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Proverbial Plato: Proverbs, Gn\textit{mai}, and the Reformation of Discourse in Plato’s Republic

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Proverbial Plato:
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in Plato’s *Republic*

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the
requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy
in Classics

by

John Roger Tennant Jr.

2019
ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Proverbial Plato:
Proverbs, *Gnômai*, and the Reformation of Discourse
in Plato’s *Republic*

by

John Roger Tennant Jr.

Doctor of Philosophy in Classics
University of California, Los Angeles, 2019

Professor Kathryn Anne Morgan, Chair

This dissertation frames Plato’s *Republic* as an attempt to reform the state of discourse in a politico-discursive crisis that occurred toward the end of the fifth and beginning of the fourth century BCE in Athens, by focusing on the previously unexplored role that proverbs and *gnômai* play in Plato’s creation of the ideal *polis*. Plato uses such commonplaces not solely for the purpose of lending his dialogue a more authentic character. Rather, they both elucidate the dynamics of power that inhere in the prevailing modes of Athenian discourse and provide a locus for Plato’s critique of the improper use of language. Plato reveals how discursive reform is inseparable from social and political reform. Proverbs, *gnômai*, and other rhetorical *topoi* serve collectively as one of the building blocks of a just society. Put simply, wordcraft is statecraft.

Plato’s effort at discursive reform in the context of proverbial expressions that are themselves part of the larger Greek wisdom tradition parallels, in turn, the critique against poetry
in the Republic. This is because many proverbs can be traced back to a particular poem and its poet. Condemnation of specific excerpted verses reflects, thus, not simply an objection to the purportedly immoral message Plato’s text attributes to such passages but, in addition, a recognition of the double life enjoyed by many of the verses as eminently quotable proverbs and gnômai. The “quotability” of poetry in a culture with a rich tradition of excerpting lines and compiling anthologies – part of the larger Greek educational and rhetorical framework that emphasized the memorization of poetry for use in argument, conversation and public speaking – poses an obstacle to any attempt to improve a society gone awry. Modern paroemiology has revealed that a key element of any proverb is the ease with which it can be recalled. Thus, to the extent that memorized lines of poetry are in fact proverbs and gnômai, such versified wisdom expressions must figure prominently in any effort at reform.

I proceed book by book through the Republic, analyzing Plato’s use of proverbs and gnômai. Book 1 can be viewed as an evolutionary “progression of proverbs” that ultimately leads to the first of what will be several definitions of “justice” which Socrates and his interlocutors consider. I re-frame the attacks against poetry in Books 2 and 3 as an exposition of the contest among competing “sayings” (legomena) which are themselves part of the linguistic behavior that constitutes a society’s discursive practices or “vocabularies.” In my reading of Books 3-7, I examine the relationship between proverbial sayings and the theoretical construction of the ideal polis as we witness Socrates and his interlocutors draw time after time from the pre-existing reservoir of traditional proverbs. Lastly, I analyze Plato’s increasing self-reflexivity in the use of proverbs in Republic 8-10, which provides a meta-commentary on the task of communicating Plato’s philosophy through the medium of language.
The dissertation of John Roger Tennant Jr. is approved.

Alex C. Purves

Andrea Nightingale

Giulia Sissa

Kathryn Anne Morgan, Chair

University of California, Los Angeles

2019
For Wendi.

δία γυναικῶν
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A NOTE ON THE TEXT

For convenience, the Greek text used throughout this text for Plato’s *Republic* (as well as the other dialogues) is from the Oxford Classical Text edition of Plato by John Burnet. All translations are my own, unless noted otherwise.
I want to thank the members of my dissertation committee for all of their guidance and support during this project, in all of its phases. The idea for reading Plato by way of his use of proverbs first arose out of conversations that my director and primary advisor, Kathryn Morgan, and I had over the course of reading the Republic as part of a Graduate Research Mentorship, generously funded by the UCLA Graduate Division. Without Kathryn’s mentorship, advice, and steadfast encouragement, this dissertation, not to mention completion of the UCLA Classics PhD program in general, would have been impossible. The other half of my academic heartbeat is Andrea Nightingale. It was Andrea who first inspired me to consider seriously the idea of abandoning a perfectly good career as a union labor lawyer and becoming a classicist. As the unofficial “co-director” of my dissertation, Andrea has provided tireless support and guidance. I am humbled by her generosity. Without Andrea as my mentor and friend from the very beginning of it all, none of this would have happened.

Alex Purves has been a constant source of encouragement and direction on all levels: from prompting me to focus first on Hesiod and the Greek wisdom tradition before writing on Plato to offering a vision of how to structure my chapters. In many ways this dissertation has its origins in a paper I wrote for Alex on one of the great proverbs in Homer: “As is the generation of leaves, so is the generation of men.” Giulia Sissa has provided inspiration and ideas from the day I first met her. Her teachings on aesthetics are what offered a way forward with respect to many of my ideas about how discursive reform conjoins with socio-political reform.

Most importantly, I want to thank my wife and partner in life’s journey, Wendi Berkowitz. There are not many spouses who would have supported their partner’s decision to
leave home and a good-paying job for six years in order to pursue another vocation. Words are inadequate to describe the boundlessness of Wendi’s support and love. When they made Wendi, they broke the mold.
BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

John Roger Tennant Jr. received a Bachelor of Science in Foreign Service from Georgetown University, graduating summa cum laude, and then earned a Juris Doctor from Harvard Law School, graduating cum laude. John worked as a union-side labor lawyer before embarking on graduate study in Classics. In 2002-03, John received a Fulbright Post-Doc Research Fellowship to work with police unions and immigrants' rights advocates in Paris, France, studying the ways in which tensions might be reduced in the Parisian suburbs between rank-and-file police officers and the primarily Muslim immigrants from the Maghreb. In 2013 John received an M.A. in Classics from Stanford University before entering the doctoral program in Classics at UCLA, where he specialized in Plato’s poetics and the Greek wisdom tradition. John’s article on “Plato’s Apology as Forensic Oratory” was published by the Brazilian journal Revista Archaï in 2015.
Chapter One – Plato, Proverbs, and Reform

The proverb is the largest coded unit occurring in our speech and at the same time the shortest poetic composition.

Roman Jakobson, Selected Writings

“Philosophy,” so defined, is the attempt to apply and develop . . . vocabularies as poetic achievements rather than as fruits of diligent inquiry according to antecedently formulated criteria.

Richard Rorty, Contingency, irony, and solidarity

HAMM:
Yesterday! What does that mean? Yesterday!

CLOV (violently):
That means that bloody awful day, long ago, before this bloody awful day. I use the words you taught me. If they don’t mean anything any more, teach me others. Or let me be silent.

Samuel Beckett, Endgame

1.1. Introduction

A persistent tone of disquiet pervades much of Plato’s work. Over and again the reader receives the distinct impression that something is profoundly amiss in the time and setting within which the dialogues take place and that some type of reform is urgently required. There is no mistaking the extent to which Socrates believes that Athens has taken a turn for the worse when he recites to the jurors in the Apology his standard rebuke of his fellow citizens (29d7-e2):

Ὦ ἄριστε ἄνδρε, Ἀθηναῖος ὄν, πόλεως τῆς μεγίστης καὶ εὐδοκιμωτάτης εἰς σοφίαν καὶ ἴσχυν, χρημάτων μὲν οὐκ ἀισχύνῃ ἐπιμελούμενος ὅπως σοι ἔσται ὡς πλείστα, καὶ δόξης καὶ τιμῆς, φρονίσεως δὲ καὶ ἀληθείας καὶ τῆς ψυχῆς ὅπως ὡς βελτίστη ἔσται οὐκ ἐπιμεληθῇ οὐδὲ φροντίζῃς;

Oh best of men, as an Athenian, a citizen of the greatest city and most well-known for its wisdom and strength, are you not ashamed that you devote yourself to wealth, so that you will acquire as much as possible, as well as reputation and renown, but you do not have a care for, nor even give a thought to, truth and understanding and making your soul as excellent as possible?

Part of what afflicts the world depicted by Plato seems to have something to do with language. In Book 10 of the Republic, Socrates describes the effort to do right in such a world as
a great struggle (μέγας ἀγών), one in which a man must labor to become good (χρηστὸν γενέσθαι) and not be swayed (ἐπαρθῆναι) from such end by esteem (τιμῆ) or money (χρήμασιν) or any office (ἀρχῇ οὖν ἔμμενα), and further, not even by (οὐδὲ γε) – what may come as a shock to modern readers – poetry (ποιητικῇ)!  

The first three are stumbling blocks familiar to anyone acquainted with the traditional motif of the path of righteousness and the difficulty of keeping to it. But poetry? When did a literary genre become an obstacle to moral improvement? It has been over fifty years since Eric Havelock famously summarized the startling impression the Republic leaves upon the reader:

Plato speaks passionately in the tones of a man who feels he is taking on a most formidable opponent who can muster the total forces of tradition and contemporary opinion against him. He pleads, he argues, he denounces, he cajoles. He is a David confronting some Goliath. And he speaks as though he had no choice but to fight the battle to a finish. . . . If he thus exhorts us to fight the good fight against poetry, like a Greek Saint Paul warring against the powers of darkness, we can conclude either that he has lost all sense of proportion, or that his target cannot be poetry in our sense, but something more fundamental in the Greek experience, and more powerful.

Havelock identified the culprit in Plato’s estimation not as poetry in the modern sense, but rather as the cultural situation that existed in ancient Greece until the middle of the fourth century: the oral communication and transmission of poetry as an overarching educational and ethical tractate which dominated all of the important transactions and relationships of Attic society. It was not the genre of poetry itself that worried Plato but instead the fact that it served as “a massive repository of useful knowledge, a sort of encyclopedia of ethics, politics, history,

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1 Resp. 608b4-8.  
2 Havelock 1963: 9, 4.  
3 Havelock 1963: 38-43.
and technology, which the effective citizen was required to learn as the core of his educational equipment.”

In addition, because the poetry of Plato’s time was experienced primarily through oral performance, memory played a critical role in poetry’s transmission: rhapsodes memorized their verses, actors memorized their lines, students learned many passages by heart as part of the Greek educational framework, and adults from all walks of life quoted lines of poetry that they had memorized in support of their arguments, the points they made in conversations, and their public speeches. Memorization of poetry was an essential precondition of daily life and conversation, as reflected in Aristotle’s claim in his *Metaphysics* that some people would not take seriously a speaker’s statements unless supported by the words of a poet.

In Havelock’s reading, Plato was deeply troubled by the deleterious psychological impact that internalizing verses of dubious moral value could have on the individual – hence, Plato’s seeming obsession with *mimesis*, a word we loosely translate as “imitation,” which Plato viewed as central to the oral experience of poetry. Havelock describes *mimesis* as a “state of total personal involvement and therefore emotional identification with the substance of the poeticized statement that you are required to retain.”

However, what has been left generally unexamined until now is the degree to which the memorization of poetry was enhanced by the gnomic character of many of the verses committed to memory – in other words, the extent to which the memorized verses qualified as genuine proverbs and *gnômai*. Modern paroemiologists take pains to emphasize how a key element of

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4 Havelock 1963: 27.
6 Arist., *Metaph.* 995a7-8.
7 Havelock 1963: 44.
any proverb is the ease with which it can be recalled. Such “memorability” is very often achieved with a clever arrangement of language. Indeed, according to Aristotle, it was precisely because of their “succinctness and adroitness” (συντομίαν καὶ δεξιότητα) that the proverbs of old were preserved (περισωθέντα).

Moreover, in ancient Greece, proverbs crystallized ideas that had endured for long periods of time, and many had their origins in poems. They played a key role in the Greek wisdom tradition (sophia), the sages of which were often poets in their own right, such as Solon, the purported author of the popular proverb, chalepa ta kala (“fine things are hard things”). This was a culture marked by a widespread practice of excerpting and anthologizing, where the sheer “quotability” of poetic verse and proverbial statement served to blur the line between the two, so that one is not surprised to discover that the poetic anthologies compiled were often gnomic anthologies, such as Hesiod’s Precepts of Cheiron (of which we unfortunately posses only a scant amount). Knowing this, we can better understand Plato’s (in)famous attack on certain passages of poetry in the Republic (the Platonic dialogue that is the focus of this dissertation).

Plato’s concern is, of course, the use – or more accurately the abuse – of memorable lines of poetry to support a morally dubious position. It certainly cannot have escaped Plato’s attention that Polycrates, in his Accusation of Socrates (written shortly after 395/4 BC), cited Socrates’ alleged use of a famous proverb from Hesiod’s Works and Days, “Work is no disgrace, idleness is a disgrace” (ἔργον δ’ οὐδὲν ὁνείδος, ἀεργή ὃ ὃ ὁνείδος, 311) in an attempt to prove that

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9 Synesius, Encom. calv 22.2-4.
10 The Platonica scholia on Resp. 435c and Hp.Ma.[Dub.] 304e father the saying on Solon, who coined it purportedly in response to Pittacus expressing concerns about Periander’s turn to tyranny: “And from that point, it developed into a proverb” (καὶ ἐντεῦθεν εἰς παροιμίαν ἐλθέν) (Greene 1938: ad loc).
Socrates was trying to justify tyranny. Polycrates charged that Socrates was teaching his followers “the most wicked sayings of the most famous poets” (τῶν ἐνδοξοτάτων ποιητῶν . . . τὰ πονηρότατα) in order to advance an antidemocratic ideology. In making his case, Polycrates relies upon the ambiguity of the two neuters, ergon and oneidos in Hesiod’s proverb, to argue that Socrates was justifying one’s acting as a tyrant because “no work is a disgrace.” Xenophon, however, attempted to rehabilitate Socrates by showing that Hesiod was referring in fact to moral work (ἀγαθὸν τι, Mem. 1.2.56-7). Polycrates’ Accusation of Socrates reveals the potential for eminently quotable language to be weaponized (irrespective of whether we choose to label Hesiod’s line as poetry or proverb) in an Athens that, from the sense conveyed by Plato’s dialogues, had reached some sort of crisis point. The sheer quotability of such lines, in a culture where lines are excerpted and anthologies compiled, obviously poses an obstacle to any attempt to improve and reform the discourse of that society. To the extent, thus, that the memorized lines are in fact proverbs and gnômai, such expressions must figure prominently in any such reform. In other words, the condemnation of specific excerpted verses in Plato’s Republic reflects not simply an objection to the purportedly immoral message attributed to such excerpts but, in addition, a recognition of the double life enjoyed by many of the verses as readily quotable proverbs and gnômai.

13 Charm. 163b1-c8.
Paroemiology as a general matter has received relatively scant attention in modern classical scholarship as concerns Greek literature. As André Lardinois noted in 2001, “Although classicists showed considerable interest in ancient Greek proverbial expressions before the Second World War, no detailed studies have appeared since then.” 15 Lardinois’ 1995 dissertation, “Wisdom in Context: The Use of Gnomic Statements in Archaic Greek Poetry,” partially rectified this state of affairs with respect to archaic poetry. 16 And more recently, Hanna Boeke’s The Value of Victory in Pindar’s Odes (2007) engages in a detailed study of gnomic statements in Pindar. Still, the gap remains to be filled with respect to Plato, especially insofar as expressions like proverbs and gnômai that make particular claims to wisdom and Plato’s use thereof, may elucidate what I argue is Plato’s re-conceptualization and attempted reformation of discursive practices so as to create, in effect, a new “wisdom” tradition – that is, the new discursive practice of philosophy.

Prior studies of Plato’s use of proverbs have been more or less limited to cataloguing the proverbs, colloquialisms and various other quotations that appear in the Platonic corpus, while also referencing the frequency of such citations and their enhancement of Plato’s prose style. 17 For example, in a 1978 article on Greek proverbs, J.F. Kindstrand perceptively notes that Plato “has a great fondness for proverbs, using them more often than other prose writers of his age”

15 Lardinois 2001: 93. One should note, however, that on the Latinist side, the state of affairs concerning paroemiological research is somewhat better, especially given the spate of interest arising in recent years surrounding Tacitus’ use of sententiae in his oeuvre. See, e.g., Kirchner 2001.


and “took over the proverbs as an element of the spoken language in order to give his dialogue a more authentic character,” thereby denoting Plato’s “great interest in, and even respect for, proverbs, which was probably not wholly without importance for . . . later development.”

Nevertheless, Kindstrand rejects the notion that there is any “problem worthy of special treatment” in analyzing Plato’s use of proverbs, since “there are no traces of a conscious theory behind this use.” I beg to differ.

Plato’s manipulation of proverbs must be understood within the context of the great struggle that Socrates elucidates in Book 10 of the Republic. This is a world where one can actually be dissuaded from becoming a good person because, in significant part, of a discursive practice – indeed, arguably the single most influential discursive practice in Greek society of the time and one which necessarily contained a great many proverbs: poetry. Moreover, this great struggle was framed by a society in the throes of a politico-discursive crisis. Discourse had begun to erode during the Peloponnesian War (431-404 BCE), and people had come to distrust language. Thucydides famously illustrates this phenomenon in his narrative of the Corcyrean Revolution (3.82.4):

καὶ τὴν εἰωθούσαν ἀξίωσιν τῶν ὄνομάτων ἐς τὰ ἔργα ἀντήλλαξαν τῇ δικαιώσει. τὸλμα μὲν γὰρ ἀλὸγητὸς ἀνδρεία φιλέταιρος ἐνομίσθη, μέλλησις δὲ προμηθής δειλία εὐπρεπῆς, τὸ δὲ σώφρον τοῦ ἀνάνδρου πρόσχημα, καὶ τὸ πρὸς ἀπαν ἄργητον ἐπὶ πᾶν ἄργον·

Men changed the customary value of words to suit the individual facts of their positions. Reckless audacity was deemed loyal partisan courage; careful hesitancy, thinly-veiled cowardice; moderation, a pretext for unmanliness; and perspective of the whole situation, utter laziness.

18 Kindstrand 1978: 73.
19 Kindstrand 1978: 73.
20 Resp. 608b4-8.
As Jacqueline de Romilly exhaustively recounts, Thucydides’ tone in this passage is characteristic of that of many other authors of the time who were not philosophers but rather, writers such as dramatists and historians who, like Thucydides, adopted it “to describe the crisis-ridden world in which they lived.”

Much of this crisis can be attributed to a problematization of language that occurred in large part because of teachings by the sophists. Here, one must exercise caution insofar as much of our view of the state of discourse in the Athens of Plato’s time is necessarily shaped by Plato’s own treatment of the sophistic movement and Plato’s unremitting efforts to distinguish Socrates from the sophists, towards whom Plato was “profoundly hostile.” Although working in the same tradition, Aristotle does affirm in his Rhetoric Plato’s treatment of the sophists: “In dialectic, sophist, refers to deliberate choice of specious arguments.” In addition Aristophanes’ satirical send-up of the sophistic manipulation of language and Socrates’ purported intimacy with sophistry in the Clouds contributes significantly to the charges brought by the “first set of accusers” against Socrates in Plato’s Apology (18a7-d2, 19b4-c5), where much of the hostility against Socrates arises from the perception that his activities include “making the weaker argument the stronger” (τὸν ἠττω λόγον κρείττω ποιῶν, 18b8-c1). From the Clouds, one

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21 de Romilly 1992: 138. See also Price 2001, who reveals with his sensitive reading of the Corcyrean stasis narrative how linguistic change necessarily attends stasis in a phenomenon Price calls “the transvaluation of words”: “Words, aside from failing as a vehicle for mutual understanding, become another violent and especially treacherous weapon in the arsenals of contending factions” (p. 81).

22 Kerferd 1981: 1. The notion that Socrates was widely perceived at the time as a sophist is supported by Aeschines in his speech delivered against Timarchus in 345 BCE: “You, Athenians, put Socrates the sophist to death because he was shown to have educated Critias, one of the Thirty who overthrew the democracy” (Ἐπειθ’ ὑμεῖς, Ὀ λῆβναυίοι, Σωκράτην μὲν τὸν σοφιστήν ἀπεκτέινατε, ὦτὶ Κριτίαν ἐφάνη πεπαιδευκός, ἐνα τῶν τριάκοντα τῶν τόνδήμων καταλυσάντων) (Tim. 173.1-4, trans. Giannapoulou).

23 Rhet. 1355b20: ἐκεὶ δὲ σοφιστής μὲν κατὰ τὴν προαίρεσιν (trans. Kennedy). Interestingly, Aristotle acknowledges in this same section of the Rhetoric the possibility that one could use the power of discourse unjustly to commit great harm (μεγάλα βλάφησαι), but this is the case with the use of all good things, save virtue. (εἰ δ’ ὃτι μεγάλα βλάφησαι ἄν ὁ χρύμενος ἄδικος τῇ τοιαύτῃ δυνάμει τὸν λόγον, τοῦτο γε κοινὸν ἐστι κατὰ πάντων τῶν ἁγαθῶν πλὴν ἄρετῆς).
discovers that Socrates and his ilk can teach you how to make an unjust argument (ἄδικον λόγον, 116) so that you can avoid unpleasant civic obligations like repaying debts.

Such thinking is consonant with the position advanced in the treatise commonly referred to as *Double Arguments (Dissoi Logoi)*: “Double arguments” can be propounded with respect to good and evil. One argument holds that there exists no clear line between good and evil, given that circumstances define what is “good” or “bad.” The other argument insists that the two are in fact separate entities.24 This treatise, written shortly before 400, seems to reflect the influence of the famous sophist, Protagoras.25 Furthermore, similar sentiments appear in the poetry of Athenian tragedy, such as a line in Euripides’ *Antiope*: “One could make a struggle between two arguments on any subject, so long as he was a skilled speaker” (ἐκ παντὸς ἂν τις πράγματος δισσῶν λόγων ἄγωνα θείτ’ ἂν, εἰ λέγειν εἶ ὑφός),26 which Diogenes Laertius maintains is an axiom that originated with Protagoras.27 Such a position, in turn, can be seen as underpinning defenses of injustice, such as that of Eteocles in Euripides’ *Phoenician Women*, which he articulates in part by lines that are proverbs in their own right: “If to all what is noble and wise were the same thing, there would be no strife voiced in two ways among men” (εἰ πᾶσι ταῦτῳ καλῶν ἔφυ σοφῶν θ’ ἄμα, οὐκ ἦν ἂν ἀμφίθεκτος ἀνθρώπῳς ἐρις, 499-500) and thus, “If injustice is required, best to do so for tyranny’s sake; but be pious in the rest” (εἴπερ γὰρ ἂδικεῖν χρή, τυραννίδος πέρι κάλλιστον ἂδικεῖν, τᾶλα δ’ εὔσεβεῖν χρεών, 524-5).

It is not difficult to imagine people quoting such lines in order to justify positions contrary to the vision of justice and a just society that Plato posits in the *Republic*. Indeed, as I

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25 de Romilly 1992: 76.
shall discuss in Chapter Five, another proverb about tyranny from Euripides, “Wise are the tyrants by converse with the wise” (“σοφοὶ τῷραννοὶ” εἰσι “τῶν σοφῶν συνουσία”, 568a11-b1), receives pronounced criticism from Socrates and constitutes a reason for considering the banishment of Euripides’ tragedy from the ideal polis. Socrates takes the proverb to mean that any wise person in the Athens of his day and age ought to ensure that he remains a close ally of “tyrants,” i.e., the sort of men who are adept at pulling the levers of power. Socrates’ singling out of this proverb parallels the practice de Romilly describes with respect to the discourse and discursive practices generated by the sophists: “People seized upon the statements that they heard bandied about and the theses whose boldness had brought them to the public eye. From them they extracted excuses, rules of action, and practical consequences.”

In other words, the discursive crisis, occasioned in part by the sophistic manipulation of language and dual arguments, had very real repercussions for society at large. Plato recognizes that discursive practices are necessarily the foundation of any polity. Wordcraft is statecraft. Moreover, the “practical consequences” that result from discourse may well turn out to be inconsistent with the conventional meaning attributed to such discourse, when viewed within its original context, as the above proverbs from Euripides illustrate. Does anyone seriously believe that Euripides was in fact championing tyranny and the benefits to be accrued from courting tyrants as friends by his inclusion of such legomena in his tragedies? And yet, cited and repeated outside of their initial textual context, quotations of passages from various texts can take on a new life and new meaning. This is a dynamic that Thucydides’ Corcyrean stasis narrative captures all too well: the customary meaning of words (εἰσι άZXωσις τῶν όνομάτων) is

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28 de Romilly 1992: 139.
changed (ἀνταλλάσσεσθαι) to conform to the individual facts (ἐς τὰ ἔργα) of a situation as one
dooms fit (τῇ δικαιώσει).

Moreover, this dynamic is well understood by modern paroemiology. No longer satisfied
by a conceptual framework that views the meanings attributed to proverbs as (1) either inherently
stable and limited to one, recurrent social situation or (2) purely contextual, arising out of the
specific circumstances in which a proverb is used, modern paroemiology emphasizes the
importance of intertextuality in proverb interpretation. As Stephen Winick explains, citing the
work of Roger Abrahams and Barbara Babcock, “some kernel of meaning” inheres within a
particular proverb text and is thus “carried over, while other elements of meaning emerge each
time the proverb is recontextualized.” For example, the proverb “Money talks” may enjoy
(what paroemiologists call) a “base meaning” of, in effect, “money wields enormous influence”
and yet can also be used sarcastically in a different context, where ample financial resources
have proved to be of no benefit whatsoever, so as to mean the precise opposite, “money is
powerless.” Similarly, the base meaning of the proverb can be altered by reuse and
reformulation, particularly by a skilled wordsmith such as Nobel laureate Bob Dylan, “Money
doesn’t talk, it swears.” If Dylan’s reformulation were to become the prevailing version of the
underlying proverb, it is difficult to imagine the original ever being used again in anything
approaching a laudatory manner.

30 See Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1981: 115-118, who provides a fascinating analysis of the wide array of different
meanings that the proverb “Money talks” can assume because of “various convergences of social situation,
participant evaluation, and interactional strategy.”
31 Winick 1998: 18, provides a useful analysis of proverbs supplanted by newer versions: “. . . a ‘perverted,’
‘altered’ or ‘manipulated’ proverb may take its gnomic quality both from the original older proverb and from the
very cleverness of the manipulation. This is made clearest in such new proverbs as ‘the early bird gets the worm, but
the second mouse gets the cheese.” In his Rhetoric, Aristotle, too, recognizes the potential for new proverbs to
supplant old ones, providing as an example a revised version of the Delphic Oracle’s famous “Nothing in excess”:
“That business about ‘Nothing too much’ isn’t true either; one cannot hate the wicked too much” (καὶ οὐδὲ τὸ μηδὲν
I believe that we should conceive of this dynamic of proverb recontextualization as one that necessarily looks to what Stephen Halliwell calls the “external context of ethical reception and influence” of a particular quotation – i.e., a quotation taken out of its original setting where “internal context of narrative voice and situation” alone determines meaning.\(^{32}\) For example, irrespective of what we understand Euripides’ gnomic statements about tyranny and tyrants to mean within the context of the particular tragedies in which those statements appear, if they are detached and cited as justifications for why “tyranny pays,” their meaning is ultimately a function of their subsequent “ethical reception and influence.” For example, as I will discuss in Chapter Three, Adeimantus cites in Book 2 of the *Republic* what is arguably the single most famous proverb in all of ancient literature, Hesiod’s “easy-road-to-vice, hard-road-to-virtue” proverb in the *Works and Days* (287-92). However, he cites it *not* for the meaning one gleans from the original context of the didactic poem in which the proverb appears – namely, that one should pursue virtue even though the path leading to it is steep, rough, and arduous – but rather as the excuse that people will give for why they prefer being unjust to living justly: the former is just so much easier than the latter. In other words, Adeimantus interprets the proverb to mean, in effect, precisely the contrary of what a reading based on the internal context of narrative voice and situation would otherwise suggest. The ethical reception of the proverb as Adeimantus describes it and what he takes to be its subsequent corrosive influence on behavior have transformed the proverb into the polar opposite of Hesiod’s original. Plato’s text prominently

\[\dot{\alpha}γαν·\ \dot{\delta}\dot{e} \gamma\dot{a}ρ \tauούς \gammaε \kappa\kappaοίς \dot{\alpha}γαν \muισέ\nu, \ 1395a33-4; \trans \ Kennedy). \ See \ my \ discussion \ in \ Chapter \ 5 \ of \ the \ transformation \ \text{(attributed, \ perhaps \ erroneously \ to \ \text{Mahatma Gandhi}) \ \text{of the} \ \text{lex talionis in \ Exodus \ 21: \ 24-5:} \ “\text{eye for eye, tooth for tooth . . .”} \ \text{by \ addition \ of \ the \ phrase} \ “\text{and \ the \ whole \ world \ goes \ blind,”} \ \text{along \ with \ its \ similarity \ to} \ Callicles’ \ \text{transformation \ of \ a \ proverb \ cited \ by \ Socrates \ in \ the} \ \text{Gorgias. \ \ }}^{32}\]
foregrounds this perceived misuse of Hesiodic proverb (which, of course, also belongs to the genre of poetry) and the deleterious effects of that misuse on society.

We can now begin to understand better why Plato takes aim at poetry – or more accurately, certain passages of poetry – in the Republic, especially in light of the fact that so many proverbs trace their origins to poems, the primary repository of knowledge and overarching ethical tractate for the Greeks. Proverbs, by their very nature, are detachable from the text (or contextual situation) in which they are first used. Moreover, they carry normative authority. As Abrahams and Babcock explain (within the context of the more modern use of proverbs than the analogous discursive practice of fifth/fourth century Athens),

Proverbs . . . achieve their primary ontological status through their use in actual face-to-face situations where they carry the force of appearing to embody norms and are therefore voiced by ones who appear to represent society. Secondarily, they may be detached from such interactional situations and still carry some of the meaning of these norms if not always their power to persuade and move. Detachability involves a process of de-situation and re-situation, transforming an item from one interactional exchange situation to one in which it is embodied in some medium of record (such as the printed page or phonograph record). This transforming process places the item in a new context, a new speaker-hearer or performance-audience relationship. . . . All proverbs . . . rely upon reflexive self-referencing (calling attention to their proverbial character) as one means of establishing their differences from the surrounding talk, and thus their integrity and detachability. The proverb’s capacity to maintain itself both within an interactional situation and outside of it exemplifies a basic feature of language as a system of signs.  

The proverb, thus, is a powerful discursive tool for shaping the behavior of a society’s members. It constitutes a discursive practice in and of itself that Plato cannot do without, if he is to create a new discursive practice of philosophy in the hope of reforming a society deep in the throes of a politico-discursive crisis.

Adeimantus’ citation of Hesiod’s famous “two roads” proverb reflects Hesiod’s own genius in offering sayings ripe for later appropriations by the Greeks in different cultural contexts. Modern classicists have used terminology that sounds very much like that of paroemiologists in explaining how Hesiod achieved lasting influence with his *Works and Days*. For example L.G. Canevaro claims that Hesiod uses the twin devices of “detaching” and “tethering” to create a work that can be read in both a coherent, linear way and in a fragmented, excerpting way.34 “Detachability” is carefully balanced against the overarching didactic purpose. In other words, verses and passages that might be detached in their own right for application in a separate context are masterfully tethered to the overall didactic thrust of the poem. Similarly, Hugo Koning describes how Hesiod employs terms that enjoy a “catchword factor.”35 In the “two roads” proverb, for example, the terms *kakotes* and *arête* are sufficiently broad to be applied to any number of contexts.36 M.L. West points out that in their original context, they most likely had to do with “inferiority” and “superiority” with respect to material property.37 However, their potential for broader application and expansion of meaning resulted in a proverb that came to be applied to innumerable textual situations, ranging from the morality of actions to philosophic excellence.38 It is no wonder, then, that Plato too would make use of Hesiod’s famous proverb in a number of different contexts within the *Republic*, as I will outline in the

34 Canevaro 2015: 31-82.
35 Koning 2010a: 144-49.
36 This observation parallels arguments by Hunter 2014: 2-3, that emphasize the poem’s potential for “extendability” and “extrapolation” by later writers and thinkers of “useful” (*chrēsimon*) information so as to extend the range of the poem’s many wise utterances (assorted *gnōmai*, maxims, precepts, etc.) to “similar things” (*homoeida*), as the third century Stoic, Chrysippus, maintained.
37 West 1978: 229.
38 See my discussion in Chapter 2.2.
succeeding chapters. As Canevaro puts it, Hesiod’s saying “captured the imagination of the ancients.”

Plato’s starting point in attempting to span the discursive divide that had riven Athenian society necessitates that he draw from the storehouse of proverbs already deeply rooted within Greek culture and discourse. Moreover, Plato’s characters’ frequent invocation of gnōmai, and proverbs in support of the various arguments they advance during their extended examination of justice and the ideal polity in the Republic, demands that the reader continually assess the purported legitimacy of, and claims to truth-status asserted by, such wisdom expressions. In a world where a society’s discursive practices are increasingly being challenged, no particular form of discourse can be taken for granted – not the poetry handed down for generations from the revered poets of old such as Homer and Hesiod, not the myths that comprise the subject matter of such poetry and which underlay so much of Greek thought and culture at the time, and not, as is relevant to my dissertation, the gnōmai, proverbs, and other expressions of proverbial wisdom that constituted a large share of the Greek wisdom tradition (sophia). All is grist for Plato’s great discourse-reforming mill.

That Plato – as I maintain – appropriates and reconfigures proverbial statements of wisdom as part of his larger project of discursive reform so as to create the new genre of philosophy accords with Richard Martin’s observation that we can see from the Greek wisdom

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40 My thinking here parallels Adi Ophir’s argument that the “Platonic dialogue brings to the surface of discourse what is so often forbidden – perhaps never again allowed – to appear there: the struggle to establish a new order within discourse, a strife for every discursive practice, the power invested in the process of establishing and maintaining discourse as a set of rules, differentiations and exclusions” (Ophir 1991: 6). Kathryn Morgan describes the matter more generally as follows: “Plato takes contemporary cultural forms and redefines their content and application” (Morgan 2009: 552). Nancy Worman acknowledges that Plato’s “dialogues clearly take up the challenge of exploring how th[e] degradation of Athens’ power and control came about” (Worman 2008: 156). And Halliwell recognizes that “the Republic reinterprets features of traditional thought by translating them into a new vision of human possibilities” (Halliwell 2000: 108).
tradition, as epitomized by the Seven Sages and their assorted “sayings,” how “the social use of artful speech and metaphor becomes a powerful tool for influencing events.”41 One should add here that such influence can happen only if you get others to adopt your terms, your phrases. In the words of the social historian James Obelkevich, “Political authority and proverbial authority have been allied since at least the time of Solomon.”42 Indeed, the Greeks often cited gnomic expressions in their law courts, so much so that one is hard-pressed to draw a clear line between nomoi (“laws”) and gnômai.43 If Plato is to succeed in wresting discursive authority from the grip of the then-prevailing traditions of wisdom in ancient Greece, he will have to contend with propounders of such gnomic legomena (e.g., the archaic sages, among others) on their own “proverbial” turf.

It is important to note that the effort to win lasting influence over people by crafting compelling legomena is remarkably consonant with the description that modern philosophers of language and political thought have described as the fundamental means by which any community – political, scientific, or artistic, for example – is formed: via the interplay of competing discourses. Perhaps more than any other thinker, Richard Rorty has captured the essence of this idea. Rorty describes an unending series of “language games” in which competing discursive practices – what he calls “vocabularies” – vie with one another for predominance, for example, “the vocabulary of ancient Athenian politics versus Jefferson’s, the moral vocabulary of Saint Paul versus Freud’s, the jargon of Newton versus that of Aristotle . . .”44

41 Martin 1993: 118.
44 Rorty 1992: 5.
According to this model, the vocabulary that comes to prevail in a language game is determinative of the community that it constitutes and whose practices in turn constitute it. Thus, to the extent that Plato correctly views the Athens of his day as in a state of moral disrepair, such a state of affairs would, consistent with Rorty’s conception, invariably be linked with the competing “vocabularies” of the day, which necessarily include those employed by the sophists as well as by the participants in fundamentally destabilizing events such as the Corcyrean stasis of the Peloponnesian War.  

This is the politico-discursive crisis that one senses in reading Plato’s dialogues and which seems to impel the numerous calls for and efforts aimed at reform, articulated primarily by Socrates. It was, after all, a discursive practice that served as the vehicle for the state-ordered death of Plato’s mentor: forensic oratory in an Athenian court of law. Indeed, A.A. Long has made the intriguing suggestion that Plato essentially “never stops rewriting the Apology,” noting that “as long as Plato retained personal hopes of reforming a society, . . . he held on to Socrates.”

If Plato is to reform Athenian society along the lines suggested in the Republic, it follows that he must alter profoundly the then-current discursive terrain, the ground upon which any society – including the ideal polis of the Republic – is invariably built. As Rorty elucidates, because philosophy is itself subject to the language game insofar as it consists of “a contest between an entrenched vocabulary which has become a nuisance and a half-formed new

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45 See Balot 2004: 91-2, who argues convincingly that the sort of violence that occurred in Corcyra in 427 BCE led to men “attacking their shared understanding of key evaluative terms” which resulted ultimately in “damage [to] the free speech and trust upon which the Athenian democracy was based – which in turn led to a violent Greek world and, later in the narrative, to civic breakdown at Athens in 411 BC.”

46 It is difficult to read as anything other than a lament over a corrupted state of discourse Socrates’ description of a man, previously freed from the famous “cave” of Book 7, “compelled” upon his subsequent return “to contend in courtrooms and elsewhere over the shadows of the just and to wrangle over the images of these things in the minds of those who have never seen justice itself” (ἀναγκαζόμενος ἐν δικαστηρίοις ἢ ἀλλοθί ποι ἄγονιζεσθαι περὶ τῶν τοῦ δικαίου σκιῶν ἢ ἀγαλμάτων ὃν αἱ σκιαί, καὶ διαμιλλάθαι περὶ τοῦτο, Ὑπὸ τῶν αὐτῆς δικαιοσύνης μὴ πῶστε ἢδόντος, 517c-e) (trans. Shorey with modification).

vocabulary which vaguely promises great things,” its “method” is ultimately akin to that of “utopian politics or revolutionary science.” What is this method? Rorty explains as follows,

The method is to describe lots and lots of things in new ways, until you have created a pattern of linguistic behavior which will tempt the rising generation to adopt it, thereby causing them to look for appropriate new forms of nonlinguistic behavior, for example, the adoption of new scientific equipment or new social institutions.  

The effort to re-envision the world requires a new discursive practice, a new vocabulary. This is Plato’s writerly project in creating the new literary genre of philosophy – a project which is also, by Rorty’s definition, a socio-political project.

A sustained examination of Plato’s use of various discursive practices and devices in the creation of philosophy as a new literary genre has certainly not been a task neglected by modern classicists and historians of ancient philosophy. For example, Andrea Nightingale has explored the complex dynamics that link the Platonic dialogue with other genres of Greek literature, and Kathryn Morgan has focused on the ambiguous role played by myth in the Platonic corpus, and Ruby Blondell has analyzed the specifics of Plato’s portrayal of the individual characters peopling the dialogues. Following in these scholars’ footsteps, I seek to expand the scope of

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49 I would argue that my claim here is not dissimilar from that of Deborah Steiner regarding Hesiod’s Works and Days, a work that of course is a virtual anthology of gnomic statements. As Steiner convincingly maintains (2007: 179), “From the proem of Hesiod’s poem on, morality is bound up with discourse and with the speeches and songs performed by gods and men. These, as well as the larger composition within which they are embedded, are the means for articulating the author’s vision of a community ruled by dikê, while modes of speaking, diction, and style can determine and reveal a speaker’s ethos, values, and moral outlook.” See my discussion in Chapter 3.3.
50 Nightingale 1995.
51 Morgan 2004.
52 Blondell 2002.
their approaches and analyses so as to encompass Plato’s use of proverbs and *gnômai* within the theoretical framework offered by Rorty and other theorists.\(^{53}\)

The power that proverbs exert to influence behavior is undeniable. This explains their prevalence throughout the Greek wisdom tradition and their prominence in poetry. Of all the discursive devices that one can imagine Plato considering in order to effect societal change, proverbs would seem to fall toward the top of any list ranked in order of priority and importance. Indeed, two of the most famous expressions in all of antiquity assume the discursive shape of *gnômai*, the Oracle at Delphi’s enigmatic pronouncements: “Know thyself” and “Nothing to excess.”\(^{54}\) Such *legomena* are foundational to Greek thought and living.

1.2. Defining Proverbs and *Gnômai*

Here it is necessary to define what I mean when I use the terms “proverbs” and “*gnômai*” (or “gnomes”).\(^{55}\) As will become clear, for purposes of this dissertation, the two are essentially interchangeable and fall under the general categories used by scholars of “wisdom expressions,” “generalizing expressions,” or tellingly, “proverbial expressions.”\(^{56}\)

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53 For example, the work of Michael Oakeshott 1975: 78. Oakeshott argues that “a morality is neither a system of general principles nor a code of rules, but a vernacular language.” See my discussion in Chapter 3.3.

54 Aristotle characterizes the phrases as “popular sayings” (διδημοσειρημένα, *Rhet.* 1395a).

55 The English word “gnome” (meaning “short pithy statement of a general truth”) does not, obviously, use a macron over the “o.” The English plural, “gnomes,” however, seems to me less elegant than the transliterated Greek, *gnômai*, which to my eye appears best when italicized and fitted with a macron over the “o” (notwithstanding the choice of some scholars such as Lardinois to neither italicize nor use the macron). My allowance for “gnome” but not “gnomes” has no doubt something to do with the plural form evoking more readily than its singular counterpart the image of a garden filled with eponymous garden “gnomes.” Thus, I will exercise a slight inconsistency in using the English term for the singular (“gnome”) and the transliterated Greek (*gnômai*) for the plural, unless referring to another scholar’s use of the term “gnomes” or using the actual Greek lettering (i.e., γνóμη and γνóμαι, along with παροιμία and παροιμίαι).

56 See Lardinois 2001: 93-4; Russo 1997: 50-64. I am hardly the first classicist to conflate the terms “*gnômai*” and “proverbs.” In a 2005 Princeton/Stanford Working Paper, Martin, both a classicist and folklorist, moves seamlessly from an analysis of how proverbs operate to an application of that same analysis to “gnomic examples” from Euripides utilized by Aristotle in that section of his *Rhetoric* that treats of both proverbs (*paroimiae*) and *gnômai*. Similarly, Lardinois, although asserting initially in his 1995 dissertation that “Greek gnomai are not the same as proverbs” (p. iii), nevertheless turns immediately to paroemiology (pp. 1ff.) for his general methodology in
In ordinary, everyday usage, the terms “proverb” and “gnome” are nearly synonymous: any random search of various and sundry dictionaries reveals that both words mean in essence a pithy saying that expresses a general truth, fundamental principle, or piece of advice. Synonyms offered for both words include “maxim,” “saying,” “saw,” “adage,” “axiom,” “aphorism,” “apothegm,” “epigram,” “dictum,” “precept,” and “words of wisdom.”

Although some scholars are accustomed to translate γνώμη as used by Aristotle in his *Rhetoric* as “maxim,” modern paroemiologists such as Joseph Russo insist that the difference between maxims (read: gnómai) and proverbs amounts to very little, especially since Aristotle himself “was aware of the impossibility of clearly separating the two” as reflected in his observation that “some proverbs are also maxims (γνώμαι)” (ἐτε ἐνιαι τὸν παροιμιῶν καὶ γνώμαι εἰσιν, 1395a19-20). While some paroemiologists prefer to call metaphorical wisdom expressions (e.g., “A stitch in time saves nine”) proverbs and literal wisdom expressions in the form of abstract principles (e.g., “Honesty is the best policy”) maxims or aphorisms, most modern paroemiologists consider both types to be genuine proverbs. Aristotle also identifies in his *Rhetoric* two other terms that scholars include within the general category of “wisdom” or “generalizing” expressions: *hypothēkai* (“instructions”) and *apopthegmata* (“terse pointed

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57 For example, the Oxford English Dictionary defines “gnome” as a “short pithy statement of a general truth; a proverb, maxim, aphorism or apothegm” and proverb as a “short, traditional, and pithy saying; a concise sentence, typically metaphorical or alliterative in form, stating a general truth or piece of advice; an adage or maxim.”


Aristotle’s analysis suggests that of the four, “gnome” was the most generic term and could encompass the others.  

Given such instability of terminology, it is not surprising that modern paroemiology has struggled, largely in vain, to draw any clear boundaries between proverbs and other generalizing expressions, let alone devise a sufficient definition for the term “proverb.” The paroemiologist Archer Taylor famously rejected out of hand the possibility of formulating any strict definition for “proverb:”

The definition of the proverb is too difficult to repay the undertaking; and should we fortunately combine within a single definition all the essential elements and give each its proper emphasis, even then we would not have a touchstone. An incommunicable quality tells us this sentence is proverbial and that one is not. Hence no definition will enable us to identify positively a sentence as proverbial.

Based on all of the foregoing, I will not be drawing any bright line distinctions between the terms “gnome” (γνώμη) and “proverb” (παροίμια) and will follow, at times, Lardinois’ practice of using the word “saying” or its transliterated Greek equivalent, legomenon, to refer to all wisdom expressions. This makes particular sense in light of the fact that τὸ λεγόμενον is often used by Greek authors for prefacing a proverb.

I will, however, signal a distinction between gnômai and proverbs when it becomes necessary to highlight a differentiation based upon Aristotle’s locating gnômai specifically and exclusively within poetic texts. As Lardinois emphasizes, “It is important to remember that Aristotle used the word γνώμη explicitly for sayings which he found in early Greek poetry.”

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62 Taylor 1958: 3; see Lau, Tokofsky, and Winick 2004: 2-14, for a good overview of the various attempts by paroemiologists to define “proverb.”
64 Russo 1997: 53. See, e.g., Resp. 362d6, which I discuss in Chapter 2.2.
65 Lardinois 1995: 20, n. 68. See, e.g., Rhet. 1395a13-14, 1395a15, 1395a16-17.
Such labeling causes Lardinois to denote all of the “wisdom expressions” that he surveys in archaic Greek poetry as *gnômai*, even though some of these must certainly constitute *paroimiai* as well, as Aristotle himself makes clear. Take for example, a verse attributed to the Greek poet Stasinus, author of the *Cypria*: “Foolish is the man who, having killed the father, leaves the children behind” (νήπιος δὲ πατέρα κτείνας παῖδας καταλείπει), which Aristotle himself cites as an example of both a gnome and a proverb and which Lardinois includes in a general list of “Gnomai in selected authors.” ⁶⁶

Aristotle’s location of *gnômai* within poetry has no doubt contributed to scholarship’s tendency to attach the term “gnome,” rather than “proverb,” as a general label to any wisdom expression found in Greek poetry – despite, again, the fact that many such expressions identified as *gnômai* could just as easily be deemed proverbs. Of especial prominence in this regard is the famous Pindaric gnome, the designation assigned by scholars to the generalizing expression often included by Pindar at the end of his myths. ⁶⁷ However, an expression like that which falls at the close of *Olympian* 11, “Neither a tawny fox nor loud-roaring lions could change their inborn nature” (τὸ γὰρ ἐμφυές οὐτ’ αἴθων ἀλόπηξ/οὐτ’ ἑρίβ’ ρομοι λέοντες διαλλάξαιντο ἦθος, 19-20), is surely of a piece with the English proverb “Leopards do not change their spots,” notwithstanding the choice by Pindar scholars such as Elroy Bundy to assign it the appellation of “gnome.” ⁶⁸

Part of the reason behind the scholarly tendency to assign the term *gnômai* to generalizing expressions found in poetry likely relates to yet another tendency, namely, that of considering age and repetition as the crucial factors in determining what qualifies as a proverb.


⁶⁷ See, e.g., Bundy 1962: 28, 52.

Lardinois, for example, conceives of proverbs as “being anonymous and passed on from one generation to the next,” factors which Lardinois asserts *gnômai* may (but need not) have, since Aristotle speaks of “coining a gnome” (γνωμοτύποι). But while age and repetition may prove useful for methodological reasons, such as the compiling of proverb collections, it soon becomes clear that what amounts to a “canonicity by virtue of repetition” approach to defining proverbs soon falters. How many times must an item be repeated, or how long must it have existed, before it is considered a genuine “proverb”? Folklorist Wolfgang Mieder puzzles over this question, conjecturing only that “our feeling tells us that a week would be too short, but perhaps a year would be long enough to be considered proverbial.” This is clearly an unworkable standard.

Indeed, as more modern approaches to paroemiology have disclosed, it is entirely possible for new proverbs to be coined – proverbs which, like the *gnômai* identified by Aristotle in particular poems and authored by particular poets on particular occasions, are attributable in fact to specific speakers/writers. As an example, Winick offers criminal defense attorney Johnnie Cochran’s phrase “If it doesn’t fit, you must acquit,” which proved to have considerable influence in the Los Angeles jury’s acquittal of O.J. Simpson on charges of murder in 1995. Winick uses Cochran’s newly coined phrase to illustrate the claim by Kenneth Burke that the rhetorical power of proverbs lies in their ability to “name typical, recurrent situations.” As Winick explains, “By using a proverb, even a new one, Cochran suggested that O.J. Simpson’s case was not unique, that the situation Simpson was in was recurrent in our society. Simpson’s

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70 Winick 1998: 38-9, rightly calls into question what he calls the “canonicity by virtue of repetition” approach to defining proverbs and raises the questions I pose here.
73 Burke 1967: 293.
position was thus recast as typical: the (black) defendant railroaded by evidence that ‘doesn’t fit’ the prosecution’s case.”\textsuperscript{74} Relying in part on Mikhail Bakhtin’s notion of “speech genres” as well as ethnographic fieldwork, Winick argues persuasively that “proverbiality ought to be part of the current communicative force, rather than part of the history, of an utterance.”\textsuperscript{75} For Winick, “‘proverb’ is more a quality of language activity than an atomistic item, more verb than noun; . . . ‘a proverb’ is a thing largely by virtue of being enacted or performed” and thus “to speak or write proverbially, ‘to proverb,’ is to use certain strategies of intertextual reference in order to achieve a rhetorical end.”\textsuperscript{76} Indeed, it is precisely for the rhetorical end of politico-discursive reform that, as I argue in this dissertation, Plato employs proverbs and gnômai from the pre-existing Greek literary tradition and, in turn, offers new variations – in effect new proverbs and gnômai – in the creation of his new literary genre of philosophy.

Winick’s idea of a proverb as something that is “enacted or performed” parallels Aristotle’s definition of a gnome as a “showing forth” (ἀπόφανσις, Rhet. 1394a22). Martin, in his own analysis of the performative aspect of a speaker’s use of proverbs, notes how the verb “to make a display” (ἀποφαίνεσθαι) gives us the noun apophansis.\textsuperscript{77} But even apart from this mutual emphasis on performance, Aristotle’s definition in full of a gnome shares considerable ground with modern paroemiology’s definition of a proverb:

A showing forth (ἀπόφανσις) not of particular things such as what sort of a man a certain Iphicrates is – but in general (καθόλου); and not about everything – such as straight is opposite to curved – but about all that has to do with actions (περὶ

\textsuperscript{74} Winick 1998: 66-7.
\textsuperscript{75} Winick 1998: 66-7.
\textsuperscript{76} Winick 1998: 66-7.
\textsuperscript{77} Martin 2005: 11.
ὅσων οἱ πρᾶξεις εἰσὶ) and what is to be chosen or avoided (αἰρετὰ ἢ φευκτὰ) with regard to action.⁷⁸

Lardinois renders Aristotle’s formulation of gnome into a more workable definition: “a generalizing statement about a particular action.”⁷⁹ There are two key respects in which this definition bears a marked similarity to what, for modern paroemiologists, defines proverbs and separates them from clichés and figurative expressions. First there is the “generalizing” component of gnômai. For modern paroemiologists, a proverb by definition states “a general truth that everyone would accept as important and useful to recall . . .”⁸⁰ Second, a gnome’s concern with “what is to be chosen or avoided (αἰρετὰ ἢ φευκτὰ) with regard to action” finds a close analogue in what modern paroemiologists see as “the illocutionary force of directives” that resides in proverbs. Proverbs, in contrast to other general sayings, “expect or demand action” (as Cochran’s memorable new proverb aptly illustrates).⁸¹

It is worth considering why Aristotle himself acknowledges that “some proverbs are also gnômai” (ἐτι ἐνια τῶν παρομιῶν καὶ γνώμαι εἰσιν, 1395a19-20), notwithstanding the substantive similarities between Aristotle’s definition of gnome and that of proverb by modern paroemiologists. As stated earlier, Aristotle cites numerous examples of gnômai from poetry – for example, “No right-thinking man should ever have his sons taught to be surpassingly wise” from Euripides’ Medea.⁸² Further, just before acknowledging that some proverbs are also gnômai, Aristotle describes how certain gnômai have become “frequently quoted and common”

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⁷⁹ Lardinois 1995: 12.

⁸⁰ Russo 1983: 121.


⁸² Eur., Med. 294-5: χρῆ δ’ οὖσθ’ ὅστις ἁρτίφρων πέφυκ’ ἀνήρ//παῖδας περισσὸς ἐκδιδάσκεθαι σοφοῦς
Among the examples he provides are Hector’s famous rejoinder to the seer Polydamas’ warnings in *Iliad* 12, “One bird sign is best: to fight for one’s country,”\(^{83}\) and the aforementioned verse attributed to the semi-legendary, early Greek poet Stasinus, author of the *Cypria*, “Foolish is the man who, having killed the father, leaves the children behind.”\(^{84}\) As Aristotle cites the latter expressly as a proverb (παροιμία) in the section of the *Rhetoric* that deals with quoting poets, oracles, proverbs, and well-known persons as witnesses, one may reasonably conclude that the repeated and widespread usage of this gnome has, for Aristotle, apparently resulted in its attaining the definitional status of a proverb. Put differently, for Aristotle, what Lardinois acknowledges as the “considerable overlap” between gnómai and proverbs appears to turn upon the frequency and extent of a gnome’s later usage by a large number of people. As Lardinois explains, “Aristotle realized that gnomes could develop into common sayings and, conversely, he must have concluded that some *paroimiai* were originally gnomai.”\(^{85}\)

In addition to explaining in his *Rhetoric* the close proximity between proverbs and gnómai, Aristotle apparently devoted an entire treatise to proverbs, where he opined that *paroimiai* are “the remnants of ancient philosophy lost in the great destructions of mankind, which were saved because of their succinctness (syntomia) and adroitness (dexiotês).”\(^{86}\) Modern paroemiologists have made use of both these elements in formulating their own definitions of proverbs, both in the ancient and the modern context, seizing upon the second element, adroitness (dexiotês), as indicating some sort of stylistic enhancement that, when coupled with


\(^{84}\) Arist., *Rhet.* 1395a16-17: νήπιος δὲ πατέρα κτείνας παῖδας καταλείπει.

\(^{85}\) Lardinois 1995: 16-17.

succinctness (*syntomia*), results in handy, pungent phrases that are easy to recall and reuse. With respect to *dexiotês*, Russo likens ancient Greek proverbs to their more modern English counterparts by dint of their shared use of rhyme, alliteration, and assonance – what Russo calls their “jingle” phenomenon. Both ancient Greek and modern proverbs often display a kind of “acoustic intensification” as displayed in the Greek *kakou korakos kakon óon* (“a bad egg from a bad crow”) and its English analogue, “a bad bird, a bad egg.” Russo’s observation in this regard is consistent with historical linguist Calvert Watkin’s emphasis on the sonic complexity of poetic language in what Watkins calls (rightly, in my estimation) a proverb in Hesiod’s *Works and Days* (which Lardinois, in accordance with his views outlined above, deems a gnome) *(Op. 25-6):*

καὶ κεραμεὺς κεραμεὶ κοτέει καὶ τέκτονι τέκτων,  
καὶ πτωχὸς πτωχῷ φθονέει καὶ ἄοιδός ἄοιδῷ

Potter vies with potter, and builder with builder,  
and beggar with beggar, and bard with bard.

Watkins perceptively notes how the first set of phonetic figures “is alliterative, *k- k- k-*, the second more complex, *k – t- t – kt- t – kt-*, while the third shows alliteration with variation in the distinctive feature of aspiration: *pt- pt- pth-*."

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87 Russo 1983: 121-22. Russo accordingly defines the proverb as “a brief, well-shaped complete sentence, understood by its users as anonymous in authorship, existing in the language for a long time in almost invariant form, stating a general truth that everyone would accept as important and useful to recall, and, because of this antiquity and accuracy of insight, sanctioned or almost ‘sanctified’ by the culture as wisdom of the elders, that must be taken seriously, must be accorded ‘weight,’ when spoken.”

88 Russo 1983: 122.

89 Russo 1983: 122. Indeed, we will see in Chapter 4 how Socrates uses the reverse of this proverb in *Republic 5 – kallista archomenos . . . kallista teleutéseien* (“the one who begins best likely ends best”) – to guide the debate on the equality of men and women.

90 Watkins 1995: 30-1 (emphasis in original). In Chapter 4.1, we will see how Socrates employs elements of this proverb and then “re-forms” it to be a *legomenon* far more conducive to his vision of the ideal *polis* than Hesiod’s original.
Notwithstanding such instances of *dexiotêς*, paroemiologists also take pains to emphasize that many proverbs, both ancient and modern, have no “striking structural features whatsoever” but make their point in plain language, such as the English proverb “Love is blind” and its ancient Greek analogue *typhlos ho Eros*.\(^1\) This potential absence of any highly stylized language is apparently another feature shared by both proverbs and *gnômai* as Aristotle defines them. For example, Aristotle points to a rather plain gnome from Book 18 of the *Iliad*: “The Wargod is common” (ξυνὸς Ἐνυάλιος).\(^2\)

There is also the matter of length. While both Aristotle and modern paroemiologists look to succinctness (*syntomia*) as a potential marker of proverbs, paroemiologist and literary scholar B.J. Whiting cautions that while a proverb “is usually short, it need not be . . .”\(^3\) Lardinois fastens upon *syntomia* as a quality not always shared by *gnômai*, given that the some of the examples of *gnômai* provided by Aristotle occupy as much as two metrical lines.\(^4\) Following Whiting’s observation, however, one could just as easily say the same of the proverb, “You can fool all of the people some of the time, and you can fool some of the people all of the time, but you cannot fool all of the people all of the time.” Clearly, length alone is not dispositive.

In light of all of the above, therefore, my working definition of proverb (which encompasses the Greek gnome, often translated by scholars as “maxim”) is as follows: a generally short, pithy statement that makes a generalizing assertion about the way the world works and thereby expects action by the listener (or reader), often (although not always) marked by certain structural features such as rhyme, alliteration and assonance indicative of stylistic

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\(^1\) Russo 1983: 125.


\(^3\) Whiting 1994: 80.

\(^4\) Lardinois 1995: 14, n. 46.
enhancement and, lastly, the meaning of which cannot be understood comprehensively without reference to the particular context in which the statement is used.

The question of anonymity remains, insofar as Lardinois, drawing upon anthropological research, believes that gnômai are akin to the “wise words” of the Western Apache – that is, sayings which are the property of a particular speaker – whereas proverbs are anonymous, passed down from one generation to the next.\(^{95}\) Similarly, paroemiologists often think of proverbs as anonymous and existing in the language for so long a time that they have become nearly invariant in form.\(^{96}\) However, it is possible for proverbs to achieve this invariant status while still maintaining a link to their original coiner. A good example is the English proverb “All they that take up the sword shall perish with the sword” which, of course stems from the original Greek saying (πάντες γὰρ οἱ λαβόντες μάχαιραν ἐν μαχαίρῃ ἀπολοῦνται) in the New Testament’s Book of Matthew.\(^{97}\) It is reasonable to assume that a sizable number of people today would be able to identify Jesus of Nazareth as the ostensible coiner of the proverb. So too, in the ancient context, the common Greek proverb, “Hard is the good” (χαλεπὰ τὰ καλά), was attributed to Solon, as mentioned earlier. In short, proverbs may be, but need not necessarily be, anonymous.\(^{98}\)

It will be useful at times during the course of my argument in this dissertation to draw a distinction between gnômai and proverbs where a contrast needs to be made between “sayings” (legomena) that have clear origins in poetic texts and those that appear to have arisen exclusively out of folk culture. For example, as we will see in Chapter Two, Socrates refers obliquely to a common rural folk saying in Republic 1: “If a wolf catches sight of a man it renders him

\(^{96}\) Russo 1983: 121.
\(^{98}\) It is also possible for an anonymous proverb to gain so singular an association with a particular individual that s/he comes to be considered the ostensible coiner of the proverb. An example of this is Theodore Roosevelt’s use of a proverb of unknown origin, “Speak softly and carry a big stick.”
voiceless”, which although a proverb, seemingly has no poetic origin and thus, would arguably be excluded from Aristotle’s definition of *gnōmai*. It is helpful when one comes across such folk proverbs to acknowledge the distinction drawn by Aristotle in his *Rhetoric* between proverbs as “popular” or “demotic” sayings – that is, sayings that are “frequently quoted and common” (τεθρυλημέναι καὶ κοιναί, *Rhet.* 1395a10-17) – and, by contrast, gnomic statements that belong to the wisdom tradition of sages, whose cultural prestige and authority scholars such as Leslie Kurke set in opposition to “lower” generic forms such as prose fable.

1.3. Proverbs and Plato’s *Republic*

Insofar as Plato’s *Republic* holds pride of place among Plato’s dialogues, both with respect to Plato’s views on the potential societal damage wrought by certain discursive practices and to the larger consideration of what constitutes a just society, the *Republic* serves as my primary text for exploring Plato’s use of proverbs (although I will refer on occasion to other Platonic dialogues). In addition, because the *Republic* is a progressive work, proceeding step by step inexorably forward in linear fashion toward a vision, as fully fleshed out as possible, of the ideal *polis* and the non-instrumental definition of justice which animates it, I will lead the reader through a book-by-book exploration of the *Republic* that looks to Plato’s use of proverbs as a guide for reading this most celebrated of Platonic dialogues.

The authority and influence of proverbs is apparent from the very opening of the *Republic*, where Socrates and the elder Cephalus cite dueling adages from poetry. Accordingly, in Chapter Two, I show how these sayings turn into a “progression of proverbs” that effectively

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99 *Resp.* 336d5-7. The tenth century Byzantine Greek farming manual, the *Geoponica*, describes this curious saying in a section of the text that lists other popular, agricultural superstitions concerning animals: *Geop.* 15.1.8. See my discussion in Chapter 2.6. Of course, we cannot know for certain whether this “wolf” proverb, seemingly folkloric in its pedigree, might not ultimately be traced back to some now-lost poetic text. I am grateful to Andrea Nightingale for this observation.

100 Kurke 2011: 330.
contain the first definition of “justice” in the dialogue. This definition, after having assumed several different formulations, ultimately takes the following form: “Just it is, to render to each what is owed him.” However, this pithy statement is only the beginning for Plato. Rather than offering a finalized “proverbial” utterance that seeks to end all conversation, Plato subjects this proverb to the cross examination of philosophic dialogue and subsequently weaves in other proverbs, several of which are demotic folk proverbs.

In Chapter Three, I offer a new investigation into Plato’s attacks against poetry in Republic 2-3. In these books, Plato exposes what amounts to a contest among proverbs, many of which are excerpted from poems, all competing for influence over the Greek youths who learned them in school. Here lies the core of my argument that proverbs are an important component of any society’s dominant discursive practices or “vocabularies.” Because poetry constituted the Greeks’ prevailing vocabulary from which Greek culture derived its conceptual and moral framework, the “poetic” proverbs, i.e., those that had poetic provenance, figure significantly in Plato’s criticism of poetry. Poetry’s “false” view of the world is to be found in significant part in its proverbs. As I argue, we cannot understand Plato’s attack on poetry without also analyzing his treatment of proverbs. Plato wants only truly “just” proverbs to prevail in the agon of competing vocabularies.

In Chapter Four, I examine the relationship between proverbial sayings and the construction of the ideal polis in Republic 3-7. In these books, Socrates and his interlocutors use numerous proverbs in their development of an ideally just state. Not surprisingly, many traditional proverbs run counter to the ideology of the just city. The interlocutors approach this problem by reinterpreting the proverbs or altering their formulations. In this way, Plato “re-
forms” discourse. He develops a new vocabulary consistent with his notion of a state founded on justice.

Finally in Chapter Five, I close by analyzing Plato’s increasing self-reflexivity in the use of proverbs in Republic 8-10. I argue that the proverbs in this last section of the dialogue offer a meta-commentary on the task of setting forth Plato’s philosophy in the medium of language. Plato uses proverbs that underscore the impermanence and potential fallibility of his own philosophic and discursive project – for example, the proverb “more malleable than wax is language.” At the close of the Republic, Plato indirectly acknowledges that his writing is ultimately subject to the agonistic dynamic found in the Greek literary tradition: no one can have the proverbial last word. Plato thus recognizes that his new mode of discourse – philosophy – necessarily enters into a larger agon of discursive practices. Accordingly, Plato cannot do without discursive devices that possess the same power to “bewitch” (κηλεῖν) and to “charm” (ἐπαιδεύειν) as poetry – poetry which, as a result, is ultimately not to be categorically banished from the ideal state. The persuasive authority and influence of proverbs enjoy some connection to properties similar to those possessed by poetry. These cannot be discarded outright as Plato creates his new discursive practice of philosophy, aimed at upending the compromised and discredited set of prevailing discursive practices in Athens and thereby offering a radically new way of thinking and acting in the world.

This dissertation arose out of my continued attempts to grapple with the singularity of Plato’s achievement on both the philosophical and literary level: How did this enigmatic author, using the voices of characters – primarily the voice of Socrates – in his dialogues, manage both to express ideas that proved decisive for Western thought, provoking controversy to this day, and to create works of unparalleled literary artistry? And what prompted him to do so? The very least
we can say is that something extraordinary happened in the encounter between a central figure in
the late 5th century Athens intellectual debates, who famously wrote nothing and was ultimately
put to death, and a younger man from a prominent family who, both as a visionary thinker and
virtuosic writer, brought the whole of the Greek literary tradition to bear in the production of his
oeuvre.

The observation that the utopian character visible in so much of Plato’s writing and
thought is necessarily a product of both politico-historical circumstances and literary-generic
influences borders on the axiomatic. Yet understanding the extent to which socio-political reform
and discursive reform are intertwined in Plato’s writing would seem to go a long way toward
beginning to answer the twin questions I pose above. To my mind, proverbs – poetic
compositions in their own right with imperatival force and the rhetorical power to name recurrent
situations – demonstrate like no other form of discourse the interconnectedness between
discursive practice and political practice. Moreover, reading Plato with a focus on his use of
proverbs allows us to understand better that particular aspect of Plato’s utopianism that has
proved alarming for so many readers: the seeming censorship of poetry. If it is less a matter of
banning poetry outright than of recognizing the potential danger posed by quoting particular
verses – especially those verses that enjoy a double life as proverbs – in a manner antithetical to
a just society, Plato’s philosophy begins to resemble less rigid dogmatism than informed literary
criticism. We begin to read Plato anew. We begin to see how “re-formed” verses, reformed
proverbs, contain the potential to reform the discourse of a society that put to death the man
whom Plato would ultimately look to as the principal literary embodiment of his utopianism, his
vision of political and discursive reform.
Chapter Two – Republic 1: Proverb’s Progress

I don’t think writers are sacred, but words are. They deserve respect. If you get the right ones in the right order, you can nudge the world a little or make a poem which children will speak for you when you are dead.

Henry the playwright in Tom Stoppard’s The Real Thing

2.1. Questioning Language’s Adequacy

The Republic almost doesn’t begin. World literature’s foremost treatment of justice nearly breaks down before it gets started.101 Indeed, it comes as almost a shock after the dialogue’s justly famous opening sentence, narrated by Socrates about how he and Glaucon went down to the Piraeus to watch a festival in honor of the goddess, Bendis – a sentence to which Plato reputedly devoted painstaking labor and made successive revisions102 – to discover that the dialogue threatens to collapse with a threat of physical violence, albeit one that is seemingly in jest (327b1–c14):

προσευξάμενοι δὲ καὶ θεωρήσαντες ἀπῆμεν πρὸς τὸ ἅστυ. κατιδὼν οὖν πόρρωθεν ἧμᾶς ὅσκαδε ὀρμημένους Πολέμαρχος ὁ Κεφάλου ἐκέλευσε δραμόντα τὸν παῖδα περιμενέιν ἐ κελεύσαι. καὶ μου ὅπισθεν ὁ παῖς λαβόμενος τοῦ ἱματίου, Κελεύει ὑμᾶς, ἔφη, Πολέμαρχος περιμενίν. Καὶ ἐγώ μετεστράφθη τε καὶ ἡρμῆν ὅπου αὐτός εἶπ. Ὑποτέος, ἔφη, δισθεν προσέρχεται· ἄλλα περιμένετε. ἄλλα περιμενοῦμεν, ἢ δ’ ὃς ὁ Γλαύκων.

Καὶ ὅλιγος ὕστερον ὃ τε Πολέμαρχος ἦκε καὶ Ἀδείμαντος ὁ τοῦ Γλαύκωνος ἀδείφρος καὶ Νικήρατος ὁ Νικίου καὶ ἄλλοι τινὲς ὡς ἀπὸ τῆς ποιμῆς.

Ὅ οὖν Πολέμαρχος ἔφη· Ὡ Σώκρατες, δοκεῖτε μοι πρὸς ἅστυ ὄρμησθαι ὡς ἀπίοντες.

Ὅ γὰρ κακῶς δοξάζεις, ἢν δ’ ἔγω. Ὄρας οὖν ἡμᾶς, ἔφη, ὅσοι ἐσμέν;

Πῶς γὰρ οὖ;

101 On Justice (ΠΕΡΙ ΔΙΚΑΙΟΥ) was the Republic’s traditional second title, although one presumably not conferred until a later time, since neither Aristotle nor antiquity in general referred to it as such. Jowett 1911: 5.

102 Dionys. Hal., Comp. 25.209–218; Resp. 327a1–4: Κατέβην χθες εἰς Πειραια τὰ Γλαύκωνος τοῦ Ἀρίστονος προσευξάμενον τε τῇ θεᾷ καὶ ἄμω τὴν ἑορτὴν βουλόμενος δεισδακτή τινα τρόπον ποιήσομαι ἀτε νόν πρῶτου ἄγοντες (“I went down to the Piraeus yesterday with Glauccon, son of Ariston, to give my prayers to the goddess and because I also wanted to see how they were going to celebrate the festival, since this was the first time”).
After having made our prayers and watched the festival, we headed back toward town. As we were making our way home, Polemarchus, son of Cephalus, spied us from afar and ordered his slave boy to run and tell us to wait for him. And the slave boy, coming up from behind, grabbed hold of my cloak and said, “Polemarchus bids you to wait.” And Glaucon replied, “We will definitely wait.” And then a little while later, Polemarcus arrived, along with Adeimantus, Glaucon’s brother, and Niceratus, son of Nicias, and some other men, apparently from the procession.

Then Polemarchus said, “Socrates, you seem as if you are starting to head back to town.”
“Not a bad guess on your part,” I replied.
“Well, do you see how many of us there are?” he asked.
“I sure do”
“Well okay then,” he continued, “either prove yourselves stronger than us or remain where you are.”
I then replied, “Isn’t there yet one other option left, namely, that we might persuade you that you should let us go?”
He retorted, “But would you really be able to persuade men unwilling to listen?”
“No way at all,” replied Glaucon.
“Well all right then, we’re not going to listen, you can be sure of that.”

In seriocomic fashion, Plato illustrates the ever-present frailty of language: it may ultimately prove inadequate to a speaker’s task of communicating effectively and meaningfully with another human being. How could Socrates and Glaucon ever hope to persuade men who refuse to listen? Plato signals the possibility that all linguistic-based means of communication are potentially subject to breakdown. Nothing guarantees that language can bridge division between communicants, not even Plato’s own finely crafted prose.

Why does Plato choose to highlight this incapacity of language, this frailty of discourse, by positing a confrontation with a partner unwilling to engage in any meaningful dialogue? Certainly there is the famous irony, noted by many commentators, of Polemarchus’ playful threat
of violence if Socrates and Glaucon do not prove themselves “the better men” (κρείττους γένεσθε) – an irony unmistakable to a Greek audience, given that the actual violence suffered by the historical Polemarchus at the hands of the Thirty Tyrants only a few years after the events dramatized in the Republic.103 The real Polemarchus was arrested and imprisoned along with his brother, the orator Lysias; the property of the brothers was confiscated; and Polemarchus was ultimately ordered to drink hemlock.104 A shared dialogue among the Republic’s ten characters in the Piraeus is a world apart from the ruin visited upon Athens by the historical “Ten in the Piraeus” – the famous ten put in charge under the supervision of the Thirty Tyrants. Plato’s character, Polemarchus, knows not what demons he invokes when he jests that force trumps discourse.

