. Another way phrasing it, as will become clearer later, is that nothing justifies the Idea of Beauty. It does not need a higher degree of reality. An unhypothetical first principle, as we shall see, is the same way. It is unhypothetical because it is self-justifying. And thus, unhypothetical principles and Ideas are the same. But in any case, the Ideas like Beauty, Justice, Courage, and so reside in this realm, and this segment is dialectic’s target.

There is one important point I want to address before moving forward. The Line is not just a categorization: it is a hierarchy. It is ordered in terms of “relative clarity and opacity.”³³ The different section of the division “have different degrees of truth, and that the copy is to the original as the sphere of opinion is to the sphere of knowledge.”³⁴ What this implies is that shadows have the same relation to their objects as objects have to their Ideas. From a metaphysical point of view, a shadow of a flower has the same relationship to the actual flower as the flower has to the Idea of Beauty. This distinction will become more important in Chapter 2.

However, there is a glaring absence in Plato’s line. Objects are placed in the lower of the two main division, and Ideas are places in the higher. While Plato does say the Good is in the intelligible realm, he does not explicitly say how it fits into either of the

³³ 509d5

³⁴ 510a4; Jowett

two categories. The Line is meant to represent different degrees of reality, yet the Good is left out. Perhaps it exists in the highest segment with the rest of the Ideas (I believe this is the case). However, in a vacuum, that does not seem compatible with an earlier extract. Socrates says “not only do the objects of knowledge owe their being known to the good, but their existence are also due to it; although the good is not being, but something yet beyond being, superior to it in rank and power.”³⁵ Furthermore, the passage at 511b, cited earlier, refers to a “first principle of everything,” and only after having grasped this first principle can the dialectician move to other Ideas. These two passages seem to suggest that the Good is both the first principle of everything and placed above the realm of Ideas.

Then a serious question arises: does dialectic aim at the Good, or only at Ideas?³⁶ Previous textual evidence suggests Ideas. However, Plato repeatedly says that dialectic is the only way to reach absolute truth. If dialectic only aims at Ideas, it would seem it does not aim at the highest truth. On the other hand, the text explicitly says that dialectic searches for Ideas.

I believe that, while the Good causes Ideas to be known and gives them truth, the Good itself is still an Idea, just perhaps a particularly special one. It is not placed at a higher degree of reality than Ideas are. The reason being comes from the Analogy of the sun.

Plato used the analogy of the sun to show how the sun caused both sight and visibility. Analogously, the Good causes both truth and knowledge. It is true that in this capacity the sun and the Good are special, but not so special as to place them on a

³⁵ 509b4-5

³⁶ Or principles, if they are entirely separated from essences.

metaphysical pedestal. The sun, after all is still an object. It can be perceived. If the analogy is continued, then the Good is still an Idea: it can be known and it certainly is some form of truth. It just radiates truth and knowledge to the other Ideas. Thus, the Good is still an Idea, just a special one.

Regarding the passage at 511b, it is certainly the case that dialectic will search for the Good. But the “first principle of everything” phrasing does not necessarily refer to the Good. If that were the case, then every Idea would, by extending the Line, participating in the Good, just as beautiful objects participate in the Idea of Beauty. But this would be inconsistent with the earlier passage, saying that “we posit a single form belonging to each, since we suppose there is a single one, and call it what each is.”³⁷ If the Good was a higher form, then Ideas would no longer be single entities. They would participate in the Good, and be related to each other in that way. But then they would not be singular or pure.

A much better interpretation of “first principle of everything” is to think of “everything” as referring to the “many” things which participate in an Idea. Instead of “everything” it should be thought of as “everything beautiful,” for example. The Idea of Beauty is the first principle of everything beautiful. Once dialecticians have grasped the Idea of Beauty, then they can work into other Ideas, perhaps things like the Idea of Music, or other things that can be considered beautiful. This interpretation keeps the Good as the source of knowledge and truth, but does not place it in higher metaphysical place, avoiding serious issues for our understanding of Ideas.

Finally, we know what Plato means when he says “true being.” Something

³⁷ 507b3

constitutes “true being” if it is an Idea, or something that unifies particulars under a single concept in its purest. While those objects participate in Ideas, they are not the highest degree of being. That status is reserved for the Idea. Their truth and the ability to know them flows from the Good, which is itself an Idea. Thus, dialectic searches for the truth by seeking out Ideas, or the highest form of being, true being. At this point, however, it is still unclear how Ideas can be grasped. I explain how in the next section.

Section 2: Reaching for Ideas—hypotheses, mathematics, and the unhypothetical

With the target firmly in sight, we now can try to answer Glaucon’s question that Socrates (more or less) dodged: what is the nature of dialect? There is a vague reference to an “art of asking and answering questions”³⁸ in the *Republic*. However, this description of dialectic is unsatisfactory. There is no clear reason why simply going back and forth with questions would lead to an Idea. After all, each of the dialogues is an exchange of questions and answers, and yet many of Socrates’ interlocutors walk away not any closer to an Idea than when they walked in. Euthyphro walks away, dodging the rest of conversation by saying “Another time, Socrates; for I am in a hurry, and must go now.”³⁹ In the *Gorgias*, Callicles is visibly perturbed and Polus is more confused than before.⁴⁰ Instead of being enlightened, they often appear irritated.⁴¹ Clearly, this method is not the way into the world of Ideas. At least, it cannot be considered an adequate blueprint of dialectic.

Earlier, I referred to a passage in Book VII at 533c, which reads: “dialectic is the

³⁸ 487b3; 534d5; see also 75d1 in the *Phaedo*

³⁹ 15e2

⁴⁰ 494c-495; 481b4

⁴¹ This point is important, and I return to it in Chapter 3.

only investigation that, doing away with hypotheses, journeys to the first principle itself in order to be made secure.”⁴² The “does away with” is an interesting phrase: what does it mean to do away with a hypothesis? Of course, answering such a question requires knowing what is meant by hypothesis. Unfortunately, Plato does not give us a specific definition of a hypothesis. Intuitively a hypothesis is an assumed proposition or statement. It is an assertion or claim that is accepted as true without a reason why. Typically, a process of logical deduction usually follows from the accepted proposition to some conclusion. For example, if we assume the even numbers, then we can deduce that two even numbers multiplied together is itself even. However, we never question the existence of even numbers in this process: we take them as given.

One way to interpret “doing away with” is to say that Plato rejects hypotheses as a mode of thinking entirely. That, however, would not make much sense. There are instances in the dialogues where Socrates announces he is proceeding by assumption. In the *Meno*, he says that they “should consider whether [virtue] is teachable, or whatever, starting from an assumption.”⁴³ Since Plato uses hypotheses in some situations, we can reasonably conclude that he sees at least some value in their use. Furthermore, if Plato is demanding that we not assume anything, he would seem to be requiring us to start from a known truth, presumably an Idea.⁴⁴ But then the point of dialectic is lost, since we start from the truth we are trying to reach. So the description at 533c cannot simply mean abandon hypotheses entirely. Rather, the fact that Plato does see some value in

⁴² 533c4

⁴³ 86e

⁴⁴ At the same time, Plato being strictly anti-assumptions would make him seem like a Cartesian foundationalist, looking for a fixed starting point. Plato’s language about looking for “secure” footing lends some evidence to the foundationalist argument. However, that theory leads to major questions. Why would Plato put hypotheses so high on his Line? Descartes seems to throw out assumptions with the senses, whereas Plato makes a clear metaphysical distinction between the two.

hypotheses can help us understand dialectic. By analyzing the strengths and weakness of hypotheses, we can better grasp what dialectic seeks to emulate but also improve.

Not only does Plato refer to using hypotheses in other dialogues, he explicitly claims that hypotheses can contain some degree of truth. Plato places inquiries which rest upon hypotheses, in the lower segment of the intelligible realm. In fact, they are a higher degree of reality than appearances and objects. Unfortunately, understanding what resides in this segment is less obvious than what resides in other parts of the Line, so much so that Glaucon responds that he is unable to understand Socrates. I pick up where I left off in the first section regarding this segment of the Line. To elaborate, Socrates says the following:

You know that students of geometry, calculation, and the like hypothesize the odd and the even, the various figures, the three kinds of angles, and other things akin to these in each of their investigations, regarding them as known.

These they treat as hypotheses and do not think it necessary to give any argument for them, either to themselves or others, as if they were evident to everyone. And going from these first principles through the remaining steps, they arrive in full agreement at the point they set out to reach in their investigation.⁴⁵

This passage is an astonishingly accurate description of mathematics, even of today's

⁴⁵ 510c1-d1

mathematics.⁴⁶ In mathematics, certain things are assumed.⁴⁷ While Plato calls them hypotheses, they are more commonly known as axioms⁴⁸ or postulates. However, the mechanics are the same: the axioms are only assumed to be true, and no account or proof is given for them.⁴⁹ They form the foundation upon which the theorems and corollaries are built. All the work that is done by mathematicians simply builds upon the axioms. But for Plato, because mathematics is built upon assumed foundations, the results are strictly hypothetical.

There is one important thing to note about mathematical axioms. They are indeed assumed. But mathematicians treat them differently than other assumptions. For example, when they assume something for contradiction, they are deliberately trying to show that the assumption must be false. In these cases, the assumption is analyzed, but with axioms, they do not analyze the assumption in any way. The axioms are left alone. Indeed, they form the foundation of mathematical conclusions, but they still are only assumed.

This fact about mathematics is a problem for Plato. It means that the foundations of math are never, as he puts it, secured. Mathematicians never justify their axioms (insofar as they prove their truthfulness). If one of those axioms turned out to be false or

⁴⁶There are some benefits to being a math major.

⁴⁷ The best example is Euclid's Postulates, but axioms are necessary in every field, from analysis to algebra. There are some branches that play with axioms, but they do not suppose to have no assumptions.

⁴⁸ A fascinating discussion is how the different geometrical axioms could be perceived to be a serious objection to Plato's metaphysics. There are Non-Euclidean geometries, like hyperbolic geometry, which are axiomatically contradictory (meaning one or more of their axioms directly contradict an axiom of a different system) to Euclidean geometry. Specifically, the axiom regarding parallel lines can be modified in two different way, giving birth to hyperbolic and parabolic geometry. Both new geometries are internally consistent; both have their practical applications (arguably more applicable than Euclidean geometry). For example, in hyperbolic geometry, a triangle has strictly less than 180 degree, while in the high school-taught Euclidean geometry, they have exactly 180 degrees. So, does the Idea of a triangle have 180 degrees or less?

⁴⁹ Of course, modern mathematics assumes different things than simply angles, shapes, and so. Rather, the axioms are statements, as in Euclid's Elements, which lists postulates about lines, points, and so on. Shapes, angles, and the rest of Plato's list are actually definitions and not postulates. Still, Plato is pointing out a fact about mathematics that holds true to this day.

contingent in some way, then everything built upon them would be problematic as well. Without the foundation secured, everything resting upon it is wobbly and liable to doubt.

Given this flaw in mathematics, it would seem that any mathematical work is doomed to fail or at least be vulnerable. However, Plato points out a redeeming feature, and why mathematics must use hypotheses:

[Mathematicians] use visible forms and make their arguments about them, although they are not thinking about them, but about those other things that they are like. They make their arguments with a view to the square itself and the diagonal itself, not the diagonal they drew, and similarly with the others. The very things they make and draw, of which shadows and reflections in water are images, they now in turn use these images in seeking to see those other things themselves that one cannot see except by means of thought.⁵⁰

What mathematicians do, simply put, is use figures or objects as clues to find the abstract. When geometers draw a circle in the sand, they are not concerned with that particular circle. Instead, they use it as a starting point, a way to drive intuitions about the absolute circle. Mathematicians use objects (or figures) to search for absolutes in the same way a person might use shadows or reflections to search for an object. When a person sees a shadow and they are trying to conclude something about the actual object, they do not take the shadow to be the true object. In the same way, mathematicians do not take an

⁵⁰ 510d2-e2

object to be the true version of that shape. In this way, mathematicians do reach for a higher form of reality, but at a cost.

To enter this higher realm, they have to set down some starting assumptions, some assumed qualities about the objects in order to draw more universal conclusions. Since particular figures or objects are being viewed in the same way as shadows are viewed to objects, the figures cannot be a firm starting point. They may drive intuition, but they cannot be considered the foundation upon which conclusions are drawn: as even modern mathematicians say today, a picture is not a proof. Since figures cannot provide a starting point, mathematicians must create their own: that is, they make assumptions. To talk about triangles, for example, some things must be assumed about angles and lines. To talk about circles, assumptions about diameters, radii, and circumference must be made. Conclusions drawn from those assumption do access a higher version of reality because they do not rely upon visibles. However, since they rely upon unsecured assumptions, they cannot claim to be the highest degree of reality.

The key observation to make is how mathematics moves up the Line, one that will help us understand dialectic. A person uses reflections to draw conclusions about the object being reflected. They are using one segment of the Line to think about the next higher one. Mathematics continues this trend, using objects to think about the next segment, the realm of hypotheses. With this kind of progression up the Line, where the foundation of one degree of reality is used to understand a higher degree, we finally can understand what is meant by dropping hypotheses.

Dialectic uses hypotheses in the same mathematics uses objects, as ways to guide or serve intuition; that is, dialectic uses hypotheses, “not as first principles, but as genuine

hypotheses (that is, stepping stones and links in a chain), in order to arrive at what is unhypothetical and the first principle of everything.”⁵¹ Mathematics uses objects as a way to jump into the world of the hypothetical (or the lower part of the intelligible world). Dialectic uses hypothesis (or members of the hypothetical world) to jump into the world of Ideas.

At this point, dialectic is understood as follows: dialectic uses hypotheses as ways to start investigating Ideas. Unlike mathematicians, dialecticians do not create hypotheses to act as axioms which are never interrogated or accounted for. Like mathematicians, however, dialecticians use a lesser form of reality (mathematics uses objects/figures; dialectic uses hypotheses) to spur intuition to act as clues to direct the investigation into the higher form of reality.⁵²

Now, it is easy to see how mathematics operates in this way. When a geometer draws a triangle, we know they are not only thinking about that particular triangle, but about triangles in general. When they draw lines and divide the triangle, or add extensions, it serves as a way to suggest the next step in a proof. Any high school student in a geometry class understands that drawing a picture is meant as a visual guide, not as the actual proof to the problem. How dialectic specifically uses hypotheses, however, is not clear. The difference between a figure in the sand and a hypothesis is massive: it is difficult to draw any conclusion via analogy. Understanding how a mathematician uses figure does not help understand how a dialectician uses hypotheses as an aid.

⁵¹ 510b3-5

⁵² I believe, but do not argue it entirely here, that the difference between mathematics and dialectic is analogous to the difference between analysis and synthesis. Synthesis takes information and is able to draw further conclusions. Analysis takes information, then tries to see things must be true in order for that information to exist. For more information on the differences, see Stephen Menn’s *Plato and the Method of Analysis*.

Unfortunately, once again, Plato does not provide a direct answer to any of these questions. As always, though, there are a few clues.

The first comes, again, from the end of Book VI. Here, Glaucon says that arts like mathematics, which proceed by hypotheses cannot be considered the highest degree of reality, because “they start from a hypothesis and do not ascend to a principle.”⁵³ As already discussed, starting from a hypothesis as if it were a known truth is risky. But it is specifically risky because the hypothesis is assumed and remains only assumed that is the source of the problem. Mathematicians “can only dream about being but never can they behold the waking reality so long as they leave the hypotheses which they use examined, and are unable to an account of them.”⁵⁴ Specifically, what holds mathematics back, what separates it from dialectic (besides the use visibles) is its refusal to attempt to justify those assumptions.⁵⁵ What dialectic does instead is use “hypotheses not as first principles, but only as hypotheses—that is to say, as points of departure into a world which is above hypotheses.”⁵⁶ Dialectic does not accept axioms. Rather, it takes a hypothesis and attempts to justify it. While Plato does not explicitly say this in the *Republic*, he does in the *Phaedo*.

In his conversation with Cebes, Socrates states that he:

cannot afford to give up the sure ground of principle. And if anyone assails you there, you would not remind him, or answer him until you had seen whether the consequences which follow agree with one another or not, and when you

⁵³ 511c5-d1; Jowett

⁵⁴ 533b4-d1; Jowett

⁵⁵ Of course, a justified assumption is no longer an assumption.

⁵⁶ 511b2-3; Jowett

are further required to give an explanation of this principle,
you would go on to assume a higher principle, and a higher,
until you found a resting-place of the best higher.⁵⁷

In this passage, the principle Socrates is referring to is like a hypothesis.⁵⁸ Indeed this move is exactly the move that Socrates makes in some dialogues. In the *Gorgias*, when Socrates is explaining his meaning of rhetoric, he says “we may assume the existence of bodies and souls [and] there is a good condition of either of them.” In order to justify his view of rhetoric and sophistry, Socrates is forced to make a larger assumption of souls and bodies. Unfortunately, Socrates is never forced to justify this hypothesis. But we can still derive much more from passage at 510b. In particular, we see how dialecticians justify hypotheses.

