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MORRISS HENRY PARTEE

Plato on the Rhetoric of Poetry

PLATO'S MISTRUST of unalterable discourse underlies both his banishment of poetry from the Republic and his ambivalent attitude towards his own works. The ambiguity of the dialogue form helps resolve the tension between immutable knowledge and tentative language. A close attention to language of any sort involves the mind in a trivial, if not dangerous exercise, for knowledge exists as independently of language as of society. The *Cratylus* argues that since language at best is an intelligent imitation of nature, the study of language cannot substitute for the direct and immediate examination of truth itself.¹ Both original confusion and present conventions render language unworthy of serious philosophical consideration. Only the dialectician, the one using the words, currently, can judge the worth of the original word-artisan's production. Any fixed language, whether written treatises or memorized poetry, can hinder as much as stimulate thought.

Since truth or falsity for Plato extend even to the level of letters and sounds, any linguistic ornaments are mere obfuscation. By thus eviscerating poetry of its verbal organs, Plato can refuse to admit artistic language to be a legitimate expression of human values. Poets, in common with sophists and rhapsodes, use their stylistic powers to call attention to their discourse. But although Plato explicitly contrasts good and bad rhetorical principles, he consistently denies any value whatsoever to the particular embodiment of thought. Utterances so brief as to

be formless are best; the continuity of speech must not obscure the continuity of reasoning. Plato saw that human art—like physical nature—tends to be amoral. Man responds to any beauty with his entire soul even though his reaction to earthly beauty consists either of nonproductive pleasure or pain. Man perceives the higher beauty with the total rapture of philosophy; Plato's distinctions between the two sorts of total inspiration are subtle indeed.²

Language has an inherently seductive power which interferes with both philosophical activity and true poetic response. The pursuit of wisdom is for Plato an essentially private enterprise; public utterances are best when impersonal. A man's personal authority can render his discourse liable to misinterpretation and confusion. As the probably authentic "Seventh Letter" states, fixed discourse is always treacherous: "The best safeguard is to avoid writing and to commit things to memory. For when a thing has once been committed to writing, it is impossible to prevent it from gaining publicity. It is for this reason that I myself have never written anything on these subjects. There is not, and there never will be, a written treatise of Plato's. Those that are called his are really the teaching of Socrates restored to youth and beauty" (314).³ It is no wonder, therefore, that the *Republic X* allows only straightforward didactic discourse to exist in the noble commonwealth.⁴ Yet the artistry of the dialogues testifies that Plato felt no need to restrict himself to this modest end.⁵ Once freed from the tyranny of the author, poetic or philosophic dis-

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course may find a legitimate immediate response in subsequent individuals.

I

Plato's perplexity over the written word shows his struggle with communication in general. Both the written word and the fixed language of poetry are ways of extending thought beyond the individual. Neither necessarily involve the listener or reader in active philosophical response. Without this critical participation in the process of creating philosophy, the individual gives himself over totally and mindlessly to the enchantment of language. But more dangerous, repeated exposure to uncritical language will deaden the listener to the truth lying behind the language.⁶

The *Phaedrus* states that far too much faith was originally placed on writing. Books separate language from the thought living in the soul. The originator of letters, Teuth, advanced his discovery as a branch of learning, an easy approach which would make people wiser and improve their memories. But his king, Thamus, knew that the ones who use devices are better judges of the tool's worth than the creator. Similarly, Socrates in the *Republic* feels that a man's creations lead him to excessive regard for the external: "The makers of fortunes have a second love of money as a creation of their own, resembling the affection of authors for their own poems, or of parents for their children" (I, 330).⁷ Thus, Teuth's exaggerated regard for his offspring, writing, has led him to declare the very opposite of its true effect. Thamus states (*Phaedrus* 275):

If men learn writing, it will implant forgetfulness in their souls: they will cease to exercise memory because they rely on that which is written, calling things to remembrance no longer from within themselves, but by means of external marks; what you have discovered is a recipe not for memory but for reminder. And it is no true wisdom that you offer your disciples, but only its semblance; for by telling them of many things without teaching them you will make them seem to know much, while for the most part they know nothing; and as men filled, not with wisdom, but with the conceit of wisdom, they will be a burden to their fellows.