But there is an even deeper level of discomfiture with language, a distrust of any presupposed efficacy of the written or spoken word, which I maintain Plato seeks to impart to, and thus disquiet, his reading audience. That the exchange among the men occurs in the form of a shared witticism fails to mitigate the deadly serious implication of their remarks: Language, at its best, may simply be inadequate to bridge the divide between opposing parties and, at its worst, may utterly fail to prevent violence among men who refuse to listen. Attaining a shared discourse to arrive at a more just state comprised of more just individuals is the task Plato sets for himself in the Republic. The magnitude of this task is vast indeed, and Plato’s opening makes clear that no reader should blithely presume otherwise.

The purpose of my dissertation is – as I have outlined in Chapter One – to demonstrate the extent to which proverbs are a critical component of Plato’s ambitious endeavor. One of the

103 There is a general scholarly consensus that the Republic’s dramatic date is circa 410-411. See generally Boeckh (vol. iv) 1874: 437ff. The Thirty Tyrants held power during an eight-month period from 404-403.

104 Lysias escaped by bribing his captor and later had Eratosthenes, one of the Thirty, tried for the murder of his brother.
potential ways to reach across a discursive divide to men who refuse to listen (μὴ ἀκούοντας) might be to begin with a common “saying” (legomenon), one whose meaning – at least initially, on its face – seems apparent to all those who are engaged in the conversation. By beginning with proverbs that are already an essential component of the Greek wisdom tradition (sophia), Plato demonstrates how dialogue concerning one of the most important subjects imagineable – i.e., how people might live and behave more justly toward one another – can begin between individuals who have very different conceptions of just what “justice” is.

The first book of the Republic sets the dialogue as a whole in motion, and this chapter of my dissertation will demonstrate how proverbs prove crucial to the interlocutors’ arrival at the first definition of justice and then move beyond it. Given what I maintain to be the especial prominence of proverbs in Republic 1 and their essential role in setting the stage for the rest of the dialogue, Book 1 merits a chapter on its own. As I explained in my opening chapter, I shall walk the reader through how Plato frames the progression of the Republic by foregrounding proverbs in the ongoing discourse. After first outlining a “progression of proverbs” that leads to the interlocutors’ initial definition of justice, I will then turn to an examination of that definition subjected to Socrates’ philosophic scrutiny, focusing in particular on how the task of riddling through the potential meanings a proverb may assume when looked at in new ways and applied to new situations mirrors the task of riddling over whether a speaker is speaking with irony. This analysis is important given the emphasis scholars have traditionally placed upon Socrates’ use of irony in Plato’s dialogues. I close the chapter by demonstrating Plato’s use of “folk” or “demotic” proverbs during Socrates’ encounter with the arch-sophist, Thrasymachus.
2.2. Cephalus and Socrates: Proverb versus Proverb

The first major exchange of the *Republic* occurs between Socrates and Cephalus, Polemarchus’ aged father. During this conversation, the reader witnesses a remarkable duel of poetic quotations and sayings, all marshaled by Socrates and Cephalus in support of their respective positions on the topic of the supposed consolations of wealth in old age. Many of these quotations from poetry and other assorted sayings are, in fact, proverbs. Taken together as a series, they amount, in my reading, to a “progression of proverbs” that ultimately leads to the first definition of “justice” in the *Republic*. It is striking that Plato chooses in significant part to use proverbs as the literary device to initiate the interlocutors’ discussion of the primary subject of the dialogue, reflecting, I maintain, Plato’s demonstration of how common *legomena* – put differently, a shared discursive practice – might serve as the starting point for attempting to span societal division.

After the mock threat of violence, the assembled characters repair to Cephalus’ home in the Piraeus. Cephalus begins the conversation with an Homeric sounding line. “You don’t come down to visit us very often, Socrates” (*Ὦ Σώκρατες, οὐ δὲ θαμίζεις ἡμῖν καταβαίνων*, 328c6), says Cephalus in greeting as the men arrive. As more than one commentator on the *Republic* has observed, οὐ δὲ θαμίζεις ἡμῖν approximates formular wording found (1) at *Iliad* 18.386 and 425, when both Charis and Hephaestus ask Thetis why she has chosen to visit their home at this particular moment since she has “not come much before this” (*πάρος γε μὲν οὖ τι θαμίζεις*) and (2) at *Odyssey* 5.88, when Calypso queries Hermes to the same effect with the identical formula. ¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁵ D.J. Allan 1940: 82, is inclined to read οὖ τι (as did Astius) in place of Plato’s οὐ δὲ (found in the majority of the mss.), for Cephalus would then be quoting directly from Homer. Allan observes that “Cephalus is fond of quotation” and makes the further claim that “the whole scene here is slightly Homeric.” Shorey 1982: ad loc., also agrees that Cephalus’ “language recalls the Homeric formula, πάρος γε μὲν οὖτι θαμίζεις . . .”; Cf. Adam 1980: ad loc.
While Homer’s formular wording in these instances may not constitute a proverb in strict conformity with my definition as set forth above in Chapter One, it does have a proverbial quality by dint of the combination of a verb in the present tense (θαμίζεις) with an adverb that refers to past time, “before” (πάρος). Indeed, in his *Vorlesungen über Syntax*, Jacob Wackernagel cites this specific formula as an example of the “timeless present,” which, he notes, “alternates sometimes with the subjunctive and sometimes with that strange creature, the gnomic aorist.”106 Moreover, in order to illustrate the quintessential use of the “timeless present,” Wackernagel turns to proverbs, citing the proverb “ά χειρ τὰν χεῖρα νίζει: manus manum lauat : eine Hand wäscht die andere (all, ‘one hand washes the other’).”107 As Wackernagel explains,

> Here the present forms – νίζει, lauat, wäscht – do not signify that this washing is proceeding now, in the present moment, as I speak, but that it proceeds in general, that it was so in the past and that it will be so in the future, too: it is something of general validity, which happens, or may happen, at any and every time.108

One detects here a marked similarity between Wackernagel’s notion of how the tense “proceeds in general” and conveys a “general validity” with what I maintain to be a primary attribute of proverbs, in accordance with my definition: *proverbs make a generalizing assertion about the way the world works and thereby expect action by the listener.*109 There is something in the manner of a proverb at work in the Homeric phrase πάρος γε μὲν οὗ τι θαμίζεις. It is a generalizing statement with an imperatival aspect: the speaker subtly refers to the recurrent situation of the recipient’s past absence(s) with an implied demand that the recipient visit more regularly than has been his past practice.

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107 Wackernagel 1926/2009: 157/202. The English equivalent of the proverb is “You scratch my back, and I’ll scratch yours” or “One good turn deserves another.”
109 See my full definition of proverb in Chapter 1.2.
Indeed, Cephalus’ “citation” of the Homeric source text serves to convey a mild chastisement – i.e., you don’t come to see me very often, down here in the Piraeus – which conforms to the valence of the Homeric formula employed by Charis, Hephaestus, and Calypso. Cephalus certainly goes on to make this point more clearly: “You ought to have. For if I still had the capacity to come to town without difficulty, you wouldn’t need to come here, but we would come see you.”  

As with the scenarios in Homer from where Cephalus’ phrase seems to originate, something more was expected in the past and thus is now demanded of the visitor in the present, who therefore suffers a faint rebuke for not satisfying a pre-assumed standard of cordiality. Moreover, by using language resonant of Homeric formula with a poetic pedigree, Cephalus vests himself with an immediate authority and recognizable erudition. As I pointed out in Chapter One, Aristotle in his *Metaphysics* makes the claim that some people will not take seriously a speaker’s arguments unless a poet’s words are cited in support. It was the Greeks’ practice to invoke poetic texts for the purpose of articulating and justifying any position or point of view. Cephalus, with his opening remark, adheres to that practice. To put it slightly differently, this is no random beginning to what will evolve into a profound engagement with the subject of justice, but rather an opening that originates from the words of a poet considered to be the virtual progenitor of Greek thought and culture. All roads lead to Homer, and Socrates faces a large task in propounding his own first remarks in response to such preeminent authority.

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110 Resp. 328c7-d1: μέντοι. εἰ μὲν γὰρ ἐγὼ ἔτι ἐν δυνάμει ἦ τοῦ ῥᾷσιος πορεύεσθαι πρὸς τὸ ἄστυ, οὐδὲν ἂν σὲ ἔδει δεῦρο ἴναι, ἄλλῳ ἡμᾶς ἂν παρὰ σὲ ἔμεν.
111 Arist., *Metaph.* 995a7-8.
112 Halliwell 2000: 94-5. See, e.g., Herod. 7.161, where the *Iliad* is quoted to support a political position.
113 See Havelock 1963: 28, who describes the Greek “conception of Homer as the Hellenic educational manual *par excellence*.”
Cephalus’ opening address to Socrates reveals how for the Greeks, people’s behavior is to be judged in part by standards pre-formulated in certain traditional expressions, frequently finding their origins in poetic texts. Any attempt by Socrates to alter discursive practice in the service of socio-political reform, on both the micro-level of his immediate interactions with his interlocutors, and on the macro-level of society at large must, at least in part, be grounded in pre-established and pre-articulated formulations that are as compelling as the phrases with which they compete. In addition it is often difficult to separate certain proverbs and gnômai from the poetic logoi in which they find their origin – the citations of which are used to lend authority to a speaker’s discourse. Halliwell rightly notes that in “certain cases, we may be dealing with language that already had the status of quasi-proverbial sayings or catch-phrases,” of which Cephalus’ opening remark is arguably one.\(^{114}\) And since for the Greeks, there was often little distinction between gnômai and nomoi,\(^{115}\) Cephalus’ deft deployment of Homeric phrase as a commentary and judgment on Socrates’ behavior is unsurprising if not entirely inevitable.

Plato accentuates in his portrayal of Cephalus the central role that language, that discourse (logos), played in Greek life and thought. The joy – there is really no better word – that the Greeks derived from seasoned verbal exchange is apparent in Cephalus’ rather touching explanation of why Socrates’ company in shared conversation is so important to him: “You ought now to come here more frequently. I’d have you know that by however much all the rest of the pleasures of the body are dying away, the desires and pleasures of good conversation [αι περὶ τοὺς λόγους ἐπιθυμίαι τε καὶ ἠδοναί] increase all the more.”\(^{116}\)

\(^{114}\) Halliwell 2000: 97.

\(^{115}\) Lardinois 1995: 5-6. Lardinois observes that because the Greeks cited gnomai in their law courts, even the difference between “laws” (νόμοι) and gnomic expressions “was not always clear cut.”

\(^{116}\) Resp. 328d1-4: νῦν δὲ σὲ χρῆ πυκνότερον δεῦρο ἴναι. ὡς εὖ ἱσθι ὃτι ἐμοιγε ὅσον αἱ ἄλλαι αἱ κατὰ τὸ σῶμα ἠδοναί ἀπομαραίνονται, τοσοῦτον αὐξόνται αἱ περὶ τοὺς λόγους ἐπιθυμίαι τε καὶ ἠδοναί.
Cephalus’ enjoyment of and participation in the world. At the close of Book 9 of the *Republic*, Glaucon famously observes that the ideal community that Socrates, he, and the other interlocutors are attempting to construct necessarily exists in *logos* (592a10-b5). If Plato’s Socrates is to found justice in *logos*, he must observe the pre-established standards by which the Greeks considered certain *logoi* more compelling – namely, those supported by poetic authority.\(^{117}\)

And so in response to Cephalus’ citation of Homer, employed in something approaching the manner of a proverb (insofar as it instructs Socrates that the world functions by virtue of reciprocity in social intercourse and that better is expected of him in the future), Socrates is compelled to use words invested with a similar level of authority. In this he does not fail. After first emphasizing that he, in fact, takes great pleasure in conversing with the elderly (χαίρω γε διαλεγόµενος τοῖς σφόδρα πρεσβύταις, 328d7-e1), Socrates opens the discussion that will ultimately extend to the dialogue’s famed search for a non-instrumental definition of justice. He asks a question that concerns a subject clearly within Cephalus’ knowledge and experience but outside of Socrates’ own: old age. More importantly, he frames this deferential query first in language that finds its origin in Hesiodic proverb and second in a direct quotation from Homer.

Indeed, the proverb that Socrates’ query first seems to evoke is from the most-cited lines of the entire Hesiodic oeuvre: the famous motif of two roads, one easy and smooth leading to vice, the other difficult and rough, leading to virtue, which Lardinois describes as a “double gnome.”\(^{118}\) The extant literature expressly quotes this passage some twenty-six times; as

\(^{117}\) See Morgan 2004: 1-2, for an extensive analysis of how ancient philosophers both used and reconfigured the poetic and mythological tradition to serve their larger philosophic project: “These thinkers had to work with existing linguistic and literary resources. There was no option to make a fresh start, free from the constraints of previous language, since language itself is a creature of convention.”

\(^{118}\) Lardinois 1995: 193.
mentioned previously, L.G. Canavero emphasizes how these lines “captured the imagination of the ancients.”

Socrates says “I believe we ought to learn from the elderly, just as if from those who have journeyed on a certain road, one that we too perhaps must travel, just what sort of path it is, rough and difficult, or undemanding and easily traversable” (δοκεῖ γὰρ μοι χρῆναι παρ' αὐτῶν συνθάνεσθαι, ὡσπερ τινὰ ὁδὸν προεληλυθότων ἢ καὶ ἡμᾶς ἰσως δεήσει πορεύεσθαι, ποία τίς ἐστιν, τραχεία καὶ χαλεπή, ἢ ῥαθία καὶ εὔπορος 328e1-4). While not every commentator on Plato’s Republic has noted proximity to Hesiod’s proverb, I maintain that the resonance is palpable (Op. 287-92):

τὴν μὲν τοι κακότητα καὶ ἱλαδὸν ἐστίν ἐλέσθαι ῥημίδως· λείη μὲν ὁδὸς, μάλα δ' ἐγγύθη νοεῖ· τῆς δ' ἀρετῆς ἱδρώτα θεοὶ προπάροιθεν ἔθηκαν ἀθάνατοι· μακρὸς δὲ καὶ ὅρθιος οἶμος ἐς αὐτὴν καὶ τρηχὺς τὸ πρῶτον· ἐπὴν δ' εἰς ἄκρον ἰκηται, ῥημίδη δὴ ἐπείτα πέλει, χαλεπή περ ἐούσα.

Easily and frequently is Villainy seized; for the road is easy and very near.
But before the road of Excellence the deathless gods have placed sweat.
And the way to it is long and steep and rough at first. But when one arrives at the summit, then it is easy, even though remaining difficult.

The imagery of an easy and smooth path to wickedness juxtaposed against a long, hard and steep slog to virtue conforms powerfully and readily to the experience of most people, past and present. Indeed, we have our own corresponding modern proverb: “No pain, no gain.”

Koning observes that those lines of Hesiod’s poetry which came to enjoy such a rich Nachleben as the famous “two roads” passage did so because of three qualities: (1) they addressed a subject of considerable interest, (2) there was something new and original to the expression with regard

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119 Canavero 2015: 7-8. See also Koning 2010a: 144.

120 Ast. (1819-32) and Adam (1980) view Plato’s language as suggested by Hesiod, while neither Jowett and Campbell (1894) nor Allan (1965) mention any connection. In the commentary to his Loeb translation, Shorey (1982) notes the similarity between the two passages.

121 Moreover, the imagery of divergent roads, the choice of which will profoundly affect the future course of one’s life, remains as durable now, with such works as Robert Frost’s The Road Not Taken, as it was in Hesiod’s time.
to form and content, and (3) they were broad enough in scope to be adaptable and capable of application to numerous different contexts. As outlined in Chapter One, Koning calls this proclivity of certain lines for future repeated quotation their “catchword factor.” In the case of the “roads” passage, it is indisputable that (1) aretē and the means by which to attain it were of central interest to Greek thought, (2) the divergent roads motif was highly original (M.L. West cites a Sumerian proverb and a Norse saying as the closest parallels122), and (3) the potential application of the road imagery and the terms kakovēs and aretē to any number of contexts proved broad indeed.123 Theognis uses them for their moral import,124 Xenophon looks to them to depict a vision of philosophic excellence,125 Plutarch and Philo use them as a meta-comment on the philosophic enterprise,126 Pindar employs them to contrast the “well-trodden” path of Homer with the “deep path” of Hesiod,127 and Prodicus famously uses them to construct the myth of two women, representing the roads to virtue and vice, that Heracles encounters.128 If Hesiod’s poem represents the first genuine instantiation of an anthology of gnōmai – a genre that came to enjoy wide influence in the fourth century, with Works and Days serving as its figurehead – then the “two roads” passage arguably represents the foremost gnome among gnōmai, given the frequency of its later citation and use by subsequent authors. It amounts to ancient literature’s equivalent of “going viral.”

122 West 1978: ad loc.
123 Koning 2010a: 144-5.
124 Thgn. 1027-8.
125 Xen. Mem.2.1.20.
126 Plut. Mor.77D. Philo De E briatate 150.
127 Pind. Pae.fr.52h.11-20
Of course the very breadth of a verse’s potential for extrapolation and extendability to other, different contexts poses a risk of over-interpretation: What might seem an echo of an original is in fact nothing of the sort. The reader, rather, has lost sight of the “real” author altogether. As one of the anonymous readers for Richard Hunter’s 2014 *Hesiodic Voices* complained, “not every uphill climb is an allusion to Hesiod, surely.”129 Such a risk certainly exists in this instance, where Socrates does not quote Hesiod directly but simply employs the Hesiod-like motif of a road (δόδος) with adjectives parallel to Hesiod’s own descriptive formulae, i.e., Plato’s τραχεῖα καὶ χαλεπὴ and ῥηδία καὶ εὐπορὸς vis-à-vis Hesiod’s τρηχὺς, χαλεπῆ, and ῥηδίως. Moreover, later in Book 2, Plato will in fact quote expressly an abbreviated section of the “two roads” passage when Adeimantus notoriously crops the lines so as to emphasize kakoiēs in making the claim that most people would rather take the easy road to villainy (*Resp.* 2.364c5-d3).130 Why then has Plato not chosen to do so here, so as to leave no doubt? Despite the ambiguity, Hunter insists that “there is . . . indeed something ‘Hesiodic’ about the opposition between the possible paths of old age, the τραχεῖα καὶ χαλεπῆ and ῥηδία καὶ εὐπορὸς, which Socrates evokes . . .”131 I concur, and maintain further that Adeimantus’ express quotation of a purposefully cropped section of Hesiod’s “two roads” passage supports an inference that Socrates’ invocation of a remarkably similar motif is intended to remind his interlocutors and us of Hesiod’s original.

First, we should recall that Cephalus’ prompt for Socrates’ Hesiodic response was not a direct citation of Homer but rather a more subtle reference, with a pronounced Homeric undertone. A proportionate response would seem to call less for direct poetic quotation than a

129 Hunter 2014: 34-5.
130 See my extensive analysis of Adeimantus’ “misuse” of the two-roads passage from Hesiod in Chapter 3.2.
131 Hunter 2014: 35, n. 86.
phrase more obliquely, but nonetheless palpably, imbued with a prior poet’s words – words that bear some relevance to the particular subject addressed, in this instance, old age. There is also a pleasing symmetry between Cephalus’ opening of the discourse in language resonant of Homer and Socrates’ rejoinder using a motif worthy of Hesiod.

Within the long tradition of poetic citation and allusion in later Greek literature, Homer and Hesiod very often travel together. It is not surprising that Plato should follow in this tradition. Additionally, if Plato is to portray Adeimantus in Book 2 as misapplying Hesiod’s lines to champion a meaning that is their precise opposite – that is to say, the “divergent roads” proverb from *Works and Days* was most certainly intended to impel its Iron Age audience to strive for *arête* and not *kakotês* as Adeimantus sophistically manipulates the verse to imply – there is all the more reason that Plato should demonstrate a use of poetry consistent with the ideal of justice after which Socrates and his interlocutors strive, in addition to the extrapolation and extension of poetic authority to conversations, arguments, and speeches in support of that ideal.

There is also the unmistakable contrast between Cephalus’ opening with a line from the progenitor of epic *narrative* and Socrates’ commencing with language rich in allusion to a famous double gnome from the undisputed father of *didactic* poetry. Plato deftly juxtaposes the narrative and didactic traditions, and Socrates’ preference for a crystallized gnomic expression over epic tale-telling suggests reservations on his (and Plato’s) part about the value to be gleaned from narrative and applied to his philosophic and reformist aims. It is worth reflecting that the first two instances of Socrates’ direct speech that we encounter in the *Republic* are, first, an expressed desire to avoid physical violence by means of verbal persuasion (327c7-14) and,

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132 Hunter 2014: 12. This is one of Koning’s (2010a) major themes.
second, the invocation of didactic proverb (328e1-4). Irrespective (or perhaps because) of the challenges inherent in bridging the divide between communicants via discourse, Socrates opts for the equivalent of Hesiodic proverb in his opening query to Cephalus, in what will turn out to be an extended dialogue with many interlocutors on all manner of subjects.

As a substantive matter, the parallel between Socrates’ query and Hesiod’s verse works well in the context of the conversation. Socrates’ question amounts to the following: “Will I have to contend with difficulty in traversing the road of old age, as I most certainly must in leading a life of excellence; or will it be easy, just like the way in which one slips effortlessly toward *kakotês*?” We should recall here modern paroemiology’s insistence that context is crucial in understanding a speaker’s use of a proverb.133 By re-framing the Hesiodic gnomic motif of the easy road to vice contrasted with the difficult road to virtue within the context of Socrates’ query to Cephalus about the nature of old age, Plato highlights the issue that will be of central concern in the *Republic*: the counterintuitive acceptance of the necessity to live justly for justice’s sake alone, without thought to incidental rewards, hard though that may be. And he does this within Socrates’ deference to Cephalus on a subject exclusively within the elder man’s purview, old age. Socrates’ question, thus, is prescriptive at the same time that it is deferential, deftly invoking poetic authority in the form of a Hesiodic proverb – in measured and proportionate response to Cephalus’ mild chastisement, invoking Homer – about the importance of striving toward *aretê* no matter how difficult the journey. Socrates’ Hesiodic proverb-based response allows the conversation between the two men to begin in earnest.

Socrates immediately follows up his Hesiodic rejoinder with the express quotation of a familiar phrase, found in numerous and varied texts, including Homer, the Homeric Hymns, Hesiod, and Herodotus (328e4-7):

καὶ δὴ καὶ σοῦ ἡδέως ἂν πυθοίμην ὅτι σοι φαίνεται τούτο, ἐπειδὴ ἑνταῦθα ἡδὴ ἐἴ τῆς ἡλικίας δ ὅ ἐπὶ γήραος οὐδῶ” φασίν εἶναι οἱ ποιηταί, πότερον χαλεπόν τοῦ βίου, ἢ πῶς σὺ αὕτῳ ἐξαγγέλλεις.

Moreover, from you, with pleasure, might I learn how it seems to you, since you are already at that period of age, which the poets describe to be “upon the threshold of old age,” whether it is a difficult time of life or just how you report it. “On the threshold of old age” is an image used frequently by ancient authors of both verse and prose.134 If Socrates’ previous invocation of poetic authority in language reminiscent of Hesiodic proverb had been somewhat oblique, there is certainly no mistaking now Socrates’ adherence to the Greek tradition of citing the poets in order to enhance his point. And while I would not classify the formula ἐπὶ γῆραος οὐδῶ as an actual proverb (at least in this instance) but simply as figurative speech – i.e., what Martin would call a cliché135 – one could imagine certain contexts in which the phrase could be employed as part of a proverb, as the English proverb “The hardest step is that over the threshold” suggests.136 More to the point, Socrates makes clear in his act of directly quoting from poetry that his response to Cephalus is all of a piece. Just as Cephalus is capable of citing poetic authority in initiating the conversation with Socrates to include a reproach for Socrates’ infrequent visits, so too is Socrates adept at poetic allusion in offering a polite rejoinder, replete with Hesiodic proverb and Homeric phrase that also highlights one of the central concerns of Plato’s Republic: the difficulty of the path to excellence, in old age or any age.

135 Martin 2005: 3.
There is a further connotation, I want to suggest, that the word *oudôs* –“threshold” – carries in this context, in addition to its association with the entrance to life’s final stage. One may well recall Odysseus disguised as an old beggar, questioning the swineherd Eumaios in Book 15 of Homer’s *Odyssey*, regarding the fate of Odysseus’ parents: “Come tell me now about the mother of godlike Odysseus / and his father, whom he left behind on the threshold of old age” (ἐἰπ’ ἄγε μοι περὶ μητρὸς Ὀδυσσῆος θείου / πατρὸς θ’, δὲν κατέλειπεν ἱὼν ἐπὶ γήραος οὐδῆ, 346-7). So, too, in Book 23, Penelope attributes the misery (ὁῖζυν) the gods have betstowed upon Odysseus and her to the couple’s longevity, delighting in youth and then reaching the *threshold* of old age (ἀγάσαντο παρ’ ἀλλήλοις μένοντε / ἣβης ταρπῆναι καὶ γήραος οὐδὸν ἱκέσθαι, 210-12).

I want to suggest that polymetis Odysseus, who spends almost half of the *Odyssey* in disguise as an old, lowly beggar, bears a marked resemblance to Socrates, a man who defies easy class categorization. Nancy Worman observes that Socrates “bears a unique relationship to both the elite games of the symposium and the crude talk of the agora.”¹³⁷ This is precisely the sort of chameleonic character who is just as at home sparring with the elite *literati* of the day, wielding dueling citations of verses (many of which are proverbs) learned and memorized from the works of the poets, as he is (we shall see) in deploying the more demotic proverbs of folk-wisdom, the sayings of the common people, in conversations with those whom he meets on the street or in the marketplace. To put it in Odyssean terms, this is a man who can hold his own against both lordly suitors and lowly beggars. We will see later in this chapter how some of the folk proverbs and sayings employed by Socrates make use of the vocabulary and imagery of a “low” idiom, consistent with what Worman describes as Plato’s “depiction of the philosopher as a low outsider

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¹³⁷ Worman 2008: 159.
who is (like, for instance, the disguised Odysseus) really more noble in attitude than those around him.”

The roots of Socrates’ low-idiom discourse lie, per Worman, “in iambos and perhaps originally in anti-epic figures like Thersites and the beggar Odysseus.” And we will see (in Chapter 2.3) this identification between Socrates and Odysseus as old beggar developed even further in the Republic – e.g., one of the few verses to receive approbation by Socrates as worthy of quotation in Kallipolis is uttered by Odysseus in beggar’s guise: “Bear up heart of mine. For you have endured far worse than this” (τέτλαθι δή, κραδίη· και κόντερον ἀλλο ποτ’ ἔτλης, Resp. 390d5 and Od. 20.18). For now, it is sufficient simply to note the parallels between the two figures and the means by which Plato subtly signals them to us through Socrates’ use of the phrase ἐπὶ γήραος οὐδῷ in his poetically- and proverbially-rich rejoinder to Cephalus.

Cephalus, in turn, responds enthusiastically to Socrates’ query about old age, and he does so first by reference to what he himself describes expressly as a proverb (παροιμία): “Often some of us of about the same age get together, thereby confirming the old proverb” (πολλάκις γὰρ συνερχόμεθα τινες εἰς ταύτων παραπλησίαν ἡλικίαν ἐχοντες, διασώζοντες τὴν παλαιὰν παροιμίαν, 329a2-4). Cephalus, interestingly, does not quote the proverb itself, whatever it may be; it is enough simply to refer to what he has in mind as an “old saw” (Paul Shorey’s translation) and presume that Socrates and the rest of those in attendance understand the reference precisely. In other words, Cephalus’ use of the phrase “old saw” (τὴν παλαιὰν παροιμίαν) coupled with some other element in his response assumes a level of shared discourse and mutual understanding. The mere mention of the term paroimia is enough to achieve a level of commonality among communicants.

139 Worman 2008: 155.
Scholars have derived the actual proverb that Cephalus has in mind from his phrase “having about the same age” (παραπλησίαν ἡλικίαν ἔχοντες): ἥλιξ ἡλικα τέρπει (literally, “same age delights same age”), whose meaning is equivalent to that of our own familiar proverb, “birds of a feather flock together.”\(^{140}\) Indeed, Benjamin Jowett translates Cephalus’ entire sentence as “Old men flock together; they are birds of a feather, as the proverb says.”\(^{141}\) Shorey, who translates the proverb as “like to like”, makes the interesting suggestion that it may enjoy some relationship to Homer’s “as ever, the god brings like and like together” (ὡς αἰεὶ τὸν ὁμοίον ἀγει θεῶς ὡς τὸν ὁμοίον) which the goatherd, Melanthius, utters in reviling the swineherd Eumaios and Odysseus in beggar’s guise, when Melanthius comes upon Eumaios leading the faux tramp into town (Od. 17.218).\(^{142}\) Shorey’s attribution gains strength from what I maintain to be Socrates’ previous invocation of Odysseus disguised as beggar in his use of the phrase ἐπὶ γῆραος οὐδό. Cephalus is responding in kind – one might even say “like to like” – with his use of Homeric proverb. The men are trading back and forth in poetic allusions sharing similar themes, couched in proverbial or near-proverbial statements. We will see this dynamic repeated again and again in the Republic.

It is also notable that Cephalus’ proverb bears more than a passing resemblance to what we will see in Book 4 is Socrates’ provisional definition of justice, articulated in an expression that itself constitutes a gnome: “Justice is the doing of one’s own” (τὸ τὰ αὐτοῦ πράττειν . . .

\(^{140}\) See, e.g., Adam 1980: ad loc.; Allan 1965: ad loc.; Jowett and Campbell 1894: ad loc.; Shorey 1982: ad loc. The proverb also appears in Socrates’ “first speech” in the Phaedrus (240c1-2), which H.N. Fowler translates as “birds of a feather flock together.” Akin to Cephalus’ need only to use an abbreviated phrase containing the term ἡλικίαν along with the word “proverb” (παροιμία) to evoke his listening audience’s recall of the full proverb (i.e., ἥλιξ ἡλικα τέρπει) is our contemporary colloquial shorthand “Birds of a feather” to call to mind the entire proverb.

\(^{141}\) Jowett 1911: ad loc.

\(^{142}\) Shorey 1982: ad loc.
As I will discuss in Chapter Four, this formulation is world literature’s first articulation of what has come to be known as the “Unique Aptitude Doctrine” (UAD), the theory that society is best served by each individual doing what she is best suited for and nothing else. Indeed, one might well rephrase the UAD as “like to like.” Doing what is akin to – i.e., “like” – one’s natural aptitude is what achieves justice for both the individual and society at large. Plato has again foreshadowed a major theme of the Republic with the opening utterances of the dialogue’s interlocutors, grounded as they are in proverbial adages. It is as if the Republic finds the initial progression of its narrative in its leading characters’ exchange of proverbs. One proverb follows another, all leading up to what will be the interlocutors’ various attempts to pin a definition on the concept of justice.

Ramona Naddaff explains this phenomenon as reflecting a restraint necessarily imposed upon Plato’s Socrates by his society’s existing discursive practices and traditions: just as Cephalus uses poetry as “an encyclopedic and reliable sourcebook to reflect wisely on such varied topics as bodily desires [and] old age . . .,” so too does Socrates require “poetic musings as the material base to examine the concept of justice dialectically,” and, thus, he “uses the poetic meditations as the necessary hermeneutical horizon against which to present his later novel definition of justice as ‘one man, one art.’” Naddaff’s interpretation amounts to another way of articulating what Halliwell describes as the established Greek tradition of citing the poets in order to bolster one’s position on any particular subject under examination.

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143 See my discussion in Chapter 1.2 as to why this expression of an abstract principle qualifies as a proverb.


145 Halliwell 2000: 96. Halliwell rightly notes how the works of the poets served as a “collection of materials stored up in the imagination – a source of phrases, ideas, motifs, and images that might be recovered in conversation, argument or public speech . . .”
My argument is that Socrates makes use of formulations by poets precisely to accomplish the larger project of discursive reform. The musings of the poets cannot be so easily cited and then discarded, irrespective of their “philosophic limitations” (Naddaff’s phrase). Rather, they must be reworked, reformulated, so as to achieve the greater “reform” on the level of both the individual and society that Plato’s Socrates seeks. If an underlying theme of Plato’s Republic is the equivalency between “soulcraft” and statecraft, I would go one step further in arguing that “wordcraft” is soulcraft is statecraft.

As I have tried to show, the very first words emanating from both Cephalus and Socrates are quotations (or near quotations) of poetic authority (e.g., Cephalus’ οὐ δὲ θαμίζεις ἡμῖν and Socrates’ ἐπὶ γῆρας οὐδὼ coupled with Hesiodic proverb). By contrast, Naddaff’s reading emphasizes how the men’s “logos, in turn, instigates the first direct citation of a poet” only at the point where Cephalus, following up on his reference to the proverb ἥλιξ ἥλικα τέρπει, now expressly cites Sophocles (329b7-c4) for the proposition that he is grateful for no longer being interested in “matters of love” (τὰφροδίσια) at his age but, rather, “has gotten away from the equivalent of a raging and savage master” (ὁσπέρ λυπτῶντά τινα καὶ ἄγριον δεσπότην ἀποδράζ).

I, however, want to go beyond Naddaff so as to draw attention to just how crucial poetic formulations were to the ancients’ practice of and capacity for striking up a conversation and achieving, from the very outset of the exchange of words, some degree of mutual understanding with another person. Each poetic allusion and formulation calls for a co-equal response. The initiator of the conversation (in this instance, Cephalus) can have confidence that his respondent (here, Socrates) picks up on his poetic allusion and can answer in kind. The respondent, Socrates, then in turn does the same, and the conversation proceeds. What is interesting from my

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146 To be fair, Naddaff in a footnote does qualify her emphasis on Cephalus’ direct citation of Sophocles by noting Socrates’ earlier allusion to Hesiodic proverb by dint of his “two roads” motif. Naddaff 2002: 139, n. 6.
perspective is how intricately and intimately proverbs are bound up with the men’s respective poetic allusions and formulations. It is by Socrates’ deft manipulation of these, as we shall see, that Plato begins to sketch out a vision of a reformed discourse underlying a reformed and just state comprised of just individuals.

Socrates counters Cephalus’ vision of old age borne well (bolstered by citation of poetic authority from Sophocles) with a phrase that has the syntactic and semantic shape of a proverb: In response to Cephalus’ claim that it is not old age in itself that determines whether the path of life is difficult or easy but a man’s “disposition” (τροπός), Socrates first announces that many believe that old age proves easy for a man like Cephalus, not by virtue of his tropos, but rather because of his sizeable wealth (οὖ διὰ τὸν τρόπον ἄλλα διὰ τὸ πολλήν οὐσίαν κεκτήσθαι, 329e3-4). Socrates then appends what paroemiologists call a literal, non-oppositional proverb: “For they say that many are the consolations for the wealthy” (τοῖς γὰρ πλουσίοις πολλὰ παραμυθιά φασίν εἶναι, 329e4-5.) While Shorey points out that this phrase bears some similarity (anachronistically) to a line of verse from Anaxandrides, its seeming authority is more a function of its quotation by numerous people – i.e., “they say” (φασίν) – than from attribution to any specific poet. In other words, Socrates now attempts to counter Cephalus’ direct citation of poetic authority with what seems to be a widely quoted statement of proverbial wisdom.

We see here what folklorists have described as the universal social function of proverbs: they are a device for externalizing and distancing authority. As the folklorist Alan Dundes explains, the phrase “they say” serves to project the responsibility for the proverb’s admonition

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147 See my discussion of the definitional parameters of “proverb” in Chapter 1.2. While some paroemiologists may prefer to denominate literal, nonoppositional proverbs such as “Honesty is the best policy” and “Virtue is its own reward” by some other term (e.g., “maxim” or “aphorism”), most modern paroemiologists consider them to be genuine proverbs. See Russo 1997: 52; Dundes 1981: 52-53.


149 Martin 2005: 5.
onto an anonymous past. This function makes proverbs especially useful in generational encounters, for example, when a parent scolds a child. As Dundes explains, “The parent is but the instrument through which the proverb speaks to the audience.” Similarly in this instance, Socrates is but the instrument by which the proverb attributing Cephalus’ self-vaunted equanimity in the face of old age to his wealth, not his disposition, is spoken. It is not Socrates to whom Cephalus must answer in kind but the larger community and its traditions, handed down from previous generations – i.e., the “they” of phāsin.

Cephalus is compelled to acknowledge that there is some truth in what the people say and then responds, again in kind, with a proverb he attributes to Themistocles (329e6-330a3):

καὶ λέγουσι μὲν τί, ὦ μὲντοι γε ὅσον οἴονται· ἄλλα τὸ τοῦ Θεμιστοκλέους εὖ ἔχει, ὃς τῷ Σεριφίῳ λοιδορομένῳ καὶ λέγοντι ὅτι οὐ δι' αὐτὸν ἄλλα διὰ τὴν πόλιν εὐδοκιμοὶ, ἀπεκρίνετο ὅτι οὔτ' ἂν αὐτὸς Σερίφιος ὃν ὀνομαστὸς ἐγένετο οὐτ' ἐκεῖνος Αθηναῖος.

There’s something to what they say, although not as much as they suppose. But the retort of Themistocles comes in pat here, who, when a man from the little island of Seriphos grew abusive and told him that he owed his fame not to himself but to the city from which he came, replied that neither would he himself ever have made a name if he had been born in Seriphos nor the other if he had been an Athenian.

It is as if the dialogue has now arrived at a point where the characters are landing their respective blows via dueling proverbs. Paroemiologists and folklorists have long noted how the proverb’s

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150 Dundes and Arewa 1964: 70.
151 Trans. Shorey (with modification). See Russo 1997: 58-9. From a hyper-technical standpoint the statement that Cephalus attributes to Themistocles falls under the heading of apothegm per the original definition as supplied by Russo: a “wise and pithy saying uttered by a distinguished individual at [an] opportune or critical moment.” Russo explains, however, that the two separate terms “proverb and “apothegm” represented for the Greeks the development over time of multiple terminology with overlapping meanings and that an apothegm ultimately came to be understood as a “virtual synonym of the maxim or gnome.” As explained in Chapter 1.2, for purposes of my dissertation there is no functional difference between a proverb and an apothegm.
social function of externalizing and distancing authority acts similarly to judicial precedent: the one who wins any verbal dispute is the one who best applies proverbs to the situation at hand.\textsuperscript{152}

This dynamic is, of course, consistent with the general Greek cultural practice of quotation. In Plato’s Republic, the reader bears witness to the dialogic interplay of the interlocutors’ repeated invocations of assorted proverbial expressions of wisdom in support of their respective positions from a virtual storehouse of such sayings collected over time and that came to be associated with the Greek wisdom tradition (\textit{sophia}). Per Halliwell’s reading, Plato evinces a tendency throughout his work to “embed” issues of ethical concern inside his representation of the Greek practice of quotation. Plato’s tendency in this regard is consistent with the Greek tradition of quotation’s “propensity to locate within poetic texts specific ‘utterances’ or ‘sayings’, \textit{rhêmata}, which may then be treated as encapsulating important insights, principles, or views of life . . .”\textsuperscript{153} Indeed, this propensity harmonizes with the \textit{sophia} tradition.

But I want to emphasize a further point: the propensity to cite certain \textit{rhêmata} extends beyond the poetic sayings that seem to fall most naturally and easily under the rubric of the Greek wisdom tradition. Halliwell acknowledges this: the “category of ‘sayings’ is, of course, much wider than that of poetry, and could include anonymous proverbs, folk wisdom, and the pronouncement of non-poietic sages.”\textsuperscript{154} As we have just seen, one of Socrates’ rejoinders to Cephalus is in the form of what appears to be the citation of a popularly quoted saying with no

\textsuperscript{152} Martin 2005: 6, citing J. Messenger 1959, who documents the use of proverbs in some African societies within the judicial process as legal precedents for arguing a litigant’s case.

\textsuperscript{153} Halliwell 2000: 98.

\textsuperscript{154} Halliwell 2000: 98. Halliwell explains further that “poet is ‘in competition’ (\textit{ἐρίζοντα}, [\textit{Resp.}] 343d3) with philosopher, and their disagreement can be traced and read, on Socrates’ view, in the conflicting sayings in which they condense their moral wisdom.”
specific poetic pedigree (i.e., “For they say that many are the consolations for the wealthy”). Moreover in Plato’s literary engagement with the Greek cultural practice of quotation and citation, the characters’ adoption of the convention – especially in the case of Socrates – serves as a springboard by which the speakers (throughout the dialogues) can begin to refashion, reformulate and openly compose their own quotable wise words, which themselves qualify as genuine proverbs under my definition.

Accordingly, Cephalus appends his own proverb to his citation of the adage he attributes to Themistocles – an adage that he frames similarly to the Themistoclean template but now applied to the particular context and subject matter under discussion with Socrates, namely, whether wealth allows a person to bear old age more easily than the one who lacks wealth (330a3-6):

καὶ τοὶς δή μη πλουσίοις, χαλεπῶς δὲ τὸ γήρας φέρουσιν, εὖ ἔχει ὁ αὐτὸς λόγος, ὅτι οὔτ' ἂν ὁ ἐπιείκης πάνυ τι ῥᾳδίως γήρας μετὰ πενίας ἐνέγκε τοῦ οὔθ' ὁ μὴ ἐπιείκης πλουτῆσας εὐκολός ποτ' ἂν ἑαυτῷ γένοιτο.

That same principle [i.e., the one embodied in Themistocles’ proverb] applies well to those who aren’t wealthy and who endure old age with difficulty, because neither would a right-thinking man endure all that easily old age coupled with poverty, nor would a wrong-headed man become content unto himself, even being wealthy.

On the level of structure and syntax, Cephalus’ newly minted wisdom statement possesses several of the attributes that Russo identifies as characteristic of the ancient Greek proverb. The adage divides neatly into two halves of roughly equal length, affording the sentence a rhythmic balance that supports what Russo describes as the “apparently universal tendency toward binary structure in proverbs.” In addition, the parallel structure reflected in the line’s repetition of the

155 Resp. 329e4-5: τοῖς γὰρ πλουσίοις πολλὰ παραμυθήα φασὶν εἶναι.
156 See my definition of proverb in Chapter 1.2
same words and grammatic-syntactic structure serves to underline the juxtaposition between the “right-thinking man” (ὁ ἐπιεικὴς) and the “wrongheaded man” (ὁ μὴ ἐπιεικὴς). And on the level of content, the adage concords easily with Themistocles’ version: the “right-thinking man” corresponds to Themistocles, hypothetically born in Seriphus, and the “wrongheaded man” corresponds to the man from Seriphus, born in Athens (again, according to Themistocles’ hypothetical). So, semantically and syntactically Cephalus proves himself to be an able wielder and assembler of proverbial expressions of wisdom, worthy of no less exemplary a Greek model than Themistocles.

One should note that Plato’s Cephalus has in fact altered the Herodotean version of the story, in which the critic of Themistocles is Timodemus of Aphidnae who, out of envy, insists that Themistocles would never have received honors from Sparta had he not been an Athenian. In Herodotus’ telling of the story, Themistocles retorts, “I would not have been honored by the Spartans had I been from Belbina, nor would you, sir, even being an Athenian” (οὔτ’ ἂν ἐγὼ ἐὼν Βελβινίτης ἑτιμήθην οὕτω πρὸς Σπαρτιτέων, οὔτ’ ἂν σὺ, ὀνθρώπως, ἐὼν Ἀθηναῖος, Hdt. 7.125). In Plato’s version, the island of Belbina (a small island about two miles south of Sunium in the entry of the Saronic Gulf, today the island of Saint George) has become the Cycladic island of Seriphus and Themistocles’ detractor a Seriphean; most commentators assume that Herodotus’ version is the more accurate of the two accounts. But as James Adam has made clear, it was the Platonic version that “afterwards held the field.”

While the alteration of a few small details might, on first consideration, appear insignificant in the rendition of a proverb, the critical role in the larger Greek educational and rhetorical framework of the fourth century practice of compiling gnomic anthologies and

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158 See Adam 1980: ad loc.; Allan 1965: ad loc.
159 Adam 1980: ad loc.
students’ memorization of gnômai demonstrates the importance, I maintain, of an author’s quotability quotient.\footnote{See generally, A. Ford 2010; B. Graziosi 2010; R. Hunter 2014: 7, 77-8.} Plato may well have set his generic sights on creating, as part of his body of uniquely philosophic writing, his own collection of gnômai which would have the potential to be cited repeatedly in the manner of the gnômai from Hesiod’s Works and Days and Precepts of Cheiron. Thus, alter a few of the tangential, background facts of a proverb, include the now refashioned adage within the larger argument about how a person may bear the indignities of old age with equanimity, and you have the potential to see your version become the version that future generations will read, memorize, and recite verbatim.\footnote{This approach is consistent with the observation by Mark Griffith1990: 195, that in the agon of Greek writers’ attempts to outdo their rivals’ versions of traditional stories and themes, proposing new or alternate lineage, parentages, and origins was a common means of distinguishing one’s own rendering of a commonly treated subject. See Chapter 3.3 for my discussion of this dynamic in the context of competing versions of the “Ring of Gyges” stories in Herodotus and the Republic.} In nearly a single stroke, Plato alters Themistocles’ saying as told by Herodotus and affixes his own, new proverb – relayed by Cephalus – so as to rework and personally contribute in his own way to the ongoing Greek tradition of quoting and compiling the pithy maxims that comprised an integral part of Greek sophia. It is in such passages as this section of the Republic that Plato’s reformist sensibility emerges.

While the refashioned proverb is, of course, Cephalus’ (and not Socrates’) handiwork, the reformulation ultimately arises from Plato, who has given us a more fully-dimensioned view of the relative strengths and weaknesses of wealth in enduring life’s hardships if one is not reasonably minded (µὴ ἐπιεικὴς), and of the limitations faced even by one who is reasonably minded (ἐπιεικής) when afflicted with poverty. Plato reveals how Socrates’ more uni-dimensional proverb (“They say that many are the consolations for the wealthy”) is insufficient to the task of Socrates and Cephalus achieving mutual understanding and agreement. The
wisdom of the many (φασίν) has been successfully refuted. On the level of what Lardinois would describe as the “narrative context” of the dialogue – that is, how the proverbs spoken by the author himself or his characters relate to the narrative of the work as a whole and the audience – Cephalus has coined a better maxim than Socrates, but one that is still incapable of demonstrating why a man should live justly for justice’s sake alone, rather than for any external rewards that living justly might confer.

It is in the exchange of dueling adages that Plato subtly hints once again, as at the opening of the dialogue, at the ever-present potential for failure of communication between parties whose values differ too fundamentally from each other. Socrates asks Cephalus whether he inherited his wealth or acquired it on his own, since in Socrates’ estimation, men who are themselves the source of their riches are far more enamored of their wealth than those who inherit it. Socrates asserts that it borders on the impossible for him to converse with the former, as such men care about nothing except their money. Fortunately for Socrates, Cephalus appears to him to fall into the camp of the latter. Cephalus confirms that Socrates has correctly assessed his pedigree and concurs with Socrates’ observation on the difficulty of conversing with “self-made” men.

At this point in the Republic, the narrative discourse begins to turn toward the key subject of the dialogue, justice. After Socrates asks what Cephalus has discovered to be the greatest

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162 Lardinois 1995: 2-3. In addition to the “narrative context” Lardinois identifies what he calls the “discourse context” which consists of the immediate linguistic context of the gnome (e.g., “what kind of words or phrases accompany it”) and the “social context,” that is, the relationship between the speaker of the gnome and his or her addressee.

163 Resp. 330c6-8: χαλέπικοι οὖν καὶ συγγενέσθαι εἰςίν, οὔδὲν ἐθέλοντες ἐπαινεῖν ἄλλῳ ἢ τὸν πλοῦτον. The corrupting influence of wealth as manifested in particular by its proclivity to render all other subjects meaningless is a theme repeated throughout Plato’s dialogues. See, e.g., Ap. 29d6-e3; Symp. 173c2-d3. One wonders how Plato might have depicted the conversation between Socrates and Cephalus proceeding at this juncture, if Plato had depicted Cephalus as a man who had acquired his wealth entirely on his own. For whatever reason, Plato forgoes what appears to be the greater discursive challenge.

164 Resp. 330b1-c9.
benefit (τὶ μέγιστον . . ἀγαθὸν ἀπολελαυκέναι) conferred by his wealth, Cephalus responds by suggesting that it is the peace of mind he enjoys as he approaches death, because his wealth enables him to make sacrifices to the gods and to fulfill any debts owed. The result is that Cephalus is not plagued by fears of punishment in the afterworld, the stories of which (λέγομενοι μύθοι περὶ τῶν ἐν Ἀιδοῦ) often appear far more real to one at the end stages of life than they previously did, operating as a source of ridicule (καταγελώμενοι τέως) when a man passed through a younger stage of life. To bolster his point, Cephalus quotes a gnome from Pindar, adding to it his idea of a man freed from the fears of torments in the afterlife by virtue of his wealth: “With him lives sweet Hope, heart-fostering nurse of old age, which most of all steers mortals’ much-veering judgment.” For Cephalus, wealth ensures that one will never, not even unintentionally, cheat or lie to his fellow man (τὸ γὰρ μηδὲ ἀκοντά τινα ἐξαπατήσαι ἢ ψεύσασθαι) and may depart to the afterlife owing neither sacrifices to the gods nor mammon to man (μηδ’ αὖ ὀφειλοντα ἢ θεόθ ἑσίας τινὰς ἢ ἀνθρώπω χρήματα, 331b1-3).

From Cephalus’ reasoning, Socrates extracts what he understands to be Cephalus’ definition of justice: to tell the truth and to pay back one’s debts (ἀληθῆ τε λέγειν καὶ ἂν λάβῃ τις ἀποδίδοναι, 331d2-3). This formulation amounts to the first formal definition of justice in the Republic. It is worth pausing to note how the interlocutors arrived at such an articulation: by working through a progression of dueling proverbs and poetic citations, traded back and forth, culminating in what will now serve as the point of departure for all succeeding attempts to define justice.

165 Resp. 330d1-331a1.
166 Resp. 331a6-9; Pi., frag. 214 Maehler: γλυκεῖα οἱ καρδίαι / ἀτάλλοισα γηροτρόφος συναορεῖ / ἐλπὶς ἂ μάλιστα θυνατῶν πολύστροφον / γνώμαν κυβερνά (trans. Race).
2.3. Proverbs, *Elenchus*, and the Question of Truth

At this moment one might read into Plato voicing through his characters’ “proverb’s progress” an overarching condemnation of the entire Greek tradition of poetic citation and the use of various *legomena* in support of an argued position. Why? Because such unilateral pronouncements have not been subjected to the *elenchus*. Absent rigorous examination using the dialectic process, one cannot be sure that bald sayings, despite whatever poetic beauty and seeming wisdom they may possess, impart the truth. Martin, for example, argues that in many ways the Greek wisdom tradition saw its end in the figure of Socrates, a man who “constantly broke the frame of performance by confronting his audience in dialogue and refusing to rely on the power of emphatic, unidirectional self-representation.”

Backing such an interpretation is Socrates role-playing the casuist towards the general principle that Cephalus has outlined by virtue of the men’s successive citations and reformulations of various sayings (331c1-9):

Παγκάλως . . . λέγεις, ὦ Κέφαλε, τοῦτο δ’ αὐτό, τὴν δικαιοσύνην, πότερα τὴν ἀλήθειαν αὐτὸ φήσομεν εἰναι ἀπλῶς οὕτως καὶ τὸ ἀποδίδοναι ἄν τίς τι παρὰ τοῦ λάβῃ, ἢ καὶ αὐτὰ ταῦτα ἔστιν ἐνιότε οὔν δικαίως, ἐνιότε δὲ ἀδίκως ποιεῖν; οἶον τοιόνδε λέγω· πάς ἄν που εἶποι, εἰ τὶς λάβοι παρὰ φίλου ἀνδρὸς σωφρονοῦντος ὑπάλληλον, εἰ μανεῖς ἀπαίτοι, ὅτι οὔτε χρῆ τὰ τοιαῦτα ἀποδίδοναι, οὔτε δίκαιος ἄν εἰ ὁ ἀποδίδοις, οὕτ’ αὖ πρὸς τὸν οὕτως ἔχοντα πάντα ἔβηλον τάληθη λέγειν

Beautifully said, Cephalus. But are we going to say that this is, without caveat, justice itself, that is, telling the truth and paying back debts, or is it possible to perform these very actions sometimes justly and sometimes unjustly? Here’s an example. Everyone would presumably say that if someone borrowed weapons from a sane friend, he should not return the weapons if the friend demanded them back after he had gone mad; the borrower wouldn’t be acting justly in such a case, nor would he who chose to speak only the truth to such a man.

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167 Martin 1993: 124. Martin’s conception of Socrates as “endpoint” to the particularly Greek evolution of sages parallels Morgan’s vision of Socrates as self-conscious inheritor and canny re-inventor of the wisdom tradition that was connected with Delphic religion and authority: “Neither a prolix deliverer of Pythian orations, nor a dedicator of *gnomai*, he is the ideal exegete of Apollo’s pronouncements and instructions, since he reacts to the god on an ongoing basis, through his life. And that is why Socrates is not a Sage, a *Sophos*, but something more realistic, a *philosophos*” (Morgan 2009: 566).
It is undeniable that in quintessential Socratic fashion, the chinks in Cephalus’ proverbial armor have been exposed, and one is inclined to applaud Socrates’ sharp capacity for reasoning and argumentation. Yet Plato does not leave a reader wholly comfortable with a response of unreserved praise. First, there is the ever-present risk of seeming a mere quibbler if one adopts a casuist’s approach. There are obviously exceptions to every rule, and one flirts with the prospect of being painted with the broader brush of sophistry – a coloring that Plato presumably sought to avoid in sketching the portraits of his master in his dialogues – when one argues from the letter, rather than the spirit, of the law.168 One also wonders just how much credit Socrates should in fact be given for putting an ultra-fine point on an admittedly broad principle that serves to provide comfort to an old man nearing the end of his life. It is, after all, immediately following this challenge by Socrates that Cephalus retires from the conversation.

Moreover, on the level of metapoetics, Plato has just tossed what is potentially an enormous spanner in the works of his entire literary endeavor. Socrates has just held out the express possibility that “truthfulness” (ἄληθεία) is not necessarily commensurate with “justice” (δικαιοσύνη). The ramifications of this for any discursive project, not the least of which is Plato’s own prose, are far-reaching. How are we to trust any discourse in the first instance? How are we to place faith in any discursive practice as having even the slightest potential to provide us with a clearer understanding of our world and ourselves? In addition, if justice may necessitate, even if only on occasion, the telling of falsehoods, how are we to conceive of the act of “telling?” Who precisely is the “teller” we can trust, and whose “justice” dictates the potentially false communications made in the service of such “justice?” On which such

168 See, e.g., Jowett and Campbell 1894: ad loc.
occasions is falsehood justified? And is there a “true” discourse that might impart to us knowledge of what the category of such occasions necessitating falsehoods is?

In short, we seem to have reached a moment not unlike that in the proem of Hesiod’s *Theogony*, where the Muses enigmatically proclaim to Hesiod during his *Dichterweihe*, “We know how to say many false things similar to genuine things / and we know how, when we want, to proclaim true things” (ἰδὲν ψεύδεα πολλὰ λέγειν ἑτύμοισιν ὁμοῖα, / ἵδεν δ’ εἴητε ἑθέλωμεν ἀληθεὰ γηρύσασθαι, 27-8). The *Republic’s* contemplation of the possibility that the truth will not always be told in the service of justice stands in marked contrast to the *Apology*, where Socrates promises without qualification to tell the jurors “the whole truth” (πᾶσαν τὴν ἀλήθειαν, Ap. 17b8), presaging our own modern-day standard by which witnesses swear before testifying in court. By contrast in Book 3 of the *Republic*, Socrates will demonstrate all too vividly his ability to speak falsehoods in the purported furtherance of justice when, drawing upon Hesiod’s model in the *Works and Days*, he establishes the “noble lie” of the myth of the races which he insists must be told to *Kallipolis’* inhabitants. How are we to explain the difference between Plato’s two texts? Is the question simply one of genre – that is, in the *Apology*, Plato is working with forensic oratory, whereas the *Republic* is something wholly different?

The *Republic’s* explicit confrontation of poetry’s role in society helps explain, I think, Socrates’ foray into what appears a hazy netherworld between truth and falsehood in poetic representation, where strict demarcations may be avoided. We arrived at this initial definition of justice (i.e., telling the truth and paying back debts) not by the *elenchus*, but by a progression of proverbs and quotes from poetry, a sizable number of which themselves qualify as proverbs. But it is worth asking whether a dialogue among multiple parties can truly be said to have

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169 Tennant 2015: 46.
“progressed” if such progress occurred through the participants’ trade in poetic proverbs and quotations rather than by true dialectic and elenctic cross-examination.

I contend that it would be a mistake to interpret the Republic (and the rest of Plato’s oeuvre) as evincing nothing but skepticism toward poetry and other compelling, poetry-like formulations of language (such as proverbs) that have not necessarily been tested via the elenchus for their relative truth or falsity. While it is nonetheless true – and indeed, is certainly a large part of my argument throughout this dissertation – that Plato found many of the pre-existing formulations of wisdom at the level both of formal poetry and of folk culture ultimately inadequate to express and represent the content of his philosophic project, the power of the sophia tradition and of quoting poetry that often had a gnomic quality was not, in Plato’s estimation, to be summarily discounted. I would add to Martin’s analysis that while Plato’s Socrates may well have broken the frame of the sages’ performative use of quotations from poetry, he could not have done so without employing the pre-existing discursive tools at his disposal. Creating the new discursive practice of philosophy necessarily rested upon Plato’s ability to employ the then-current modes of discourse. By doing this, Plato is able to call into question the truth status of these very modes of discourse. This is a crucial move in inventing the new genre of philosophy – a genre in which the wisdom tradition’s “power of emphatic, unidirectional self-presentation” no longer holds undivided sway.

Halliwell explains that one detects in Plato’s citations of poetry:

- a constant interplay between Plato’s willingness to reflect and even perpetuate, with modifications, the traditional power of poetic authority, and his need to submit this authority – by a whole repertoire of dramatic, linguistic, and conceptual means – to the standards of discourse and reason embodied in, and advocated by, his own philosophical writing.

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Thus, it is not simply a matter of summarily dismissing all of Plato’s build up to the first definition of justice as a faulty assemblage of progressing proverbs – a good number of which enjoy a poetic provenance – to be jettisoned once the dialogue gets down to the more serious business of elenctic inquiry.

Indeed, Socrates in fact commends in Book 2 “making falsehood like truth as much as possible, in such a way that we make it useful” (ἀφομοιοῦντες τῷ ἀληθεῖ τῷ ψευδός ὅτι μᾶλιστα, οὗτο χρήσιμον ποιοῦμεν, 382d2-3). Truth-telling is apparently not an entirely straightforward affair in either Socrates’ own discursive practice or poetic expression. Some sort of alliance seems to exist between the two.

Plato consistently demonstrates a keen awareness of the persuasive power of certain types of figurative speech, to which unquestionably belong proverbs – again many of which have their origin in poems. It would therefore be a mistake to reduce, as commentators on the Republic reaching as far back as Cicero have done, the citation of proverbs in this section of the dialogue to the overly simplistic generalization that (in the words of Jowett and Campbell) “poetical and proverbial expression . . . is better suited” to an elderly, good-natured gentleman like Cephalus, who possesses “the mannerism and garrulity of age, the love of anecdote and quotation” than to the younger men of a later generation, “deeply versed in the Sophistical and dialectical method . . . ” As we shall see, Plato’s sustained use of proverbs throughout his work demonstrates the considerable influence such figurative speech continues to hold over the

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172 For the proximity of Resp. 382d2-3 to Op. 27-8 see Belfiore 1985; Pratt 1993: 146-56.
discourse of all ages, not just that of the elderly, including even Sophistic and dialectic discursive practices.  

2.4. *Elenchus* Meets Proverb: Socrates and Polemarchus

Dismayed by Socrates’ attempt to dismantle with casuistry Cephalus’ definition of justice as the obligation to tell the truth and pay back one’s debts, Polemarchus comes to his father’s aid. He interrupts Socrates and announces that Cephalus’ definition is attributable in fact to the famed poet Simonides, thereby lending the weight of poetic authority to the phrase. Cephalus then departs to return to his religious offerings, unsettled no doubt by Socrates’ deft disassembly of what was surely an article of faith concerning the meaning of “acting justly.”

One should note that Polemarchus does *not* supply a definition of justice that would put to rest Socrates’ complaint that Cephalus’ “definition” of justice is in fact no definition (Οὗκ ἄρα οὖτος ὃρος ἐστὶν δικαιοσύνης, 331d2). Instead, Polemarchus paraphrases Simonides so that he is able to reformulate Cephalus’ definition with the result that it assumes the discursive shape of a proverb: “Just it is, to render to each what is owed him” (τὸ τὰ ὀφειλόμενα ἐκάστῳ ἀποδίδοναι δίκαιον ἐστι, 331e3-4). Crucially important, this phrase is not relevant to the discussion of justice as a line of poetry *per se* – indeed, it hardly qualifies as a line of poetry and is not found in any of the extant writings of Simonides – but rather as a sort of stand-alone maxim encapsulating a particular conception of what it means to be just. My interpretation supports Halliwell’s conjecture that “the treatment of a poetic text as logos is here perhaps accentuated by the manner

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174 Apposite to my observation here is Halliwell’s claim that there exists a “recurrent tension” throughout Plato’s oeuvre between the demands of “discursive reason” and “certain kinds of intensely heightened and transformed consciousness” such as “poetic experience” that are “not wholly amenable to rational analysis” and, moreover, that Plato’s writing evinces an “aspiration to find a way of unifying” such tensions (Halliwell 2011: 158-9).

175 *Resp.* 331c1-d3.
in which Polemarcus paraphrases, rather than strictly quot[es] from, Simonides.”  

Polemarchus’ paraphrase of Simonides’ purported saying constitutes a literal nonoppositional proverb such as “Honesty is the best policy” and “Virtue is its own reward,” as I explained in Chapter One.  

Polemarchus’ invocation of Simonides calls into service the Greek wisdom tradition given Simonides’ association with the legendary Seven Sages, ironically, by dint of Plato’s own portrayal in the Protagoras of Simonides’ incorporation into his poem (the Ode to Scopas) Sage Pittakos’ saying “It is hard to be good” (χαλεπὸν . . . ἔσθλὸν ἐμμέναι). Polemarchus’ citation of Simonides initially throws Socrates back on his heels, as he confesses that he is at pains to disbelieve (ἀπιστεῖν) such a “wise and godlike man” (σοφὸς γὰρ καὶ θεῖος, 331e5-6). It is tempting to read Socrates’ comment as ironic and, further, his subsequent dismantling of the gnome “Just it is, to render to each what is owed him” by elenctic questioning of Polemarchus (332a1-336a10) as evincing Plato’s univocal prioritizing of discursive enquiry over gnomic pronouncement. Morgan is no doubt correct in her observation that “authoritative gnomic or oracular utterances are useful only as a starting point for philosophic investigation and are not an end in themselves,” echoing Gregory Vlastos’ similar claim that Socrates refuses his interlocutors the ability to “quote some wise man’s answer – as Polemarchus does in Republic 1,” because he expects his interlocutors to defend any “wise man’s” answer as their own. But while it is true that proverbs are insufficient to serve by themselves as the foundational element

176 Halliwell 2000: 106.  
177 Dundes 1981: 52-3; Russo 1997: 52. See my discussion of the definitional parameters of “proverb” in Chapter 1.2.  
178 Prt. 339ff. We derive our knowledge of the Seven Sages and the associated tradition from a variety of sources, stretching from Hipponax through Stobaeus, but most of it is contained in Book 1 of Diogenes Laertius. See Martin 1993: 109.  
179 Morgan 2009: 552; Vlastos 1983: 34.
in Plato’s assembly of the Republic’s philosophic and reformist project, the larger Greek tradition of quoting lines from poetry and citing the poets and Sages is too powerful and too central to Greek cultural and linguistic practices to shed. That tradition needs to be reworked and reformed in the service of Plato’s own generic ends.

To assert otherwise would be to ignore what actually occurs during the elenches in which Polemarchus is compelled to defend his gnome, reputedly authored by Simonides. If the vision of philosophy championed by Plato’s Republic were truly one where discursive questioning forever trumped gnomic pronouncement, why then does Plato not simply depict Socrates discrediting Polemarchus’ proverb, author and all, Simonides be damned? Why should Socrates concern himself in the slightest about Simonides’ purported authorship?180 On the contrary, the elenctic process depicted in this section of the dialogue that leads to Polemarchus’ acquiescence hardly amounts to a thoroughly sound argument, much less an unequivocal renunciation of Simonides and his reputation for wisdom. As Halliwell remarks, “If anyone has been refuted here, then, it is surely Polemarchus, not Simonides . . .”181 Rather than condemning Simonides as a know-nothing poet, as one might expect (à la Socrates’ treatment of poets and their purported wisdom in the Apology182), Socrates takes measures to defend him and, by implication, the possible attribution of other gnomic statements to him. It is only the particular gnome in question, in addition to Simonides’ purported authorship as suggested by Polemarchus, that draws fire from Socrates.

After compelling Polemarchus by a series of somewhat dubious elenctic moves to concede that the maxim is not an adequate definition of justice and thus, could not possibly have

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180 Elsewhere in Plato’s oeuvre, Socrates professes disinterest in the sources and origins of propositions that exhibit wisdom, caring only for whether they prove to be true or not. See, e.g., Phdr. 275b3-c2.
been said by anyone wise (οὐκ ἦν σοφὸς ὁ ταῦτα εἰπόν, 335e4), Socrates not only upholds the reputation for wisdom ascribed to Simonides but brings him within the fold of the Seven Sages: “So we will fight, both you and I in common cause, if anyone claims that Simonides said this or Bias or Pittakos or any other of the wise and blessed men” (Μαχούμεθα ἄρα, ἦν δ' ἔγὼ, κοινῇ ἔγὼ τε καὶ σοῦ, ἢ ἄν τις αὐτὸ φη ἢ Σιμωνίδην ἢ Βίαντα ἢ Πιττακόν εἰρηκέναι ἢ τιν' ἄλλον τῶν σοφῶν τε καὶ μακαρίων ἄνδρῶν, 335e7-9).\footnote{Bias and Pittakos were, of course, counted among the ranks of the Seven Sages according to tradition. See Prt. 343a1-5.}

While the commentators are nearly unified in their confidence that here, too, Socrates displays razor-sharp irony in his use of the words “wise and blessed” (σοφῶν τε καὶ μακαρίων),\footnote{See, e.g., Jowett and Campbell 1894; Allan 1965; Adam 1980: ad loc.} such confidence would be better founded if (1) the sophia tradition and practice of quoting and citing poets and sages did not possess as strong a command over the Greek imagination, as Halliwell and others have demonstrated\footnote{See Halliwell 2000: 94-99; A.L. Ford 2010: 146-9; B. Graziosi 2010: 113; R. Hunter 2014: 7, 77-8.} and (2) the arguments Socrates uses to undermine Polemarchus were not so anemic, as the commentators themselves acknowledge.\footnote{See, e.g., Adam 1980 (p. 80, n. 32) who acknowledges that Socrates’ “argument is unsound and not intended to be serious . . .”}

With respect to the first point, Plato risks losing the confidence of his readership if his chief protagonist presents himself as condemning the wisdom tradition root and branch. As discussed previously, citation of poetic authority, much of which was formulated in proverbs and gnōmai, was one of the primary methods of persuasion. No matter how radical Plato might have been in his reformist vision, he could not – nor, I maintain, would he have wanted to – discredit altogether the entire rhetorical and educational framework of the Greek literary tradition, upon
which his own writing was necessarily based. In many ways our grasp of Plato and the purpose behind his prolific output is enhanced by emphasizing, in addition to the breadth and novelty of his philosophic thought, his extraordinary, nearly singular skill at bringing the whole of the Greek literary tradition to bear in the production of his oeuvre. Far better, then, for a writer of such capacity to depict his chief character as attributing a saying that he wishes to discredit to someone already discreditable in the eyes of his audience than to cast aspersions on the tradition itself and the most notable fonts of that tradition, the poets and legendary Sages, with whose company, for whatever reason, Plato associates Simonides in more than one dialogue. Socrates does exactly this when he hypothesizes that the author of Polemarchus’ ill-advised gnome must have been, instead of Simonides, “Periander or Perdiccas or Xerxes or Ismenias the Theban or some other rich man who had great power in his own conceit” (Περιάνδρου ἔτοιμα ἢ Περδίκκου ἢ Ἑρέξου ἢ Ἰσμηνίου τοῦ Θηβαίου ἢ τινος ἄλλου μέγα οἰκομένου δύνασθαι πλουσίου ἄνδρός, 336a5-7).

While I would agree with those scholars who see Plato as deftly undermining the presumption of the sophia tradition that wisdom necessarily resides in the gnômai of the poets and Sages, it would be too facile and reductive to interpret as ironic every laudatory statement

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187 This is not to ignore the strong condemnation of certain passages of poetry in Books 2-3, and the motif of poetry’s banishment from the ideal polis which reaches its culmination in Book 10. However, as I shall discuss in Chapters 3 and 5, Plato’s “critique” of poetry is far more nuanced than normally supposed. In addition, as I shall explain at length in Chapter 5, the curious “epilogue” to the discussion of poetry’s banishment in Book 10 casts severe doubt on whether there is even to occur any banishment of poetry.

188 Prt. 339ff; Resp. 331ff. In the Protagoras, Socrates goes to great lengths to defend Simonides against Protagoras’ assertion that Simonides’ Ode to Scopas is flawed because of inconsistency. Marian Demos explains that “Socrates’ reaction to Protagoras’ attack on Simonides can be understood as an attempt to preserve the stature of a traditional transmitter of παιδεία, in the case of Simonides, the poet educator for the χορός, and to reject the audacious claims of the sophist” (1999: 16).

189 Trans. Shorey.

190 See, e.g., Martin 1998: 124, who argues that Socrates and his deployment of the elenchus mark the endpoint of the Sages and the accompanying tradition of performative wisdom; Morgan 2009: 564, who observes that appeals to gnomic wisdom as an authority can be used to “cut off discussion” and, thus, a “worry about the authority of
by Socrates of that tradition and its practitioners\textsuperscript{191} – or, to put a finer point on what we mean by ironic, as making use solely of what Vlastos calls “simple irony” as opposed to “complex irony, a distinction which I shall address in the next section of this chapter. A better and more balanced interpretation is that Plato is advancing his characters’ exploration of what it means to be just by first hinging their discussion on a gnome attributed to a sage poet, then calling into question the propriety of such gnome, and finally re-attributing that gnome, which has been shown to embody anything but an adequate sense of justice, to any one of several other famous “wise” men, whom one would be hard pressed to exalt as standard bearers of justice. Periander was a famous despot, who ruthlessly cut down his rivals, as Herodotus records (5.92).\textsuperscript{192} Plato, thus, takes pains to exclude him from the ranks of the Seven Sages, as is apparent in Socrates’ naming Periander as the potential author of the fatally flawed gnome and in Protagoras’ wholesale omission of Periander’s name from the list of the Seven, in Plato’s dialogue that bears the famous sophist’s own name.\textsuperscript{193} Perdikkas was a Macedonian king whose son Archelaus was an unscrupulous tyrant, as detailed in Plato’s Gorgias.\textsuperscript{194} Xerxes was of course the hated monarch of Persia who attempted to invade Greece. And Ismenias was a Theban who was widely known to have received large bribes from the Persians. Moreover, as D.J. Allan notes, while Ismenias did not commit his misdeeds until after Socrates’ execution, “Plato, in the warmth of his disapproval,

\textsuperscript{191} Halliwell 2011: 158-9, rightly complains that the now “dominant consensus” in all branches of scholarship, not just the specialist literature, that engages with Plato (e.g., history of philosophy, literary criticism/theory, art theory, and aesthetics) views Plato as “uncompromisingly hostile” to poetic expression per se, thereby “ignor[ing] crucial signals of Platonic ambivalence toward poetry” – poetry which, again, is the source of a great number of gnômai and proverbs.