Ian Mueller is particularly insightful in understanding exactly what is meant by this passage. What a dialectician is searching for is an unhypothetical principle, as we saw in the first section. Now, “for a principle to be unhypothetical is for it to require no higher hypothesis for justification, that is, to be capable of withstanding argumentative assault on its own.”⁵⁹ (I return to this important point in Chapter 3.) This understanding of an unhypothetical principle is consistent with our understanding of Ideas, and especially the Good. An Idea is the unifying quality: there is nothing “behind” it which further justifies it. The Idea of Beauty, for example, a reason for why it is beautiful: it is beauty. Now, to go from a hypothesis to the unhypothetical requires a repetitive series of

⁵⁷ 101d1-5

⁵⁸ Note that he does not call them first principles. Indeed, the reference to a principle here is consistent with the Idea of a mathematical hypothesis: it is a starting from which one draws conclusions, seeing if they are consistent with other principles.

⁵⁹ Ian Mueller, “Mathematical method and philosophical truth,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Plato*, ed. by Richard Kraut (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 190.

justifications.

Given a hypothesis, “one finds an assumption that would justify it, and, if demands for justification continue, one proceeds in the same way until one finds an assumption not needing justification.”⁶⁰ Once the dialectician has reached an assumption not needing justification, that is, it justifies itself, then the dialectic is complete: we have reached a thing which is its own justification, or just is, and that is the Idea.

To return to mathematical assumptions, switching from mathematics to dialectic means justifying the axioms. As Plato pointed out, mathematicians make assumptions about the figures and the three kind of angles. Therefore, “to justify the hypotheses of mathematics will be to answer questions like What is figure? And What is angle? Answering this kind of question satisfactorily requires one to move from arguing about sensibles to arguing about [Ideas]” and this is the “change from mathematics to dialectic.”⁶¹

But a question may be raised: how do we know when to stop? Simply put, how do we know when we have reached an unhypothetical position, a position that justifies itself? Unfortunately, Plato does not give us any outright answers. But I do think that we can come to at least a notion. Indeed, I think that Ideas become “obvious” after a point, obvious in the sense that of course they must be the case.

At the beginning of the *Republic*, the group of interlocutors set out to find “that thing itself, justice.”⁶² After going back and forth with Cephalus and Thrasymachus over various definition, Socrates proposes that they find justice by seeking it in the perfectly

⁶⁰ Mueller, “Mathematical method,” 182.

⁶¹ Mueller, “Mathematical Method,” 189

⁶² 331c1

constructed state.⁶³ But now consider the passage at 432. Socrates exclaims “Ah ha!” and says:

It seems, blessed though you are, that the thing has been rolling around at our feet from the very beginning, and yet, like ridiculous fools, we could not see it. For just as people who are holding something in their hands sometimes search for the very thing they are holding, we did not look in the right direction but gazed off into the distance, and perhaps that is the very reason we did not notice it.⁶⁴

Socrates is indicating that justice was actually right in front of them the entire time: it was, in a sense, obvious. When they reached justice, it was not a sudden realization like the kind Archimedes is claimed to have or like when Newton discovered gravity. Rather, it was like looking in one’s own hand and finding the truth already in their hands. Thus, dialectic, we may say, gets one to the point where the Idea becomes obvious: it is clear and requires no further justification. Dialectic culminates in less of a “Eureka!” moment and more of an “Oh, there it is” moment, like finding one’s phone in hand.

With these details, we can now sufficiently grasp what constitutes Plato’s dialectic (I do return to dialectic in Chapter 3, but the information we have now is enough). Dialectic is a process which brings the thinker from the lower section of the intelligible world to the higher realm of Ideas, the things which are true being. It does so by using hypotheses in the same way as mathematics uses figures and shapes, that is, not as assumptions believed to be the actual truth, but as a contingent starting points from

⁶³ 368e4-369a1

⁶⁴ 432d1-e3

which further justifications can be made. Where a mathematician offers a justification of why a triangle has 180 degrees by appealing to the axioms, a dialectician offers a series of justifications for hypotheses, eventually grasping an Idea. There comes a point when an assumption does not require further justification: it itself is its justification. At that point, the dialectician has arrived at their goal, and has found a first principle, an Idea.

To put it all together, dialectic searches for Plato's famous Ideas, things that are unhypothetical in the sense that they are self-justifying. There is no reason why the Idea of Beauty is beautiful—it just is. Dialecticians search for them by using hypotheses as stepping stones. That is, they assume a hypothesis, but then attempt to justify it. Doing so often requires making higher assumptions, which then must be justified. When they reach a hypothesis that justifies itself, then they have reached something that is unhypothetical, and they have grasped an Idea.

Now we have a decent blueprint for dialectic. It is the art that grasps the highest degree of reality. In the next chapter, we move to the lowest degree of reality and see how imitations and poetry compare to dialectic. In particular, I show why poetical imitations can be dangerous.

CHAPTER 2: THE POWER OF IMITATION

At the beginning of Book X, Plato returns to the subject of poetry. This move is rather interesting. Back in Book III, after analyzing both the content of poetry and the various styles, Socrates says they “have completed our discussion [...] that deals with speech and stories.”⁶⁵ At this point, it seemed that the subject was concluded. In the

⁶⁵ 398b3; Reeve

succeeding books, Plato talks about psychology, the state, education, and many of other topics. And so, to return to poetry again in Book X is intriguing. Socrates says:

Of the many excellences which I perceive in the order of our State, there is none which upon reflection pleases me better than our rule about poetry. To the rejection of imitative poetry, which certainly ought not to be received.⁶⁶

The rule he is referring to is, of course, the exile established back in Books II and III. Still, it seems somewhat redundant to emphasize simply the point. However, Socrates gives us a clue as to why his thoughts have once again turned towards poetry: he can “see far more clearly now that the parts of the soul have been distinguished.”⁶⁷ After Glaucon asks for an explanation, Socrates responds that:

All [imitative] poetry is likely to corrupt the mind of those of its hearers who do not have the knowledge of what it is really like as a drug to counteract it.⁶⁸

There is a lot to draw from this passage, and I will address the different points in turn.

First, this charge is significantly different than the indictments of Books II and III. Earlier, the main issue with poetry (particularly in II) was that it gave false portrayal of heroes and gods.⁶⁹ While there was discussion about imitation, it was mainly a question of how a poet tells his particular tale—that is, whether he assumes the role of a character or merely relays the events as an outside observer.⁷⁰ Socrates concludes that anyone who

⁶⁶ 595a1-3; I default to Jowett in the chapter.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸ 595b3; Reeve

⁶⁹ The gods can only do and create good things (380c) and are unchanging (381c), while poets often portray gods as conniving and deceiving.

⁷⁰ 392c5-d3

can give poetical imitations will not be allowed in the city.⁷¹

Furthermore, the opening of Book X seems to be placing imitation as the main indictment against poetry, separating it from Books II and III. Plato also seems to be implying some kind of connection between imitative poetry and the soul. What that connection is, however, is not clear in the slightest. It is not even remotely clear or obvious why poetry, and the banishment thereof, should become an issue again now that the parts of the soul have been outlined. There is no direct argument for why poetry's metaphysical status should have any bearing on its psychological effects, and why these lead to ethical and political problems. And lastly, Plato is unclear as to what is meant by corrupting the soul.

There are some immediate objections to Plato's claims. First of all, even if imitation, metaphysically, is problematic, there is no clear reason that it would "corrupt the mind."⁷² If we turn to Books II and III, we find some clues. Particularly, Plato thinks that young children, "who cannot judge what is allegorical and what is literal,"⁷³ are at serious risk. If they are allowed to be "under the influence of the poets" they will act immorally, like cowards.⁷⁴ For example, if deceptions of Homer's Achilles are allowed, then those who perceive such a scene will not have "any shame or self-control," and instead will "always be whining and lamenting on slight occasions."⁷⁵ But, at least in Book II and III, Plato does not tell us why this effect is bound to happen, and there are many reasons to think that it would not.

⁷¹ 398a1-4

⁷² 595b3; Reeve

⁷³ 378d5-e2

⁷⁴ 381e3

⁷⁵ 388d5

Watching *Star Wars* may cause toddler to try cutely to push a door open with the Force, but no serious adult, even a teenager, takes these things seriously. They do not take Yoda, Obi-Wan Kenobi, or Luke Skywalker to be moral exemplars in any special sense. The same can be said about more dramatic forms of art more similar to those of Ancient Greece. Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, considered to be one of the best love stories ever told, does not seem to have these effects that Plato claims it might. Few people ever see each other, fall in love, and get married within three days flat.⁷⁶ One of the iconic plays about love and romance has not caused more people to act like the titular characters. It is difficult to think, or at least be as certain as Plato, that watching or listening to the *Iliad* would cause people weep and wail and behave as Achilles did.

The beginning of Book X, then, looks like a series of *non sequiturs*. Imitation does not seem to be as dangerous as Plato is implying. Still, there does seem to be something to Plato's argument, something which we are all familiar with. We have age restrictions on films because we do not believe that young children are mature enough to be exposed to graphic material. Parents often restrict what kind of cartoons their children can watch, even though they are intended for that audience. Cartoons make for poor role models, some argue, that display violent tendencies and other troublesome characteristics.⁷⁷ We have warning labels on video games, where the player is imitating a soldier on the front lines in a bloody war. These restrictions are hardly controversial: quite the contrary, most people support them. In fact, in regards to video games, many people have argued that video games meant for adults can lead to poor behavior in

⁷⁶ Admittedly, this portrayal of poetical influence is a bit exaggerated, but as a caricature it serves the purpose of driving home the relationship between poetry and human behavior.

⁷⁷ Nebojsa Mandrapa, "Negative Impacts of Cartoons," *Novak Djokovic Foundation* (blog), Jan. 20 2014, <https://novakdjokovicfoundation.org/negative-impacts-of-cartoons/>

children. Camilla Turner reports in the *The Telegraph* that “nearly half of parents reported a negative change in their child’s behavior since they started playing video games aimed at adults.”⁷⁸ Based on these results, it would seem that imitating a soldier in *Call of Duty* may actually have implications similar to those that Plato outlines in Book III.

In any case, we cannot simply dismiss Plato’s argument as a line of *non sequiturs*, even if it may first appear to be just that. However, since each step does not follow as nicely as we might like, we have to examine each step in depth. This chapter does just that. Section one takes a step back from poetry and focuses on imitation and what exactly constitutes an imitation. I do so by diving deep into the three degrees of reality he outlines, and really try to grasp why imitation is “thrice removed from the truth.” In doing so, I explain why appearances are just as metaphysically distinct from objects as objects are from Ideas.

Section two addresses poetry and rhetoric and why these two arts are imitative. Plato discusses imitation, as a general concept, by using painting as an analogy. However, the analogy is difficult to extend to poetry: after all, what does poetry imitate? The same question goes for rhetoric. To answer the poetry question, I remain in Book X, but for rhetoric, I leave the *Republic* to go to the *Gorgias*, where I explain how rhetoric aims to imitate things like politics and justice.

Finally, section three addresses the psychological implications of imitation,

⁷⁸ Camilla Turner, “Children are exposed to video game violence because parents do not take age ratings seriously, survey finds,” *The Telegraph* online, July 12, 2018, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/education/2018/07/12/children-exposed-video-game-violence-parents-do-not-take-age/>

specifically for poetry. In short, poetry appeals to the irrational part⁷⁹ of the soul. In doing so, poetry empowers the irrational part of soul, throwing the soul out of order and corrupting it. Jessica Moss is exceedingly helpful on the topic of imitation⁸⁰, and I rely on her extensively in teasing out this issue. Moss analyzes the relationship between poetry's metaphysical status and its ethical effects, and I largely follow her analysis. However, I want to include more than just poetry. I try to make the same connections with rhetoric. I also elaborate more on the metaphysical distinction between imitations and their objects of imitation, explaining how one is inferior to the other.

Section 1: Imitation—The Difference between Appearance and Reality

Plato's concept of imitation is slippery and difficult to grasp, especially when he says that imitations are "thrice removed from the king and from the truth."⁸¹ Plato uses the art of painting and painters as a case study of imitation, and develops his theory by analogy. However, it's not obvious why a painting, whether it be of a table or a bed, would be so removed from reality. A painting of a mountain can look nearly the same as the actual mountain. A person can still discern that the mountain is incredibly tall, with snow-capped mountains and steep slopes peppered with trees. While there is certainly a difference between the physical mountain and the painting, it does not seem that difference is so vast as to constitute the same distinction as objects from Ideas. To explain better the distinction, Plato takes the example of a bed:

⁷⁹ By "irrational part" I mean the appetitive part of the soul. I address this choice latter on. Another way to view it would be to say "lower parts" of the soul.

⁸⁰ Jessica Moss, "What is Imitative Poetry and Why is it Bad?" in *The Cambridge Companion to Plato's Republic*, ed. by G. R. F. Ferrari (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 414-444.

⁸¹ 597e4

Here are three beds, one existing in nature, which is made by God. There is another which is the work of a carpenter.

And the work of the painter is the third.⁸²

The bed in nature is singular: there is only one Bed, for if there were two, “a third would still appear behind them which both of them would have for their Idea, and that would be the ideal bed and not the two others.”⁸³ Clearly, Plato is relating the theory of Ideas from Books VI and VII, which I covered in chapter one. In fact, this passage parallels almost perfectly the discussion of beauty at 507b: whenever there is a multiplicity of something, there is an Idea behind those things. The many beds represent a multiplicity, and so there must be something unifying them as beds. That something, as we saw in chapter one, is the Idea of Bed. Furthermore, objects also hold a lesser degree of reality than their Ideas. Every physical bed has some non-bed in it, something imperfect which makes it incomplete.

The work of the carpenter, then, refers to objects. Carpenters create physical beds, but the singular Idea of Bed is not a physical entity, while physical beds can be many. Up till now, Plato appears to be rehashing the Line from Book VI. There are Ideas at the top, and physical beds as objects are less real than the Idea of Bed.⁸⁴ But then he says:

“we may fairly designate [the painter] as the imitator of that which the others make,” and

⁸² 597b2; As Reeve notes, “in nature” means “that is in its nature a couch.”

⁸³ 597c4

⁸⁴ There is one glaring omission which I shall briefly address. There is no mention of hypotheticals in Book X. The Line was composed of four parts, where the higher segment was broken down into Ideas and then hypotheticals. Then the lower segment was broken into objects and shadows/reflections. Plato has skipped an entire segment of his Line, and gone directly from Ideas to objects. I do not think this poses a problem, however. In theory, Plato could have added another profession, something akin to mathematician, who formulates “hypotheses” to beds, and then they could be placed between god and the carpenter. However, this would not help clarify the relationship between imitations and the objects they imitate. Rather, it would just cause more confusion, since the present discussion is about imitation.

is “third in the descent from nature.”⁸⁵ If we refer to the Line, then it seems that imitations are shadows or reflections. But that is not entirely obvious. After all, a painting can give a remarkable likeness of an object. The imperfections appear to be few and minor, at worst. We often use pictures for educational purposes because they give a reliable likeness to the original (the original object, that is). So, it would seem that the relationship between painting and object is much tighter than the relationship between an object and its Idea. Our original suspicion, that imitations reside in the lowest part of the line, seems to be less solid than before. The multiplicity distinction does not seem to hold as well as it did with objects and Ideas. It is entirely possible that there have been more physical beds than there have been pictures of beds. The imperfect or incomplete distinction also appears weak. A picture of a bed would seem to tell nearly all there is to a bed: what it looks like, height, etc. For Plato, however, these intuitions are false.

He wants to put daylight between an imitation and the thing which is imitated. He starts by asking: does the painter copy the Idea, or the object? But the next question is perplexing and all the more revealing. He asks whether the painter imitates objects “as they are or as they appear.”⁸⁶ Here, Plato makes a sharp contrast between an object and an object’s appearance.⁸⁷ This one, seemingly innocent question contains a lot, and we require more text in order to unpack completely the theory behind it. The most important text comes when Socrates describes appearances as follows:

You may look at a bed from different points of view,

⁸⁵ 597e4

⁸⁶ 598a1

⁸⁷ For contemporary minds, this thought may be difficult to grasp. We often assume (perhaps all too quickly) that what we see *is* the object; when we see a chair, we are seeing the *object*. Plato wants to put daylight between the two.

obliquely or from any other point of view, and the bed will appear different, but there is no difference in reality [...] the difference is only apparent.⁸⁸

There are two important points to draw from this passage: first imitations are about appearances, and second, they are thrice removed from reality.