Again, Plato chooses myth to advance his

more tentative reasoning.⁸ The semblance of knowledge, fixed in writing, is dead and useless. Having data encoffined in this manner causes man to let his memory atrophy, and for Plato, perception of the Forms comes from recollection. Memory and reminiscence have little in common. The former gives access to the truth, the latter only a shadow of reality. The love of wisdom requires involvement. Bookish discourse, like poetry, can be noticed without response. Moreover, access to this source of fact would allow a man to presume to unmerited honor and knowledge. Plato's attack on both sophist and poet comes from his hatred of presumption.⁹ Poets flatter the appetite; sophists abuse the intellect.

Besides softening the fiber of the mind, the written word lacks substance and permanence. Both writer and reader engage in a futile attempt to grasp the flux of this world. The maker leaves the written manual behind him; the words lie empty of the soul which would seek living truth. Only the simpleminded would trust writing to provide something reliable and permanent. Just as knowledge precedes the application of discourse, speech precedes the literary embodiment. Written words can do nothing more than remind one who has previously known the subject of the writing. The proper interpretation of writing—like that of poetry—requires a preexisting knowledge. And he who already understands does not need these external reminders. Writing will thus be necessarily inferior to knowledge and recollection of the same matters.

In a real sense, both painting and writing to Plato are silent, for they cannot respond with immediate thought. Etymologically, Plato has justification for this identification. The word ζωγραφία (painting) literally means a drawing of living creatures. This word has obvious relations with the Greek word γραφή (writing). As in the *Republic* X, Plato seriously presents his argument that discourse and painting can be analogous (*Phaedrus* 275):

The painter's products stand before us as though they were alive; but if you question them, they maintain a most majestic silence. It is the same with written words: they seem to talk to you as

though they were intelligent, but if you ask them anything about what they say, from a desire to be instructed, they go on telling you just the same thing for ever. And once a thing is put in writing, the composition, whatever it may be, drifts all over the place, getting into the hands not only of those who understand it, but equally of those who have no business with it; it doesn't know how to address the right people, and not address the wrong. And when it is ill-treated and unfairly abused it always needs its parent to come to its help, being unable to defend or help itself.

Such written statements impose a false stability on the complexity of life; a set discourse can make only one answer. Basically unintelligent, such compositions wander about making their single statement indiscriminately. Wisdom cannot be separated from the originator; the creator of the work must be present to defend his offspring.

Skill in speaking can ravish the hearers, but true communication depends on an immediate and active interchange of ideas. Earlier, the long and eloquent speech of Protagoras has thrown Socrates into a trance, a nonintellectual stupor. But when Protagoras stops, the doubts of Socrates return (*Protagoras* 329):

If a man were to go and consult Pericles or any of our great speakers about these matters, he might perhaps hear as fine a discourse; but then when one has a question to ask of them, like books, they can neither answer nor ask; and if anyone challenges the least particular of their speech, they go ringing on in a long harangue, like brazen pots, which when they are struck continue to sound unless someone puts his hand upon them; whereas our friend Protagoras cannot only make a good speech, as he has already shown, but when he is asked a question he can answer briefly; and when he asks he will wait and hear the answer; and this is a very rare gift.

A speech and a poem should be interpreted in the same way. Extended discourse draws the soul of man away from its seeking of knowledge, whereas brief passages or statements of poetry can be grasped and assimilated.¹⁰

The danger in written language stems from the superficial resemblance between ordinary language and philosophical discourse. Written language and speech are brothers. Yet not only does spoken discourse alone possess an unquestioned legitimacy, but it is inherently superior and more effec-

tive. This discourse is "the sort that goes together with knowledge, and is written in the soul of the learner; that can defend itself, and knows to whom it should speak and to whom it should say nothing" (*Phaedrus* 276). The *Philebus* expresses a similar attitude toward the external impressions on the soul. Here Socrates analyzes the relationship between opinion, memory, and perception. When seeing a distant object, the soul receives the impress of opinion just as a book does. "Memory and perception meet and they and their attendant feelings seem to me almost to write down words in the soul, and when the inscribing feeling writes truly, then true opinion and true propositions which are the expressions of opinion, come into our souls—but when the scribe within us writes falsely, the result is false" (*Philebus* 39). Plato then makes his familiar analogy of writing to painting. After the scribe has done his work, the painter puts the writing into images. The mind does not proceed to work with the words, but rather transforms them into images: "A man, besides receiving from sight or some other sense certain opinions or statements sees in his mind the images of the subjects in them" (*Philebus* 39). Thus, the soul will create false or true images corresponding to true or false opinions and words. Each external impression must be immediately and correctly inscribed by some faculty under the direction of memory; the internal painter depends almost entirely on the internal scribe.¹¹

Living speech is the original of the written word. Separated from the individual, the written, dead discourse can be only an inferior image. Socrates would implant intelligent words into the soul of the hearer. These words truly live—they respond actively to the rational element of the soul and have the power to place themselves in new contexts for their own defense. These words may be living bits of traditional wisdom, but only if the sayings evoke an intelligent reaction in the present. These living words are autonomous of the individual's perception. A word either speaks or is silent, is living or is dead. The written word, then, provides an image, the dangerous sort of image Plato has generally condemned.