\textsuperscript{192} See Martin 1993: 111, for a more extensive discussion of Periander’s misdeeds.

\textsuperscript{193} Prt. 343a1-5.

\textsuperscript{194} Grg. 471a1-d2.
defies chronology. In other words, Plato playfully distorts the conventional notions of who should be considered Sages and just what sort of wisdom may or may not be contained in their reputedly “wise” maxims.

2.5. Riddling Gnômai and “Complex Irony”

A sensitive reader who (1) ponders whether Socratic irony is at play in the text and (2) considers the author’s use of proverbs will notice an interesting parallel: Both irony and proverb can (and often do) assume a riddling aspect. Dundes makes clear that it is common for a saying to have a “double life” as both a proverb and a riddle. For example, the Burmese phrase “The one who does not know about it may walk over it; the one who knows about it will dig it up and eat it” is a riddle when the “referent” (i.e., the “answer”) is a potato or any crop which grows underground and a proverb when it applies to a situation where someone is ignorant of something valuable that is nearby but not readily apparent. Context, as is the case with all proverbs, determines the precise meaning.

Similarly, context is crucial for determining whether a speaker is using irony, if we mean by irony the modern definition, “The use of words to express something other than, and especially the opposite of [their] literal meaning” (Webster’s) and not what Vlastos maintains was irony’s initial sense in Greek literature, “the intention to deceive.” Vlastos gives the example of a criminal “fence” trying to pawn off a ring he knows to be a fake: He is not being

195 Allan 1965: 92.
197 See Chapter 1.2. The Fante, a subgroup of the Akan people, in Ghana and the Ivory Coast have a proverb that conveys this very sense: “There is no proverb without the situation” (Finnegan 1981: 27; Lardinois 1995: 1).
198 Vlastos explains that the modern definition of irony accords with Quintilian’s contrarium ei quod dicitur intelligendum est (Inst. Orat. 9.22.44) but not with the Greek meaning that, per Vlastos, existed before Plato’s depiction of Socrates resulted in a change to that definition. Originally, eirôneia meant “the intention to deceive,” “dissimulation” (L.S.J., s.v. 1). See Vlastos 1991: 21-44.
ironic when he says to a jewelry dealer, “Can I interest you in a diamond ring?” He is simply acting with the intent to deceive; otherwise, lying would be a standard form of irony. In contrast, he would be ironic if he were to say the same thing to his ten-year old daughter who might be wise enough to know the truth but – and this is the crucial point – would have to riddle out for herself the meaning of her father’s statement, its irony, that if the ring really were a priceless diamond, her father would not be about to hand it over to a her.

The history of proverbs masquerading as riddles enjoys an illustrious provenance, epitomized, as they are, most famously in the Oracle at Delphi’s enigmatic pronouncements. Indeed, it is hard to imagine two more famous or more puzzled-over gnomic maxims than “Know thyself” and “Nothing to excess.” So too, the task of detecting when one speaks with irony can be just as puzzling. To take a famous example from Shakespeare, when precisely should the audience watching a performance of *Julius Caesar* understand Marc Antony’s repeated use of the phrase “And Brutus is an honourable man” during his funeral oration for Caesar to have become ironic? In other words, when are we to understand that Antony is now confident that he has swayed the assembled crowd to his side regarding the assassination of Caesar and away from the crowd’s previous belief in Brutus’ position resulting from Brutus’ own prior speech and thus can now use the suggestive phrase ironically? Similarly, how can the reader – and in particular, the commentators referenced above – be sure that Socrates is ironic when he describes Simonides as *sophos*, not once but several times, and further, when he includes Simonides, Bias, and Pittakos among the ranks of the “wise and blessed men” (τῶν σοφῶν τε καὶ μακαρίων ἄνδρῶν)?

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199 Scholars in recent years have begun to reassess their former propensity to find a great many instances of Socrates speaking ironically throughout the dialogues. See, e.g., Wolfsdorf 2007: 184, who insists that “Socrates is rarely verbally ironic” and that the scholarly tendency to see irony often at work reflects a faulty hermeneutics that prioritizes realism and intertextual consistency over imagism and dramaturgy: “Plato takes liberties in his treatment
I suggest that proverb mirrors irony and irony, proverb by virtue of their shared riddling component and further, that this mirroring phenomenon is on especial display in this section of the dialogue where Polemarchus’ gnome of purported Simonidean origin is put to elenctic challenge. Let us return to the question of whether a reader might be justified in reading Socrates’ statement that “it is difficult to disbelieve Simonides because he is a wise and godlike man” (Σιμώνιδη γε οὐ ρᾴδιον ἀπιστεῖν – σοφὸς γὰρ καὶ θεῖος ἀνήρ, 331e5-6) as ironic, notwithstanding my earlier arguments to the contrary.200 Following Vlastos’ reasoning, the issue cannot be resolved simply by our belief that Socrates is, in effect, pulling Polemarchus’ leg when he describes Simonides as “wise and godlike.” The text must provide us credible grounds for believing that Polemarchus himself, too, recognizes the irony or is at least capable of understanding, after riddling through the statement, that Socrates does not mean what he says.201

If Socrates is not being ironic, then he is either lying to Polemarchus, as is Vlastos’ criminal hypothetical “fence,” or he is telling the truth. There is also a fourth possibility, namely

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200 See my discussion in Chapter 2.4.

201 Iakovos Vasiliou 1999 would likely disagree with this statement, given his belief (p. 465) that “Vlastos’ stricture that the irony must be understandable to the interlocutor is unreasonably strong.” However, I find that Vasiliou’s notion of “conditional irony” (a conditional with an antecedent that attributes knowledge to an interlocutor is used Ironically by Socrates if the reader has good reason to believe that Socrates does not believe the antecedent) risks minimizing the importance that dialogic exchange holds for Plato’s dialogues to the extent that it appears to prioritize what Vasiliou calls “the outer frame,” i.e., the relation between the text and reader over, “the inner frame,” i.e., the relation between Socrates and his interlocutors. Vasiliou is no doubt correct that an interlocutor might well end up being completely deceived by Socrates’ “conditional irony” (e.g., Euthyphro by Socrates’ conditional that if Euthyphro knows what piety is, Socrates must become his pupil, Euthphr. 4e4-5a4) while the reading audience would nevertheless recognize the irony. However, the interpretive gain offered by such a reading is offset by the resulting devaluation of the possibility of meaningful dialogic exchange between the two characters (i.e., Socrates and his interlocutor) if some potential does not exist on the part of the interlocutor to discern that Socrates is in fact speaking ironically. Indeed, Socrates’ interlocutors are potentially reduced to little more than straw men under such a reading, and we are left with a Socrates who is simply “winking” at Plato’s reading audience. While this may occur at times in the dialogues (and, indeed, as I shall argue in Chapter 2.6, does in fact occur during Socrates’ exchange with Thrasymachus, but during Socrates’ direct narration to the reader), any over-reliance on what is, in effect, a “Socrates-winking-at-the-audience” interpretation risks undermining the presumption that meaningful dialogue can and does occur in Plato’s dialogues.
that Socrates is employing what Vlastos calls “complex irony.” In such a reading Socrates would mean both that Simonides is wise and is not wise, for in complex irony, per Vlastos, “what is said both is and isn’t what is meant: its surface content is meant to be true in one sense, false in another.”

But no matter which of the four scenarios Plato’s text depicts – i.e., (1) Socrates is entirely serious when he calls Simonides “wise and godlike,” (2) he is lying to Polemarchus, (3) he is being ironic, (4) he is using “complex irony” – both Polemarchus and the reader will have to riddle out the meaning of Socrates’ statement, if irony is at all a potential interpretation. This is especially true if “complex irony” is a possibility, as then we must puzzle over how Socrates can believe both that Simonides is in some sense wise and in another unwise.

We are in a position similar to that of Socrates himself in the Apology, where he is compelled to ponder the Delphic Oracle’s enigmatic utterance that no one is wiser than Socrates:

“What it the world does the god mean and why ever does he riddle (αινίττεται) so? . . . Whatever does he mean by saying that I am the wisest? For he clearly isn’t lying. For that would not be right of him.”

While one might find it difficult to defend the god’s pronouncement that “no one is wiser [than Socrates]” (ἀνείλεν οὖν ἡ Πυθία μηδένα σοφότερον εἶναι, Ap. 21a6-7) as a genuine proverb – even though one could certainly imagine repeated use of the phrase over time resulting in a proverb à la “You don’t tug on Superman’s cape” – it seems undeniable that the task of riddling over a proverb mirrors the task of riddling over a potentially ironic statement.

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203 Ap. 21b3-7: Τί ποτε λέγει ὁ θεός, καὶ τί ποτε αἰνίττεται; . . . τί οὖν ποτε λέγει φάσκων ἐμὲ σοφότατον εἶναι; οὖ γὰρ δῆτον φεύγεται γε· οὐ γὰρ θέμις αὐτῶ. Following Adam and Adam’s lead in seeing a possible “allusion to some form of proverbial speech resembling that in Theognis” in Socrates’ claim in the Protagoras that the “wisest appears more beautiful” (τὸ σοφότατον κάλλιον φαίνεσθαι, Prt. 309c11-12), one is tempted to see something similar here in the Apology, when Socrates rephrases the Delphic Oracle’s σοφότατον as σοφότατον. See Adam and Adam 1940: ad loc.

204 This is not to say that all proverbs appear immediately to be riddling upon first encounter – although certainly some proverbs are more opaque than others, such as “A friend in need is a friend in deed” which has multiple meanings, as Kirschenblatt-Gimblett 1981: 113-14, discloses. Indeed, as I have attempted to show in this chapter,
The text at this particular point in the Republic does not provide immediate evidence that Polemarchus understands Socrates to be ironic. There is nothing even close to what occurs in the Phaedrus, when after Socrates describes Phaedrus’ recitation of Lysias’ speech as so “miraculous” (Δαιμονίως) that he was quite “overcome” (ἐκπλαγήναι) by it, Phaedrus instantly accuses Socrates of being ironic: “So you see fit to make fun of it?” (οὕτω δὴ δοκεῖ παίζειν; 234d1-7). Here, by contrast, Socrates follows up his professing Simonides to be “wise” with an affirmative declaration about the poet and the gnome attributed to him: “Clearly he didn’t mean this, the very thing that we were just talking about, the return of something lent to anyone whosoever demands it, even if he’s not thinking straight.” Of course, this statement does not foreclose the possibility that Socrates might have been speaking ironically (either with “simple” or “complex” irony), but we do not yet have enough textual support to say one way or another. Now it is true that Socrates’ statement which falls just before the declaration might be taken as continuing some type of irony contained in Socrates’ assertion that Simonides is wise – i.e., “Perhaps you understand, Polemarchus, whatever in the world [Simonides] means, but I don’t” – but, again, there is no textual support for any firm conclusion. At best, if we are to foreclose the possibilities that Socrates is either categorically lying or categorically telling the truth when he says these particular words, the most we might surmise is that we have a statement

the Republic’s opening conversation between Cephalus and Socrates amounts to a demonstration that one way of reaching across a discursive divide is to commence with common sayings, whose meanings – at least initially, on their face – seem apparent to everyone in the discussion. And yet, the deeper one delves into what any one saying might really mean in a particular context and given a particular usage, the more the meaning of even relatively unambiguous proverbs must be riddled through. This is particularly true when one subjects proverbs to philosophic scrutiny as Socrates does here with the gnome attributed to Simonides. See Kirschenblatt-Gimblett 1981:115-118, who provides a fascinating description of all the varied and numerous meanings the relatively straightforward proverb, “Money talks,” can assume, depending upon context and usage.

205 Trans. Fowler.
206 Resp. 331e8-332a1: δήλων γὰρ ὅτι οὐ τοῦτο λέγει, ὅπερ ἄρτι ἐλέγεις, τὸ τινὸς παρακαταθεμένου τι ὅτι οὐ μὴ σωφρόνως ἀπαιτοῦντι ἀποδίδοναι.
207 Resp. 331e6-8: τοῦτο μέντοι ὅτι ποτὲ λέγει, σὺ μὲν, ὦ Πολέμαρχε, ἵσως γιγνόσκεις, ἐγώ δὲ ἀγνοῶ.
akin to a modern-day trial lawyer who adopts a folksy manner in displaying a sort of complex irony before a jury: “Ladies and gentlemen of the jury, perhaps my opponent is capable of understanding so subtle an argument as his client’s position in this case, but it’s beyond the ken of a simple country lawyer like myself.” The statement is false modesty, but it is not entirely untrue. In other words neither Socrates nor my hypothetical “country lawyer” considers the particular argument/proposition at issue to be one that is right or appropriate and in that sense, then, it lies beyond their respective capacities for comprehension. We must riddle out further Socrates’ exact position with respect to Simonides’ own riddling gnome about justice.

Now, it is certainly the case that Socrates’ inquiries about the meaning of the line attributed to Simonides have contributed mightily to the line’s opacity. What at first seemed relatively clear to Polemarchus has now been thrown into doubt by Socrates’ line of inquiry. Would it really be “just” to return weapons borrowed to a lender who is no longer sane? Socrates has made the line riddling by virtue of his queries. Such a move, of course is entirely consistent with Socrates’ practice of inducing aporia on the part of his interlocutors concerning subjects whose meaning they thought they had fully grasped before being subjected to Socrates’ elenchus, as we see occur throughout Plato’s “Socratic” dialogues. However, Socrates could not have achieved this inducement of perplexity, if the line itself was not subject to multiple interpretations, as many proverbs are, depending upon the specific context and usage. Indeed, it comes as no surprise that for the Greeks there was a close relation between nomoi and gnômai, given the ever-present problem in legal jurisprudence of applying what might at first seem relatively straightforward legal prescripts to new and unforeseen situations.208

208 For example, does the relatively unambiguous First Amendment of the United States Constitution – “Congress shall make no law . . . abridging the freedom of speech . . .” – allow Nazis to march in an area inhabited by many Jewish survivors of the Holocaust? Both state and federal courts “riddled” over this question in the mid-1970’s until
After Polemarchus clarifies in response to Socrates’ elenctic inquiry that Simonides meant by his gnomic statement to invoke the traditional, popular Greek moral code of “helping one’s friends and harming one’s enemies” (332a9-10), Socrates’ response reveals even more clearly the parallel between riddling irony and riddling proverb: “So it’s likely then that Simonides riddled, in the manner of the poets, as to what is the just” (Ἡνίξατο ἀρα . . . ὡς ἔοικεν, ὁ Σιμωνίδης ποιητικῶς τὸ δίκαιον ὡς ἔη, 332b9-c1). Adam sees further irony at work here, claiming Socrates is not “serious” and certainly “knew” what Simonides “meant to say”. Assuming that Adam is correct, Polemarchus must then be supposed to have to puzzle through for himself Socrates’ brand of irony. Otherwise it is not irony per se but outright dishonesty by Socrates, which would make no sense in this particular context. According to this reading, Plato is depicting one of his characters grappling with the challenge of solving the riddle of Socrates’ irony (leaving aside entirely, for the moment, the reader’s own struggle with interpreting this complex exchange!) and moreover, this irony is on display as the two men attempt to decipher the precise meaning of a proverbial maxim that has been described – at least on the surface of the text – as “a riddle” written in “the manner of the poets.” Irony and proverb are conjoined in their mutual riddling component.

In other words, to the extent Plato’s character of Socrates makes use of irony and especially that type of irony which Vlastos deems “complex,” the riddling aspect of such irony parallels – and in some sense might even be said to be conjoined with – the riddling quality also present in some of the proverbs and gnômai that Socrates and his interlocutors encounter and which they, in the course of their discussion, begin to reformulate in the service of Plato’s larger

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209 Adam 1980: ad loc.
project of discursive reform. Vlastos gives as examples of Socrates’ use of complex irony – i.e., instances where what is said both is and isn’t what is meant – Socrates’ famous twin disavowals of knowledge and teaching. According to Vlastos,

Each of these is intelligible only as a complex irony. When he professes to have no knowledge he both does and does not mean what he says. He wants it to assure his readers that in the moral domain there is not a single proposition he claims to know with certainty. But in another sense of “knowledgeable,” where the word refers to justified true belief – justifiable through the peculiarly Socratic method of elenctic argument – there are many propositions he does claim to know. So too, I would argue, Socrates’ parallel disavowal of teaching should be understood as a complex irony. In the conventional sense, where to “teach” is simply to transfer knowledge from a teacher’s to a learner’s mind, Socrates means what he says: that sort of teaching he does not do. But in the sense which he would give to “teaching” – engaging would-be learners in elenctic argument to make them aware of their own ignorance and enable them to discover for themselves the truth the teacher had held back – in that sense of “teaching” Socrates would want to say that he is a teacher, the only true teacher; his dialogue with his fellows is meant to have, and does have, the effect of evoking and assisting their own effort at moral self-improvement.  

Of course, Plato does not spell out the precise interpretation that Vlastos gives to these twin disavowals by Socrates. Socrates’ interlocutors – and, by extension, Plato’s readers – must puzzle out for themselves just what Socrates means, as with an enigmatic proverb. Indeed, if one could begin to treat the Delphic oracle’s cryptic “no one to be wiser [than Socrates]” (μηδένα σοφότερον εἶναι) as a proverb in its own right (as suggested earlier), such phrase, such proverb, becomes emblematic of, in Vlastos’ words, this “mysterious, enigmatic figure” of Socrates, whose words and deeds, whose very life, have proved to be an engaging puzzle for generations

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210 Vlastos 1991: 32. While numerous scholars have contested Vlastos’ conceptions of Socratic irony in recent years, even Vlastos’ critics acknowledge that “Vlastos’s work on irony [is] the definitive word on Socratic irony for many Plato scholars . . .” Vasiliou 1999: 457 (quoting Gordon 1996: 131). In Chapter 4.3, I will offer a reading that looks beyond Vlastos to work by philosopher Jonathan Lear (and Richard Bernstein’s treatment of Lear’s ideas) that draws from Kierkegaard’s writings on Socratic irony in my reading of a section from Book 4. For now, however, I find Vlastos’s concept of “complex irony” more useful than other alternatives – e.g., Vasiliou’s notions of “conditional” and “reverse” irony (Vasiliou 1999 and 2002) which, to my thinking, are subsumed within Vlastos’s complex irony – in explaining what is at play in this exchange between Socrates and Polemarchus in Book 1.
of thinkers.\textsuperscript{211} Does Socrates really believe Simonides to be “wise”? Is he truly confused about what was meant by the quotation attributed by Polemarchus to Simonides (and the subsequent gloss on it of “helping friends and harming enemies”)? And if he is being ironic, then it is the task of both Polemarchus and ourselves, Plato’s readers, to riddle out just what Socrates means. And we must do this, like Polemarchus, in the overall context of interpreting a gnomic statement about justice.

I want to be clear that there is much to commend for taking Socrates at his word about Simonides’ purported wisdom. But to the extent that irony may be present, without clear textual support that those present with Socrates understand their role in the joke – i.e., to be fooled with in order to make Socrates’ intended meaning apparent – Plato’s text requires that the characters and Plato’s readers riddle over the irony in order to comprehend the larger significance, much as Vlastos has done with respect to Socrates’ disavowals of knowledge and teaching.

Whether speaking with irony or not, Socrates conjectures that what Simonides had in mind (διενοεῖτο) when he riddled (ἡνίξατο) in a poetic (ποιητικῶς) manner about justice, was the “return of what is fitting to each” (τὸ προσῆκον ἐκάστῳ ἀποδιδόναι), and “this he labeled that which is owed (τὸ τῶ ὀφειλόμενα ἐκάστῳ ἀποδιδόναι δίκαιον ἔστι, 331e3-4) and Polemarchus’ later gloss on it, “To help friends and harm enemies” (Τὸ τοῦ φίλου ᾧ ἐν ποιεῖν καὶ τοὺς ἤθεροὺς κακῶς, 332d7), Socrates’ hypothesized re-articulation of Simonides’ original definition of justice has, again, the discursive shape of a gnome. As Morgan notes in a separate context, the use of the neuter (τὸ) has the effect of turning a statement into a

\textsuperscript{211} Vlastos 1991: 37.
kind of maxim or adage. As we reflect on whether Socrates is being ironic (including where and when specifically in this passage of the dialogue), the two characters work through the meaning of the gnomic statement attributed to Simonides by formulating their own gnomic statements which are themselves reformulations of the purportedly Simonidean original. Again, irony and proverb are seemingly conjoined by virtue of Plato’s literary artistry in their shared proximity to riddle.

Then, just like a seasoned trial attorney who is thoroughly skilled in the art of cross-examination, Socrates employs a series of leading questions to propel Polemarchus toward ever more morally-repugnant variations on the original gnome such as “Of whatsoever someone is a skilled guard, so, too, is he a skilled thief” (Ὅτου τις ἄρα δεινός φύλαξ, τούτου καὶ φῶρ δεινός, 334a5) and “If the just man is skilled at guarding money, so too is he skilled at stealing it” (Εἰ ἄρα ὁ δίκαιος ἀργύριον δεινός φυλάττειν, καὶ κλέπτει δεινός, 334a6-7). Following Dundes’ analysis, these phrases would qualify as “oppositional proverbs,” the form of which is of considerable antiquity, as one can see in the ancient Sumerian proverb, “Who builds like a lord, lives like a slave / Who builds like a slave, lives like a lord.” These proverbs culminate finally in Socrates coining two outrageous legomena, “So, the just man is a certain type of thief” (Κλέπτης ἄρα τις ὁ δίκαιος, 334a10) and “Justice is a certain kind of thievery, albeit for the benefit of friends and the harm of enemies” (ἡ δικαιοσύνη . . . κλεπτική τις εἶναι, ἐπ’ ὑφελία μέντοι τῶν φίλων καὶ ἐπὶ βλάβη τῶν ἐχθρῶν, 334b3-5), both of which enjoy a close proximity to literal nonoppositional proverbs. While there is no doubt that Socrates is not seriously proposing that these statements adequately represent justice, the label of irony (whether simple

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212 Morgan 2009: 555, n. 19 (citing Adam and Adam 1940) in reference to Plato’s *Protagoras*, 309c11-12.

213 Dundes 1981: 55; See also Russo 1997: 52.

or complex) also does not seem to fit very well these or any of Socrates’ prior, troubling reformulations of Simonides’ purported original. Rather, such reworkings are equivalent to any good trial lawyer’s demonstration to the witness being cross-examined that an initial position the witness articulated – in Polemarchus’ case, the original gnome he attributed to Simonides – leads in fact to absurd results, results antithetical to the original position. Here, the results are in the form of ever more preposterous proverbs.

To drive the point home, Socrates then attributes the outrageous maxims to none other than Homer: “You likely learned this from Homer, for that man reveres Odysseus’ maternal grandfather, Autolycus, and also reports that he surpassed all men in both thievery and perjury.”215 Here one can safely maintain that Socrates speaks with some type of irony, given Polemarchus’ immediate acknowledgement that he “no longer knows what he was talking about.”216 And with this admission, both he and the reader glimpse how wrongly attributing ill-conceived adages to poets, sages, and other cultural authority figures, in conformity with the Greek wisdom tradition and the concomitant practice of memorizing and quoting poetry, can have unintended and sometimes disastrous results. One must approach and practice the traditions of *sophia* and poetic quotation and citation with all due care. Philosophic examination of lines should occur before one quotes them. Socrates presses the point, telling Polemarchus that it will certainly turn out to be the case that “the just man is a certain kind of thief” (Κλέπτης ἄρα τις ὁ δίκαιος) if one follows the definition of justice “according to you and according to Homer and according to Simonides” (κατὰ σὲ καὶ καθ’ Ὄμηρον καὶ κατὰ Σιμωνίδην), namely, that justice consists of acting for the “benefit of friends and for the harm of enemies” (ἐπ’ ὑφελία μέντοι τῶν

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215 334a10-b3: καὶ κινδυνεύεις παρ’ Ὄμηρου μεμαθηκέκναι αυτό· καὶ γὰρ ἐκείνος τὸν τοῦ Ὅδυσσεώς πρὸς μητρὸς πάππον Αὐτόλυκον ἀγαπᾶ τε καὶ φησίν αὐτῶν πάντας ἀνθρώπους κεκάσθαι κλεπτοσύνη θ’ ὄρκω τε.

216 334b7: οὐκέτι οἶδα ἐγώ χείρ της ἐλεγον.
In other words, you had best be careful about whom you quote and what precisely you quote them as saying in their poetry, as their purported sayings may evolve into guiding proverbs and maxims that, in turn, may substantially influence people’s lives and behavior, for better or for worse. Plato draws our attention to the power of language like no other ancient author.

Duly chastened, Polemarchus nevertheless persists in his argument that justice must have something to do with helping friends and harming enemies. After Socrates sidetracks Polemarchus for a moment with a series of nettlesome questions about how some people who seem to be friends are in fact enemies and vice versa, and Polemarchus, in turn, is forced to clarify his position to be, in effect, that one justly helps only those who both seem to be and are in fact friends (with the same principle applying to harming enemies), Socrates posits a moral principle: harming anyone, even enemies, renders them worse with respect to that specific virtue that is a distinctly human quality: justice. Socrates puts it thus: “By necessity, my friend, is it the case that men who are harmed become more unjust” (Καὶ τοὺς βλαπτομένους ἄρα, ὦ φίλε, τῶν ἀνθρώπων ἀνάγκη ἀδίκωτέρους γίγνεσθαι, 335c6-7).

While this statement does not meet the criteria of a proverb per se, it draws ever closer to the famous proverbial maxim that Paul would in time articulate in his Epistle to the Romans: “Recompense no man evil for evil” (μηδενὶ κακὸν ἀντὶ κακοῦ ἀποδίδοντες, 12:17).

Although Plato does not reformulate the prior, ill-conceived proverb, “Just it is, to render to each what is owed him” (τὸ τὰ ὀφειλόμενα ἐκάστῳ ἀποδίδοναι δίκαιον ἐστι, 331e3-4) to the degree Paul does (e.g., note the use in both proverbs of a form derived from the verb, ἀποδίδωμι “to pay back”), Socrates does offer this final formulation of the

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217 Socrates was famous in antiquity for the principle that one should never do wrong under any circumstances, as famously articulated in Plato’s Crito (49a5-6): οὐδαμῶς τὸ γε ἄδικεν οὕτω ἄγαθον οὕτω καλὸν. Of course, in the Crito, the definition of justice is taken for granted and not a source of dispute as in the Republic.

218 King James trans.
legomenon: “It is not the function of the just man to do harm, neither to friend nor anyone whomsoever, but the function of his opposite, the unjust man” (Οὐκ ἄρα τοῦ δικαίου βλάπτειν ἔργον, ὦ Πολέμαρχε, οὔτε φίλον οὔτε ἄλλον οὐδένα, ἄλλα τοῦ ἑναντίου, τοῦ ἀδίκου, 335d11-12). This phrase appears to fall within the parameters of what Dundes calls a “multi-descriptive element proverb” in which both topics and the comments on them are members of contrastive pairs, such as “Man proposes, but God disposes.” Here, the “unjust man” (ἀδίκος), whose purpose or “function” (ἔργον) is “to do harm” (βλάπτειν) is juxtaposed with the “just man” (δίκαιος), whose function is the precise “opposite” (ἑναντίον).

With this reformulated proverb, Plato depicts Socrates putting the lie to the fiction that was the original proverb – one attributed (falsely, as it now seems) by Polemarchus to sage Simonides. Indeed, Socrates makes it abundantly clear that no wise man could have said such a thing (335e1-5):

Εἰ ἄρα τὰ ὀφειλόμενα ἐκάστῳ ἀποδίδοναι φησίν τις δίκαιον εἶναι, τούτῳ δὲ δὴ νοεῖ ἄντω τοῖς μὲν ἐχθροῖς βλάπτην ὀφειλέσθαι παρὰ τοῦ δικαίου ἄνδρος, τοῖς δὲ φίλοις ὀφελείαν, οὐκ ἦν σοφὸς ὁ ταῦτα εἰπών. οὐ γὰρ ἠληθῆ ἔλεγεν· οὐδαμοῦ γὰρ δίκαιον οὐδένα ἡμῖν ἐφάνη ὃν βλάπτειν.

So if someone says that it is just to render to each what is owed him, and he has in mind by this that harm is owed to enemies and benefit to friends by a just man, it was no wise man who said such a thing. For he was not speaking the truth. Because in no way does it appear just to us to do harm to anyone whomsoever.

Instead, we are led to conclude that the fatally-flawed proverb must have been the handiwork of men hardly enjoying a reputation for justice – i.e., Periander (now summarily removed from the ranks of the Seven Sages), Perdiccas, Xerxes, or Ismenias (anachronistically transported by Plato into this dialogue). Under no circumstances should we be quoting such men’s phrases, their proverbs, nor have these historical figures any rightful place in the Greek

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wisdom tradition as do Simonides, Bias and Pittacus, whose own proverbs are presumably worth citation.²²⁰ Plato has, in the person of Socrates, alerted the reader to the importance of exercising the Greek practice of quotation and citation of the poets and their sayings in a morally responsible fashion, with an eye toward justice.

It would be absurd to believe that Socrates is in any way ironic when he states that “it was no wise man who said these things” (οὐκ ἦν σοφὸς ὁ ταῦτα εἰπὼν, 335e4), that is, that justice consists of helping friends and harming enemies. This is precisely the formulation of justice that Socrates wants to discredit. So is it at all possible that Socrates is actually being ironic when in the very next breath he argues that we should not attribute, therefore, the misguided maxim to “Simonides or Bias or Pittacus or anyone else of the wise and blessed men” (Σιμωνίδην ἢ Βίαντα ἢ Πιττακὸν . . . ἢ τιν’ ἄλλον τῶν σοφῶν τε καὶ μακαρίων ἄνδρῶν, 335e8-8), as the commentators maintain? I would argue that to read Socrates’ statement as simple irony – i.e., that he actually means the opposite of what he says – would make little or no sense in the context. It would undermine what Socrates has accomplished: the discrediting of Polemarchus’ flawed proverb, one that Socrates has shown was wrongly attributed to Simonides. However, as we and Polemarchus riddle our way through Socrates’ statement, we may come to conclude that Socrates is, in fact, exercising a type of complex irony as described by Vlastos. He means that, on one level, Simonides and Bias and Pittacus are most certainly wise, as they represent a longstanding tradition of Greek wisdom and citing poetic authority, from which Plato’s own writing necessarily arises and of which it makes continual use. Poetry is compelling, for all the power that figurative language necessarily brings to bear over the reader’s imagination. Plato is not about to unilaterally disarm himself of one of the most compelling discursive practices

²²⁰ Resp. 335e1-336a3.
available to the Greek world of his time. Accordingly, Plato does not, in his dialogues, simply and solely depict uniform demonstrations by Socrates of the *elenchus*, albeit with his standard literary virtuosity. The underlying literary tradition and discursive practices of which Simonides, Bias, and Pittacus are part have too much to offer Plato’s own writing to be discarded entirely. However, in another sense, the traditional poets, Sages, and other assorted, literary and cultural authority figures are certainly not wise, to the extent that the *sophia* tradition and the practice of citing poetic authority (such as their own) in support of a speaker’s arguments and positions are subject to misuse and abuse and are in urgent need of reform. Indeed, such discursive practices are a fundamental part of the larger politico-discursive crisis that I maintain lies at the core of Plato’s literary and philosophic concerns. We shall see the alleged culpability of the poets in this regard become much more apparent in Books 2, 3, and 10 of the *Republic*.

2.6. “Talking Trash” and Telling Old Wives’ Tales with Thrasymachus

One of the more dramatic entrances in literature occurs next, when the arch-sophist Thrasymachus violently interrupts Socates’ and Polemarchus’ disquisition on what would constitute a proper maxim for justice. Thrasymachus is an ethical skeptic in the extreme, a man whom the philosopher Bernard Williams deems an “immoralist,” representing the view that attachments to conventional notions of ethical values, like justice, are irrational and inferior to “self-interested strategies.” Another of Plato’s characters who fits this mold is Callicles in the *Gorgias*. Such men epitomize a type of brutal Realpolitik – indeed, a Realpolitik which, in Williams’ words, “kept the empire together by ruthless and unprincipled means” notwithstanding “the aspirations of Periclean democracy at home.”²²¹ Few thinkers in the history of philosophy

²²¹ Williams 2006: 97. See also Adam 1980: 25: “‘Might is Right’ was the only argument by which the existence of the Athenian empire could be defended before the tribunal of Greek public opinion . . .”
rival Plato in the scope of his attempts both to engage seriously with such cutthroat perceptions of the political world (and, by extension, their adherents) and to counter them with persuasion and force.222

While Socrates’ encounter with Thrasymachus has understandably generated much commentary over the centuries, we may gain new purchase on the text by viewing the exchange as a continuing struggle – a struggle that I maintain is apparent throughout the whole of Book 1 – over the formulation of proverbs. In other words, we are witnessing a contest over proverbial expression that accurately and compellingly conveys the meaning of the point of focus. At stake is the formulation of a pithy saying that will (1) adequately capture the “right” meaning of justice (i.e., “right” according to the prevailing party’s definition) and (2) express it in a manner captivating and memorable enough to retain lasting relevance.

The contentiousness of this battle over how to render language into compelling expression of a subject, as well as the magnitude of the stakes, is reflected in the vivid language Plato employs to describe Thrasymachus’ dramatic entrance into the conversation (336b1-6):

Καὶ ὁ Θρασύμαχος πολλάκις μὲν καὶ διαλεγομένων ἦμον μεταξὺ ὀρμα 
ἀντιλαμβάνεσθαι τοῦ λόγου, ἔπειτα ὑπὸ τῶν παρακαθημένων διεκολύετο 
βουλομένων διακούσαι τὸν λόγον· ὡς δὲ διεπαυσάμεθα καὶ ἔγὼ ταῦτ’ εἶπον, 
οὐκέτι ἡσυχίαν ἦγεν, ἀλλὰ συστρέψας ἐκεῖνον ὀσπερ θηρίον ἦκεν ἔφ’ ἡμᾶς ὡς 
διαρπασόμενος.

And Thrasymachus repeatedly was attempting to interrupt the conversation all the while we were talking but had been prevented by the others who were sitting, wanting to hear the end of the argument. As we were wrapping things up and I finished my comments, he was no longer able to contain himself, but having coiled himself up like a wild beast, he hurled himself at us as though he were about to tear us limb from limb.

Aside from impressing upon the reader a near-visceral sense of the boiling rage represented by a figure like Thrasymachus, a man who espouses the ethically bankrupt

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222 Williams 2006: 97.
“immoralist” position, Plato’s evocative language here serves as a template for how would-be stylists of figurative expression might convey a memorable and riveting image (even though nothing here reaches proverb status). Indeed, Demetrius would go on to appropriate Plato’s imagistic language in his manual On Style to describe how a writer should handle his linguistic tools: “Just as wild beasts coil themselves before they attack, the spoken word should also draw itself taut to form a sort of coil for forceful impact” (ὥσπερ τὰ θηρία συστρέφαντα ἕαντα μάχεται. τοιαύτη τις ἄν εἰη συστροφή καὶ λόγου καθάπερ ἐσπειραμένου πρός δεινότητα, Eloc. 8).

After noisily barging into their midst (eiς τὸ μέσον φθεγξάμενος), Thrasymachus bluntly and summarily dismisses the ideas expressed by a now thoroughly “frightened” (δείσαντας) Socrates and Polemarchus as just so much “garbage” or “nonsense” (φλυαρία) and accuses the men of “playing the fool” (εὐθίζεσθαι, 336b7-c2). For Thrasymachus, Socrates’ and Polemarchus’s efforts to craft a proverb encompassing nothing less than the meaning of justice is drivel: they have been “talking nonsense” – or to use the English slang expression, “talking trash.”

Thrasymachus now makes his own demands on how the assembled party should proceed in formulating a proper gnome for justice (336c6-d4):

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223 See Purves 2019: 97-103, who, using examples from Homer, Pindar, and Henry James, reveals how the imagery of beasts in a coil or crouch and ready to leap is strongly evocative of a “prelude to . . . some as yet unspecified event around the corner.” In her analysis of Odysseus’ final action at the close of the Odyssey – “after coiling himself up, he swooped forward like a high-flying eagle” (οἴμησεν δὲ ἄλεις ὧς τ’ αἰετός ὑψιετήεις, 24.538) – Purves reveals that “Demetrius uses the same verb (συστρέφω: to gather oneself together in preparing to spring) that the exegetical scholia use to explain ἄλεις . . . ” (p. 100, emphasis in original).

224 The Cambridge Dictionary provides two meanings for the expression “talk trash”: (1) “to say things that do not have a lot of meaning” and (2) “to criticize other people, especially unfairly or cruelly.” The first meaning of the expression accords with Thrasymachus’ use of the terms phluaria and kathlos at this point in the men’s exchange. We shall see the second meaning come into play when Thrasymachus accuses Socrates of being a sukophantês in his arguments at 340d-341a. A number of commentators explain this term in part as a description of one bent on “damaging a man’s personal reputation and credit.” Adam 1980: ad loc. See also Schneider 1833 (quoted by Adam): ad loc.: scilicet existimationis et pecuniae detrimentum facturus sibi videbatur sophista ideoque Socratem se, quamquam frustra, impugnare in sequentibus quoque criminatur.
καὶ ὅπως μοι μὴ ἔρεις ὅτι τὸ δέον ἐστὶν μηδ' ὅτι τὸ ὄφελιμον μηδ' ὅτι τὸ λυσιτελοῦν μηδ' ὅτι τὸ κερδαλέον μηδ' ὅτι τὸ συμφέρον, ἀλλὰ σαφῶς μοι καὶ ἀκριβῶς λέγε ὅτι ἂν λέγης· ὡς ἐγὼ οὖκ ἀποδέξομαι ἐάν ὅθλους τοιούτους λέγης.

And don’t you be telling me that it is that which ought to be, or the beneficial or the profitable or the gainful or the advantageous, but express clearly and precisely whatever you say. For I won’t take from you any such drivel as that! 225

Plato’s depiction of Thrasydamus’ forceful, boisterous intrusion into the conversation is remarkable for several reasons. First, as Worman argues, “we have all of the elements that characterize the confrontations between the lowbrow Socrates and the haughty sophists,” among them the fact that “Socrates appears weak and . . . speaks drivel . . .” 226 I would add to Worman’s analysis that Thrasydamus cleverly perceives precisely what is at stake in the dialectic exchange: Socrates’ attempt to reform the conventional discourse on justice by undermining traditional “proverbial” formulations of its definition. Thrasydamus, who is about to offer his own, notorious maxim for what justice is – namely, “the advantage of the stronger” (τὸ τοῦ κρείττονος συμφέρον, 338c2) – attempts to preempt the field by dismissing as “such drivel” (ὕθλος τοιούτος, 336d4) the types of synonyms that Socrates might have employed in the dialectic process to arrive at a satisfactory understanding of the nature of justice, e.g., “that which ought to be, or the beneficial or the profitable or the gainful or the advantageous” (ὅτι τὸ δέον ἐστὶν μηδ' ὅτι τὸ ὄφελιμον μηδ' ὅτι τὸ λυσιτελοῦν μηδ' ὅτι τὸ κερδαλέον μηδ' ὅτι τὸ συμφέρον, 331c6-d2). Again, as illustrated earlier, the use of the neuter (τὸ) has the effect of turning a statement into a proverb. 227

Then consider Thrasydamus’ use of the word ὅθλος, which the LSJ defines as “idle talk, nonsense,” and most tellingly, when used with the genitive plural “old women” (γραῶν), means

225 Trans. Shorey.
226 Worman 2008: 206. See also Adam 1980: ad loc., who notes that the idiom ὅπως μοι μὴ κτλ. “is colloquial and abrupt, almost rude . . .” Such is the degree of the sophist’s contempt for the philosopher.
“old wives’ gossip.” Socrates himself uses the word in this way in Plato’s *Theaetetus*: “The right motive is not that one should seem innocent and good – that is no better, to my thinking, than an old wives’ tale . . .” (τὸ δ’ οὖ, ἵνα δὴ μὴ κακὸς καὶ ἵνα ἁγαθὸς δοκῆ εἶναι· ταῦτα μὲν γὰρ ἐστὶν ὁ λεγόμενος γραῦν ὅθλος, *Tht.* 176b6-7).

Here in the *Republic*, the full valence of the term ὅθλος, as used by Thrasymachus in his bellicose demand to Socrates, makes it clear that the arch-sophist will accept nothing less than a clear and precise definition of justice, not just the equivalent of some old wives’ tale.

Socrates then, narrating in the first-person, describes directly to the reader his reaction to Thrasymachus’ belligerence, in one of the more richly allusive and truly enigmatic passages of the entire work (336d5-7):

Καὶ ἐγὼ ἀκούσας ἐξεπλάγην καὶ προσβλέπων αὐτὸν ἐφοβούμην, καὶ μοι δοκῶ, εἰ μὴ πρῶτος ἔωράκη αὐτὸν ἢ ἐκεῖνος ἐμέ, ἄφωνος ἄν γενέσθαι.

And I, when I heard him, was dismayed, and looking upon him was filled with fear, and I believe that if I had not looked at him before he did at me I should have lost my voice.

This is the earliest reference in Greek literature to a popular adage from rural folklore that if a wolf sees a man first, the man becomes dumb. The tenth century, Byzantine Greek farming manual, the *Geoponica*, describes this curious saying in a section of the text that lists other popular, agricultural superstitions concerning animals. And interestingly, the *Geoponica* attributes the saying directly to Plato: “If a wolf catches sight of a man it makes him weak and tongue tied, says Plato in the *Republic*, but if the man sees the wolf first it becomes weaker.”

One might describe such a piece of proverbial folk wisdom less than charitably as an “old wives’ tale.”

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228 Trans. Cornford.
tale.” A modern-day analogue might be “Step on a crack, break your mother’s back.” There is delicious irony in Socrates sharing the equivalent of an “old wives’ tale” as he describes his own disequilibrium that results from Thrasymachus accusing Socrates himself of telling “old wives’ tales” (ὀθλούς), as part of his and Polemarchus’ efforts to posit a proper proverb concerning justice. As the reader ponders Plato’s wordplay, the circle becomes whole. What sort of old wives’ tales are the sophists themselves spinning as they quote and articulate proverbial maxims in support of their definitions of justice?

This is also the first instance in the dialogue of Plato’s use of a lower-brow folk proverb, as opposed to the higher-culture maxims of poets and sages, emblematic of the wider penchant for generic hybridity that characterizes so much of Plato’s oeuvre. Plato displays a remarkable (and at times, genuinely courageous) level of rhetorical ecumenism in the discourse he employs. Such generic hybridity is a powerful engine for what I maintain to be Plato’s project of discursive reform, particularly with respect to Plato’s agonistic engagement with the Greek wisdom tradition. Martin makes a persuasive case that Hesiod’s Works and Days – traditionally believed to have been composed for “the peasant of Boeotia rather than the Ionian aristocrat” – rightly belongs to the genre of “wisdom composition” precisely because of Hesiod’s “most-important poetic strategy for constructing such an open-ended advice composition” namely, “the inclusion of a number of other genres”, two of which, not surprisingly, are “songs and proverbs”

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231 Regina Austin (2002: 173, n.1) explains that this phrase is documented among “black folk sayings” and may have its origin in the notion from a bygone era that stepping on the cracks of wooden floor boards not properly nailed down can cause the boards to fly up, causing injury.

232 See, e.g., Nightingale 1995: 2: “It is noteworthy that the same man who voices such a ringing condemnation of generic impurity in the Laws exhibits a positive hankering for the hybrid in so many of his texts: again and again, Plato mixes traditional genres of discourse into his dialogues and disrupts the generic boundaries of both his own texts and the texts that he targets.”

233 See, e.g., Grg. 494e1-8, where after Socrates invokes the profoundly disturbing image of a lewd “catamite” (κίναρος) as representing the logical culmination of Callicles’ claim that the man who satisfies his appetites to the fullest is the happiest of men, Callicles accuses him of debasing the conversation: “Are you not ashamed, Socrates, to lead our discussions into such areas?” (Οὐκ ἀἰσχύνῃ εἰς τοσοῦτά άγουν, ὦ Σώκρατες, τούς λόγους;).
with roots in oral folklore.\textsuperscript{234} The intermixing of sages’ maxims with folk proverbs in radically new and meaningful juxtapositions creates the potential to upend the existing discursive world.\textsuperscript{235}

As Mikhail Bakhtin observes, generic hybridity, because of its folkloric, “carnival sense of the world, possesses a mighty life-creating and transforming power, an indestructible vitality.”\textsuperscript{236} Plato masterfully imbues with this hybridity the person of Socrates, a figure who defies class categorization and proves capable of holding his own both at the level of elite discourse in the symposium and with the cruder sort of talk that one finds in the agora.\textsuperscript{237} Indeed, Socrates show himself to be a master of widely divergent “speech genres,” a term that Bakhtin uses to describe the complex sets of values and “residues” of past behavior that he sees as underlying language, and which, in turn, shape and guide both future behavior and specific utterances. Gary Morson and Caryl Emerson summarize well this complex notion of speech genres and how such genres operate within a larger discursive context:

To know a language is to command a repertoire of its speech genres, which means to understand more than ‘language’ in the narrow sense. Each genre implies a set of values, a way of thinking about kinds of experience, and an intuition about the appropriateness of applying the genres in any given context.\textsuperscript{238}

\textsuperscript{234} Martin 1992: 11 (quoting the Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetics) and 22.

\textsuperscript{235} See Morgan 2017: 181, who makes a similar point regarding Plato’s conjoining of disparate images in the similes his Socrates offers for transformational effect: “Socrates’ discursive practice is characterized by . . . image-making that brings together seemingly disparate elements and fuses them into one to create new possibilities.”

\textsuperscript{236} Bakhtin 1984a: 107-108. Bakhtin describes generic hybridity as follows: “a multi-toned narration, the mixing of high and low, serious and comic; . . . wide use of inserted genres – letters, found manuscripts, retold dialogues, parodies on the high genres, parodically reinterpreted citations; . . . a mixing of prosaic and poetic speech, living dialects and jargons . . ., and various authorial masks . . .”

\textsuperscript{237} Worman 2008: 159.

\textsuperscript{238} Morson and Emerson 1990: 290-2.
As we shall see, Socrates provokes Thrasymachus’ ire precisely because he knows how to wield a lower-register, folk-based speech genre in a context that seems entirely inappropriate to such genre.

But first, we must address exactly how the superstitious folk wisdom concerning a wolf’s rendering a man voiceless by spying him first qualifies as a genuine proverb. In addition, what does Plato’s use of this folk proverb reveal at the point it appears in the dialogue?

The scholarship of the paroemiologist G.L. Permyakov provides guidance. Permyakov acknowledges a close similarity between what he terms “signs and omens used in rural life and bits of farming wisdom” (e.g., “A horse snorts for bad weather”), which fall under the general heading of “analytical clichés,” and proverbs and aphorisms, in their outward, morphological-syntactic structure. However, since these clichés express “only one concrete meaning and allow of no extended interpretation,” they ultimately fail as “proverbs” in Permyakov’s analysis. Permyakov explains the difference, comparing the folk superstition “When the rooster crows out of the usual time, cold weather will let up” with the genuine proverb, “The sun will rise whether the rooster crows or not.” The latter, unlike the former, admits of “extended interpretation” in that it refers not only to the particulars that it describes – what paroemiologists call the realia – “but to all similar situations” for which it serves as a model. Another set of contrasting pairs of this type further elucidates the difference – the omen “A dog’s howl portends eternal rest” can be juxtaposed with a proverb containing the same realia, “A dog’s bark is carried around by wind” or another similar proverb, “A dog barks, but the caravan goes on.” The former is monosemantic: it does not allow of various interpretations, since “eternal rest” can only be interpreted as

239 The saying was in fact characterized in antiquity as a proverb by several ancient grammarians. See, e.g., Serv. ad loc.; Donat. ad Ter. Ad. 537 (lupus in fabula): “silentii indictio est in hoc proverbio . . . .”

240 Permyakov 1979: 29, 85.

“death.” The latter phrases, by contrast, admit of various applications: Permyakov explains that they have been used to refer to “a gossip monger, an irresponsible politician or a mud-slinging pen-pusher.” The basic meaning of these twin proverbs remains the same: “No matter how much a given subject (‘dog’) may talk (‘bark’), its efforts are in vain (‘carried around by wind’) and the cause will not suffer (‘the caravan goes on’).”

Here, too, as with Cephalus’ reference to (but not direct quotation of) the proverb “like to like” (Ἥλις Ἡλικά τέρπει), we are not provided with the “wolf” adage itself. Plato leaves it to the reader to recall the omen from folklore and construct the relevant words which, following the Geoponica’s formulation, we might render simply as “If a wolf catches sight of a man it renders him voiceless.” At first blush, the saying appears to be merely a piece of rural superstition qualifying solely as an analytical cliché, not a proverb. Permyakov allows, however, for the possibility that some analytical clichés can be used in a metaphoric sense, providing as an example the omen “Autumn fog promises cold wind”, which can be used to describe “a gloomy social situation.” Relevant to my analysis is Permyakov’s acknowledgement that in such a case, “it would be not an omen, but a proverb, homonymous to the former.”

Unlike the term “eternal rest” in the superstition concerning a howling dog, the realia of the wolf omen Socrates obliquely references – i.e., both the wolf and the man rendered voiceless – refer not solely to themselves but can be understood metaphorically also. The upshot of the proverb seems alike in certain respects to the English proverbs “He who hesitates is lost,” “Delay always brings danger,” and “Procrastination is the thief of time,” where the quick-acting wolf and the dilatory man stand in for industriousness contrasted with languor. An analogous proverb

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243 Resp. 329a2-4.
244 Permyakov 1979: 87.
in German even uses the image of a wolf: “Der Letzte wird vom Wolfe gefressen” (“The last is eaten by the wolf”). Twin proverbs in Dutch and German have a similar meaning and employ the imagery of literally empty mouths, replacing the man (who has no voice in his mouth) with the wolf itself: “Schlafendem Wolf läuft kein Schaf ins Maul” and “De slapende wolf loopt geen schaap in den mond” (“A sleeping wolf runs no sheep into his mouth”). The demand made by these particular proverbs on their listeners is clear: act promptly or you will find yourself with literally nothing in your mouth – i.e., food, according to the particular realia of the proverb, but a metaphorical reading allows a connection to language, voiced from the mouth. Lastly, another English proverb uses both the image of an empty-mouthed wolf and a man who admits of nothing but failure: “The idle wolf wins little meat, nor the sleeping man success.”

Applying the message of the wolf-omen-turned-proverb to the passage from the Republic in which it is referenced (but, again, not expressly quoted) by Socrates, the implications for the task facing Socrates – and by extension, Plato’s text – are unmistakable: Socrates must beat Thrasymachus to the proverbial punch in articulating the “right” and most compelling proverb concerning justice. Put differently, Plato must outpace the immoralist position embodied in Thrasymacheanism by creating a new discourse (part of the new genre of philosophy) possessing the capacity to articulate in ever more compelling and eminently quotable ways – something approaching Hesiod’s oft-cited “two roads” simile, perhaps – a non-instrumental definition of justice. If Socrates, if Plato, should fall short in this effort, then in every practical sense, they and their ideas are rendered “voiceless.” Whatever proverbs, gnômai, or other generalizing expressions that Plato might formulate in furtherance of discursive and societal reform will be rendered mute. Voice finds its instrument in language. And the power of language rests in its

245 All of these proverbs are collected in Strauss 1998.
capacity for repeated quotation, Koning’s “catchword factor,” given the fourth century’s rhetorical and educational framework that placed a premium on selective anthologizing and excerpting of quotable sayings. As Hunter explains, the fact that this excerpting and anthologizing habit “had a firm hold in Athenian culture by Plato’s day . . . made it a particularly powerful opponent to the moral project which Plato sets himself in the Republic;” indeed, as Adeimantus remarks to Socrates in Book 2, there are so many sayings of magnitude (τοιαῦτα καὶ τοσαῦτα λεγόμενα) that young men can “flit” (ἐπιπτέσθαι) from passage to passage just like bees, with the result that, as Hunter puts it, “there will always be a suitable poetic defence for any moral stance.”

Plato’s text must meet this challenge. And part of the method Plato will employ to counter sophistic representations of justice will be the integration within his generically-hybrid text (à la Hesiod’s advice composition, teeming with quotable verses) of the sort of folk sayings that are exemplified in the wolf proverb. He will pull out the generic stops, not limiting himself solely to the poetry of the Sages and the more elite discourse of the symposia. The omission in Plato’s text of the specifics of the wolf omen seems evidence that the saying was well known to the audience at the time and was already firmly possessed of Koning’s catchword factor. Plato will take it one step further, deploying the omen-turned-proverb in furtherance of his own reformist project. If the saying is viewed as an ὅθλος, Plato’s reference to the folk proverb highlights that it is the “trash-talking” sophists like Thrasymachus who are in fact telling old wives’ tales (ἀφωνος) concerning justice. If it is viewed as a serious proverb, one worth heeding, then it reveals that Plato will not be rendered silent, “voiceless” (ἄφωνος) in this all-important struggle with the immoralists. Thus, Plato finishes the oblique reference to the wolf proverb by

246 Koning 2010a: 144-5.
247 Hunter 2014: 119. See my discussion in Chapter 3.2
depicting a Socrates capable of overcoming the discursive challenge personified by Thrasymachus: “But then, just as he was beginning to turn savage because of our discussion, I spied him first, so that I attained the capacity to respond” (νῦν δὲ ἦνικα ὑπὸ τοῦ λόγου ἢρχετο ἐξαιρεῖνεσθαι, προσέβλεψα αὐτὸν πρότερος, ὡστε αὐτῷ οἶός τ’ ἐγενόμην ἀποκρίνασθαι, 336d7-e1).

As the two men’s competition proceeds over an appropriate “quotable” representing their respective conceptions of justice, Socrates chafes against Thrasymachus’ effort to limit the lexical parameter of his attempted formulations. Socrates complains that Thrasymachus’ strictures are the equivalent of querying how much twelve equals and then prohibiting the answers that “twelve equals two times six or three times four or six times two or three times four” since Thrasymachus will not accept “any such nonsense” (τοιαῦτα φλυαρῆς). So, too, after Thrasymachus defines justice as “the advantage of the stronger” (τὸ τοῦ κρείττονος συμφέρον, 338c2), Socrates rightly objects that Thrasymachus previously had precluded Socrates from defining justice in terms of “advantage” (συμφέρον, 336d2): “So your reply, Thrasymachus, is that the advantageous constitutes the just, even though you forbade me from answering that way . . .” (τὸ συμφέρον μὲν οὖν, ὦ Θρασύμαχε, καὶ σὺ ἀπεκρίνω δίκαιον εἶναι – καίτοι ἐμοιγε ἀπηγόρευες ὅπως μὴ τοῦτο ἀποκρινοίμην, 339a6-8). Creating a memorable gnomic saying for justice requires employing words that pack a punch – words that, to paraphrase Demetrius who used Plato’s imagery describing Thrasymachus’ entree in his own stylistic advice on this score, are coiled taut with forceful impact. The more such words (like συμφέρον) that Thrasymachus can deny to Socrates the better, in the men’s contest to compose a winning,

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248 Resp. 337b1-4: μὴ ἐρεῖς ὅτι ἔστιν τὰ δώδεκα δίς ἐξ μηδ’ ὅτι τρίς τέτταρα μηδ’ ὅτι ἐξάκις δύο μηδ’ ὅτι τετράκις τρία· ὡς οὖκ ἀποδέξιμαι σου ἐὰν τοιῶστα φλυαρῆς. One cannot help but be struck by the proximity of Socrates’ hypothetically prohibited responses to the archetypal untruth represented by the phrase “Two plus two equals five,” used by numerous writers such as Samuel Johnson, Victor Hugo, and, most famously, George Orwell.
memorable proverb on justice. The word “advantage” or “interest” (συμφέρον) – tightly wrought, as it is, into the neuter substantive used here from the all-purpose and wide-ranging verb sympherō which can mean “to bring together, to contribute” and “bring into conflict” in addition to numerous other significations – will prove to be a crucial lexical building block in the men’s attempts to outdo each other in their fight to formulate the winning gnome on justice.

Thrasymachus, after becoming frustrated when Socrates does not categorically rule out the possibility (Οὐκ ἄν θαυμάσαμι . . . εἴ μοι σκεψαμένῳ οὖτῳ δόξειν) that he might answer in one of the ways and with some of the terminology he has expressly forbidden (ἀπαγορεύειν, ἀπειπεῖν, 337c6-10), vaunts that he is about to reveal (δείξειν) a better definition of justice (περὶ δικαιοσύνης, βελτίω τούτων, 337d1-2). In addition, he makes a clever play on the traditional judicial formula that is read to a man found guilty, “What do you deserve to suffer or pay?” (τί ἄξιοις παθεῖν ἢ ἀποτείσατο;), by asking Socrates, “What will you deserve to suffer?” (τί ἄξιοῖς παθεῖν; 337d2) if Socrates were to forced to concede that Thrasymachus had invented a better formulation of justice. In retort, Socrates more than meets the sophist’s challenge at wordplay by parrying with a deft reworking of the same judicial formula, using paronomosia so as to transform it into his own, new proverb. Moreover, it becomes a proverb that can serve as a pithy encapsulation of Socrates’ vision of both the purpose of a dialectic exchange (the very sort in which he and Thrasymachus are presently engaged) and of a far better judicial system than one modeled upon traditional flawed representations of justice (e.g., “helping friends and harming enemies”). Socrates’ new rhyming gnome is: “It befits one to learn [mathein] from the one who knows. So this is what I deserve to suffer [pathein]” (προσήκει δὲ ποι μαθεῖν παρὰ τοῦ εἰδότος· καὶ ἐγὼ οὖν τούτο ἄξιον παθεῖν, 337d4-5). More important to any sound conception of justice than inflicting a penalty for the one adjudged guilty to suffer (pathein) are education and
reformation, in other words, the opportunity for the wrongdoer to learn (mathein). So, too, should Socrates’ and Thrasymachus’ dialectical exchange on the subject of justice have as its end the men’s mutual enlightenment (mathein) rather than the defeat of one by the other so that he must suffer (pathein).\footnote{See, e.g., Grg. 458a1-7, where Socrates makes clear that he is the sort of man who would “gladly be refuted” (τὸν ἤδειος μὲν ἄν ἐλεγχθὲντον) if he should say “something that is untrue” (τι μὴ ἀληθεῖς) since “it is a greater good to be delivered from the greatest evil than to deliver another therefrom” (μετίζον ἀγαθὸν ἐστίν αὐτὸν ἀπαλλαγῆναι κακοῦ τοῦ μεγίστου ἢ ἄλλον ἀπαλλάξαι).}

Socrates thus reveals by his new formulation that in all considerations of what constitutes the just, pathein constitutes an impoverished approach; rather, the subject is properly understood in terms of mathein. Socrates’ new formulation, his new proverb – “It befits one to learn from the one who knows” (προσήκει δὲ ποι μαθεῖν παρὰ τοῦ εἰδότος) – is discursive reform at its best. Thrasymachus can do nothing but respond with a grudging admission in the form of a sarcastic compliment that Socrates has, for the moment, outfoxed him on the terrain of wordplay, “Very cute of you” (Ἡδὺς γὰρ εἶ, 337d6). And true to form, the best that Thrasymachus can do is return to the traditional judicial formula, now bringing in its other lexical component, left unmentioned until this moment – the payment of a fine (ἀποτέσσαι): “But in addition to ‘learning’ (μαθεῖν) you must also pay money” (ἄλλα πρὸς τῷ μαθεῖν καὶ ἀπότεισον ἀργύριον, 337d6-7). Socrates then responds, “Surely, whenever some comes into my possession” (Οὐκοῖν ἐπειδὰν μοι γένηται, 337d8). Thrasymachus’ misguided attempt to reframe the judicial formula to his advantage has only served to remind the reader of the vast difference between Socrates and the sophists concerning the education of those who come to learn (mathein) from them. Thrasymachus and his ilk demand payment of a fee (apoteisai); Socrates asks for nothing, as is evidenced by his penury.\footnote{See also Phdr. 266c, where Socrates describes Thrasymachus as eager to make money; see D. Nails 2002: 289.} Even to attempt to conceive of “learning” (mathein) – as is also the
case with justice – in such terms as “payment” (apoteisai) and “suffering” a penalty (pathein) is already to get things wholly wrong. Plato is presenting an entire world imagined anew through a new proverbial formulation of the now-discredited judicial formula.

One should not underestimate, however, Thrasymachus’ own proverb-building skill during the sequence of thrusts and parries between sophist and philosopher, as they each attempt to construct the most unassailable gnome on justice. And by “unassailable,” I mean both at the bar of reason and by virtue of the compelling use of the sort of language that is apparent in so many of the proverbs and gnômai of the discourse of the time. Thrasymachus clearly believes that he himself has hit the mark with his gnomic pronouncement, “The just is nothing other than the advantage of the stronger” (εἴναι τὸ δίκαιον οὐκ ἄλλο τι ἢ τὸ τοῦ κρείττονος συμφέρον, 338c1-2) which, as described earlier, constitutes a literal nonoppositional proverb such as “Discretion is the better part of valor.” Immediately after somewhat pompously announcing his formulation (Ἄκουε δὴ, 338c1), Thrasymachus promptly belittles Socrates for not instantly conceding its merit: “Well, why don’t you applaud? No, of course, you’ll do anything but that.”

Like many a good gnome, Thrasymachus’ proclamation compels his interlocutors, as well as Plato’s reading audience, to riddle through it. Indeed at one point, Polemarchus and Clitophon trade interpretations over what precisely Thrasymachus means by his enigmatic statement, after Socrates has further muddied the waters by compelling Thrasymachus to admit that rulers and the stronger (ἄρχοντες τε καὶ κρείττονες) sometimes are mistaken in the laws they

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251 Dundes 1981: 52-3; Russo 1997: 52. Thrasymachus’ devaluation of justice through his literal, nonoppositional proverb operates in the same way that the lyric from songwriter Kris Kristofferson and Fred Foster’s 1969 song “Me and Bobby McGee” serves to subvert the traditional notion that “freedom” is necessarily a good thing: “Freedom’s just another word for nothing left to lose.”

lay down and thus unintentionally act for the benefit of the ruled (τοῖς ἄρχομένοις). Polemarchus asserts that Socrates has revealed a fundamental weakness in Thrasymachus’ formulation, whereas Clitophon counters that Thrasymachus simply meant that what a ruler, the “stronger,” orders is that which he believes to be to his advantage” (ὁ ἣγοιτο ὁ κρείττων αὐτῶ συμφέρειν, 340a1-b8). One is reminded here of the penchant, prominent in the fourth century, for debating over what an author meant by an ambiguous proverb, such as Demosthenes’ and Aeschines’ dueling forensic orations over the meaning of Hesiod’s enigmatic gnome on rumour – “light and easy to acquire, painful to bear, and hard to escape. . . . and she is some sort of god” – or Xenophon’s dispute with Polycrates over the interpretation Polycrates gives to another proverb in Hesiod (as previously discussed in Chapter One), “No work is a disgrace, idleness is a disgrace” (ἔργον δ’ οὐδέν ὄνειδος, ἀεργήτη δέ τ’ ὄνειδος, Op. 311) and Socrates’ appropriation of it in Polycrates’ Accusation Against Socrates. To have their respective proverbial formulations of justice quoted and debated over by future audiences is the ultimate goal of both Thrasymachus and Socrates. This is equally true for Plato in the philosophic prose he creates to further discursive and societal reform. If he could keep getting quoted, cited, and debated, he might well be able to alter the prevailing discourse (along with the traditional conceptions) concerning justice.

Thrasymachus is certainly aware of these stakes. Immediately after Socrates attempts to clarify the point of debate between Polemarchus and Clitophon by asking if in fact Thrasymachus meant by “the advantage of the stronger” that which appears to the stronger to be

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253 Resp. 339b7-e8.
255 Compare Aeschin., In Timarch. 129-30 and De falsa legat 114-5 with Dem., De falsa legat., 243-4; see Xen., Mem. 1.2.56-7, as well as my discussion in Chapter 1.1. of how the proverb also appears in the Charmides (163b1-c8), where Critias uses it to draw a distinction between “making” (ποιέω) and “doing” (πράττω).
to his advantage (regardless of whether it really is), Thrasymachus accuses Socrates of being, in
effect, a “swindler” or “lout” with language and argument (Συκοφάντης . . . ἐν τοῖς λόγοις, 
340d1). Indeed, Thrasymachus’ response bears all the markings of a man who thinks that he has
shown Socrates to be a disingenuous cheat and, therefore, a poor choice for coiner of gnómai,
expressing mock disbelief that Socrates would ever call a physician “a physician when he is in
the act of making a mistake concerning his sick patients” or a mathematician “a mathematician
when he errs in the act of calculating.”

Rather, according to Thrasymachus, “we only talk this way in a manner of speaking” (λέγοµεν
tῷ ῥήµατι οὕτως, 340d5); in point of fact, “no craftsman, wise man, or ruler, if you will, makes a mistake whenever he is actually ruling, but
everyone speaks as if it were the case that ‘the physician’ erred or ‘the ruler’ erred’” (δηµιουργός
ὁ σοφὸς ἢ ἄρχον οὐδεὶς ἀµαρτάνει τότε ὅταν ἄρχων ἢ, ἀλλὰ πᾶς γ’ ἂν εἶπο ὅτι ὁ ἰατρὸς ἠµαρτεν
καὶ ὁ ἄρχων ἠµαρτεν, 340e4-6).

If one plays the “swindler” or “scoundrel” (sukophantês) with the fundamentals of how
we use language (logos) – which in this context obviously assumes the form of “argumentation”
(hence the multivalent term, logos) – then the ideas that one aims to express, and the gnómai by
which one aspires to articulate them memorably so that they might ultimately become integral to
the Greek rhetorical and educational framework, will amount to little more than a shyster’s
tricks, the very sort of fraud perpetrated by a sukophantês. Worman rightly notes that the term
sukophantês “has connotations of boldness and deceit, both of which . . . are often attributes of
aggressive, pandering talkers familiar from Aristophanes.”

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256 340d2-5: ἰατρὸν . . . τὸν ἐξαµαρτάνοντα περὶ τοὺς κάµνοντας κατ’ αὐτὸ τοῦτο ὁ ἐξαµαρτάνει . . . ἡ λογιστικῶν, ὃς
ἀν ἐν λογισµῷ ἀµαρτάνη, τότε ὅταν ἀµαρτάνη, κατὰ ταύτην τὴν ἀµαρτίαν;

257 Worman 2008: 206. The verb sukophanteô and the noun sukophantês are notoriously difficult to translate in this
passage. Given that sycophants were “habitual prosecutors” who very often initiated legal actions without good
reason, it is understandable that Jowett translates Ἀριστοφάνης . . . ἐν τοῖς λόγοις as “argue like an informer,” but that
rendering seems to fall short of what precisely Thrasymachus finds at fault with Socrates’ manner of discourse.
irony is at play in Plato’s portrayal of Thrasymachus accusing Socrates of playing games with language, given what we know of Thrasymachus’ reputation in antiquity. Aristophanes depicts Thrasymachus as a “hairsplitter” in *Banqueters* and in the *Phaedrus*, Socrates warns Phaedrus that it is in fact Thrasymachus who “knows best how to inflame a crowd and, once they are inflamed, how to hush them with his words’ magic spell” and that he “is as good as producing slander as he is at refuting it.”

Leaving aside entirely the substance of Thrasymachus’ clarification of his gnome’s meaning, Socrates presses Thrasymachus solely on his accusation by first asking “You think that I’m a swindler in my argumentation?” (δοκῶ σοι συκοφαντεῖν; 341a5). Then, after Thrasymachus confirms as much, even accusing Socrates of “using violence” in the way he handles language (βιάσασθαι τῷ λόγῳ, 341b1-2) and vowing not to let Socrates “play the knave and scoundrel” (κακουργεῖν καὶ συκοφαντεῖν, 341b9) against him in discourse, Socrates responds, as the master conversationalist he is, with a proverb: “Do you think that I would be so mad as to try to shave a lion and knavishly play with words against Thrasymachus?” (Οἴτι γὰρ ἄν με ὅτω μανῆναι ὡστε ξυρεῖν ἐπιχειρεῖν λέοντα καὶ συκοφαντεῖν Θρασύμαχον; 341c1-2).

This proverb is so rare that it seems to occur nowhere else in classical Greek. The scholiast asserts that the proverb has as its focus those who attempt something that is either

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Shorey’s “you argue like a pettifogger” is little better and seems hopelessly out of date. Grube’s “you are a false witness in arguments” is somewhat closer to the meaning that Thrasymachus appears to intend, a meaning which Jowett and Campbell’s commentary convey with the phrase “You are a sharper . . . in argument.” The epithet “sharper” seems to me, indeed, very close to the true sense of the term in this passage, hence my rendering it as “swindler” and “scoundrel” (or perhaps “lout”) “with language/argument.” I am grateful to David Blank for his observation that we simply may not possess the full range of semantic connotations that the term συκοφαντές had for the Greeks of Plato’s time. See generally Hornblower and Spawforth 2003: 1459; Ober 1989: 173-4.

258 *Banq.*, frag. 198 Kock; See Nails 2002: 288.


260 Adam 1980: ad loc.
against their own interests or simply impossible to accomplish. There can be little doubt that it is ultimately the source of the English saying, “To beard a lion” as construed in the English proverb, “Hares may pull dead lions by the beard.” Given the phrase’s lack of any poetic pedigree, it seems reasonable to assume that it was a folk saying, along the lines of the wolf proverb to which Socrates had alluded earlier. Thrasymachus, thus, has gone from being a wolf that might render Socrates voiceless in the men’s battle over an expression that properly conveys the concept of justice, to a lion that Socrates would provoke at his peril if he played captious games with language, ignoring the conventional ways people speak (τὸ ῥῆματι οὕτως, 340d5). However, Socrates has just proven himself to be the real master of words and phrases, deploying a folk proverb whose staying power remains evident today.

Thrasymachus expresses utter contempt for the way Socrates conducts the verbal exchange: “Once again, you amount to nothing, with respect to this” (οὐδὲν ὀν καὶ ταῦτα, 341c3). Jowett and Campbell provide a good paraphrase and explanation of this dismissive retort to Socrates: “‘Although you made a fool of yourself at this too,’ i.e., at cheating Thrasymachus as you would have also done at shaving a lion if you had attempted it.” Thrasymachus simply cannot conceive or acknowledge that Socrates has any genuine skill in logos. On the contrary, Socrates seems a mere trickster, and Thrasymachus continually belittles him as doing nothing more than “making mischief in the argument” (κακοφργήσας μάλιστα τὸν λόγον, 338d4). Worman explains that the “heavy emphasis in this passage on abusive terms for a quibbling,
underhanded way of talking suggests that it is somehow important that Thrasymachus be seen to aggress Socrates in this way.”

What is so provocative about Socrates’ manner of argument, of discourse, that causes Thrasymachus to react so strongly? So pronounced is the level of Thrasymachus’ revulsion at Socrates’ argument and speech that at one point he calls Socrates “loathsome” (βδέλυρός, 338d3) and at another derides him as needing a nurse (τίτθη) to “wipe his snotty nose” (κορυζόντα περιορᾶ καὶ οὐκ ἀπομύττει δεόμενον, 343a4-8).

Scholars such as Worman and Blondell have noted the demotic, even coarse, element that seems to pervade much of Socrates’ speech. Worman, for example, describes as “vulgar” Socrates’ rejoinder to Thrasymachus’ definition of justice that if the just is in fact the advantage of the stronger, does that mean that eating “beefsteak” (tà Βόεια κρέα, 338c7-d2) amounts to justice because it makes an athlete stronger? Blondell, similarly, takes note of Socrates’ “demotic intellectual personality” and “discourse . . . marked by a homespun style,” replete with a “notorious use of analogies from everyday life” as evinced by his various craft-examples which “cover low or servile activities . . .”

It seems clear that this demotic element to which both Worman and Blondell rightly draw our attention also extends to Socrates’ use of proverbs, as is apparent in his deft deployment of the folk saying about shaving a lion, which provokes Thrasymachus’ summary dismissal of Socrates as “amounting to nothing” (οὐδὲν ὤν, 341c3). As is the case in his use of other genres of discourse, Socrates is a master of both the highbrow and lowbrow when it comes to gnōmai and proverbs. And it is precisely this intermixing of the two registers that provokes

266 Worman 2008: 205-6.
267 Blondell: 2002: 76.
Thrasymachus’ wrath. Here Bakhtin’s concept of “speech genres” becomes relevant. As Bakhtin observes, “Many people who have an excellent command of a language often feel quite helpless in certain spheres of communication precisely because they do not have a practical command of the generic forms in the given spheres.”