Say there is a bed. Now, as Plato outlined above, there are many different points of view, many perspectives, from which the painter can paint the bed. Each of these paintings would be slightly different, since each perspective has a different look. However, the bed does not change. Therefore, since the painter is capable of capturing many different perspectives, he captures the appearance of the bed, not the bed itself. Hence, Socrates concludes at 598b that an imitation of things is of appearance, and not of reality. While the painting analogy applies specifically to sight, it is just an analogy. This conclusion applies to all forms of imitation, not just painting. Whenever someone is imitating something, they are merely imitating the appearance of that thing, not the thing itself.

The second, and arguably more significant point to be drawn from this passage, is why appearances, and therefore imitations, are a lower degree of reality. Walking around a bed, and viewing the bed from multiple perspectives, gives rise to a multitude of images, each one slightly different than the rest. Imagine if a painter were to paint many of these different perspectives. Each painting would be a unique image of the bed. There would be a multiplicity of differing images to a single, unchanging object. Each image certainly captures part of the bed, but not all of it; it could be from an angle that conceals

⁸⁸ 598a3-b2

part of the object. This understanding is why Plato says that imitators imitate things as they appear, not as they are.⁸⁹ As they are, objects are stable and unchanging, whereas the appearances of an objects do change.

This distinction parallels, almost word for word, the distinction between Ideas and objects: “whenever a number of individuals have a common name, we assume them to have a corresponding Idea or form.”⁹⁰ That is, there are multiple beds, each one slightly different than the rest, but there is a corresponding Idea, the Idea of Bed, which is the true bed, the highest level of bed there is. There is a multiplicity of objects, beds, corresponding to a single Idea; and there is a multiplicity of images corresponding to a single object. These images can change as well: moving around the bed gives rise to different perspectives. And just like objects, appearances are imperfect and incomplete compared to the original.

Recall from chapter one that physical objects are imperfect and incomplete with respect to their Idea. A red rose is beautiful, but it has some non-beauty elements to it as well, namely that it can decay or otherwise change. The same goes for appearances. From one angle, say directly above it, the bed may appear to be a square. But from a different angle, it looks to be a three-dimensional rectangle. From one angle, it could appear to have only two legs, another three, but there are really four. From Chapter 1, the fact that objects can change (whereas Ideas cannot) implied that there was some imperfection or incompleteness to the object. The same can now be said of appearances. Appearances capture part of the object, but not all of it. Indeed, every perspective is necessarily going to miss something—there will always be the other side of the object, concealed from

⁸⁹ 598b3

⁹⁰ 596a4

view. Furthermore, the viewer will miss the material inside the object. Appearances will inevitably miss parts of the original. Therefore, they are incomplete. They are imperfect, since they change with perspective whereas the object does not.

In fact, it may be worse for appearances. Not only do they change with perspective, but they miss other important qualities. For example, a person cannot sleep in a painting of a bed. The bed may smell of a particular kind of wood. The painting does not capture that either. So not only are imitations imperfect and incomplete because they are liable to change, but they cannot grasp other important qualities, such as what you can do with the objects, how to use them, etc.

With these two distinctions complete, we can summarize the driving force behind Plato's metaphysical distinctions. First, there is a multiplicity to singularity relationship. All beautiful objects participate in the single Idea of Beauty. Imitations partake of a single object. But objects are incomplete and imperfect with respect to Ideas. Similarly, imitations are incomplete and imperfect with respect to physical objects.⁹¹

At last we can see why imitations are categorized below objects in Plato's metaphysics. The distinction between Ideas and objects lies in the fact that there are many objects, each one relating to a specific quality or characteristic. These objects may be very close to one another, but there are differences (perhaps even apparent contradictions) between them. Those differences imply an imperfection when compared with the Idea. The same can be said about appearances. The subtle differences reveal that

⁹¹ There is one major question which arises from this interpretation. I will not address it in this thesis, but offer it up instead. Plato uses painting as an analogy. However, paintings (at least, the realistic ones) capture visuals that can be nearly identical to the image that our own eyes would capture. It seems to follow, therefore, that our very eyesight, and the images our brains capture, has the same metaphysical status as paintings. We do not actually see an object (or sense it in any other way, for that matter). We only get the appearance, the same appearance that a painting reveals.

there is something about the appearances that is not in the object. That is, imitations are imperfect and incomplete with respect to objects. The relationship between appearances and objects, therefore, is the same as the relationship between objects and Ideas.

Now we can see why imitations are thrice removed from reality. From chapter one, we learned that objects, which participate in Ideas, are a part of an incomplete and imperfect multiplicity liable to change and variation. Thus, objects are one degree removed. Imitations, which copy appearances, also are a part of an incomplete and imperfect multiplicity which is liable to change and variation. But the things they copy are already imperfect and incomplete. Thus, imitations are thrice removed from reality. Hence, Plato concludes that “the imitator is a long way off the truth, and can do all things because he lightly touches on a small part of them, and that part an image.”⁹²

With an understanding of imitations, we now have the necessary framework to analyze poetry. Specifically, we can now understand what makes poetry imitative. Poets, I argue, copy the appearance of human virtue, and given an imperfect if not false account of ethics.

Section 2: Poetry and Rhetoric—imitations of humans and ethics

Now we turn our attention to poetry and rhetoric. At the beginning of Book X, Socrates singles out imitative poetry. But what exactly is imitative poetry? We now understand that imitations copy the appearance of something. But what does poetry copy? And while the painting analogy is easily accessible, the analogy begins to break down (somewhat) because poetry has very little to do with sight (at least, in the way that a

⁹² 598b3

painting does). What, then, does poetry imitate? Or, to be more precise, what appearances does poetry copy?

Furthermore, it is stated in the *Gorgias* that poetry is a kind of rhetoric. If poetry can be imitative, it seems likely, then, that rhetoric can be imitative as well. Indeed, I argue this claim. Thus, in this section, I show how poetry and rhetoric constitute imitations.

First, I tackle poetry. In particular, I show what appearances poetry copies. Jessica Moss, I believe, has the correct interpretation, and I follow his analysis while strengthening the relationship with the metaphysics that she touches on. There are two key passages that give us direct, though incomplete answers. The first comes at 600e. Socrates tells us we must “infer that all these poetical individuals, beginning with Homer, are only imitators; they copy images of virtue and the like, the truth they never reach.”⁹³ From this passage, it appears that poetry imitates virtue. But we still need more—it is not clear what it means to copy virtue.

Second: “Imitation imitates the actions of men, whether voluntary or involuntary, on which, as they imagine, a good or bad result has ensued, and they rejoice or sorrow accordingly.”⁹⁴ These two passages indicate that poetry, especially the likes of Homer, is concerned with virtues, or, even more broadly understood, ethics. That is, poetry copies the actions of humans, and portrays them as either being exemplars of virtue or examples of vice. Indeed, this account is consistent with our historical understanding as well.

In ancient Greece, the poets were the source of ethical knowledge. Indeed, as Protagoras says in *Protagoras*, “when the boy has learned his letters and is beginning to

⁹³ 600e3

⁹⁴ 603c2-4

understand what is written, as before he understood only what was spoken, they put into their hands the works of great poets, which he reads on a bench at school,” and within these stories “are contained many admonitions, and many tales, and many praises, and encomia of ancient famous men, which he is required to learn by heart, in order that he may imitate or emulate them and desire to become like them.”⁹⁵ In ancient Greek culture, young people pulled their role models from the poets’ tales. They would take Homeric heroes and try to imitate them. Characters like Achilles and Ajax became the ideal person, the embodiment of virtue (at least for would-be warriors). Poetry gave the populace a blue print for behavior and action, examples to follow.

We should not ignore the fact that Plato’s Protagoras says “imitate.” If someone wants to be virtuous, they should, according to Protagoras, copy the heroes. That does not mean going to war with Troy. Rather, it is more along the lines of “what would Achilles do in this situation?” For ancient Athenians, knowing how to this kind of question requires knowing Homer. In this way, poetry informed people how to be virtuous.

However, there is a difficulty here. We know imitations copy appearances. What, then, is the appearance of virtue? The appearance of an object like a bed is intuitive to grasp; but the appearance of virtue is not. Here is where Moss is insightful, and I follow her account.

One possible explanation would be that poets copy the looks and sensible, physical elements of human beings, things like motion, voice, and expression. This explanation, however, is not sufficient. It adds no explanation as to why poetical imitations would lead to ethical harm. I hold that the issue with this interpretation is that

⁹⁵ 325e1-326a4

is focuses too much on the physical, and misses something deeper. Specifically, virtue is not about looks: it is about excellence (*aretê*). And so, we must endeavor to understand the difference between true excellence and excellence as it appears. As Moss correctly points out, a poet “copies what appear to be, but are not, instances of human excellence, the appearance of excellence, *apparent excellence* (emphasis original).”⁹⁶ The phrase “apparent excellence” is particularly illuminating. As Moss further explains, “apparent,” in this context, means that something appears to be excellent, but is in fact not. And so, an apparently good person, on the surface, looks like a virtuous person. However, in truth, they are not.

Still, it is not obvious why poetry is a form of imitation. Some poetry may fall under the above category, where one character is deceptive or misleading. Yet, it still seems possible that some truly virtuous characters could still be represented in a poem. It is not obvious that imitative poetry categorically excludes imitations of virtuous characters. After all, in Book II, Plato allows poets to compose stories of heroes, but only in the approved way.⁹⁷ Gods are only to be portrayed as good and just,⁹⁸ as well as unchanging.⁹⁹ Heroes are not to be shown to be “weeping and wailing,”¹⁰⁰ lamenting, or angry¹⁰¹. That is, heroes are not to be out of control emotional—they are to be composed, under control, and static.

Someone may object: what if someone was steadily angry? Then surely, they would be static, unchanging. However, that cannot be the case. Being virtuous is not just

⁹⁶ Moss, “What is Imitative Poetry?” 13

⁹⁷ 378c

⁹⁸ 379b1-c4

⁹⁹ 381c3

¹⁰⁰ 387d1

¹⁰¹ 390e3

being static in whatever emotion: it means those emotions are under control. Being angry all of the time may be fine, if reason called for it. But Homer's Achilles is anything but composed and under the control of reason.

However, these distinctions are extremely important: indeed, it explains why Plato believes these poems are considered imitations. When heroes are presented as unstable, prone to emotional outbursts, courageous and composed at one moment but flustered and disturbed the next, they are portrayed as changing, even contradictory, just as paintings do when give different images of a single object. Since these heroes represent virtue, and what a virtuous person looks and acts like, virtue is unstable and liable to change. But true virtue is not. Therefore, there is a thing which is unchanging in reality, but is portrayed as changing, and differing. This distinction is exactly the division between objects and imitations. As Moss points out, it parallels the distinction between an imitation of a bed and the material bed, or between the many beautiful things and the Idea of Beauty. Characters that vary appear excellent, whereas true excellence lies in stability and consistency.¹⁰² Thus, when poetry show heroes and gods in this way, they are copying the appearance of excellence because excellence is being portrayed as changing and alterable, when in reality, it is unchanging.

Before I continue, I want to clarify what is meant by changing and unchanging. In the case of a physical bed, the appearance certainly does change: some angles make it look like it has only three legs where there are in fact four. But what it means to change in terms of virtue is much slipperier. Someone with an extremely virtuous character—someone like a philosopher-king—will certainly do different things, like law-making and

¹⁰² Moss, "What is Imitative Poetry," 14

charging into battle.

While the philosopher-king certainly does different things, that does not mean that their virtue is changing. Being composed does not require a person to be doing the same activity, but to engage in all activities in a composed way. The philosopher-king makes laws in a composed way and charges into battle in a composed (rational) way. They are always composed, just as the bed always has four legs.

Another objection might be raised: but what if a true god were portrayed in a poem, one that fulfills all of Plato's criteria? Would this not also be an imitation? After all, we may assume that it uses the same literary devices that the above poems used: imagery, meter, etc. It would seem that such a poem would be imitative, but only of the true conception of god. These poems would be allowed by Plato, but they are imitative.

Still, I think my understanding holds. Recall from earlier that Socrates asks Glaucon whether or not painters copy things "as they are or as they appear."¹⁰³ Plato appears to be admitting that it is possible to copy things as they are: but simply copying something does not imply the thing is being imitated. That is, it is possible to copy something as it is, not as it appears. Therefore, the poem which portrays gods as Socrates requires in Books II and III would be copying "things as they are, not as they appear."¹⁰⁴ That is, poetry is imitative precisely because it copies the appearance of excellence. If it does not copy appearance, it is not considered imitative.

And so now we understand why poetry (at least in the popular form at the time), was imitative: it showed human excellence, in heroes and in gods, as varying, when in reality, it is stable and composed. Now I turn to rhetoric. There are two things I try to

¹⁰³ 598a1

¹⁰⁴ Moss, "What is Imitative Poetry?" 20

accomplish. The first is to show how poetry is a kind of rhetoric. I will continue this argument in Chapter 3, but I want to establish some connections now. This analysis focuses mainly on the technical aspects of poetry and rhetoric, things like the use of language. The second is to show how rhetoric is a kind of imitation.

To do so, we leave the *Republic* and move to the *Gorgias*, where Socrates is discussing with Calicles the nature of pain and pleasure and how it relates to good and evil. Socrates is attempting to show how rhetoric is concerned with pleasure instead of justice, and do to so he addresses poetry. He shows how poetry is concerned with the pleasures,¹⁰⁵ then makes the following statement:

Suppose we strip all poetry of song and rhythm and metre,
there will remain speech, and this speech is addressed to a
crowd of people. Then poetry is a sort of rhetoric.¹⁰⁶

At this point, the similarities between poetry and rhetoric are merely mechanical: rhetoric is a speech directed at a crowd, and poetry adds rhythm and meter to speech. There is no mention of human excellence, gods, heroes, or virtue. However, there are still important similarities that can be drawn between rhetoric in the *Gorgias* and poetry in the *Republic*.

The first is the subjects which they concern themselves with. One remarkable feature of the opening pages of the *Gorgias* is that Socrates leads Gorgias through a series of increasingly focused definitions of oratory. It will be illuminating to consider them in order. At first, Gorgias says that rhetoric is concerned with the greatest class of

¹⁰⁵ 502b1-5; I do not mean to intentionally gloss over poetry and its relationship with pleasure, but I address it more fully in the next section where I discuss the epistemology and psychology implications of poetry, of which pleasure is a one.

¹⁰⁶502c1-d1

things, “and the best of human things.”¹⁰⁷ Of course, as Socrates points out, this definition is incredibly vague. Still, we can draw some clues from this admission. Gorgias, being the self-proclaimed expert on rhetoric, is already indicating that his profession has to do with human activities. While not explicitly human excellence, it at least is in the neighborhood.

Socrates then gets Gorgias to refine his definition, with Gorgias adding that rhetoric is concerned about the people’s greatest good, “being that which gives to men freedom in their own persons, and to individuals the power of ruling over others in their several states.”¹⁰⁸ Here, Gorgias has inched slightly closer to human excellence, but still he is still off the mark.

Finally, Socrates gets Gorgias to admit that rhetoric is an artificer of persuasion, but in particular, it is the “art of persuasion in courts of law and other assemblies [...] and about the just and unjust.” That is, rhetoric aims to achieve justice through speech and language.¹⁰⁹ But justice is a virtue. In Book IV of the *Republic*, Socrates searches for justice in his imaginary city by finding each of the four cardinal virtues, one of which is justice.¹¹⁰ That is, justice is a virtue, just like the kind that poets imitate. (The others are wisdom,¹¹¹ courage,¹¹² and temperance.¹¹³) Thus, rhetoricians and poets are both concerned with virtue. Poets copy the appearance of virtue. Rhetoricians are primarily

¹⁰⁷ 451d4

¹⁰⁸ 452d4

¹⁰⁹ It is true that Gorgias admits that rhetoric can be used for injustice. However, it must be noted that he does not think it is the purpose of rhetoric: a rhetorician “ought to use rhetoric fairly” (457). For Gorgias, rhetoric is a tool, and just as a tool can be used for other things other than its purpose, so too can rhetoric. But just because a hammer can be used to hit someone, its purpose is still to nail things together. For Gorgias, rhetoric is supposed to achieve justice.

¹¹⁰ 428

¹¹¹ 428a5

¹¹² 429b5-c1

¹¹³ 430e2

concerned with justice, specifically how it applies to a state.

So we have justice as the object of rhetoric (or politics, more broadly understood, given Gorgias's reference to courts and assemblies¹¹⁴). The next question is whether rhetoric copies justice as it is in reality, or as it appears. Or, more simply put, is rhetoric imitative?