But writing need not be excluded completely. A man may provide himself with an amusement for when his real powers fail. Plato recognizes human failings, but he never admits them as excuses. He uses an image of a farmer sowing seeds to extend his concept of words as living, responding entities. Like a farmer, a thinker may legitimately seek amusement. But he will not seriously write them in water or that black fluid called ink, for his pen would sow words which can neither speak in their own defense, nor present the truth adequately. The written word can refresh but not replace the human memory: "He will sow his seed in literary gardens, I take it, and write when he does write by way of pastime, collecting a store of refreshment both for his own memory, against the day 'when age oblivious comes,' and for all such as tread in his footsteps; and he will take pleasure in watching the tender plants grow up. And when other men resort to other pastimes, regaling themselves with drinking parties and such like, he will doubtless prefer to indulge in the recreation I refer to" (*Phaedrus* 276). Even old men may want to exchange ideas. These writings will provide a worthwhile recreation when the man has lost the power of active thought. Elsewhere, Plato says "A man may sometimes set aside meditations about eternal things, and for recreation turn to consider the truths of generation which are probable only; he will thus gain a pleasure not to be repented of, and secure for himself while he lives a wise and moderate pastime" (*Timaeus* 59). Certainly the written monuments to one's own past thought are more noble than idle banqueting. But one should not confuse innocent pastimes with a search for the eternal verities.

The writing of discourses about justice and other noble topics can be an acceptable pastime. But these individual amusements are useless as far as real philosophy is concerned. Nor can these recreations be shared; even in play a man keeps to himself. The serious treatment of great issues requires the art of dialectic. "The dialectician selects a soul of the right type, and in it he plants and sows his words founded on knowledge, words which can defend both themselves

and him who planted them, words which instead of remaining barren contain a seed whence new words grow up in new characters; whereby the seed is vouchsafed immortality, and its possessor the fullest measure of blessedness that man can attain unto" (*Phaedrus* 276-7). Plato attributes great power to the properly applied word. As in the *Cratylus*, the dialectician is the true and effective user of language. He responds to a waiting spirit and fills him with these forceful words. The very act of giving the words aids the giver as well as the responder. These words have a social value; they do not exist in a vacuum. Moreover, these words have the animate property of reproduction; the seed lies within the word and given proper treatment, will respond immortally. Human words are static and need their creator to defend them. But words implanted by the dialectic pass from one soul to another.¹²

Plato now brings his discussion back to the immediate cause of the argument. A rhetorician must know the audience, his subject matter, and all the applicable rules of logic, particularly when he commits his idea to writing. Lysias' speech is condemned, not because of his evil praise of lust, but because of muddy thinking and inept artistry. The deliberate composition and delivery of speeches are not necessarily a matter of reproach, but his conclusions "have shown that any work, in the past or in the future, whether by Lysias or anyone else, whether composed in a private capacity or in the role of a public man who by proposing a law becomes the author of a political composition, is a matter of reproach to its author (whether or not the reproach is actually voiced) if he regards it as containing important truth of permanent validity. For ignorance of what is a waking vision and what is a mere dream image of justice and injustice, good and evil, cannot truly be acquitted of involving reproach, even if the mass of men extol it" (*Phaedrus* 277). Popularity can no more justify bad writing than applause can vindicate bad poetry. Indeed presenting one's ideas to the masses increases the danger of being swayed by vulgar adulation. Certainty and clearness of discourse

depend on knowledge, not on techniques of style.

Thus, Plato identifies writing with eloquent speaking; both tend to be superficial persuasion. All language must inspire criticism and instruction; fixed language is frivolous—language is either believed or criticized, not simply enjoyed. A written discourse on any subject must necessarily contain much useless material. Indeed, written verse or prose merits little serious attention. The same strictures apply to the set speech. Declamation usually is mere persuasion without any questioning or exposition. Such compositions are at best a means of reminding those who know the truth already.