Such is the plight of Thrasymachus vis-à-vis Socrates. To use a modern analogy, it were as if some “fast-talking” lawyer, with his folksy examples and experience in filing purportedly frivolous lawsuits (in other words, a sukophantês), had suddenly “crashed” a scholarly symposium and attempted to challenge one of the faculty presenter’s ideas with vocabulary and turns of phrase far different from – one could say beneath – the language customarily used at these events.

Blondell observes what she calls a “democratic’ versatility in [Socrates’] mastery of varied genres of discourse, from oratory to literary criticism, and in his remarkably detailed familiarity with various aspects of the material world and the crafts.” It is precisely such generic versatility – a versatility that reflects Plato’s generic hybridity – that possesses the capacity to alter the world, in accordance with Bakhtin’s vision. As Worman argues, “Socrates consistently aligns himself against power and perceptible (i.e., aristocratic) virtues. His discourse mirrors this stance; as mentioned, it is usually full of the humble stuff of daily life, which disgusts and irritates highbrow, spirited sophistic types.”

Much of the appeal of proverbs and gnômai lies precisely in the commonness, the ordinariness, which characterizes many of them. By commonness, I mean both the fact that such

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268 Bakhtin 1986: 147.
269 Indeed, one could well argue that sukophantês is the fifth- and fourth-century analogue of an “ambulance chaser,” an unethical personal-injury lawyer who cares only for monetary reward, not the merit of the cases he files in court. See, e.g., MacDowell 1995: 75: “Aristophanes presents sycophancy as if it were a regular, though disgraceful, profession, rather like prostitution.”
270 Blondell 2002: 75.
271 Worman 2008: 165.
sayings have come to be quoted repeatedly over time by many people as well as the ordinary *realia* (e.g., shaving, animals, elements from folk superstition, etc.) of which they are often comprised. Such discourse might well appear out of place in more rarified settings, in the presence of more elite company. Yet, as Aristotle recognized, herein lies the attraction of such “common” speech. In his *Rhetoric*, after first noting that “rustic folk are especially good *gnōmai*-users and readily display them” (οἱ γὰρ ἄγροῖκοι μάλιστα γνωμοτύποι εἰσί καὶ ράδιως ἀποφαίνονται), he advises that one ought to make use of such “common” (*κοιναῖς* and “frequently quoted” (*τεθρυλημέναις*) sayings for two reasons: (1) “because they are common, they seem to be true, as everyone is in agreement about them” (διὰ γὰρ τὸ εἶναι κοινά, ὡς ὀμολογούντων πάντων, ὀρθὸς ἔχειν δοκοῦσιν, 1395a) and (2) because of “the vulgarity of the listening audience” (τὴν φορτικότητα τῶν ἄκροστῶν) who “are delighted” (χαίρουσι) to hear “views that they hold themselves severally” (τῶν δοξῶν ἃς ἐκεῖνοι κατὰ μέρος ἔχουσιν, 1395b).

Yet it is precisely the common and vulgar element of this discourse that those preferring a more sophistic manner of discussion find offensive and off-putting. In Plato’s *Gorgias*, Polus protests against Socrates’ treatment of Gorgias by claiming that Socrates “takes the discussion into areas that are the height of boorishness” (εἰς τὰ τοιαῦτα ἔχειν πολλὴ ἄγροικία ἐστὶν τοὺς λόγους, Gorg. 461c3-4) and Socrates himself later acknowledges that the subject matter of his discourse is “rather boorish” (ἀγροικότερον, Gorg. 462e6). In other words, while all things *agroika*, “boorish” or “crude,” have the potential to offend the sophisticated class, it is the *agroikoi*, the “boorish yokels” as it were, who, according to Aristotle, are most inclined to use and hear *gnōmai* – i.e., they are *malista gnōmotypoi* – given “their vulgarity” (τὴν φορτικότητα).

For the more refined set, *agroikia* is of a piece with *phluaria*, the “nonsense” or “trash” that Socrates trades in. As Callicles derides Socrates in the *Gorgias*, “You keep talking about
Something similar is at work when Thrasymachus reviles Socrates with his “snotty nose” insult. Immediately after the lion-shaving proverb, Socrates attempts to dismantle Thrasymachus’ definition of justice by employing his tried-and-true craft analogies, the first of which is that of the doctor (ἰατρός, 341c5). It is through use of such craft analogies that Socrates provides support for his ever more compelling turns of phrase – verbal constructions that I would liken to proverbs – by which he ultimately undermines Thrasymachus’ position and causes the arch-sophist to blush (Θρασύμαχος ἑρυθρίωντα, 350d2), something Socrates has never before witnessed. For example, Socrates coins a proverb with the following: “Let us put it this way: a just man aims to surpass not his like but his unlike, whereas for an unjust man, it is both his like and his unlike” (Ὧδε δὴ λέγωμεν, . . . ὁ δίκαιος τοῦ μὲν ὁμοίου ὡς πλεονεκτεῖ, τοῦ δὲ ἄνομοίου, ὁ δὲ ἀδίκος τοῦ τε ὁμοίου καὶ τοῦ ἄνομοίου, 349c11-1d1). He then provides further support for this proverb and links it with another step essential to his argument by analogizing it to the craft of a musician: when tuning a lyre (ἁρμοτόμους λύραν), a musician would not seek to surpass another musician in “the tightening and loosening of the strings” (ἐν τῇ ἐπιτάσει καὶ ἀνέσει τῶν χορδῶν) but he would seek to surpass a “non-musician” (ἄμοισον, 349e10-16). Here the proverb-like quality of Socrates’ formulations is strengthened all the more by the phrases’ proximity to the famous Hesiodic proverb that also concerns competing craftsmen, “Potter vies with potter and builder with builder, and beggar envies beggar, and bard bard.”272 Of course in the new Socratic proverbs, the zero-sum game inherent in Hesiod’s vision of the craftsmen’s

agon with fellow craftsmen is removed entirely. Socrates’ is the new, more humane vision, and we shall see this theme developed further in Book 4.

Socrates’ conjoining of proverbs taken from ordinary crafts like medicine and lyre-playing is all part of seducing Thrasymachus to accede ultimately to the logically infirm argument that we are what we are like, which has the direct effect of reversing Thrasymachus’ original position: the just man ends up being intelligent and wise because he seeks to surpass only his unlike, i.e., the ignorant, and the unjust man ends up being unintelligent and unwise because he seeks to surpass his like, i.e., the ignorant. Thrasymachus cannot help but blush that he has been duped so handily by such phluaria, assembled with the help of ta agroika. As Adam notes, Socrates’ argument rests upon a fallacy akin to the *a dicto secundum quid ad dictum simpliciter*. Nonetheless, Socrates ultimately succeeds in eliciting Thrasymachus’ assent to such phluaria because of his compelling, proverbial formulations, built in part on homespun material of a type more common and vulgar than Thrasymachus and his sophistic set are accustomed. The immoralist has been outdone by a man who demonstrates that he can wield gnômai more deftly than even the author of “Justice is nothing more than the advantage of the stronger.”

Plato also demonstrates, with Socrates’ tour-de-force display of gnome-formulation in the service of a patently fallacious argument, that not all proverbs are to be trusted, despite their captivating language and clever constructions. One must not, like Thrasymachus, allow oneself to be hoist on one’s own proverbial petard. In Plato’s view, “Just it is, to render to each what is owed him,” akin to “Justice is a certain kind of thievery, albeit for the benefit of friends and the harm of enemies,” and “Justice is nothing more than the advantage of the stronger,” are little

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273 Adam 1980: ad loc.
more than “old wives’ tales.” These are not true proverbs, worthy of citation and quotation by future readers. And with this realization we are able to appreciate the exquisite irony in Plato’s narrative near the close of Republic 1. Thrasymachus, beaten at his own maxim-building game and having just been asked by Socrates whether he remembered that he had once maintained justice to be a powerful thing (ισχυρόν, 350d7) grumbles in feeble retort: “Go ahead and question away. And I’ll just answer you as one does to old wives spinning their tales, ‘Very good’” (ἐρώτα· ἐγὼ δὲ σοι, ὄσπερ ταῖς γραωσίνταῖς τοὺς μῦθους λεγούσαις, “εἰεν” ἐρῶ, 350e2-4). With that, the wolf that was Thrasymachus demonstrates that he is rendered voiceless, as he answers mechanically in agreement with Socrates for the remainder of Book 1. By virtue of his skillful deployment of proverbs and gnómai, Socrates has altered the discourse. Plato’s project of reform is underway.
Chapter Three – Republic 2 and 3: The Use and Abuse of Proverbs

I have defined “dialectic” as the attempt to play off vocabularies against one another, rather than merely to infer propositions from one another. . . . A more up to date word for what I have been calling “dialectic” would be “literary criticism.”

Richard Rorty, Contingency, irony, and solidarity

A morality is neither a system of general principles nor a code of rules, but a vernacular language.

Michael Oakeshott, Of Human Conduct

I don’t know, that’s all words . . . all words, there’s nothing else.

Samuel Beckett, The Unnamable

3.1. Contemplating “Release” from Logos

The second book of Plato’s Republic begins curiously: Socrates describes to the unnamed audience of his narrative (that is to say, to us, the readers of Plato’s text) how he had thought that at this point in his dialogue with his various interlocutors, the discourse (logos) had come to an end. And significantly, he uses language connoting “release,” “deliverance.” The Greek infinitive ἀπηλλάχθαι means literally to have been “set free or released from a thing” (LSJ, s.v. B.1). Socrates puts it thus, “And so, after having said these things, I thought that I had been released from the discourse [logos]” — or, in Adam’s rendering of λόγον, “that I had been released from speaking”274 — “whereas in point of fact, it turned out, so it seems, to have been a prologue” (Ἐγὼ μὲν οὖν ταῦτα εἰπὼν ὄμην λόγου ἀπηλλάχθαι τὸ δ’ ἦν ἄρα, ὡς ἔσκε, προοίμιον, 357a1-2).

To be sure, the passive of ἀπαλλάσσω is often translated as “have done with” or “make an end of,” but the upshot remains the same: the cessation of something is contemplated, in this

274 Adam 1980: ad loc., argues that “λόγου=τοῦ λέγειν, not ‘the discussion’ (Jowett) which would be τοῦ λόγου.”
instance, of the *logos*, of speaking (*τοῦ λέγειν*), with the verb’s persistent undertone of release still present. It is interesting that Plato marks the beginning of yet another chapter with the idea that the *logos* can – and here, *should*, by all rights – end, at least in the estimation of his primary character and the narrator of his text, Socrates, who thinks momentarily that he has been released from discourse.275

The pairing of various forms of the verb ἀπαλλάσσω with *logos* in the sense conveyed here is relatively infrequent in ancient Greek literature. But in two of the key places that the combination does occur, we receive the unmistakable impression of near contempt for *logos*. In Euripides’ *Medea*, after detailing her plans to kill Jason’s bride, Medea exclaims “But now I put an end to this talk” (ἐνταῦθα μέντοι τόνδ’ ἀπαλλάσσω λόγον, 790) just before she determines to murder her children. When the chorus objects and urges her not to commit such a horrible deed, Medea chides them: “From this point forward, all words are superfluous” (περισσὸι πάντες οὖν μέσωι λόγοι, 819). Donald Mastronarde affirms that the meaning conveyed by τόνδ’ ἀπαλλάσσω λόγον in this instance constitutes “an unusual use of this highly flexible verb.”276 Similarly, in Sophocles’ *Electra*, the sinister Paedagogus chides Orestes and Electra for what he perceives as their dalliance in “joyous” (σὸν χαρᾶ) *logos* immediately following the recognition scene and their jubilant reuniting with one another. He urges them to dispense with their words and get on with the dirty business of killing both Clytemnestra and Aegisthus: “Have done now (νῦν ἀπαλλαχθέντε) with lengthy speeches (τῶν μακρῶν λόγων) and with this insatiable over-joyous outcry . . . since in such matters delay is reprehensible, but to make an end is supreme

275 See my argument at the beginning of Chapter 2 that Republic 1 opens with Plato signaling the distinct possibility that discourse could all too easily end, possibly even in violence, if the communicants are unwilling to listen to one another. And tellingly, in Republic 1, *logos* holds the potential “to release” (ἀφεῖναι) willing communicants from the threat of violence (Resp. 327c9-12).

276 Mastronarde 2002: ad loc.
J.H. Kells explains how both the first aorist passive (ἀπαλλαξθέντε) and the first perfect passive (ἀπηλλάχθαι) “have a heavy, harsh sound which seems to emphasize contempt” for the “delaying tactics of Orestes and Electra” as evinced in their prolonged discourse.278

Why would Socrates use the same expression in describing his own logos with his interlocutors? Why should he portray discourse as something he thinks he “has been released from” or “has put an end to,” employing a verb with a valence that, per Kells, can suggest a shade of contempt? I want to propose that again, as with the opening of the Republic in Book 1, Plato demonstrates an exquisite sensitivity to the possible futility of discourse, particularly where the pivotal role that the manipulation of language can play in a larger, humanitarian disaster is all too clearly evident (even if only in Plato’s perception of things). This is an age where, after all, brutal civil war was marked – as Thucydides explains – by opposing sides perversely shifting (ἀντῆλλαξαν), as they deemed fit (τῇ δικαιώσει), the customary value of words (τὴν εἰσοθήναν ἀξίωσιν τῶν ὄνομάτων) in order to suit the individual facts (ἐς τὰ ἔργα, 3.82.4) of the situation (that is, of the bloody stasis in Corcyra during the Peloponnesian War).279 How could one not desire, on some level, to be “released from,” “to have done with,” language that so sorely lacks any consistency or integrity? Indeed, it is precisely that which stands apart from logos – what one might describe as “logos-less” or, more literally, “thought-less” (alogistos, LSJ, s.v. I.) – that is honored in the world Plato confronts in his writing. Kells artfully compares the Paedagogus’ chiding of Orestes and Electra’s extended logos with passive forms of the verb ἀπαλλάξασθαι to Thucydides’ further comment on the language- and value-shifting stasis at Corcyra where

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277 Trans. J.H. Kells (with modification).
278 Kells 1973: ad loc.
279 See Gomme 1970: ad loc., where he cites and explains Dionysos’ paraphrase of τῇ δικαιώσει: “ἄλλως ἥξιον αὐτὰ καλεῖν; they ‘claimed the right’ to impose new interpretations on old words.”
“thoughtless daring [tolma alogistos] was considered partisan courage, and prudent hesitation was deemed prettified cowardice” (τόλμα μὲν γὰρ ἄλογοτος ἀνδρεία φιλέταιρος ἐνομίσθη, μέλλησις δὲ προμηθής δειλία εὐπρεπῆς, Th. 3.82.4)\(^{280}\)

There is, of course, no question that Sophocles’ Paedagogus and Plato’s Socrates differ radically in their respective approaches to such a world turned-upside-down, where the customary meanings of words have been upended: the Paedagogus prizes action over the fruitless tedium of discourse, while Socrates espouses philosophy that at its most basic level stands in opposition to the prevailing discursive practices of Plato’s day (e.g., to the sophistical rhetoric of orators like Gorgias). Yet there is a level of pessimism evinced by both men toward the pre-supposed efficacy of “the word” that cannot be ignored.\(^{281}\) The Paedagogus discards discourse altogether: better to use brute force in a world that honors brute force. By contrast, Socrates understands that he must remain committed to logos, but nonetheless worries aloud to Thrasyvachus (in Book 1) that the two men may not be “capable of having a discussion with one another according to conventional practice” (ἐἴχομεν ἄν τι λέγειν κατὰ τὰ νομιζόμενα λέγοντες, 348e) given the seemingly enormous gulf in values and language which threatens to make mutual understanding impossible. And since the men’s logos ultimately proves to be largely inconsequential in light of Thrasyvachus remaining unconvinced by Socrates’ arguments – as illustrated by Thrasyvachus mechanically responding “yes” and “no” to Socrates’ questions at the close of Book 1 – it really comes as no surprise that Socrates speaks at Book 2’s opening in terms of “having been released from,” “having done with” (ἀπηλλάχθαι) discourse. It will have

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\(^{280}\) Kells 1973: 212. Civil war broke out in Corcyra in 427. We have no evidence whatsoever for the date of Electra. But even if the play were written and performed before the Corcyrean stasis, this would not preclude Sophocles’ perception that the combination of the Peloponnesian War and the sophistic enlightenment were calling into question previous social and educational verities.

\(^{281}\) Of a similar mindset is the Messenger in Euripides’ Medea, who asserts that “mortal who seem to be wise and are concerned with logos bring upon themselves the greatest folly” (τοὺς σοφοὺς βροτοὺς / δοκοντας εἶναι καὶ μεριμνητὰς λόγων / τοῦτος μεγίστην μωρίαν ὀφλισκάνειν, 1225-27).
to be enough that Thrasymachus has been rendered silent, in effect, “voiceless” (ἄφωνος, 336d5), even if he remains unpersuaded.282

And yet, Socrates realizes all that was just a “prologue” (τὸ δὲ ἦν ἄρα, ὡς ἐστικε, προοίμιον).283 He seems to recognize the fancy in thinking that one could ever “put an end to” or come to “have been released” (ἀπηλλάχθαι) from logos. It is as if Socrates has reached a moment analogous to that of the twentieth-century modernist writer, Samuel Beckett, whose work had as its primary aim “the end of language” but who also realized that a discourse which seems to lead nowhere must nevertheless continue.284 As Beckett writes at the close of his aptly named The Unnameable, “You must say words, as long as there are any . . . I can’t go on. I’ll go on.”285 So, too, must Socrates, must Plato, “go on” with logos, despite and at the same time precisely because the debased state of discourse demands as much. As Eric Voegelin observes, “The issue at stake is that of communication and intelligibility in a decadent society.”286 There can be no release from the need to bridge the discursive divide that existed in the society of Socrates and his greatest pupil, notwithstanding Plato’s display of apparent pessimism over the efficacy of the word.287

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282 See my discussion at the end of Chapter 2 of how Thrasymachus comes to occupy the position of the man rendered voiceless (ἄφωνος) in the folk proverb about the quick-acting wolf spying first a dilatory man.

283 Socrates’ view in this regard seems to parallel the tradition among both ancient and modern scholars that regards Book 1 of the Republic as a separate work written earlier by Plato, perhaps as a sketch for the Gorgias, and then ultimately used as the introduction to the rest of the Republic, composed at a later date (see, generally, Shorey 1982: x; Vlastos 1991: 248-51). Socrates says, in effect, that Book 1 was just a proem, a remark that amounts to a kind of meta-recognition on Plato’s part that the subject needs more detailed treatment. It is telling, thus, that Plato’s writerly strategy for the remainder of the Republic, following the initial “proem,” is to begin anew in Books 2 and 3 with the poets. I am grateful to Kathryn Morgan for this observation.

284 L. Hill 1990: 162.


286 Voegelin 1957: 29.

287 In his Seventh Letter, Plato voices his profound doubt that the subjects he treats can ever be expressed in words as other subjects are (ῥητὸν γὰρ ὀδύμαμος ἔστιν ὡς ἄλλα μαθήματα, 341c5-6). Even if the Seventh Letter is not authentic, the fact that ancient tradition views Plato as having held this view speaks volumes about Plato’s thoughts on language and its presumed (in)efficacy.
Language is the medium in which Plato must work, efficacious or not. Justice may prove a most elusive quarry,\(^\text{288}\) one especially resistant to capture by even the most comprehensible of terms, let alone words whose meanings have been inverted as Thucydides describes. Plato, however, has no choice but to use the prevailing discursive practices of his day, flawed as they might appear to be, in order to do what his interlocutors demand. Further, this is something that no one else has ever yet (οὐδὲὶς πώποτε) accomplished, as Adeimantus puts it, “set forth in poetry or private conversation, sufficiently by discourse, that [injustice] is the greatest of all evils that the soul contains within itself, but that justice is the greatest good” (οὐτ' ἐν ποιήσει οὐτ' ἐν ἰδίοις λόγοις ἐπεξῆλθεν ἰκανῶς τῷ λόγῳ ὡς τὸ μὲν μέγιστον κακῶν ὅσα ἵσχε ψυχῇ ἐν αὐτῇ, δικαιοσύνη δὲ μέγιστον ἀγαθόν, 366e7-9). As was the case with Republic 1, we shall see firsthand the role that proverbs and gnômai must necessarily play in any such undertaking, with the progression of the dialogue in Books 2 and 3.

3.2. The Abuse of Proverb

Books 2 and 3 of the Republic are rightly famous (or, depending on one’s perspective, notorious) for the severity of the attacks they level against certain passages of poetry, as Socrates and his interlocutors attempt to reach a non-instrumental definition of justice for both the individual and the state. Such attacks may be explained in large part by the fact that for the Greeks, poetry was not equivalent to our modern conception of poetry as a highly stylized form of literary expression, often separated from the day-to-day business of life and work in what we

\(^{288}\) Indeed, in Republic 4, Socrates uses the vivid simile of himself and his companions as “huntsmen surrounding the copse” in which justice, their quarry, hides (νῶν δὴ ἡμᾶς δὲὶ ὄσπερ κοινητές τινὰς δήμον κύκλῳ περιστασθαί, 432b7-8).
take to be the “real world.” Poetry seems today to be more a rhetorical luxury than an essential component of a properly functioning society.

By contrast, poetry for the Greeks was not simply a literary genre. Rather, as I described in Chapter One, it was a key component of ancient Greek culture until the middle of the fourth century. Oral communication and transmission of poetry was the overarching educational and ethical tractate that dominated all of the important transactions and relationships of Attic society. Thus not surprisingly, memorization of poetry was an essential precondition for daily life and conversation. As mentioned previously, Aristotle observes in his *Metaphysics* that some people would not take seriously a speaker’s statements unless supported by the words of a poet. Accordingly, students learned many passages by heart as required by Greek pedagogy, and adults from all walks of life quoted lines of poetry that they had memorized in support of their arguments, in the points they made in conversations, and in their public speeches.

But if poetry could be “abused” to support a morally dubious position, the “quotability” of poetry in a culture where lines are excerpted and anthologies compiled (often of *gnômai, à la* Hesiod’s *Precepts of Cheiron*) poses an obstacle to any attempt to improve society gone awry. The discursive practice of selective quotation of memorable poetic passages constitutes a potential impediment to social reform. Accordingly, social reform necessarily entails discursive reform.

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289 One thinks here of New York Governor Mario Cuomo’s famous observation, “You campaign in poetry; you govern in prose” (Kolbert: 2015).


293 Hunter 2014: 119; see my discussion in Chapter 1.1.
After Adeimantus intervenes in Socrates’ conversation with his brother, Glaucon, early in Book 2 of the *Republic*, he provides a stunning example of how poetry can be misused to obstruct the reform of ideas about justice and attaining the desired non-instrumental formulation of justice for its own sake. Glaucon had been arguing that Socrates must provide a definition of justice that demonstrates why justice should be sought for its own sake, not for any benefit that it may happen to confer – in short, a non-instrumental definition of justice. Importantly for my thesis, several of the verses that Adeimantus quotes from memory in his demonstration are *gnômai* and proverbs. (We will return to the specifics of Glaucon’s argumentation shortly, as they, too, in their own way involve a misuse of proverb.) In accordance with my definition of proverb in Chapter One, I shall use the terms “gnome” and “proverb” interchangeably unless there is a specific reason for denoting a particular phrase as either a proverb (παροίμια) or a gnome (γνώμη) either (1) because a text expressly refers to a particular phrase as a “proverb” (παροίμια) or (2) because there is a need to draw attention to the poetic origin of particular *gnômai*, based upon Aristotle’s having used the word γνώμη explicitly for sayings which he found in early Greek poetry, a practice which many scholars have seen fit to follow. The latter distinction proves useful insofar as it serves to highlight Aristotle’s apparent view that *gnômai* could evolve over time into *paroimiai*, if they were to become “frequently quoted and common” (τεθρυλημέναι καὶ κοιναί, *Rhet.* 1395a10-17). For my purposes, this also helps to distinguish proverbs that have clear origins in poetry from those that might have arisen primarily out of folk culture.

We should first note how Socrates expresses his acceptance of Adeimantus intervening at this juncture into the conversation, when Adeimantus insists that Glaucon has not exhaustively

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294 Ar., *Rhet.* 1395a10-23; see my discussion in Chapter 1.2; Lardinois 1995: 16-17.
covered the relevant concerns that anyone seeking a non-instrumental definition of justice must address. Socrates invites Adeimantus into the discussion by way of what he describes explicitly as a “saying” (τὸ λεγόμενον), which is a term often used to preface a proverb: “Well then, let a brother help a brother” (Ὅκον . . . ἀδέλφος ἀνδρὶ παρεῖη, 362d6). Indeed, the scholiast defines this saying as a “proverb” (paroimia) and locates its source in Homer.295 In Book 16 of the Odyssey, Odysseus disguised as a poor beggar asks his son Telemachus whether he finds his non-existent “brothers” (κασιγνήτοις) inadequate to the task of overthrowing the greedy suitors who plague Penelope, insofar as “a man relies upon such men in fighting when a great quarrel arises” (οἷς περ ἀνήρ/μαρναμένοις πέποιθε, καὶ εἰ μέγα νεῖκος ὀρηται, Od. 16.97-8).296

We are about to witness Adeimantus demonstrate how a number of proverbs stand squarely in the way of anyone who aspires to conceive of justice as a good in and of itself. It seems only fitting, thus, that Plato should deftly mark the beginning of such a demonstration with its own introductory proverb, quoted by Socrates. Here, however, the “help” to be offered borders on the perverse, insofar as Adeimantus stands ready to aid (παρεῖη) a brother whose previous demands of Socrates in defending justice as a non-instrumental good were themselves alone sufficient (ικανά), as Socrates protests, to “pin him to the mat” (καταπαλίσαμι) and render him “incapable of helping justice” (ἀδύνατον ποιῆσαι βοήθειν δικαιοσύνη, 362d8-9). “Let a brother help a brother,” indeed.

Adeimantus then proceeds to quote a select number of proverbs – described generally as “sayings” (λεγόμενα, 365a5) – which fall into two categories: those that praise justice for the

295 Greene 1938: ad loc.: παροιμία ἀδέλφος  metavar>eitei παρεῖη ὃτι προτιμητέον τούς οἰκείους εἰς βοήθειαν (emphasis in original).
296 See my discussion in Chapter 2.2 of the parallel between Socrates and Odysseus disguised as a poor, old beggar.
benefits it confers rather than praising justice in and of itself (αὐτὸ, 363a1), and those that point to the ease and pleasure of vice and describe how gods angered by a man’s injustice may be appeased with sacrifices in a universe where too often just men suffer tragedy while the unjust live without affliction (i.e., the “problem of Job”). The former contain legomena from Hesiod’s *Works and Days* – specifically from a section that Lardinois describes as the poem’s Dikê-paraenesis, which itself “consists almost entirely of long, expanded gnomes, interrupted by four sets of imperatives . . . and an interesting soliloquy in which Hesiod draws some of the consequences of his Dike-paraenesis for himself.” Plato’s use of gnômai in his prose from this particular source seems apt, given that one might well describe the better part of the *Republic* itself as a Dikê-paraenesis. However, the gnômai that Adeimantus quotes support a proposition entirely different from that which is of central importance to the *Republic*, namely, that justice is to be sought for its own sake, not for the rewards it brings or the ways in which it enables one to avoid penalties and punishment. Moreover, Adeimantus employs the gnômai not only in support of the polar opposite to the *Republic*’s non-instrumental definition of justice, but, further, to illustrate how benefits and rewards accrue not to a person who really is just but to anyone who merely seems to be just (δοκοῦντι δίκαιῳ, 363a2-3).

Adeimantus cites the “noble Hesiod” (ὁ γενναῖος Ἁσίοδός) and quotes lines excerpted from the lengthy gnomic exposition on the merits of dikê which follows the famous parable of the hawk and the nightingale in the *Works and Days*. Per Adeimantus’ reading, these gnômai

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297 The full phrase is αὐτὸ δικαιοσύνην. Adam 1980: ad loc., explains that here “αὐτὸ is ipsum, ‘by itself,’” in light of the fact that “αὐτὸ may be thus used even when the feminine of the article is present.”

298 Lardinois 1995: 194. Lardinois definition of “gnome” (based upon that of Aristotle in his *Rhetoric*) is, as I explained in Chapter 1.2, remarkably close in key respects to how modern paroemiologists define a proverb: “a generalizing statement about a particular action” (Lardinois 1995: 12).

299 Hesiod, *Op.* 202-12. The fable of the hawk and nightingale differs radically from the gnomic exposition of dikê’s merits that follows in Hesiod’s didactic poem, since the fable concludes with a proverb that seems to endorse the law of the jungle after the hawk seizes the nightingale: “Foolish is he who seeks to vie with the stronger; / for he
guarantee that for the man who seems “just from his good repute (ἀπὸ τοῦ εὐδοκιμεῖν . . . τῷ δικαίῳ, 363a4-5) oak trees will bear “acorns on their tops, bees in their middles (ἀκρας μὲν τε φέρειν βαλάνους, μέσσας δὲ μελίσσας)” and “fleecy sheep are weighed down with wool (εἰροπόκοι δ’ οίες . . . μαλλοίς καταβεβρίθασι).” The lines’ lesson here seems clear: one should strive to be just – or rather, according to Adeimantus’ gloss, to acquire a reputation for justice – in order to receive the good things that result.

Adeimantus continues to press the point by describing still more extensive benefits (μακροτέρους . . . μισθοῦς) that allegedly accrue to those who seem just: “For they say that hereafter remain unfailing the children’s children and the stock of the pious and oath-keeping man” (παῖδας γὰρ παῖδων φασὶ καὶ γένος κατόπισθεν λείπεσθαι τοῦ ὀσίου καὶ εὐόρκου, 363d3-4). While the Scholiast finds the origin of this saying in Herodotus, the more likely candidate is yet another, earlier use of the same gnome in Hesiod’s Works and Days given that Adeimantus has just quoted expressly from Hesiod and is about to do so again barely one Stephanus page later, as we shall see in a moment. Moreover, the gnome that Adeimantus appears to paraphrase – but not quote expressly – is the concluding gnome of Hesiod’s Dikê-paraenesis, from which Adeimantus obtained his previously quoted lines. Indeed, as Lardinois explains, it is the last of Hesiod’s three gnômai on justice which expand a long gnome about the law of Zeus (282-5):

loses and suffers pain in addition to shame” (ἀφρων δ’, ὡς κ’ ἐθέλη πρὸς κρείσσονας ἀντιφερίζειν· / νίκης τε στέρεται πρὸς τ’ αἰσχρεῖν ἄλγεα πάσχε, 210-11).

Resp. 363b1-3 (quoting Op. 234-5).

Trans. Shorey (with modification).

Greene, C.G. 1938: ad loc.: ἔξ Ηροδότου (6.86) ἀπὸ τοῦ δοθέντος χρησμοῦ Γλαύκῳ τῷ Λάκωνι ὡς Άνδρὸς δ’ εὐόρκου γενεὴ μετόπισθεν ἀμείβων. See also Adam 1980: ad loc. In Herodotus, the Delphic Oracle warns Glaucus the Spartan about the son of Horkos who pursues the man who swears falsely. The last verse of the oracle is identical to Op. 285: ἄνδρος δ’ εὐόρκου γενεὴ μετόπισθεν ἀμείβων.

δὲ δὲ κε μαρτυρίησιν ἐκών ἔπιορκον ὁμόσας
ψεύσεται, ἐν δὲ δίκην βλάψας νήκεστον αἰσθῆ,
τοῦ δὲ τ’ ἀμαυρωτέρη γενεῖ μετόπισθε λέλευσται:
ἀνδρὸς δ’ εὐόρκου γενεῖ μετόπισθεν ἀμείνον.

He who lies, deliberately swearing falsely in his testimony,
is himself irreparably hurt by harming the just,
and the family he leaves behind is even more obscure
but better is the stock hereafter of the oath-keeping man. 304

If we were to follow the thinking of Aristotle in his *Rhetoric* concerning how some
proverbs began as *gnômai* and then became “frequently quoted and common” (τεθρυλημένας
καὶ κοινὰς, 1395a10-11), it would seem that Plato in the person of Adeimantus is revealing how
both the *gnômai* that are expressly quoted and attributed to a specific author – e.g., Adeimantus’
first quotation of *Works and Days*, lines 234-5 – and the *paroimiai* that subsequently evolve
following their initial debut as *gnômai* in a poetic text into frequently quoted sayings – e.g.,
Adeimantus’ subsequent paraphrase of *Works and Days*, lines 282-5 – have the potential to be
used as authority for morally dubious ends. Adeimantus is employing the full force of proverb to
justify why men do not practice justice for its own sake but rather for its collateral benefits.

Adeimantus then shifts to describing how, while everyone (πάντες) lauds justice and self-
control (σωφροσύνη τε καὶ δικαιοσύνη), they also find these things to be unpleasant and
laborious (χαλεπὸν μέντοι καὶ ἐπίπονον). By contrast, everyone acknowledges that “injustice and
licentiousness are pleasurable and easily acquired, but shameful only because of law and
custom” (ἀκολασία δὲ καὶ ἀδικία ἡδὺ μὲν καὶ εὐπετές κτῆσασθαι, δόξῃ δὲ μόνον καὶ νόμῳ
αἰσχρόν, 364a1-4). And how do people justify such a morally questionable position?
Adeimantus gives an explanation that amounts to an anachronistic citation of Aristotle’s advice,
namely, that people quote the poets in support of their view: “For all of these arguments, they

304 See Hunter 2014: 118, n. 200, who argues convincingly that Plato uses κατόπισθεν for Hesiod’s μετόπισθε(ν).
bring in the poets as supporting witnesses concerning the ease of obtaining vice” (τούτοις δὲ πᾶσιν τοῖς λόγοις μάρτυρας ποιητάς ἐπάγονται οἱ μὲν κακίας πέρι, εὐπετείας διδόντες, 364c5-6).

Moreover, the lines of poetry which Adeimantus maintains are quoted by those people who want to justify the ease of vice vis-à-vis the difficulty of virtue, constitute one of the most famous and most-quoted gnómai in Greek literature, the ubiquitous “two roads” passage from Hesiod’s Works and Days, with its memorable image of two divergent roads, one of vice and one of virtue.305 Indeed, I think it reasonable to consider these lines as having achieved the status of a proverb under Aristotle’s analysis, precisely because they were quoted so often and repeated so widely in the ancient world.

Adeimantus, however, crops the lines to make a claim entirely counter to the didactic thrust of the passage as it appears in Hesiod’s original: instead of the hard road of virtue, the easy road to vice receives approbation in Adeimantus’ selective quotation, in order to support Ademiantus’ claim that most people, regrettably, would rather take the easier road to villainy (364c5-d2306):

τὴν μὲν κακότητα καὶ ἱλαδὸν ἔστιν ἐλέσθαι
ῥηιδιῶς· λείη μὲν ὀδὸς, μάλα δ’ ἐγγύθι ναίει·
τῆς δ’ ἄρετῆς ἱδρῶτα θεοὶ προπάροιθεν ἐδηκαν

Easily and frequently is Villainy seized; for the road is easy and very near. But before the road of Virtue the [deathless] gods have placed sweat.

Adeimantus conveniently omits the second half of the proverb (Op. 290-2):

ἀθάνατοι· μακρὸς δὲ καὶ ὅρθιος οἳμος ἐς ἀυτῆν
καὶ τριχής τὸ πρῶτον· ἐπήν δ’ εἰς ἄκρον ἱκηται,
ῥηιδῆ δὴ ἐπειτα πέλει, χαλεπὴ περ ἐοῦσα.

And the way to it [Virtue] is long and steep and rough at first. But when one

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arrives at the summit, then it is easier, even though remaining difficult.\(^{307}\)

What in Hesiod’s original had been an exhortation to pursue the hard, yet righteous path now becomes, in Adeimantus’ selective quotation, an excuse to yield to one’s baser instincts.

Hesiod’s original seems in many ways to be the Hesiodic analogue of the aforementioned Greek proverb, “Hard is the good” (χαλεπὰ τὰ καλὰ) which Socrates and his interlocutors quote twice elsewhere in the Republic, specifically with respect to the difficulty of the inquiry they are undertaking in the dialogue.\(^{308}\) Thus, if one were to follow the course of action seemingly demanded by Adeimantus’ (mis)-citation and (mis)-use of Hesiod’s gnome turned-paroimia, the participants in Plato’s Republic would be justified in setting aside their inquiry altogether, in putting an end (ἀπηλλάχθαι) to their discourse, as Socrates had briefly envisioned at Book 2’s opening. Better and far easier to do what everyone else does and then summon the gnômai of the poets and proverbs as support: Don’t scruple to commit wrong so long as you maintain the appearance of being just. Attempting the hard path of acting justly for justice’s sake is a fool’s errand.

Indeed, barely one Stephanus page later, Adeimantus provides what Adam calls an “audacious application of the proverb χαλεπὰ τὰ καλὰ” – “outrageous” may be more accurate – in proffering as a rejoinder to anyone who objects that it is “not easy for a wrongdoer to escape detection indefinitely” (οὐ ρᾴδιον ἀεὶ λανθάνειν κακὸν ὄντα, 365c6-7) this ersatz bit of wisdom: “And so, too, is neither any other big endeavor easy” (Οὐδὲ γὰρ ἄλλο οὐδὲν εὕπετές. . . τῶν

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\(^{307}\) I omit from my translation ἀθάνατος, as it belongs to the previous line, which Adeimantus cropped.

\(^{308}\) Resp. 435c8, 497d10. The scholium on 435c attributes the proverb to Solon, revealing that, as was the case with Hesiod’s two-roads motif, the saying began as a gnome, if we follow Aristotle’s view that gnômai which become frequently quoted also qualify as paroimiai. In addition, a variant of the same proverb is at issue in Protagoras’ and Socrates’ dueling interpretations of Simonides’ “Ode to Scopas” in Plato’s Protagoras (339b1ff.).
μεγάλων, 365c7-d1).\textsuperscript{309} The world and its hitherto notions of traditional morality are turned upside down when proverbs are employed in ways that invert their usual meanings.

Adeimantus is, of course, playing devil’s advocate. He understands full well the hazards posed by the selective quotation of proverbs, many of which find their origins in poetry, e.g., the gnômai from Hesiod that he so “audaciously” applies. Indeed, after quoting another gnome (from Homer)\textsuperscript{310} and before launching into even more quotations and sayings, Adeimantus sums up precisely the problem that lies at the very heart of Plato’s concerns (365a4-b1):

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Ταῦτα πάντα . . . ὦ φίλε Σώκρατες, τοιαῦτα καὶ τοσαῦτα λεγόμενα ἁρετῆς πέρι καὶ κακίας, ὡς ἄνθρωποι καὶ θεοὶ περὶ αὐτὰ ἔχουσι τιμής, τί οἰόμεθα ἀκοουόσας νέον ψυχῆς ποιεῖν, ὅσοι εὐφυεῖς καὶ ίκανοὶ ἐπὶ πάντα τὰ λεγόμενα ὀσπερ ἐπιστόμενοι συλλογίσασθαι εξ αὐτῶν ποιός τις ἄν ὄν καὶ πῇ πορευθείς τὸν βίον ὡς ἀριστα διέλθοι;
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My dear Socrates, what do we suppose is the effect of all these sayings, so many and of such sort, as to how men and gods hold in esteem both virtue and vice, on the souls of the young men who hear them, however many are well-suited and capable of flitting upon them like bees and gathering from them whatever sort of person a man would be and the way by which having proceeded, he might lead his life the best?

Then, to illustrate his point as he leads up to his outrageous misapplication of chalepa ta kala in support of vice rather than virtue, Adeimantus takes Socrates (and Plato’s reader) through a near dizzying display of multiple sayings, quotations, paraphrases, and poetic excerpts, several of which qualify as genuine proverbs. His purpose is to illustrate the potentially damaging effects

\textsuperscript{309} Adam 1980: ad loc.

\textsuperscript{310} The Homer excerpt is Plato’s freely-edited version of Phoenix’s words to Achilles in II. 9.407-501: “Propitiable by prayers are the gods, whose anger men turn aside, entreating by sacrifices and gentle prayers, libation and the savour of burnt fat, whenever someone sins or transgresses” (λιστοὶ δὲ τε καὶ θεοὶ αὐτοῦ, / καὶ τοὺς μὲν θυσίαις καὶ εὐχολαῖς ἀγαναίαν / λοιβῇ τε κνίσῃ τε παρατρωπῶς’ ἄνθρωποι / λισσόμενοι, ὅτε κέν τις ὑπερβηθαι καὶ ἁμάρτηθ.). Lardinois classifies the passage as a gnome because, as outlined in Chapter 1.2, he follows Aristotle’s practice of denoting the lines found in early Greek poetry that make a generalizing assertion about human actions and thereby prescribe whether to adopt or reject them, as gnômai. Lardinois 1995: 7-13, 20, n. 68, 280-81. In addition, the suppressed copula of the first clause, the polyptoton of λιστοὶ — λισσόμενων, the general categories of “gods” (θεοὶ) and “men” (ἄνθρωποι), the axiological terminology (ὑπερβηθη καὶ ἁμάρτηθ.), and the assonance in general of Plato’s appropriated version of Homer’s poetry are all potential markers of proverbs (see generally Most 2008: 146).
wrought by *ta legomena*. What Adeimantus does in the course of only a few lines amounts to a demonstration in miniature of my larger point, that proverbs and their skillful deployment constitute one of the key battlegrounds on which the struggle is waged for influence over people’s behavior and the resulting formation of a society that necessarily reflects that society’s prevailing discursive practices. We are, and we become, what we speak.

Rorty elucidates how any reform-oriented politics worthy of the name “utopian” seeks to create “a pattern of linguistic behavior which will tempt the rising generation to adopt it, thereby causing them to look for appropriate new forms of nonlinguistic behavior, for example, the adoption of new scientific equipment or new social institutions.”311 This helps explain Adeimantus’ concern about the effect of “so many” *legomena* “of such sort” (τοιαῦτα καὶ τοσαῦτα λεγόμενα) on the young men who are “well-suited and capable” (ἐὖφυεῖς καὶ ἰκανοί) of making use of them for the purpose of constructing their very identities and living their lives (συλλογίσασθαι ἐξ αὐτῶν ποιῶς τις ἀν ὤν καὶ πῆ πορευθεῖς τὸν βίον ὡς ἀριστα διέλθοι, 365a6-b1). In the parlance of Rorty, Adeimantus illustrates the significance of the “contest” between competing “vocabularies” or “language games” which constitute the fundamental way human beings formulate their beliefs about the world, e.g., “the vocabulary of ancient Athenian politics versus Jefferson’s, the moral vocabulary of Saint Paul versus Freud’s, the jargon of Newton versus that of Aristotle, the idiom of Blake versus that of Dryden . . .”312 The reigning “vocabularies” of any particular era and culture – including that era and culture’s oft-quoted sayings, which frequently take the form of proverbs – both shape and reflect the conceptual, as well as moral, framework of the community at large.


worth quoting at length (365b1-366b2):

Adeimantus’ tour-de-force exposition of this contest among differing legomena — i.e.,

part of the linguistic behavior that constitutes a “vocabulary” in Rorty’s sense of the word — is

One might reasonably ask himself that saying from Pindar, “Shall I ascend the loftier wall by justice or by crooked deceptions and lead my life, fortified all around, in this way?” For the sayings affirm that for me actually being just, if I don’t seem to be so, there is nothing advantageous, but toil and manifest loss. However, a godlike life is promised to the unjust man who has procured for himself a reputation for justice. Therefore, since “the seeming is what masters the truth,” as the wise men say, and is lord of happiness, to this I must devote myself without stint. For I must draw ‘round myself as my front and my exterior a shadow painting of virtue, but I must also drag behind me the shifty and profit-hungry fox of that most sage Archilochus. “But,” someone says, “Not forever easy is the task of lying hid for the wrongdoer.” “So, too,” we shall say, “neither is any of the other great endeavors easy.” But nevertheless, if we are going to be
happy, by this way we must journey, as the path of our discourse leads. . . “But against the gods neither secrecy nor force can avail.” But if there are no gods or they have no care for mankind, why should we be concerned about eluding them? And if they do exist and pay heed, surely we do not know or have not heard of them other than from custom and their pedigrees traced by the poets, the same men who say how the gods are such that they can be persuaded and turned aside by sacrifices and gentle prayers and votive offerings, men whom we ought to believe in both ways or in neither way. So if we must believe them, then we must commit injustice and then make sacrifices from the fruits of our wrongdoing. For as just men we will only be free from punishment by the gods, but we will be thrusting away from ourselves the profits of injustice. But as unjust men we will shall win those profits and by praying, although we transgress and sin, we shall get off scot free by persuading them. “But in Hades then shall we pay the penalty for the crimes we have committed here, either we ourselves or our children’s children.” “But my dear friend,” a calculating man will say, the expiatory rights and the delivering gods have great power, as the greatest cities testify and the children of the gods, those who have become poets and prophets, the men who reveal that things are in this way.”

Let us consider in detail this breathtaking array by Adeimantus of the various legomena playing off one another in a bid for their hold on the young men’s collective imagination. He begins with a fragment from Pindar that crystallizes the decision every human being must face as to how to live life: will one strive to achieve success – rendered metaphorically as scaling the loftier wall (τεῖχος ὕψιον) – by living a life guided by justice (δίκα) or by more Machiavellian means (σκολιάς ἀπάτας)? The question appears to be rhetorical given that the answer ought to be obvious: follow the path of righteousness.

But what do the other numerous legomena advise as to this decision? First they say (φασιν) that it makes no difference whether I am truly just (δικαίῳ μὲν ὄντι), but only if I seem (δοκῶ) to be so. The former is of no advantage (ὁφελος οὐδέν) but amounts only to toil and self-evident loss (πόνους δὲ καὶ ζημίας φανεράς). By contrast, however, “It is said that a godlike life is in store for the unjust man who procures for himself a reputation for justice” (ἀδίκῳ δὲ δόξαν δικαιοσύνης παρεσκευασμένω θεσπέσιως βίος λέγεται). This phrase has the markings of a proverb: short and pithy with enhanced stylistic features such as figura etymologica coupled with
alliteration (ἀδίκω δὲ δόξαν δικαιοσύνης) and homoioptoton (θεσπέσιος βίος), introduced by the
telltale legetai which epitomizes the universal social function of proverbs: to externalize and
distance authority. As modern paroemiology and folklore studies make clear, phrases like “it
is said” serve to project the responsibility for the proverb’s admonition onto an anonymous
past.

In support of this proverb, misguided as it is, Adeimantus then offers yet another,
“Therefore, since ‘It is the seeming,’ as the wise men make clear, ‘that masters the truth’ and is
lord of happiness, we must devote ourselves entirely to that” (οὐκοῦν, ἐπειδὴ τὸ δοκεῖν, ὡς
dηλοῦσί μοι οἱ σοφοί, καὶ τὰν ἀλάθειαν βιῶται καὶ κύριον εὐδαιμονίας, ἐπὶ τοῦτο δὴ τρεπτέον
ὁλως, 365c1-2). The scholium on Euripides’ Orestes (verses 235 and 782) attributes this proverb,
tὸ δοκεῖν καὶ τὰν ἀλάθειαν βιῶται, to Simonides. And so once again, as in Book 1, Simonides
is pressed into service to bolster a position contrary to the non-instrumental definition of justice
that the discussants seek. Here, however, only some unnamed sophoi, not Simonides, are
expressly cited. We seem then to have a saying that has evolved into a proverb after beginning its
elocutionary life as a Simonidean gnome, consistent with Aristotle’s view that oft-quoted gnômai
evolve into paroimiai. The saying has developed to a point where its core message – appearance
is stronger than reality – is read as underlying situations as diverse as Orestes’ maintaining that it
is better to look healthy when in fact you are sick (Or. 235-6) and Adeimantus’ claim that
seeming just is superior to being just.

313 Martin 2005: 5.
314 Dundes and Arewa 1964: 70.
316 Resp. 331d4ff; see my discussion in chapter 2.4.
317 δόξαν γὰρ τὸν ὑγιείας ἔχει· κρεῖσσον δὲ τὸ δοκεῖν, κἂν ἀληθείας ἀπῆλ.
Adeimantus then appears to try his own hand at proverb-building, with the following saying that conjoins the central idea of the just-quoted proverb “It is seeming that masters the truth” with the idea that there is profit to be gained from being unjust: “I must draw ‘round myself as my front and my exterior a shadow painting of virtue, but I must also drag behind me the shifty and profit-hungry fox of that most sage Archilochus” (πρόθυρα μὲν καὶ σχῆμα κύκλω περὶ ἐμαυτὸν σκιαγραφίαν ἁρετῆς περιγραπτέον, τὴν δὲ τοῦ σοφωτάτου Ἀρχιλόχου ἀλώπεκα ἔλκτεον ἐξόπισθεν κερδαλέαν καὶ ποικίλην, 365c2-6). While the fox certainly enjoyed a reputation in Greek literature as the “embodiment of cunning,” in large part due to Archilochus’ verse, now here do we find that fox melded together with architectural imagery on the order of a building’s “front and exterior” (πρόθυρα . . . καὶ σχῆμα). The meaning of Archilochus’ saying seems not far afield from the proverb, “Speak softly and carry a big stick,” used by Theodore Roosevelt in support of a U.S. foreign policy backed by robust military action, which is itself arguably a variation of the proverb-like phrase “iron fist in a velvet glove.” Whether his mixed metaphor of the prototypical crafty fox and the frontal structures of buildings really works all that well on a poetic level, Adeimantus is essentially attempting to demonstrate via his newly-coined saying that new proverbs will continue to develop out of the wrongheaded poetic formulations already extant and currently being committed to memory by those young men disposed and capable (ἐὼρφεῖς καὶ ίκανοι) of employing them as further justification for pursuing the potential profits to be reaped from unjust actions.

Adeimantus then takes up the opposing position by creating an imaginary respondent to counter the sayings offered in support of maintaining the pretense of justice while acting to the contrary. “‘But,’ someone says, ‘not forever easy is the task of lying hid for the wrongdoer’”

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318 Adam 1980: 84-5. See Archilochus, frags. 174.2, 185.5, 201.1 West.
(Ἀλλὰ γὰρ, φησὶ τις, οὐ ῥᾴδιον ἢ ἔνει λανθάνειν κακὸν ὄντα, 365c5-6). This rather plain saying bears a marked resemblance to a noted gnomé from Bacchylides’ fourth dithyramb: “For it is not always easy for the doer not to meet with evil” (οὗ γὰρ ῥᾴδιον αἰὲν ἐπὶ ὄντα μὴ 'ντυχεῖν κακῷ).319 This saying, in turn, reflects a moral familiar to many Greeks, exemplified by such other, similar gnômai as Aeschylus’ “‘For him who does, suffering,’ that is what the old, old saying states” (δράσαντα παθεῖν, τριγέρων μύθος τάδε φονεῖ, Ch. 313-14),320 and Pindar’s “It is fitting that the one doing something, too, should suffer” (ῥέζοντά τι καὶ παθεῖν ἐοικεν, N. 4.32). Such gnômai articulate the lex talionis, the ancient doctrine of retaliation, an “eye for eye, tooth for tooth . . .” Adeimantus, thus, is seemingly paraphrasing a similar gnome from Bacchylides to illustrate the magnitude of the task faced by anyone who believes that one can commit wrongdoing under the pretense of seeming just: one must also succeed in forever escaping the talio.322

In response to this Bacchilydean-style proverb positing how tremendous a feat it is for a wrongdoer to escape detection indefinitely, Adeimantus then offers his audacious (mis)-application of the proverb, chalepa ta kala (i.e., “So, too, is neither any other big endeavor easy”) as discussed previously. Moreover, he then bolsters the mis-applied proverb with a new saying that itself is resonant of Hesiod’s divergent paths, the easy way leading to vice and the difficult to virtue: “But nevertheless, if we are going to be happy, in this way we must go, as the tracks of our discourses lead” (ἀλλ’ ὀμος, εἰ μέλλομεν ἐνδαιμονήσειν, ταύτη ἱέν, ὡς τὰ ἵκη

320 Trans. Sommerstein.
321 In Plato’s Crito (49c4-6), Socrates repudiates the lex talionis in what Vlastos (1991: 179-99) argues is a stunning, salutary step forward for humanity: ΣΩ. Τι δὲ; ἀντικακουργεῖν κακοῦς πάσχοντα, ὡς οὐπολλοὶ φασιν, δίκαιων ἢ οὐ δίκαιων; ΚΡ. Οὐδαμῶς.
322 See Shorey 1907: 235, who rightly disagrees with Jebb’s interpretation that the verse refers to the unbroken series of Theseus’ victories, proving that Theseus is under divine protection, given the saying’s proximity to “a familiar and pertinent Greek moral” exemplified by other gnômai such as Pindar’s ῥέζοντά τι καὶ παθεῖν ἐοικεν, N. 4.32
We now have what I would argue is a proverb that functions on a metapoetic level by referencing the function of proverbs themselves, of influential discursive practices in general, in other words, those *logoi* which “lead” (φέρειν): they persuade us to act in a manner consistent with their respective generalizations as to how the world works. Which of Hesiod’s two proverbial paths the “meet and capable” (εὐφυεῖς καὶ ἰκανοί) young men will ultimately choose to take will in large part be determined by the dominant “vocabularies” (in Rorty’s terminology) to which those young men subscribe. The *gnômai* and proverbs that the young men have committed to memory by virtue of their traditional Greek education will ultimately lead them via the “tracks of their discourses” (τὰ ἰχνη τῶν λόγων). The danger, of course, lies in the fact that too many of those sayings – as Adeimantus reads them – point in the direction of the easier path to injustice.

Adeimantus then summons what seems yet another proverb to counter the notion that injustice pays indefitely, with no final comeupance: “‘But against the gods, stealth and violence are of no avail” (“Ἀλλὰ δὴ θεοὺς οὔτε λανθάνειν οὔτε βιάσασθαι δυνατόν”, 365d6-7). One might well argue that this rather plain statement, for which we have no apparent poetic pedigree, does not rise to the level of a genuine proverb. I could counter by observing, again, that many proverbs are composed of plain language and that any proverb’s meaning necessarily depends on the specific context in which it is used.324 Here, there seems little doubt that Adeimantus’ newest rejoinder to an imaginary proponent of the “injustice pays” line of thought, with its generalization about the impossibility of escaping the gods’ own justice and *sotto voce* prescription to act justly, serves most assuredly as a proverb in the context in which it is used:

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323 Adam 1980: ad loc., conjectures that the words ἰχνη φέρει come from Archilochus.

324 Russo 1983: 125, explains that many proverbs, both ancient and modern, have no “striking structural features whatsoever” but make their point in plain language such as the English proverb “Love is blind” and its ancient Greek analogue *typhlos ho Erôs*. 

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rebut opposing proverbs. Yet even to concede that the statement fails as a genuine proverb is to make the more significant point: so powerful are the competing gnómai and proverbs holding the opposite position – namely, that it is better to reap the rewards of injustice but appear to be just – that society’s present attempts to formulate new sayings and proverbs in the service of justice are a poor match in the contest between vocabularies for their hold over the public imagination. As Adeimantus complains only a few paragraphs hence, “No one has ever set forth sufficiently in discourse, neither in poetry or ordinary private conversation that [injustice] is the greatest of evils . . . but justice is the greatest good” (οὐδεὶς πώς ποτε ὁὐτ' ἐν ποιήσει οὐτ' ἐν ἰδίοις λόγοις ἐπεξήλθην ἵκανῳς τῷ λόγῳ ὃς . . . δικαιοσύνη δὲ μέγιστον ἄγαθόν, 366e7-9). That Adeimantus fails to formulate an elegant and effective proverb in support of justice should surprise no one.

Adeimantus then replies to his own most recent proverb – or perhaps poor imitation of one – with an absolutely devastating response: “But if there are no gods or they do not care about mankind, why should we be concerned about eluding them?” (Οὐκοὖν, εἰ μὲν μὴ εἰσίν ἢ μηδὲν αὐτοῖς τῶν ἀνθρωπίνων μέλει, τι καὶ ἡμῖν μελητέον τοῦ ἀνθρώπου; 365d7-e1). What makes this retort so powerful – leaving aside entirely the issue of whether it constitutes a proverb\(^{325}\) – is its implicit recognition of the contingency of all human efforts to make sense of the world in language. At its most immediate level, Adeimantus’ statement is equivalent to an atheist’s assertion that they cannot be guilty of blasphemy since for them there is no God. An atheist chooses to describe (or better, to conceive of) the world with a vocabulary – no doubt replete with its own sayings and proverbs, like any vocabulary – that is entirely separate from the believer’s vocabulary, with its own set of proverbs, sayings, etcetera. And thus, on a more profound level, Adeimantus is again making another metapoetic observation: the “language

\(^{325}\) To be sure, a question can in fact constitute a proverb, e.g., “Why buy the cow when milk is so cheap?” See Winick 1998: 36.
game” that he has been in the process of demonstrating by his display of competing sayings, maxims, proverbs, gnômai, etcetera is itself contingent. There is no final vocabulary that will be absolutely determinative on the subject of justice (or on any subject for that matter). It is impossible to have “the last word” on anything. There will always be new and different vocabularies that shape our thinking on any subject – indeed, vocabularies which determine ab initio what we even conceive as a “subject” of our discourse. We are close here to the thinking of philosophers of science such as Thomas Kuhn and Mary Hesse who have argued that scientific revolutions are “metaphoric redescriptions” of nature, not “insights into the intrinsic nature of nature.” Relevant, too, is Nietzsche’s definition of “truth” as “a mobile army of metaphors.” If we substitute “proverbs” or “gnômai” or, more broadly, “discursive practices” (i.e., logoi) for Nietzsche’s “metaphors,” we begin to see Adeimantus’ larger point. Proverbs and sayings are part of the larger contest for creating the overarching vocabulary as regards justice.

Adeimantus thus sets up well the critique that Plato is making regarding the potentially deleterious effect of certain sayings and their repeated quotation on the broader society. As Hunter explains,

One of the clear lessons of Adeimantos’ speech, with its easy citations of Hesiod, Homer, Pindar and Archilochus, a lesson both explicitly spelled out and demonstrated through the style of the speech, is that the “quotability” of poetry, enshrined in the excerpting and anthologizing habit which already had a firm hold in Athenian culture by Plato’s day, made it a particularly powerful opponent to the moral project which Plato sets himself in the Republic; the young man who wants to decide (like Prodicus’ Heracles) which course of life he should follow, the life of justice or the life of deceit, can “flit” from passage to passage like a bee – there will always be a suitable poetic defence for any moral stance.

328 Rorty 1989: 17
Indeed, Adeimantus is quick to point out that any existence the gods may enjoy is intimately connected with the “custom” of society’s traditional discourse, in particular, on the poets’ verse: “And if they do exist and pay heed, surely we do not know or have not heard of them other than from custom and their pedigrees traced by the poets” (εἰ δὲ εἰσὶ τε καὶ ἐπιμελοῦνται, οὐκ ἄλλοθέν τοι αὐτοῦς ἱσμεν ἢ ἀκηκόαμεν ἢ ἔκ τε τῶν νόμων καὶ τῶν γενεαλογησάντων ποιητῶν, 365e1-3). So if this is the case, if our prevailing vocabulary as concerns the gods comes from the poets, well, those “same men” (ἀὐτοὶ οὗτοι) tell us that the gods can be “turned aside” (παράγεσθαι) from punishing us for our sins, having been “persuaded” (ἀναπειθόμενοι, 365e2-5) by the sorts of things we learn only by virtue of the poets’ gnómai, enshrined in our collective memory.

To illustrate his point, Adeimantus re-quotes a phrase he had cited earlier from a Homeric gnome that stipulates one of the means by which the gods can be persuaded to forgive one’s acting unjustly for profit’s sake: beseech them with “gentle prayers” (εὐχωλαῖς ἀγανήσιν, 365e4). If one is to subscribe to this line of thought arising from the poets’ gnómai, if one “must believe/obey” (πειστέον) the poets’ vocabulary, then one “must also commit injustice and make sacrifices from the fruits of his sins” (ἀδικητέον καὶ θυτέον ἀπὸ τῶν ἀδικημάτων, 365e6-366a1).

Adeimantus makes one final show of an attempt to counter this dominant line of discourse with a statement containing some figura etymologica resonant of Adeimantus’ prior paraphrase of an Hesiodic gnome: “But in Hades then shall we pay the penalty for the crimes we have committed here, either we ourselves or our children’s children” (Ἀλλὰ γὰρ ἐν Ἀιδῶν δίκην δῶσομεν ὄν ἄν ἐνθάδε ἀδικήσωμεν, ἢ αὐτοὶ ἢ παῖδες παίδων, 366a4-6). In “children’s children”

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330 From Iliad 9.949. See note 310.
(παιδες παιδων) we detect the weak echo of Adeimantus’ previous reference to Hesiod’s gnome from the *Dikê*-paraenesis of *Works and Days*, according to which the progeny of the oath-keeping man – i.e., his “children’s children” – is superior to that of the perjurer.\(^{331}\) However, the faint traces of this countering Hesiodic vocabulary and its attendant gnômai are seemingly no match for a hypothetical “calculating man” (λογιζόµενος) whom Adeimantus “quotes” to wind up his stunning display of the power of memorized gnômai, proverbs, and other assorted sayings: “The expiatory rites and the delivering gods have great power” according to the “the greatest city-states which *say* these things and the children of the gods, having become both poets and prophets, who reveal that things are in this way” (αι τελεται αυ µεγα δυναναι και οι λυσιοι θεοι, ως αι µεγισται πολεις λεγουσι και οι θεοι παιδες ποιηται και προφηται των θεων γενοµενοι, οι τατα ουτως εχειν µηνυουσιν). In sum, the world’s currently ascendant vocabulary – pronounced by the “greatest city states” and by their traditional transmitters of customs and values, the poets – is incapable of persuading men to be just for justice’s own sake. And so, the need for discursive reform – for a new “vocabulary” as concerns justice – could not be greater.

To be sure, the problem for Plato lies not solely with the fact that Adeimantus is quoting poets. It is, more specifically, the particular *quotability* of the lines that Adeimantus chooses, as noted by Hunter.\(^{332}\) Of the eight genuine excerpts from poetry cited by Adeimantus (three from Hesiod, two from Homer, one from Pindar, one from Simonides, and one from Archilochus) more than half qualify as gnômai – gnômai which by definition, according to Aristotle, also necessarily constitute proverbs to the extent that they become “common and frequently quoted”

\(^{331}\) Compare Resp. 363d3-4 (“For they say that hereafter remain unfailing the children’s children and the stock of the pious and oath-keeping man” [παιδες γαρ παιδων φασι και γενος κατοπισθεν λειπεσθαι των θειου και ευδορκου]) with Op. 285 (“Better is the stock hereafter of the oath-keeping man” [ανδρος δε ευδορκου γενεη μετοπισθεν άμεινου])

\(^{332}\) Hunter 2014: 119.
(τεθρυλημέναις και κοιναῖς). While poetry alone may lend itself more than other discursive practices to memorization (by such structural features as meter and rhyme) and thus to preservation, the extent to which certain verses from poetry also constitute gnómai and proverbs increases all the more those verses’ “quotability” – a “quotability” which Hunter rightly emphasizes as a source of poetry’s power. Linguistic expressions that are particularly quotable would seem to be stronger candidates than other expressions for inclusion in any instantiation of Rorty’s concept of a “vocabulary.” If the current, prevailing vocabulary concerning justice – evinced by the many “quotables” that Adeimantus offers – is to be replaced, “re-formed,” with a new discourse, then the widespread practice of selecting, citing, and quoting proverbs and gnómai must be reimagined, re-thought, in Plato’s project of discursive and societal reform.

3.3. Tales of Two Gyges: Plato’s Proverbs versus Herodotus’

Before Adeimantus had taken the reins of the colloquy with Socrates to demonstrate the pervasive, undesirable influence of ta legomena on young men’s souls, Glaucon had proffered two thought-experiments designed to elucidate why men will always choose injustice over justice. The first of these two experiments involves what appears to be a reworking of Herodotus’ famous account of Gyges and Candaules, the King of Lydia. As Herodotus tells the story, Candaules compels Gyges, a close confidant and member of his royal guard, to view in secret his wife undressing so that he can witness firsthand her extraordinary beauty. After

333 Rh. 1395a10-11.
335 The second thought-experiment (360e1-62c8) concerns the contrast between two men, one of whom has the reputation and accompanying social rewards for being perfectly just but who is, in fact, perfectly unjust, and the other who, although in reality is a perfectly just man, is mistakenly perceived to be absolutely unjust, so much so that he is tortured to death.
discovering that Gyges has seen her nude, the queen forces Gyges first to slay Candaules and then to take her as his own wife and assume power as monarch in Candaules’ place.

In Plato’s rendering, however, Gyges is a shepherd, not a member of the king’s court, and the story, as Glaucon tells it, also includes a thunderstorm, an earthquake, and a hollow bronze horse with a corpse wearing a magical ring inside, a ring which turns its wearer invisible. Plato’s Gyges finds and dons the ring so that he can slay the king and seduce his wife. The moral of Glaucon’s story is that any man, given the choice of whether to wear the magic ring of invisibility, would undoubtedly do just as Gyges did.

Given the divergence of the two versions of the stories, questions invariably arise. Is Plato’s Gyges the same person as Herodotus’ Gyges? Why is there no ring in Herodotus’ account? Any number of interpretations have been offered in an attempt to reconcile the two versions. Many scholars have searched for an original, some Urtext of the Gyges story, as did Kirby Flower Smith in an influential 1902 article that sought to “reconstruct the old popular tale of Gyges” by using a wide variety of sources, including comparative material from Greek and Near Eastern literature, as well as such authors as Damascenus, Ptolemaius Chennus, and Philostratus, in addition to Herodotus and Plato.336 Other scholars like Andrew Dyck have claimed that Plato’s “folktale version” is in fact the original, while Herodotus’ account is but a “secondary rationalization.”337 In contrast, Adam argues on philological grounds that Plato’s account is unconnected to Herodotus’, given Glaucon’s characterization of the protagonist as “an ancestor of Gyges the Lydian” (τῷ Γύγου τοῦ Λυδοῦ προγόνῳ, 359d1) – that is, not the Gyges of Herodotus’ historical account but rather his homonymous ancestor.338 Andrew Laird, following

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336 Smith 1902: 263. See Laird 2001: 13-14, for a good summary of Smith’s efforts and reconstruction of the legend.
Adam’s lead, has emphasized that “Glaucón’s protagonist is frequently identified with Gyges himself, generally with little or no justification” in support of Laird’s larger point that Plato largely invents Glaucón’s version of the tale, thereby revealing the salutary benefit of fictional fabrication to philosophic argument (à la Descartes’ “evil genius”). And most recently, Gabriel Danzig has made the intriguing claim that Herodotus’ version of a seemingly “innocent” Gyges, forced against his will to view a naked queen, kill her husband and take his throne is, in essence, an educational “riddle” for his audience to solve. That is, Herodotus’ version is simply a second-hand account that attempts to rationalize the usurpation of a throne – history having been written by the victor (Gyges) rather than the loser (Candaules). Danzig argues that Plato then essentially re-writes the Herodotean version so as to strip away the ambiguities of Herodotus’ portrait of Gyges, and instead reveal that “what for Herodotus are amusing anecdotes about the way the world works are for Plato grave endorsements of injustice.”

I believe that if we now shift our focus to the particular dimension of the twin stories which concerns differing and competing formulations of proverbial wisdom, we may gain a fuller understanding of what Plato seeks to achieve with the story of Gyges’ ring. Rather than attempt to harmonize Herodotus’ and Plato’s versions or, conversely, definitively separate them, in part by philological emphasis on Plato’s phrase, “an ancestor of Gyges the Lydian” (τῷ Γύγου τοῦ Λυδοῦ προγόνῳ, 359d), we should instead view the authors’ twin stories as continuing the longstanding Greek agonistic tradition of the pre-classical poets, in Mark Griffith’s words, to “contest and contradict” their rivals’ poetic formulations of preexisting themes, “to tell and retell

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341 In contrast to Adam, Jowett and Campbell 1894: ad loc., attempt to make Plato’s Gyges the same as Herodotus’ by suggesting that the text be amended to either (1) τῷ Κροίσου τοῦ Λυδοῦ προγόνῳ or (2) Γύγη τῷ Κροίσου τοῦ Λυδοῦ προγόνῳ, so that the Gyges in the Republic becomes the ancestor of Croesus.
traditional or new stories.” I would argue that the “agonistic stance” exemplified in the many assorted genres that Griffith rightly describes as “confrontational and antithetical” – for example, the matched speeches and battlefield vaunts in the Homeric epics, the debate scenes in tragedy, the epirrhetic agon and invective of Old Comedy, the antiphonal thênos over the dead, the insult-battles of iambos, the amoibaia and short prize-poems (ancestors of Theocritean pastoral), and the sympotic skolon – reveals an appreciation on the part of some ancient authors for the same dynamic that Rorty identifies in his theory of competing “vocabularies.” Moreover, the object of Plato’s and Herodotus’ variant – once could say “competing” – Gyges stories, I maintain, is proverbial expression. As was the case with Adeimantus’ display of numerous legomena – all vying for prolonged status as quotable proverbs with concomitant influence over the demos – the tales of two Gyges concern the question of which proverbs will exert a lasting hold over the Athenian populace’s conception of justice.

In Herodotus’ account of Candaules and Gyges, one finds not just one or two, but three separate proverbs: believing that Gyges did not fully appreciate his wife’s beauty, Candaules cites the proverb, “The ears are less trustworthy than the eyes” (ὅτα γὰρ τυγχάνει ἀνθρώποις ἐόντα ἀπιστότερα ὑμνησκόμιον, Hdt.1.8.2) while forcing Gyges to spy upon his wife in the act of undressing. Gyges, in turn, resists and cites two proverbs: (1) “When a woman takes off her dress, she takes off her shame” (Ἄμα δὲ κιθόνι ἐκδυομένῳ συνεκδύεται καὶ τὴν αἰδῶν γυνῆ, Hdt.1.8.3) and (2) “Everyone mind his own affairs” (σκοπέειν τινὰ τὰ ἐωστῶ, Hdt.1.8.4).

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343 Ibid., 193.
344 Socrates even employs the imagery of a contest after Glaucon has set forth in full his two thought-experiments: “Bravo, my dear Glaucon! How powerfully you scour clean each of your ‘two men’ as if a statue for the prize in a competition” (Βαβαί, . . . ὁ φίλε Γλαύκων, ὡς ἐρρομένος ἐκάτερον ὡσπερ ἀνδρίαντα εἰς τὴν κρίσιν ἐκκαθαρίας τοῖν ἀνδροῖν, 361d–6) (trans. Shorey, with modification).
345 Trans. Russo (with modification).
Russo explains that Herodotus’ proverb-rich account demonstrates the result of transgressing a proverb: Candaules loses his kingdom because he repudiates “two compelling pieces of proverbial wisdom,” and Gyges, who knows the right proverbs but is compelled to violate them, attains the kingdom but not in a lasting way: the Delphic oracle reveals that the kingship will not survive past the fifth generation (Hdt. 1.13).346

Overlooked, however, is the subtle reference by the queen to the famous “two roads” proverb of Hesiod. When the queen confronts Gyges after he has seen her naked, she offers him a “choice” (αἵρεσις) described in what by now should be very familiar imagery (1.11.2):

Now Gyges, I am giving you the choice of which of two roads you wish to take that lie before you. Either kill Candaules and take me and the kingship of Lydia or you must die immediately.347

Of course, the queen’s demand raises the choice framed by the Hesiodic proverb to a morally excruciating level: kill (and usurp) or be killed. But this is precisely Herodotus’ point: Gyges recognizes almost immediately that a virtual Hobson’s choice has been put to him and, not surprisingly, elects to live. Herodotus’ version of the Gyges tale makes no pretense that a man would ever choose Hesiod’s harder road to virtue if that road necessitated his death. Yes, some element of justice is undeniably present in Herodotus’ tale. Candaules forfeits his kingdom, arguably because he ignored Gyges’ two proverbs (as Russo maintains). And Gyges’ lineage ultimately loses the kingship, due arguably to Gyges’ inability to rise to the superhuman height

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346 Russo 1983: 127-28. Russo provides no explanation of Candaules’ citation of the proverb “The ears are less believable than the eyes,” aside from its numeric relation to Gyges’ proverbs: “Gyges may have more proverbs, but King Candaules has more power . . .”