Admittedly, this point is difficult. Plato does not formally address imitations at all in the *Gorgias*¹¹⁵, and the discussion of imitation in Book X is focused almost squarely on poetry. Therefore, we must try to see if the definition of imitation applies to rhetoric. In particular we must answer one question: does rhetoric copy justice as it is (i.e., copy true justice), or the appearance of justice? I show that, for Plato, rhetoric is not concerned with true justice. Instead, it parades as justice, while actually being a flattery, placating to people's pleasures.¹¹⁶ The key lies in the multiplicity and variance of applications for rhetoric.

First, we must understand what rhetoric does. Above, rhetoric was said to be a kind of persuasion. But as Socrates notes, there are two kinds of persuasion, "one which is the source of belief [*pistis*] without knowledge, [and] the other is of knowledge."¹¹⁷ The first kind, belief without knowledge, can be false.¹¹⁸ A person can indeed be persuaded to hold a false belief, like the Earth is flat. The second kind of persuasion produces knowledge. A geometry lecture can persuade the audience about triangles and other figures, but (assuming it is a good lecture) the audience has learned something—

¹¹⁴ See 452e

¹¹⁵ The passages around 464 certainly foreshadow the later theory of imitations in the *Republic*, but Plato's focus is not on imitations.

¹¹⁶ In doing so, our theory remains consistent. Just as poetry parades as the keeper of virtues, rhetoric parades as the keeper of justice, while in reality, they do not actually capture that which they claim to.

¹¹⁷ 454e3

¹¹⁸ 454d2

they have gained knowledge. Both instances involve persuasion, but only one produces knowledge.

Rhetoric falls into the first category; it only brings about beliefs, which can be true or false.¹¹⁹ But belief [*pistis*] has a special place, metaphysically, for Plato. Returning to The Line, there are:

Four conditions in the soul corresponding to the four subsections of the line: understanding dealing with the highest, thought dealing with the second; assign belief [*pistis*] to the third, and imagination to the last.¹²⁰

So, beliefs belong to the third segment of the line. Rhetoric therefore, produces things that belong in the third segment. Initially, this may appear to undermine my argument that rhetoric is a kind of imitation, but I do not think so. Painters produce objects, just as sculptors produce sculptures and photographers produce pictures. In that regard, paintings are a kind of object. But they still copy the appearance of something, it just so happens that the medium of their imitation is physical. The same could be the case for rhetoric: it may produce beliefs, but that does not necessarily imply that rhetoric is not imitative. I still hold that rhetoric is a kind of imitation because it does copy appearances: we only have to look at what Gorgias thinks rhetoric does.

Gorgias claims that “the rhetorician can speak against all men and upon any subject; in short, he can persuade the multitude better than any other man of anything which he pleases,”¹²¹ and while the rhetorician is capable of persuading people to do

¹¹⁹ 455a1

¹²⁰ 511d4-e1; Reeve

¹²¹ 457a3; However, again, while rhetoric is capable of all these things, its purpose (or so Gorgias claims) is still justice.

anything, they should not commit injustice with it. Simply put, rhetoric is capable of doing justice and injustice: there is no implicit quality that prevents it from being used to cause injustice.¹²² A rhetorician could give a speech in a court in support of one policy. Now, the rhetorician will claim that their policy fosters justice, and if the government adopts their policy, it will be just. However, as Gorgias admits, rhetoric could be used for injustice. And so, that policy could appear to cause justice, when in reality it causes injustice.

Instead, as Socrates says, while rhetoricians “appear to aim at what is best” and “seek to improve the citizens by their speeches,” in reality, they are “bent upon giving them pleasure, forgetting the public good in thought of their own interest, playing with the people as with children, and trying to amuse them, but never considering whether they are better or worse for this.”¹²³ Instead of being concerned with true justice, rhetoricians pander to their audiences, giving pleasure but calling it justice. And as pleasures change, so too does “justice.” Therefore, the “image” of justice as portrayed as rhetoricians is changing, even contradictory, instead of the unchanging, stable reality of justice. Thus, rhetoric copies the appearance of justice, and is an imitation thereof.

Rhetoric, in the vein of Gorgias, Polus, and Callicles, therefore constitutes a kind of imitation. A rhetorician will say that justice is one thing today, but another thing tomorrow. They bring about false beliefs regarding justice, beliefs that vary. We deduced this conclusion after following the increasingly focused definitions given by Gorgias and his compatriots. But this is not to say that any speech or any address is imitative. Indeed, Socrates thinks that there is a true “rhetoric,” one that is not imitative like the kind

¹²² 457a4

¹²³ 502e2-5

professed by Gorgias.

The true art of rhetoric is about bettering the citizenry. The true rhetorician will try to implant justice in the souls of the citizenry and remove injustice. In short, the true rhetorician is he “who will strive and struggle to make [the people] as good as possible” as opposed to a “flatterer of the state.”¹²⁴ Of course, Socrates thinks that he is only true politician of his time, for he is the only one who looks “to what is best and not to what is most pleasant.”¹²⁵ But the difference between “Socratic rhetoric” and the traditional kind is vast. “Socratic rhetoric,” the kind aimed at the good, sounds more like an educator teaching the populace how to improve their lives. There is no talk about pleasures or the ability to talk on any subject. On the other hand, the kind practiced by Gorgias is still an imitation: it changes with audiences, and produces only beliefs that can vary and change. Rhetoric, as traditionally practiced, still qualifies as an imitation.

Up to now, we have poetry and rhetoric (I will refer to just poetry from here, for simplicity’s sake) as two imitative arts. They are imitations because they copy the appearance of something, not the thing itself. What separates appearances from the thing itself is the stability of each: the thing itself is unchanging, whereas the appearance can change, and appear differently, having an imperfection. Poetry, broadly understood, imitates human virtue because it shows virtuous people as unstable and prone to emotional outbursts, instead of composed and rational. Rhetoric imitates justice (or politics) by changing theories or advice in accordance to the audience’s varying and even contradictory pleasures and desires.

Still, it is not obvious why imitations are so problematic for the soul. Just because

¹²⁴ 521a3

¹²⁵ 521e1

they only represent appearances does not mean they inherently corrupt the mind. In order to see why Plato views imitations, especially poetry, with contempt, we must turn from metaphysics to psychology.

Section 3: Imitations—Psychological Corruption

Plato hints that the problem with poetry stems not necessarily from metaphysics, a (although as we've been seeing, the fields are related), but from psychology when Socrates says that he is happy with the banning of poetry because he sees "more clearly now that parts of the soul have been distinguished."¹²⁶ Much of what follows in Book X is what I examined above: what imitation is and why Homer and the other famous poets are imitative. Then, at 602c, Socrates asks "what is the faculty in man to which imitation is addressed."¹²⁷ Here, Plato is shifting from the metaphysical analysis of poetry to the psychological. When he speaks of faculty, he is referring to the tri-partition of the soul which he established in Book IV. There, he outlines three parts of the soul: the rational principle of soul, or "the one with which a man reasons"; the appetitive or irrational part, the one "with which he loves, hungers, and thirsts, and feels the flutterings of any other desire";¹²⁸ and lastly the spirit, or passion part which deal with honor and pride.

Between the three, certain kinds of relationships can occur. Reason and appetites often conflict with one another. Desires may yearn for a tasty treat, but reason will pull back, much like the way an archer simultaneously pushes and pulls on a bow.¹²⁹ The spirited part of the soul, however, does not necessarily pull in a third direction. Rather, it

¹²⁶ 595a5

¹²⁷ 602c3

¹²⁸ 439d2-5

¹²⁹ 439b5

takes sides. When a person gets upset, angry, or disappointed with themselves after consuming a jelly-filled donut, it is an instance where the spirit sided with reason. When the person ate the donut, anger went “to war with desire.”¹³⁰

Perhaps more importantly, the spirit rarely sides with desire: “but for the passionate or spirited element to take part with the desires when reason decides that it should not be opposed, is a sort of thing [which is] never observed.”¹³¹ If reason decided a donut was a good thing, then “anger refuses to be excited.”¹³² The spirited part of the soul, therefore, is only called into action by reasons, and “will not be quelled until either he slays or is slain; or until he hears the voice of his shepherd, that is, reason, bidding is dog no more.”¹³³ Spirit can only be excited by the commands of reason and can only be calmed by reason. Thus, Plato concludes, “in the conflict of the soul spirit is arrayed on the side of the rational principle.”¹³⁴

Within the soul, there are three parts. But if there is conflict within it, then it becomes desires versus reason and spirit. The important thing to draw is that it is reason and desire that get caught up in a tug of war: spirit just pulls on the side of reason.

Note that, as I proceed, I will refer to the appetitive or desirous part of the soul as the irrational part. It is true that spirit is technically irrational, but in terms of division when in conflict, the spirit goes to reason, becoming imbued with a kind of rationality. Thus, only the desires are left as purely irrational.

But how does the soul relate to imitations? To make the connection, Plato shows

¹³⁰ 4403

¹³¹ 440b1-5

¹³² 440c3

¹³³ 440c5-d1

¹³⁴ 440e2

how appearances lead to the same kind of tension.

The same objects appear straight when looked at out of the water, and crooked when in the water; and the concave becomes convex, owing to the illusion about colors to which the sight is liable. Thus every sort of confusion is revealed within us; and this is that weakness of the human mind on which the art of conjuring and deceiving by light and shadow and other ingenious devices imposes. [...] And the arts of measuring and numbering and weighing come to the rescue of the human understanding—there is the beauty of them—and the apparent greater or less, or more or heavier, no longer have the mastery over us, but give way before calculation and measure and weight. And this, surely, must be the work of the calculating and rational principle in the soul.¹³⁵

Here, Plato is contrasting what each part of the soul is telling a person. The irrational part of the soul says there is a difference, while the rational part of the soul says there is no difference: what appears to be bent is in reality straight.¹³⁶ The irrational part of the soul sees the changes in appearance, while the rational part of the soul realizes there is no change. Furthermore, since it is the rational part of the soul that saves the day, we can infer that the irrational part of the soul does not realize that the bending is simply an

¹³⁵ 602c3-e1

¹³⁶ Here there is a disagreement in the soul. The irrational part disagrees or is in conflict with reason. As mentioned earlier, spirit would align itself with reason.

illusion. That is, it believes the appearance to be the truth—the stick is really bent.

Given what we know about the irrational part of the soul, it may seem odd connecting desires with sense perceptions. But there is a way to link the two. When it comes to appetites, the irrational part of the soul believes that whatever satisfies its desires is good. One day, it is pizza, the next, carrots. Both pizza and carrots are good, according to this part of the soul. But these two foods are (essentially) contradictory when it comes to health. The point is that the irrational part of the soul can perceive conflicting things and see no problem. Inconsistencies are not a problem to rectify for the irrational part. Thus, the stick in the water can be bent for the irrational part: it perceives no problem with it.

Indeed, part of the reason why the stick in the water is an illusion is because part of the soul wants to believe it is bent. Since the rational part is not confused, only the irrational part is left. And so, it must be the irrational part that believes the illusion. Since the rational part of soul recognizes a problem and the irrational part does not, there is tension and conflict.

While the connection between the irrational part of the soul and imitations seems clear, it is nonetheless important to draw a clear connection between imitative poetry specifically and the irrational part of the soul. At 603b, Socrates asks if the connection between imitation and the soul “extend[s] to the hearing also, relating in fact to what we term poetry,” and that we should not rely “on the probability derived from the analogy of painting; but let us examine further and see whether the faculty with which the poetical imitation is concerned is good or bad.”¹³⁷ So the analogy of the bent stick is not sufficient

¹³⁷ 603b5-c1

for our purposes—more is needed to connect poetry to the irrational part of the soul.

To do so, Socrates compares the reactions of a person controlled by reason to those of a person controlled by the irrational part. He focuses on the emotions of grief and lamentation as a case study.

On one hand the reasonable person will “moderate his sorrow,”¹³⁸ for the “principle of law and reason [...] bids him to resist.”¹³⁹ When confronted with calamity, he will understand that “to be patient under suffering is best, and that [he] should not give way to impatience, as there is no knowing whether such things are good or evil; and nothing is gained by impatience.”¹⁴⁰ That is, when a terrible or distressing event occurs to the reasonable person, they will be patient because they are not sure if this event is good or bad.¹⁴¹ They will remain calm, trying to understand the nature of the event.¹⁴²

On the other hand, the irrational person reacts like a child: “who [has] had a fall, keeping hold of the part struck and wasting time in setting up a howl.”¹⁴³ Instead of being collected, the irrational person lashes out, reacting erratically. Imagine a young child when their toy is taken away from them by their parent because it is time for bed. Going to sleep is indeed a good thing for them. However, they respond by throwing a temper tantrum, throwing things, flailing, and crying. They have been taken over by their emotions, by the desire to play. Reason has been thrown out the window, and the

¹³⁸ 603e4

¹³⁹ 604a5

¹⁴⁰ 604b4-5

¹⁴¹ This understanding is further supported from a passage from the *Gorgias*. Being punished may actually be a good thing: “justice punishes us, and makes us more just, and is the medicine of our vice.” (478d) Punishment, which can be a quite painful, and distressful event, is actually an ethically good thing. Therefore, the reasonable person would welcome punishment instead of wailing and crying about it.

¹⁴² A prime example, of course, is Socrates in the *Crito* and *Phaedo*.

¹⁴³ 604c4

passions take over.¹⁴⁴

The question, then, is which of these two reactions is connected with poetry. Plato claims poetry is connected with the second. When someone listens to a passage from Homer or some other poet, “in which he represents some pitiful hero who is drawling out his sorrows in a long oration, or weeping, and smiting his breast—the best of us, you know, delight in giving way to sympathy, and are in raptures at the excellence of the poet who stirs our feelings the most.”¹⁴⁵ When a hero or other character is on stage, expressing their emotions, the audience enjoys partaking and connecting with the character. The “giving way” word choice is revealing: the audience is not just experiencing some kind of emotional reaction. Rather, it is a kind of surrender to emotions (in this case, sympathy), and in doing so the audience feels pleasure.

This may seem strange at first, the Idea of giving way to emotions as a kind of pleasure. I address it more thoroughly in a moment, but to drive some intuition, I’ll offer a brief example. Say someone has a dog whom they love and cherish. Times goes by and the dog grows old and eventually they have to put the dog down. The person will probably come to tears. But why do they cry? It cannot be because crying is painful—if it was they would not do it. Rather, the tears and the grief make them feel better. It is a kind of cathartic release. People often say they feel better after a rant—they just “needed to vent.” If someone has a particularly bad day, they may break down, but they feel better afterwards, in part because of the release. Going through the emotions makes people feel better.

Watching a tragedy or reading a poem is one way for people to experience these

¹⁴⁴ Of course, young children have very little reason, but we are merely using them as an example.

¹⁴⁵ 605c5-d2

emotions (without having to actually lose anything). By empathizing with characters, the audience can experience a kind of pleasure. Orators can do something similar. A eulogy can help people grieve during difficult times; a commencement speech at a graduation is about making the graduates feel good about their accomplishments. There is another component to poetry and rhetoric about value affirmation that brings pleasure, but I discuss it in Chapter 3. For now, all we need to understand is that poetry appeals to and can satisfy certain desires, which appeals to the irrational part of the soul.

And so, we have poetry being a kind of imitation, where the appearance of virtue is copied, and that imitation appeals to the irrational part of the soul. Hence, “we may fairly take [the poet] and place him by the side of the painter, for he is like him two ways: first, inasmuch as his creations have an inferior degree of truth—in this, I say, he is like him; and he is also like him in being concerned with an inferior part of the soul.”¹⁴⁶

However, later in this passage Socrates says, because of these conclusions, “we shall be right in refusing to admit [the poet] into a well-ordered State, because he awakens and nourishes the feelings and impairs the reason.”¹⁴⁷ This conclusion does not follow. Just because poetry deals with imitation and is associated with the irrational part of the soul, does not mean it corrupts the entire soul. After all, Plato does not insist that there should be no emotions, merely that they must be controlled by the rational part of the soul.¹⁴⁸ A person can hunger and seek food, but they must do so according to reason. A person can thirst and seek drink, but they must respond to it according to reason. It would seem that seeking some kind of emotional release would be acceptable, given that

¹⁴⁶ 605b1

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁸ 441e2

it was done according to reason. But Plato does not think so, at least via poetry.

Here is where the language used at 605c is revealing.¹⁴⁹ The audience is giving way to passions; there must be something holding them back, something restraining them before they watch the tragedy, in order for there be any “giving way.” That something is reason, or the rational part of the soul. Socrates says “when any sorrow of our own happens to us, then you may observe that we pride ourselves on the opposite quality—we would fain be quiet and patient.”¹⁵⁰ The “opposite” word choice is the giveaway. Since that the rational person would be calm and contemplative (or patient), this disposition lies in opposition to the urge to be overly emotional.