On the other hand, Plato realizes that some communication is not only necessary, but desirable. But he ignores the medium altogether. The true speaker first establishes the truth within himself. His discourses are then legitimate children, creatures with a life of their own (*Phaedrus* 264, 277–8). This creation must be reinforced by correct instincts. With the proper purpose, a statement on justice, honor, goodness, or such topics can have a noble lucidity and seriousness. These spiritual children do not enter into another. Rather the sons and brothers go into the souls of other men (*Phaedrus* 278). There, the good discourse is engraved correctly, thus encouraging the listener to paint true images in his mind. Clearly, oral communication is far superior to its imitation in the written word. Only in personal contact can discourse be truly graven on another's soul. Personal, living knowledge must immediately precede all forms of discourse; writing can be only a faint echo of living speech.¹³

II

The spoken word of poetry shares the subordinate status of writing. A man may write well or badly, but no matter what his skill, he cannot directly convey knowledge to his hearer. Plato's readiness to link truth with visual images¹⁴ may explain why poetry cannot contain more than its surface texture will hold. Perception comes from envisioning reality, not from understanding lan-

guage. The *Phaedrus* recognizes that man can aspire to the highest heaven, a realm no earthly poet can justly describe. Yet motivated by the high subject matter, Plato boldly makes the attempt through his metaphors of flight and vision. "In the place beyond the heavens, true Being dwells, without color or shape, not susceptible to touch. Reason alone, the soul's pilot can behold it, and all true knowledge is knowledge thereof. Now even as the mind of a god is nourished by reason and knowledge, so also is it with every soul that has a care to receive her proper food; wherefore when at last she has beheld Being she is well content, and contemplating truth she is nourished and prospers, until the heaven's revolution brings her back full circle" (*Phaedrus* 247). During the travels of the soul, she perceives the very essence of justice, temperance, and knowledge. In this rapture the soul rises above the knowledge, which, as neighbor to Becoming, varies with man's unintelligent perception of various objects. "And when she has contemplated likewise and feasted upon all else that has true being, she descends again within the heavens and comes back home. And having so come, her charioteer sets his steeds at their manger, and puts ambrosia before them and draught of nectar to drink withal" (*Phaedrus* 247). The soul which has seen the most of being becomes a philosopher; less vision makes a poet or other imitative artist. As in the *Symposium* 211 and the *Republic* VII 517–8, Plato has the inspired soul return to the lower world. But this return does not result necessarily in effective work in this world of shadows.

Most people have lost the memory of the holy things they once saw. Some had the vision only for a moment; others forsook the "holy objects of their vision." The image of fading sight can describe the process of forgetting. "Few indeed are left that can still remember much: but when these discern some likeness of the things yonder, they are amazed, and no longer masters of themselves, and know not what is come upon them by reason of their perception being dim. Now in the earthly likenesses of justice and temperance and all other prized possessions of the soul there dwells no luster; nay,

so dull are the organs wherewith men approach their images that hardly can a few behold that which is imaged" (*Phaedrus* 250). True rapture makes a man gaze around like a bird. On the other hand, a partial vision may result in merely the dull response of ignorant amazement. Any man whose senses are not dead can respond, but he cannot understand his own reaction. The perception involves some effort on the part of the individual. Images of reality can enrapture, but few people have the power to rise above this unintellectual rapture to see the truth itself.¹⁵

The metaphor of eye as soul evokes a corresponding image of beauty as wisdom. The eye of the mind of course has a far greater power than that of the body, but both are windows of perception. The soul before imprisonment in the body had an unblemished vision of all sorts of revelations: "Now beauty, as we said, shone bright amidst these visions, and in this world below we apprehend it through the clearest of our senses, clear and resplendent. For sight is the keenest mode of perception vouchsafed us through the body; wisdom, indeed, we cannot see thereby—how passionate had been our desire for her, if she had granted us so clear an image of herself to gaze upon—nor yet any other of those beloved objects, save only beauty; for beauty alone this has been ordained, to be most manifest to sense and most lovely of them all" (*Phaedrus* 250). Plato could easily have allowed beauty of all sorts to lift man to a vision of true beauty. And indeed, artifacts and beautiful humans can serve this function. But art first calls attention to itself as a physical object and does not necessarily stimulate further vision. Earthly beauty causes not true rapture, but selfish pleasure. Wisdom cannot be seen in this mundane existence, for the mere sight would be overwhelming.