347 The choice of which road to take serves as an important metaphor for Herodotean historiography in general. See, e.g., Purves 2010: 122, who underscores the frequent observation “that the narrative of the Histories, which proceeds (probainô) through a number of cities, and which stops and decides which ‘roads’ to go down at various points on its journey, depends greatly on the model of traveling along a path or route.”
of literal self-sacrifice required to elect the queen’s version of Hesiod’s more difficult road to virtue, per the proverb. But that limited element of justice does not mitigate the damage that has been done to Hesiod’s original.

Indeed, the takeaway from Herodotus’ version of the tale, which Glaucon’s own variation emphasizes, is that self-interest will necessarily lead the actor to opt for injustice over justice. Just as Herodotus’ Gyges really had no choice, so too does Glaucon illustrate his Gyges as possessing no choice once he discovers the ring of invisibility (360b2-c2):

εἰ οὖν δύο τοιούτω δακτυλίω γενοίσθην, καὶ τὸν μὲν ὁ δίκαιος περιθείτο, τὸν δὲ ὁ ἁδίκος, οὐδεὶς ἄν γένοιτο, ὡς δόξειν, οὕτως ἁδαμαντίνος, ὡς ἄν μείνειν ἐν τῇ δικαιοσύνῃ καὶ τολμήσειν ἀπέχεσθαι τῶν ἄλλων καὶ μὴ ἀπευθείη, ἐξὸν αὐτῷ καὶ ἐκ τῆς ἄγορᾶς ἁδεῖς ὁτι βουλίται λαμβάνειν, καὶ εἰσίντα εἰς τὰς οἰκίας συγκνησθαι ὧτῳ βουλίται, καὶ ἀποκτείνοναι καὶ ἐκ δεσμῶν λύειν οὐστινας βουλίται, καὶ τάλλα πράττειν ἐν τοῖς ἀνθρώπως ἱσόθεον ὄντα.

If there were two such rings, and a just man should put on one and an unjust man the other, there would be no one made of such steel, so it seems, who could hold to righteousness and keep away from, and not reach out to grab, the goods of others, since it would be possible for him to take fearlessly whatever he wanted from the marketplace and to go into peoples’ homes and lie with whomever he desired and kill, as well as release from prison whomever he wanted and do other such things, given that he would be the equivalent of a god.

Such is the pitiful condition to which Hesiod’s “two roads” proverb has been reduced in Glaucon’s version of the Gyges tale: there really is no choice of “roads.” Everyone will choose the path to injustice, whether compelled by pain of death or swayed by access to a “godlike” (ἰσόθεον) power. Glaucon’s variation of the Gyges story continues Herodotus’ own erosion of whatever force Hesiod’s proverb once held for people, to prompt them to choose the more difficult path of virtue. We can see, too, how Glaucon’s undermining the core message of the Hesiodic proverb by dint of his Gyges tale mirrors the damage Adeimantus inflicts, both by cropping select lines from Hesiod’s passage and by misapplying the adage’s popular analogue, chalepa ta kala so as to mean the precise opposite of Hesiod’s original. In addition, Glaucon’s
version omits entirely the other proverbs that Herodotus’ Gyges cites in vain to Candaules – namely, “When a woman takes off her dress, she takes off her shame” and “Everyone mind his own affairs.”

Interesting, however, is the proximity of the latter – σκοπέειν τινά πάντα ἐωντοῦ – to Socrates’ own definition of justice in Book 4 of the Republic, which itself has the shape of a proverb: “Justice is the doing of one’s own” (τοῦ τὰ αὐτοῦ πράττειν . . . δικαιοσύνη ἐστὶ, 433a8-9). Might then we detect in the Republic’s version of what was presumably a highly popular story, the recognition by Plato that such a proverb-laden tale, at least as Herodotus tells it, did not adequately express the sort of proverbial wisdom necessary to underpin the vision of justice articulated in the Republic? Might the Republic’s Gyges story, incorporated within the larger framework of the dialogue as a whole and ultimately concluded, as we shall see in a moment, by its reappearance in Book 10, represent Plato’s own effort to recast the tale in a new light, one consistent with the sort of proverbial wisdom Plato was after? If so, such an attempt would be entirely in accord with (1) Griffith’s view of the agonistic dynamic inherent in Greek authorship stemming from the pre-Classical period and (2) Rorty’s vision of vocabularies in competition with one another for dominance over a culture and its ways of thinking.

Towards the beginning of Herodotus’ account, Candaules complains that Gyges does not appear to be convinced of his wife’s surpassing beauty by his “speaking” about it (Γύγη, οὐ γάρ σε δοκέω πείθεσθαι μοι λέγοντι περὶ τοῦ εἰδέος τῆς γυναικός, Hdt.1.8.2). This is, of course, the task faced by all authors, by all tellers of tales (including those tellers of “fiction” in the service of philosophy, per Laird): peithein legonti, to convince by telling. Similarly, those vocabularies of Rorty’s come to hold sway do so precisely by their “speaking” (legousin) more compellingly,
more persuasively, than their rivals. Plato is not about to be outdone by prior storytellers of the Gyges tale. It is his lexicon of justice – a justice pursued for its own sake, irrespective of the rewards or the detriments accrued by adhering to it alone – that must, and will ultimately come to, have the most lasting and compelling force of all prior accounts of justice.

This reading would help explain why Plato chooses to describe Glaucon’s Gyges as the “ancestor to Gyges the Lydian” (τῷ Γύγου τοῦ Λυδοῦ προγόνῳ, 359d1). In the agon of Greek writers’ attempts to outdo their rivals’ versions of traditional stories and themes, proposing new or alternate lineages, parentages, and origins was a common means of distinguishing one’s own rendering of a commonly treated subject.349 If Plato wants to “re-form” Herodotus’ telling of the Gyges tale, altering what might seem to be some of the relatively minor details of the story from its very beginning – e.g., “Once upon a time, an ancestor of Gyges the Lydian” not “Once upon a time, Gyges” – is an excellent method of marking one’s own version definitively.

How then does Plato make use of the Gyges tale so that the moral of its story is ultimately in keeping with the theme of the Republic? First, there is the obvious magnitude of the challenge put to Socrates, to which both of Glaucon’s two thought-experiments and Adeimantus’ citation of a host of legomena contribute. This enhances all the more the drama of the dialogue. After both Glaucon and Adeimantus have presented their challenges, Socrates describes himself as especially impressed (τότε πάνω γε ἣσθην, 367e7-368a1) by their arguments but concedes that the challenge put to him may be too much: “I don’t know how I can help. For I seem to be incapable” (οὐτε γὰρ ὡς βοηθῶ ἔχω. δοκῶ γὰρ μοι ἀδύνατος εἶναι, 368b4-5). Clearly, both Herodotus’ account of the Gyges tale and Glaucon’s altered version pack the proverbial punch.

Socrates then compliments the men with an appellation contained in what purports to be a saying but the origins of which remain obscure: “Sons of Ariston, godlike progeny of a glorious man” (παῖδες Ἀρίστωνος, κλεῖνοι θείον γένος ἄνδρός, 368a3). While Shorey believes the line originates in certain Pythagorean sayings,\textsuperscript{350} Adam convincingly argues that Aristón suggests aristos and thus “the pun conveys a friendly, if halfironical, compliment to ‘his excellency’ Thrasymachus, whose παῖδες (so far as the argument is concerned) Glaucôn and his brother are.”\textsuperscript{351} Adam rightly sees a parallel here to similar wordplay with a proper name, combined with a proverb, that Socrates makes in the Symposium when he invites Aristodemus to come along as an uninvited guest to dinner with Agathon, an obvious pun on agathos: “Then come along, so that we might undermine the proverb by changing it, so that it’s now ‘Good men go of their own accord to Goodman’s table’” (“Επον τοίνυν, ἔφη, ἵνα καὶ τὴν παρομίαν διαφθείρομεν μεταβαλόντες, ὡς ἂρα καὶ Ἀγάθων ἐπὶ δαίτας ἱασιν αὐτόματοι ἄγαθοί., Symp. 174b3-5).\textsuperscript{352} The specific proverb (παρομία) which the men will “undermine by altering” is, as the Scholiast remarks, “Good men go of their own accord to the feasts of inferior men” (παρομία αὐτόματοι δ’ ἄγαθοι δειλῶν ἐπὶ δαίτας ἱωσιν).\textsuperscript{353} Kenneth Dover observes that “such a proverb is insulting if uttered by a guest and obsequious on the lips of a host.” By contrast, Socrates’ reformulation is

\textsuperscript{350} Shorey 1982: ad loc.

\textsuperscript{351} Adam 1980: ad loc.

\textsuperscript{352} MSS B, T, and W have ἄγαθων which, while less explicitly a pun on “Agathon,” nevertheless brings out the upshot of the proverb: “Unbidden do good men dine at good men’s tables.” Burnet, whose text I use, opts for Lachmann’s Ἀγάθων’.

\textsuperscript{353} Greene 1938: ad loc.; Dover 1980: ad loc., remarks that while δειλῶν connotes “cowardly” in Plato’s Attic, the meaning is “much less specific in archaic poetry, sometimes simply ‘poor.’”
“useful on a greater variety of occasions.” Moreover, variations of this proverb are found in both Hesiod and Bacchylides.

Socrates’ remark that the men are “undermining the proverb by changing it” amounts to nothing less than a programmatic statement of what I maintain to be Plato’s overarching goal with respect to proverbs and gnômai throughout his oeuvre. This dynamic is especially on display in the Republic: reformulate and thereby “reform” the existing Greek proverbial tradition so as to provide for legomena that comprise a critical component of Plato’s new discourse – in Rorty’s parlance, new “vocabulary” – concerning justice, to be found in his new literary genre, philosophy.

Thus in Book 10, at the conclusion of Socrates’ exhaustive and extensive effort to meet Glaucon and Adeimantus’ challenge of defending justice for its own sake, Socrates re-crafts the moral of Glaucon’s Gyges story to be the following: “Haven’t we discovered that justice itself is the best thing for the soul itself, and that the soul ought to do the just, whether it possesses the ring of Gyges or not . . .?” (ἀλλ᾽ αὐτῷ δικαιοσύνην αὕτη ψυχῇ ἀριστον ἦρομεν, καὶ ποιητέον εἶναι αὐτῇ τὰ δίκαια, ἐάντ' ἐχει τὸν Γύγου δακτύλιον, ἐάντε μή, 612b2-4). At this juncture Socrates is now conflating the “ancestor of Gyges” with Gyges himself, and the apparent confusion is, according to Laird, one of the reasons that the expression, “the ring of Gyges” ultimately “came to enjoy proverbial status in Greek authors after Plato.” It is no doubt a matter of legitimate debate whether Socrates’ precise words in Book 10 constitute a genuine

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354 Dover 1980: ad loc.
355 αὐτόματοι δ’ ἀγαθοὶ ἀγαθῶν ἐπὶ δαίτας ἱενταὶ (Hesiod, frag. 264 Merkelbach and West). Zenobius comments that “Hesiod used the proverb as follows: Heracles was going towards the house of Ceyx the Trachinian and said this” (trans. Most 2007: 278-9).
356 Αὐτόματοι δ’ ἀγαθῶν ἐς δαίτας εὐόχθους ἐπέρχονται δίκαιαι φῶτες (Bacchylides, frag. 1.23-26 [Paanes] Irigoin).
357 Laird 2001: 15.
proverb, but they are, at the very least, a stepping stone on the path toward endowing the phrase “the soul ought to do justice whether it has Gyges ring or not” with its own proverbial ring (pun intended). Irrespective of whether Plato’s text coins a phrase that meets precisely whatever formal qualifications we may demand of a proverb, the phrase “ring of Gyges” ultimately became shorthand for a proverb, albeit one not expressly articulated (just as many proverbs operate via a virtual shorthand phrase, e.g., “Birds of a feather . . .”). 358 As wielded by Glaucon, it stands for the proposition that injustice is superior to justice if the perpetrator possesses the means to be sure of impunity, 359 but in Socrates’ reformulation and reformation, it amounts to an exhortation to a higher standard of conduct: act justly even when the profits from injustice are attainable free of both punishment and the resulting disrepute (doxa), by means of the “ring of Gyges.”

Indeed, Socrates’ reformation constitutes the reason why Cicero in his De Officiis expressly invokes Plato’s version and relates the story, like Socrates, as centering not upon an ancestor of Gyges but on Gyges himself (3.37-8):

satis enim nobis, si modo in philosophia aliquid profecimus, persuasum esse debet, si omnes deos hominesque celare possimus, nihil tamen avare, nihil iniuste, nihil libidinose, nihil incontinentem esse faciendum. Hinc ille Gyges inducitur a Platone . . . Hunc igitur ipsum anulum si habeat sapiens, nihil plus sibi licere putet peccare, quam si non haberet; honesta enim bonis viris, non occulta quae sunt.

For only having made some progress in philosophy, we should be sufficiently convinced that, even if we can escape the detection of gods and men, we must still never act in a greedy, unjust, lustful or intemperate way. This is why that figure of Gyges is introduced by Plato . . . So then if a wise man had a ring like this, he would no more be able to do wrong than if he did not have it; for good men seek what is moral, not what is secret. 360

358 See my discussion in Chapter 2.6 of how both the “wolf proverb” and the proverb “like as to like” are not expressly articulated in the text.

359 Shorey 1946: 118 astutely notes the similar “moral” to H.G. Wells’ The Invisible Man.

360 Trans. Laird.
Plato’s “ring of Gyges” ultimately became the definitive Gyges tale.\textsuperscript{361} Indeed, Adam goes so far as to call Plato’s entire Gyges story a “proverb” and refers to the ring (as do Laird and many other commentators) as the “proverbial ring of Gyges.”\textsuperscript{362} While I do not believe that a mythic tale or fable can constitute a proverb under any reasonable definition of proverb as provided by modern paroemiology, it is certainly possible to imagine how a tale might ultimately be crystallized into a legomenon that meets the requisite definitional standards. Such a potential evolution is what I believe Plato is after: Plato is altering the discourse – in Rorty’s parlance, the vocabulary – of justice, by competing in the broader literary agon of storytellers and would-be proverb-makers to alter the older, standard versions of proverbial wisdom, offering new suggestions to take their place. Plato reworks the Gyges tale so that it might be distilled into a proverb.

Indeed it is arguable that Cicero is following in Plato’s footsteps in tacking onto the end of his own retelling of Plato’s “ring of Gyges” a phrase that has the makings of a Latin sententia (the Latin equivalent of the Greek gnome\textsuperscript{363}): “for good men seek what is moral, not what is secret” (honesta enim bonis viris, non occulta quae runtur).\textsuperscript{364} The balanced binary structure, the opposition of the rhyming axiological terminology (honesta—occulta), and the use of a general category (bonis viris) are all hallmarks of proverbial expression.\textsuperscript{365}

\textsuperscript{361} See, e.g., Laird 2001: 25, who explains how Cicero sees Plato’s version of the story “as illustrating the immorality of secret or furtive behavior.”

\textsuperscript{362} Adam 1980: 126-7. Dyck 1996: 539-40, n. 6, affirms that the “ring of Gyges was proverbial in antiquity . . . hence its appropriateness for illustrating teachings about the relation of morality to the fear of detection . . .” and claims in addition that “it has long been recognized that Plato’s folk tale version . . . is original and Herodotus’ version a secondary rationalization . . .” In a not dissimilar vein, Danzig 2008: 186, describes Plato’s tale as having a “folk-story-like quality.”

\textsuperscript{363} See, generally, Kirchner 2001.

\textsuperscript{364} See Dyck 1996: 540-1, n. 38, who observes that in the sentence which launches what seems to be the sententia, the “sapiens substitutes for ὁ δίκαιος in Plato; the tale may have passed to Cicero via a Stoic intermediary, or he may have himself adjusted it to Stoic terminology.”

\textsuperscript{365} Russo 1983: 122; Dundes 1981: 54-55; Most 2003: 146.
In addition to Cicero, both Lucian and Philostratus would go on to use Plato’s “ring of Gyges” in their writings, although simply with reference to the power of invisibility conferred by the ring. However, the twelfth-century Persian Sunni Muslim poet Nizámi Ganjavi depicts Plato himself telling the story of the ring without even mentioning the name of Gyges, in Nizámi’s poem, the *Sikander Námah-i Bahri*. In Nizámi’s version, Plato is in attendance at the court of the young royal, Sikander, along with other Greek philosophers. Moreover Nizámi uses the Arabic term *rusul*, which can mean both “messenger” and “prophet,” for the messengers of the king with whom Gyges intermingles in Plato’s version (τῶν ἀγγέλων γενέσθαι τῶν παρὰ τὸν βασιλέα, 360a8) in order to kill the king. This allows Nizámi’s nameless shepherd to claim that he is a prophet, which, according to Nizámi scholar J.C. Bürgel, invests the story with new meaning that I find entirely consonant with Socrates’ reformation of the tale: “It is no longer just about magic power and the danger involved in its being misused by an irresponsible person; it is about false prophets and their unscrupulous use of power and violence.” That Plato’s Gyges tale became for some writers the tale about the proverbial “ring of Gyges” stands as a lasting testament to the success of Plato’s efforts to re-craft proverbial wisdom in the service of his own philosophic project.

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367 Cowell 1861: 151-57; Adam 1980: 127.
369 See generally Laird 2001, 29, who affirms that Plato’s version “has engaged the attention of both philosophers and novelists.” Of these, Laird offers the reflection by Jean-Jacques Rousseau in his *Les Rêveries du Promeneur Solitaire* (1782) on what he would do if he owned a ring of invisibility -- a reflection that bears the unmistakeable stamp of Socrates’ reformation of the proverbial ring of Gyges: “Tout bien considéré, je crois que je ferais mieux de jeter mon anneau magique avant qu’il m’a fait faire quelque sottise.”
3.4. Finding and Crafting Better *Legomena*

Midway through Book 3, Socrates offers yet another programmatic statement, this time on the question of language’s relation to whatever degree of justice may exist in a state. He does this in the portion of the dialogue where, notoriously, he opines on specific poetic passages that he believes should be excluded from a just society’s educational framework and conversely, those verses he finds appropriate. These particular sections of the *Republic* that fall at the close of Book 2 and the first third or so of Book 3 (in addition to a related section in Book 10, to which I will return in Chapter Five) have long been decried as censorship on the part of Plato, leading in turn to the widespread view that Plato is an enemy of poetry, *tost court*, especially insofar as Socrates appears to “banish” the greatest poets from the ideal city. And, indeed, the passage that provides the clearest textual support for the idea of literal “banishment” is precisely Socrates’ programmatic statement on language vis-à-vis justice. Let us examine closely just what it is that Socrates says (398a1-b4):

> Ἀνδρα δή, ώς ἔοικε, δυνάμενον ὑπὸ σοφίας παντοδαπὸν γίγνεσθαι καὶ μιμεῖσθαι πάντα χρήματα, εἰ ἡμῖν ἄφικοιτο εἰς τὴν πόλιν αὐτὸς τε καὶ τα ποιήματα βουλόμενος ἐπιδεῖξασθαι, προσκυνώμεν ᾠν αὐτὸν ὡς ἱερὸν καὶ θαυμαστὸν καὶ ἔλεγον, ἐπιστομοῦν δὲ ὅτι οὐκ ἔστι τοιοῦτος ἀνήρ ἐν τῇ πόλει παρ᾽ ἡμῖν οὗτε θέμες ἐγγενεῖσθαι, ἀποπέμπομεν τε εἰς ἄλλην πόλιν μύρον κατὰ τῆς κεφαλῆς καταχέαντες καὶ ἔριφ στέγασσαι, αὐτοὶ δὲ ὅτι τῷ αὐστηρότερῳ καὶ ἄρεστοτέρῳ ποιητῇ χρώμαθα καὶ μυθολογῷ ὄφελίας ἔνεικα, ὅς ἡμῖν τὴν τοῦ ἐπεικοῦς λέξιν μηκότο καὶ τὰ λεγόμενα λέγοι ἐν ἑκείνοις τοῖς τόποις οἷς κατ’ ἀρχάς ἐνομοθετησάμεθα, ὅτε τοὺς στρατιώτας ἐπέχειρομεν παϊδεύειν.

If a man should arrive in our city seemingly capable of imitating everything and of assuming every shape by virtue of his poetic artistry and eager to show himself off with his poems, we would fall down and worship him as godlike, astounding, and delightful, but we would say that there is no man of this sort in our city, nor is it lawful for any such man to arise among us, and we would send him off to some

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370 See Halliwell 2011: 158-9, who observes that the “dominant consensus” today – a “consensus” to which Halliwell takes strong exception, as do I – is that “Plato was consistently, uncompromisingly ‘hostile’ to poetry per se (and even to ‘art’ more generally). For such orthodoxy, the hypothetical banishment of the greatest poets from the ideal city of the *Republic* is the supreme, unequivocal symbol of Plato’s verdict on the subject, his definitive pronouncement of condemnation.”
other city after pouring myrrh down over his head and crowning him with wool 
fillets, but we ourselves make use of a more austere and less entertaining poet and 
wordsmith for the sake of our soul’s benefit, who emulates the diction of a good 
man and speaks the sayings in the patterns we ordained from the outset, when we 
set out to educate our protectors.

Taken in the narrowest of readings, the passage can certainly be made the culprit as 
Plato’s detractors would have it: Socrates and his like would literally “send away” (ἀποστέμπειν) any poet or storyteller whose style does not conform to what Socrates describes as the “more severe and less entertaining” (αὔστηροτέρῳ καὶ ἀπεδεικτερῷ) one practiced in their imagined society. But leaving aside this critique’s glaring omission of how Socrates and company in fact heap lavish praise on such a literary artist notwithstanding their decision that his artistry would be out of place in the world they conjure, the closing, crucial section of the passage makes clear that poetry is not only to be allowed but employed (χρῆσθαι). Why? Precisely for the benefit (ἡφαλία) conferred. And how do we come to know this benefit? It takes its shape in the “diction that befits a good man” (τὴν τὸι ἐπιεικοῦς λέξιν) and the “sayings” (τὰ λεγόμενα) that adhere in the “patterns” and “impressions” or “models” (i.e., τῶι τύπωι) which the society “prescribes” (νομοθετεῖν).

Here we are remarkably close to the thinking of modern philosophers like both Rorty and Michael Oakeshott, who view morality as an integral component and critical function of language. As Rorty paraphrases Oakeshott, “We can keep the notion of ‘morality’ just insofar as we can cease to think of morality as the voice of the divine part of ourselves and instead think of it as the voice of ourselves as members of a community, speakers of a common language.”

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Oakeshott himself makes the point in even blunter terms: “A morality is neither a system of general principles nor a code of rules but a vernacular language.”

Socrates and his companions are creating a world – ideally a just world – in and via language: “Come then, let us create a state in discourse, from the beginning” (Ἂθι δή, ἓν δ' ἐγώ, τῷ λόγῳ ἐξ ἀρχής ποιῶμεν πόλιν), exhorts Socrates, adding that “Our need, it seems, will create it” (ποιήσει δὲ αὐτήν, ὡς ἔοικεν, ἢ ἡμετέρα χρεία, 369c9-10). Language and the just state and men’s “need” for the very things that comprise the just state, whatever they may be, are closely intertwined in Socrates’ vision of how the just community is created. It is by a new discourse, a new vocabulary – a vocabulary, I would add, replete with its own gnômai and proverbs – that the just polis can be attained. Moreover, crucial to this enterprise is education: “Come then, let us educate our men with discourse, just as wordsmiths telling their tale and having ample leisure” (Ἂθι οὖν, ὄσπερ ἐν μύθῳ μυθολογοῦντές τε καὶ σχολὴν ἄγοντες λόγῳ παιδεύομεν τοὺς ἀνδρας, 376d9-10), exclaims Socrates again, echoing his own line a few Stephanus pages earlier, as he begins his discussion of which passages from poetry are detrimental and which conducive to the type of society the men are striving to create in logos. To presume that it is the literary genre per se of poetry that poses for Socrates the primary obstacle to moral improvement – in other words, poetry in our more contemporary sense of the term as opposed to poetry as it was conceptualized at the time – is to misunderstand the Republic and, more generally, the relationship between the writings of Plato and ancient Greek poetry.

In addition, to read Plato as categorically opposed to poetry is, ironically, to assume the position of a “metaphysician” with respect to the concepts of language and morality, that is, the very sort of stance many would-be critics of Plato would presumably be loathe to occupy insofar

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as they view Plato himself as the arch-metaphysician.\textsuperscript{373} I use “metaphysician” in the sense employed by Rorty, adapted from Heidegger: a metaphysician is someone who takes a question like “What is the intrinsic nature of morality?” at face value. As Rorty puts it, the metaphysician “assumes that the presence of a term in his own final vocabulary ensures that it refers to something which \emph{has} a real essence” and, as a result, “does not question the platitudes which encapsulate the use of a given final vocabulary . . .”\textsuperscript{374} By “final vocabulary,” Rorty means the set of words which all humans “carry about” and “employ to justify their actions, their beliefs, and their lives.” Such a vocabulary is “final” only in the limited sense that there is no “noncircular argumentative recourse” if doubt is cast on the worth of the words: they are as far as one can go with language; “beyond them there is only helpless passivity or resort to force.”\textsuperscript{375} But someone who, in contrast to the metaphysician, takes a stance that is more nominalist and historicist – someone whom Rorty deems an “ironist” – has a set of different concerns: she spends her time worrying about the possibility that she has been initiated into the wrong tribe, taught to play the wrong language game. She worries that the process of socialization that turned her into a human being by giving her a language may have given her the wrong language, and so turned her into the wrong kind of human being.\textsuperscript{376}

This “worry” is identical to that of Socrates in the \textit{Republic} (and by extension, to that of his author-creator, Plato).

\textsuperscript{373} See Nightingale 1995: 2, for a good discussion of how “Plato is often scripted as a villain by theorists of postmodernism . . .”

\textsuperscript{374} Rorty 1989: 74 (emphasis in original).

\textsuperscript{375} Rorty 1989: 73. The opening lines of the \textit{Republic} would seem to present a vivid illustration of Rorty’s point about the limits of a “final vocabulary” and the possibility of a resort to force should one’s vocabulary be thrown into question, when Polemarchus playfully raises the prospect of the use of force if Socrates and Glaucon prove themselves unable, through use of language, to persuade Polemarchus and his companions to let them go. See my discussion in Chapter 2.1.

\textsuperscript{376} Rorty 1989: 75.
We might pause here for a moment to reflect that despite the seeming innovation of Plato’s approach to language, Plato is actually following in the footsteps of earlier authors and, in particular, one for whom gnômai assumed primary importance, namely, Hesiod. I have already pointed out several of the instances when Socrates and his interlocutors make reference to, employ for their own purposes, or alter outright several of the proverbs from Works and Days (most prominently, the ubiquitous “twin roads of virtue and vice” passage). Here we must recognize that intimately connected with Hesiod’s didactic work is the idea of language intertwined with morality. Deborah Steiner has demonstrated how the famous “fable” (ainos) of the hawk and nightingale is a thinly disguised morality tale, symbolizing the divide between the poetry of Homeric epic, with its emphasis on war and martial valor, in the figure of the hawk, and the poetry of wisdom literature (read Hesiod himself) concerned with the resolution of disputes and peacetime activities like agriculture, in the figure of the nightingale. The hawk embodies in its aggression against the nightingale not only a value system that Hesiod rejects but also, in Steiner’s words, “a genre of poetry (and the ethics that genre foregrounds) that prove antithetical to the larger composition in which the bird appears.”377 The point here, as Steiner makes clear, is that the “larger composition” of the Works and Days articulates not just a community governed by dikê but, significant for my thesis, the view that “modes of speaking, diction, and style can determine and reveal a speaker’s ethos, values, and moral outlook” given that “morality is bound up with discourse and with speeches and songs performed by gods and men.”378 Steiner’s analysis aligns precisely with the thinking of Rorty and Oakeshott.

It should come as no surprise, then, that in such a work where morality and language amount to virtually two sides of the same coin, arguably the single most prevalent syntactic

378 Steiner 2007: 179.
element of the *Works and Days* is the gnome,\(^\text{379}\) given that expression’s close association with justice. As mentioned earlier, Lardinois emphasizes that because the Greeks cited *gnômai* in their law courts, even the difference between “laws” (νόμοι) and gnomic expressions “was not always clear cut.”\(^\text{380}\) For an author to employ a gnome/proverb, then, is to signal the close connection existing between language and justice.

Just before Socrates begins his disquisition on what constitute proper educational extracts from poetry, he gives voice to a number of phrases that echo Hesiod’s *Works and Days*. While not proverbs *per se*, these phrases may be seen as the beginnings of Socrates’ attempt to articulate a new vocabulary that will be a crucial underpinning for his vision of a just society, fundamentally different from the Hesiodic conception. For example, in contrast to Hesiod’s set of instructions to farmers on how to make their own tools, along with the admonition to have two plows at the ready (δοιὰ δὲ θέσθαι ἄροτρα, *Op.* 432), Socrates articulates the beginnings of what will ultimately come to be *the* definition of justice, each citizen performing the task to which he is best suited: “One man is naturally fitted for one task and another for another” (ἀλλὰ διαφέρων τὴν φύσιν, ἀλλος ἐπ’ ἄλλου ἔργου, 370b1-2). In a society governed by such proverbs, there will be no need for the farmer to make his own, single plow, nor any of his other farming tools.\(^\text{381}\) But Socrates does not simply reject outright all Hesiodic formulations; rather, he does as Plato has been demonstrating throughout the *Republic* with respect to his characters’ various citations of and quotations from verse: he mines the extant *corpus* of poetry, including that of Hesiod, for the building blocks of persuasive speech that will come to comprise the vocabulary of a

\(^{379}\) Lardinois 1995: 190-1, identifies no less than 124 *gnômai*, many of which are quite elaborate, a fact that causes Richard Hamilton to worry that classical scholarship does not yet possess “analytical equipment” sufficient to handle what he calls the poem’s “massive chaos of gnomic material” (Hamilton 1989: 49).

\(^{380}\) Lardinois 1995: 5-6.

\(^{381}\) *Resp.* 370c9-d1: ὁ γὰρ γεωργός, ὡς ἔτικεν, οὐκ αὐτὸς ποιήσεται ἐαυτῷ τὸ ἄροτρον, εἰ μέλλει καλὸν εἶναι, οὐδὲ σμυνύην, οὐδὲ τάλλα ὀργάνα δέσα περὶ γεωργίαν.
reformed, more just society. This process is evident in Socrates’ coining of a proverb that could have come straight out of Hesiod: “Whenever one lets slip the right season of any task, work is destroyed” (ἐὰν τίς τινος παρῇ ἔργου καρόν, διόλλυται, 370b7-8). Socrates parrots Hesiod’s own gnome on the subject, “The seasonable moment is best in everything” (καιρὸς ὁ ἐπὶ πᾶσιν ἄριστος, Op. 694).

That gnómai and proverbs are closely allied with concerns about justice and morality becomes all the more significant to the extent that such gnómai and proverbs were being committed to memory and anthologized as part of Greek educational practice and tradition. Indeed, the argument can be made that it was Hesiod’s pronounced use of gnómai that led to the very idea of the creation of poetic, gnomic anthologies, which became wildly popular in the fourth century and an integral part of the educational framework. One of our earliest representations of a Greek book roll is on a kyathos from the beginning of the 5th century, depicting a youth holding open a papyrus roll while two other lads with walking sticks stand on either side of him listening. On top of a box in front of the reading youth is another volume inscribed Cheironeia. Andrew Ford makes the reasonable suggestion that this might well refer to Hesiod’s Precepts of Cheiron, which certainly contained the sort of legomena one was likely to have committed to memory as part of a proper education. Such were some of the critical components of one of the prevailing “vocabularies” of Plato’s time, a source of potential worry for Socrates in the Republic. It is only by reading with an appreciation of the central role of memorized legomena in Greek educational practices that we can begin to understand fully those sections of Books 2 and 3 that all too often are interpreted solely – and, thus, condemned – as instances of censorship and suppression of artistic freedom.

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382 Hunter 2014: 77.
Indeed, in light of the importance of the memorization of *legomena* to education and the fact that such *legomena* are a key element of one of Athen’s prevailing “vocabularies” we can now grasp more fundamentally the import of an abrupt question – indeed, one possessing an almost existential urgency – that Socrates poses at the onset of the men’s exploration of what poetic passages are conducive to a healthy *polis*: “What then is our education? Or is it difficult to find a better one than that discovered by time immemorial?” (Τίς ὁν ἡ παιδεία; ἢ χαλεπὸν εὑρεῖν βελτίω τῆς ὑπὸ τοῦ πολλόν χρόνον ἡρημάνης; 376e2-3). Socrates recognizes full well the magnitude of the task at hand: it is nothing less than an attempt to alter in significant part the practice of memorizing *legomena* – many of which were necessarily proverbs and *gnômai* – by asking hard questions about what sort of *legomena* foreground an ethics (to borrow Steiner’s terminology) co-extensive with the morality, with justice pursued for its own sake, to which Socrates and his companions aspire. Socrates is searching (in Rorty’s parlance) for a better “final vocabulary” than the one that his society is currently using.384 As Socrates asks rhetorically (377b5-9),

'Αρ' οὖν ῥαδίως οὕτω παρήσομεν τοὺς ἐπιτυχόντας ὑπὸ τῶν ἐπιτυχόντων μύθους πλασθέντας ἄκοιψεν τοὺς παῖδας καὶ λαμβάνειν ἐν ταῖς ψυχαῖς ὡς ἐπὶ τὸ πολὺ ἐναντίας δόξας ἐκείνας ἅς, ἐπειδὰν τελεωθῶσιν, ἔχειν οἰησόμεθα δεῖν αὐτούς;

Will we so carelessly allow our students to hear any random tales fashioned by any random teachers so that they possess in their souls opinions by and large contrary to those which we shall think they ought to have, when they reach maturity?

Wordcraft is soulcraft, which, in turn, is statecraft.

Socrates certainly does not have in mind any set of anodyne, shallow sentiments, the fourth-century equivalent of “New Age” platitudes. Far from it. Indeed, just before Socrates presents the first example of proverbs (from the *Iliad*) that he finds at odds with the type of

society and education he and his companions are in the process of envisioning, he leads off by quoting approvingly an unattributed proverb remarkable for its degree of pessimism: “For blessings are far fewer with us than ills” (πολύ γὰρ ἐλάττω τὰ γαθῶ τῶν κακῶν ἡμῖν, 379c4-5). Both Adam and Jowett and Campbell in their respective commentaries find surprising in Plato’s text the level of “melancholy” and “pessimism” evinced by Socrates’ unattributed proverb, as does Shorey in the comments to his translation of the Republic. Jowett and Campbell view the saying as an echo of the Homeric gnome (Il. 17.446-7)

οὐ μὲν γὰρ τί ποῦ ἔστιν οἰζυρότερον ἀνδρός πάντων, ὅσσά τε γαῖαν ἔπι πνείει τε καὶ ἔρπει.

Nowhere is there anything more miserable than man of all the things, however so many, that draw breath and creep upon the earth.

Adam, however, locates a more intriguing and, in my opinion, more accurate gnomic precursor of Socrates’ proverb in Pindar’s Pythian 3, presented here along with the poet’s introductory words (80-3):

εἰ δὲ λόγον συνέμεν κορυφάν, Ἰέρων, ὀρθὰν ἐπίστα, μανθάνων οἶσθα προτέρων ἐν παρ’ ἐσλόν πῆματα σύνδου δαίονται βροτοῖς ἀθάνατοι. τὰ μὲν ὄν
οὐ δύνανται νῆπιοι κόσμῳ φέρειν, ἀλλ’ ἀγαθοί, τὰ καλὰ τρέψαντες ἔξω. (80-3).

But, Hieron, if you can understand the true point of sayings, you know the lesson of former poets: the immortals apportion to humans a pair of evils for every good. Now fools cannot bear them gracefully, but good men can, by turning the noble portion outward.

The statement that introduces this Pindaric version of Socrates’ own bleak meditation would seem to reflect a concern on the part of the epinician praise poet strikingly similar to what

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386 Jowett and Campbell 1894: ad loc.
387 Trans. Race.
I maintain is Plato’s own: of paramount importance are one’s understanding of and fluency with $\textit{gnômai}$ and proverbs, critical components as they are of any society’s prevailing discursive practices, of its influential vocabularies. In addition, the Pindaric gnome is the more likely candidate for Socrates’ version given its proximity to a specific Homeric gnome which will be the first to draw fire from Socrates in his singling out of various poetic excerpts as inconsistent with the ideal $\textit{polis}$, namely, the “two urns” gnome from $\textit{Iliad}$ 24 (527-8):

\begin{verbatim}
doi ôi γάρ τε πίθοι κατακείαται ἐν Διὸς οὐδὲι
dῷρον οία δίδωσι κακῶν, ἐτερος δὲ ἔδων

Two urns stand on the floor of Zeus of such gifts, one bestows evils and the other blessings;
\end{verbatim}

William Race reads Pindar’s text as both drawing from this gnome and, tellingly, interpreting it to mean that there were in fact $\textit{two}$ urns of evil gifts but only $\textit{one}$ of good.\cite{Race2012}

Socrates disapproves of Homer’s gnome because it stands in opposition to his position that “god” ($\textit{ὁ θεός}$) cannot be the source of any evil.\cite{Resp} However, he, unlike Pindar, interprets there to be only two urns at issue. This reading is apparent in his altered rendering of Homer’s original (379d3-4):

\begin{verbatim}
doi ôi τε πίθοι κατακείαται ἐν Διὸς οὐδέι
κηρῶν ἐμπλειοί, ὁ μὲν ἐσθλῶν, αὐτάρ ὁ δεύλων;

Two urns stand on the floor of Zeus, filled with dooms, one of blessings, the other, banes;\cite{PenelopeMurray}
\end{verbatim}

Penelope Murray attempts to explain the alteration in part by claiming that while “Homer mentions first the bad things then the good . . ., P[lato] reverses that order because he wants to

\begin{footnotes}
\footnote{\textsuperscript{388} Race 2012: ad loc.}
\footnote{\textsuperscript{389} Resp. 379c6-7.}
\footnote{\textsuperscript{390}Socrates continues to abbreviate and to alter subsequent lines from Homer’s original as well as to add another, unattributed line, one found nowhere in Homer: ταμίας ἦμιν Ζεῦς – ἀγαθῶν τε κακῶν τε τέτυκται (379d5-e2).}
\end{footnotes}
show that god is the cause of the good.”

However, Plato is not crafting a new proverb with this verse; on the contrary, Socrates urges that Homer’s original be rejected entirely, irrespective of whatever alteration he has made in his less-than-verbatim quotation, when he says before quoting the gnome, “Then we must not accept from Homer or from any other poet such an error made foolishly about the gods as when he says . . .” (Ὅυκ ἄρα . . . ἀποδεκτέον οὔτε Ὄμήρου οὔτε ἄλλου ποιητοῦ ταύτην τὴν ἁμαρτίαν περὶ τοὺς θεοὺς ἁνοητῶς ἁμαρτάνοντος καὶ λέγοντος, 379c9-d2). The only proverb that retains unalloyed approbation by Socrates is his earlier, grimmer admonition that we live in a world where evils outnumber goods. This is the sort of “real-world” advice that ought to instilled in people’s collective memory via quotable legomena. Under no circumstances should those ills be blamed on the gods, as the Homeric “two urns” gnome would prescribe.

In other words, while the key reason behind Socrates’ disapproval of verses is found in their portrayal of the gods as sometimes perpetrating horrific acts and, further, describing the underworld as a place to be dreaded and death as something to be feared, Socrates’ vision of human existence is by no means rose colored. The gnōmai and proverbs he commends (and coins) are those that best equip one to confront a world where evils do, in fact, outweigh blessings. For example, not long before he begins his examination of “proper” legomena from poetry, he echoes a gnome from Heraclitus with his claim that “invincible and unconquerable is the spirit, in whose presence the entire soul stands fearless and undefeatable” (ἄμαχον τε καὶ ἀνίκητον θυμός, οὗ παρόντος ψυχή πᾶσα πρὸς πάντα ἄφοβος τέ ἐστι καὶ ἁήττητος, 375b1-2). While the language is relatively plain, the line’s parallel structure with its elegant use of chiasmus (amachon/anikeiton—thumos—psychê—aphobos/aeiteitos), highlighted by the jingle

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391 Murray 2008: ad loc.
and echo of its opposing sets of near synonyms (*amachon/anikeiton* and *aphobos/aeiteitos*), employs several key features of ancient Greek proverbs.\(^{392}\) In addition, numerous scholars through the years have been struck by the line’s proximity to the Heraclitean gnome “Hard it is, to fight against the spirit, for its will is bought with the cost of life” (θυμῶν μάχεσθαι χαλεπόν· ὁ γάρ ἂν θέλη, ψυχής ὑνεῖται).\(^{393}\)

With respect to matters concerning one’s *psyche* and *thumos*, Socrates’ rendition of the Heraclitean *legomenon* is the type of saying that the young men should be committing to memory, rather than Achilles’ despairing gnome uttered after encountering Patroclus’ shade, which he is unable to embrace as it disappears like smoke beneath the earth (*Resp.* 386d4-5 and *Il.* 23.103-4):

\[\text{ὢ πόποι, ἥ ῥά τις ἔστι καὶ εἴν Αἴδαο δόμοισιν ψυχή καὶ εἰδώλων, ἀτάρ φρένες οὐκ ἕνι πάμπαν·}\]

Alas, so too, even in the halls of Hades there is soul and wraith but no nowhere within resides understanding;

Socrates demonstrates the proper use of *legomena*, while those teachers who compel their students to memorize such *gnōmai* as these particular verses from the *Iliad* are misusing proverb – “misusing” it in the sense that their proverb does not approximate the vocabulary that Socrates believes is fundamental to a just society.

One could justifiably describe Socrates’ efforts in this regard as “literary criticism” if we think of dialectic in a manner consistent with Rorty’s conception of the language game in which discourses compete against each other for prominence. Dialectic as literary criticism amounts to “the attempt to play off vocabularies [i.e. various discursive practices] against one another, rather than merely to infer propositions from one another, and thus as the partial substitution of

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Socrates trains his eye over a wide array of excerpts from archaic and classical poetry, discerning the value (or lack thereof) such passages embody with respect to the type of discourse that is conducive to a state where justice is to be sought for its own sake. Moreover, Socrates proves himself capable even of transforming passages that might seem to lack gnomic status into genuine proverbs in their own right, recasting them as critical legomena to be stored up in one’s soul (λαμβάνειν ἐν ταῖς ψυχαῖς, 377b7), from the extant corpus of Greek poetry. For example, in order to inspire young men to rise to the challenges of a world where ills outweigh blessings and in which the proverbial road to virtue is far harder than that to vice, Socrates commends Odysseus’ stirring self-admonition in Book 20 of the Odyssey. While disguised as a beggar, Odysseus experiences a sort of “dark night of the soul” as he attempts to sleep huddled on the forecourt, a stranger in his own house: “Bear up heart of mine. For you have endured far worse than this” (τέτλαθι δή, κραδίη· καὶ κόντερον ἄλλο ποτ’ ἔτλης, Resp. 390d5 and Od. 20.18).

To understand why this constitutes a proverb we must recall one of the key insights provided by modern paroemiology into proverb use and meaning: context is critical. What might not seem a proverb in one context can, in a separate context as part of another speaker’s performance, become a proverb. As Charles Briggs discovered in studying Mexicano proverbs in northern New Mexico, his informants had trouble at times identifying a proverb text as a proverb per se once it was stripped of its normal contextual features. For example, the phrase “They don’t just cook horse beans here” (no más aqui se cuecen habas) can appear to be nothing more than mere words (no más palabras es) based on the reaction by Briggs’ consultants. However, if

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394 Rorty 1989: 78-9. This is not, of course, to imply that Rorty’s attempts to “de-metaphysize philosophy” can be mapped squarely onto Plato’s philosophic project, only that Plato’s aptitude in and familiarity with the fourth-century equivalent of Rorty’s “language game,” as demonstrated by Plato’s leading character of Socrates, discloses a discursive strategy not dissimilar from that of Rorty. This aptitude and familiarity are particularly on display in the juxtaposition of kompsoi and sophoi that occurs in Book 8 (as well as the Gorgias), which I will discuss in chapter 5.
linked with what Briggs calls a “tying phrase” such as “And an elder of bygone days used to say” (y decía un viejito de antes) it becomes more recognizable as a genuine proverb – one that can mean either “everyone has his faults, and we should look for our own first” or “if you try hard enough, you can accomplish anything” depending upon its application.\(^{395}\) In order to make sense of this phenomenon, Briggs looks to the work of Czech literary theorist Jan Mukařovský concerning the “dialogization of texts” in which proverbs, voices outside of the present context, intervene. By virtue of what Mukařovský calls the “theatricalization of an utterance’ with the use of a quote,” a speaker’s quoted speech takes on the features of a proverb and may be identifiable by listeners as such. What might not seem a proverb in one context can, within a separate context as part of another speaker’s performance (i.e., in her “theatricalization of the utterance”), become a proverb. As Mukařovský explains, “the effect of the context may give this quotation a meaning which it does not have of itself . . .”\(^{396}\) In Briggs’ analysis, it was as if the speaker had moved to the back of the stage and the spirit of a deceased elder had intervened into contemporary affairs.\(^{397}\) The anthropologist Greg Urban calls such a phenomenon “replication” which constitutes a marker of proverbiality. Sentences which did not constitute proverbs in their original use can become proverbs via replication in a different context, such as the famous line from the movie, *The Wizard of Oz*, “Toto, I’ve a feeling we’re not in Kansas anymore.”\(^{398}\)

By quoting Odysseus, Socrates in essence “theatricalizes” his pained utterance in beggar’s guise on the forecourt, thereby transforming it into a generalizing statement about the


\(^{397}\) Briggs 1988: 132-35. See also Martin 2005: 8-9. Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1981: 119, summarizes well what is at play here: “Proverb meaning ultimately emerges from a proverb’s use in a specific context and . . . it is not the meaning of a proverb per se that need be our central concern but the meaning of proverb performances . . .” For a good discussion of modern paroemiology’s emphasis on the importance of context see Winick 1998: 4-19; Russo 1983: 126; Lardinois 1995: 1-2.

inevitability of hardships to be borne in life coupled with a demand for action – in effect, a call to rise to the challenge. It is rather as if Socrates combines the sentiment of the American proverb “When the going gets tough, the tough get going” with another quote that has achieved the status of a proverb, Henry V’s rousing exhortation to his troops in Shakespeare’s eponymous play,

Once more unto the breach, dear friends, once more or close up the wall with our English dead. 399

This is the sort of vocabulary that Socrates aspires to have the citizens of the just polis incant.

Socrates understands well the power that those phrases possessing a fair degree of quotability hold over the imagination. Indeed, Socrates is more concerned about certain passages precisely because they are “more poetical” (ποιητικώτερα, 387b4) – and, thus, more quotable – if they are also not conducive to a just polis, if they do not accord with the new lexicon that Socrates envisions. Moreover, Plato affords us a window into Socrates’ own attempts to build phrases “more poetical” than the ordinary, a process which we might describe as “proverbs under construction.”

For example, when Socrates warns against the harm posed to a just state by laypersons who tell falsehoods, he solders a piece of a proverb from Homer’s Odyssey onto his own phrase that deftly incorporates another word, anatreptikos – “turning upside down,” “upsetting” – whose metaphorical range renders it applicable to both “ship” and “state,” hence, a seeming precursor to the famous ship-of-state metaphor (389d1-5):

Ἄν ἄρ᾽ άλλον τινὰ λαμβάνῃ ψευδόμενον ἐν τῇ πόλει – τῶν οἱ δὴμοφόροι ἔσι, μάντιν ἢ ἰητήρα κακῶν ἢ τέκτονα δούρον, κολάσει ώς ἐπιτήδευμα εἰσάγοντα πόλεως ὀσπέρ νεώς ἀνατρεπτικὸν τε καὶ ὀλέθριον.

399 Act 3, sc. 1.
If [a ruler] should catch anyone else speaking falsehoods in the city, “any of the craftsmen, be he prophet or healer of ills or builder of beams,” he will rebuke him for having brought in a practice as subversive and destructive of the state as if it were a ship.

In this remarkable sentence, Plato allows the reader to witness firsthand the creative process involved in the attempt to craft memorable phrases that may, by virtue of their quotability, have the potential to achieve the fourth century’s equivalent of “going viral,” that is, to be committed to memory by students as part of their education and perhaps anthologized in a manner akin to Hesiod’s Precepts of Cheiron.

First Socrates opts for an eminently “quotable” proverb from Book 17 of Homer’s Odyssey. It is the swineherd Eumaios’ brave rebuke to Antinoos, who chastises Eumaios and Telemachus for having brought the beggar – that is, Odysseus in disguise – to the palace where the suitors hound Penelope unceasingly. Eumaios asks Antinoos rhetorically what man who himself arrives from elsewhere would ever “invite” along yet another stranger, in addition to himself, if that stranger were not a “worker of the people” (deimioergos), and then lists off the aforementioned tradesmen, in addition to a bard (aoidos) (17.382-85):

τίς γὰρ δὴ ξεῖνον καλεῖ ἄλλοθεν αὐτὸς ἐπελθὼν
ἄλλον γ’, εἰ μὴ τῶν, οἱ δημιουργοὶ ἔσαι;
μάντιν ἢ ἵπτήρα κακῶν ἢ τέκτονα δούρων,
ἡ καὶ θέσπιν ἀοίδον, ὃ κεν τέρπησιν ἅειδον.

For who, himself a stranger, invites yet another stranger, unless he is one of the craftsmen,
be he prophet or healer of ills or builder of beams
or also inspired bard, one who delights by his singing?

Aside from constituting a crucial component of Eumaios’ gnome, this list of various “workers of the people” – i.e., prophet, doctor carpenter, bard – is perhaps one of the earliest verbal codifications of a list of professions and/or social professional identities that serves to enhance the quotability and memorability of a phrase or series of phrases. One thinks here of the counting
game and nursery rhyme “Tinker, Tailor” with its list of professions (“tinker, tailor, soldier, sailor . . .) or the phrase “the butcher, the baker, the candlestick maker” from the nursery rhyme, “Rub-a-Dub-Dub.” The latter contains the moral to avoid gossip, and, thus, mere mention of only the phrase “butcher, baker, candlestick maker” can serve as synecdoche for the meaning of the rhyme, a feature that proverbs often share (e.g., “Birds of a feather” is shorthand for the full proverb’s meaning). Socrates may well intend to have the already memorable phrase listing the professions from Eumaios’ gnome serve as the synecdochic signal for his new “proverb under construction” that laypersons should not lie. But the simple power of using Homer’s “more poetical” (ποιητικώτερα) language – “more poetical” by dint of its poetic features such as meter, rhythm, and its ABAB structure (ieiteira/kakôn–tektona/dourôn) – has by itself educational ramifications.

Indeed, “Tinker, Tailor” is arguably nothing more than a rhyming scheme to count by, and yet a sizeable number of authors, including Thomas Hardy and Virginia Woolf, have incorporated its suggestive language into their works. In addition, the British novelist James Crace makes a point apposite to Socrates’ emphasis on the educational impact of phrases “more poetical” in describing the effect that hearing “Tinker, Tailor” as a child had on his becoming a writer and how similar “poetical” language can influence future writers. In a 2013 interview, after detailing at length the specifics of what Crace believes constitutes the melodic and rhythmic beauty of the lines in “Tinker, Tailor,” he asserted the following:

This poem registered profoundly in my imagination. . . . [I]t created a literary consciousness in me. We should never underestimate what it is that will turn a young person into someone who wants to love literature. . . . How are these

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400 Dating back to the 14th century, the original nursery rhyme seems to have referred to the men having gone to a fair in order to view maids in a tub, a fairground attraction akin to a modern peep show.

401 Others include J.M. Coetzee, Michael Ondaatje, John le Carré, Irwin Shaw, Dorothy Sayers, and Tom Clancy. The list could go on.
people formed? They’re not formed by being sent to do MFAs in creative writing. That’s too late. They’re formed by early encounters. They’re formed by something that their mother said that made them laugh because it was so well shaped.  

Crace’s point is on par with historical linguist Calvert Watkins having dubbed the traditional English round, “Oats, peas, beans, and barley grow” a “masterpiece of the Indo-European poet’s formulaic art” by virtue of its “essential semantics, formulaics, and poetics”: what today is little more than a formulaic utterance that serves to amuse children might well be the continued “ringing in our ears [of] the transformation of the central merism of an Indo-European agricultural prayer, harverst song, or the like.”

It is in a similar vein that Socrates recognizes Homer’s impressive capacity for producing “well-shaped,” “more poetical” turns of phrase. It is one’s “early encounters” with such language that proves determinative in character formation. Socrates will use those “more poetical” expressions that are conducive to his larger project and reject those he considers detrimental to a just society and the vocabulary that comprises it. To use gnômai and proverbs in any other way would constitute an abuse.

However, Socrates is not yet finished with the excerpt from Homer. He completes the aforementioned proverb by joining Homer’s gnome to an adjective and noun pairing, anatreptikos and polin, that echoes a fragment from Alcaeus, “This man who seeks supreme power will soon overturn the city” (ὁ[ν]ηρ οTextWriter

402 Fassler 2013 (emphasis added).
404 Alcaeus, frag. 141 Lobel and Page.
405 Vespae 1232-5.
Plato’s reading audience. This serves to increase all the more the potential for quotability possessed by Socrates’ new “proverb under construction,” which holds that no private layperson ought to lie, lest the ship of state be overturned. Indeed, to the extent that discourse has been “turned upside down” by the cataclysmic events of the Peloponnesian War and the sophists’ manipulation of language, Socrates is attempting to set the discourse right. With Socrates, Plato begins to build a new discourse, a new vocabulary.

It is in this light, then, that everything Socrates says about poetry in Books 2 and 3 must be read and understood – that is, which passages are harmful, which beneficial, and, in addition, which might be employed in Socrates’ own wordcraft. The world is to be made anew through this new discursive practice that is philosophy, possessing its own vocabulary, its own set of gnômai and proverbs, hopefully to be memorized and anthologized. In Books 2 and 3 of Plato’s Republic, the reader is given the unique opportunity to witness firsthand the beginnings of the creation of a new, just state in discourse (ἐν λόγοις, 592a10), with words and phrases “more poetical” that might serve as the building blocks for a new “vocabulary” that would, by itself, constitute a morality. Proverbs and gnômai necessarily play a crucial role in any vocabulary, in any morality.
Chapter Four – Republic 3-7: Proverbs and the Construction of the Ideal State

And we should always be eager to recognize our kinsmen through discourse.  
Plato, Statesman

Therefore, poetic language – as, after all, every functional language – is rooted in the system of a particular national language.  
Jan Mukařovský, On Poetic Language

4.1. Introduction

After the critique of poetry that Books 2 and 3 have as their focus, the Republic returns to a lengthy discussion about what an ideally just state would look like and how it might be realized. While this subject had been initially taken up in Book 2, considerations of the proper education for the ideal state’s “guardian” class necessitated a detailed examination (and resulting critique) of poetry. Now, from roughly the latter third of Book 3 to the close of Book 7, Socrates and his interlocutors grapple with the task of constructing Kallipolis. Proverbs play a crucial role in the progression of the dialogue and the attempt to articulate what would constitute the foundations of a more just society.

The importance of proverbs to this endeavor is not surprising given that the practice of expressing conceptions of justice by way of proverbs had rich poetic antecedents. We have it on authority from the twelfth century commentator on Aristotle, Michael of Ephesus, that according to the philosopher Theophrastus, two of the most famous coiners of ancient gnômai, Theognis and Phocylides, are credited with a famous gnomic saying, “In justice there is the sum total of every excellence” (ἐν δὲ δικαιοσύνῃ συλλήβδην πᾶσι’ ἀρετῇ ἕνι) – a statement which, as Aristotle explains in his Nicomachean Ethics, “we say, making it into a proverb” (παροιμιαζόμενοι φαμεν,

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Aristotle’s view in this regard is consistent with his conception that proverbs were *gnômai* that over time became “frequently quoted and common” as I explained in Chapter One.) If Plato aspires for the *Republic* to be the definitive tractate on a new, reformed vision of justice – to be the foundation of the ideal *polis* – then the coinage of new and improved *gnômai* and proverbs on that same subject, expressions which bear the potential to become frequently quoted and common in the manner of Plato’s literary gnomologic forebears such as Theognis and Phocylides, seems all but a requirement of the genre in which Plato writes.

Here again, as I explained in Chapter Two, Richard Rorty’s conception of different “vocabularies” competing in a culture’s larger “language game” lies behind my claim that by attempting to reformulate and hence “reform” proverbial sayings, Plato is in fact writing genuine philosophy, even by contemporary standards:

> Interesting philosophy is rarely an examination of the pros and cons of a thesis. Usually it is, implicitly or explicitly, a contest between an entrenched vocabulary which has become a nuisance and a half-formed new vocabulary which vaguely promises great things.

Socrates and his interlocutors draw time after time from the pre-existing reservoir of proverbial sayings and *gnômai*. They do this either to bring attention to the help – or hindrance, as the case may be – of such sayings in imagining an ideally just state or, alternatively, to reformulate and thereby “reform” various *legomena* to achieve a new discourse consistent with Plato’s characters’ imaginings, a state founded on the idea of justice pursued as an end in itself. The middle books of the *Republic* provide us with the opportunity to see such *legomena* at work in the construction of the ideal state. As I hope to make clear, Plato at times displays a near-dizzying number and variety of proverbs in his text – including, among others, bits of Hesiodic

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408 τεθρυληµέναις καὶ κοιναῖς, *Rhet.* 1395a10-11

gnômai, Homeric formulae, pieces of maxims and *sententiae* by Phocylides and Theognis, apothegms quoted by Pindar, Alcaeus, and Aristodemus, folk sayings from popular cultural practices such as board games – but then subtly shows how they can be re-worked, re-fashioned so as to be consonant with the *Republic*’s vision of an ideally just state.

The structure of my argument in this chapter is as follows: I begin with a telling example of how Socrates reforms Hesiodic proverb to craft what will become the definition of justice for the ideal state: “Justice is the doing of one’s own” (τὸ τὰ αὐτὸν πράττειν δικαιοσύνη ἐστὶ). This illustration of proverbial reform occurs in Book 4, which has as its central focus the parallel between the individual soul and the civic structure of the ideal state. Socrates’ proverb-like definition is consistent with the principal of justice central to *Kallipolis*: what is just for the state is identical to what is just for the individual soul. I turn briefly to illustrate how this development follows naturally from a discussion of wealth’s relationship to justice in the latter part of Book 3, which also advances by way of Socrates’ reformulation of proverb from early Greek poetry, akin to what he accomplishes with Hesiod.

I then turn to an examination of how a colloquial proverb with seemingly no poetic origin, “Cities upon cities, but no city!” (πόλεις μὲν εἰσὶ παμπόλεισ, ἀλλ’ οὐ πόλις) highlights just how distant the ideal *polis* stands in relation to then-current Greek cities, as embodied by the term *polis*. Socrates refers to this proverb in Book 4 when the men ponder the question of how their ideal city, lacking wealth, could ever survive in the current brutal political environment. Drawing upon Kierkegaard’s conception of Socratic irony, as developed more recently by Jonathan Lear and Richard Bernstein, I demonstrate how the riddling character of this common proverb – a riddling character enjoyed by many proverbs, as discussed in Chapter Two –

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410 Halliwell 1993: 1.
discloses the “gap” between the “pretense” of an expression like “city” and the “aspiration” embedded in that same term. Socrates and his interlocutors long for a more just world, and the use of this riddling proverb reveals the larger irony of the Greek world’s having many “cities” but no “city” in the sense of the ideal, just city.

I end my exploration of the proverbs in Book 4 by highlighting the rhetorical power possessed by common (κοινά) and seemingly insignificant (σμικρά) proverbs, using Socrates’ invocation of the proverb “Friends have things in common” (κοινά τὰ φίλων) as a prime example. This inconspicuous and ostensibly uncontroversial saying sets the stage in fact for the introduction of the three great waves (τῆς τρικυμίας, 472a2) of radical reform that occupy Book 5 – i.e., the equality of women and men, the abolition of the private family, and the rule of philosopher-kings. I suggest that common, colloquial proverbs possess enormous transformative potential, which, conversely, also becomes a source of worry if legomena antithetical to a just society hold influence. Discursive and civic practices are intertwined.

Thus, proverbs, while essential to persuasive discourse given their familiarity and quotability, must not be considered all-powerful discursive tools that preempt any further examination. As I show in the next section that explores Book 5’s elaboration of “sharing” (κοινωνία), Socrates’ use of the common saying koina ta philôn proves insufficient to the task of convincing his interlocutors of the necessity of having the guardian class share wives and children, an utterly laughable proposition from society’s current vantage point. Moreover, as the interlocutors reel off proverb after proverb in response to Socrates’ attempt to gloss over so radical a proposal with a mere commonplace, the reader is left with the distinct impression that there is no “last word” to be had on any subject. I demonstrate how this dynamic accords with both Rorty’s notion of the “language game” and the traditional agon of Greek poetic
competition. I then end my exploration of the proverbs in Book 5 by showing how with an initial
nod to the comic and iambic tradition of Sophronic mime and the aporrhisms of Epicharmus,
Plato depicts Socrates both coining new proverbs and transforming several traditional ones to
demonstrate how radical ideas of reform, such as those represented by the three waves, will
invariably be subject to scorn and ridicule by a society itself in need of just such reform.

Lastly, I conclude the chapter by revealing how proverbs help support the metaphysical
framework presented in Books 6 and 7 for the ideal of governance by philosopher rulers, the last
of the three waves. While these books are much more famous for the Sun, Line, and Cave
analogies, I show how proverbs work alongside the vividness of Plato’s imagery, culminating in
the Cave, itself seemingly fashioned from imagery in Hesiodic proverb, to show how the world,
including its discursive practices, might be reimagined in a way consistent with the foundation of
Kallipolis.

4.2. Proverbial Reform

A watershed moment occurs midway through Book 4, when Socrates and his
interlocutors begin to perceive that their long-sought definition of justice is tantamount to
modern political theory’s Unique Aptitude Doctrine (UAD), the notion that society is best served
by each individual doing what she is best suited for and nothing else. They arrive at this
conclusion, which ultimately will play a significant role in the development of Western political
and economic thought, by way of proverb – or, more precisely, by reformulating the elements
of several proverbs that originate in Hesiod’s Works and Days.

For example, the UAD principle as articulated by Plato’s characters bears more than a slight resemblance to
Adam Smith’s theory as to how the efficient division of labour necessarily leads to exponential increases in
productivity, and in this sense, history’s most famous idealist presages its most famous economist by some 2000
years.
Socrates worries aloud that to afford the “greatest happiness” (πλείστη εὖδαιμονία) to the various practitioners of the different professions that comprise society would result in a world where “a farmer would no longer be a farmer nor a potter a potter” (οὔτε ο γεωργὸς γεωργὸς ἔσται οὔτε ο κεραμεὺς κεραμεὺς). Instead, it would lead to a society of “merrymakers” (ἔστιτορας), where “the potters recline by the fire, engaged in drinking bouts” (τοὺς κεραμέας κατακλίναντες ἐπὶ δέξια πρὸς τὸ πῦρ διαπίνοντάς, 420d5-421b5). This is decidedly not a picture of the “good Strife” (ἡ ἀγαθὴ Ἔρις) famously described by Hesiod in a series of proverbs in the opening lines of the Works and Days – that is, the sort of strife that fosters a community where “potter vies with potter and builder with builder” (κεραμεὺς κεραμεῖ κοτέει καὶ τέκτονι τέκτων, 24-5). One cannot help but be struck by the semantic proximity of Plato’s ὁ γεωργὸς γεωργὸς ἔσται οὔτε ο κεραμεὺς κεραμεὺς to Hesiod’s κεραμεὺς κεραμεῖ κοτέει καὶ τέκτονι τέκτων, along with the stark contrast between the Hesiodic “good Strife” fostering competition among tradesmen and the leisurely drinking for sport (διαπίνειν) of the shiftless potters in Socrates’ imagined world-gone-wrong. Socrates seems to be saying that such a world would be guilty of having ignored the wisdom imparted by the gnômai in the opening of the Works and Days.

But not so fast. Socrates immediately pivots so as to upend the core maxim underlying much of Hesiod’s Iron Age anthology of gnômai – namely, that one should strive to avoid poverty and to work hard in order to become wealthy during such an unforgiving time – when he tells his interlocutors without equivocation that craftsmen are destroyed by both poverty (πενία) and wealth (πλοῦτος, 421d4). Moreover, in expressing this sentiment, Socrates introduces a new term for “potter,” khutreus (421d6), in place of the previous kerameus. It is as if Plato has embarked on the coinage of a new proverb, replete with revised terminology, to replace the older and – in Plato’s Socrates’ estimation – ultimately faulty, gnomic statements of Hesiod. Whereas
envy of a wealthy man, in the Hesiodic formulation, is what catalyzes the “good Strife” of competition between tradesmen so that the impoverished may become wealthy themselves, it is the very attainment of wealth, under Plato’s reformulation of the proverb, that in fact makes a potter (now deemed χυτρεύς instead of κεραµεύς) “more idle and negligent” (Ἀργὸς δὲ καὶ ἀµελῆς . . . µᾶλλον) and “much worse” (κακίων . . . πολύ, 421d9-12) than he was before he became wealthy. Now it is both poverty and wealth that cause harm, as framed in a generalizing statement that has the syntactic shape of a proverb: “From both wealth and poverty then it is that the works of the craftsmen are worse and that they themselves are worse” (Ὑπ’ ἀµφότερων δή, πενίας τε καὶ πλούτου, χείρω μὲν τὰ τῶν τεχνῶν ἔργα, χείρους δὲ αὐτοῖ, 421e4-5). The parallelism of erga with the intensive autoi, the use of the axiological terminology cheirô/cheirous as part of that parallelism and heightened by polyptoton, the suppressed copula—all of these are stylistic markers of proverbs.\footnote{See Most 2003: 146.}

With this new formulation, Plato has deftly equated a surfeit of happiness, which he first had Socrates conjoin with the idleness that Hesiod condemns throughout his didactic poem, to a surfeit of wealth, to which Hesiod presumably would have no objection. Nothing short of the transformation of Hesiod’s proverbial wisdom is underway. As Book 4 continues to unfold, Socrates ultimately concludes that the way to avoid such detrimental surfeit is for everyone to practice the craft for which his natural aptitude is highest (i.e., the UAD) and that this is, in fact, the very definition of justice (433a1-434d1). What the state requires of us turns out to be the same as what is best for the health of our indidivual soul. This revelation, too, he articulates in an expression that has the shape of a proverb: “Justice is the doing of one’s own” (τὸ τὰ αὐτοῦ πράττειν . . . δικαιοσύνη ἔστι, 433a8-9). The use of the neuter (τὸ) has the effect of turning a...
statement into a kind of proverb, and Socrates’ newly coined phrase qualifies as what modern paroemiologists deem “literal nonoppositional proverbs” such as “Virtue is its own reward” and “Honesty is the best policy.” Plato’s reformulation of Hesiodic proverb, thus, results in world literature’s first articulation of the UAD.

From the Republic’s opening, it is clear that Plato is concerned about the relationship of both wealth and work – and, conversely, lack thereof – to justice. We recall that one of the initial questions Socrates poses to his first interlocutor in the dialogue, the old man Cephalus, concerns the effect that Cephalus’ enormous wealth may have had on Cephalus’ ability to live a just life. As I explained in Chapter Two, this exchange between Socrates and Cephalus amounts to a virtual duel of proverbs and gnōmai wielded by the two men in support of their respective positions. It comes as no surprise, then, that Socrates should confront Plato’s precursor and competitor at gnōmai-coining, Hesiod, as he begins to construct the ideal state, on the relationship of both wealth and work to a just society – a society which is, of course, the principal topic of both authors’ texts (i.e., the Works and Days and the Republic).

We see in fact the stage set for Socrates’ engagement with this subject toward the close of Book 3, when Socrates considers the relationship of both wealth and work (or, again, their lack) to excellence (ἀρετή). While explaining to Glaucon how a man who has work (ἔργον) to perform, such as a carpenter, has no time for excessive and prolonged medical treatment, Socrates raises the contrasting image of a wealthy man and frames the point he wishes to make by way of a purportedly common saying: “But a rich man, as we say, has no such work set

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413 Morgan 2009: 555, n. 19 (citing Adam and Adam 1940) in reference to Plato’s Protagoras, 309c11-12. Although Morgan uses the term “maxim,” modern paroemiology reveals there is little difference between the two, as I explained in Chapter One.

414 See Dundes 1981: 52-3; Russo 1997: 52.

415 See Chapter 2.2 for a full discussion of this proverbial “duel.”
before him, a man for whom life becomes intolerable being compelled to keep away from work” (ὁ δὲ δὴ πλούσιος, ὃς φαμεν, οὐδὲν ἔχει τοιοῦτον ἔργον προκείμενον, οὐ ἀναγκαζομένῳ ἀπέχεσθαι ἄβιωτον, 407a4-5). Glauc, interestingly, denies having heard this adage.\footnote{416} Socrates, in turn, responds with a proverb from Phocylides: “Why, you haven’t heard that saying of Phocylides ‘For whom there is already livelihood, he must practice excellence’” (Φωκυλίδου γάρ . . . οὐκ ἀκούεις πῶς φησι δεῖν, ὅταν τῷ ἡδῇ βίος ἦ, ἀρετὴν ἀσκεῖν, 407a7-8)? Now Glauc takes the point: “I think even before that, too [i.e., before he has a livelihood]” (οἶμαι δὲ γε . . . καὶ πρότερον, 407a9). For Socrates to cite a maxim by Phocylides is certainly consistent with Phocylides’ reputation in antiquity as one of the best advisors on human living, precisely because he authored numerous gnómai in his poetry.\footnote{417} But even more importantly, Socrates has deftly altered Phocylides’ original proverb to highlight what he now wants to emphasize: the need to practice aretê, irrespective of one’s material circumstances. Here is Phocylides’ original: “Seek a livelihood, and after you have it, excellence” (δίζησθαι βιοτήν, ἀρετὴν δ’, ὅταν ἦ βίος ἢδη).\footnote{418} Adam, in his commentary, notes that Phocylides’ maxim “is one of the earliest expressions of the all but universal cry χρήματα χρήματ’ ἄνηρ” – “money, money is the man” – which we find in Pindar’s Second Isthmian.\footnote{419} The Pindaric Scholiast informs us that the expression “is classed among the proverbs (ἀναγράφεται μὲν εἰς τὰς παροιμίας) by some, but it is really an apothegm of Aristodemus, as Chrysippus tells us in his work On Proverbs (ἐν τῷ περὶ παροιμιῶν)” and, further, that Alcaeus quoted Aristodemus’ apothegm in his poetry: “For they say that Aristodemus once expressed it

\footnote{416} 407a6: Ὑδίκουν δὴ λέγεται γε.
\footnote{417} See, e.g., Isoc., Ad Nicoclem 43-4.
\footnote{418} Phocylides, frag. 9.1 Diehl.
\footnote{419} Adam 1980: ad loc.; Pi., I. 2.10: χρῆματα χρῆματ’ ἄνηρ.
shrewdly at Sparta, ‘Money is the man (χρήματι ἀνήρ), and no poor man is good or honorable.’

Diogenes Laertius also mentions Alcaeus’ quotation of Aristodemus’ apothegm in relaying a story told by Andron of Ephesus in his work on The Tripod, about how Aristodemus won the tripod from the Argives as a prize of virtue for being the wisest of the Greeks but retired in favor of Chilon, one of the Seven Sages. Phocylides’ original saying thus belongs to a long and distinguished pedigree of proverbial expression that emphasized the overarching importance of wealth to Greek culture and society.