Therefore, the rational part of the soul demands we be patient and calm in the face of calamity, while the irrational part takes delight in seeing weeping and wailing. And since “poetry feeds and waters the passions instead of drying them up,”¹⁵¹ it is opposed to reason. Thus,

When in misfortune we feel a natural hunger and desire to relieve our sorrow by weeping and lamenting, and that this feeling which is kept under control in our own calamities is satisfied and delighted by the poets; the better nature in each of us (that is, the rational part), not having been sufficiently trained by reason or habit, allows the sympathetic element to break loose because the sorrow is another's.¹⁵²

¹⁴⁹ Reeve translates it as “give ourselves over to it.”

¹⁵⁰ 605d5

¹⁵¹ 606d3

¹⁵² 606a1-b1

Under normal circumstances, we do not weep and wail when bad things happen, even though we may feel like it. However, when a poet displays a hero, a person we admire, as doing so, they give the irrational part of the soul power, so much so that the irrational part can break free of the reason's control. Now, this passage may appear to indicate that this threat only applies to those who have not "been sufficiently trained by reason." However, Plato is explicit (although subtle) that poetry poses a threat to everyone: "the power which poetry has of harming even the good (and there are very few who are not harmed), is surely an awful thing."¹⁵³ The power of poetry is not small or inconsequential: it threatens even those who are most governed by reason. And thus, poetry is capable of overthrowing reason as the ruler of the soul, and crowning the irrational part as master.

Now we understand the complex relationship between the metaphysics of imitations, the psychology of imitations, and the ethical implications of poetry. Imitations only copy the appearance of something, and in particular poetry copies apparent virtue. In doing so, it appeals exclusively to the irrational part of the soul. It satisfies a desire to be emotional instead of rational about things. This effect, in turn, gives the irrational part of the soul power, so much so that it can usurp reason, putting the soul into disarray and chaos.

Before I move onto the next chapter, I would like to review briefly this one. Imitations copy the appearances of things, appearances which are imperfect, incomplete multiplicities of an object. There are many appearances of a single object, but only one object. The appearances are imperfect copies of the original, missing important qualities and features. Poetry in particular copies the appearance of virtue. The irrational part of

¹⁵³ 605c3

the soul, which deals with desire, is fed and strengthened partly because poetry provides an emotional release.

But still, it is not quite obvious why these facts necessitate the poets' exile. After all, painters are not exiled, and they are imitators. But more importantly, it would seem that philosophy can be a defense. Plato was aware about these problems with poetry: he used philosophy to understand the true nature of them, and as Socrates says, that would be like a drug to counteract poetry. The perfect state, the one based on philosophy, would then have the same knowledge and the same protection. In that case, there would not be much reason to exile the poets. In chapter three, this point is the focus of my argument—to show why philosophy cannot protect the state from the corrupting influences of poetry.

CHAPTER 3: THE FALL OF DIALECTIC

We now have the pieces to understand why Plato exiled the poets. First, there is dialectic. Dialectic is the search for Ideas via hypotheses; poetry and rhetoric are imitations that give the appearance of virtue and justice. In this chapter I answer the main question: why does Plato ban poetry? Previous work has argued that imitative poetry cripples the rational part of the soul, thereby corrupting it.¹⁵⁴ While these interpretations may be accurate (indeed, I think they are), I do not believe they are enough to explain why Plato bans poetry. Just because poetry is bad, psychologically, ethically, or both, does not explain why it must be banned. In this vein, I offer the following challenge.

Assume we have the perfect state, one where philosophers are guardians, who

¹⁵⁴ Jessica Moss, "The Doctor and the Pastry Chef: Pleasure and Persuasion in Plato's *Gorgias*," *Ancient Philosophy* 27, no. 2 (2007): 229-249.

know and practice dialectic. Furthermore, let us assume the these guardians are raised and trained as Plato prescribes; they are drawn towards pleasures of the soul, and not bodily ones;¹⁵⁵ they have a pleasure in learning;¹⁵⁶ they have a good memory;¹⁵⁷ and that they have “naturally well-proportioned and gracious mind[s], which will move spontaneously toward the true being of everything.”¹⁵⁸ The citizens are “well educated, and grow into sensible men,” and “they will easily see their way through all these, as well as other matters.”¹⁵⁹ From this good education, the citizenry (and especially the guardians) will have good constitutions, which improve themselves as time progresses.¹⁶⁰

With this perfect state now assumed, I now present the challenge. Let the poets back in, (especially as visitors); let Homer, Hesiod, and all the other banished rhapsodists return to the city. Here is the question: what threat do they pose? Even if we grant the problematic elements of poetry as discussed in chapter two, it seems that the good, philosophical education of the citizens would act as a safeguard against poetry. The guardians, with the power of dialectic, will know about the dangers of poetry, and will be able to protect themselves against poetical corruption. They will know the difference between appearance (or multiplicity and imperfection) and reality (unity and perfection). They would be like the prisoner returning to the cave after seeing the sun, and he “would rather suffer anything than entertain these false.”¹⁶¹ The guardians would not be inclined to indulge in shadows and appearances—that is, they would not be seduced by poetry. Therefore, the poets do not seem to pose much of a threat to the guardians.

¹⁵⁵ 485d5

¹⁵⁶ 486c1

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁸ 486d1

¹⁵⁹ 423e2

¹⁶⁰ 424a2

¹⁶¹ 516e1

It may be said that the threat is not posed to the guardians, but to the auxiliaries or the artisans. However, if we are to assume the perfect state, then we must assume that the state is just. This implies that “each of the three classes [does] the work of its own class,”¹⁶² and therefore the guardians will do the “counselling (or law making), and the other (the auxiliaries) fight under [their] leader[s], and courageously executing [their] commands and counsels.”¹⁶³ And so, as for the auxiliaries, in the perfect state they would obey the guardians. The guardians, who are aware of the dangers of poetry, would be able to order and control the auxiliaries so that they too are protected. So poetry would not affect the auxiliaries in any serious way.

As for the artisans, we need not worry about them either. Since the guardians and auxiliaries are

nurtured and educated, and having learned truly to know their own functions, will rule over the concupiscent [or the pleasure and appetites] [...] over this they will keep guard, lest, waxing great and strong with the fulness of bodily pleasures, as they are termed, no longer confined to her own sphere, should attempt to enslave and rule those who are not her natural-born subjects, and overthrow the whole [state].¹⁶⁴

Since the guardians and auxiliaries are educated in the best way, they will prevent the

¹⁶² 441d1

¹⁶³ 442b2

¹⁶⁴ 442a2-b1; Some of these passages are pulled from places where Plato is specifically referring to the justice in the soul. However, this is not a problem. The soul and the state are parallel in terms of analysis: “the state and the individual bear the same relation to all the other virtues,” and that “the individual will be acknowledged to us to be just in the same way in which the state is just.” (441d)

artisans (the state's parallel to the appetites) from overindulging, and in particular, from over indulging in the pleasures that poetry gives.

And so, it would seem that, in the perfect state, ruled by philosopher-kings, poetry poses little if any legitimate threat. The education of the citizens will be a safeguard against the dangerous effects of poetry. Like a vaccinated body, the state could be exposed to poetry with little to no concern. Poetry may still have the problems discussed in Chapter 2, but they are nullified by dialectical protection. Philosophy, in short, would protect the state. Thus, Plato's banishment thus seems unnecessary, perhaps even unjustified.

This challenge gives us a lens through which we can better understand Plato's ban. To use the vaccination analogy, poetry would be like a virus trying to corrupt the body (or state). Philosophy would be like a vaccine, creating white blood cells able to protect the body from such corruption. But what if the virus did not just attack the body, but the white blood cells created by the vaccine? In other words, what if poetry acted like the HIV virus? In short, what if poetry attacked philosophy?

If we answer in the affirmative, then the story changes dramatically. Poetry is not just opposed to philosophy, insofar as they preach opposite theories. They cannot coexist. The two become mutually exclusive. If poetry is allowed back into the city, the work of the guardians, the work of philosophy, cannot defend the citizens from the corrupting effects of poetry. Poetry will attack dialectic (as the road to truth) first, and once dialectic is out of way, poetry would then spread through the populace, unopposed. If this is the case, then Plato's banishment becomes reasonable (at least, it is consistent with his other positions).

This chapter, then, shows that this is indeed Plato's theory, that poetry is not just opposed to dialectic, but actually poses a threat to dialectic. It stems from a problem inherent in dialectic: it can cause serious confusion in those who are learning it. From there, they slowly degenerate from people who cared about the truth to people who are anti-intellectual, or misologists. They reject the teachings of the guardians and focus their efforts on pleasure.

Here is where the poets come into play. They will give pleasure to those disaffected by dialectic. Instead of criticizing their beliefs, the poets and rhetoricians will pander to them, and this gives the poets and rhetoricians power. Finally, the poets and rhetoricians use this power to attack dialectic (and philosophy in general), not just its theories, but literally will attempt to kill those who practice it.

This chapter walks through this series of steps. Section one begins where I left off in chapter one with dialectic. There, I showed that dialectic searches for Ideas by continuously attempting to justify hypotheses. But now we want to know what that means. It was alluded to in chapter one, but now I show that justifying hypotheses means one person holding a position and an interlocutor asking questions that undermine it. But this kind of questioning can be damaging to those who are not very good at it. After losing many arguments, and even failing to defend the things they have been taught to believe, the would-be dialecticians become misologists, or those who hate and distrust argument. Thomas Miller has an insightful analysis of this process, and I partly follow his interpretation. After they give up the search for truth, they seek pleasure.

Section two shows why loving pleasure makes these former dialecticians vulnerable. In short, they can easily be persuaded by flatteries and this section dissects

what Plato means by flattery. These are practices that pretend to know a true art (like dialectic), but actually are copies that persuade by bringing pleasure. But the power of flattery is not just to persuade: it is the ability to argue against the true artist—and win.

Section three takes poetry and rhetoric and shows why they are flatteries. It takes the general “formula” for flattery and fills in the variables for poetry and rhetoric. Jessica Moss has already filled in many of these variables, and I elaborate and extend her interpretation further to connect imitative properties to flattery. To offer a glimpse, poetry and rhetoric bring pleasure, which in part makes them flatteries, by confirming important beliefs and values, especially about ethics and politics. In this way, poetry and rhetoric imitate philosophy. And this puts dialectic and poetry at odds.

Section four concludes the final step of the degeneration. After the poets have persuaded the former dialecticians to their side, they will use this influence to attack the guardians and those who practice philosophy. Since they have become misologists, the former dialecticians will not be persuaded by the philosophers’ logical arguments. Thus, authority and power of the guardians would be undermined. Furthermore, poetry, rhetoric, and philosophy are not just different modes of thought, they are different ways of life. Philosophy is about *logos* and order; poetry and rhetoric are about pleasure. The total antithetical nature of dialectic requires that one must go—and Plato picked poetry.

Section 1: Dialectic’s Achilles’ Heel

After discussing dialectic in Book VII, Socrates makes a curious remark. He notices a great “evil which dialectic has introduced,” one that fills “the students of the art

with lawlessness.”¹⁶⁵ Apparently, those who are learning dialectic can be filled with some kind of evil. What is more interesting is this evil is natural and “most excusable.”¹⁶⁶ It is natural, Plato is saying, that dialectic comes with this problem. But what is this problem, and where does it come from?

Back in chapter one, I analyzed dialectic: dialecticians search for Ideas by using hypotheticals. They begin with a hypothesis then justify that hypothesis, often using a higher hypothesis. The goal is to reach an unhypothetical, something that justifies itself. Those unhypotheticals constitute Ideas: they just are.

But it is unclear how any of these parts introduce evil. I argue, however, that the evil comes from the need to justify hypotheses. It was necessary, in chapter one, to set up the larger framework of dialectic. Otherwise, it would be difficult to find where the evil comes from. But now I want to focus in on the part of dialectic that justifies hypotheses.

This section answers two questions. First, what does it mean to justify a hypothesis? What process has to happen in dialectic for a dialectician to say they have justified their position? Second, what are the psychological effects of this process? I argue that justifying a hypothesis means being able to withstand an argumentative attack. One dialectician will defend a hypothesis; another will try to attack it. The attacker asks questions that undermine the hypothesis. If the defender can answer those questions without giving up the hypothesis, then the defender will have justified (in part) their hypothesis.

However, for those students that Socrates is referring to, this process can be frustrating, especially when they try to defend things they have been taught by the

¹⁶⁵ 537e1

¹⁶⁶ 539a3

guardians. After many wins and losses, they will lose trust in dialectic and argument. Instead of caring about the truth, they will argue for and seek pleasure.

Let us first figure out what it means to for a position to be unhypothetical. In a survey of both ancient geometrical texts and Plato's reworkings of them, Mueller shows that "for a principle to be unhypothetical is for it to require no higher hypothesis for justification, that is, to be capable of withstanding argumentative assault on its own."¹⁶⁷ If a position can defend itself on its own, that is, it can defend itself against objections and criticisms without having to appeal to some other principle, then it is unhypothetical. But in order for that criterion to be met, objections must be made. Someone has to give an argument against the principle. Indeed, Plato says:

Until he can run the gauntlet of objections, and is ready to disprove them, not by appeals to opinion, but to absolute truth, never faltering at any step of the argument—unless he can do all this, you would say that he knows neither the Idea of the good nor any other good.¹⁶⁸

Justifying hypotheses requires someone to be actively trying to criticize and undermine them. The justification rests in the ability to defend against those criticism, and if the hypothesis can do it on its own, it is unhypothetical.¹⁶⁹

This interpretation is consistent with the way Socrates operates. He says multiple times that he is willing to be refuted if what he says is not true.¹⁷⁰ We can interpret him to be challenging his interlocutors to try and undermine his position. He wants to be sure

¹⁶⁷ Mueller, "Mathematical Method," 190

¹⁶⁸ 534c1-5

¹⁶⁹ See also 101b in *Phaedo*.

¹⁷⁰ *Gorgias* 458a1

that his position is not vulnerable to objections, and so he invites others to criticize him. He wants people to question his assumptions, to force him to justify his hypotheses.

With this new information, we can expand our understanding of dialectic. Dialectic is all about justifying hypotheses until an unhypothetical is reached. But that justification requires someone to attack and undermine the principle. Defending the principle will often require appealing to higher hypotheses, but then those hypotheses have to be defended as well. The defender will have to defend more and more assumptions. But when they reach an Idea, it will be self-justifying. Just as the Idea of Beauty has no reason why it is beautiful, an unhypothetical position has no further reason why it is true. It can justify itself on its own. Justification is more than answering the “why” question: it is about defending against objections and criticisms. Dialecticians, therefore, must be able to attack and defend hypotheses in order to justify their principles. Now we can turn to the second question of this section: what are the psychological effects of this kind of adversarial process?

I argue that that there are several effects, linked together, that eventually lead to a kind of anti-intellectualism. The first effect is confusion. But so much confusion can lead to doubt, doubt in dialectic and in philosophy. Would-be dialecticians end up as anti-intellectuals, misologists who believe that argument and logic are useless.

Picture a person in the city who is learning dialectic for the first time. Dialectic requires them to defend their beliefs (or principles) against argumentative assault. Suppose they once believed a certain thing to be a true, but then they are questioned and their belief comes under scrutiny. After so many attacks, they feel lost: where they once thought they knew something, they now have no clue. Indeed, this is exactly what

happened to Meno. He tells Socrates:

Socrates, before I as much as made your acquaintance I had heard that you are simply perplexed yourself and that you make others perplexed as well; and now, as it seems to me, you are bewitching me with magic and all together putting a spell on me, if I may actually make a joke, to be altogether most like, both in appearance and in other respects, to that flat sea-fish, the electric ray. For this causes whoever at any time comes close to it and comes contact with it to be numb; and I think you too have done something like this to me.¹⁷¹

After Socrates cross-examines him, Meno feels perplexed, lost, and confused. He once thought he knew what excellence was, but now he is unable to “say at all what it is.”¹⁷² Socrates himself is at a loss: “I am most definitely at a loss myself, and it is in this way that I cause others to be at a loss as well.”¹⁷³ Meno went from a place of “knowing” to a place of confusion, all because of dialectic. Socrates, (who is doing the undermining) is also confused: he does not know what excellence is either.

For would-be dialecticians, this confusion would be a regular experience. However, it does not remain a simple matter of confusion on a single point. The repeated sense of not-knowing, of being lost, of being perplexed after originally knowing eventually leads them to not believe the things they have been taught:

¹⁷¹ 79e-80

¹⁷² 80b

¹⁷³ 80c

When they have made many conquests and received defeats at the hands of many, they violently and speedily get into a way of not believing anything which they believed before, and hence, not only they, but philosophy and all that relates to it is apt to have a bad name with the rest of the world.¹⁷⁴

So much confusion eventually causes them to abandon dialectic and philosophy. But how does this happen? Confusion, after all, is not necessarily a bad thing. It can lead to a renewed desire to discover the answer. It can be a small price to pay in order to find the truth. However, the repeated confusion leads not to just confusion about the truth, but about the truth finding method: i.e., confusion about dialectic.