Language can create only the basic condition for man's achieving this vision of absolute wisdom and beauty. The quest for truth does not begin from nothing; the mind must interact with tradition.¹⁶ The sayings of the ancients have grace and beauty. These bits of lore contain an important inactive wisdom. Respect for the

traditional runs throughout the dialogues—usually expressed by deference to the ancients or by allusions to poetry. Plato's inquiry often begins from a word from the past.¹⁷ For example, Plato says "Not to be lightly rejected, Phaedrus, is any word of the wise; perhaps they are right: one has to see. And in particular this present assertion must not be dismissed" (*Phaedrus* 260). But often great modifications and restrictions must be applied, for here Phaedrus has just advanced a widespread belief that "the intending orator is under no necessity of understanding what is truly just, but only what is likely to be thought just by the body of men who are to give judgment; nor need he know what is truly good or noble, but what will be thought so; since it is on the latter, not the former, that persuasion depends" (*Phaedrus* 259–60). So the sayings are only stable points for departure; one moves away from them, not to them.¹⁸ The word must challenge rather than grip the soul.

Socrates' disclaiming of merit almost always accompanies his eloquence. Deferential references to the ancients abound when he waxes poetic. By removing his own personality from his speech, he reaffirms—in accordance with his identification of soul and true discourse—the tentative nature of his words. Socrates declares that if Phaedrus goes "as far as that I shall find it impossible to agree with you; if I were to assent out of politeness, I should be confuted by the wise men and women who in past ages have spoken and written on this theme" (*Phaedrus* 235). Socrates characteristically cannot remember who, but he knows that "there is something welling up within my breast, which makes me feel that I could find something different, and something better, to say. I am of course well aware it cannot be anything originating in my own mind, for I know my own ignorance; so I supposed it can only be that it has been poured into me, through my ears, as into a vessel, from some external source; though in my stupid fashion I have actually forgotten how, and from whom, I heard it" (*Phaedrus* 235). Elsewhere Plato has stated that true discourse originated only in the soul of the speaker, yet Socrates declares his emptiness. His eloquence,

the flowing outward of a speech earlier poured into his ears, merits no respect. But the images thus stimulated in the soul of another are the true offspring of the philosopher. Irony, the language which constantly refutes its direct statement, helps keep Plato's audience from passively absorbing doctrine.

III

Plato has explicitly denied worth to other's imaginative language and implicitly rejected the seriousness of his own dialogues. But the consummate artistry of his prose belies his casual dismissal of all but philosophical conversation. The example of the dialogues runs startlingly counter to the strictures both on creations of the imagination and on written words. Consistency to Plato's condemnation of art would certainly demand a repudiation of the dialogues in any good state.¹⁹ But the tentative nature of the dialogues saves them from the damning dogmatism of other forms of discourse. Phaedrus should convey a message to composers of speeches, political tracts, and poets: "If any of them has done his work with a knowledge of the truth, can defend his statements when challenged, and can demonstrate the inferiority of his own writings out of his own mouth, he ought not to be designated by a name drawn from those writings, but by one that indicates his serious pursuit" (*Phaedrus* 278). Socrates will not call them possessors of wisdom, for only gods always have knowledge. Instead, he who can create and defend his creation will be called a lover of wisdom or a philosopher.²⁰ Through his use of irony, Plato has already recognized the inferiority of the dialogues to true personal discourse. By patterning his work as closely as possible to the interchange of ideas, Plato sets up attack and defense within the dialogues themselves.²¹

For Plato, speech is more plastic than wax or other such media.²² Thus he has only contempt for stylists, those who spend hours on phrases, twisting them around, pasting them together and pulling them apart. Directly seeking popular recognition, such men should be contemptuously called poets or

speech-writers or law-givers. Literary craftsmanship, Plato thinks, consists of unintelligent word games. Obviously polished phrases show that their creator has been manipulating mere words rather than attending to truth itself.²³

The *Timaeus* shows a similar distinction between the lovers of truth and the lovers of language. A man may certainly admire the nobility of his discourse, but this love must not lead to sterile complacency. Indeed, out of frustration comes further inquiry. The description of the perfect state, the dialogue *Republic*, gives Plato a certain measure of satisfaction. "I might compare myself to a person who, on beholding beautiful animals either created by the painter's art, or, better still, alive but at rest, is seized with a desire to see them in motion or engaged in some struggle or conflict to which their forms appear suited; this is my feeling about the State which we have been describing" (*Timaeus* 19). A painter can create beautiful works just as a philosopher can leave behind noble examples of his thought. But both creations are inferior to real animate creations or to the real philosophic process.²⁴ Plato would like to see his creation in existence, performing in its proper way. But just as a painting gives only a momentary glimpse of true being, a dialogue can only suggest the Form for the state.