Plato, thus, has Socrates make use of the esteemed lineage enjoyed by Phocylides’ saying in the context of the men’s discussion about work, wealth and justice but alters it ever so subtly. As Adam explains, “Plato for his own purposes represents Phocylides as laying the stress on ἀρετὴν ἀσκεῖν rather than on δίζησθαι βιοτήν, where it really falls.” Now the proverb emphasizes the cultivation of virtue rather than the accumulation of wealth. On my reading, Plato is re-working traditional proverbs in the service of his vision of discursive reform. The ancient conversation concerning the relationship of wealth and work to justice and excellence must be changed, “re-formed.” In contrast to a literary heritage that includes proverbial sayings by Pindar, Alcaeus, and wise men on par with the legendary Seven Sages (e.g., Aristodemus), all articulating the virtues of wealth, Plato means to lay a new gnomological foundation for future sayings, now emphasizing the values expressed in the Republic, notably, aretē, and dikē pursued

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420 Scholia vetera I 2.17.1-3 (trans. Campbell). There is no functional difference between a proverb and an apothegm insofar as (i) the two separate terms represented for the Greeks the development over time of multiple terminology with overlapping meanings and (ii) modern paroemiologists define an apothegm as closely akin to a proverb, namely, as a “wise and pithy saying uttered by a distinguished individual at [an] opportune or critical moment . . .” (Russo 1997: 58, 63; see my definitional parameters of “proverb” in Chapter 1.2).

421 Vitae philosophorum 1.30.11-1.31.6.

422 See my analysis in Chapter 3 of how Plato artfully distorts the conventional notions of who should be considered Sages and just what sort of wisdom may or may not be contained in their reputedly “wise” maxims.

423 Adam 1980: ad loc.
for its own sake, the guiding principle of the ideal state. A new “vocabulary” (to employ Rorty’s terminology), complete with its own proverbs, is a prerequisite for Plato’s project. The ideal state cannot be envisioned without such a reformed discourse.

4.3. “Cities upon Cities, but No City!” – Colloquial Proverb and Ironic Longing

As we saw in Book 1 with Socrates’ reference to folk sayings in the volatile exchange with Thrasymachus, the central books of the Republic also disclose Plato’s seeming fondness for colloquial proverbs, the sort of sayings that one would be more likely to encounter on the street or in the agora than in the classroom or symposium. In Book 4, Socrates’ allusion to one of these in particular – “Cities upon cities, but no city!” (πόλεις μὲν εἰσὶ παμπόλεις, ἄλλ’ οὐ πόλις) – illuminates the magnitude of the task faced by anyone who, like Socrates and his interlocutors, attempts to articulate the ideal in language, which is precisely the challenge of constructing Kallipolis in the men’s dialogue with each other.

Not long after Socrates subverts Hesiodic proverb about the superiority of wealth, Adeimantus responds with his own challenge to Socrates: How will Kallipolis be able to defend itself in war without resources, without wealth? Will it not be easy prey for some rich and large (μεγάλην τε καὶ πλουσίαν) rival state? Socrates replies with a revised version of a colloquial proverb that the Athenian Stranger employs in Plato’s Laws: “the old and true saying how it is hard to fight against two foes on the opposite side” (ὁρθὸν μὲν δὴ πάλαι τε εἰρημένον ὡς πρὸς δύο μάχεσθαι καὶ ἕναντια χαλεπόν, Laws 919b4-5). Socrates, however, alters the saying significantly: “It is clear that it would be harder [to fight] against one, but easier against two such kind” (δῆλον . . . ὅτι πρὸς μὲν μίαν χαλεπότερον [πολεμεῖν], πρὸς δὲ δύο τοιαύτας ῥάν, 422a8-b1).
Adeimantus is perplexed. “How can you say that?” (πῶς εἶπες; 422b2), he asks, bewildered by Socrates’ strange reformulation. That Socrates’ new version has a riddling component comes as no surprise given what modern paroemiology has revealed: certain sayings can lead double lives as both proverbs and riddles. More importantly, however, Plato is setting the stage for the introduction of the still-more puzzling colloquial proverb, “Cities upon cities, but no city!” which will have profound ramifications for how we ought to conceive of an ideal city in the real-world context of the threat posed by rich and powerful rival states. As was the case with justice and aretē, we are about to learn that considerations of wealth are entirely irrelevant to a just state, even when forced to defend itself against hostile powers. This is no academic discussion.

First we should note a telling connection between Socrates’ revised saying about fighting “two foes of opposite quarters” and the two specific “foes” that the Athenian Stranger has in mind in Plato’s Laws, when he quotes the original, quasi-proverb. Those “enemies” are none other than “wealth” (πλοῦτος) and “poverty” (πενία, Laws, 919b7-8) – in other words, the very same constructs that barely half a Stephanus page ago we witnessed Socrates configure in a new proverb so as to counter the old Hesiodic proverb that lionized wealth and demonized poverty. Now we have Socrates offering yet another new proverb but one that seems at odds with the “old and true saying” voiced by the Athenian Stranger. Moreover, the Athenian Stranger’s “saying” would itself appear to have aligned nicely with how Socrates previously reformed Hesiod’s retrograde wisdom: it may be hard to do battle against such formidable foes as poverty and

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424 See Chapter 2.5 where I discuss the explanation by Dundes 1981: 51, of why the Burmese phrase “The one who does not know about it may walk over it; the one who knows about it will dig it up and eat it” qualifies as both a riddle and a proverb.

425 To repeat, Socrates “re-formed” Hesiodic proverb is “From both wealth and poverty then it is that the works of the craftsmen are worse and that they themselves are worse” (Ὑπ’ ἄμφοτέρων δή, πενίας τε καὶ πλούτου, χείρου μὲν τὰ τῶν τεχνῶν ἐργα, χείρου δὲ αὐτοί, 421e4-5).
wealth, but then – to paraphrase another proverb we see quoted elsewhere in the Republic – “Hard is the way of the good” (χαλεπὰ τὰ καλὰ).

However, even leaving aside the disjunction between Socrates’ earlier and later “revised” proverbs, how can it be easier to fight two than one? Shorey explains the riddling proverb as an “apparent paradox to stimulate attention.” While this is no doubt true, the bewilderment engendered by the proverb is the precursor to an even deeper aporia that necessarily accompanies the radical undermining of traditional thinking concerning the relationship of wealth and power to justice, now pursued for its own sake.

Socrates begins to clarify things by arguing that a virtuous and well-trained man – the ideal exemplified by the guardians – could easily best two, fat, rich men (πλουσίοιν δὲ καὶ πιόνοιν, 422b8) in a boxing match. Adeimantus concedes the point and acknowledges further that since the rich are likely to be more skilled in boxing than warfare, the ideal city’s virtual “athletes of war” (πολέµου ἄθληται, 422b8) will likely be able to fight two times, even three times (διπλασίοις τε καὶ τριπλασίοις, 422c8-9) their own number. However, Adeimantus raises a valid concern after Socrates imagines the ideal polis sending an embassy to another city and then announcing that because neither gold nor silver is lawful (θέµις) to its own inhabitants, the other city, honoring wealth, would naturally make common cause with the ideal polis, preferring not to do battle with the ideal city’s “sturdy and strong hounds” (κυσὶ . . στερεοῖς τε καὶ ἰσχυρῖς) but instead against the “fat and tender sheep” (προβάτοις πίοσι τε καὶ ἀπαλοῖς 422d1-7) who inhabit the wealthy cities, in order to acquire those wealthy cities’ spoils. Adeimantus, senses danger in this way of thinking and cautions Socrates, “But consider whether the wealth of other

426 At 435c8 and 497d10.
427 Shorey 1982: ad loc.
428 Trans. Shorey.
cities gathered together into a single city should not pose a danger to our city that is not wealthy.”

Socrates’ rejoinder is remarkable in its multi-leveled irony, setting up the introduction of the pivotal colloquial proverb, “Cities upon cities, but no city!”: “You are happily innocent to think that you can properly deem any city other than the one we are founding ‘a city’” (εὐδαίμων εἶ . . . ὅτι οἶει ἄξιον εἶναι ἄλλην τινά προσειπεῖν πόλιν ἢ τὴν τοιαύτην οἶαν ἡμεῖς κατεσκευάζομεν, 422e3-5). This rejoinder is part of Socrates’ larger point that the so-called “cities” to which Adeimantus refers are not so much cities as rival groups within a polity, not truly “one city” (πόλιν μίαν, 423a9) in the sense that Kallipolis is. The commentators note that Socrates must, then, be ironic in calling Adeimantus “happy” or “fortunate” (εὐδαίμων – which I, following Shorey’s lead, translate as “happily innocent”), since in Socrates’ estimation, Adeimantus has failed to employ the term polis accurately. The other so-called “cities” that prize wealth are not genuine “cities” in the true sense of the word but merely collections of competing factions. Socrates’ irony, thus, conforms to the standard definition: “the use of words to express something other than, and especially the opposite of [their] literal meaning” (Webster’s).

However, there is yet another, more profound sense in which irony operates here, which is critical to ascertain if we are to grasp the full import of the coming proverb, “Cities upon

429 422d8-e2: ἀλλ' ἐάν εἰς μίαν . . . πόλιν συναθροισθῇ τὰ τῶν ἄλλων χρήματα, ὥρα μὴ κίνδυνον φέρῃ τῇ μὴ πλουτούσῃ.
430 Trans. Shorey (with modification).
431 See, e.g., Adam 1980 ad loc.: “εὐδαίμων is less common in this ironical sense than μακάριος.”
432 The standard, modern definition of irony conforms to the classic definition provided by Quintilian, namely, a figure of speech or trope “in which something contrary to what is said must be understood” (in utroque enim contrarium ei quod dicitur intellegendum est, 9.2.44.7-9).
cities, but no city!” In one sense, Adeimantus is, in fact, “blessed” to be able to employ words in a unidimensional way, where there exists no gap between a word’s pretense and what further, larger aspiration the person employing a single, blunt term like “city” may associate with that single term. It is in this gap that one glimpses the deeper irony in Socrates’ statement. Here I look to the work of the philosopher Jonathan Lear (and Richard Bernstein’s treatment of Lear’s ideas), who, drawing from Kierkegaard’s writings on Socratic irony (specifically, from Plato’s portrayal of Socrates), introduces the concept of a “gap” between Kierkegaard’s notion of “pretense” (that is, a putting forward of oneself, the making of a claim – i.e., not making something up in the sense of “to pretend”) and the “aspiration” that is embedded in that pretense. It is in this gap that a potential for irony arises. Lear puts it thus:

The possibility of irony arises when a gap opens between pretense as it is made available in a social practice [e.g., in Lear’s thinking, the practice of being a “teacher” or a “citizen” or a “businessman” or a “Christian” – or, in my analysis here, the practice of a polity’s being a “city”] and an aspiration or ideal which, on the one hand, is embedded in the pretense – indeed which expresses what the pretense is all about – but which, on the other hand, seems to transcend the life and the social practice in which that pretense is made. The pretense seems at once to capture and miss the aspiration.433

As Bernstein explains in elucidating Lear’s conception of Kierkegaard’s pretense, the fundamental ironic question for Kierkegaard becomes “In all of Christendom is there a Christian?” or as Lear rephrases it, “Among all Christians, is there a Christian?” These questions are not tautologies. Rather, they are means of focusing our attention on the gap between the pretense of being a Christian and the task of living up to the aspiration embedded in the pretense. In my reading of the Republic, it is precisely this same sort of gap that exists between Adeimantus’ use of the term polis and the aspiration embedded in the pretense of that term, to which Socrates’ draws our attention by telling Adeimantus how “fortunate/blessed/innocent”

(εὐδαιμον) he is to be able to use the term polis as if it were limited solely to its pretense, as opposed to the aspiration which arguably only the ideal polis that the men have been “constructing” (κατασκευάζειν) in the dialogue can meet. Socrates and his interlocutors in Plato’s Republic are longing for the attainment of the aspiration embedded in the pretense of the term, polis. If they were already satisfied with the word in the sense that the gap between pretense and aspiration had been bridged, they would all be eudaimones, indeed.

Adeimantus is puzzled by Socrates’ irony. “Why, what should we say then?” he asks. Now Socrates deploys the colloquial proverb: “You ought to refer to the other ['cities'] more numerously. For each of them is, as the saying of the game goes, not ‘a city but a-many cities.’” (Μειζόνως, ἢν δ’ ἐγώ, χρὴ προσαγορεῦειν τὰς ἄλλας· ἐκάστη γὰρ αὐτῶν πόλεις εἰσὶ πάμπολλαι ἄλλ’ οὐ πόλις, τὸ τῶν παιζόντων, 422e7-9). Socrates seems to refer here to an ancient board game. The scholiast informs us that the phrase “playing cities” (πόλεις παίζειν) pertains to a type of draughts board game (εἰδός ἐστι πεττευτικῆς παιδιᾶς) and that the phrase “has also been translated into a proverb” (μετήκται δὲ καὶ εἰς παροιμίαν). Both the Suda and Hesychius confirm, too, that the phrase poleis paizein came to have proverbial signification. Adam adds that the “the phrase τὸ τῶν παιζόντων in Plato seems always to mean ‘as they say in the proverb’ . . .” He hypothesizes that “it is probable from the position of τὸ τῶν παιζόντων that ἄλλ’ οὐ πόλις forms part of the proverb: so that the whole saying may have run πόλεις μὲν εἰς παμπόλεις, ἄλλ’ οὐ πόλις – translated roughly as “Cities upon cities but no ‘city’!” If we

434 422e6: ἄλλα τι μὴν; ἐφη (trans. Shorey).
435 Trans. Adam (with modification).
436 Greene 1938: ad loc.
437 Hsch. pi.2757.1-3 (in Schmidt 1965); Suid. pi.1911.1 (in Adler 1971).
438 Adam 1980: ad loc. See, e.g., Resp. 9.573d1 and Laws 6.780c8 (cf. 4.723d8-e1).
439 Adam 1980: ad loc.
suppose, then, that a compact body of pieces was called a *polis* which in turn constituted the whole of a player’s side, one can imagine, as Adam puts it, a “defeated player, gazing ruefully at his depopulated squares, each of which, as well as the whole of his side is a ‘city’” exclaiming this phrase that became the proverb (as reconstructed by Adam) to which Socrates refers in responding to Adeimantus: “Cities upon cities but no city!”

As is the case with many proverbs, the phrase has to be riddled through. What in the world is Socrates driving at? Fortunately, he goes on to explain in making his larger point about how Adeimantus mistakes rival groups within a polity for a “city” in the same sense as *Kallipolis* (422e9-423b2):

\[\text{δόο μέν, καὶ όπιοῦν ἢ, πολεμία ἄλληλαις, ἢ μὲν πενήτων, ἢ δὲ πλουσίων· τούτων δὴ ἐν ἐκατέρα πάνω πολλαί, αἷς ἐὰν μὲν ὡς μιᾷ προσφέρῃ, παντὸς ἀν ἀμάρτοις, ἐὰν δὲ ως πολλαίς, διδόος τὰ τῶν ἑτέρων τοῖς ἑτέρων χρήματά τε καὶ δυνάμεις ἢ καὶ αὐτοῖς, συμμάχοις μὲν ἂι πολλοῖς χρήση, πολεμίοις δ’ ὀλίγοις. καὶ ἔως ἂν ἢ πόλις σου οἰκῇ σωφρόνως ὡς ἁρτὶ ἐπάχθη, μεγίστη ἔσται, οὐ τῷ εὐδοκιμεῖν λέγω, ἀλλ’ ως ἡλθός μεγίστη, καὶ ἐὰν μόνον ἢ χιλίων τῶν προπολεμοῦντων· οὕτω γὰρ μεγάλην πόλιν μίαν οὐ βάδιος οὔτε ἐν Ἑλλησίν οὔτε ἐν βαρβάροις εὐρήσεις, δοκούσας δὲ πολλάς καὶ πολλαπλασίας τῆς τηλικαύτης.}\n
There are two [cities] – if there be even anything – hostile to one another, one of paupers, and one of rich men. And in each of these are many more, which, if you should treat them as one, you would err altogether, but if you treat them as many, giving the wealth, powers, and the men themselves of one group to the other, you will always make many allies and few enemies. And so long as your city is governed wisely, in the way recently established, it will be the greatest – I don’t mean in reputation, but truly the greatest, even though it count no more than one thousand defenders. You will not easily discover among either the Greeks or the barbarians a city of this magnitude that is truly one, although there are many that seem to be so and many times the size of this.

In other words, to call “cities” those polities that the dialogue’s participants were formerly accustomed to think of as “cities” is to be at sea with respect to the true meaning of “city.” Such cities, although many in number and many times larger (πολλάς καὶ πολλαπλασίας) than the ideal city, are merely the sort that “seem to be” cities (δοκούσας). To use Lear’s
terminology (derived from the thought of Kierkegaard), there is a wide gap between the pretense of being a city and the aspiration which the term “city” embeds in its pretense. Hence the irony of the board-game player’s cry, “Cities upon cities but no city!” It is the same irony realized in the despairing cry of Samuel Taylor Coleridge’s ancient mariner: “Water, water, everywhere, Nor any drop to drink”, which has developed over time into its own proverb, “Water, water everywhere, but not a drop to drink.” What appears to be a surfeit is, ironically, a paucity.

It is here, in the irony arising from the gap between the pretense of an expression and its aspiration, that the extent of our longing for a unity between the two, between pretense and aspiration, becomes manifest. Despite the fact that the ancient mariner is surrounded on all sides by “water,” he ironically has no “water.” Yet he longs desperately for what the term “water” aspires to – life-sustaining liquid. Kierkegaard asks whether one can find a single “Christian” in a “Christendom” that is peopled, ironically, with many “Christians.” Kierkegaard’s question signals a longing for those who in fact fulfill the aspiration of what it means to be a Christian. Socrates’ use of the popular proverb from players of the board game poleis – indeed, so popular a proverb that the phrases poleis paizein and to tôn paizontôn themselves took on proverbial signification, meaning in effect “as they say in the proverb” – reveals the irony of the Greeks having many “cities” but no true “city.” Socrates and his interlocutors long for just such a city. Its realization is the theme of the Republic and in the middle books of the dialogue, Socrates and company set about constructing it.

4.4. Sharing the “Small Stuff” (ta smikra) – the Transformative Potential of the “Common” (ta koina)

Plato’s use of colloquial proverbs in his text like “Cities upon cities but no city!” suggests a writer’s acute sensitivity to the persuasive power of such commonplaces, as well as the manner
in which they operate in discourse. Whatever degree of rhetorical force and persuasion a proverb exerts over an audience seems in direct proportion to the amount of consonance the proverbial expression enjoys with that same audience’s experience. Is it one that the audience has heard before (or at least something similar), an expression thereby possessing a pre-established level of credibility with its listeners? We might re-describe this idea of consonance as “commonality.” Aristotle, in his *Rhetoric*, uses the adjective “common” – *koinos* – to describe why proverbs prove so compelling to people. He advises that, “one should even use trite and common (κοιναῖς) *gnômai*, if they are applicable; for because they are common (κοιναῖ), they seem true, as though everyone agreed.”440 Aristotle’s position accords with modern paroemiologists’ conception of a proverb as “a general truth that everyone would accept as important and useful to recall . . .”441 This “generality” of whatever “truth” a proverb contains seems closely related to Aristotle’s notion of *koinos* and what I am choosing to call a proverb’s “commonality.”

Such commonality may obviate the need even to articulate an entire proverb in full, as with the expressions, “Birds of a feather” and “Different strokes,” both of which are shorthand for the larger proverbs called swiftly to mind.442 Socrates’ success at using a pre-established stock of familiar proverbial expressions to emphasize his points depends in part upon the commonality those sayings enjoy among his listeners. Moreover, by subtly altering the wording of some of the sayings and reframing them within a dialogue that seeks to envision a perfectly


441 Russo 1983: 121.

442 As described in Chapter 2.2, Cephalus’ mere mention of the words “old proverb” (*τὴν παλαιὰν παροιμίαν*), coupled with the phrase “having about the same age” (*παραπλησίαν ἡλικίαν ἔχοντες*, 329a4), suffices to trigger his listeners’ recognition of the proverb, ἡλικίας ἡλικα τέρπει, which translates roughly as “like unto like.” See, e.g., Adam 1980: ad loc.; Allan 1965: ad loc.; Jowett and Campbell 1894: ad loc.; Shorey 1982: ad loc. See Chapter 2.6 for a discussion of how, just as with Cephalus’ reference to (but not direct quotation of) the proverb “like unto like,” we are not provided with the folk proverb “If a wolf catches sight of a man it renders him voiceless” which Socrates obliquely references when he describes his reaction to Thrasymachus’ forceful intervention in the colloquy.
just state, Socrates begins to change the common (that is, shared) understanding of the proverbs’ meaning. In this manner our author, Plato, is “re-forming” the element in proverbs that Aristotle describes as koinos, by virtue of which all agree that any given proverb is true.443 Or, using the terminology of modern paroemiologists, the “general truth” represented by a proverb is refashioned – sometimes only slightly, but in furtherance of Plato’s discursive reform, as Socrates and his companions construct the ideal polis.

For example, just after illustrating in Book 4 that Adeimantus’ conception of “city” is impoverished, Socrates turns to address the proper size and makeup of a “true” city. The true city must be neither “too small, nor great only in seeming to be so” (μήτε σμικρὰ . . . μήτε μεγάλη δοκοῦσα) but “sufficient and one” (ἰκανὴ καὶ μία, 423c3-4), and the class of guardians of the city (as well as the other classes) must be properly maintained in accordance with the UAD: one man to one work (πρὸς τοῦτο ἐνα πρὸς ἐν ἐκαστὸν ἔργον δεῖ κομίζειν), i.e., each person to that task “for which he is fitted by nature” (πρὸς ὃ τις πέφυκεν, 423d3-4). Throughout Socrates’ exposition, Adeimantus wryly comments that following all of Socrates’ instructions on how the true city must be composed and governed will not be an easy task for the guardians.

Socrates’ rejoinder to Adeimantus incorporates, once again, a segment from a famous proverb (423d8-e2):

Οὐτοὶ . . . ὁ ἀγαθὲ Αδείμαντε, ὡς δόξειεν ἀν τις, ταῦτα πολλὰ καὶ μεγάλα αὐτοῖς προστάττομεν ἄλλα πάντα φαῦλα, ἕαν τὸ λεγόμενον ἐν μέγα φυλάττοσι, μᾶλλον δ’ ἀντὶ μεγάλου ἰκανόν.

In fact, my dear Adeimantus, our injunctions to them are not many and difficult, as one might suppose, but easy, every one of them, if, they attend to the proverbial “one great thing,” or rather not “great,” but “adequate.”444

443 Rhet. 1395a11-12: ὡς ὁμολογοῦντων πάντων, ὅρθως ἔχειν δοκοῦσιν.

444 Trans. Adam (with modification). See Adam 1980: ad loc.: “J[owett] and C[ampbell err in translating ἰκανόν ‘to a sufficient extent’ . . .’}
We are reminded here of Archilochus’ saying, “the fox knows many things, but the hedgehog one big thing” (πόλλ’ οἶδ’ ἀλώπηζ, ἀλλ’ εἴχος ἐν μέγα, fr. 201), which has enjoyed relevance to this day. As is the case with so many other proverbs whose meanings are not self-evident, we are required to puzzle over what precisely Socrates has in mind. Jowett and Campbell propose that here, Socrates “reflects that the whole spirit of his previous remarks is against aiming at bigness in anything.”

We recall that up to this point, Socrates had been repeatedly offering somewhat enigmatic variations on established truisms handed down in the form of sayings, some of which stem from Plato’s literary precursors. Here are Socrates’ reworkings: (1) it’s not poverty that makes a man worse but both poverty and wealth (pace Hesiod), (2) let him practice excellence, for whom there is already livelihood (pace Phocylides), (3) it’s actually easier to fight against two than one (pace the source of the Athenian Stranger’s “old saying” [πάλαι τε εἰρημένον] to the opposite effect in Plato’s Laws). Now Socrates carves off a piece from Archilochus’ oft-quoted “the hedgehog-knows-one-big-thing” proverb in order to counter Adeimantus’ quite reasonable concern that Socrates and his companions are imposing too many burdensome commands on their idealized city’s guardians. Socrates, however, re-fashions the saying so that its focus is now on what will prove adequate, hikanos, for the ideal polis.

Wealth and size are no longer to be the markers of a state’s greatness. Indeed, the very idea of greatness needs to be replaced with the concept of hikanos – the adequate, the sufficient.

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445 Shorey 1982: ad loc. Making use of Archilochus’ maxim, the philosopher Isaiah Berlin (1953) famously divided thinkers and writers into those whose work conceives of and describes the world via a single, unifying idea and those who view the world as manifold. In the former, Berlin places authors such as Plato and Dostoyevsky and in the latter, writers such as Herodotus and Shakespeare. The philosopher Michael Walzer (1995) extended Berlin’s pattern of description to apply to Berlin himself, arguing that in contrast to some of the more narrow-minded contemporary philosophers obsessed with a single way of explaining reality, Berlin’s classical liberalism allowed for a great variety of approaches to the world in all its complexity.

446 Jowett and Campbell 1894: ad loc.
what constitutes “enough” and lacks excess. Socrates then wastes no time defining what should be called to mind any time a person henceforth encounters his new proverbial “one sufficient thing” (ἂν ἰκανόν) known by Archilochus’ hedgehog. Socrates describes, in yet again a somewhat paradoxical fashion, this new, one sufficient thing: it is in fact twofold in nature, consisting of “education and upbringing” (παιδείαν . . . καὶ τροφήν, 423e4). Proper education and rearing are, together, the one sufficient thing for the ideal polis, not wealth and size.

Now Socrates rolls smoothly and easily from this “re-formed” adage into yet another common proverb, one that on its face seems relatively benign but which in fact has far-reaching consequences for society, as used by Socrates: “Friends have things in common” (κοινά τὰ φίλων, 424a1-2). Indeed, it is this proverb in particular that provides the basis for what will be a major “structural pivot” in the Republic’s narrative, i.e., Book 5’s discussion of the three great waves of reform.447 Here is how Socrates first casually broaches in Book 4 the subject of the second wave, the abolition of the private family (423e4-424a2):

ἐὰν γὰρ εὖ παιδευόμενοι μέτριοι ἄνδρες γίγνονται, πάντα ταῦτα ρυθίως διόψονται, καὶ ἄλλα γε ὡσα νῦν ἡμεῖς παραλείπομεν, τήν τε τῶν γυναικῶν κτῆσιν καὶ γάμων καὶ παιδοφοιάς, ὅτι δεῖ ταῦτα κατὰ τὴν παρομίαν πάντα ὅτι μάλιστα κοινά τὰ φίλων ποιεῖσθαί.

For if men are right-minded by virtue of having been educated well, then easily will they understand all of these [injunctions], as well as however many of them we now pass over, such as the acquisition of wives and marriage and procreation, these things that ought to be rendered, as much as possible, “common among friends,” according to the proverb.

Both the scholiast and Diogenes Laertius attribute the proverb koina ta philôn to Pythagoras, based upon statements by Timaeus.448 Adam offers the intriguing suggestion that ta philôn might well have been added by a scribe to the Republica MS, since “it is more elegant to suggest than

447 Ferrari 2015: 7, aptly calls this juncture in Book 5 one of the dialogue’s “structural pivots.”
448 Greene 1938: ad loc.; Vitae philosoporum 8.10.5-7.
to quote so familiar a proverb.”[^449] That practice is certainly consistent with Socrates’ previous references to only pieces and fragments of gnômai and proverbs, rather than quoting them verbatim (although he does quote the full proverb in Lysis[^450]).

Socrates’ use of this proverb in conjunction with marriage and procreation envisions the communistic possession of wives and children by the ideal state’s guardians. It may well be that the suggestion of so radical a proposition is best introduced by way of a familiar proverb, in order to lessen the shock effect on the audience. The proverb’s easy consonance with the men’s experience – why wouldn’t friends have “things in common”? – and its commonality in the discourse of the day soften, at least for the moment, the strangeness of Socrates’ transformative utopianism. As we shall see, the proverb ultimately proves insufficient, since Glaucon and Adeimantus will compel Socrates in Book 5 to explain more fully his radical proposal and not simply rely on a familiar proverb.

There is, however, a method to Socrates’ madness. A parallel exists between the commonality enjoyed by the proverb Socrates employs and the commonality in the shared possession of guardians’ wives and children. Language – that is, discursive practice – and social and civic practices are mutually interactive, mutually reinforcing, reflecting back onto one another. Discourse is close kin to the customs and traditional institutions that comprise a society. Socrates opines that a state composed in the way he prescribes (partly by use of apt proverbs) then “proceeds to accumulate in force just like a whirl” (ἐρχεται ὡσπερ κύκλος αὐξανομένη, 424a4-5). The momentum at play in Socrates’ progression from proverb to proverb as he

[^449]: Adam 1980: ad loc.
[^450]: 207c10. Phaedrus also quotes the full proverb at the close of the eponymous dialogue (297c6-7), as does the Athenian Stranger in the Laws (739c2-3).
instructs how the ideal polity should be constructed runs alongside the vis inertiae of that same polity, now “growing” (αὐξανοµένη). Discursive practice is intertwined with civic practice.

This interweave of wordcraft and statecraft is the focus of a discussion shortly afterwards about music, when Socrates reworks a famous piece of Homeric wisdom. Socrates cautions against a particular interpretation of a well-known gnome from the Odyssey. The gnome consists of Telemachos famous upbraid of his mother, Penelope, for her request that the bard Phemios end his song of the Achaians’ bitter homecoming from Troy: “Men praise more the song, whichever is the latest to hover around the listeners” (τινὰ γὰρ ἰσόδην μᾶλλον ἐπικλείοσιν ἄνθρωποι / ἧ τις ἀκουόντεσσι νεωτάτη ἄμφιπέληται, Od. 1.351-2)\(^{451}\) Plato, however, substitutes ἐπιφρονέοσιν (literally, “they are thoughtful/prudent”) in place of Homer’s ἐπικλείοσιν (“they praise”) and ἀειδόντεσσι (“men singing”) for ἀκουόντεσσι (“men hearing”).\(^{452}\) Socrates’ version thus becomes, “Men are thoughtful more for the song / whichever hovers newest on the singers.” Adam attributes the alterations to Plato’s likely having had a different Homeric recension. George Howes explains the latter of the two differences as Plato’s “parodying the verse somewhat.”\(^{453}\) Irrespective of whatever recension Plato had available, more is at work here than mere parody. Plato alters the gnome in order to mark the version in the Republic, to highlight it so that people will henceforth remember the verse as one that is problematic, not one that merits praise.

Why is this? Because, as Socrates worries aloud, someone might think, upon hearing the gnome, that “the poet did not mean new songs but a new mode (τρόπον) of song, and he is


\(^{452}\) Resp. 424b9-10: ἰσόδην μᾶλλον ἐπιφρονέοσιν ἄνθρωποι, ἧ τις ἀειδόντεσσι νεωτάτη ἄμφιπέληται,

\(^{453}\) Adam 1980: ad loc.; Howes 1895: 205.
praising this.” Why does this interpretation pose a problem? Because, as Socrates explains, “the modes of music are never disturbed without unsettling of the most fundamental political and social conventions” (οὐδαμοῦ γὰρ κινοῦνται μουσικῆς τρόποι άνευ πολιτικῶν νόμων τῶν μεγίστων, 424c5-6). While the subject matter here concerns music, there is little doubt that the lyric verse accompanying song is connected in some important way to Socrates’ critique, since so much of the poetry of antiquity was accompanied by music. Adam rightly observes that any innovations in music “were accompanied by changes not only in rhythm, but also in the quality, ethical and otherwise of the words sung.” In short, words and music go hand in hand for Socrates. While a thoroughgoing exploration of why the “New Music” of poets like Timotheus might have been a source of concern for Plato exceeds the scope of this dissertation, to the extent that any deterioration (in Plato’s estimation) occurred in the practices that produced the words sung in such music, reform of those practices is essential. Why? Because, as Socrates tells us, “the most fundamental political and social conventions” turn upon them. What might seem a countervailing gnome from Homer must not to cause people to believe otherwise.

Indeed, proper discursive practices necessarily precede and are even more important than lawmaking and legislation. Laws are no guarantee of a healthy society, insofar as they

454 Resp. 424c1-2: μὴ πολλάκις τὸν ποιητήν τις οἴηται λέγειν οὐκ ἔσματα νέα ἀλλὰ τρόπον ὑδῆς νέον, καὶ τοῦτο ἐπαινή.
455 Trans. Shorey.
457 He states this expressly in Book 3: “Indeed, good rhythm and bad rhythm follow, the one corresponding to fine discourse, and the other to its opposite, as do the harmonious and the discordant, if in fact rhythm and harmony follow the language, just as we were saying, and not vice versa” (Ἀλλὰ μὴν τὸ εὐρυθμὸν γε καὶ τὸ ἄρρυθμον τὸ μὲν τῇ καλῇ λέξι τῇ ἑπεται ὁμοιούμενον, τὸ δὲ τῇ ἑναντίᾳ, καὶ τὸ εὐάρμοστον καὶ ἀνάρμοστον ὀσσαίτος, εἴπερ ῥυθμός γε καὶ ἀρμονία λόγος, ἀσπερ ἄρτι ἐλέγετο, ἀλλὰ μὴ λόγος τούτως, 400d1-4).
458 See, generally, Moreau 2017, who, drawing from scholarship that posits a fifth-century revolution in aulos music (e.g., Wallace 2003), argues convincingly that “the New Music compromised the foundational jurisprudential tenet essential to Athenian civic virtue, namely, an understanding of the law (nomos) as necessarily instantiating a musical ethos” (Moreau 2017: 201).
themselves are also a product of discursive practice. The inculcation of salutary modes of discourse at an early age is crucial for the development of a just state. Adeimantus takes Socrates’ point about the importance of the discursive practice that comprises the musical education of the young, noting that “lawlessness itself easily slips in, escaping notice” in early education.459 Socrates readily confirms as much: “Yes, because it is supposed to be only a form of play and to work no harm” (Ναί . . . ὡς ἐν παιδίας γε μέρει καὶ ὡς κακὸν οὐδὲν ἐργαξομένη, 424d5-6). In Chapter Three, I discussed the profound influence that the counting game and nursery rhyme “Tinker, Tailor” with its list of professions (“tinker, tailor, soldier, sailor . . .”) has had on scores of writers and thinkers. Adeimantus, grasping the full import of Socrates’ view, makes this wry observation about such a seemingly inconsequential mode of discourse – in the parlance of Socrates, mousikês tropoi (424d7-e2):

Οὐδὲ γὰρ ἐργάζεται . . . ἄλλο γε ἡ κατὰ σμικρὸν εἰσοικεσιμένη ἥρέμα ύπορρεῖ πρὸς τὰ ἥθι τε καὶ τὰ ἐπιτηδεύματα: ἐκ δὲ τούτων εἰς τὰ πρὸς ἀλλήλους συμβολαία μείζων ἐκβάινει, ἐκ δὲ δὴ τῶν συμβολαίων ἑρχεται ἐπὶ τούς νόμους καὶ πολιτείας σὺν πολλῇ . . . ἁσελγεία, ἦσον ἀν τελευτώσα πάντα ἵδια καὶ δημοσία ἀνατρέψῃ.

It certainly causes no harm other than when infiltrating little-by-little, it softly flows into men’s characters and pursuits; and as a result overtakes with greater force men’s business dealings with one another and then moves from their business relations against their laws and constitutions with great recklessness until finally overthrowing everything, both public and private.

This is the danger posed by blithely ignoring deleterious alterations of “seemingly trifling conventions” (τὰ σμικρὰ . . . δοκοῦντα εἶναι νόμιμα, 425a8),460 i.e. the smikra that exist at the level of a society’s discursive practices.

Moreover, attempting to ward off such a devolution of society and degradation of its institutions (as sketched by Adeimantus) by the “enactment of laws” would amount to a “fool’s

459 424d3-4: Ἡ γοῦν παρανομία, ἔφη, ῥηδίως αὐτή λανθάνει παραδοσιμένη.
460 Trans. Shorey.
errand” (Νομοθετεῖν . . . εἴηθες, 425b7). Indeed, Plato goes on to coin a new proverbial expression with a metaphor capable of being deployed in any proverb that concerns attempting the impossible: Socrates describes anyone who tries to reform corruption in a state by merely enacting laws (νομοθετεῖν, 426e5) as “trying to cut off a Hydra’s head” (Ὑδραν τέμνουσιν, 426e8). Zenobius classifies this saying as “a proverb that is said about things impossible” (ἐπὶ τῶν ἁμηχάνων εἰρηται ἡ παρομία), and authors ranging from Plutarch to Horace went on to use Plato’s new proverbial phrase in their writings. Thus, Plato caps off the men’s discussion of the overarching importance to society possessed by seemingly meager, insignificant discursive practices (τὰ σμικρὰ) – practices which doubtless include proverbs and proverbial expressions – by crafting, ironically, a new proverbial expression, one that has become common (koinê) in discourse.

4.5. Socrates Hoist with His Own (Proverbial) Petard

Notwithstanding their rhetorical force and the persuasive punch they can deliver in conversation or debate by a speaker’s skillful deployment, proverbs are not all-powerful discursive tools, the mere summons of which guarantees success in convincing an audience of the merits of a speaker’s position. While Plato displays a keen awareness of the indispensable role proverbs play in achieving a shared discourse that achieves sympathy with its audience, he also reveals the limitations of proverbs. For a proverb to work, it must accord with the listeners’ understanding of the proverbial phrase in relation to its particular discursive context. None other than Socrates himself serves as Plato’s model for how an out-of-tune proverb results in the

461 Trans. Shorey.
463 See Plu. Cat.Ma. 16.7.4; Hor. Carm. iv.4.61. Tarrant 1958: 115, describes the saying as a semi-proverb.
speaker being “hoist with his own petard,” to quote the well-known line from *Hamlet* that has evolved into a proverb in its own right.\(^4\)

As he did in the opening passages of both Books 1 and 2, Plato now draws our attention at the beginning of Book 5 once again to the possible impotence of discourse. Socrates worries aloud about the task set before him, of communicating the particulars of the ideal *polis*: he doubts whether he has the ability even to know what he should say (πιστεύοντος μὲν γὰρ ἐμὸν ἐμοὶ εἰδέναι ἃ λέγω, 450d8-9). Indeed, Socrates goes so far as to call this venture “dangerous and slippery” (φοβερόν τε καὶ σφαλερόν, 451a1),” that is, to “speak with knowledge the truth about the greatest and dearest matters” (περὶ τῶν μεγίστων τε καὶ φίλων τάληθή εἰδότα λέγειν, 450d10-e1) when he himself is “doubtful and is seeking at the same time the words to be employed” (ἀπιστοῦντα δὲ καὶ ζητοῦντα ἃμα τοὺς λόγους ποιεῖσθαι, 450e1-2). What has caused such self-doubt? It is Socrates’ failure to convince his interlocutors of the merits of shared possession of wives and children by using the proverb *koina ta philôn* without further explanation.

Moreover, just as occurred at the opening of Book 1, the prospect of *logos’* failure to persuade raises the specter of the use of force, albeit in the same seriocomic vein as the dialogue’s opening. Socrates narrates directly to the reader how, just at the point where he was about to expound the four kinds of “bad states” (κακὰς πολιτείας: “bad states” in the sense of both political entities and men’s souls), Polemarchus, who had been noticeably silent until then, suddenly seized Adeimantus’ cloak – an action described in exactly the same way the slave boy was depicted as grabbing Socrates’ cloak on Polemarchus’ order, in the opening lines of Book 1 (λαμβάμενος τοῦ ἰματίου, 1.327b4 and 5.449b3). Socrates describes how Polemarchus then asks Adeimantus whether they should “release” (ἀφῆσομέν) Socrates. This event, of course, parallels

\(^4\) Act 3, sc. 4: “For ‘tis the sport to have the enginer / Hoist with his own petar . . .”
Polemarchus’ playful refusal to “release” (ἀφεῖναι) Socrates and Glaucon at the dialogue’s opening, even if the two men should try to persuade Polemarchus and his companions otherwise.⁴⁶⁵

After Socrates queries Adeimantus as to what concern has prompted Polemarchus and him to consider not “releasing” him (τί μάλιστα, ἔφην, ὑμεῖς οὐκ ἀφίετε; 449b8), Adeimantus reveals that the fault lies with Socrates’ use of the proverb, koina ta philôn (449c2-5):

ἀπορραθομεῖν ἡμῖν δοκεῖς, ἔφη, καὶ εἶδος ὅλον ὅ τὸ ἐλάχιστον ἐκκλέπτειν τοῦ λόγου ἵνα μὴ διέλθῃς, καὶ λήσειν οἴηθηναι εἰπὼν αὐτὸ φαύλος, ὡς ἀρα περὶ γυναικῶν τε καὶ παιδῶν παντὶ δῆλον ὅτι κοινὰ τὰ φῖλων ἔσται.

“You seem to us to be slacking off on the job,” he said, “and to be cheating us out of the whole portion, not the least of the argument, so as to avoid having to explain it, thinking we won’t even notice by breezily saying how it’s obvious to everyone that as concerns wives and children, ‘Friends have things in common.’”

Adeimantus’ reply is remarkable in the degree of attention it focuses on the question of how one should properly deploy a proverb. Indeed, one is hard pressed to find anywhere else in ancient literature a more explicit consideration of the efficacy (or lack thereof) of a proverb as used in a particular context than here.

Socrates depicts himself as taken aback somewhat by Adeimantus’ objection to his use of the bare proverb, without any further elaboration: “Isn’t that right, Adeimantus?” I said (Οὐκοῖν ὡς, ἔφην, ὦ Αδείμαντε, 449c6). Adeimantus then proves himself an adept student of paroemiology (449c7-d6):

Ναὶ, ἢ δὲ ὡς ἄλλα τὸ ὡς τοῦτο, ὡςπερ τὰλλα, λόγου δεῖτος τίς ὁ τρόπος τῆς κοινονίας· πολλοὶ γὰρ ἂν γένοιντο, μὴ οὖν παρῆς ὢντια σὺ λέγεις· . . . μέγα γὰρ τι οἴσωζα φέρειν καὶ ὅλον εἰς πολιτείαν ὡς ἢ μὴ ὡς γιγνόμενον.

“Yes,” said he, “but this word ‘right,’ like many other things, requires defining as to the way and manner of such a community. There might be many ways. Don’t, then, pass over the one that you have in mind; . . . We think that the right or

⁴⁶⁵ 327b2-c14. See Chapter 2.1 for an extensive analysis of this episode in the opening pages of the Republic.
wrong management of this makes a great difference, all the difference in the world, in the constitution of a state.”

In other words, Adeimantus grasps one of the essentials concerning proverbs and their use: they are malleable, multivalent, capable of taking on different meanings in different contexts. Socrates has not come close to explaining sufficiently (ἰκανὸς διελέσθαι, 449d7) why the proverb “friends have things in common” is “rightly” (ὁρθῶς, 449c7) applicable to and supportive of the radical and far-reaching proposition that the guardian class should enjoy koinônia (“common possession”) of wives and children. There is still much to be unpacked with respect to the term koina as used in the proverb koina ta philôn, with its multiple possible meanings as applied to koinônia.

Indeed, almost as if taking a cue from Adeimantus singling out of the vagueness of the term koina as Socrates has used it thus far, Glaucon responds with his own clever bit of wordplay, a colloquial expression that makes use of polyptoton: “Count me too then as a partner – [literally “man in common,” koinôn] – in that vote.”⁴⁶⁶ If Socrates can wield koina with seemingly unfettered abandon, then so too can his companions. After all, “friends have things in common,” including liberal use of the term koina and its cognates.

Now Thrasymachus, long silent since Book 1, seems impatient to get in on the act of wielding colloquial expressions against Socrates as payback for his proverb’s insufficiency. When Socrates complains that by pressing him on this point, his interlocutors are stirring up a virtual hornet’s nest of arguments (ὅσον ἐσμὶν λόγων ἐπειρέειν, 450b1) that he had hoped to avoid, Thraysmachus turns on him with a proverb whose origins are found in an obscure anecdote: “What’s this? Did you think we came here now to prospect gold from ore rather than

⁴⁶⁶ 450a3-4: καὶ ἐμὲ τοῖνυν . . . κοινωνὸν τῆς ψήφου ταύτης τίθετε.
to listen to arguments?” (Τί δὲ; . . . χρυσοχοήσοντας οἴει τούσδε νῦν ἐνθάδε ἀφίχθαι, ἄλλῳ οὖ λόγων ἀκουσομένους; 450b3-4).

Thrasymachus has masterfully turned the tables on Socrates, demonstrating via, tellingly, a proverb, how Socrates’ own proverb cannot alone convince the assembled gathering of the merits of communal possession of wives and children. The second century grammarian Harpocration tells us that Plato was the first to use the verb *chrûsochorein* (“to smelt ore in order to extract gold”) in a phrase that evolved into a proverb. The verb derives from an arcane story about a mob of Athenians who abandoned their usual work to seize a heap of gold dust that had been discovered on Hymettus and was guarded by giant ants. Failing to seize the gold, they returned defeated and were jeered by their neighbors, “Did you think that you were going to extract gold from ore?” (σὺ δὲ ὄφου χρυσοχοήσειν, *Harp.* 308.10). The proverb, thus, came to mean attempting to do what is impossible while also neglecting the duty that lies nearest.\(^{467}\)

Thrasymachus’ criticism draws blood. The arch sophist is in fact making a point that one would have expected to hear from Socrates: clever wordplay and pleasant-sounding adages taken at face value (like *koina ta philôn*) are no substitute for reasoned argument.\(^{468}\) The piquancy of Thrasymachus’ critique is matched only by the irony that he scores his point against Socrates by coining a proverb that will enjoy its own Nachleben. Socrates is being hoist on his own proverbial petard. If Socrates expects *his* proverbs to provide a discursive basis for a more just society, to be learned and memorized by students in the manner accorded other foundational texts like Hesiod’s *Precepts of Cheiron*, he is going to have to do better than simply saying *koina ta philôn*.

\(^{467}\) Adam 1980: 277. See also Leutsch and Scheidewin 1839: 464; 1851: 91, 727.

\(^{468}\) See Morgan 2009: 563: “Aphorisms are not arguments and do not explain themselves.”

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Thrown back on his heels by Thrasymachus’ question as to whether he really thinks his interlocutors have assembled to “prospect gold from ore rather than listen to arguments,” Socrates responds with somewhat less than his usual verve, “Yes, in measure” (Ναί . . . μετρίων γε, 450b5).\(^{469}\) Now Glaucon enters the conversation and, following Thrasymachus’ lead, employs Socrates’ just-uttered words against him in yet another new proverb: “But for reasonable men, Socrates, the ‘measure’ of hearing such arguments is the whole of one’s life” (Μέτρον δέ γ’ . . . ὁ Σώκρατες, ὁ Γλαύκων, τοιούτων λόγων ἀκοῦειν ὅλος ὁ βίος νοῦν ἔχουσιν, 450b6-7). Once again, we have a response in the form of a proverb that one could better imagine coming from Socrates himself than those whom he is supposed to be guiding in conceiving the ideal polis. Glaucon’s coinage constitutes a “literal nonoppositional proverb,” such as “Experience is the best teacher.”\(^{470}\) In addition, the ethic dative (νοῦν ἔχουσιν), the quantifier (ὅλος), the generalizing deictic (τοιούτων), the particle (γε), the suppressed copula, as well as the phrase’s brevity and condensation all contribute to imbue the saying with the qualities of a proverb.\(^{471}\)

This *legomenon* also seems to look back to another proverb about “measure,” a gnome from Hesiod’s *Works and Days*: “The greatest treasure among men is a sparing tongue, and by its going according to measure, the most pleasure” (γλώσσης τοιθησαυρός ἐν ἀνθρώποισιν ἁριστος θεωλαθς, πλείστη δὲ χάρις κατὰ μέτρον ιούσῃς, 719-20). Given Hesiod’s apparent praise of the virtues of reticence, Glaucon now seems to be playing the role of proverb-reformer: the real and proper “measure” of discourse is, *contra* Hesiod, one’s hearing a multitude of *logoi*.

\(^{469}\) Trans. Shorey. Jowett’s translation (1911) has the effect of making Socrates seem even more taken aback by Thrasymachus’ question: “‘Yes,’ said I, ‘but discourse should have a limit.’”

\(^{470}\) Dundes 1981: 52-3; Russo 1997: 52.

\(^{471}\) Most 2003: 146.
for the entire duration of life. Socrates, by contrast, appears to hew to the older line of thought: observe measure, even in *logos*.

Glaucon then changes tack by making what may be an approving reference – albeit very subtle – to Hesiodic proverb when he urges Socrates “not to grow weary” (μηδαμῶς ἀποκάμης, 450b8) of explaining why shared possession of wives and children is appropriate for the guardian class. Glaucon’s use of the verb *apokamnein* (“to grow quite weary, fail, flag utterly,” *LSJ*, s.v. 1) recalls Socrates’ own use of the verb near the close of Book 4 when he tells Glaucon that they “must not grow weary” (οὐ χρῆ ἀποκάμειν, 445b7) in their investigation of why justice practiced for its own sake is superior to committing unjust acts even if the doer escapes punishment, given that Socrates and his interlocutors have come so far (δῆμος ἐπέξερεν ἑνταῦθα ἐληλύθαμεν, 445b5-6) in their examination of the subject, so that they are “looking down most clearly” (σαφέστατα κατιδεῖν, 445b6). Here there is a hint of Hesiod’s famous “hard and steep road” (μακρὸς δὲ καὶ ὀρθὸς οἶμος) leading up to “excellence” (ἀρετήν), which although “rough at first” (τρηχὺς τὸ πρῶτον) then “becomes easier once you reach the top” (ἔπιν δὲ εἰς ἄκρον ἵκηται, ἤ ἔξοδος ἡ ἐπιτα πέλει) notwithstanding the unavoidable fact that it “is still difficult” (χαλεπὰ περ ἐοῦσα).472 Earlier in Book 4, Glaucon employs a more succinct version of Hesiod’s “hard-road-to-virtue” gnome, the popular Greek proverb, “Hard is the good” (χαλεπὰ τὰ καλὰ)473 in buoying Socrates to undertake the exploration of whether both the state and the human soul are threefold in nature, parallel with respect to their three respective parts, urging Socrates again “not to grow weary but to go on with the inquiry” (Μὴ τοῖνον ἀποκάμης . . . ἄλλα σκόπει, 435d9).474

473 The scholiast attributes the proverb to Solon. See my discussion in Chapters 1.2 and 3.2.
474 Trans. Shorey (with modification).
One may, thus, reasonably conclude that in Plato’s prose, a speaker’s use of the verb *apokamnein* in a negative imperative construction signals at the very least the moral of the story embodied in both Hesiod’s famous “easy-road-to-vice, hard-road-to-virtue” gnome and its popular counterpart, the common Greek proverb, *chalepa ta kala*. We have then, in Glaucon’s new proverb about measure (i.e., that the only real “measure” or “limit” to hearing discourse is one’s entire life) and his admonition that Socrates not grow weary (μηδαμως ἀποκαμείν) in explaining (διεξιέναι) through discourse his conception of the guardians’ joint-possession of wives and children, respectively both a rebuttal to and an affirmation of Hesiod’s proverbial wisdom.

Why this ambiguity of position in Plato’s prose toward Hesiodic *gnômai*? Does Plato mean to reform proverbs in the service of his philosophic project or not? As I discussed in Chapter Two, to imagine that Plato sought to condemn the wisdom tradition root and branch would be to assume that he meant to overturn the entire rhetorical and educational framework of Greek society, based as it was in significant part on the memorization and citation of poetic authority. One of the chief methods of persuasion was to cite the wisdom of the poets, much of which was formulated with proverbs (as in Hesiod’s *Works and Days*) in support of one’s argument. Plato cannot dispense wholesale with the primary discursive tools at his disposal (just as he does not dispense with poetry altogether, a point to which I shall return in Chapter Five). Proverbs that are at odds with conceiving a just *polis* (e.g., “a sparing tongue, going in measure, affords the most pleasure”) must be rethought while those that hold true within the discursive context of contemplating a non-instrumental definition of justice (e.g., “hard is the good”) prove useful.
What Plato decidedly does not do in this episode is present Socrates’ interlocutors decimating with water-tight arguments Socrates’ lackluster explanation of the guardians’ koinônia. On the contrary, we see these interlocutors, one after another, coining new proverbs and referencing older established ones in taking Socrates to task for not yet having provided an extended argument in support of his idea of koinônia. And even after having been flogged verbally with such proverbs, Socrates remains skeptical about the efficacy of any discourse in support of the concept of koinônia that he is being asked to expound, save presumably the pithy proverb koina ta philôn that he recently employed (450d6-c2):

Οὐ ῥάδιον, ὦ εὐδαίμον, ἢν δ’ ἔγω, διελθεῖν· πολλὰς γὰρ ἀπιστίας ἔχει ἐτὶ μᾶλλον τῶν ἔμπροσθεν ὅν διήλθομεν. καὶ γὰρ ὡς δύνατα λέγεται, ἀπεστοίτ’ ἄν, καὶ εἰ ὅτι μάλιστα γένοιτο, ὡς ἄριστ’ ἂν εἴη τάυτα, καὶ ταύτῃ ἀπιστήσεται. διὸ δὴ καὶ ὄκνος τις αὐτῶν ἀπτεσθαι, μὴ εὐχὴ δοκῇ εἶναι ὁ λόγος, ὦ φίλε ἔταϊρε.

“It’s not easy to explain, my dear fellow,” I said. “For it raises many doubts, even more than the things I’ve previously gone through. One might doubt whether what is said is even possible, and even if it were, one will be skeptical as to whether it would be the best arrangement. And because of this, one shrinks from grasping it, lest the argument (logos) seem an impossible wish, my dear friend.”

Indeed, Socrates fears that he will drag his companions down with him (συνεπισπασάμενος) as he is overthrown (σφάλεις, 451a2) while searching for the proper arguments (ζητοῦντα ἁμα τοὺς λόγους, 450e2) concerning the most important subjects imaginable (ἀ ἡκίστα δεῖ σφάλλεσθαι, ἑκατὸν τε καὶ ἁγαθῶν καὶ δικαίων νομίμων, 451a4): “noble and good and just institutions” (καλῶν τε καὶ ἁγαθῶν καὶ δικαίων νομίμων, 451a7).

These statements reveal a remarkable level of skepticism about the presumed efficacy of logos. When faced with the task of giving voice to the ideal state, logos may prove a mere “wish” or “aspiration” (εὐχή). I want to suggest that such skepticism, coupled with the back-and-forth exchange of proverbs – all arising from the concerted effort to chastise Socrates for attempting to explain and justify the guardians’ communistic possession of wives and children
by means of a bare proverb – is indicative of a larger reflection by Plato on the futility of striving to have the last word on anything. No gnome from an inspired poet, no colloquial proverb, no pithy saying – in sum, no exercise in the medium of language – can possess and wield final authority. Indeed, in this passage Plato demonstrates a keen awareness of the contingency of any “final vocabulary” in the sense of that term as used by Rorty: the set of words any particular individual (including, obviously, Plato himself) uses to justify their actions, beliefs, and lives, beyond which lies only “helpless passivity or a resort to force” insofar as there is no “noncircular argumentative recourse” by which to provide justification.\(^{475}\) There is no final, overarching metavocabulary that outpaces all others. There are only the particular “final vocabularies” of separate individuals that play off against each other in the innumerable discursive contexts that make up the world of the written and spoken word.

To a certain degree, Plato simply illustrates here in this passage the agonistic dynamic that was a central feature of the Greek literary tradition. And yet, paradoxically, as Mark Griffith has written in analyzing the agonistic stance of Greek poetry in particular, instances of deterministic outcomes and clear-cut victories are remarkably rare despite what would seem to be the key requirement of any practice involving competition: a definitive winner and loser. In the *Contest between Hesiod and Homer* for example, Homer receives universal approbation of the assembled Greeks based upon his technical poetic skill, but the sole verdict of the king pronounces Hesiod the winner, as his is the more peaceful poetic message.\(^{476}\)

In Socrates’ exchange with his interlocutors over the appropriateness of *koina ta philón*, it is next to impossible to say who precisely has “won” this duel of the adages. Certainly not

\(^{475}\) Rorty 1989: 73. See Bernstein 2016: 118-19, for his use of the terms “vertical” and “horizontal” justification to describe more precisely the limitations imposed by Rorty’s conception of “circular justification.”

\(^{476}\) Griffith 1990: 190.
Socrates, and this outcome may surprise anyone who supposes that as Plato’s chief protagonist, Socrates should have the last word. On the contrary, it is the arch-sophist Thrasymachus who offers a proverb that, ironically, supports what Socrates ought to be championing: reason-based discourse – you convince someone by arguments, not by requiring them “to prospect gold from the ore” of a bare proverbial expression. However, further irony lies in the fact both that Thrasymachus employs a proverb in scoring this argumentative point and that such proverb will go on to have its own Nachleben. So who or what exactly has won in Plato’s depiction of Thrasymachus’ reply?

There are those, of course, who will argue that Plato’s larger meaning in his Republic lies beyond the dizzying wordplay on display in passages like these: the elaborate edifice and exceptional beauty of Plato’s metaphysics, epitomized most famously in the Forms; the radicalism of his unparalleled political theory of rule by philosopher kings; the single most memorable metaphor in all of philosophy, the cave with its shadow images of the real and ignorant inhabitants freed from their blindness into the dawn of enlightenment. All of these, many will argue, are far more revelatory of Plato’s grander design than any unresolved fisticuffs waged with proverbial expressions that only result in Socrates having to return to the proverbial drawing board to justify anew a single component of the ideal state, albeit one with far-reaching implications for familial relations.

I would agree with such a critique to the extent that all of the above-recited “grander” features of the Republic contribute to the reformist vision that I maintain is the primary animus behind not just this dialogue but all of Plato’s oeuvre. I do not doubt what G.R.F. Ferrari describes as the “sincerity of Plato’s utopianism and its instantiation in Callipolis.” Indeed, the

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477 Ferrari 2015: 11-12. Ferarri states unabhdedly, “I take Plato to be a sincere utopian in general, and I take the particular reforms represented by Callipolis as sincerely meant.”
crux of my entire thesis turns on the proposition that proverbs and gnômai are essential discursive tools in Plato’s articulation of that utopianism, and that re-working and “re-forming” such discursive practices contributes mightily to instantiating Plato’s reforms in the ideal polis. Plato, however, works within a certain larger literary tradition and, thus, necessarily follows the dynamics of that tradition and its attendant discursive practices. One of the most fundamental of Greek literary dynamics adheres in the recognition that poetic aspirations – in the words of Griffith – “to say ‘the last word’ on their subject and to render all previous and future attempts futile” prove illusory.478 Far better, in Griffith’s words, “to leave loopholes for possible exceptions, pegs on which to hang possible additions, open ends to accommodate codas or modifications . . .”479 Indeed, it is the open-endedness of the proverb koina ta philôn that serves as the discursive vehicle for the introduction of the three waves of reform.

Moreover and of particular relevance to my thesis, there is a remarkable degree of consonance between the dynamic as described by Griffith and more contemporary conceptions of philosophy and philosophic writing that recognize the contingency of language. Having the last word is impossible. Philosophers like Rorty and Bernstein who hew to what they describe as an “ironist” approach to philosophy make the claim that “from the ironist’s perspective, it is only a temporary illusion to think that in philosophy there are (or even that there ought to) be knock-down theoretical arguments or rigorous ahistorical transcendental arguments that are immune from revision.”480 One is reminded here of the economist and political theorist Albert Hirschman’s observation that all dialectical thinkers ultimately display a “propensity for self-subversion” – that is, a “skepticism . . . toward one’s own generalizations or theoretical

480 Bernstein 2016: 118.
constructs.” As Kierkegaard famously remarked about Hegel’s *Science of Logic*, “If Hegel had prefaced his work with ‘This is all just a thought-experiment,’ he would have been the greatest thinker who ever lived.”

To the extent that Plato’s writing contains passages seemingly emblematic of the thinking behind such modern perspectives, the dialogues prove remarkably durable and current in their continued relevance. Plato’s prose consistently foregrounds the interplay of not just proverbs and *gnômai* but a multitude of assorted fragments and quotations from poetry (not all of which are axiological in character like the proverbs quoted from poetry), excerpts from and retellings of mythological accounts, countless figurative expressions, multiple usages of numerous genre types such as high tragedy, low comedy, Sophronic mime, erotic verse, forensic oratory, to name but a few – the list could go on. Such a “‘hetero-voiced’ hybridity” (in the words of Leslie Kurke paraphrasing Mikhail Bakhtin) is usually thought to be more a feature of the novel than a philosophic work purporting to establish a unified and doctrinaire metaphysics, utterly incapable of alteration. As Andrea Nightingale has observed, Plato’s “positive hankering for the hybrid” is more symptomatic of a thinker who refuses to “fix the boundaries of philosophy once and for all”, sensing perhaps “that philosophy is not well served by a permanent and closed border.”

This is not to say that Plato’s work founders on relativism. Rather it is to posit that Plato’s writerly philosophy demonstrates by its hetero-voiced hybridity a recognition of what Rorty describes as the problem faced by (in his parlance) “ironist theory,” a term I would define more generally as any way of thinking that acknowledges the contingency of language: “

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481 Hirschman 1995: 87. See also Naddaff 2002: 3.
482 Rorty 1989: 104.
484 Nightingale 1995: 2, 12.
problem of how to finitize while exhibiting a knowledge of one’s own finitude – of satisfying Kierkegaard’s demand on Hegel.\textsuperscript{485}

Plato reveals at the opening of Book 5 that notwithstanding the persuasive power and durable Nachleben of certain proverbs, no one should ever imagine that they render the “last word” on anything, just as no discursive practice can claim absolute and final authority, the new genre of philosophy included. There is no final and absolute (i.e., noncircular) justification for one’s actions, beliefs, and life that is not subject to redescription. One’s final vocabulary is not really “final;” it is “final” only in the sense that beyond it lies only passivity or the use of force (the specter of which was raised at the opening of Books 1, 2, and 5). Other possible final vocabularies exist that have the potential to justify the most heinous of practices – torture, for example. Bernstein offers the compelling example of the recent “redescription” of torture as “enhanced interrogation.”\textsuperscript{486} Such a redescription calls to mind Thucydides’ account of the manipulation of language during the Peloponnesian War, an event through which I maintain Plato’s discursive reform must be understood: the participants in the Corcyrean stasis redescribed, among other things, “reckless audacity” (τόλμα. . ἀλόγιστος) as “loyal partisan courage” (ἀνδρεία φιλέτωρος) and “careful hesitancy” (μέλλησις. . προμηθῆς) as “thinly-veiled cowardice” (δειλία εὐπρεπῆς, 3.82.4).\textsuperscript{487}

In order to justify anything – Plato’s philosophy included, along with Socrates’ prescribed koinònia – one must recognize, commensurate with Rorty’s and Bernstein’s thinking, that

\textsuperscript{485} Rorty 1992: 104-5.
\textsuperscript{486} Bernstein 2016: 119.
\textsuperscript{487} Thucyd. 3.82.4.
Justification involves the use of metaphors \[\text{à la Nietzsche’s definition of truth as “a mobile army of metaphors”},^{488}\] stories, narratives, indirect discourse, redescriptions, imaginative speculations and humor – indeed, the full range of rhetorical and persuasive devices that are frequently blended together. These are not simply accidental accretions to the justification of final vocabularies; they are intrinsic to the activity of justifying.\(^{489}\)

It is through the lens of such a perspective that Plato’s use of proverbs is best viewed, including the head-spinning interplay of proverbs at Book 5’s opening, which is a key structural pivot in the narrative of the Republic. The proverb koina ta philôn cannot shoulder alone the task of justifying the communal possession of the guardians’ wives and children. But the subsequent exchange of proverbs that explores whether that proverb has been “rightly” (ὀρθῶς, 449c7) employed in this context results in the coinage of even more new proverbs and moves the narrative arc of the Republic inexorably forward, providing still further discursive tools by which Plato may aspire to articulate a “winning” description of the ideal state within a larger literary tradition that itself recognized no final and permanent “winners.” Plato’s writerly philosophy discloses an understanding of that tradition notwithstanding its aspirations of discursive reform. No text can ever have the proverbial “last word.”

4.6. Radical Proverbs and Ridicule

Taken aback by his interlocutors’ demand to explain his radical proposal that the guardians share wives and children, Socrates turns again to proverbs to bolster his case. First, however, he makes an apparent reference to the mimes of Sophron, for which Plato had an especial fondness according to an ancient tradition that stretches back to the fourth century.
historian Duris of Samos. Socrates muses that “it might be right to go through with the female drama after the male drama has been thoroughly completed” (τάχα δὲ ὁστός ἤν ὁρθὸς ἔχοι, μετὰ ἀνδρείων δράμα παντελῶς διαπερανθέν τὸ γυναικεῖον αὖ περαῖνειν, 451c1-3). The low, sometimes obscene, Sicilian mimes of Sophron were classified as “male mimes” (ἀνδρεῖοι μῖμοι) and “female mimes” (γυναικεῖοι μῖμοι), according to the Suda, with male characters represented in the former, female in the latter. Socrates is about to attempt a justification for why the guardians should jointly possess their wives and children (i.e., the abolition of the private family). In doing this, he will, as a first step, present the equally radical (for the times) proposal that women be educated with men and share all tasks in common. This is the first of the set of three great “waves” (τῆς τρικυμίας, 472a2), so-called in part because of the “waves” of laughter and ridicule they seem likely to provoke (μέλλει γέλωτι τε ἀτεχνὸς ὀσπερ κόμα ἐκγελῶν καὶ ἀδοξίᾳ κατακλύσειν, 473c8-9). To set the stage for this ambitious line of argument likely to draw guffaws, Socrates refers to Sophron’s comic oeuvre – in particular, to the male-female divide in the mimes. Socrates will explain first the male capacity to be educated and to govern – in other words, he will perform the “male drama” first – and then, in turn, the female version of the same principle (i.e., the “female drama”).

Sophronic mime, with its low-class affiliations and scurrilous subject matter, might seem a curious generic motif through which to frame as profound and far-reaching a proposal as effecting equality between the sexes. We may understand Plato’s nod to Sophron in a number of ways. First, as argued earlier, Plato’s hybrid, multi-voiced text pulls out the generic stops in

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490 Halliwell 1993: ad loc.; Kurke 2011: 258-9, argues convincingly that the “tradition of Plato’s admiration and imitation of Sophron was very robust in antiquity.” See generally Riginos 1976: 174-6; Hordern 2004: 26-7 (cited by Kurke 2011).

491 Adam 1980: ad loc.; Kurke 2006: 16, describes Sophron’s mimes as “low, sometimes obscene.”

492 The second two waves are the abolition of the private family with respect to the guardian class and rule by philosopher kings.
upending our notions of traditional generic boundaries in creating the new genre of philosophy, mixing, in the words of Bakhtin, “high and low, serious and comic” and making wide use of “inserted genres” including “retold dialogues, parodies on the high genres, parodically reinterpreted citations . . . living dialects and jargons . . .”.493 Indeed, Plato’s multi-toned approach is precisely what makes proverbs such appropriate candidates for inclusion in the generically-hybrid Republic. A significant reason why Hesiod’s Works and Days – the closest forerunner to Plato’s own meditation on a just society – belongs to the genre of wisdom composition is, according to Richard Martin, “the inclusion of a number of other genres,” two of which, not surprisingly, are “songs and proverbs.”494 In describing Plato’s purported penchant for Sophron’s mimes (copies of which Plato supposedly kept under his pillow), Diogenes Laertius also preserves a tradition that Plato borrowed extensively from another Sicilian comic poet, Epicharmus, famous for his own proverbs like “The hand washes the hand: give something and you may get something” (ά δὲ χείρ τὰν χείρα νίζει· δός τι καὶ λάβῃ αἱ τι <λῆς>) – aphorisms that were presumably collected from his plays.495 Indeed, Diogenes Laertius quotes a fragment in which Epicharmus predicts that some later writer will memorialize his logoi, “stripping them of the meter that now holds them and clothing them in purple garment, elaborating them with fine phrases.”496 Diogenes Laertius further records how a certain Alcimus maintained that Plato derived much of his doctrine from Epicharmus.497

494 Martin 1992: 11, 22.
495 Epicharmus, frag. 273.1 Kaibel.
496 Kurke 2011: 258, n. 20 (quoting Diog. Laert. 3.17).
497 Dover 2003: 532 (citing Diog. Laert. 3.9ff). Dover clarifies, however, that the Pseudepicharmeia were regarded as forged by as early as the 4th century BCE and “continued to be so by critical historians” and “it is hardly credible” that passages cited in support of Alcimus’ claim were composed early in the 5th century.
While doubt has been cast upon the validity of such accounts, Socrates’ seemingly unmistakable reference to Sophronic mime in the immediate wake of his failure to sway his audience by use of the proverb *koina ta philôn* is certainly indicative of the *Republic*’s generic porousness – much of which is achieved, to repeat, by Plato’s inclusion of proverbs and colloquial sayings. We have already seen how a number of these *legomena* have lower generic origins than higher-register poetry, for instance, the board-game saying about “city” playing-pieces and the folk proverb describing how you lose your voice if seen by a wolf (in Book 1). Such expressions, like the invocation of mime here, contributed to the ancient literary tradition that viewed the wider genre of *Sôkratikoi logoi* as having what Kurke describes as “(real or imagined) humble, banausic origins.” The most famous example of this line of interpretation is Aristotle’s affiliation, at the beginning of his *Poetics*, of *Sôkratikoi logoi* with the mimes of Sophron and Xenarchus.

In mentioning the “male” and “female drama,” Socrates seems to go out of his way to refer to the vocabulary and imagery of a “low” idiom, that falls more on what Nancy Worman describes as “the blaming, iambic side of the poetic divide.” In doing so at this particular juncture in the dialogue, he sets the stage for a deliberate contrast between both his own discursive practice (epitomized by his use of just such “lower” idioms) that articulate the ideal state and the discursive practices of a more elite, sophisticated set and their corresponding notions of proper society. As Socrates explains in turning first to consideration of men’s capacity to be guardians (the “male drama”), he is attempting “to establish by discourse the men as guardians of the flock” (ὡς ἀγέλης φύλακας τοῦ ἄνδρας καθιστάναι τῷ λόγῳ, 451c7-8).

499 *Poet*. 1, 1447a28-b13.
500 Worman 2008: 155.
Moreover, in accomplishing this, he will bring to bear yet more proverbs to stress the rightness of his vision of a just polis.

Socrates and his companions begin to explore the question of whether men and women ought to “perform in common” (κοινῇ πράττειν, 451d5) all the duties of governance. We are again struck by the prominence of that adjective, koinos, “common”, “shared in common” (LSJ, s.v. I) which Plato seems to highlight deliberately and which lies at the heart of Socrates’ previous, “failed” proverb. As the discussants begin to reach the groundbreaking conclusion that male and female natures are equal, Socrates emphasizes that “much concerning the things now being said contrary to established custom might seem laughable if they were to be achieved in the way that is said” (παρὰ τὸ ἔθος γελοῖα ἂν φαίνοιτο πολλὰ περὶ τὰ νῦν λεγόμενα, εἰ πράξεται ἡ λέγεται, 452a7-8). This is a remarkable statement when one pauses to consider the particulars of Plato’s Greek: it is the legomena – literally, “the sayings” – that might appear to be “laughable,” “ludicrous” (γελοῖα) insofar as they are contrary to the prevailing ethos, particularly if they are “brought about” (πράξεται) in the “manner” by which they “are said” (ἡ λέγεται). Socrates’ point seems to be a distillation of my larger thesis: all social and political practices are nothing less than discursive practices – legomena – made a reality: praxetai. Moreover, truly transformative legomena and their resulting praxis may well seem ludicrous (γελοῖα) in juxtaposition with current custom (ἔθος). Socrates’ previous allusion to the comic mimes of Sophron now takes on new significance. The radical proposition that men and women are in fact equal in nature, articulated by means of “sayings” (legomena) – some of which are proverbs such as koina ta philôn – might well appear to be as laughable as Sophron’s obscene and low mimes.

The likelihood of Socrates inviting ridicule with his argument reaches its peak when the discussion of male-female equality leads to the conclusion that women should exercise naked in
the palestra along with the men. Socrates acknowledges that this is the “most laughable” (γελοιότατον) of the ramifications resulting from the men’s utopian imaginings concerning equality of the sexes, and Glaucon readily agrees that this “would indeed appear ludicrous under present circumstances” (γελοιον γὰρ ἃν, ὡς γε ἐν τῷ παρεστῶτι, φανείη, 452a10-b5). Socrates, however, is about to overturn traditional notions of what ought to be considered laughable and ludicrous, and he will coin new proverbs in the process.