This effect is examined in the *Phaedo*. After hearing Cebes give a serious criticism of the immortality of the soul, Phaedo becomes worried. He was firmly convinced of the soul's immortality after listening to Socrates, but after realizing that was wrong, he becomes doubtful not just about the soul's immortality, but if any argument can actually prove anything:

Although we had been so firmly convinced before, now to have our faith shaken seemed to introduce confusion and uncertainty, not only about the previous argument, but about any future one. [...] What argument can I ever trust again? For what could be more convincing than the argument of Socrates, which has now fallen into discredit?¹⁷⁵

¹⁷⁴ 539b5-c3

¹⁷⁵ 88d1

For those would-be dialecticians, after firmly believing something to be true, they lose faith in dialectic's effectiveness. They were entirely convinced by an earlier argument, but now they realize how wrong they were. But they not only doubt the earlier beliefs, they also doubt how to justify beliefs.

In the *Phaedo*, Socrates sees the threat of this effect. He says that we should take steps to avoid the danger of becoming "misologists," or "haters of argument."¹⁷⁶ He says that people become misologists because they go through a series of refutations, in the sense that they once believed something that ultimately turned out to be false, and "instead of blaming himself and his own want of wit, because he is annoyed, should at last be too glad to transfer the blame from himself to arguments (*logoi*) in general."¹⁷⁷ The doubt is not just about a particular position or belief: it is about the ability of logic or argument to grasp truth at all.

Thomas Miller argues, I think correctly, that misologists are kind of proto-skeptics, people who "doubt the power of philosophical arguments in general."¹⁷⁸ They hold a position similar to that of Heraclitus's "flux-theory," where everything changes.¹⁷⁹ Miller says that misologists, (or antilogicians) "already possess dialectical skill." I disagree with Miller on this point. Dialectic is not simply the ability to argue. As I showed in chapter one and earlier in this section, dialectic is more than arguing back and forth. There is a strict method, one that deals with hypotheses and justifying those hypotheses until one reaches an Idea. Misologists cannot be considered dialecticians because their goal in arguing is not to find the truth. Rather, their goal, as Miller points

¹⁷⁶ 89d2

¹⁷⁷ 90d2-4

¹⁷⁸ Thomas Miller, "Socrates' Warning Against Misology," *Phronesis* 60, no. 2 (2015): 146.

¹⁷⁹ Miller, "Socrates' Warning," 159.

out, is to undermine *logos* as a whole. So misologists do not attack hypotheses as a means to higher reality: they attack hypotheses (or arguments in general) to create doubt in *logos* in general.

However, Miller does have a point: misologists do have the ability to engage in argument. They just engage for the wrong reasons. This fact is useful for my argument because it shows how former dialecticians are especially liable to become misologists. Studying dialectic gives them a small skill in arguing, but continuously being refuted leads to doubt in the effectiveness of *logos*.

In fact, we can find this exact effect in the *Republic*. For those who practice dialectic, the frustrations of confusion can lead to a kind of skepticism like the one described in the *Phaedo*:

When a man is in this state, and the questioning spirit asks what is fair or honorable, and he answers as the [guardian] has taught him, and then arguments many and diverse refute his words, until he is driven into believing that nothing is honorable any more than dishonorable, or just and good any more than the reverse.¹⁸⁰

There are two things to pull from this passage. The first is the similarity to the *Phaedo* passage. A person, after being refuted many times, eventually gives up, and believes that any argument is just as good as its opposite.

The second point is about the first line of the passage, where Plato refers to what the guardians have taught the youth. For would-be dialecticians, if they are asked what is

¹⁸⁰ 538d4-e2

honorable, they will answer what they have been told by the guardians. But, since they are engaged in dialectic, they will be questioned, and be forced to justify their theory. But they are students: they do not have the dialectical abilities as the guardians, and they will be unable to effectively justify their position.¹⁸¹ Their inability leads to doubt: if they cannot justify the theory, how do they know it is true? And so, being unable to justify their own beliefs, they enter into skepticism, the kind that we find the *Phaedo*.

But, and this is perhaps more important, the young dialecticians do not just become skeptical of some things: they become skeptical of the guardians and their theories. They no longer believe that honor is what they have been taught, that good is what they have been taught. In the end, not only are they skeptical of the guardians, but of dialectic. I quoted this passage earlier, but I cite it again to highlight this different point.

When they have made many conquests and received defeats at the hands of many, they violently and speedily get into a way of not believing anything which they believed before, and hence, not only they, but philosophy and all that relates to it is apt to have a bad name with the rest of the world.¹⁸²

These would-be dialecticians end up abandoning dialectic: that is why philosophy gets a bad name. It does not end there however. After they have given up the search for truth,

¹⁸¹ When I say would-be or former dialecticians, I mean those who have gone through the educational process proscribed in Books III, V, VI, and VII. They have gone through rigorous training in music, gymnastics, and mathematics before reaching dialectic. Some may object and say this implies that the students are ready for dialectic. I think that many of them will be (theoretically), but I do not think that all of them will necessarily handle the confusion. As the young grow up, they are tested to see if they are worthy of being a guardian (i.e., a dialectician). If they fail a test, they are rejected from the program, so to speak. It is entirely possible to have someone pass all the earlier tests, but then fail when they try to learn dialectic. They would be former, or would-be dialecticians.

¹⁸² 539b5-c3

Plato thinks they move onto a different mission: the search for pleasure.

These (now) former dialecticians have the ability to argue (as pointed out by Miller). But now they use their abilities for a different purpose. Indeed, instead of arguing for matters of truth, they will “argue for amusement, and are always contradicting and refuting others in imitation of those who refute them; like puppy-dogs, they rejoice in pulling and tearing at all who come near them.”¹⁸³ Giving up dialectic, they devote their lives to arguing for pleasure.

This degeneration itself is concerning. Indeed, it would appear that dialectic is bound to produce anti-intellectuals who only argue for the pleasure of it. The fact that they seek pleasure is even more alarming, for it means that they are exposed to a particular kind of person: flatterers. Plato describes this process via analogy:

Imagine a supposititious son who is brought up in great wealth; he is one of a great and numerous family, and has many flatterers. When he grows up to manhood, he learns that his alleged are not his real parents; but who the real are he is unable to discover. [...] While he is ignorant of the truth he will be likely to honor his father and his mother and his supposed relations more than the flatterers; he will be less inclined to neglect them when in need, or to do or say anything against them in any important matter. But when he has made the discovery, I should imagine that he would diminish his honor and regard for them, and would

¹⁸³ 539b1-4

become more devoted to the flatterers; their influence over him would greatly increase; he would now live after their ways, and openly associate with them.¹⁸⁴

In this analogy, the son represents the young dialecticians growing up under the guardians, the parents.¹⁸⁵ His blind allegiance to his parents represents the young dialecticians blindly following the conventional definition for justice, honor, etc. His realization that his parents are not what he thought is like the young dialecticians having doubts about the theories, and then dialectic.

But then comes the part where the son goes over to his flatterers. I argue that this line is more literal than the rest of passage. Flattery, as I will show more thoroughly in the next section, appeals to the pleasures. Former dialecticians, after they have given up philosophy, pursue pleasure. Indeed, at 539, the young man who had to grapple with the questioning spirit, goes through something similar. He cannot be “expected to pursue any life other than that which flatters his desires.”¹⁸⁶ Hence, the last part is more literal than the rest of the analogy. Former dialecticians would pursue lives that gratify their desires, and according to the analogy, associate with those who flatter them.

These factors help explain why Socrates believed that these problems were natural, and are to be expected when dialectic is taught. Therefore, Plato concludes, “every care must be taken in introducing them to dialectic,”¹⁸⁷ and why special provisions

¹⁸⁴ 537e5-538c1; This passage is particularly helpful because it assumes Plato’s perfect state. The description about not knowing the true parents, then coming to learn the truth, is a direct reference to Plato’s plan to separate children from parents early on. So the effects described, we can infer, would occur within the perfect state.

¹⁸⁵ The illustrious family also represents the highest class, the guardians. The guardians, indeed, do act as parents for the state. They decide all of the rules; they can lie to the rest of the state for its own good. Plato has been called a paternalist in the past for a reason.

¹⁸⁶ 539a1

¹⁸⁷ 539a5

were made to counter this effect—why “the disciples of philosophy were to be orderly and steadfast.”¹⁸⁸ They are natural insofar as they stem from the very design of dialectic. The justification stage of dialectic can be extremely frustrating, and it is to be expected that some will become skeptical about dialectic as a science. It is not that someone makes a mistake or misuses dialectic: it is just a difficult art. A person must have resolve to be able to maintain a kind of faith in dialectic to continue searching for truth. They must be able to withstand the constant criticisms and objections that dialectic requires to be made. If someone cannot take the pressure, then they will be susceptible to becoming misologists and pleasure-lovers.

But if we look at the analogy and the passage at 539, flattery seems to be a critical point in the degeneration of would-be dialecticians. Flattery appears to have something to do with desires, and the analogy suggests that flatterers are the people who end up controlling the former dialecticians. It is necessary, therefore, to develop a full understanding of flattery and how it fits in with this degeneration.

Thus, I turn next to the topic of flattery. I briefly referred to it in chapter two, but now it is necessary to have a better grasp of it. Flatterers play an important role in the descent of a dialectician, as we saw in the last passage. And so first I next address flattery as a general concept.

Section 2: Flattery and the power of pleasure and persuasion

Flattery, for Plato, is a technical term. It is not just a pleasant compliment— it contains important metaphysical and psychological implications. Earlier, when discussing

¹⁸⁸ 539d3

imitations, flattery made a brief appearance, but now I want to fully flesh out Plato's theory of flatteries and do two things. First, show how flattery constitutes a kind of imitation, and second, how powerful flattering persuasion is. Understanding these concepts will help us understand why the former dialecticians end up with their flatterers.

Socrates characterizes flattery as follows. Most importantly, it guesses what the real nature of things are, "pretends to be that which she simulates" and is "always making pleasure the bait of the unwary, and deceiving them into the belief that she is of the highest value to them."¹⁸⁹ There is a lot to unpack here, so an example is useful, and I use one of Plato's favorites.

Consider the difference between cosmetics and gymnastics. Gymnastics is concerned with "true beauty (*kalon*)."¹⁹⁰ Beauty (or *kalon*) in this context refers to something that is fine, noble, or admirable. Beauty is a combination of usefulness and appearance: without the two, a body would not be truly beautiful. Bodies "are beautiful in proportion as they are useful, or as the sight of them gives pleasure to the spectators."¹⁹¹ Gymnastics deals with true beauty because it makes the body useful and pleasant to view. It makes the body useful by making it able to run long distances, lift heavy objects, and compete in the Olympics. But gymnastics also makes a person look attractive—the body looks strong, with toned muscles and a sculpted physique.

Cosmetics, on the other hand, uses "lines, and colors, and enamels, and garments,"¹⁹² or a kind of makeup, to make a person appear beautiful. They can make a body appear fit and pleasant to look at. But cosmetics does not make the body useful—

¹⁸⁹ 464c3-d2

¹⁹⁰ 465b4

¹⁹¹ 474d3-5

¹⁹² 465b2-3

cosmeticians cannot help people compete in the Olympics, for example. It does not give stronger muscles or better hand-eye coordination. Cosmetics, then, only meets one of the two requirements for beauty. Makeup can make a person pleasant to look at—but the body is not useful, does not help it serve a purpose.

In this manner, gymnastics is the true craft, while cosmetics constitutes a flattery, simulating gymnastics. It pretends to give beauty by giving only the appearance of it, but lacks the usefulness. People who receive cosmetics may be pleasurable to look at, but they only have the appearance. Cosmetics is only concerned with the pleasurable aspect—that is, making someone pleasant to look at.

In another example, Plato's uses cookery to describe flattery. "Cookery simulates the disguise of medicine" insofar as the cook claims to understand "the goodness and badness of food."¹⁹³ The cook will say that eating a donut will be better than taking a remedy to fix an upset stomach. Jessica Moss describes the dynamics as follows: "Pastry-baking 'pretends to know what foods are best for the body.' How? Simply by offering foods that *taste* good, i.e. are pleasant."¹⁹⁴ For the cook, pleasure is equated to goodness, and thus pretends to know how to cure an ailment by prescribing pastries that are pleasant.

There are several important observations to take from this characterization of flattery. The first is the emphasis on pleasure. The aim of flatteries is pleasure: "This sort of thing which I term flattery, whether concerned with the body or the soul" is "employed with a view to pleasure and without any consideration of good and evil."¹⁹⁵ In the case of

¹⁹³ 464e1, see also the chart at 465c

¹⁹⁴ Moss, "The Doctor and the Pastry Chef," 22.

¹⁹⁵ 501c1-3

cosmetics, the true end is for the person to have a pleasurable appearance: they do not care about the good (or useful) aspect of the body. The second observation is closely related to Chapter 2: flatteries pretend to be, or have the appearance of being, a different art or craft. Moss characterizes flatteries (or knacks) as imitations of crafts.¹⁹⁶ Indeed, by Moss's understanding, "the pastry chef (another flatterer, this one of medicine) imitates and overthrows the doctor."¹⁹⁷ Since flatteries imitate other arts, it would seem that flattery is a kind of imitation in the way that I outlined in Chapter 2. However, we should not rely on the use of the same word as conclusive evidence. Thus, I next show how flatteries are in fact a kind of imitation. By doing so, not only are we able to conclude that flatteries are a kind of imitation, but we reveal an important link between imitations and the downfall of dialecticians.

While Plato does not say flatteries fall under the imitations of *Republic X*, the case can be made that they do.¹⁹⁸ First, imitations capture appearances, which can vary, and pawn them off as reality. Flatteries do the same thing. Consider the cook. People's tastes vary greatly: a donut may be the tastiest thing to a toddler, while a steak is to an older gentleman. The cook would change their "remedy" according to the person, and so "health" would be varied. For the toddler, "health" would be the donut, for the gentleman, the steak. Indeed, Socrates portrays the cook as saying: "how unlike the variety of meats and sweets on which I feasted you."¹⁹⁹ The same can be said of the cosmetician. The makeup for one person can be vastly different for another. Blush and

¹⁹⁶ Moss "The Doctor and the Pastry Chef" 30.

¹⁹⁷ Moss, "The Doctor and the Pastry Chef," 22.

¹⁹⁸ This fact should not be surprising, considering that *Gorgias probably* came before *Republic*, and that Plato's theory of imitations was probably not developed at the time. I hold that the work on flattery in *Gorgias* actually foreshadows the theory of imitations in the *Republic*.

¹⁹⁹ 522a2

eyeliner might do the trick for one person, while plastic surgery is necessary for another. While there are many flatteries, too many to analyze here, one thing is clear. Since people's appetites vary (what they find pleasant), the flatterer will vary their knack accordingly. They shift their prescriptions in accordance with shifting pleasures.

Thus, flatteries fulfill the variety or multiplicity requirement of imitations. They also are imperfect or incomplete with respect to the art they imitate. Cosmetics are imperfect because they do not make the body useful in the way the gymnast coach does. The cook can make people feel good by giving them pleasure through tasty foods. But feeling pleasure does not equate to health. Cookery still lacks important qualities of medicine—namely, that it gets rid of illness. Thus, flatteries are also incomplete and imperfect versions of the art they simulate.

We can conclude, therefore, that flatteries are kinds of imitations. They give only the imperfect, incomplete version of other crafts. This interpretation is consistent with the other characterization of flattery, namely that they pretend to be something else. Poets pretend to know ethics; rhetoricians pretend to know justice. Cooks pretend to know medicine. Cosmeticians pretend to know beauty.

Up to now, I have given an account of flattery. Now I turn to what flattery can do, namely that it can persuade, and do it extremely effectively. The text from 464d:

If the physician and the cook had to enter into a competition in which children were the judge, or men who had no more sense than children, as to which of them best understands the goodness or badness of food, the physician

would be starved to death.²⁰⁰

The physician is the expert; the cook is the flatterer. The physician knows what is best for health and the cook only knows what food tastes delicious. But Plato is clearly implying that the cook can convince the children or ignorant men that he knows what is best. In short, the cook can persuade the audience of his expertise. In this passage, Plato is stressing that flatteries are better at persuading people, more than the rival arts.²⁰¹ However, Plato is mute as to why this is the case, and we need to know why flatteries are persuasive in order to understand how former dialecticians could fall under the influence of their flatterers. Moss gives a revealing answer.

Why does the pastry chef succeed where the doctor fails?