Plato does not claim authority for his teaching, nor does he approve of anyone else, such as the poets or sophists, making such claims.²⁵ The poets are the self-appointed and generally recognized teachers. But their art has no more permanence than Plato's, and their dogmatism discourages any intelligent response. The poets inescapably imitate human actions; they set both real and ideal deeds in the province of the old humanity. Bound by natural human limitations, no man can speak directly, yet significantly, to the human situation. Plato states, "I am conscious that I myself should never be able to celebrate the city and her citizens in a befitting manner, and I am not surprised at my own incapacity; to me the wonder is rather that the poets, present as well as past, are not better—not that I mean to depreciate them; but everyone can see that they are

a tribe of imitators, and will imitate best and most easily the life in which they have been brought up; while that which is beyond the range of a man's education he finds hard to carry out in action, and still harder adequately to represent in language" (*Timaieus* 19). Poets tend to imitate without personal involvement or philosophical evaluation. These poets lie passively in their environment; their limited imagination does not allow them to improve upon what society has given them. And language proves more recalcitrant to meaningful expression than do actions. An action or thing may participate in some way with its corresponding Form. But there is no Form for language to resemble. Language can suggest all Forms, while being none of them truly.

The earlier tentative statements about the role of the dialogues become more definite in the *Laws*. The dialogues are indeed to be regarded as true poems, not the gripping poetry of conflict, but a serene embodiment of truth and beauty. Almost as an afterthought, the Stranger recognizes some merit in his long discourse (*Laws VII* 811–2):

I think that I am not wholly in want of a pattern, for when I consider the words which we have spoken from early dawn until now, and which, as I believe, have been inspired by Heaven, they appear to me to be quite like a poem. When I reflected upon all these words of ours, I naturally felt pleasure, for of all the discourses which I have ever learnt or heard, either in poetry or prose, this seemed to me to be the justest, and most suitable for young men to hear; I cannot imagine any better pattern than this which the guardian of the law who is also the director of education can have. He cannot do better than advise the teachers to teach the young these words and any which are of a like nature, if he should happen to find them, either in poetry or prose, or if he come across unwritten discourses akin to ours, he should certainly preserve them, and commit them to writing.

Even here Plato does not claim authority for his creation. First, the words of the dialogue are to be used in conjunction with the personal direction of a teacher. And second, the principles and laws are not directly recommended for the world where the Athenian reasons with Cleinias and Megillus, but rather in the state set up by the dialogue. So in the second-best state, fallible men may

need the aid of the written word. True poetry of the soul comes through a god-like communion with the eternal. But when the inspiration is not present, preserved discourses may give some direction to education.

Anyone who deals with the mere transmission of facts and customs must submit to the authority of one who truly knows, here the lawgiver. The teachers Plato envisions in the *Laws* primarily transmit sayings or discourses rather than ideas. For this reason, good discourses are of great importance. The teachers must learn and approve the dialogues. Those who will shall be employed; those objecting will be dismissed. But Plato carefully declares that the Athenian's ideas do not stem from a personal whim. The source of inspiration is the same for philosophy and for poetry. Good words are always inexplicable—they come from the muses. The seriousness of his intent and the intensity of his lifelong dedication to philosophy lead Plato to admit that his dialogues, being just, are suitable for the consideration of young men. But even here, his customary modesty leads him to suggest that the dialogue is only a fanciful tale.

Besides their role in education, written laws can help guide the state in its ordinary functions. Whatever its inadequacies, written discourse does have the advantage of allowing even the slowest man to absorb its meaning. The value of such discourse still comes from its being tested for contemporary relevance. Cleinias receives the approval of Megillus and the Athenian by saying that "the greatest help to rational legislation is that the laws when once written down are always at rest; they can be put to the test at any future time, and therefore, if on first hearing they seem difficult, there is no reason for apprehension about them, because any man however dull can go over them and consider them again and again; nor if they are tedious but useful, is there any reason or religion, as it seems to me, in any man refusing to maintain the principles of them to the utmost of his power" (*Laws X* 891). The state described by the *Laws* lacks the absolute order of the world set up by the *Republic*. The Athenian knows that hereti-

cal discourses have been scattered through the realm. The legislator himself must compose counterarguments. Thus, towards the end of his life, Plato begins to recognize that a wise man must fight error by some more direct method. The philosopher must not only bring down the dazzling vision of truth to this world, but he must clear away the murk of human ignorance. Nevertheless, Plato will not illumine and cleanse with the same instrument. To the last, the philosopher rejects this dangerous compromise.