He begins by advising that “one must not fear the jibes by members of the witty class, however many and whatever sort they may cast against so great a revolution becoming a reality” (οὐ φοβητέον τὰ τῶν χαριέντων σκόμματα, ὡς καὶ οἷα ἄν εἴποιεν εἰς τὴν τοιαύτην μεταβολὴν γενομένην, 452b6-8). While commentators have been tempted to see in this an allusion to Aristophanes and his Ecclesiazusae, Socrates seems to be establishing the more general point that all great social and political reform is likely to be met initially with jeers and insults. Calling Sophron’s mimes laughable is an understatement when compared to the likely reception of Socrates’ “howler,” namely, the proposal that men and women are in fact equal in nature. Now that’s funny.

Socrates does not back down but rather exhorts his interlocutors that together they “must proceed to the rough part of the law” (πορευτέον πρὸς τὸ τραχύ τοῦ νόμου, 452c4-5), an admonition which, with its trachu (“rough”), faintly echoes yet again the single-most quoted gnome in Greek literature, Hesiod’s proverbial two-roads – the easy way leading to vice and the “rough” (τρηχός) to excellence. The men must continue on their difficult journey of creating

501 Indeed, to this day Plato’s description of this proposal in Republic 5 elicits laughter in the classroom when students first encounter it.
502 Adam 1980: ad loc.
the ideal state with all of its radical ramifications, including equality of the sexes. Mockery by the clever, the wits (τὰ τῶν χαριέντων σκώμματα), be damned.

Indeed, Socrates now labels the would-be mockers *asteioi* – literally, “men of the town” – with its not-so-subtle suggestion of a contrast between city sophisticates and rubes. Socrates asserts that he and his companions must remind the scoffers of today that it was not so long ago (οὐ πολὺς χρόνος) that the very idea of men training in the nude – forget women – seemed shameful and laughable to the Greeks (Ἐλλησιν ἑδόκει αἰσχρὰ εἶναι καὶ γελοῖα), just as it does now to the majority of barbarians (γόν τοῖς πολλοῖς τὸν βαρβάρων). In addition, when the Cretans and later the Spartans began the practice of men exercising naked, “It was open to the town-bred to mock it entirely” (ἐξῆν τοῖς τότε ἀστείοις πάντα ταῦτα κωμῳδεῖν, 452c6-d1). These statements and Socrates’ earlier allusion to Sophronic mime with its low-class affiliations have together the effect, once again, of casting Socrates in the role of, in Worman’s words, “a low outsider who is . . . really more noble than those around him.”504 What the *asteioi* mock, the déclassé Socrates champions, with history on his side.

Now Socrates fashions a new proverb that makes short work of any who would mock the reforms he proposes to bring about the ideal *polis*. First, he states that the ridicule against men exercising naked ultimately lost its power when “experience showed it is better to strip than to veil all things of this sort” (ἐπειδὴ . . . χρωμένος ἀμείνον τὸ ἀποδύεσθαι τοῦ συγκαλύπτειν πάντα τὰ τοιοῦτα ἐφάνη, 452d3-4).505 In a remarkable statement Socrates then explains that “What seemed laughable to the eyes faded away beneath the best, revealed by discourse” (τὸ ἐν τοῖς ὀφθαλμοῖς δὴ γελοῖον ἔξερχη ὑπὸ τοῦ ἐν τοῖς λόγοις μηνυθέντος ἄριστου, 452d4-6). We are reminded again of the power of *legomena*; it is in discourse that the best (ἄριστος) is made

504 Worman 2008: 155.
505 Trans. Shorey.
manifest. We should also note Plato’s use of the verb *exerrouē*, the aorist passive of *ekrein*, “to flow out”, which is difficult to translate into English (the *LSJ* [s.v. I.3] offers “fade away”). It is not surprising that Plato has chosen a verb that evokes water flowing out. Such imagery is consonant with the three great “waves” (κῦματα) of radical reform. While the “wave” image certainly connotes in part “waves of laughter,” Socrates’ phraseology also implies that retrograde thinking on the subjects under discussion will be incapable of withstanding the coming “waves” of reform and will be compelled to do the opposite of “flowing out” (ἐκρεῖν), overwhelmed “beneath the best revealed by discourse.”

Socrates then offers an example of the type of discourse which in fact reveals the best. He sums up with a proverb the larger point he has been making about what is really worthy of ridicule: “Foolish is he who considers laughable anything but evil” (μάταιος ὃς γελοῖον ἄλλο τι ἠγεῖται ἦ τὸ κακόν, 452d6-7). Once again we have a literal, non-oppositional proverb, but one that also varies the standard “equational” quality (A=B) that modern paroemiologists like Dundes associate with non-oppositional proverbs. As Dundes explains, “Proverbs of the form ‘He who A is B’ seem to be transformations of the basic A=B formula” that characterize literal, non-oppositional proverbs. Dundes gives the example of “He who hesitates is lost.” This well-known proverb implies that “hesitating” = “losing.” In Socrates’ new proverb, “considering anything other than evil to be worthy of ridicule” equals “being foolish.” Socrates goes on to elaborate his new proverb (452d7-e2):

καὶ ὁ γελωτοποιεῖν ἑπιχειρῶν πρὸς ἄλλην τινὰ δυνὴν ἀποβλέπον ὡς γελοῖον ἦ τὴν τοῦ ἄφρονός τε καὶ κακοῦ, καὶ καλοῦ ἀν πιουδάζει πρὸς ἄλλον τινὰ σκοπὲν στησάμενος ἦ τὸν τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ.

And [foolish is] he who attempts to make sport, looking toward any other sight as laughable than that of folly and evil, and conversely sets his sights seriously on any other target he has set up than the beautiful or the good.
Plato seems to be attempting to shift prevailing attitudes as to what society ought to consider *geloia*, “laughable.” Numerous scholars have found it irresistible to conclude that Plato must have had in mind Aristophanes and his satirical portrait of an imagined gynocracy in *Ecclesiazusae* when he wrote these remarks, as well as the whole of Book 5’s idealized notion of the community of wives and children. August Krohn made the fascinating claim in the late nineteenth century that the order of publication was *Republic* 1-4, *Ecclesiazusae*, *Republic* 5. This theory led Krohn to claim that the reference to the guardians’ joint possession of wives and children in Book 4 via the proverb *koina ta philôn* and its cultivation as a topic of conversation among influential Athenian circles resulted in Aristophanes’ ridicule of the same in his *Ecclesiazusae*. Other scholars went even further, positing that Socrates’ remark alone was sufficient to inspire Aristophanes, without any wider diffusion of the idea among the lettered class. According to these theories, Plato then in *Republic* 5 responded in detail to Aristophanes’ send-up of *koina ta philôn* as applied to women and governance.

Such claims, if true, would certainly provide a rich illustration of the power of proverb. They would also explain Socrates’ elaboration of his new proverb – a proverb we now understand as offered in response to Aristophanes’ ridicule of the application of the previous proverb, *koina ta philôn*, to women’s participation in political activity – when he uses the verb *gelôtopoiein* not long after *kômoidein* (452d1) to describe how the *asteioi* at onetime mocked even the now customary practice of men performing their physical training in the nude. Beyond the scope of this dissertation is any attempt to resolve definitively the question of whether *Republic* 5’s extensive treatment of the subject of women’s equality constitutes a direct response by Plato to Aristophanes’ *Ecclesiazusae*, itself written as a parody of the bare reference to the

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larger subject by the proverb \textit{koina ta philôn} in Republic 4. However, it would seem unreasonable to rule out categorically any connection between the existence of Aristophanes’ play and Plato’s composition of Republic 5, given numerous findings by scholars dating back to the late nineteenth century that tradition-breaking notions of \textit{Weibergemeinschaft} (“community of women”) were in wide circulation at Plato’s time.\footnote{Adam 1980, vol.1: 355. See also Schofield 2006: 228, and Halliwell 1993: 225, who support my reading. Schofield goes even further and claims that while “there is no self-consciously signposted echo of Aristophanes’ play in the text of Book 5, . . . it is highly probable that the \textit{Assemblywomen} lies behind it” insofar as Plato seems to be “arguing out in all seriousness and from first principles a social and political programme which (as the author and his first readers knew very well) had quite recently been most memorably acted out as a sexual extravaganza on the Attic stage.” Somewhat more equivocally, Halliwell opines that with respect to the question of whether Plato had \textit{Eccl.} in mind when composing \textit{Rep.} 5 . . .[.] the most we can say is that he may well, but need not have.”} Moreover, what better way to oppose the ridicule likely invited by such radical notions of \textit{Weibergemeinschaft} than to compose a new proverb, a new “quotable,” that takes direct aim at would-be mockers of unorthodox efforts to improve society – indeed, mockers of anything other than what is evil?

Socrates goes farther and next deploys proverb as a way of framing how any debate with his ridiculers ought to proceed. He asserts that the first point that must be agreed upon (\textit{πρῶτον . . . ἄνομοιογιτέον}) regarding any proposals about equality of the sexes is “whether they are possible or not” (\textit{ἐὶ δύνατὰ ἢ οὐ}). Furthermore, the question to be given (\textit{δοτέον}) to anyone who wants to debate the matter (\textit{ἐθέλει ἀμφισβητῆσαι}), irrespective of whether they are jesting or in earnest (\textit{ἐἴτε τις φιλοπαίσμων ἐτε σπουδαστικὸς}), is whether “female human nature is capable of sharing with the male all tasks or none at all, or some but not others” (452e4-453a3).\footnote{Trans. Shorey (with modification).} At this point, Socrates offers a proverb to sum up the merits of any debate on the question of female-male equality that is conducted in the manner he has suggested: “In this way who begins best likely also ends best” (\textit{οὗτος ἂν κάλλιστά τις ἀρχόμενος ὡς τὸ εἰκός καὶ κάλλιστα τελευτήσειν}, 453a4-5). The parallelism and repetition of \textit{kallista archomenos—}
kallista teleutéseien with its axiological terminology (κάλλιστα) clearly mark this saying as a proverb, not dissimilar from Shakespeare’s “All’s well that ends well.” Paul Shorey finds Socrates’ saying to be “an overlooked reference to a proverb also overlooked by commentators on Pindar, Pyth. i.35.”  

The relevant lines are (Pyth. 1.33-5):

υασισορήτοις δ’ ἄνδρασι πρώτα χάρις
ἐξ πλόον ἄρχομένοις πομπαίον ἐλθέιν
οὐρον· ἑοικότα γάρ
καὶ τελευτά φερτέρου νόστου τυχεῖν.

For seafaring men the first blessing
as they set out on a voyage is the coming of a favorable wind, since it is likely that they will attain
a more successful return at the end as well.  

Pindar describes these lines as ὁ λόγος, which William Race translates as “this saying.” If Shorey’s attribution is correct, then Socrates is refashioning a proverb found in Pindar (and likely elsewhere) to guide the debate on the radical proposition that women and men are equal in nature. Ludicrous or not, the utopian proposal that men and women share equally in the tasks of society ought to be considered in the fashion Socrates has suggested.

Socrates goes on to acknowledge that there exists a deep contradiction in the arguments he and the others have been expressing up to this point, when they attempt to posit the equality of men and women. Moreover, he advises that the proper procedure of the debate he has just suggested necessitates that he and his companions give voice to that contradiction, even on behalf of those who would ridicule them, “in order that the other side not be besieged without a defense” (ἵνα μὴ ἔρημα τὰ τοῦ ἐτέρου λόγου πολιορκῆται, 453a8-9). Socrates’ procedural

509 Shorey 1982: ad loc.
510 Trans. Race.
511 Race 2012: ad loc.
fairness toward his opponents, even those who mock him, arguably sets a new standard by which significant issues of the day should be addressed.

Thus, with one proverb, Socrates redefines what is truly worthy of ridicule (γελοître). With another, he sums up the best way (κάλλιστα) to conduct any debate on a subject that some people deem ridiculous. The manner of discourse about such topics, the way in which one debates over deeply contested issues, is crucial to a healthy and properly functioning civil society.

The dialogue’s participants have already concluded that the ideal city is to be founded (οἰκίζεσθαι) on the principle that each person should perform the task that accords with their individual nature (δεῖν κατὰ φύσιν ἐκαστὸν ἐν ἐν τὸ αὐτὸ πράττειν, 453b4-5), i.e., the UAD. However, it is difficult not to acknowledge that men and women differ to some extent. Thus, Socrates and his companions have seemingly erred (ἀμαρτάνειν) and contradicted themselves (τάναντία ἦμῖν αὐτοῖς . . . φάσκοντες, 453c3-4).

Glaucon in particular is thrown off balance by this realization and exclaims to Socrates: “I will beg and I do beg of you to expound the logos, whatever it is, on our behalf” (σοῦ δὲ ἡψόμαι τε καὶ δέομαι καὶ τὸν ὑπὲρ ἦμῶν λόγον, ὡς τις ποτ' ἐστίν, ἐρμηνεύσαι, 453c7-9.) Here I have left logos untranslated, since Socrates is about to coin another proverb to encourage Glaucon and the others not to lose heart in making an argument that might face a charge of inconsistency. While logos could be rendered as “argument,” intriguing possibilities arise when one leaves the range of possible meanings open. The logos that Glaucon seeks might well come in the shape of a proverb.

Socrates acknowledges the unsettling nature of the uncertainty Glaucon experiences and tells his companions that they are now able to understand why he was initially hard-pressed to

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512 453b7-9: “Ἔστιν οὖν ὅπως οὐ πάμπολοι διαφέρει γυνὴ ἄνδρός την φύσιν;” Πῶς δ' οὐ διαφέρει;
explain in detail the communistic possession of wives and children – put differently, to unpack fully the ramifications of the proverb *koina ta philôn*: “These and many similar difficulties, Glaucon... I foresaw and feared and so shrank from touching on the law concerning the getting and breeding of children.”

Now Socrates offers his new proverb of encouragement: “Whether someone dives into a small swimming hole or into the middle of the great sea, he swims all the same” (Ἀντίς τις εἰς κολυμβήθραν μικρὰν ἐμπέσῃ ἀντε εἰς τὸ μέγιστον πέλαγος μέσον, δόμως γε νεὶ οὐδέν ἦττον, 453d5-7). Despite the ridicule of the wits (τὰ τῶν χαριέντων σκόμματα) and the town-bred (ἀστείοις) who parody everything of this sort (πάντα ταῦτα κωμῳδεῖν) – i.e., men like Aristophanes – and despite the seeming inconsistencies that invariably arise in propounding almost any argument, all great and transformative proposals require one to argue his position, just as one must do with respect to a smaller, less radical proposition. Here the imagery of swimming in the vast sea accords well with the metaphor of the three great waves that occupy Book 5 – the equality of women and men with respect to both educational ability and the performance of social duties, the abolition of the private family, and the rule of philosopher-kings. It is easy to be swept away by the far-reaching ramifications of such radical proposals and the laughter they may engender. Socrates and his companions must be able “swimmers,” indeed.

In addition, only a few Stephanus pages later, Socrates employs yet another proverb to preempt those who would mock the idealized equality of the sexes, epitomized in the caricature-like image of women exercising naked alongside men. He slices off a verse from Pindar to form a proverb and then appends a second proverb to his first, Pindar-inspired formulation (457a10-b5):

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513 453c10-d2 (trans. Shorey): Ταῦτ' ἐστὶν... ὁ Γλαύκον, καὶ ἄλλα πολλὰ τουαίτα, ἡ ἐγὼ πάλαι προορῶν ἐφοβούμην τε καὶ ἄκινην ἀπετέθαι τοῦ νόμου τοῦ περὶ τὴν τῶν γυναικῶν καὶ παιδῶν κτήσιν καὶ τροφήν.
ὁ δὲ γελῶν ἀνήρ ἐπὶ γυμναῖς γυναιξὶ, τοῦ βελτίστου ἐνεκα γυμναζομένας, ἀτελῆ τοῦ γελοίου [σοφίας] δρέπων καρπὸν, οὐδὲν οἶδεν, ὡς ἔοικεν, ἐφ᾽ ὦ γελά ὦδ᾽ ὅτι πράττει κάλλιστα γὰρ ὅτι τοῦτο καὶ λέγεται καὶ λελέξεται, ὅτι τὸ μὲν ὀφέλιμον τὸ μὲν ὀφέλιμον καλὸν, τὸ δὲ βλαβερὸν αἰσχρὸν.

He “plucks the unripe fruit of laughter,” the man who mocks women exercising naked for the sake of the highest good, and it is likely that he knows nothing about what he mocks or what he does. For the fairest thing that is said and ever will be said is that “Beautiful is the beneficial, and ugly the harmful.”

A fragment from Pindar contains the line, “He plucks the unripe fruit of wisdom” (ἀτελὴ σοφίας καρπὸν δρέπ(ειν)), which, according to Stobaeus, refers to natural philosophers. 514 Adam, accordingly, brackets as corrupt “sophias” in the appendix to his edition of the text, assuming it to be a gloss interpolated to complete the quotation. 515 It appears that Plato employs a presumably well-known verse from Pindar, deletes the reference to “wisdom” (σοφίας) and substitutes in its place “laughter” (τοῦ γελοίου), to create a proverb. Thus we have yet another instance of a proverb belonging to the ‘He-who-A-is-B’ variety which itself is a transformation of the basic “A=B” formula, characteristic of literal, non-oppositional proverbs. Plato is “reforming” Pindaric verse for his ideal of social and political “reform”: women enjoy equal capacity with men to share in the responsibilities of governance. Moreover, by then appending his own proverb (i.e., “Beautiful is the beneficial, and ugly the harmful”) to this “re-formation” of Pindar’s original, Plato solidifies further the new meaning: Henceforth only harmful things are to be considered ugly and shameful. Women exercising nude – even those equal in age to their older male counterparts who are “wrinkled and unpleasant to look at” (ῥυσοίκαὶ μὴ ἥδεις τὴν ὀψιν, 452b2-3) 516 – are by no means a revolting sight; indeed, the very opposite. The new proverb (τὸ μὲν ὀφέλιμον καλὸν, τὸ δὲ βλαβερὸν αἰσχρὸν) – replete with parallel structure,

516 Trans. Shorey.
suppressed copula, axiological terminology, and general categories – sets up well the contrast to come toward the close of Book 5 between the mere “lovers of sights and sounds” (φιλήκοοι καὶ φιλοθεάοινες, 476b4) and those capable of “apprehending and taking delight in the nature of the beautiful itself” (αὐτοῖ δὲ τοῦ καλοῦ . . . αὐτῶν ἡ διάνοια τῆς φύσιν ἰδεῖν τε καὶ ἀσπάσασθαι, 476b6-8)\(^{517}\) – namely, the philosophers. In this way, Plato foreshadows the third great “wave” to come: rule by philosopher-kings.

Moreover, by re-forming a verse from Pindar that leveled criticism at natural philosophers, Plato draws an important distinction between natural philosophers and the type of philosopher that Socrates embodies: a moral and political philosopher concerned with human affairs. Aristophanes’ earlier satirical portrait of Socrates in *Clouds* presented him as the arch-caricature of a natural philosopher: a man utterly divorced from daily reality, a “ponderer of the heavens and subterranean realm” (τὰ τε μετέωρα φρονιστής καὶ τὰ ὑπὸ γῆς) one literally “walking in air” (ἄεροβατεῖν), as Socrates describes Arisophanes’ parody of himself in Plato’s *Apology*\(^{518}\). We learn from Plato’s *Phaedo* that although Socrates in his earlier years did in fact study natural philosophy, he ultimately grew dissatisfied with its account of causality and turned to seeking wisdom through dialogue with his fellow Athenians – his so-called “second sailing.”\(^{519}\) Knowing this we can discern Plato’s larger theme: while the natural philosophers are deserving of “ridicule by the wits” (τὰ τῶν χαριέντων σκόμματα) like Aristophanes, moral and political philosophers are the ones capable of appreciating what is truly beautiful (τὸ καλὸν), namely, the beneficial (τὸ ὕφελμον) and, conversely, what is truly ugly or disgraceful (τὸ αἰσχρόν), namely, that which is harmful (τὸ βλαβερὸν). Aristophanes’ parody of Socrates is of a

\(^{517}\) Trans. Shorey.  
\(^{518}\) *Ap.* 18b7-8, 19c2-3.  
\(^{519}\) *Ph.* 96a6-100b3.
piece with those who would mock women exercising naked alongside men – indeed, those who would mock any person so idealistic as to take seriously the radical notion of equality between the sexes. Plato refashions a Pindaric verse (originally targeting natural philosophers) and coins new proverbs, new quotables, that one can recall to rebut swiftly and conclusively all those who would mock such an ideal. In providing such discursive support for his utopian vision, Plato sets the stage for the third great “wave,” rule by philosopher-kings. Only philosophers of Socrates’ cut will be able to know what is truly “beautiful” and “beneficial” for society and, conversely, will recognize what is truly “shameful” and “harmful.”

4.7. Proverbs and the Metaphysical Framework for Philosopher Kings

In Books 6 and 7 of the Republic, Plato presents the metaphysical framework to support an ideal of philosopher rulers. This section of the dialogue is perhaps most famous for the vivid Sun and Line analogies in Book 6 and the unforgettable metaphor of the Cave in Book 7. Interestingly, there appear relatively few proverbs and gnômai in Books 6-7, compared to the rest of the Republic. It is arguably the presence of just such compelling literary images as the Sun, Line, and Cave that inclines Plato to forego the use of other stylized literary devices like proverbs. In addition, the complex metaphysics supporting philosopher-king rule may be more suited to an elevated style than that afforded by colloquial proverbs or oft-quoted gnômai. However, the few proverbial expressions that Plato does employ serve to enhance a metaphysical structure that cannot be attained via the usual dialectic exchange. Indeed, right from the opening of Book 6, Adeimantus reveals the limit of dialectic, disclosing that while people may well agree with Socrates that the rule of their polis should be entrusted to philosophers, they will not be wholly convinced (487b1-c4):

Καὶ ὁ Ἀδείμαντος, Ὡ Σώκρατες, ἔφη, πρὸς μὲν ταῦτα σοι οὐδεὶς ἦν οἷς τ’ εἴη ἀντεπείν. ἀλλὰ γὰρ τοιοῦδε τι πασχοῦσιν οἱ ἀκοφόντες ἐκάστοτε ἦν νῦν λέγεις· ἡγοῦνται δὲ ἀπεράντων τοῦ ἔρωταν καὶ ἀποκρίνεσθαι ὑπὸ τοῦ λόγου παρ’ ἐκάστον τὸ ἐρώτημα σμικρὸν παραγόμενοι, ἀθροισθέντων τὸν σμικρὸν ἐπὶ τελευτῆς τῶν λόγων μέγα τὸ σφάλμα καὶ ἐναντίον τοῖς πρῶτοις ἀναφάρωσθαι, καὶ ὦσπερ ὑπὸ τῶν πεπετεύειν δεινὸν οἱ μὴ τελευτώντες ἀποκλείονται καὶ οὐκ ἔχουσιν ὅτι φέροσιν, οὕτω καὶ θείον τελευτώντες ἀποκλείονται καὶ οὐκ ἔχειν ὅτι λέγουσιν ὑπὸ πεπετείας ἀδ ταῦτης τινὸς ἓτερος, οὐκ ἐν ψήφοις ἀλλ’ ἐν λόγοις· ἐπεὶ τὸ γε ἀληθῶς οὐδὲν τι μᾶλλον ταῦτῃ ἔχειν.

And Adeimantus replied, “No would one be able to contest you in these matters, but on each occasion that your audience hears the things that you’re now saying, they experience something along these lines: they feel that due to their inexperience in ‘question and answer,’ they’re led astray bit by bit by the argument at each question, and when these bits are taken together as a whole at the close of the exchange, a great fall is revealed, the opposite of what they first said, and just as men not accomplished in playing draughts are trapped by skilled players and are unable to make a move, in this way, too, they are finally trapped and lack anything to say because of this different sort of draughts game, played not with game pieces but words; for in fact the truth has nothing whatsoever to do with this.”

We might well ask after reading the entire Republic, what remains foremost in our collective conscious. It is certainly not Socrates besting anyone in dialectic with some tour-de-force argument. Rather, it is for most people – even those who have only a passing familiarity with the work – the allegory of the Cave. I want to suggest that for Plato’s ancient audience, the experience was not dissimilar. Winning dialectic exchanges is ultimately not how one achieves a lasting grasp over an audience’s collective imagination. Compelling images, striking similes and metaphors, and yes, memorable sayings such as proverbs and gnômai, often prove the most durable.521

Socrates himself acknowledges the limits of dialectical exchange when he responds to Adeimantus’ further queries about why philosophers ought to govern: “You’re asking a question

521 The durability of proverbs coupled with an author’s reputation for coining them may even result in that author’s receiving credit for a proverb whose origin is in doubt. As recently as May 2019, a prominent columnist for the New York Times attributed to Plato the saying of uncertain provenance “Be kind, for everyone you meet is fighting a hard battle” (R. Cohen, “Reflections on the Graduation of My Daughter,” NY Times, May 18, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/2019/05/17/opinion/graduation-2019.html).
that requires an answer expressed by way of an image” (Ἐρωτής . . ἐρώτημα δεόμενον ἀποκρίσεως δι’ εἰκόνος λεγομένης, 487e4-5). Kathryn Morgan suggests that we may explain Socrates’ turn to imagery by the fact that Socrates “is actually advancing ideas rather than . . . engaged in the cut and thrust of the elenches.”522 The idea that Socrates advances here is, of course, the last – and arguably most incredible – of the “three waves,” i.e., governance by philosophers. Dialectic will only get you so far with your audience as Adeimantus makes clear, and thus we can see at this juncture, in the words of Morgan, a “move in the corpus from simple question and answer to a more positive and fleshed-out presentation of Socrates’ ideas.”523 That presentation of a metaphysics consonant with philosopher rule will culminate in the image of the Cave. As Morgan suggests, we have in the Republic an “almost unparalleled opportunity to watch systems of imagery develop and transform . . .”524 I would add to Morgan’s analysis that with respect to imagery, that opportunity is especially evident in Books 6-7 and, moreover, that we have in the Republic precisely the same opportunity to observe Plato’s development and transformation of proverbs. Where the elenchus reaches its limits, images and proverbs remain to advance Plato’s vision of the ideal city. While the proverbs in Books 6-7 are fewer in number given what I suspect is Plato’s writerly strategy not to overwhelm his text with too many stylized literary devices in close proximity, those that are present play an important role in advancing the dialogue and rendering Plato’s ideas all the more vivid and memorable. Indeed, as we shall see, one of the most stunning and creative uses of proverb occurs in conjunction with the very memorable allegory of the Cave.

522 Morgan 2017: 181. Morgan provides a fascinating analysis of the image of the “goat-stag” (τραγέλαφος) which Socrates conjures before proceeding to the ship of state analogy.
523 Morgan 2017: 182.
524 Morgan 2017: 181.
4.7.1. Education, Logos, and the Divine

In an attempt to resolve Adeimantus’ (and the others’) doubts about the suitability of philosophers for ruling the polis, Socrates delivers the image that he opined was needed for a response: the famous ship of state analogy. The polis is like a ship with a slightly deaf shipmaster who neither sees well nor knows very much about navigation, with the sailors all vying to seize the helm in various unscrupulous ways, unaware that only someone truly skilled in navigation can successfully guide the ship; however, any such person would be dismissed as a “stargazer” (μετεωροσκόπος) and a “babbler” (ἀδολέσχης) and generally “useless” (ἄχρηστος, 488a7-489a2). Such a person is the philosopher, and the sailors’ attitudes toward the true navigator are analogous to those of Athenian society toward philosophers.

This ship-of-state analogy is justly famous and has received much commentary. But what has been generally left unexamined is a proverb that follows the analogy, which Socrates immediately reformulates once he articulates it. Socrates intends this proverb as a heuristic device, to be used together with the ship analogy by Adeimantus and the rest, in teaching others why Athenian society does not presently honor philosophers. After Adeimantus acknowledges that the ship-of-state analogy is an accurate depiction of the Athenians’ disposition toward true philosophers (ταῖς πόλεσι πρὸς τοὺς ἀληθινοὺς φιλοσόφους τὴν διάθεσιν ἔοικεν, 489a5-6), Socrates urges him to then “teach” (διδάσκε) anyone who is surprised that philosophers are not esteemed in Athenian society by means of the ship-of-state image (τὴν εἰκόνα, 489a8-b1). Adeimantus heartily agrees: “Indeed, I shall so teach” (Αλλὰ διδάξω, 489b2).

Socrates then puts himself in the role of Adeimantus instructing the skeptic (489b2-c2):

Καὶ ὅτι τοῖς τάληθης λέγεις, ὡς ἄχρηστοι τοῖς πολλοῖς οἱ ἐπιεικέστατοι τῶν ἐν φιλοσοφίᾳ: τῆς μέντοι ἄχρηστίας τοὺς μὴ χρωμένους κέλευε αἰτιᾶσθαι, ἀλλὰ μὴ

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525 See, e.g., Keyt 2006; Long 2017; Reeve 2006.
And [say] further that “You speak the truth about how the best and the brightest are useless to the multitude in philosophy.” But bid him to blame such uselessness not on the best and brightest but on the ones who don’t make use of them. For it is not natural for a helmsman to beg the sailors to be ruled by him nor “for the wise to go to the doors of the rich.” And the man who coined that gem was a liar, but the truth is this, be he wealthy or poor, a sick man has to go to the doctors’ doors, and everyone in need of governance to the doors of one capable of governing, not that the ruler should beg his charges to be governed by him, if he truly is to be of any value.

Aristotle attributes to Simonides the proverb “Wise men go to the doors of the rich.” As Aristotle recounts the story, when Simonides was visiting Hieron, the tyrant of Syracuse, Hieron’s wife reportedly asked him whether it was better to be wise or rich. Simonides replied “Rich, for one sees wise men spending time at the doors of the rich” (πλούσιον . . . τοὺς σοφοὺς γὰρ . . . όραν ἐπὶ τὰς τῶν πλουσίων θύρας διατρίβοντας, Rhet.1391a10-12). We have, then, yet another adage representative of a tradition that prized the accumulation of wealth and, accordingly, formulated numerous sayings in furtherance of that value. The generalizing terminology of “the wise” and “the wealthy” (τοὺς σοφοὺς, τῶν πλουσίων) coupled with the poetic imagery of “going to the doors” (ἐπὶ τὰς θύρας ἰέναι) of a general group marks the phrase as a proverb. Further, Socrates expressly denotes it as such and implies that many people have already heard it when he calls the phrase’s coiner a liar. We are reminded of the place in Book 1 where a saying whose origins seemingly lie with Simonides poses an obstacle to Plato’s vision of a just society. Indeed, Adam states unequivocally that this passage reveals how “Plato liked to

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526 Trans., Kennedy.
527 See my discussion in Chapter 2.4-5.
get his knife into Simonides.” I would argue for a more cautious reading: Socrates does not mention Simonides by name and has already taken pains both to defend him and to uphold his position within the Greek wisdom tradition during the previous exchange in Book 1 with Polemarchus over whether Simonides authored the maxim “Just it is, to render to each what is owed him.” As I argued in Chapter Two, Plato risks losing the confidence of his readership if his chief protagonist condemns the wisdom tradition in its entirety.

The proverb itself, however, and its contributing role to Athenian society’s prioritizing wealth over everything else deserve reproof and are grist for Plato’s discourse-reforming mill. Adeimantus and others should not use the ship-of-state analogy by itself (vivid though it may be) in “teaching” Athenians why their values have left them at sea. The teachers of Plato’s vision of the ideal state must also replace the earlier saying with new proverbs. Indeed, we witness in this extraordinary passage several proverbs embedded in an argument about which proverbs ought to be used for educational ends. Socrates counters the older saying first with an express declaration that his coinages articulate the truth (τὸ δὲ ἀλήθες πέφυκεν), whereas the proverb “wise men go to the doors of the rich,” lies (ἐψεύσατο). He then makes use of one of the traditional and recurrent formulae for introducing gnomic statements in the form of a third person imperative: constructions such as (οὐ) χρή, ἔοικε, or (οὗκ) ἐστίν + infinitive which “express the need or desirability of certain actions.” As Andre Lardinois explains, “Such patterns helped the speaker to create a saying on the spot and, at the same time, the listener to identify that statement as gnomic.” Socrates uses ἀναγκαῖον εἶναι to coin his new proverbs to rebut the older wisdom

528 Adam 1980: ad loc.
530 Lardinois 1995: 22. Lardinois provides a useful list of examples from archaic poetry of χρῆ + infinitive, among which are Odyssey 15.74 (χρῆ ξείνου παρεόντα φιλεῖν, ἐθέλοντα δὲ πέμπειν) and Iliad 2.24 (οὐ χρῆ παννύχιον εὔδειν βουληφόρον ὄνδρα). In his Rhetoric, Aristotle cites as an example of a gnome, θνατὰ χρῆ τὸν θνατόν, οὐκ
saying. These are “Be he wealthy or poor, a sick man must go to the doctors’ doors” (ἐάντε πλούσιος ἐάντε πένης κάμη, ἀναγκαῖον εἶναι ἐπὶ ιατρῶν θύρας ἰέναι), followed immediately by “And all in need of rule should go to the doors of the man who can rule” (καὶ πάντα τὸν ἄρχεσθαι δεόμενον ἐπὶ τὰς τοῦ ἄρχειν δυναμένου, 489c1-2). We can imagine that the fully developed new proverb, to be taught alongside the ship-of-state analogy, might run something along the lines of “Just as sick men, whether wealthy or poor, must go to the doctor’s doors, so too must everyone in need of rule go to the doors of men equipped to rule.”

The essential component of this new proverb – i.e., “all in need of rule should go to the doors of the man who can rule” (πάντα τὸν ἄρχεσθαι δεόμενον ἐπὶ τὰς τοῦ ἄρχειν δυναμένου) – sounds less artful in English than in the original Greek, where it enjoys grammatical parallelism in a quadripartite structure – archesthai deomenon . . . archein dunamenou – and a generalizing term, pavta. Moreover, Socrates’ new formulation is surely a proverb, if only because its semantic force and lexical structure trade upon that of its less-than-salutary precursor. As modern paroemiology has revealed, one of the simplest methods of creating a proverbial utterance is “replication.” While replication often refers to quoting a previously heard utterance in a new context – which Socrates certainly does here with his new version of the “going-to-the-doors-of” proverb – the borrowing of semantic and lexical features with explicit and intentional intertextual reference is also a clear marker of a proverb. In this instance, of course, Socrates borrows from the original only to transform the meaning entirely.

Socrates’ express reference to a larger didactic purpose, with his use of both the ship-of-state analogy and the new proverb, points toward the educational and rhetorical framework of

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Greek society, in which the memorization and anthologizing of quotables from literature played a significant role. Plato is laying a new gnomological foundation for his educational program. Images may well prove more compelling than dialectic exchange as this section of the Republic suggests, but proverbs have a fundamental purpose in education as well – to inculcate the values underlying the ideal state.

Plato may even have faced some competition in his reformation of this particular proverb. Diogenes Laertius records that when asked by the Syracusan tyrant Dionysius why it is that philosophers go to the doors of rich men but not vice versa, the philosopher Aristippus replied, "While one group knows what it needs, the other does not know" (οἱ μὲν ἰσασιν ὑν δέονται, οἱ δ’ οὐκ ἰσασιν, 2.69.3-4). A similar saying was attributed to the philosopher Antisthenes:

ο αὐτὸς πυνθανομένου του τυράννου, τί δήποτε οὐχ οἱ πλούσιοι πρὸς τοὺς σοφοὺς ἀπίσαιν, ἄλλ’ ἀνάπαλιν, εἶπεν. "Ὅτι οἱ σοφοί μὲν ἰσασιν ὑν ἐστίν αὐτοῖς χρεία πρὸς τὸν βίον, οἱ δ’ οὐκ ἰσασιν, ἐπεὶ μᾶλλον χρημάτων ἢ σοφίας ἐπεμελεύοντο.”

The same man [Antisthenes], when a tyrant asked him why rich men do not go in quest of wise men, but the opposite, he said, “Because wise men know what they need for life, but rich men do not know, since they have concerned themselves more for money than for wisdom.”

These passages suggest a robust tradition of sayings concerning the topic of wealth’s relationship to wisdom. Plato is not about to be outdone by his proverb-composing rivals and, accordingly, appends his own version to the unforgettable image of the ship of state. Both the image and the reformed proverb are part of Plato’s paideia.

Of course, the paideia that Plato conceives as essential to the creation of the ideal polis is worlds apart from then-current educational practice. Not long after he recommends use of the

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532 Vitae philosophorum 2.69.2-3: διὰ τι οἱ μὲν φιλόσοφοι ἐπί τῶν πλουσίων θύρας ἐρχονται, οἱ δὲ πλούσιοι ἐπί τῶν φιλοσόφων οὐκέτι...  
533 Gnomologium Vaticanum no. 6 (Sternbach) reprinted in Prince 2015: 552 (frag. 166; trans. Prince).
ship-of-state analogy and the reformed “going-to-the-doors-of” proverb in teaching Athenians why philosophers should govern the state, Socrates roundly condemns what passes for paideia in contemporary Athens. After opining that it is crucial for a philosopher to be educated in a proper environment, without which only a god could save him (492a1-5), Socrates makes clear that the censure and approval of the mob when it is gathered in courtrooms, assemblies, and other public meetings renders impossible any philosophically minded education that aspires to virtue.\textsuperscript{534}

Significantly for my thesis, he drives this point home with a proverb (492e3-6):

οὔτε γὰρ γίγνεται οὔτε γέγονεν οὔδὲ οὖν μὴ γένηται ἄλλοιον ἢθος πρὸς ἀρετὴν παρὰ τὴν τούτων παιδείαν πεπαθεμένον, ἀνθρώπειον, ὥ ἐταίρε – θεῖον μέντοι κατὰ τὴν παροιμίαν ἐξαιροῦμεν λόγου.

For there isn’t now, hasn’t been in the past, nor ever will be in the future anyone with a character so unusual that he has been educated to virtue in spite of the contrary education he received from the mob – I mean, a human character; the divine, as the proverb goes, is the exception to the rule.\textsuperscript{535}

If we translate Socrates’ paroimia literally, we can see that he may in fact be referencing, but not expressly quoting, the proverb per se in his formulation: “The human – my friend, since we should remove the divine from our logos, according to the proverb” (ἀνθρώπειον, ὥ ἐταίρε – θεῖον μέντοι κατὰ τὴν παροιμίαν ἐξαιροῦμεν λόγου, 492e5-6). Adam believes that Plato is “playing on the proverb τὸ θεῖον ἐξαιρῶ λόγου,” a deduction he makes by looking to other similar expressions in other dialogues, one of which, the Symposium, I shall address in a moment. But even if τὸ θεῖον ἐξαιρῶ λόγου was not in fact the original proverb, it may have been something along the lines of “The divine is the exception to the rule” or even a saying that followed the simplest of all “proverbial patterns,” namely, “x is x,” i.e., “The divine is the

\textsuperscript{534} 492b5-8: συγκαθεζόμενοι ἄθροοι πολλοὶ εἰς ἐκκλησίας ἢ εἰς δικαστήρια ἢ θέατρα ἢ στρατόπεδα ἢ τῖνα ἄλλον κοινὸν πλῆθους σύλλογον σὺν πολλῷ θορύβῳ τὰ μὲν ψέγωσι τῶν λεγομένων ἢ πραττομένων, τὰ δὲ ἐπαινῶσιν . . .

\textsuperscript{535} Trans. Grube (with modification).
Irrespective of its exact formulation, the upshot of the proverb in this context seems clear: under the present circumstances, only someone who in some way has access to “the divine” (θεῖον) can ever hope to be educated in the proper manner. Indeed, Socrates confirms as much when he continues (492e6-493a2),

εὖ γάρ χρή ειδέναι, ὅτι περ ἂν σωθῇ τε καὶ γένηται οἶον δεῖ ἐν τοιαύτῃ καταστάσει πολιτείων, ὅτι θεῶν μοίραν αὐτὸ σώσαι λέγων οὐ κακῶς ἔρεις.

For you should know well that if anything is saved and becomes what it ought to be, given the present condition of society, you will not err in saying that it is the dispensation of the divine that preserves it.

We now see how the proverb both sets up Plato’s higher order metaphysics with its Sun, Line, and Cave images to come and refers to Socrates himself as the one capable of expounding on such “divine” subjects. If anyone is possessed of a θεῖον ἡθος, it is surely Socrates. Elsewhere in Plato’s dialogues, language reminiscent of the proverb is used to describe Socrates. In the Symposium, Socrates is portrayed as possessing nearly superhuman abilities, such as his remarkable resistance to severe cold during a winter military campaign (220a6-c1), his singular power of concentration which enables him to stand all day and night in the same position, thinking about a particular problem (220c3-d5), and, “the most amazing thing of all” (ὅ πάντων θαυμαστότατον) his utter imperviousness to the effects of alcohol (220a4-5).

With respect to this last ability, Eryximachus uses the same phraseology (as Adam notes) that Socrates employs in his own proverb when Eryximachus describes his relief that the attendees at Agathon’s dinner have ultimately decided not to drink to excess after their previous night’s debauch: “I remove Socrates from the logos. For he could either drink or not, with the result that whatever we do will suffice for him” (Σωκράτη δ’ ἐξαιρῶ λόγου. ἰκανός γὰρ καὶ

The “x is x” formula represents not a meaningless tautology as Winick has argued but rather creates a proverb based upon intertextual reference, as, for example, in the phrase “a promise is a promise” which is shorthand for the larger sentence contemplated: “A promise is a promise, so don’t try to get out of this one” (Winick 1998: 68).
ἀμφότερα, ὡστ' ἐξερκέσει αὕτω ὑπότερ' ἂν ποιῶμεν, 176c3-5). In both Socrates’ proverb and Eryximachus’ statement I have deliberately left λόγου untranslated again, given the manifold meanings attributable to the word. In general terms, however, we can define it thus: Just as the divine must be removed from any human consideration or calculation (λόγου), so too must Socrates. He is the exception to the “human” rule. Indeed, only a few Stephanus pages further, Socrates mentions his “divine sign” – his daimonion (τὸ δαιμόνιον σημεῖον, 496c40), which also appears in several other dialogues.⁵³⁷ To put the matter in slightly different terms, society’s present logos, its dominant discursive practices (to which the divine, like Socrates, is an exception) are at odds with what is needed to create the ideal polis. A new logos, one fostered by and consistent with the θεῖον ἥθος which animates the ideal state, is necessary. In short, the ideal polis requires a philosopher king, for it is the philosopher who has unique access to the divine. Unfortunately, absent divine intervention (θεοῦ μοῖραν, 493a1-2), “it is impossible for the multitude to be a philosopher” (Φιλόσοφον μὲν ἄρα . . . πληθος ἄδυνατον εἶναι, 494a4). A new logos is needed, one to which the divine is no longer an exception.

4.7.2. The Hard Way to the Good, Up and Out of the Cave

To be sure, Socrates and his companions harbor no illusion about the magnitude of the task involved in building such a world, with its concomitant discursive practices, where philosophy would be the animating spirit of governance. Socrates articulates the seeming impossibility of the men’s endeavor with – in the terminology of Lardinois – a double gnome: “For all great things are prone to fall, and, it is true, as the saying goes, ‘Hard is the good’” (τὰ γὰρ δὴ μεγάλα πάντα ἐπισφαλῆ, καὶ τὸ λεγόμενον τὰ καλὰ τῷ ὄντι χαλεπά, 497d9-10). We have already seen how Plato either deploys or makes oblique reference to the latter proverb

⁵³⁷ See, e.g., Ap. 31c-d; Phaedr. 242c.
throughout the *Republic*. In many ways, that proverb comes to signify the core task in the *Republic* and serves to motivate the men to press on in their quest to give birth to the ideal *polis*. Now, however, Socrates conjoins the proverb with another phrase that is itself apparently a new proverb: “All great things are prone to fall.” With its neuter predicate and suppressed copula coupled with axiological terminology in a general category (“prone to fall” + “all great things”), the phrase was sufficiently quotable for Longinus to use in *On the Sublime*. Moreover, Longinus quotes the “new” proverb – made companion to the older *chalepa ta kala* – during his treatise’s curious digression on the notion of the “flawed genius,” in which he defends a number of Plato’s stylistic “failures” such as inelegant metaphors (33.2):

εγώ δ’ οἶδα μὲν ώς αἱ ὑπερμεγέθεις φύσεις ἥκιστα καθαραί: <τὸ> γὰρ ἐν παντὶ ἀκριβεῖς κίνδυνος μικρότητος, ἐν δὲ τοῖς μεγέθεσιν, ὀσπέρ ἐν τοῖς ἄγαν πλούτοις, εἶναι τι χρὴ καὶ παραληγοροῦμενον· μήποτε δὲ τὸτο καὶ ἀναγκαῖον ἦ, τὸ τὰς μὲν ταπεινὰς καὶ μέσας φύσεις διὰ τὸ μηδαμῇ παρακινδυνεύειν μηδὲ ἐφίσθαι τὸν ἀκρον ἀναμαρτήτους ὡς ἐπὶ τὸ πολὺ καὶ ἀσφαλεστέρας διαμένειν, τὰ δὲ μεγάλα ἐπισφαλῆ δι’ αὐτὸ γίνεσθαι τὸ μέγαθος.

I know that exceedingly great natures are the least pure. For there is a risk of pettiness in being entirely accurate, but in grandeur, just as in great wealth, something must be neglected. It may be inevitable that low and middling natures, on account of never taking risks nor aiming for the heights, free from error, remain largely secure, but greatness is prone to fall on account of its very greatness.

The meaning the phase takes on seems clear: truly great endeavors transcend more petty – one could even say more *human* – considerations. Greatness is not achieved on the scale of the merely human. The task of creating (that is, articulating via *logos*) an ideal *polis* is extremely difficult – superhuman even, an exception to any ἄνθρωποιον λόγοι – but then “hard things are truly good things” (τὰ καλὰ τῷ ὄντι χαλεπά) and any great endeavor is riskier precisely because of its greatness (τὰ γὰρ δὴ μεγάλα πάντα ἐπισφαλῆ). Plato’s new proverbial wisdom, built on the foundations of an older proverb (τὰ καλὰ τῷ ὄντι χαλεπά) – which, as I explained previously,
was attributed to another foundational figure in the origins of Greek political thought, Solon – serves as a rallying cry of sorts for Socrates and his interlocutors in their dogged pursuit of the ideal *polis*, irrespective of the laughter and disbelief which the idea of philosopher kings, the last of the three great waves, may elicit. This sort of edifying function of proverbs has long been noted by paremiologists and literary theorists: “Proverbs are *strategies* for dealing with *situations,*” as Kenneth Burke famously noted. Burke proposed going even further and extending such a “sociological approach” to the whole field of literature, asking whether the most complex and sophisticated works of art [could] legitimately be considered somewhat as ‘proverbs writ large’?” Burke’s question, as applied to the *Republic*, is certainly worth considering.

The challenge faced by Socrates and his interlocutors is to construct in *logoi* a foundation for the ideal state that the rest of society will find convincing. However, then-present discursive practice blocks their way. Socrates puns about this difficulty when he playfully ridicules the overly-elaborate epideictic maneuvers of rhetoricians like Gorgias, “For of the thing now being spoken (*legomenon*) men have never beheld a token (*genomenon)*,” explaining that “*jingles of this sort were artificially made to agree with one another, not as those here, dashed together spontaneously.*” One can reasonably interpret Socrates’ rhyme as a proverb unto itself, a meta-commentary on discourse: the *legomena* which Socrates and his companions are attempting to speak have never yet come into being (*genomena*). What passes for discourse, for *logos*, there and then, are the verbal games of sophists and rhetoricians. Socrates shows that he is more than

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538 Burke 1967: 296 (emphasis in original).
539 Burke 1967: 296.
540 498d6-e3 (trans. Shorey, with modification): οὐ γὰρ πῶς ἔδωκαν γενόμενον τὸ νῦν λεγόμενον, ἀλλὰ πολὺ μᾶλλον τοιοῦτ᾽ ἄττα ἡμετερὸ ἔξετερον ἄλληλος ἴμοιομένεν, ἄλλ᾽ οὐκ ἀπό τοῦ αὐτομάτου ὄσπερ νῦν συμπεσόντα. This passage is extremely challenging to translate in a way that successfully communicates in English Socrates’ pun. Grube’s version is as follows: “They’ve never seen a man that fits our plan . . .” (emphasis in original).
equal to the task of composing clever rhymes, suitable for memorizing and quoting, but unlike those of the sophists, his coinages have a larger educational purpose, consistent with the values of the ideal *polis*. His are the *legomena* that in an ideal state would also be *genomena*. His poetic language is to be the new, national language.

The petty artificiality and trivial verbal tricks deployed by the sophists and rhetoricians are at odds with the discursive practice that Plato is after. Indeed, any petty, purely human-scale standard necessarily interferes with the conceptualization of a perfectly just *polis*. Socrates demonstrates this point with another new proverb that seems to take direct aim at one of the most famous proverbs in all of Greek thought: the sophist Protagoras who is reported to have said that “man is the measure of all things” (*πάντων χρημάτων εἶναι μέτρον τὸν ἄνθρωπον*). After first referencing a “longer road” (*μακροτέρα περίοδος*) that one must journey in order to see best the matters they have been discussing (*κάλλιστα αὐτὰ κατιδεῖν*), Socrates corrects Adeimantus’ belief that in fact the men have already covered such topics “in good measure” (*μετρίως*) (504c2-3):

> Άλλ’, οἱ φίλε, . . . μέτρον τῶν τοιούτων ἀπολείπον καὶ ότιον τοῦ οὗ τού πάνυ μετρίως γίγνεται· ἀπελέξ γὰρ οὐδὲν οὔδενός μέτρον.

But my dear friend, the measure of such matters left unfinished to even the slightest degree as to what exists provides no good measure whatsoever; *for nothing imperfect is the measure of anything*.

Socrates’ use of the phrase *μακροτέρα περίοδος* puts us once again in mind of Hesiod’s proverbial longer and more difficult path to virtue, as well as its vernacular analogue, *chalepa ta kala*, which has become essentially a clarion call for the men in their dialogic quest. Now, Socrates has deftly one-upped his interlocutors, surpassing Glaucon, who had previously coined his own proverb about measure – “But for reasonable men, Socrates, the ‘measure’ of hearing

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541 Protagoras, frag. 13.2.2 Diels-Kranz; see also Pl., *Cra*.385e6-386a1.
such arguments is the whole of one’s life” (Μέτρον δὲ γ᾽ . . . ὁ Σώκρατες, ὁ Γλαύκων, τοιούτων λόγων ἀκούειν ὄλος ὁ βίος νοῦν ἔχουσιν, 450b6-7) – for the purpose of admonishing Socrates that he had not sufficiently elucidated the proverb *koina ta philôn* with respect to the communistic ownership of wife and children. At that point in the dialogue, it was Socrates who believed that he had addressed the subject “in measure” (μετρίων γε, 450b5), and Glaucon chided him that he must not grow weary (μηδαμῶς ἀποκάμης, 450b8) in arguing his position more clearly. As I argued earlier, the phrase μηδαμῶς ἀποκάμης used in this context carries the discernible echo of Hesiod’s longer, more arduous path toward virtue.

The vehicle by which Socrates reveals that he and his interlocutors have now traded places as to who exactly has spoken “in good measure” is a proverb that audaciously challenges Protagoras’ more famous version. Man, imperfect as he is, and his necessarily imperfect discourse and argumentation, are ultimately not the measure of anything, certainly not the ideal *polis*. In the *Laws*, Plato will complete the expected rejoinder to Protagoras’ human-centered maxim: “For us, God will be ‘the measure of all things’ in the highest degree” (ὁ ὁθεὸς ἡμῖν πάντων χρημάτων μέτρον ἐν εἴη μάλιστα, 716c4-5).542 For now, however, it is enough simply to signal first, that the superficial discursive practices of the sophists and rhetoricians are no measure of anything, least of all assessing the adequacy of the ideal state and, second, the larger point that discourse in and of itself is necessarily limited; ultimately it cannot bring about the divine. Yet, discourse remains the sole means at our disposal for envisioning the ideal. Glaucon will recognize this at the close of Book 9 when he surmises, “I understand you to mean that the city whose founding we have described is established in words (τῇ ἐν λόγοις κειμένη), for I think it exists nowhere on earth (γῆς γε οὐδαμοῦ, 592a10-b1).” Plato’s task is to create a better, less

542 Trans. Bury (with modification).
“imperfect” (ἀτελές) discursive practice that people might use in striving for a more just society.\(^{543}\)

Such a society would embody what Socrates insists he and his interlocutors strive to attain: “the form of the good” (ἡ τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ ἴδεα, 505a2), which is the “greatest subject for learning” (μέγιστον μάθημα) and “by which both just things and other things useful become in fact both useful and beneficial” (ἡ δὴ καὶ δίκαια καὶ τάλλα προσχρησάμενα χρήσιμα καὶ ὀφέλιμα γίνεται, 505a1-3). Unfortunately, the majority of people do not think it “necessary to seek further” (οὐδὲν δεῖν περαιτέρω ζητεῖν) than the “imperfect measure” (ἀτελές μέτρον) of their present discourse because of “laziness” (διὰ ῥᾳθμίαν, 504c2-5). This posture is “completely unsuited for [any] guardian of the state and its laws” (ἡκιστα προσδεί φύλακι πόλεώς τε καὶ νόμων, 504c6-7). Instead, Socrates urges that a guardian “must take the longer road” (Τὴν μακροτέραν τοῖνον . . . περιτέον, 504c9), thereby calling to mind yet again Hesiod’s longer, steeper path to virtue. To be satisfied with traveling as far as current Athenian discursive practices allow means that a guardian “will never arrive at the culmination of the greatest and most appropriate subject for learning of all” (τοῦ μεγίστου τε καὶ μᾶλιστα προσήκοντος μαθήματος ἐπὶ τέλος οὖσας ἡξεῖν, 504d2-3) – namely the “form of the good” (ἡ τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ ἴδεα). Plato has deftly intertwined a proverb about the inadequacy of incomplete, unfinished (ἀτελές) discourse that “seems sufficient” to many in contemporary Athens (δοκεῖ δ’ ἐνιοτέ τισιν ἢκανὸς ἦδη ἐχεῖν, 504c3) with the imagery of the proverbial longer and harder path that “requires a learner to toil no less than in physical training” (ὴπεμον μανθάνοντι πονητέον ἦ γυμναζομένῳ)

\(^{543}\) In his Seventh Letter, the authenticity of which admittedly remains in serious doubt, Plato goes even farther and expresses what he sees as language’s inadequacy ever to articulate the ideal: “There is no – nor will there ever be – any treatise of mine on such things, for they are not communicable in words like other studies” (οὐκον ἐμὸν γε περὶ αὐτῶν ἔστιν συγγραμμα οὐδὲ μήποτε γένηται· βριτῶν γάρ ὠνδαμώς ἔστιν ὡς ὄλλα μαθήματα, 341c4-6). Even if the authorship of the Seventh Letter is spurious, the content nonetheless reflects an established, ancient tradition that saw Plato as recognizing the potential impotence of language.
and has now added a phrase that will come to enjoy its own proverbial status: the “form of the good” (ἡ τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ ἴδεα). Diogenes Laertius, for example, writes of how Amphis, a poet of Middle Comedy, made use of Plato’s proverbial “good” in his Amphicrates: “The good, whatever in the world it is that you are likely to get on this woman’s account, I know less of that, master, than I do of Plato’s good.”

Adam explains that “τὸ Πλάτωνος ἀγαθόν was in antiquity a proverb for any dark or obscure saying.”

Thus, Plato has created a new set of sayings that, taken together, aim to inspire his audience to traverse the longer, more laborious road than that afforded by the clever but superficial wordplay of the sophists and rhetoricians, toward the very form itself of the good, enigmatic though it may be. Plato posits this route as the only way forward for those who aspire to a truly just society, as embodied in the ideal polis.

These memorable sayings that Plato attempts to craft will reach their culmination in what is the single most famous analogy in all of philosophic writing: the Cave in Book 7. Even to call the image a “cave” is somewhat of a misnomer, since “cave” can imply a ground-level cavern. Plato’s Cave, however, is an “underground cavern-like dwelling with a long (μακρὰν) entrance that opens toward the light, as wide as the cave (καταγείῳ οἰκήσει σπηλαιώδει, ἀναπεπταμένην πρὸς τὸ φῶς τὴν εἴσοδον ἐχούσῃ μακρὰν παρὰ πᾶν τὸ σπῆλαιον, 514a3-5).

Indeed, the “ascent” (ἀνάβασις) out of the Cave is “rough” (πραξεία) and “steep” (ἀνάντης), which one cannot climb without “suffering pain” (ὀδυνᾶσθαι, 515e7-8). The parallel between the

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544 Vitae philosophorum, 3.27.9-11: τὸ δ’ ἀγαθὸν δ’ τι ποτ’ ἐστίν, οὐ σὺ τυχόντειν μέλλεις διὰ ταύτην, ἦτον οἶδα τοῦτ’ ἐγὼ, ὦ δέσποτ’, ἢ τὸ Πλάτωνος ἀγαθόν.

545 Adam 1980: ad loc.

546 Adam 1980: ad loc. Adam argues convincingly that παρὰ πᾶν τὸ σπῆλαιον should be taken separately from μακρὰν which describes the εἴσοδος. The words, thus, define the width of the entrance, which is “along the whole of,” i.e., “as wide as” the cave’s mouth at the surface. It is the ingress leading down to the prisoners that Plato in fact describes as μακρά.
philosopher’s difficult climb out of the Cave and Hesiod’s long (μακρὸς), steep (ὁρθὸς) and rough (τρηχὺς) road to “virtue, before which the gods have placed sweaty toil” (τῆς ἀρετῆς ἱδρῶτα θεοὶ προπάροιθεν ἔθηκαν, Op. 289), is unmistakable. Plato has appropriated the imagery of the single most-quoted proverb in all of ancient literature to create what will become the single most-cited analogy in philosophy. Of course, Plato’s Cave is not itself a proverb, but it audaciously integrates elements of Hesiod’s original gnômai so as to provide a new context for the proverb. The aretê to be attained by enduring what lies along Hesiod’s harder path (ὁμος) can now be understood – after Plato’s transformation – as the “form of the good, the last thing to be seen and reached only with difficulty” (τελευταία ἡ τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ ἰδέα καὶ μόγς ὀρᾶσθαι, 517b8-c1).547

One may argue that any connection between the anabasis out of Plato’s Cave and Hesiod’s uphill oimos is too attenuated to be of interpretive value. Such an objection would mirror the complaint made by an anonymous Cambridge University Press reader to Richard Hunter’s 2014 monograph on Hesiod’s palpable presence throughout ancient literature: “Not every uphill climb is an allusion to Hesiod, surely . . .”548 As Hunter himself observes, there doubtless exists a weakness on the part of both ancient and modern scholars to be too quick to link together two passages on a similar theme that survived by chance. However, as Hunter argues, Hesiod’s Works and Days is a “special case” insofar as it was

one of those central texts of ancient literate culture which were, through educational practice, so ingrained in habits of expression and thought that the search for its influence must indeed sometimes take the form of deep-trench archaeology, rather than surface survey. In the context of that literate culture, quite a few uphill climbs may indeed be claimed to be indeed “Hesiodic”, particularly in the context of the acquisition of forms of knowledge . . .549

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547 Trans. Grube.
548 Hunter 2014: 34-5.
549 Hunter 2014: 35 (emphasis added).
I believe Hunter’s analysis is especially true with respect to the single-most quoted proverbial passage in all antiquity. Here, both the lexical and semantic coincidences – the Cave’s “rough” (τραχεία) and “steep” (ἀνάντης) anabasis to the “form of the good” (ἡ τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ ἱδέα) that is painful to ascend (ὁδυνᾶσθαι), and Hesiod’s long (μακρός), steep (ὀρθός) and rough (τρηχός) oimos to “virtue” (τὴν ἀρετήν) that necessitates “sweaty toil” (ἴδρωτα) – are too close to be discounted. Just as Plato “re-formed” traditional, Hesiodic proverb at the opening of Book 4 about the benefits of accumulating wealth in order to fashion the defining maxim of justice in the ideal city – “Justice is the doing of one’s own” (τὸ τὰ αὑτοῦ πράττειν . . . δικαιοσύνη ἐστί, 433a8-9), i.e., the UAD – so too does he recast Hesiod’s hard road to virtue as the philosopher’s difficult ascent out of the Cave of delusion – indeed, literally of “nonsense” (φλυαρίας, 515d2), according to Socrates – to behold the true form of the good.

We have then, in effect, the conclusion of a ring composition, centering on Plato’s description of how the ideal state is to be constructed. Recall that Book 4 (as well as this Chapter) opened with Socrates’ worries about affording the “greatest happiness” (πλείστη εὐδαιμονία) to the various practitioners of the different professions. These worries arose because Adeimantus pressed Socrates on what seemed inadequate rewards to the guardians for their labors in protecting the city. In Adeimantus’ estimation, Socrates did not seem to have made the guardians all that happy in his assembly of the ideal polis, since they did not enjoy the benefits of the city that by rights belonged to them. While other men acquired estates and huge, beautiful homes along with gold and silver and all the other things associated with those who are truly blessed, the guardians seemed to be hired mercenaries, there for no other purpose than to guard the state (419a1-420a1). It was in response to Adeimantus’ concerns that Socrates reworked

550 Canevaro 2015: 7; see Koning 2010a: 144, n. 74.
Hesiodic proverbs lionizing the aggrandizement of wealth to reveal that excessive wealth was harmful both to the individual and society. Instead, it is the UAD that will guarantee a truly just society.

Now, with the Cave analogy – fashioned in significant part from the imagery of Hesiod’s hard-road-to-virtue gnome – Socrates reveals that scaling the difficult *anabasis* out of the Cave and ultimately beholding the form of the good (ἡ τοῦ ἁγάθου ἰδέα) is the guardian’s true reward. Below is only the nonsense (φλυαρίας, 515d2) of an unenlightened existence. With Plato’s use of the word *phluarias*, we are reminded, too, of Thrasymachus accusing Socrates in Book 1 of spouting “nonsense.”551 The discursive practices of sophists like Thrasymachus are in fact the “nonsense,” both symptom and cause of a world with values precisely in reverse of what they should be, just as the traditional reward of wealth to successful men described in the *Works and Days*’ vision of an ideally just world is the exact opposite of where one finds true reward: in the form of the good (ἡ τοῦ ἁγάθου ἰδέα). As Socrates explains, those who are to be the philosopher rulers, i.e., those having beheld the good (519c10), are the “truly wealthy, not in gold, but in that with which happiness makes one wealthy, a good and intelligent life” (521a2-3).

So dramatic is the contrast between the unenlightened life lived in the dark recesses of the Cave and the world of the good above, that Socrates stunningly reimagines and reformulates one of the most famous verses from Homer’s *Odyssey* – indeed, lines that he had previously announced in Book 3 should be “banned” (ἐξαλείφειν, 386c) – as a virtual credo for the newly enlightened philosopher. In essence, Plato has Socrates transform the formerly censored verse into an edifying proverb. After the arduous ascent to behold the form of the good, the philosopher will neither desire what passes for honors, commendations, and prizes bestowed by

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551 See my discussion in Chapter 2.6.
the philosopher’s former fellow prisoners on that man best able to discern the shadow images passing by, nor will he envy those who are so honored and who rule because of such honor (516c8-d4). No, the philosopher will have come to recognize the Cave’s nonsenses (φλυαρίας) for what they truly are. Rather than “hold such opinions and live again in such a way” (κεῖνα τε δοξάζειν καὶ ἐκείνως ζῆν), the philosopher would, instead, “identify with that line of Homer and prefer very much ‘to work as a serf, beside another, unpropertied man’” (τὸ τοῦ Ὀμήρου ἄν πεπονθέναι καὶ σφόδρα βούλεσθαι ἐπάρουρον ἐόντα θητευέμεν ἄλλῳ ἀνδρὶ παρ’ ἀκλήρῳ, 516d4-7).552 In Book 3, this underworld lament by the shade of Achilles was the first verse to receive Socrates’ reprobation as unfitting for the education of the future leaders of the state, the guardians who must not fear death, but instead, prefer it to slavery and defeat (αἰρήσεσθαι πρὸ ἠττῆς τέ καὶ δουλείας θάνατον, 386b5-6). In that context, Socrates quoted the full three lines of the ghost of Achilles’ despairing protest against Odysseus’ exhortation not to grieve in death (Resp. 386c5-7 = Od. 11.489-91):

βουλοίμην κ’ ἐπάρουρος ἐὼν θητευέμεν ἄλλῳ ἀνδρὶ παρ’ ἀκλήρῳ, ὃ μὴ βίοτος πολλὸς εἶπῃ
ἡ πάσιν κεκύρασεν καταφθιμένοις ἀνάσσειν

I would rather work as a serf beside another unpropertied man, to whom there is not much livelihood than to rule over all the perished dead.

To understand why a previously-banned quotation from Homer’s Achilles can, in a different context, constitute a proverb, we should recall Czech literary theorist Jan Mukařovský’s theory of the “‘theatricalization of an utterance’ by the use of a quote,” in which quoted speech takes on the features of a proverb and may be identifiable by listeners as such. What might not seem a proverb in one context can, within a separate context as part of another speaker’s

552 Cf. Homer, Od.11.489-90: βουλοίμην κ’ ἐπάρουρος ἐὼν θητευέμεν ἄλλῳ / ἀνδρὶ παρ’ ἀκλήρῳ.
performance (i.e., in her “theatricalization of the utterance”), become a proverb. As Mukařovský explains, “the effect of the context may give this quotation a meaning which it does not have of itself . . .” Socrates has effectively “theatricalized” the previously-banned utterance into a proverb that advances what Socrates calls “our work as the founders” (ἡμέτερον δή ἔργον . . . τῶν οἰκιστῶν) of the ideal polis: to “compel the best natures” (τὰς τε βελτίστας φύσεις ἀναγκάσαι) to “scale that ascent” (ἀναβήναι ἐκείνην τὴν ἀνάβασιν) and “behold the good” (ἰδεῖν τε τὸ ἀγαθόν, 519c7-d2). The shade of Achilles’ underworld lament has been transmuted into a motivating proverb for the philosopher rulers. The prizes and honors of the cave are nonsense (phluaria) when compared with the “form of the good” (ἡ τοῦ ἄγαθοῦ ἱδέα).

Moreover, the reintegration of the censored line into acceptable discourse amounts to a meta-commentary on the transformative potential of discursive practice when coupled with philosophy – a transformation which, I maintain, is the Republic’s primary theme. It is by access to the “form of the good” – an access reached, we should recall, by traversing a re-imagined version of Hesiod’s proverbial hard road to virtue – that instances of a formerly harmful discursive practice (e.g., Homeric verse that arguably fosters fear of death) can be re-framed as potentially edifying injunctions. Such is the metamorphic power to be attained by enlightened philosophers, those who are to able to make the hard journey out of the Cave, behold the good, and thereby qualify to govern the ideal polis. Previously discredited discourse has the potential to be renewed, restored, and ultimately “re-formed” by the “form of the good.” Everything else is just so much phluaria, so much nonsense.

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Chapter Five – *Republic* 8 – 10: Proverbs and the Discourse of the Ideal State

“I understand,” he said. “You mean the city whose establishment we have described resides in words.”

Plato, *Republic* 554

There, my blessing with thee,
And these few precepts in thy memory . . .

Polonius to Laertes – William Shakespeare, *Hamlet* 555

The closing books of the *Republic* evince an increasing self-reflexivity on the part of Plato as author. Indeed, they offer a meta-commentary of sorts on the communicative process and the task of conveying Plato’s philosophy via the medium of language – philosophy, which, it must be remembered, constituted a new literary genre – so that it comes to prevail in the discursive practice of the ideal state which is necessarily “established in language” (τῇ ἐν λόγοις κειµένῃ, 9.592a11). In this concluding chapter, I will offer a reading that looks to Plato’s use of proverbs and gnomic statements to frame what it means to communicate philosophy “in language” and the significant role that discursive practices which transcend strictly analytic vocabulary necessarily play in the ideal *polis* and the foundation of philosophy as a prevailing discourse.

5.1. Communicating the Incommunicable with Proverbs

Books 8 and 9 are famous for illustrating how political evil and injustice find their exact correlates in the individual soul. Towards the opening of Book 8, as Socrates prepares to expound the different forms of government (πολιτείαν), he asks Glaucon two questions designed


555 Act 1, sc. 3.
to prompt recognition that such polities correspond in fact to the different characters (εἴδη) of men. The second of these questions is both rhetorical and proverbial (544d6-e3):

Οἶσθ’ οὖν, ἂν δ’ ἔγω, ὃτι καὶ ἀνθρώπων εἴδη τοσαῦτα ἀνάγκη τρόπων εἶναι, δόσατε καὶ πολιτειῶν; ἡ οἶει έκ δρυός ποθεν ἡ έκ πέτρας τὰς πολιτείας γίγνεσθαι, άλλα οὐχί έκ τῶν ἥθων τῶν ἐν ταῖς πόλεισιν, ἀ ἄν ὡσπερ ἰέγανα τάλλα ἐφελκύσηται; Οὐδαμῶς ἐγωγ’, ἐφη, ἀλλοθεν ἢ ἐντεῦθεν.

“Do you know, then,” I said, “that there are necessarily just as many types of men as there are of governments? Or do you suppose that the types of government are born from oak or rock, but not from the characters of the individuals in the city-states, which, just like the falling of the scales’ weight, drag other things after them?”

“They certainly don’t come from anywhere else,” he replied, “but there.”

Adam likens the saying “not born from oak or rock” to a German proverb, “Es ist doch nicht aus der Luft gefallen.” While on the most basic interpretive level, Adam’s reading is correct in light of the passage’s seeming derivation from Odyssey 19.162ff, where Penelope asks Odysseus disguised as a beggar to tell her of his lineage (γένος) as he surely was “not born from any fabled oak or rock” (οὐ γὰρ ἀπὸ δρυός ἐσσι παλαιφάτου οὐδ’ ἀπὸ πέτρης, Od. 19.163), the phrase has deeper associations with language and communication.

M.L. West draws our attention to such connotations, conjured by a similar proverb in the proem of Hesiod’s Theogony: “But what do matters concerning an oak or rock have to do with me?” (ἄλλα τί μοι ταῦτα περὶ δρῶν ἢ περὶ πέτρην; 35). Among a number of possible interpretations of this line, West suggests, “Why do I relate what no one will believe?” – an interpretation (1) supported by a similar proverb in Macarius which West urges “does not look

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556 Adam 1980: ad loc.
557 Indeed, Socrates employs the metaphor in this same manner at Ap. 34d3-5: Ἐμοὶ, ὃ ἂριστε, εἰσὶν μὲν ποῦ τίνες καὶ οἰκεῖοι· καὶ γὰρ τόσο αὐτὸ τὸ τοῦ Ὁμήρου, οὐδ’ ἐγὼ ἀπὸ δρυός οὐδ’ ἀπὸ πέτρης’ πέρυκα ἄλλ’ εξ ἀνθρώπων . . .
558 West 1966: ad loc.
like a mere regurgitation of Hesiod and (2) whose essential meaning, i.e., ἀπίθανα λέγειν (“to say what is not believable”) accords with both Plato’s own use of the phrase and Homer’s. In the Phaedrus, Socrates uses it to berate Phaedrus for questioning the source of his story about an Egyptian king’s condemnation of writing as the ruin of memory. In Book 22 of the Iliad, Hector invokes the oak/rock adage when he despairs on the futility of attempting to speak reason to Achilles. In both of these texts, the central idea of the phrase concerns not the impossibility of being born from rock or oak but, rather, the question of whether communicating with such entities is ever possible.