The trial allegory suggests an obvious answer: the ignorant and believe those who give them tasty treats rather than those who subject them to painful procedures. [...] Flattery of all kinds is persuasive *because* it gratifies people's appetites, causing pleasure; correction of all kinds is unpersuasive *because* it frustrates people's appetites, and causes pain.²⁰²

Since flatteries aim at the pleasure, they gain a persuasive edge. I will not go into great detail as to why this is the case: Moss does a convincing job, and I refer the reader to her work on this topic. To briefly summarize, when people—or at least most people—feel pleasure, they believe they are being benefited, and they mistakenly equate the state of

²⁰⁰ 464d3-465a1

²⁰¹ Moss, "The Doctor and the Pastry Chef," 14 (Emphasis original).

²⁰² *Ibid.*

pleasure with the state of being in a good condition.²⁰³ If the donut tastes good, it must be good for me; this makeup makes me look attractive, so it is good for me. Naturally, people want what is good for them, and so are persuaded by flatteries.

On the flip side, genuinely beneficial arts can be extremely painful. A physician may require painful procedures or medicines, such as being burned or cut.²⁰⁴ In this way, the beneficial arts are enemies of the desire for pleasure.²⁰⁵ People, therefore, extend the pleasure/goodness further, and conclude that pain is badness, and in doing so confuse pain with harm.²⁰⁶ The rival to flatteries, then, “is unpersuasive *because* it frustrates people’s appetites, and causes pain.”²⁰⁷ Ignorant people, thus, operate by two equations: the pleasure/good equation, and the pain/bad equation. These equations mean flatteries are persuasive because they bring pleasure, whereas the legitimate arts are not persuasive because they bring pain. The disparity between the two is so great that audiences can be convinced that the flatterer is the true expert, as shown in the trial analogy.²⁰⁸

But this power of persuasion extends beyond the ability to convince a small crowd of expertise: this persuasion can be so powerful that it can kill the true expert. The foreshadowing and allusions to *The Apology* are plentiful. Socrates says:

I shall be tried just as the physician would be tried in a

²⁰³ Moss, “The Doctor and the Pastry Chef,” 31.

²⁰⁴ 479b1

²⁰⁵ Moss “The Doctor and the Pastry Chef,” 18.

²⁰⁶ Moss “The Doctor and the Pastry Chef,” 31.

²⁰⁷ Moss “The Doctor and the Pastry Chef,” 14.

²⁰⁸ There is a subtle disagreement between myself and Moss on this topic. Moss says that it is the ignorant who fall into this confusion (14). While I believe this is true, it can be misleading. I will address this later on, but for now I will say this. Yes, it is the ignorant who fall into error. But ignorant has a much broader meaning for Plato than for us. Socrates repeatedly calls himself ignorant. The prisoners in the cave are ignorant. But they are ignorant for a particular reason: they do not have knowledge in the metaphysical sense. They have not grasped the Ideas, and until they do, they do not have true knowledge. So to be ignorant is actually an easy thing to be, and most of us would be ignorant to Plato.

court of little boys at the indictment of a cook. What would he reply under such circumstances, if someone were to accuse him, saying, ‘O my boys, many evil things this man has done to you: he is the death of you, especially of the younger ones among you, cutting and burning and starving and suffocating you, until you know not what to do; he gives you the bitterest potions, and compels you to hunger and thirst. How unlike the variety of meats and sweets on which I feasted you!’ What do you suppose that the physician would be able to reply when he found himself in such predicament? If he told the truth he could only say, ‘All of these evil things, my boys, I did for your health,’ and then would there not just be clamor among a jury like that?²⁰⁹

From this passage, we can conclude that the persuasive power of the cook is not just to convince the crowd of his particular goodness: it is so powerful that it can turn the crowd against the physician. The cook is able to do two things simultaneously. He takes the pleasure/goodness equation and applies it to himself, giving himself power over the crowd. At the same time, he takes the pain/bad equation and uses it to persecute the physician. Not only is the physician unable to convince the audience of his expertise, he is unable to defend himself from persecution.

Thus, when pitted against each other, flatterers have a double advantage. They

²⁰⁹ 521e3-522a5

can persuade people that they are experts. And worse, they can turn people against the rival artist.

Dialectic, however, is an art. It claims to bring knowledge and truth to those who practice it. In particular, it can bring justice and virtue to not just individuals, but also entire states. Are there any flatteries of dialectic? I believe there are—rhetoric and poetry. Thus, next I show how rhetoric and poetry are flatteries and that they simulate philosophy.

Section 3: Rhetoric and Poetry—masters of persuasion

Chapter 2 showed how poetry and rhetoric constitute imitations. Poetry imitates human actions, pretending to display ethical human behavior; rhetoric and sophistry imitate justice, pretending to know the just way to govern a state. But now I show how these two imitations are also flatteries. In particular, I show how these practices bring pleasure, and in doing so, become persuasive.

Towards the beginning of the *Gorgias*, Socrates observes that “rhetoric is the artificer of persuasion, having this and no other business.”²¹⁰ Gorgias agrees: “persuasion is the chief end of rhetoric.”²¹¹ However, if rhetoric is a flattery, as Socrates maintains,²¹² then it must fulfill the two requirements of flattery, (1) that it pretend to be a different art, and (2) that it aim at pleasure. However, from these two passages it is not clear how rhetoric satisfies either of these criteria.

As for the first criteria, Socrates is quick to claim that rhetoric “is the ghost or

²¹⁰ 453a1

²¹¹ 453a3

²¹² 463a5

counterfeit of a part of politics.”²¹³ The political craft was said to be the care of the soul, encompassing both legislation and justice.²¹⁴ Therefore, rhetoric pretends to know what is best for the citizens’ souls. However, Socrates has a more specific art in mind when he says “political craft”: philosophy. The connection is clear at 521d, where Socrates claims to be “the only or almost the only Athenian living who practices the true art of politics.”²¹⁵ Socrates’ art, of course, is philosophy. Indeed, in *The Apology* Socrates claims to be helping the state by being the gad-fly, helping the state by asking people questions and refuting them. Throughout the *Gorgias*, he says that he would like he is “very willing to be refuted if [he says] anything which is not true, and very willing to refute anyone else who says what is not true, and quite as ready to be refuted as to refute.”²¹⁶ This talk of refuting sounds strikingly similar to dialectic: through questions, Socrates tries to refute others, and he himself wants to be refuted if he is false. From *The Apology* and the *Gorgias*, it would appear that dialectic (or philosophy), then, is the true art of politics.

And so, philosophy is the craft of politics. This understanding is consistent with the rest of Plato’s work, especially the *Republic* where philosophy is the guiding force of the entire state.²¹⁷ Rhetoric, then, pretends to be the practice of justice, politics, and legislation. But now comes the more interesting question: how does rhetoric bring about pleasure?

²¹³ 463d1

²¹⁴ Moss “The Doctor and the Pastry Chef,” 11.

²¹⁵ 521d4

²¹⁶ 458a1

²¹⁷ Specifically, dialectic is this practice. I do not want to dwell long on this point. I refer the reader to Moss. Indeed Moss often says “Socratic dialectic.” To give a quick argument, throughout the *Gorgias* Socrates refers to being refuted as the best way forward. False beliefs, especially about ethics and politics, are disorderly, and only by being refuted can order be restored.

This question is not as easy. Often, in rhetorical events, it seems pleasure is not the aim. In a heated debate, the aim can often be to offend or upset. Political speeches or debates bring as much ire as they do applause. Nevertheless, these kinds of rhetoric do actually aim at pleasing someone. Plato never claimed that rhetoric tried to please everyone, just that it aims please someone. And bringing pleasure, for rhetoric, is all about affirming someone's particular belief.

There are several passages that support his point. Socrates says to Calicles:

I observe that you, with all your cleverness, do not venture to contradict your favorite in any word or opinion of [Demus, whom Calicles is the lover of]; but as he changes you change, backwards and forwards. When the Athenian people deny anything that you are saying in the assembly, you go over to their opinion.²¹⁸

Calicles (and other rhetoricians) will change his opinion to appease the whims of his romantic interest. This dynamic can be seen on a political level, but with the populace instead of a lover.

Think of a politician who “pancakes,” or repeatedly switches their position on multiple issues. On the issue of same sex marriage, ten years ago a politician might have been more or less opposed to it. But as public opinion turned, all of a sudden, they change their position. They typically say something to the tune of “I’ve evolved” or “I made a mistake.” Yet many people sense or realize that it is mostly just pandering. And that is exactly what Plato is pointing to: “a person with political ambitions must befriend the

²¹⁸ 481d4-e4; The “backwards and forwards,” and “as he changes you change” language also confirms that rhetoric is a kind of imitation.

masses—precisely, he implies, by praising and censuring the same things they do.”²¹⁹

Still, it is not clear why pandering brings pleasure to the audience. While some basic intuition may suggest it, there does not seem to be a connection between pandering and the kind of pleasure that the cook brings.

However, the answer is rather simple: “it is pleasant to believe that you are virtuous and wise.”²²⁰ Since it is pleasant to think that one is good, a rhetorician or orator will craft his speech to affirm the audience’s belief. In particular, he will praise the audience, affirming their beliefs about what is good and what is bad, i.e., their value judgements.²²¹ When a rhetorician adopts the opinion of the assembly, it is because he wants to affirm the assembly’s beliefs. They dare not contradict popular opinion because it would be antithetical to their purpose of bringing pleasure. A congressman or MP changes their position not because they think they have made a policy mistake or because they evolved. They changed only to match the public’s view, with the only mistake they are actually afraid of is upsetting the masses. And since pleasure is persuasive, pandering to the audience’s value judgements gives the rhetoricians the appearance of expertise, and that makes them even more persuasive.²²² By confirming the audience’s beliefs, the rhetorician pleases the audience. Since pleasure is confused with goodness, the audience thinks the rhetorician is knowledgeable on the topic and therefore is persuaded by his points.²²³

Before I go on to the next section, I want to address a possible objection. These

²¹⁹ Moss “The Doctor and the Pastry Chef,” 24.

²²⁰ Moss “The Doctor and the Pastry Chef,” 28.

²²¹ Moss “The Doctor and the Pastry Chef,” 24, emphasis original.

²²² Moss “The Doctor and the Pastry Chef,” 25.

²²³ Confirmation bias comes to mind.

last sections have revolved around rhetoric, whereas chapter two focused almost exclusively on poetry. In Chapter 2, I attempted to make a connection between the two. But now with flattery properly analyzed, I would like to address the topic again. Recall the passage at 502c:

Suppose we strip all of poetry and song and rhythm and metre, there will remain speech. And this speech is addressed to a crowd of people. Then poetry is a sort of rhetoric. And [...] the poets in theatres seem to you to be rhetoricians. Then now we have discovered a sort of rhetoric which is addressed to a crowd of men, women, and children, freeman and slaves. And this is not much to our taste, for we have described it as having the nature of flattery.²²⁴

Here Plato concludes that poetry, which is a kind of rhetoric, is also a kind of flattery. While the mechanics may be different (a poem uses rhyming devices and meter), they can be used for the same purposes: to please an audience. In an Athenian court, a poet could easily be persuasive by comparing someone to Achilles or other heroic characters. By using the poems that form the ethical guidelines of the time, poets can appeal to the value judgements of a given culture.²²⁵ Since the audience has been appeased, they are more likely to be persuaded by the performance.

A tragic poet can do something similar. Even though they depict horrible and even grotesque scenes, they still pander to the audience's moral preconceptions. It may

²²⁴ 502c2-d4

²²⁵ See *Protagoras*, 325c5-326a5

be disturbing to watch Oedipus gouge his eyes out, but it confirms the preconception that rash, horrible punishment is the best way to correct injustice. The scene itself may be gory, but it still causes pleasure insofar as it affirms the audience's conception of right and wrong.

Now we can see the important connection between poetry and rhetoric as imitations and poetry and rhetoric as flatteries. As imitations, they appeal to the irrational part of the soul, the part devoted to desire and pleasure. Thus, they make effective flatteries since they are metaphysically disposed to pleasure. The fact that they capture appearances means they can change according to their audience. Thus, the imitative nature of poetry and rhetoric makes them particularly potent flatteries, able to persuade audiences of their expertise.

Now we see poetry and rhetoric are powerful persuasive tools. More importantly, they simulate philosophy and dialectic and oppose them as flatteries. Finally, we are ready to understand Plato's fears, and why exiling the poets is a necessary part of his perfect state. In the next section, I show how poetry and rhetoric's powers exploit dialectic's weakness. Since dialectic cannot protect the people from the corrupting influences of poetry, it must be banned to preserve order.

Section 4: The Death of Dialectic

In this section, I combine the findings of the chapter thus far. In the first section, I analyzed a weakness in dialectic. The adversarial nature of the art leads to confusion. Students who are learning the art will lose faith in the process and no longer believe what they were taught. Every time they try to argue for a position, they are refuted and become

confused. In their confusion, they turn away from the pursuit of truth and instead argue for pleasure. But the poets and rhetoricians will do the opposite of dialectic. Instead of refuting the young student, they pander to them. In doing so, the poets and rhetoricians gain influence over the students. Then, the poets use their newfound power to remove the philosophers from power.

In the first section, I pointed out how dialectic can cause interlocutors to become confused. Because of this confusion, they become misologists, distrustful of *logos*. Instead of pursuing truth, they pursue pleasure. This concern with pleasure, coupled with the frustrations of confusion, puts them in a weak, vulnerable position, one that makes them ripe targets for flatterers. In this section, I show how these flatterers are in fact poets and rhetoricians, and they are the ones who gain influence over former dialecticians. Not only has dialectic fallen into disrepute (in the eyes of the misologists), but the poets will use their influence to attack dialectic and its practitioners. I argue this by first connecting the flattery from the *Republic* to the flattery of the *Gorgias*. Then, I show how poetry and rhetoric exploit the misology of the former dialecticians—whereas dialectic was critical of beliefs, poetry and rhetoric are affirmative, and this brings pleasure to those who were once confused by dialectic. Finally, I show that the poets would use their influence to target dialecticians and philosophy as a whole.

Earlier, I quoted, at length, the passage at 538b. To recall briefly, this passage described an analogy about a son who becomes disillusioned about his parentage and abandons their notions of honor. But there is an important, and often over looked line, one that is incredibly illuminating. Socrates says that the youth would grow up having

“many flatterers,”²²⁶ and “would become more devoted to the flatterers; their influence over him would greatly increase; he would now live after their ways, and openly associate with them.”²²⁷ I argue that these flatterers are precisely the poets and rhetoricians. I argue this point by showing that poetry and rhetoric cause pleasure in the opposite way that dialectic causes pain. That is, poetry’s persuasive power is most effective against the frustration caused by dialectic.

Before we answer this question, we must first see if Plato in the *Republic* is referring to the same kind of flattery as is the *Gorgias*. The answer would appear to be yes. At 538d Socrates outlines the “opposite maxims and habits of pleasure which flatter and attract the soul,”²²⁸ which is consistent with the *Gorgias*’s description of flatteries as appealing to the pleasures. However, the single reference is not enough to confirm our theory. Much of the Platonic corpus deals with pleasure in different ways, so we cannot connect it directly to the *Gorgias*.

However, I argue that this reference to flattery is not only synonymous with the *Gorgias*’s theory, but that it is precisely the poets and rhetoricians to whom Plato is referring, even though he does not say it explicitly. Indeed, this passage at 538b is an analogy for the fall of a dialectician. To show this fact, I argue that this reference to flattery is consistent with (if not a direct reference to) the *Gorgias*.

Recall that flatteries appeal to the pleasures, and often they appeal to them in ways that their counterpart art causes pain in some capacity. The pastry chef says his craft is the true craft of health because his donuts taste good and bring pleasure, whereas the

²²⁶ 538a2

²²⁷ 538c1

²²⁸ 538d1

doctor recommends painful surgeries and disgusting remedies. The same dichotomy is true between dialectic and poetry/rhetoric.

Earlier, I showed how poetry and rhetoric bring about pleasure by reaffirming a person's beliefs and values. Dialectic does the complete opposite. In dialectic, a belief is not affirmed, but is deliberately attacked. A person is told why they are (or could be) wrong at every step in the argument. And, simply put, "it is unpleasant to be told you are wrong. It is pleasant to believe that you are virtuous and wise, unpleasant to be told that you are not."²²⁹ This difference in pleasure between being right or being wrong maps onto the difference between dialectic and poetry. Dialecticians critique and challenge values; orators and poets praise and confirm values. Dialecticians question popular morality and notions; orators reinforce them. Thus, the dialectician causes distress while the rhetorician and poet provide pleasure.²³⁰ In the broad picture, poetry and rhetoric and not just opposed to philosophy and dialectic insofar as they deal with the same things (as in justice and virtue) but because poetry and rhetoric's flattering advantage targets precisely the weakness in dialectic. That is, they are persuasive in precisely the way dialectic is unpersuasive.