¹ See my "Plato's Theory of Language," *Foundations of Language*, 8 (1972), 113–32.

² I have discussed this point more fully in "Inspiration in the Aesthetics of Plato," *JAAC*, 30 (1971), 87–95.

³ *The Platonic Epistles*, trans. J. Harward (Cambridge, 1932), p. 103. See Herman L. Sinaido, *Love, Knowledge, and Discourse in Plato* (Chicago, 1965), pp. 3–10.

⁴ See Paul Friedlander, *Plato: An Introduction*, trans. Hans Meyerhoff (New York, 1958), pp. 121–4.

⁵ R. G. Collingwood in "Plato's Philosophy of Art," *Mind*, 34, (1925) focuses on *Republic X* 595–608, which he feels typical of Plato's thought elsewhere. He states, "If it is asked why Socrates permits certain forms of art to be retained in the ideal state instead of consistently banishing them all alike, the answer is surely obvious: these are, in the opinion of Socrates, the forms which art will take in the hands of men who understand its true nature" (pp. 156–7). Collingwood's reasoning would argue, however, that one can cheerfully accept an injection of the Black Death if he has sufficient streptomycin in his system. Leonard Moss in "Plato and the Poetics," *Philological Quarterly*, 50 (1971), 533–42 provides a useful summary of scholarly positions on Plato's theory of imitation and the admissibility of art into the state.

⁶ See Eric Havelock, *Preface to Plato*, (Cambridge, Mass., 1963), pp. 3–19.

⁷ Usually, fame should be despised: "You are aware that the greatest and most influential statesmen are ashamed of writing speeches and leaving them in a written form, lest they should be called sophists by posterity" (*Phaedrus* 257). On the other hand, some creations may bring fame without stigma: "Who, when he thinks of Homer and Hesiod and other great poets, would not rather have their children than ordinary human ones? Who would not emulate them in the creation of children such as theirs, which have preserved their memory and given them everlasting glory?" (*Symposium* 209).

⁸ The myths of Plato are subject enough for several books. Plato obviously feels myths are useful. In the *Gorgias*, Socrates tells Callicles that he will regard his account as a fable; he, Socrates, regards it

as reasonable (523). Similarly, the *Phaedo* states that myths deal with the most likely or probably (114). J. Tate in "Plato and Allegorical Interpretation," *Classical Quarterly*, 23 (1929), 146 reemphasizes this point. Plato himself comments on what he regards as the proper interpretation of a myth. Socrates neither accepts nor rejects the myth in which Boreas is said to have carried off Orithyia from the bank of the Ilissus (*Phaedrus* 229–30). Sinaido refers to the importance of this myth for understanding the entire *Phaedrus* (p. 13). [See Page 22A] Ludwig Edelstein in "The Function of Myth in Plato's Philosophy," *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 10 (1949), 463–81 distinguishes between the ethical myths which are an addition to rational knowledge and the historical and scientific myths which serve where such knowledge does not exist (p. 473).

⁹ Sophists, like the rhapsodes of the *Ion* claim all sorts of knowledge. See, for instance, *Euthydemus* 273.

¹⁰ Plato knows the rules for good rhetoric. Lysias, on the other hand, begins at what properly should be the end. Socrates observes, "Then as to the other topics—are they not thrown down anyhow? Is there any principle in them? Why should the next topic follow next in order, or any other topic? I cannot help fancying in my ignorance that he wrote off boldly just what came into his head, but I dare say that you would recognize a rhetorical necessity in the succession of the several parts of the composition" (*Phaedrus* 264). Still, brief passages are best (*Protagoras* 342–3). Plato develops only the second of these two positions.

¹¹ Roy L. Hart in "The Imagination in Plato," *IPQ*, 5 (1965), astutely observes, "That Plato did not elaborate an explicit doctrine of the imagination is owing less to his only slightly developed psychology than to his appreciation of the ontological complexity of such a doctrine" (p. 436).

¹² The *Symposium* 209 also suggests a wordless conception: "Souls which are pregnant—for there certainly are men who are more creative in their souls than in their bodies—conceive that which is proper for the soul to conceive or contain. And what are these conceptions? Wisdom and virtue in general. And such creators are poets and all artists who are deserving of the name inventors. But the greatest and fairest sort of wisdom by far is that which is concerned with the ordering of states and families, and which is called temperance and justice." The state of mind is all important to the outward expression: "Since there has been shown to be false speech and false opinion, there may be imitations of real existence, and out of this condition of the mind an art of deception may arise" (*Sophist* 264).

¹³ G. R. Levy in his introduction to J. A. Stewart's *Myths of Plato* (Carbondale, Ill., 1960) states that "Plato's whole plan for the dissemination of philosophy in writing was a continuation of personal relationships, not the perpetuation of doctrine" (p. 5).

¹⁴ John Warry in *Greek Aesthetic Theory* (New York, 1962), correctly states, "It is worth remembering that the word for 'seeing' in Greek is etymologi-

cally germane to that which denotes 'learning,' and the same is true in other Indo-European languages. If pressed to name the second 'clearest' sense, Plato would hardly have done other than name that of hearing, for after the eye the ear is indisputably the finest minister to the intellect" (p. 29).

¹⁵ Douglas Morgan in *Love: Plato, the Bible and Freud* (Englewood Cliffs, 1964) states, "Seeing is sometimes believing, but believing is never knowing. What we see, we do not know. What we know, we do not see. This is the first and fundamental law of Plato's philosophy. It seems odd only to men whose understanding is beclouded by their senses, and who by habit close the eye of the mind to see only with the eye in the head" (p. 15).

¹⁶ But even good information—laws, sayings, customs—is more antidote than treasure: "Of all kinds of knowledge the knowledge of good laws has the greatest power of improving the learner; otherwise there would be no meaning in the divine and admirable law possessing a name akin to mind (*νοῦς, νόμος*). And of all other words, such as the praises and censures of individuals which occur in poetry and also in prose, whether written down or uttered in daily conversation, whether men dispute about them in the spirit of contention or weakly assent to them, as is often the case—of all these the one sure test is the writings of the legislator, which the righteous judge ought to have in his mind as the antidote of all other words" (*Laws XII* 957).

¹⁷ *Lysias* 214, *Phaedrus* 235, *Republic I* 332, *II* 364–5, *Protagoras* 339–347.

¹⁸ Cf. *Meno* 81.

¹⁹ Carleton Lewis Brownson in *Plato's Studies and Criticisms of the Poets* (Boston, 1920) states that when Plato "pronounces his final judgment against the poets, he seems to forget or disregard the significance which he has given to *mimēsis* in X. For he banishes not all poetry which is mimetic in the wider sense of X, but preeminently that which is mimetic in the narrower sense of III. Hymns to the gods and encomia upon good men are admitted to the state. They might well have been excluded by the argument of X; they are not mimetic, however,

if one adheres to the definition of III. The conclusion of X is consistent, therefore, with the premises of III, but not fully consistent with the premises of X" (pp. 93–4).

²⁰ Cf. *Laws IX* 858–9.

²¹ Paul Shorey in *Platonism, Ancient and Modern* (Berkeley, 1938) states, "In Plato dialectics simply means discussion, argument; and the skill with Plato in his dialogues makes the written word perform the function of the spoken word, is, in this respect, one of the chief though least often recognized values of the study of Plato. . . . At its best, Plato's realistic reproduction of argumentative conversation is a real verification of, and check upon, the processes of thought" (pp. 37–8).

²² See *Republic IX* 588, *Laws IV* 712, *V* 746.

²³ Socrates always claims a plain, awkward style. He would ask a question, "and if I do this in a very inartistic and ridiculous manner, do not laugh at me, for I only venture to improvise before you because I am eager to hear your wisdom: and I must therefore ask you and your disciples to refrain from laughing" (*Euthydemus* 278).

²⁴ There is some justification for D. R. Grey's paradoxical statement in "Art in the *Republic*," *Philosophy*, 27 (1952) that "there is, properly, no place for art in the *Republic*, because the whole philosophical, political, and metaphysical conception is aesthetic from beginning to end" (p. 302). Plato allows the rulers of the Republic only the greatest of arts—statecraft (see *Republic III* 342 and *Euthydemus* 291). Statecraft is like coloring sculpture (*Republic IV* 420), like painting (*Laws VI* 769, *Republic VI* 484), and like composing a tragedy (*Laws VII* 817).

²⁵ G. R. Levy states that "for every Myth he is accustomed to use a different means of introducing the break in the dramatic dialogue, and of disclaim it as his own creation, 'I am not good at inventing stories,' says his spokesman Socrates. Stewart has gathered a bunch of these impersonal openings, whose diversity may hide a subjective, and therefore, perhaps a universal, origin" (p. 70).