With this dynamic in mind, the passage at 538 makes the most sense when the flatterers are poets and rhetoricians. It would not make sense, for example, for a pastry chef to be the flatterers—pastries do not "fix" a confused mind. To fill in the blanks, the students of dialectic becomes confused after many defeats. After trying to defend the theories they were taught by the guardians, they become confused, unable to tell what is true from what is false. Now this is a rather frustrating situation to be in, constantly being

²²⁹ Moss "The Doctor and the Pastry Chef," 28.

²³⁰ Moss "The Doctor and the Pastry Chef," 27.

shown you are wrong. Fed up, they give up the search for truth,²³¹ become misologists, and argue just for pleasure.²³² Then the poets and rhetoricians (whom we have let into the city, per the challenge) praise their theories and beliefs, telling the former dialecticians how correct and honorable they are. Since they have already turned to pleasure as their measure of good or bad,²³³ the poets are particularly potent in persuading and, therefore, controlling them. The former dialecticians then “live after their ways, and openly associate with them.”²³⁴ Through a series of small changes, beginning with confusion, the poets are able to gain influence over the former students who were once trying to master the art of dialectic.

This fall from dialectic is concerning in and of itself. Philosophy, as Plato says, gets a bad name. But the trouble does not end there. The poets and their recruits will not simply exist as a separate sort of society, coexisting with the philosopher-kings and their state. They will use their power to undermine and ultimately destroy the philosophical state.

Returning, once again, to the *Gorgias*, we can see how the poets and rhetoricians use their powers to persecute dialecticians and those who practice philosophy. In the famous passage at 521d, the one filled with incredible foreshadowing to *The Apology*, Socrates outlines what would happen if he were brought to court on charges:

I shall be tried just as a physician would be tried in a court
of little at the indictment of the cook. What would he reply
under such circumstances, if someone were to accuse him,

²³¹ See 538e4

²³² See 539b1

²³³ Recall the pain/bad, pleasure/good equations from earlier.

²³⁴ 538c1

saying ‘O my boys, many evils has this man done to you: he is the death of you, especially of the younger ones among you, cutting and burning and starving and suffocating you, until you know now what to do; he gives you the bitterest potions, and compels you to the hunger and thirst. How unlike the variety of meats and sweets on which I feasted you! [...] And if anyone says that I corrupt young men, and perplex their minds, or that I speak evil of old men, and use bitter words towards them, whether in private or public, it is useless for me to reply, as I truly might, ‘Gentlemen of the jury’—as your rhetoricians say— ‘All this I say and do justly’—or anything else.’²³⁵

Notice the accusations Socrates is anticipating. He will be accused of perplexing people’s minds: that is, confusing them, the very thing dialectic can cause. Just as the physician is accused of bringing about death by “cutting and burning and starving,” the dialectician (whose stand-in is Socrates) is accused of causing pain by confusing the populace. At the same time, the poet would reinforce his position by appealing to the audience’s pleasure, saying something to the effect of “How unlike myself, who has supported you and helped to confirm your beliefs and values.” The end of such a trial, for Plato, is obvious: death. *The Apology* serves as a prime example of how poets and rhetoricians persecute a philosopher.

There are numerous hints in *The Apology* that parallel the difference between

²³⁵ 521e3-522c3

poets/rhetoricians and dialecticians (or philosophers). Socrates, who represents dialectic, has been accused by “Meletus, who has a quarrel with me on behalf of the poets; Anytus, on behalf of the craftsman and politicians; Lycon, on behalf of the rhetoricians.”²³⁶ It was the poets and rhetoricians who brought the philosopher to trial. They accused him of corrupting the youth and not believing in the city’s gods. Or, put another way, they accuse Socrates of challenging popular morality.²³⁷ They spoke elegantly and persuasively: Socrates says that “they almost made me forget that I was the accused—so persuasively did they speak.”²³⁸ In many ways, *The Apology* is word for word the same story of the physician and pastry chef, but with the philosopher versus the poet and rhetorician. Of course, the trial ends with a death sentence for Socrates.

One can question this chain of events. For example, why would poets and rhetoricians, even if they had incredible influence, go after dialecticians? Plato does not give us an explicit answer, but there are clues. In *Republic X*, Socrates says “there is an ancient quarrel between philosophy and poetry.”²³⁹ Where does this quarrel stem from? This question is vast, and I do not intend on entirely answering it, but I think the answer lies in the different kinds of lives the arts lead to. Poetry is, at the end of the day, about pleasure. It is an imitation which takes the form of flattery, and its goal is to bring pleasure to the listener. It does so by presenting varied accounts of human action, but uses those accounts to pander to the audience. Dialectic is the opposite. Dialectic, while not directly opposed to pleasure, is concerned with Ideas. And what philosophy often

²³⁶ 23e3-25a1

²³⁷ Even though he does believe in the gods, the accusation reveals a tactic used by poets and rhetoricians. They frame philosophers as opposed to the popular morality, even if they are not, because it is an effective tactic. It allows the poets and rhetoricians to appeal to the value systems of the audience and use it as leverage.

²³⁸ 17a1

²³⁹ 607b2

says is that pain is a necessary part of life, not to mention that dialectic can be extremely frustrating.

In the *Gorgias*, it is said repeatedly that it is better to suffer unjust punishment than to punish unjustly.²⁴⁰ Later, Socrates says that satisfying your desires to no end is a bad way to live, and that restraint and order are far better.²⁴¹ Callicles maintains (the token for rhetoric) that “he who would truly live ought to allow his desires to wax to the uttermost, and not to chastise them [...] and this [is] natural justice and nobility.”²⁴² Socrates shows later “the good is not the same as the pleasant, or evil the same as the painful; there is a cessation of pleasure and pain at the same moment; but not of good and evil, for they are different.”²⁴³ The questions Socrates grapples with are not small trifles: they are questions of how to live.

The quarrel between poetry and philosophy, why they must inevitably clash, comes from their diametrically opposed ways of living. They are entirely different value systems, poetry based, fundamentally on pleasure, and philosophy on order. While not contradictory, they are in many ways incompatible. Order often calls for restraint, to resist pleasure. Rhetoric is similar, and Socrates makes a clear choice between the life of philosophy and the life of rhetoric:

What question can be more serious than whether he should follow after that way of life to which you exhort me, and act what you call the manly part of speaking in the assembly, and cultivating rhetoric, and engaging in public

²⁴⁰ 475e4; 479c-e; 507d3

²⁴¹ 518e 1-519a4

²⁴² 491e5-492a1

²⁴³ 497da2

affairs, according to the principles now in vogue, or
whether he should pursue the life of philosophy.²⁴⁴

Poetry and philosophy are two different ways of life, with one threatening the validity of the other. Naturally, poets would be expected to want to defend their way of life and value systems. Indeed, the poets of *The Apology* who accuse Socrates of being an atheist can be viewed to be defending their beliefs, namely in the gods. To do so, they have to attack and remove the threat. One way of doing so is to literally kill those who preach the opposing way of life, as they did with Socrates. The two ways of life will inevitably conflict. With this final step, we can understand why Plato wants to ban the poets.

The war between philosophy and poetry comes from different answers to serious questions: how to live, what is justice, and many more. But in their conflict, poetry and rhetoric have a decisive edge. These arts are capable of exploiting a weakness in dialectic.

In the perfect state, where dialectic is the major method for finding truth, those who are learning dialectic are at risk. The nature of dialectic requires intense scrutiny and criticism. This criticism causes students of dialectic to become confused and turn away from dialectic. They become misologists who despise *logos*, and instead of searching for truth, they seek pleasure. The poets take advantage of this fact, and by pandering and flattering the them, they gain power and influence. With this power, they will use it to attack philosophy and its practitioners, perhaps even the guardians, just as they did with Plato's teacher. Nothing about the perfect state prevents this degradation from occurring. Dialectical confusion is inevitable, and if poets and rhetoricians are allowed in the state,

²⁴⁴ 500c3-500d2; also see 482 for a similar dichotomy.

they will take advantage of that confusion and use it for their own purposes, purposes which end with the literal death of dialecticians, and in turn, dialectic.

Since there is no philosophical way to prevent this outcome, Plato turns to banishment. Allowing the poets in the state poses too much of a threat, and since they are able to exploit dialectic's weakness, philosophy, and by extension the state, cannot defend itself internally. Poetry literally acts like the HIV virus: it attacks the intellectual, ethical, and political defenses of the state. And once the defenses are gone, the virus is free to run rampant (not to mention the other dangers that philosophy is able to repel). Therefore, the best option is banishment.

CONCLUSION

Plato's exiling of the poets has a far deeper justification than previously thought. Past work, like Jansen's, suggested that it was poetry's unique ability to cause the irrational part of the soul, namely the appetitive part concerned with pleasure, to rule. While I think this account of poetry is accurate, it does not sufficiently explain why Plato feels he must banish the poets. We have to go much deeper, both into the structure of the ideal state and into Plato's philosophy.

To understand Plato, we have to begin with dialectic. While dialectic seems like an odd place to start, it is necessary to understand what dialectic is and what it claims to do. In Chapter 1, I showed just that: dialectic searches for the truth. But the truth is a specific concept for Plato. In particular, the "truth" is the realm of Ideas, things that are eternal and unchanging. They include things like Beauty, Triangle, Good, and all sorts of other things that embody the highest being of reality. The Ideas do not change: they are

fixed, forever in their purity.

Dialecticians search for Ideas by a unique method. They replicate the mathematician, but on a higher level. Mathematicians will take images, like a circle in the sand, and use those to develop hypotheses about those objects, knowing that the image in the sand is an imperfect representation. They merely use images as a starting point to jump into the world of hypotheses. Dialecticians make a similar kind of jump, but instead of using images, they use hypotheses to jump into the realm of Ideas. They begin with a hypothesis, like one about beauty, but then try to justify it using a higher hypothesis. They continue this process until they reach a hypothesis that is self-justifying, or able to withstand argumentative assault on its own. At that point, the hypothesis is considered unhypothetical, and is an Idea.

In Chapter 3, I further expanded on dialectic, focusing on what it means to withstand argumentative assault. One continually tries to justify that hypothesis, while the other continually tries to undermine it. If they reach a hypothesis that justifies itself, then the process has succeeded and they have arrived at an Idea.

In Chapter 2, I left dialectic and turned to poetry and imitations. In Book X, Socrates clearly links the problems with poetry to its imitative nature. But imitation is more than just replication. It has a serious metaphysical quality that separates it from philosophy and dialectic. Imitation is about displaying appearances and pawning them off as real. The painter of a carpenter is legitimately saying that the image accurately represents the carpenter: the image is a true carpenter. But the perspective of a carpenter can change, and thus the image can as well. Thus imitations, like paintings, present reality as variable, changing, and unfixed. Because of this fundamental fixation on

variety, imitation is based on a kind of disorder. Thus imitations are also imperfect, missing important facts about the original. According to Plato's metaphysical theories, this fact places imitations at the lowest level of reality, that of shadows and appearances.

The poet (and rhetorician) is considered an imitator because it imitates virtue and the good life. Homer portrays heroes as being composed one moment before battle, but spastic and unhinged another when something horrible happens. The poets claim that this portrayal displays virtue in its entirety. Rhetoric, in a same manner, imitates justice, giving policies that vary with the audience's biases and pre-held beliefs.

But imitations go beyond just metaphysics. There is a critical psychological effect. Since imitations are at the lowest level of reality, they also appeal to the lowest part of the soul. The appetitive part of the soul, the part concerned with pleasures and desires, is appeased by this kind of disorder and variety. Imitations feed and satisfy this part of the soul, giving it more power. The relationship becomes cyclical: imitations feed the appetitive part of the soul, giving it more power; with more influence it drives the person to pursue pleasures instead of what is rational; this influence causes the person to seek out pleasures, like poetry, and the cycle repeats. It ends with the corruption of the soul.

In Chapter 3, I put all of these analyses together to show why Plato bans poetry from his ideal city. That endeavor required a discussion about flattery, particularly found in the *Gorgias*. Flattery, I argued, is a special kind of imitation. In particular, flatteries imitate art forms or crafts. Furthermore, flatteries appeal to pleasures and desires. But more importantly, Plato hints that flatteries are in a way opposed to the real art that they imitate. The pastry-chef has the ability to persecute the physician, the true knower of

health. They are, Plato suggests, antithetical to one another.

Poetry and rhetoric are indeed imitations. As I argued in Chapter 2, they imitate philosophy insofar as they preach about the same topics: ethics, justice, piety, politics, and so on. In this capacity, they are therefore flatteries. They bring pleasure to an audience by patronizing or praising their biases, telling them how good their way of life is. They confirm previously held beliefs, and that just feels good to the audience. Combine these effects and, poets are particularly effective at persuading those who have succumbed to their desires.

Dialectic, on the other hand, does the complete opposite. Someone is deliberately negating beliefs: they are trying to undermine and tear them down through adversarial cross-examination. Where confirming beliefs brings pleasure, denying them brings frustration. Plato believes that this effect is dangerous, particularly for those who are just learning dialectic. A student of dialectic, who is just learning the art, would not be able to defend all of his positions. This inability leads to anti-intellectualism. Next, this misogyny causes the person to abandon philosophy and dialectic, and instead argues for the sake of pleasure. Finally, if the poets are permitted in the state, they take advantage of this weakness. Using their persuasive powers, they bring the fallen dialectician under their influence. The former student follows the life of the poet, constantly seeking what is pleasurable.

But this fall from grace affects not just the student. It leads to the persecution of dialecticians. Poetry and philosophy prescribe two different ways of life, two different value systems. Philosophy values the truth, which ultimately is unchanging and fixed. A philosophical life echoes this fact: composed, disciplined, and invariable as possible. In

short, philosophy is about order. Poetry values pleasure and what brings pleasure. They value what is variable and changing, whatever satisfies their desires. These two lifestyles are, for all intents and purposes, antithetical. It is exceedingly difficult for them to coexist. Eventually, this division will lead to conflict.

Plato believes that, if poetry is permitted in the city, what happened to Socrates will happen to the state. The poets, with their power over former dialecticians, will end up attacking dialectic as the foundation of society. They will say that philosophy causes confusion and frustration, which is harmful to the public, and those who practice philosophy ought to be punished. The end of the philosopher, and for the state, is the same as it was for Socrates: death, not only in the literal sense, but in the sense that the guiding force of the ideal state will be lost. The state was supposed to be guided by the guardians, who practice dialectic and find the truth. But with philosophy attacked, and eventually eradicated, the state will too fall from grace, and be thrown into disorder and chaos, ruled by pleasures and guided by the poets, just as Greek culture was.

I believe that this account better explains why Plato expels the poets. While previous scholarship is correct that poetry corrupts the soul, it does not completely grasp Plato's worry. In the perfect state, philosophy will not be able to guard against the influences of poetry. No matter what the guardians teach or do, the poets will always be able to take advantage of dialectical confusion.

Plato's solution to this problem is simply to expel the poets from the city entirely. Not only are they not admitted as citizens, they are not allowed even as visitors. Once poets are allowed in, they will begin to undermine the state by undermining philosophy. Therefore, they must not be allowed to enter: that is, they must be exiled.

As I said at the beginning of this thesis, I do not support banning or censorship of any kind. I believe that free-speech is an essential component to any free society, and art, especially poetry, tragedy, and prose, are important ingredients to a prosperous and vibrant society. In the pursuit of truth, we have so many blind-spots and unseen biases that we must allow others to criticize our views, otherwise we run the risk of letting a falsity sneak in from our blind spots. But, if that is the case, then it is important to understand the arguments against it. And Plato makes a unique argument.

This thesis, then, has been a good-faith effort to understand and interpret Plato. It shows just how complex his argument and philosophy can be. The issue of exiling the poets was not just a political matter: it required an analysis of metaphysical, epistemological, and psychological theories. The connections between them shows how intricate and careful Plato's theory was. One cannot help but admiring the thought behind the argument. Still, this thesis was not just a way to admire Plato. It has serious connections to contemporary issues.

While there are many differences between ancient Greece and the modern world, there are still plenty of lessons to learn. The current issue surrounding climate science and the way in which climate-deniers are able to create (unwarranted) doubt about the science echoes Plato: persuasive people who appeal to pre-held beliefs or affirm lifestyles can undermine legitimate efforts to find and utilize the truth. The same goes for all kinds of issues, from flat-earthers to antivaxxers. For those who support free speech and the market place of Ideas, understanding Plato and his concern helps better to defend their position. The relationship between truth and open expression, even if it is just poetry and rhetoric, is much more complicated than it may initially appear, and the ability to

acknowledge and account for that relationship goes a long way in further justifying free speech and open expression. If one wants to defend free-speech, they must be able to argue beyond basic politics. They must be able to address metaphysics, epistemology, and psychology, just like Plato did.

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