Plato’s use of this enigmatic proverb foregrounds the conundrum of communicating to others that which seems, as West puts it, “unbelievable” (ἀπίθανον) – in other words, that which cannot be communicated effectively in way that is heard and understood, just as conversing with a rock or oak seems impossible. Yet this is essentially what Plato must do: compose a literary work that will represent the establishment in language (ἐν λόγοις καὶ ἐπὶ τῶν ἀδολεσχοῦντων καὶ μυθολογοῦντων παράδοξα) of the ideal polis – that is, a state where what is just for the individual is made identical to what is just for the state, thereby overcoming the challenge put by Glaucon and Adeimantus to Socrates in Book 2, to define justice as a good in and of itself. Even an average person would more likely listen to an oak or rock speak than hear and believe the apithana contained in Plato’s Republic. However, returning now to the proverb’s more superficial meaning as read by Adam, the characters of men do align with those of the different polities they comprise – they are not “born from oak or rock –

560 “For the people at that time, since they were not wise like you young men, were content simply to listen to an oak or rock, provided only that they spoke the truth” (τοῖς μὲν οὖν τῶτε, ἢ τε οὐκ ὁδῷ σοφοῖς ὄσπερ ὤμες οἱ νέοι, ὀπερᾷ δρυὸς καὶ πέτρας ἐκούειν ὡς εὐθείαις, εἰ μόνον ἀληθῆ λέγουν, Phaedr. 275b7-c1).
561 “There is no way from an oak or rock to chat with him” (οὐ μὲν πως νῦν ἔστιν ἀπὸ δρυὸς οὐδ’ ἀπὸ πέτρας/τῷ ὀρατίμενα, Il. 22.126-7).
and, so it follows, a polity’s justice will align with its individuals’ justice. Thus, the oak/rock proverb serves a dual purpose in the text: it affirms Socrates’ argument that polities correspond to their inhabitants’ characters, while also serving as a meta-commentary on the challenges in communicating that argument en logois.

Socrates reinforces the idea that polities are a function of their citizens’ characters a few Stephanus pages later when he describes the devolution of the different types of governance – i.e., from aristocracy to timocracy to oligarchy to democracy to tyranny. Here, he coins a proverb that will be frequently quoted beginning in antiquity and continuing to the present: “That which men honor, at any time, is what is practiced, while what is dishonored is neglected” (Ἀσκεῖται δὴ τὸ ἄει τιμῶμενον, ἀμελεῖται δὲ τὸ ἀτιμαζόμενον, 551a4-5). The American Christian clergyman and longtime peace activist, Reverend William Sloane Coffin, often quoted the modern version of the proverb in his sermons and speeches, attributing it to Plato: “What’s honored in a country will be cultivated there.”562 In so doing, Coffin followed in the footsteps of the Greek rhetoricians Themistius and Libanius who worked the proverb into numerous orations,563 and the Christian Neoplatonist, Synesius, who used a version of the maxim in his Aegyptus sive de providentia.564 Cicero, too, employed his own rendering in the opening of his Tusculan Disputations: “Public esteem nourishes the arts, and everyone is fired to pursuit by renown, but what is generally disdained is that which always lies neglected” (honos alit artes, omnesque incenduntur ad studia gloria, iacentque ea semper, quae apud quosque improbantur, 1.4.5-7). With the coinage of this proverb, thus, Plato achieved a “quotable” that approximates the enduring Nachleben of Hesiod’s eminently quotable “easy-road-to-vice, hard-road-to-virtue”

562 See, e.g., Merritt 2014.
563 See, e.g., Lib., Or. 18.156.11-13, Or. 62.15.15-17 (in Foerster 1977); Them., Or. 15.195d5-6, Or. 31.353.a5-6 (in Schenkl, Downey, and Norman 1971).
gnome. Synesius mentions the Seven Sages – sophoi known in large part for the wisdom they “performed” in their quotations from poetry that served as proverbs – in the same breath as he quotes the proverb and names its author, as if to include Plato among their number. Apithana or not, Plato’s articulations in support of the general idea that individual justice and societal justice are necessarily and inextricably intertwined result in a proverb that retains force and credibility to this day.

It is somewhat ironic that such gnomological success occurs in the context of a bleak discussion of how government devolves in successive stages from aristocracy to tyranny. Plato is unsparing in his grim portrait, in Adam’s words, of “the gradual descent of the perfect State and the perfect Man through successive phases of ever-growing degeneration down to the lowest depths of wickedness and crime.” Indeed, these last Books of the Republic present “an ideal history of evil, [where]as the previous books put before us an ideal history of the good.”

Socrates articulates the pervasive sense that all is ultimately for naught by means of a proverb. Even a polis constructed according to an ideal design will not endure indefinitely, “since for everything that comes into being, there is destruction” (ἐπεὶ γενοµένῳ παντὶ φθορά ἐστιν, 546a2). The brevity of the phrase, with its pronounced ethic dative expressing the general category of literally “everything that is,” coupled with the sweeping concept of “ceasing to be” (φθορά), marks this plainly as a gnomic pronouncement, worthy of proverbial status. Indeed, it articulates what came to be a universally recognized principle of ancient philosophy, to which Plato also alludes in the Timaeus and which Aristotle later acknowledged.

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566 Most 2003: 146.
Interestingly, Plato does not have Socrates take credit for the saying. Rather, this entire section of Book 8 is ascribed to the Muses – they relate the story of humankind’s downfall, as has been their assigned role throughout Greek literary tradition from Homer forward. Socrates explicitly invokes them in a mock-epic style: “Shall we, just like Homer, beseech the Muses to tell us ‘how’ civil war ‘first came to pass?’” (βούλει, ὠςπέρ Ὄμηρος, εὐχόμεθα ταῖς Μοῦσαις εἰπεῖν ἡμῖν ὅπως δὴ πρῶτον στάσις ἔμπεσε, 545d7-e1). Numerous invocations of this sort by other authors – Plato’s literary rivals, to be sure – come to mind, perhaps most notably Homer’s famous appeal at the turning point in the Iliad: “Tell me now, Muses, how fire first fell upon the ships of the Achaians?” (Ἔσπετε νῦν μοι Μοῦσαι . . . ὅπως δὴ πρῶτον πῦρ ἔμπεσε νησὶν Ἀχαίων, Il. 16.112-13). The concurrence of ὅπως πρῶτον ἔμπεσε in both texts is a dead giveaway: Plato is tagging Homer – and, more broadly, the epic tradition – with discursive responsibility for the language that communicates the downfall of humankind, including generalizing proverbs such as “for everything that comes into being, there is destruction.”

By contrast, Plato is attempting to birth a new discourse that moves beyond the older tradition auguring the inevitable ruin of humankind. If the world could only grasp the wisdom and full implication of Socrates’ new proverb “A society cultivates what it honors,” the destruction foretold by the Muses might be avoided. To achieve that, however, would require a wholly new discursive means by which to re-imagine both the world and humankind’s place in it. Plato can only approximate that new, thoroughly transformative discourse; he cannot bring it to pass forever. He and his writings are, too, a creation of the larger Greek literary tradition.

He can, however, bring that tradition to bear in illuminating the ills suffered by a society that does not strive for the ideal polis imagined in the Republic. For example, after describing via a complex exposition of metaphysics how human societies will invariably fail to recognize the
metaphysically perfect numerical cycle for bearing children, Plato has Socrates explain how those societies will then see their grooms and brides marry at inauspicious times (παρὰ καιρόν, 546d1), contrary to Hesiodic proverb in the *Works and Days*. This in turn will lead to the improper commingling of the different “metals” of the races as described by Hesiod and adopted by Plato in Book 3 – e.g., “iron mixed with silver and bronze with gold” (μιγέντος σιδηροῦ ἀργυρῷ καὶ χαλκοῦ χρυσῷ, 547a1). “Discordant inequality” (ἀνωμαλία ἀνάρμοστος, 547a2) will ultimately result, which, according to the Muses, “always begets war and hatred” (ἀεὶ τίκτει πόλεμον καὶ ἔχθραν, 547a4).

Socrates then deploys a devastating proverb, seemingly both a pained meditation on the human condition and a commentary on the pretense of Greek literary tradition to represent that condition. Socrates opines that with respect to the “war and hatred” (πόλεμον καὶ ἔχθραν, 547a4) which are the inevitable products of a degenerating society, “You must boast civil war to be ‘of this lineage’ whenever it comes to pass and on every occasion” (παῦτης τοι γενεῆς χρῆ φάναι εἶναι στάσιν, ὡς ἄρ ἡ γίγνηται ἀεὶ, 547a4-5). Socrates appears to be quoting part of an Homeric formula, the proud reply on the battlefield by both Glaucus and Aeneas to challenges, respectively, by Diomedes to Glaucus in *Iliad* 6 and by Achilles to Aeneas in *Iliad* 20: “I boast to be of this lineage and bloodline” (παῦτης τοι γενεῆς τε καὶ οἴματος εὕχομαι εἶναι, *Il.* 6.211, 20.241). As I explained in previous chapters, a quotation can serve as a proverb when used in another context. As paroemiologist Stephen Winick explains, drawing upon anthropologist Greg

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568 See *Op.* 694-705.

569 That Socrates’ choice of words amounts in fact to a reference to *Iliad* 6.211 and/or 20.241 is a point upon which the *Republic*’s commentators and translators are generally – if not unanimously – agreed. See, e.g., Adam 1980 ad loc., who translates the sentence in a proverb-like manner as “Such, as we must say, is the pedigree of Sedition, wheresoever she arises”; Jowett and Campbell 1894, Shorey 1982, Grube and Reeve 1992: ad loc. See also *Grg.* 449a7-8 (ὁ γε εὔχομαι εἶναι, ὡς ὢρη Ομηρος), which Dodd 1959: ad loc., describes as “the stock Homeric formula,” citing *Iliad* 6.211. So too does the scholiast trace the origin of the statement in the *Gorgias* to both *Iliad* 6.211 and 20.241.
Urban’s idea of “entextualization,” “The simplest method of creating a proverbial utterance is what Urban (1996) calls ‘entextualization,’ the quoting of a previously-heard utterance in a new context . . .”570 Relevant here, too, is Winick’s description of a proverb as “more a quality of language activity than an atomistic item, more verb than noun” which, it follows, means that “to speak or write proverbially, ‘to proverb,’ is to use certain strategies of intertextual reference in order to achieve a rhetorical end.”571 If we follow Winick’s conception of how “proverbing” works, we can see that Socrates employs specific Homeric language (ταύτης τοι γενεής) that has strong associations for his listeners with the sorts of lineages and heritages that one can be proud of, indeed, something to boast about. But he employs that intertextual reference in order to conjoin it with the horror of civil war, thereby constructing a proverb that works by virtue of its irony, in stark juxtaposition with Homer’s original. In Socrates’ reformulation of the Homeric phrase, humankind has nothing to “boast” of. On the contrary, war and hatred are to be society’s inheritance, if the state is allowed to degenerate in the manner that Socrates describes in Book 8.

Moreover, this is the Muses’ own pronouncement, as Glaucon quickly affirms: “And rightly, too, indeed, we will say that they [the Muses] answer” (Καὶ ὅρθῳς . . . αὐτάς ἀποκρίνεσθαι φήσομεν), to which Socrates replies, “And necessarily so, since they are Muses” (Καὶ γὰρ, ἢν δ’ ἐγὼ, ἀνάγκη Μοῦσας γε οὖσας, 547a6-7). Socrates, channeling the Muses, essentially turns the Homeric and epic tradition back on itself. To even mouth the words ταύτης τοι γενεής is to summon not membership in a glorious heritage but rather kinship with

570 Winick 1998: 99. We should recall, too, Czech literary theorist Jan Mukařovský’s theory of the “‘theatricalization of an utterance’ by the use of a quote,” in which quoted speech takes on the features of a proverb and may be identifiable by listeners as such. What might not seem a proverb in one context can, within a separate context as part of another speaker’s performance (i.e., in her “theatricalization of the utterance”), become a proverb. Urban calls such a phenomenon “replication” which constitutes a marker of proverbiality. Sentences which were not initially proverbs become proverbs via replication in a different context, such as Dorothy’s “Toto, I’ve a feeling we’re not in Kansas anymore” from The Wizard of Oz (Winick 1998: 76-7; Urban 1996: 21-4, 37-8, 41-3).

“everything that comes into being, for which there is destruction.”\textsuperscript{572} It is of a piece with Tacitus’ later, pained *sententia* on the state of the Roman Republic under Tiberius: “as if *that* were a republic . . . (*quasi . . . illud res publica esset*, *Annals*, 4.19.3). Socrates employs the Muses to proclaim, “As if *your* lineage were something to boast about.”\textsuperscript{573} By invoking the Muses, Socrates marks the quotation as a wisdom statement, investing it with proverbial status.

Moreover, Socrates make clear that the reason a society descends into civil strife is “on account of neglecting the true Muse, of discourse and philosophy” (\textit{διὰ τὸ τῆς ἀληθινῆς Μούσης τῆς μετὰ λόγων τε καὶ φιλοσοφίας ἠμεληκέναι}, 548b8-c1). During his explanation later in Book 8 about how a polity devolves from oligarchy to democracy, Socrates describes how society is “just like an ailing body that needs but a slight tip of the scales from without to fall into sickness” (\textit{ἐσπερ σῶμα νοσῶδες μικρᾶς ῥοπῆς ἐξωθεὶν δεῖται προσλαβέσθαι πρὸς τὸ κάμνειν}, 556e3-4). This simile, so illustrative of the weak society debilitated with debased discourse, seemingly originates from a proverb that has been described as “the most beautiful line in Sophocles,”\textsuperscript{574} the Corinthian messenger’s summary (and somewhat philosophical) explanation to Oedipus of the death of the man whom Oedipus had falsely believed to be his father, Polybus: “A slight tilt of the balance is all it needs to lay an aged frame to rest” (\textit{Σμικρὰ παλαιὰ σῶματ’ εὐνάζει ροπῆ}).\textsuperscript{575} In Socrates’ reformulation of the Sophoclean adage, a polity’s successive decline from oligarchy to democracy corresponds to an already ailing man’s death, invariably occasioned by even a “small cause” (\textit{σμικρὰς προφάσεως}, 556e6). In addition, the scale metaphor hearkens back to a similar metaphor that Socrates used to end his previous oak/rock

\textsuperscript{572} *Resp*. 546a2.

\textsuperscript{573} One is reminded of Ronald Syme’s knowing observation on Tacitean *sententiae*: “Ever and again the pitiless diagnosis . . . condenses into an aphorism, acrid, intense and unanswerable” (Syme 1958: 417).

\textsuperscript{574} Dawe 1982: 194.

\textsuperscript{575} Soph., *OT*. 961 (trans. Dawe).
proverb, reinforcing his claim that polities conform to the characters of the people who comprise them: the different types of government are born “from the characters of the individuals in the city-states, which, just like the falling of the scales’ weight, drag other things after them” (ἐκ τῶν ἥθων τῶν ἐν ταῖς πόλεσιν, ἃ ἀν ὀσπερ ῥέψαντα, 544e1-2). Now the meta-commentary offered by the oak/rock proverb becomes even more significant: The challenges faced by anyone who attempts to articulate the ideal in words are especially difficult in a society where discourse itself has become corrupted and enfeebled, just like a sick body. The *logos* of a society in which true justice – i.e., justice pursued as an end in itself – cannot be envisioned and articulated, insofar as such a thing would be utterly *apithanos* and incommunicable to the men whose characters comprise that type of society, would be a sick and enfeebled *logos*, indeed.

And what is the *logos* of such a world? Socrates goes on to offer a chilling description of the descent of a *polis*, from oligarchy into democracy, with unrestrained license. He describes the *logos* of such a retrograde *polis* as the “false discourse of a charlatan braggart” (Ψευδεῖς δὴ καὶ ἀλαζόνες . . . λόγοι), who names reverence as folly (τὴν μὲν αἰδὸν ἠλιθιότητα ὀνομάζοντες) and deems prudence to be cowardice (σωφροσύνην δὲ ἀνανδρίαν καλούντες), by teaching that moderation and orderly expenditure are in fact boorishness and servility (μετριότητα δὲ καὶ κοσμίαν δαπάνην ὡς ἀγροικίαν καὶ ἀνελευθερίαν οὕσαν πείθοντες) while euphemistically calling violence, good education; lawlessness, freedom; wastefulness, magnificence; and shamelessness, courage (ὑποκοριζόμενοι, ὃβριν μὲν εὐπαιδευσίαν καλούντες, ἀναρχίαν δὲ ἐλευθερίαν, ἀσωτίαν δὲ μεγαλοπρέπειαν, ἀναίδειαν δὲ ἀνδρείαν, 560c2-561a1).

This is precisely the debased state of discourse described in Thucydides’ famous narrative of what amounted to a secondary theatre of operations between Athens and Sparta in the bloody Coreyan Revolution during the Peloponnesian War: the opposing sides were
perversely shifting (ἀντήλλαξαν) the customary value of words (τὴν εἰσωθυῖαν ἀξίωσιν τὸν ὄνομάτων) in order to suit the individual facts (ἐς τὰ ἔργα) of the situation as they deemed fit (τῇ δικαίωσει, 3.82.4). There, the combatants in deadly seriousness defined “reckless audacity” (τόλμα. . ἀλόγιστος) as “loyal partisan courage” (ἀνδρεία φιλέταμος) and “careful hesitance” (μέλλησις. . προμηθῆς) as “thinly veiled cowardice” (δειλία εὐπρεπῆς, 3.82.4). As Jonathan Price emphasizes, we can see in Thucydides’ Corcyrean stasis narrative how linguistic change necessarily attends civil strife via a phenomenon that Price aptly calls “the transvaluation of words”:

There is a general breakdown in communication. Two or more contending groups, who in the past had shared language, religious beliefs and institutions, moral systems, and social and political institutions, not only stop sharing all those elements of mutual identity and purpose but also lose the ability to communicate effectively once those bases for mutuality disappear. Words, aside from failing as a vehicle for mutual understanding, become another violent and especially treacherous weapon in the arsenals of contending factions. . . . A speech will not be listened to receptively or openly and thus will be misunderstood, and conversely the one who gives a speech will not be able to find the right words to persuade his hearers since he uses words like weapons.577

So, too, do we learn from Socrates’ own, more general sketch of a state’s devolution from aristocracy all the way down, ultimately to tyranny, just how closely political and civic decay is accompanied by discursive decay, with exactly the same sort of transvaluation in terminology as Price describes.

5.2. The Discourse of the Ideal State

Discourse and societal health (or infirmity) are thus integrally related. The dialogue’s own version of a Corcyrean-stasis state of discursive decline, coupled with the preceding “scale” proverbs about the ease with which ill people perish and the difficulty of articulating the ideal

576 See Gomme and Dover 1970: ad loc., who cite and explain Dionysios’ paraphrase of τῇ δικαίωσει: “ἀλλως ἢξιον αὐτῷ καλέων; they ‘claimed the right’ to impose new interpretations on old words.”

\textit{polis} to people whose ailing characters and discourse weigh down and oppress the state, vividly demonstrates the high stakes in the clash of competing discourses – a battle, which as the events in Corcyra reveal, can have deadly consequences. What is ultimately needed in any society that aspires to a healthy condition are “fine practices and discourses that hold true, which are the best sentinels and guardians of the thoughts of those beloved to the gods” (ἐπιτηδευμάτων καλὸν καὶ λόγων ἄληθῶν, οἷς ἄριστοι φρουροὶ τε καὶ φύλακες ἐν ἀνδρῶν θεοφύλῶν εἰσὶ διανοίᾳς, 560b8-10). The creation of such “discourses” is, I maintain, a chief aim of Plato’s \textit{Republic}.

Blocking the path to this preferred language, however, is the presently corrupted discourse. Socrates makes this clear when he describes how a tyrant brutally seizes power on account of a democracy’s excessive liberty and then must acquire an armed bodyguard of more and more trustworthy men (πλειόνων καὶ πιστοτέρων δορυφόρων δεήσεται), to protect him – men whom Socrates reviles as “drones, an alien and motley gang of mercenaries” (Κηφῆνας. . . ἥνικούς τε καὶ παντοδαπούς, 567d12-e1) and “freed slaves (δούλους ἄφελμος, 567e5). Socrates sarcastically derides this “blessed tyrant business” (µακάριον. . . τυράννου χρήμα) – a business in which men such as the tyrant’s bodyguards are considered “trusted friends and associates” (τοιούτως φίλους τε καὶ πιστοῖς) – indeed the most trustworthy of all (πιστότατοι) – as opposed to the tyrant’s former supporters whom the tyrant had to destroy in order to seize power (τοὺς προτέρους ἑκείνους ἀπολέσας, 567e8-568a2).

Most problematic of all is the discourse of a society that acknowledges such developments as normal, even beneficial, as when such men are deemed \textit{pistoi}. According to Socrates, no less a figure than the tragedian Euripides is partly to blame, given a proverb that Socrates attributes to Euripides. Socrates explains why the blame should be laid on Euripides – and by extension, on tragedy in general – after Adeimantus acknowledges that a tyrant is
compelled to rely on mercenaries and freed slaves for his support, since he has destroyed all of his former allies (568a4-b1):

Ἀλλὰ μὴν, ἐφη, τοιούτοις γε χρήται.
Καὶ θαυμάζουσι δή, εἴπον, οὗτοι οἱ ἐταίροι αὐτὸν καὶ σῶνεισιν οἱ νέοι πολίται,
οἱ δ' ἐπιεικεῖς μισοῦσι τε καὶ φεύγουσι;
Τί δ' οὐ μέλλουσιν;
Οὐκ ἐτός, ἢν δ' ἐγώ, ἢ τε τραγῳδία ὅλος σοφὸν δοκεῖ εἶναι καὶ ὁ Εὐριπίδης
dιαφέρον ἐν αὐτῇ.
Τί δή;
Ὅτι καὶ τοῦτο πυκνῆς διανοίας ἔχομενον ἐφθέγξατο, ὡς ἃρα “σοφοὶ τύραννοι”
eἰς “τῶν σοφῶν συνουσία.”

“But of course,” he said, “he would make use of just such men.”
“And these companions,” I said, “admiре him, and his associates are the new citizens, whereas the upstanding sort detest and shun him.”
“Why would they not?”
“It’s no wonder then,” I said, “that tragedy in general is considered wise and Euripides above all the rest.”
“Why’s that?”
“Because he was the author of this saying of pregnant thought, “Wise are tyrants by converse with the wise.”

The line σοφοὶ τύραννοι τῶν σοφῶν συνουσία was ascribed by the scholiasts both to an unknown play by Euripides and to Sophocles’ lost tragedy, Ajax Locrus. The spurious Platonic dialogue Theages also references the verse. The scholiast on Aristophanes’ Thesmophoriazusae believes that either it was the case that both Sophocles and Euripides wrote the same line independently or that the attribution to Euripides is a mistake due to Aristophanes misleading others, such as Antisthenes. In short, no less than fourteen authorities in antiquity quoted the line, a fact that demonstrates its onetime prominence. That the line constitutes a proverb no doubt helps explain the frequency of citation: the parallelism of the axiological and

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578 Greene 1938: ad loc.; Sophocles frag., 14.1 Radt.
579 Greene 1938: ad loc.
general terminology (σοφοὶ . . . σοφῶν) coupled with homioptoton (σοφοὶ τύραννοι) and a suppressed copula in a generalizing statement mark the phrase as proverbial. Attributing the line to Euripides is also understandable in light of the playwright’s pronounced reputation in antiquity for using gnômai and proverbs in his tragedies. Indeed, Quintilian called Euripides sententiis densus, and it was to the works of Euripides that Aristotle turned in citing examples of gnômai and proverbs for his Rhetoric.\(^{582}\)

The upshot of Plato’s use of the proverb here seems clear: Euripides – a purported sophos in his own right – is to be condemned for having coined a memorable but morally bankrupt saying that conjoins tyrants with wisdom and wise men. As Adam remarks in his commentary, “None but a σοφός could have written σοφοὶ τύραννοι τῶν σοφῶν συνουσία.”\(^{583}\) Socrates’ apparently sarcastic remark that it’s not surprising people think that tragedy is “wise” and that Euripides is the best of the tragedians would seem to confirm Adam’s view. We are reminded, too, of Socrates taking aim at a similar proverb in Book 6 about wise men going to the doors of the rich (τοὺς σοφοὺς ἐπὶ τὰς τῶν πλουσίων θύρας ἰέναι).\(^{584}\) Indeed, Adam asserts that this is what the poet “really meant . . . but Plato maliciously twists the words into compliment to tyrants and their rabble rout . . .”\(^{585}\) So, too, do G.M.A. Grube and C.D.C. Reeve maintain that “Plato twists [Euripides’] words to mean that the drones and slaves, who are the tyrant’s last resort, must be deemed wise, since they associate with him.”\(^{586}\) Moreover, Adam believes that Sophocles was in fact the author of the suspect line and that the “reduplication of the cant Euripidean σοφός is responsible for a kind of error [i.e., in the attribution of authorship] which

\(^{582}\) Arist. Rhet. 2.21; Quint. Inst. 10.1.68; See generally Most 2003.
\(^{583}\) Adam 1980: ad loc.
\(^{584}\) 489b7-8. See my discussion in Chapter 4.7.1.
\(^{585}\) Adam 1980: ad loc.
\(^{586}\) Grube and Reeve 1992: ad loc.
was easier in antiquity than it would be now.” If nothing else, the prevalence of citation of the proverbial verse and the amount of attention the line received in antiquity remove any doubt as to why Plato would fasten upon it, if he were at all concerned about the influence of proverbs on the broader public and society.

5.2.1. The Ethical Reception of Legomena

There is a larger problem here, irrespective of the verse’s source. Is Socrates guilty of simplistic, even faulty, hermeneutics in his condemnation of the line and Euripides – not to mention the rest of the tragedians – along with it? Moreover, are we to believe that Plato himself actually interpreted Euripides to mean by the line that the sort of men a tyrant conscripts as his bodyguards are in fact “wise” men – the same men whom he portrays Socrates deriding as “drones” and “mercenary slaves”? Here is Socrates’ and Adeimantus’ exchange on Euripides’ meaning and its ramifications (567b1-c1):

...καὶ ἔλεγε δήλον ὅτι τούτους ἐίναι τοὺς σοφοὺς οῖς σύνεστιν.
Καὶ ὡς ἰσόθεον γ', ἔφη, τὴν τυραννίδα ἐγκωμίαζει, καὶ ἔτερα πολλά, καὶ ὁτὸς καὶ ὁ ἄλλοι ποιηταί.
Τοιγάρτοι, ἔφη, ἄτε σοφοὶ ὄντες οἱ τῆς τραγῳδίας ποιηταί συγγιγνώσκουσιν ἡμῖν τε καὶ ἐκείνους ὄσοι ἡμῶν ἐγγὺς πολιτεύονται, ὅτι αὐτοὺς εἰς τὴν πολιτείαν οὐ παραδεξόμεθα ἀτε τυραννίδος ὑμνητάς.
Οἶμαι ἔγωγ', ἔφη, συγγιγνώσκουσιν ὅσοιπέρ γε αὐτῶν κομψοί.

“. . . and he clearly meant that those men are wise with whom [the tyrant] associates.”

“Yes, both he and the other poets,” he said, “extol the tyrant’s power as godlike and they praise it many other ways.”

“Well then,” I said, “since these poets of tragedy are wise, they will forgive us, along with however many people there are who practice politics like us, for the fact that we will not admit them into our polity, since they are lauders of tyranny.”

“Indeed, I think,” he said, “that however many of them are subtly minded will forgive us.”

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587 Adam 1980: ad loc.
Before condemning Socrates (and by extension, arguably Plato himself) for naïve hermeneutics, we should first recall Adeimantus’ concerns in Book 2 about how the poets are cited as authorities for all manner of claims and positions, many of which are fundamentally at odds with the non-instrumental definition of justice that the Republic’s interlocutors press Socrates to articulate and which is to serve as the basis for the ideal state.\textsuperscript{588} Moreover, Adeimantus demonstrates how certain lines of poetry can even be cited for the precise opposite of their original meaning, as derived from internal context. For example, Adeimantus distorts Hesiod’s famous easy-road-to-vice, hard-road-to-virtue proverb to show why people choose vice over virtue: it’s the easier of the two roads, and they cite Hesiod precisely in support of their immoral acts.\textsuperscript{589}

In other words, Plato’s text evinces a greater concern about the ethical reception of citations from poetry (many of which are proverbs) than about what an arguably more sophisticated hermeneutics would interpret a cited verse to mean. The two may be very different. It would be a mistake to limit our understanding of the meaning of a verse cited in Plato’s text solely to the situation of that particular poetic saying within its original location. Turning back to Euripides’ “wise-are-the-tyrants” proverb, it would be too easy, for example, to look, to a similar line from Euripides Trojan Women, where Hecuba laments Hektor’s death and the fact that her son will never enjoy “youth and wedlock and tyrannical power” (ὥβης τυχών γάμων τε καὶ τῆς ἵσοθέου τυραννίδος, 1168-9) and then claim that the meaning of this verse is utterly divorced from Socrates’ charge against Euripides. We must instead, as Halliwell convincingly argues, “consider Plato’s citations in relation to a double model of meaning as, on the one hand, grounded in internal context, and, on the other, modified by a further interpretive act of

\textsuperscript{588} See, e.g., Resp. 364c5-6, 365a4-366b2.
\textsuperscript{589} Resp. 364c5-d2 quoting Op. 287-92.
application or appropriation.”

To accuse Plato of anti-contextualism is to ignore what for Plato is the more relevant standard of interpretation: Plato is not so much disregarding the internal context of narrative voice and situation as he is giving priority to, in Halliwell’s words, “the external context of ethical reception and influence.” The widespread Greek practice of citing poets reveals, in Halliwell’s words, “a mentality which penetrates as far as the deepest ethical convictions both of individuals and the culture as a whole.” We cannot imagine that those citations ever served “a single invariable function” but were necessarily intertwined with those ethical convictions, thereby “generating, exemplifying, and corroborating them in various patterns . . .”

Glaucon had lamented, earlier in the dialogue, that in Athens at that time, “every man believes, and believes truly, that injustice is much more profitable for him personally than justice” (λυσιτελεῖν γὰρ δὴ οἴεται πᾶς ἀνήρ πολὺ μᾶλλον ἰδίᾳ τὴν ἀδικίαν τῆς δικαιοσύνης, ἀληθῆ οἰόμενος, 360c8-d1). If this is the case, it is no wonder that people might think that those who associate with tyrants are “wise,” insofar as such men prove capable of using the levers of power to their own advantage. Indeed, the Republic is not the only dialogue that exhibits a concern that people might admire tyrants. In the Gorgias, for example, Polus and Callicles confirm Glaucon’s perception of popular opinion, professing, as they do, admiration for brutal tyrants and authoritarian rulers (Polus for Archelaus and Callicles for Xerxes and Darius), men who act however they please, safe in the knowledge that power renders irrelevant considerations of what is just. Polus considers such men to be “happy” (εὐδαιμόν, 470d). When Socrates

590 Halliwell 2000: 100-01.
591 Halliwell 2000: 112.
592 Halliwell 2000: 100.
593 Gorg. 471c6-d2, 483d2-7. Here I cannot help but be reminded of Alger Hiss’s admiring comment on the Moscow show trials, “Joe Stalin certainly plays for keeps” (Kempton 1955: 37). The infatuation with power and brute force
disputes this, Polus responds with a sarcastic tirade about how according to Socrates’ logic, Archelaus must be the most wretched of men (ἄθλιώτατος) rather than the happiest (εὐδαιμονέστατος), given the multitude of crimes he committed in seizing absolute rule over Macedonia, and that Athenians “would prefer to be any other Macedonia than Archelaus” (δέξατ’ ἂν ἄλλος ὡστισοῦν Μακεδόνων γενέσθαι μᾶλλον ἢ Ἀρχέλαος, 471c6-d2).

The upshot seems clear: tyrants and their friends and associates are the wise ones, the rest are dupes and rubes. This notion of “justice,” manifest in both a society’s rules and its prevailing discursive practices, is precisely that described by the Athenians in Thucydides’ Melian Dialogue: “What is just is arrived at in human discourse when the necessity on both sides is equal, and the powerful exact what they can and the weak have to comply” (δίκαια μὲν ἐν τῷ ἀνθρωπεῖῳ λόγῳ ἀπὸ τῆς ἱσης ἀνάγκης κρίνεται, δυνατὰ δὲ οἱ προέχοντες πράσσουσι καὶ οἱ ἀσθενεῖς ξυγχωροῦσιν, 5.89).594

To the extent the proverb attributed to Euripides (i.e., σοφοὶ τύραννοί τῶν σοφῶν συνοισίᾳ) adds further rhetorical heft and poetic authority to such a conception of “justice” – irrespective of whether the particular dramatic context in which the phrase appears even supports that conception – the proverb and its purported coiner become appropriate targets for one whose aim is discursive reform. To accuse Plato of hermeneutical naiveté is to adopt a decidedly one-dimensional approach to literary criticism – one that looks solely to authorial intent and textual context to the exclusion of all else, overlooking the myriad ways in which language can take on multiple meanings and be subject to radically divergent interpretations, all depending on the audience and the context.

disclosed by such a comment would seem to contradict whatever egalitarian aspirations an adherent of Marxist ideology might claim.

594 Trans. Hornblower (with modification).
It is ironic that Plato, an author who is so often “scripted as a villain by theorists of postmodernism” (to borrow Nightingale’s phrase) had an approach to hermeneutics that expands well beyond the bounds of the relatively circumscribed school of literary interpretation that had its origins in American New Criticism. As Halliwell comments,

If American New Criticism is often singled out as stringently and programmatically contextualist, it needs stressing here that there is a much broader set of contextualist instincts which have become common to almost all literary critics. But this is not, one must insist, because of any timelessly or naturally self-evident quality which recommends those instincts, but because (in part) of the combined and cumulative effect, over two centuries or more, of cultural forces which have increasingly resisted a directly moral, religious, or didactic function for the category of literature, and have instead claimed for it a status which makes it imaginatively autonomous.

How language becomes quoted (or “mis”-quoted), used, reused, recycled, re-integrated and even transformed over successive iterations is of enormous interest and importance to Plato. Plato’s recognition of how particular phrases and sayings have a repercussive effect over time – “repercussing” and resounding in different ways, in new and different situations – marks him as a sensitive literary critic, one who also understands the moral and ethical dimensions of the use and reuse of language with its varying repercussions in different contexts. By first identifying just how multi-dimensional and complex Plato’s critical citation and singling out of certain extracts from the Greek literary corpus (including proverbs) is, we can begin to comprehend better the curious juxtaposition of the words sophoi and kompoi, which occurs only here in Socrates’ condemnation of the Euripidean proverb and in Plato’s Gorgias, as we shall see in a moment.

596 Halliwell 2000: 111.
597 While Plato’s Statesman also juxtaposes κοµψός with σοφός, it is only the former that denotes a plural group of men, while the latter refers to a statement that the κοµσοί believe to be “something profound” (τι σοφόν, 284e11-285a2). See Blank 1991: 24-5, for a good overview of the dialogues in which Plato uses κοµσός.
5.2.2. *Kompsoi* and the “Language Game”

I want to argue that the *kompsoi* – as that term is used by Plato vis-à-vis the *sophoi* – are those who understand what I described earlier as “the language game,” in the terminology of the philosopher Richard Rorty. The way that human beings form their beliefs about, and corresponding behavior in, the world around them, is a function of a language game, of competing “vocabularies” (e.g., “the vocabulary of ancient Athenian politics versus Jefferson’s . . .”). Rorty makes the significant point that those vocabularies that prevail in the language game create, in turn, “new forms of nonlinguistic behavior, for example, the adoption of . . . new social institutions.”

To be sure, the language game itself has no definitive terminus. There will always arise new vocabularies in new instantiations of the language game that ultimately come to outpace other, pre-established vocabularies. There is no final, proverbial “last word” on anything. Moreover, Rorty’s postmodern vision of how language operates is strikingly consonant with the marked agonistic tradition of Greek literature. As I argued in the previous chapter, the aspiration to have the “last word” on a subject, thereby rendering worthless all previous and future literary efforts, was widely recognized as futile. Mark Griffith explains that a principal feature of the Greek literary *agon* was “to leave loopholes for possible exceptions, pegs on which to hang possible additions, open ends to accommodate codas or modifications desired by particular audiences in the light of other existing songs or cult traditions.” My claim is that the two times that Plato uses the term *kompsoi* expressly juxtaposed with *sophos* (i.e., in the *Republic* and *Gorgias*), he is referring to someone who both understands and exploits this dynamic.

598 Rorty 1992: 5. See my discussion in Chapters 1.1 and 3.2.
600 Griffith 1990: 195. See Nagy 1992 for an opposing view with respect to Hesiod’s *Theogony*. 
Under this analysis, writers who are *kompsoi* will come to *sugignóskein* (“agree with,” “have a fellow feeling with,” *LSJ*, s.v. I, IV) the reason that they and their writings – specifically, those writings that are presently at odds with the customs and social institutions that Socrates and his companions seek to inculcate in the ideal *polis* – are not going to be *paradekhênai* (“received,” “admitted”) into such a society (568b6-7). They recognize the contingency of competing vocabularies, operating within the culture’s larger language game and that such a game necessarily entails winners and losers. They understand that the best they can hope for is to create a linguistic basis for their audiences to think as they have intended them to think.

Socrates’ use of Euripides in the *Republic* to illustrate this dynamic is telling, since competing Euripidean proverbs within the context of the other *sophos-kompsoi* juxtaposition in the *Gorgias* also assume prominence, specifically, in the allegory of the water-carriers in Hades which has received much attention from classical scholars. In the *Gorgias*, Socrates faces a challenge similar to that posed by the Euripidean proverb in Book 8 (i.e., *σοφοὶ τύραννοι τῶν σοφῶν συνουσία*): his opponents, Polus and Callicles, admire tyrants and believe them to be the happiest of men. We encounter the *sophos-kompsoi* juxtaposition when Socrates attempts to refute Callicles’ claim that for a man to be happy and live correctly, he must allow his appetites to become as great as possible and then satisfy them by means of his courage and intelligence (δι’ ἀνδρείαν καὶ φρόνησιν, 492a1-2), something that a tyrant is uniquely equipped to accomplish. Socrates retorts by referencing a proverb, one that appears to be an oft-quoted (λέγονται) piece of wisdom reflecting an ascetic ideal of happiness: “So those who are in need of nothing are not rightly said to be happy” (Οὐκ ἄρα ὁρθῶς λέγονται οἱ μηδενῶς δεόμενοι εὐδαίμονες εἶναι,

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601 See, e.g., Linforth 1944; Blank 1991.
The phrase οἱ μηδενὸς δεόμενοι εὐδαίμονες is a lovely example of a non-oppositional proverb with an “equational” aspect (A=B), the effect of which is heightened by the alliterative assonance of the delta and mu combinations in the phrase’s principal words. We might translate Socrates’ proverb-wielding retort idiomatically as, “So, the saying that ‘Happy are those who need nothing’ isn’t true after all?”

This translation facilitates our understanding of Callicles’ deft reply: “No, for in that case, corpses and stones would be the happiest of all” (Οἱ λίθοι γὰρ ἄν οὖτω γε καὶ οἱ νεκροὶ εὐδαίμονέστατοι εἶν, 492e5-6). By a skillful deployment of rhyme in articulating the general categories of stones and corpses (λίθοι . . νεκροί), together with the use of another general category, “those who are happiest” (εὐδαίμονέστατοι), Callicles subverts Socrates’ proverbial wisdom with his own pithy legomenon. His new saying is the equivalent of John Maynard Keynes’ famous reformulation of any expression that turns upon the purported benefit of having a larger perspective and looking to the proverbial “long run:” “In the long run, we are all dead.” Callicles has cast Socrates squarely on the side of what is non-feeling, non-human. We are witness here to a mini-duel of proverb formation by the two men.

Now Socrates responds by quoting a gnomê from Euripides’ Polydias (frag. 638) (492e7-11):

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602 Dodds 1959: ad loc., describes how the sentiment contained in this saying can found in collected fragments of apothegms attributed to Socrates, which reflect a doctrine not peculiar to Socrates but one that runs from Democritus through Epicurus to Lucretius and from Socrates through Antisthenes to the Stoics, who in turn came to have influence on the Christian ideal of the saint.


604 Keynes 1923: 80.

605 Any argument that Callicles’ response does not amount to a stand-alone proverb in its own right would be misplaced. Many proverbs are recognizable only because they are responses to and/or modifications of previously existing proverbs. A striking example of this is a phrase attributed (perhaps erroneously) to Mahatma Gandhi, “And the whole world goes blind”, which can be recognized only in relation to – and as a moral condemnation of – the proverbial formulation of the lex talionis in Exodus 21: 24-5: “eye for eye, tooth for tooth . . .” See generally Fischer 1950: 77.
Ἀλλὰ μὲν δὴ καὶ ὡς γε σὺ λέγεις δεινὸς ὁ βίος. οὐ γὰρ τοι θαυμάζομαι ἂν εἰ Εὐριπίδης ἄληθῆ ἐν τοῖσδε λέγει, λέγον – τίς δ' οἴδεν, εἰ τὸ ζῆν μὲν ἐστὶ κατθανεῖν, τὸ κατθανεῖν δὲ ζῆν;

Well then life as you describe it is certainly a strange business. And I wouldn’t be surprised then, you know, if Euripides spoke the truth when he said, “Who knows, if to be alive in fact is to be dead, and to be dead is to be alive?”

The Euripidean gnome here is a splendid example of a chiastic proverb. The lines have rhythmic balance in the standard binary structure that is so common to proverbs, which becomes even more elegant with the addition of chiasmus: ABBA: ζῆν – κατθανεῖν – κατθανεῖν – ζῆν. The verse may well be Heraclitean or Orphic in origin, and Euripides said the same thing in the Phrixos (frag. 833).

Socrates’ citation of Euripides here is particularly important because earlier in the dialogue during his great rhēsis, Callicles quoted no less than four passages from Euripides’ Antiope to demonstrate how Socrates with his philosophizing is akin to the play’s character Amphion, lost in self-indulgent thought, whom his brother, Zethus – the archetypal exemplar of the “man of action” – summons into the real world of the polis. In other words, Callicles had used Euripides’ poetic authority to attempt to convince Socrates of just how atopos he is. Now Socrates quotes Euripides’ chiastic proverb about how life equals death, which, upon first examination, would appear to support Callicles’ claim that “stones and corpses” would be the

606 Russo 1983: 124-5, cites as a “prize specimen” of a chiastic proverb that quoted by Aristotle in his Rhetoric: οὐ δὲι . . . φιλεῖν ὡς μισήσοντας, ἄλλα μᾶλλον μισεῖν ὡς φιλήσοντας – “Don’t love as one who is going to hate, but hate as one who is going to love” (1395a26-7).

607 See, e.g., Russo 1983: 124: hina gar deos, entha kai aidôs – “where there’s fear, there is also shame.”

608 Linforth 1944: 295.

609 Gorg. 484e2-486a3. The lines that read “Each man shines in and eagerly pursues – allotting the greatest share of the day to it – that in which he discovers himself to be best of all” (λαμπρὸς τε ἐστιν ἐκαστὸς ἐν τούτῳ, καί ἐπὶ τούτῳ ἐπειληγεται νέμων τὸ πλέον ἡμέρας τούτῳ μέρος, ἵνα αὐτὸς αὐτῷ τυχάναι βέλτιστος ἄν, 484e2-7) were cited frequently in antiquity, a fact that speaks to the authority and influence of the passage, which arguably constitutes a proverb. See Dodds 1959: ad loc. Nightingale 1995: 69-87, provides an extensive analysis of how Plato uses the entire tragedy of Euripides’ Antiope as a subtext for the philosophical drama of the Gorgias.
happiest if one subscribes to what Callicles believes is the erroneous view represented by Socrates’ proverb that “Happiest are those who need nothing.”

Socrates, however, is not yet finished. First he segues directly from the Euripidean proverb to a supporting quotation by a “wise man” (sophos) (493a1-5):

καὶ ἡμεῖς τῷ ὄντι ἵσως τέθναμεν· ἤδη γὰρ τοῦ ἐγωγε καὶ ἡκουσα τὸν σοφῶν ὡς νῦν ἡμεῖς τέθναμεν καὶ τὸ μὲν σῶμα ἔστιν ἦμῖν σήμα, τῆς δὲ ψυχῆς τούτο ἐν ὧ ἐπὶ θυμίαι εἰς ἡγχάνει ὁν οἶον ἀναπέιθεσθαι καὶ μεταπίπτειν ἀνω κάτω . . .

And perhaps we are actually dead. For I once heard from one of the wise men how we are now dead and the body is our tomb, and the part of the soul in which desires are, happens to be the sort that can be swayed and shifts up and down . . .

The phrase τὸ μὲν σῶμα ἔστιν ἦμῖν σήμα is possibly a Pythagorean or Orphic formulation.610 The parallelism of the rhyming σῶμα—σήμα and brevity of the phrase mark it as proverbial. Socrates has apparently reinforced his citation of Euripides’ chiastic proverb with yet another proverb from the wisdom tradition of the sages (του . . . τῶν σοφῶν). Just as to be alive is in fact to be dead, so too is the body our tomb. However, as we shall see, the unnamed sophos’ elaboration of his enigmatic proverb contains the basis for overturning Callicles’ previous undermining of Socrates’ ascetic adage (i.e., “Happiest are they who need nothing”): the sophos characterizes the part of the soul where the desires reside as “the sort that can be swayed and shifts up and down” (ὁν οἶον ἀναπέιθεσθαι καὶ μεταπίπτειν ἀνω κάτω).

Now Socrates turns from his unnamed sophos to the famous allegory of the water carriers in Hades by quoting another nameless figure, this time a kompos (493a5-b7):

καὶ τοῦτο ἄρα τις μυθολογῶν κομψός άνήρ, ἵσως Σικελός τις ἢ Ἰταλικός, παράγον τῷ ὄνοματι διὰ τὸ πιθανόν τε καὶ πειστικόν ὄνομασε πίθων, τοὺς δὲ ἀνδρῶς ἀμφότερους, τῶν δ’ ἀνδρῶν τοῦτο τῆς ψυχῆς οὐ ὧ ἐπικαθύμαι εἰςί, τὸ ἀκόλαστον αὐτῶν καὶ οὐ στεγανόν, ὡς τετρημένος εἰς πίθως, διὰ τὴν ἐπιληπτικάς τοῦνταν δὴ οὕτως σοί, ὃ Καλλίκλεις, ἑνδείκνυται ὡς τὸν ἐν Ἅιδου

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610 Linforth 1944: 296.
And *this* [i.e., the part of the soul where the desires are located] a certain mythologizing, clever man, perhaps some Sicilian or Italian, by misleading with the name, on account of both its “persuasive” and “convincing” nature, deemed it a “jar,” and the “ignorant” the “uninitiated,” and that part of the soul of the ignorant where the desires are – unrestrained and unable to hold water – he likened to a perforated jar, because of its inability to be filled. Indeed, this man, Callicles, opposite to you, demonstrates how those in Hades – meaning “the unseen” – may well be the most miserable, and they bear water into the perforated jar from another such perforated sieve.\(^6\)

By dint of the *kompsos’* wordplay, Socrates regains the upper hand and preserves the force of his initial proverb, albeit it in a parable as opposed to a proverb, while at the same time demonstrating the bankruptcy of Callicles’ estimation of an orator’s power and offering a meta-commentary on how the “language game” is played. Let me explain. The *kompsos’* skillful wordplay lies in the fact that the phrase πιθανόν τε καὶ πειστικὸν does not strictly conform to the *sophos’* elaboration of his aphorism, namely, that the part of our soul where the emotions are located is “the sort that can be swayed and shifts up and down” (ὅν οἶον ἀναπείθεσθαι καὶ μεταπίπτειν ἄνω κάτω). On the contrary, taken in their most natural sense, the words πιθανόν τε καὶ πειστικὸν, which the *kompsos* uses to describe this same part of the soul, both mean “persuasive” as opposed to “credulous and suggestible” as numerous translators and

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\(^6\) It is possible that the reference to “some Italian or Sicilian” (Σικελός τις ἢ Ἰταλικός), coupled with the mention of the “uninitiated” (ἁμώητοι), is Plato’s means of drawing attention to the Pythagorean and/or Orphic origins of the myth, since the Pythagoreans came from Italy and there were Orphic “initiations.” (I am grateful to Andrea Nightingale for this observation.) However, contrary to Linforth 1944, I am reluctant to hazard a conjecture on any specific reference intended in Socrates’ description of the κομψὸς ἄνηρ as a Sicilian or Italian other than to note that it gives the account a greater hint of realism. Any good story ought to contain references to particular locations and details that render the account less than generic. If the reference happens to conjure notions in the audience’s mind of Pythagoreans, who came from Italy, or the fact that two of the dialogues main characters, Polus and Gorgias, are Sicilian, so much the better. The poet Joseph Brodsky’s take on overuse of this practice is instructive, as outlined in Brodsky’s famous apostrophic *Letter to Horace* 1995: 443: “It seems to me that you were all overdoing it a bit with the references; they often strike one as filler. Although euphonically of course they – the Greek ones especially – do marvels for the texture.”
commentators have rendered them. The latter meaning is obtained by taking \( \pi\theta\alpha\nu\nu \) in the passive sense and translating \( \pi\varepsilon\iota\sigma\tau\iota\kappa\omicron\nu \) as the equivalent of \( \pi\varepsilon\sigma\tau\omicron\nu \), which Dodds confesses he “is strongly tempted to write.”

As David Blank explains, the difference between the two meanings allows us to understand the two different descriptions of the soul that they represent as corresponding respectively to Socrates’ and Callicles’ view of the orator: whereas Callicles believes an orator to be “persuasive,” with \( \pi\theta\alpha\nu\nu \) taken in the active sense (together with \( \pi\varepsilon\iota\sigma\tau\iota\kappa\omicron\nu \)), Socrates sees him as easily “persuadable,” with \( \pi\theta\alpha\nu\nu \) taken in the passive sense – in other words, he is subject to the whim of the mob because he must say whatever pleases them.

Moreover, it is by “playing with the name” (\( \pi\alpha\rho\acute{a}\gamma\omicron\nu \tau\acute{o} \o\nu\omicron\mu\acute{a}t\acute{t} \)) of \( \pi\theta\alpha\nu\nu \) that the \textit{komp} so\textit{s} – in my interpretation, someone who understands the dynamics of Rorty’s language game – analogizes a leaky “jar” (\( \pi\iota\theta\omicron\zeta \)) to the appetitive part of the soul, which in turn serves as the basis for the allegory of the water carriers, the meaning of which is precisely the opposite (\( \tau\omicron\nu\omicron\alpha\nu\nu\tau\acute{t}i\omicron \)) of Callicles’ position. Of course, if rendered grammatically correct, the phrase \( \pi\theta\alpha\nu\nu \tau\epsilon \kappa\acute{a} \pi\varepsilon\iota\sigma\tau\iota\kappa\omicron\nu \), means “persuasive and convincing” and thereby undermines the \textit{soph} os’ view of the appetitive part of the soul as “the sort that can be swayed and shifts up and down” (\( \acute{o} \nu \acute{o}\omicron \\acute{a}\nu\alpha\acute{z}e\iota\theta\epsilon\omicron\sigma\theta\acute{a} \kappa\acute{a} \mu\acute{e}t\acute{a}p\acute{i}t\epsilon\omicron\nu \acute{o}\omega \kappa\acute{a}t\omega \)), a position which is essential to the formulation of the water carrier allegory. But it is the dual meaning of \( \pi\theta\alpha\nu\nu \) with its contrary active and passive senses and the proximity of \( \pi\varepsilon\iota\sigma\tau\iota\kappa\omicron\nu \) to \( \pi\varepsilon\sigma\tau\omicron\nu \) that allows us to see the skill of a \textit{komp} so\textit{s}, who is able, on the one hand, to exploit the ambiguity of \( \pi\theta\alpha\nu\nu \) to create the water carrier myth while on the other, highlighting the enormous difference between Socrates’

\textsuperscript{612} Dodds 1959: ad loc.
\textsuperscript{613} Dodds 1959: ad loc.
\textsuperscript{614} Blank 1991: 26-7.
and Callicles’ respective visions of the orator, all the while offering a meta-commentary on the language game. Indeed, one could go further and argue that the Janus-faced nature of πιθανός, with its active and passive meanings, is itself Plato’s linguistic representation of something that shifts to and fro (μεταπέπτειν ἄνω κάτω) depending on a skillful author’s deployment of the adjective. The kompsos understands how words can be manipulated because of their ambiguity and reconfigured in different contexts, thereby creating new “vocabularies” in Rorty’s sense of the term, that can underpin new ways of thinking and behavior. It may even result that words used in new and different contexts take on new meanings that are contrary to those meanings represented in their prior usage.

Turning back to the Republic and Socrates’ seeming blame of a Euripidean gnome (σοφοὶ τύραννοι εἰς τῶν σοφῶν συνουσία, 568b1) for the widespread belief that one acts wisely in becoming a willing associate of a tyrant, we can better understand Plato’s larger meaning, notwithstanding what might initially appear to be hermeneutical naiveté. Euripides is a member of those who qualify as sophoi, the tragedians (σοφοὶ ὄντες οἱ τῆς τραγῳδίας ποιηταί, 568b5-6). Indeed, Euripides is even described as the best of the tragedians (ὁ Ἐὐριπίδης διαφέρων ἐν αὐτῇ, 568a9), a compliment that arguably is attributable to his reputation as sententiis densus. Such sophoi as Euripides, writers who by their mastery of language succeed in authoring numerous legomena that come to have an impact on how people think and behave, will surely understand

615 I am grateful to Kathryn Morgan for this observation.

616 I see as a potential over-simplification Blank’s characterization of Plato’s view of the kompsos as usually “derogatory” (Blank 1991: 24). While Plato may well object to what Blank describes as a kompsos’ “tricky brand of philosophizing, opposed to truth,” Plato’s use of the term in the contexts I describe seems to reveal something more nuanced than a univocal condemnation. Moreover, the conception of “truth” that underlies Blank’s phrase “opposed to truth” would seem to be at odds both with the thinking of philosophers of science such as Thomas Kuhn and Mary Hesse who have argued that scientific revolutions are “metaphoric redescriptions” of nature, not “insights into the intrinsic nature of nature” and with Nietzsche’s definition of “truth” as “a mobile army of metaphors.” Such ways of conceiving “truth” are critical to Rorty’s notion of the language game and its competing vocabularies, over which I maintain Plato’s kompsos enjoys a knowing command. See Rorty 1989: 16-17.
that the intended meanings of their *legomena* may well alter and metamorphose in changing circumstances and new, different contexts, if such men are also *kompsoi* – that is, those who understand the contingency of language and who are themselves superbly skilled in formulating their own competing vocabularies, replete with eminently quotable proverbs and *gnômai*, so as to participate fully in their culture’s larger language game.\(^{617}\)

We can now better understand why Socrates uses the participial form of κομψεύω, i.e., κομψευσάμενος, to describe in Book 6 the man who coined the objectionable proverb about how “wise men go to the doors of the rich” (τοὺς σοφοὺς ἐπὶ τὰς τῶν πλουσίων θύρας ἱέναι, 489b7-8). Such men are Plato’s rivals, able competitors in the language game, the ultimate aim of which is to create new vocabularies that win the hearts and minds of the Athenian public. If Plato’s utopian aspirations are to be realized, the new “vocabulary” that he coins, the new genre of philosophy, must prevail over the vocabularies of his *kompsoi* competitors.

Throughout much of Plato’s corpus we find numerous instances of what Kathryn Morgan describes as “the obtrusive layering of multiple sources.”\(^{618}\) In the *Gorgias*’ allegory of the water carriers, for example, we start with a proverb from Euripides about the possible inversion of life and death, quoted also in order to match Callicles’ earlier appeal to Euripides’ *Antiope*, then move on to the *legomenon* of a “wise man” (σοφός) which parallels the Euripidean gnome, and finally to the speculations of a *kompos* that seem to be allegorical and are based on a kind of wordplay. Morgan is understandably skeptical of whether these “three approaches . . . necessarily form part of a cohesive whole,” particularly since Socrates himself signals the

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617 One should resist the temptation to equate the *kompsoi* with the *sophists*, although there are no doubt overlaps between the two categories. Plato’s list of sophists, culled from the dialogues, is relatively short: Protagoras, Gorgias, Prodicus, Hippias, Euthydemus and Dionysodorus, and Micus. Nowhere is Euripides held out as a potential candidate for inclusion in their ranks. Moreover, as numerous scholars such as Hakan Tell have argued in recent years, the “workings of language” were not the “exclusive interest” of the sophists, nor had the subject “gone unexplored by earlier practitioners of wisdom” (Tell 2011: 10). See also Griffith 1990: 187; Kerferd 1981: 71.

618 Morgan: forthcoming.
oddness of the material by calling it atopa. I propose, however, that we view such “obtrusive layering” as Plato’s illustration of various and varied sayings, phrases, verbal formulations – a virtual flotsam and jetsam of linguistic material – all vying for prominence in the larger language game, represented in miniature within the Platonic dialogue. Instructive here is Adi Ophir’s observation that

Platonic dialogue brings to the surface of discourse what is so often forbidden – perhaps never again allowed – to appear there: the struggle to establish a new order within discourse, a strife for every discursive practice, the power invested in the process of establishing and maintaining discourse as a set of rules, differentiations and exclusions.

Indeed, the final section of Book 8 of the Republic contains varied citations from multiple sources. For example, as Socrates and his interlocutors explore how a democracy devolves into a tyranny, there occurs what appears to be an almost free association of phrases within less than two Stephanus pages, as the men somewhat randomly cycle through various legomena that concern democratic ideology. First we have a “saying” (ῥῆμα) that amounts to a political truism, one that Glaucon and Adeimantus claim to have heard everywhere (Λέγεται γάρ δή . . . καὶ πολὺ τοῦτο τὸ ρῆμα, 562c3): “In a [democracy] alone is it worthwhile for a man, who is free by nature, to live” (ἐν μόνῃ ταύτῃ ἄξιον οἰκεῖν ὀστίς φύσει ἐλεύθερος, 562c1-2). Then Socrates employs metaphor in describing how the “democratic city, thirsting for [the wine of] liberty obtains evil cupbearers and becomes intoxicated on too much of that unmixed [wine]” (δημοκρατουμένη πόλις ἐλευθερίας διψήσασα κακῶν οἰνοχών προστατοῦντων τύχῃ, καὶ πορρωτέρω τοῦ δέοντος ἀκράτου αὐτῆς μεθυσθῇ, 562c8-d2), an image that will have a lasting

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619 Morgan: forthcoming; See Grg. 493c3-4: ταῦτ’ ἐπιεικὸς μὲν ἐστὶν ὑπὸ τι ἄτοπα . . .

Nachleben among later authors, historians, and social critics. This adage then metamorphoses into a variation on a prophecy from Hesiod about the ruin of the Iron Race, where instead of Hesiod’s foreshadowing of fathers no longer resembling their sons and sons their fathers, Socrates claims that a democracy is actually the sort of regime where “a father is accustomed to become like his son and fears his sons, and the son becomes like the father and dishonors and does not revere his parents, in order that he should become a free man” (πατέρα μὲν ἐδίζεσθαι παιδὶ ὀμοιόν γίγνεσθαι καὶ φοβεῖσθαι τοὺς υἱὲς, ὕν δὲ πατρὶ, καὶ μὴτε αἰσχύνεσθαι μήτε δεδιέναι τοὺς γονέας, ἵνα δὴ ἐλεύθερος ἦ, 562e7-9). This adage-in-reverse of Hesiod’s prophecy then moves by way of a saying attributed to Aeschylus—“Shall we not say whatever rises to our lips” (Οὐκοῦν ἐροῦμεν ὃτι νῦν ἥλθ’ ἐπὶ στόμα; 563c1-2)—to a self-described “proverb” (κατὰ τὴν παρομίαν): “dogs literally become like their mistresses” (ἀτεχνῶς γὰρ αἱ τε κύνες . . . οἰαίπερ αἱ δέσποινα γίγνονται, 563c6). Plato is no doubt demonstrating the discursive manifestations of poikilia, with its connotation of neverending variety and unrestraint, that is a hallmark of democratic forms of government in his estimation. “Shall we not say whatever rises to our lips,” indeed. And yet, additional purchase is gained by recognizing that this virtual free fall of phrases further illuminates the dynamic of competing vocabularies in play for a larger hold on the public imagination. It is a mark of Plato’s writerly genius that his illustration of this dynamic achieves almost slapstick proportions. It is as if the interlocutors are introducing the

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622 Op. 182: οὐδὲ πατὴρ παιδέσθαι ὁμοίος οὐδὲ τι παιὰ
dec.

623 TrGF 351: (ὅ τι) νῦν ἥλθ’ ἐπὶ στόμα (trans. Shorey with modification).

624 Adam 1980: ad loc., interestingly, notes how a traveller in modern Greece will be reminded of “the ‘democratic dogs’ of Peloponnesian villages.” He explains that “the proverb was οἰαίπερ ἡ δέσποινα, τοία χί κύων (Schol.), and meant ὃτι ὅποια δέσποινα, τοὐτὴ καὶ ἡ θεραπανίς ‘like mistress, like maid.’ Plato takes κύων literally: hence ἀτεχνῶς” (citation omitted).
various legomena one after another in the comedic manner of “Hey, have you heard the old saying about so and so?”

Indeed, as Book 8 closes, Socrates uses one of the most familiar of all proverbs, still in currency to this day, in describing how the need to support the tyrant’s bodyguard of slaves will impoverish a city: “Out of the frying pan and into the fire.” Moreover, in doing this, he appends a reformulation of a proverb from Pindar that we first witnessed Cephalus use in Book 1, characterizing Hope as a heart-fostering nurse of old age (569b6-c2):

Πατραλοίαιν λέγεις τύραννον καὶ χαλεπὸν γηροτρόφον, καὶ ως ἐοικε τοῦτο δὴ ὀμολογουμένη ἐὰν ἥδη τυραννίς εἴη, καὶ, τὸ λεγόμενον, ὁ δὴμος φεύγων ἄν καπνὸν δουλείας ἐλευθέρων εἰς τῦρ δούλων δεσποτείας ἄν ἐμπεπτωκός εἴη

You mean the tyrant would be a parricide and a “harsh nurse of old age,” and since it seems that this would be tyranny without question, then, as the old saying goes, the demos fleeing the smoke of servitude to free men would have fallen into the fire of the despotism of slaves . . .

It is an open question whether the saying “out of the smoke, into the fire” achieved in Plato’s time the clichéd status that its modern analogue enjoys today, although Leutsch and Schneidewin’s citation of numerous instances of its use certainly is evidence of a fair degree of prominence. However, Plato’s coupling of the proverb with a perverse reformulation of the Pindaric gnome to close out what has been a nearly comic cavalcade of sayings in Socrates’ tracing the decline and devolution of timocracy all the way into tyranny illustrates well the seemingly random interplay of legomena, all vying to achieve a quasi-permanent discursive foothold. Just as governments prove unstable, so too is the discourse that underlies such polities. By Plato’s portrayal of these various sayings all coming to the fore within the different contexts that Socrates and his interlocutor use them and their various iterations, we are able to witness the

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625 331a6-9; Pindar, frag. 214 Maehler: γλυκεῖα οἱ καρδίαι / ἀτάλλοισα γηροτρόφος συναρεῖ / ἐλπίς ἀ μάλλιστα / θνατῶν πολύστροφον / γνώμαν κυβερνά. See my discussion in Chapter 2.2.

626 Leutsch and Schneidewin 1839: 314.
instability of discourse as competing vocabularies jockey with one another for lasting influence. Plato seems to demonstrate a self-reflexive understanding that all writing, his own included, is necessarily contingent and subject to the language game.

Of course, Plato is himself a willing and able competitor in the discursive *agon*, ready to best the competing *sophoi* and *kompsoi* at their own game. He also allows the sensitive reader to glimpse his own authorial self-reflexivity with respect to competing in that game. In Chapter Five, I argued that Plato audaciously integrates elements of Hesiod’s famous “two-roads” gnome, which subsequently became the single most-quoted proverb in antiquity, to create the image of the Cave, the single most famous analogy in all of Western philosophy. In Book 9, we find a seemingly self-reflexive reference to that literary creation on Plato’s part, signaled by a proverb and, once again, with a reference to something overheard from one of the “wise men” (τῶν σοφῶν τινός, 583b5). To a couple of “victories” that Socrates describes in which a just man triumphs over the unjust, Socrates adds another, indeed, the “greatest” (µέγιστον) and “most decisive” (κυριώτατον) triumph. More importantly, he does so by what the scholiast describes as a proverb (παροιμία): “the third [victory] in Olympian fashion to the savior and to Olympian Zeus” (τὸ δὲ τρίτον ὀλυμπικῶς τῷ σωτῆρι τε καὶ τῷ Ὀλυμπίῳ Δί, 583b2-3) – a phrase Plato uses on occasion to introduce the third or culminating stage in an argument or demonstration and which became proverbial. The mere use of the proverbial τὸ τρίτον τῷ σωτῆρι, i.e., the third libation poured at banquets to Zeus Soter, alone would be interesting enough, but Socrates (read Plato) then links it with what seems to be a reference to a previous saying of his own: the third, greatest triumph is that “any pleasure other than that of the intelligence is not altogether real or pure but is a sort of shadow-painting, as I seem to have heard from a certain wise man” (οὐδὲ

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627 See, e.g., *Phlb.* 66d4; *Charm.* 167a9; *Lg.* 692a3; Adam 1980: ad loc.; Jowett and Campbell 1894: ad loc.; Greene 1938: 116.
παναληθής ἐστιν ἢ τῶν ἄλλων ἡδονή πλήν τῆς τοῦ φρονίμου οὐδὲ καθαρά, ὡς ἐσκιαγραφημένη τις, ὡς ἐγὼ δοκῶ μοι τῶν σοφῶν τινος ἄκηκοέναι, 583b). This seems a thinly veiled reference to Plato’s Socrates’ own description of the cave and the shadows cast upon its walls, an image starkly juxtaposed with the light of intelligence, which triumphs over the ignorance possessed by a cave-dweller in the manner of an Olympic victor, deserving of the proverbial τὸ τρίτον τὸ σωτηρί. 628 Socrates (read Plato) is quoting himself. Socrates (Plato) himself is the unnamed sophos, drawing reference to his own contribution to the literary agon. He is creating his own brand of proverbial wisdom. Getting quoted and cited is precisely how proverbial wisdom is generated in the first place and is, in turn, how it comes to be handed down to posterity. One is reminded of the mistaken attribution of the flawed definition of justice, “Just it is, to render to each what is owed him” to Simonides in Book 1. 629 The act of attribution is part and parcel of proverbial constructions, and Plato is ensuring that his own proverbs are already in a state of attribution, even if only by his own writerly hand.

Moreover, he reveals how he is “playing” in the language game of constructing a new vocabulary, the genre of philosophy, to outpace his rivals. During a discussion of which of the three types of human beings – that is, the lover of wealth (φιλοκερδής), the lover of honor/lover of victory (φιλότιμος/φιλόνικος), and the lover of wisdom (φιλόσοφος), each of whom corresponds to one of the three different parts of the soul – might possess the “instrument of judgment (ὀργάνου κρίνεσθαι),” Socrates makes a bold claim. Since it is “by means of discourse that judgment must be reached (διὰ λόγων. . .δεῖν κρίνεσθαι),” and “discourse is especially the instrument of the philosopher (Λόγοι δὲ τούτου [φιλοσόφου] μάλιστα ὁργάνον),” it is the

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628 Of Plato’s commentators, Stallbaum and Wilamowitz agree with my reading, Jowett and Shorey disagree (ad loc.).

629 Resp. 331d4-e4.
philosopher’s judgments (κρινόμενα) that will be the most valid and true (ἀληθέστατα). For the other two types of people, “wealth and profit” (πλοῦτος καὶ κέρδος) and “victory and courage” (νίκη καὶ ἀνδρεία) are, respectively, the criteria by which judgment of anything is determined. In other words, Plato valorizes language and discourse (λόγοι) over competing criteria (e.g., riches, military triumphs) by which society determines the worth of anything, and claims that logos falls especially within the province of the philosopher. It is the philosopher who we may suppose is best equipped to use language and to construct discourse that will have a lasting and salutary societal impact.

A philosopher grasps better than most the proverb that “more malleable than wax is speech” (ἐὐπλαστότερον κηροῦ. . λόγος, 588d1-2), which Glaucon introduces when Socrates begins to construct toward the close of Book 9 “an image of the soul in speech” (εἰκόνα πλάσαντες τῆς ψυχῆς λόγῳ, 588b10), an image that conjoins a many-headed beast with both a man and a lion. Glaucon’s phrase falls under the heading of what paroemiologists label an oppositional proverb that is “contrastive” as opposed to an oppositional proverb that relies on a strict negation of any identification. Compare, for example “Blood is thicker than water” (oppositional—contrastive) to “Two wrongs don’t make a right” (oppositional—strict-negation). Both Cicero and Pliny the Younger would later appropriate the contrastive image in Glaucon’s phrase.

Here, Plato is simultaneously depicting a philosopher’s aptitude for constructing memorable images, such as the tripartite nature of the soul, while also self-reflexively noting via the proverb how creating such images requires one to mold language like wax. This is how a

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630 Resp 582b7-e9.
631 Dundes 1981: 54.
632 See Cic De or. 3.45: sicut mollissimam ceram . . fingimus; Pliny, Epist. 7.9: ut laus est cerae, mollis cedensque sequatur. See also Shorey 1982: 401.
writer constructs discourse consonant with the ideal of the *polis* envisioned in the *Republic*, an ideal which Socrates expressly contrasts with what he describes, interestingly, as yet another “saying” (*λεγόμενον*) – indeed, the very saying with which the men’s entire dialogic endeavor began and which has brought them to this point (*τὰ πρῶτα λεχθέντα, δι’ ἂ δεῦρ’ ἥκομεν*): It is none other than “the saying that ‘it profits a perfectly unjust man, who seems to be just, to commit injustice’” (*λεγόμενον λυσιτελῖν ἀδικεῖν τῷ τελέως μὲν ἀδίκῳ, δοξάζομεν δὲ δικαίῳ*, 588b2-4).633 Plato has to best such “sayings” with his own discourse if he is to have any hope of seeing his utopian aspirations realized. In Plato’s narrative, it is, not surprisingly, the philosopher who demonstrates the capability to mold language, “more malleable than wax,” to create memorable new images that will ultimately have a lasting impact on how Western thought will henceforth conceive of the soul. It is the philosopher who is just the man to outpace his rivals in the language game, as Plato reveals with his self-reflexive proverb.

The stakes in this particular language game could not be higher. As Glaucon and Socrates recognize at the close of Book 9 when they consider the odds faced in actually achieving the ideal *polis* that they seek, their reformed polity necessarily “resides in discourse” (*τῇ ἐν λόγοις κεῖμένη*) since it is found “nowhere on earth” (*γῆς γε οὐδαμοῦ*, 592a10-b1). Reform and discourse are inextricable, and laying the discursive foundation for a reformed *polis* is a tall order. Moreover, Socrates does not fail to recognize the contingency of discursive practice, including that to which he and his interlocutors aspire in laying the discursive foundation for the new, ideal *polis*: “It doesn’t matter whether it exists now or ever will exist” (*διαφέρει δὲ οὐδὲν εἴτε πον ἐστιν εἴτε ἐσται*). What matters is that for the one who “aspires to see it and establish himself there” (*τῷ βουλομένῳ ὥρᾶν καὶ ὁρῶντι ἐαυτὸν κατοικίζειν*), such a person “will take

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633 Trans. Shorey (with modification).
part in the practices of only this city and no other” (τὰ γὰρ ταύτης μόνης ἄν πράξειν, ἄλλης δὲ σοῦ δεμιᾶς, 592b2-5). Such a position is very close to Rorty’s view of the intertwined contingencies of community and language: “If the demands of a morality are the demands of a language, and if languages are historical contingencies . . . then to ‘stand unflinchingly for one’s moral convictions’ is a matter of identifying oneself with such a contingency.”

Put differently, the choice among competing discourses and fidelity to that which is ultimately chosen is of paramount importance to both the individual and the society which she and her fellow citizens comprise.

5.2.3. Refusing to Banish Discourse with the Power to Charm (κηλεῖν, ἐπάδειν)

By recognizing that Plato demonstrates the contingency of language throughout his text – in significant part by foregrounding proverbs – and, further, that such contingency necessarily affects the function of discourse in a society and its prevailing (but by no means permanent) mores, we can better grasp Book 10’s famous motif of the banishment of poetry, as well as that motif’s curious epilogue which appears to imagine a continuing engagement with poetry, even in the ideal polis. To be fair, Socrates does not actually banish (ἀποστέλλειν, 607b3) all poetry and all poets but, rather, allows an exception for religious hymns and encomia in praise of good men to be admitted into Kallipolis (μόνον ὤμων θεοίς καὶ ἑγκόμια τοῖς ἄγαθοῖς ποιήσεως παραδεξέτων εἰς πόλιν, 607a2-4). Nonetheless, the proscription against existing poetry appears

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635 607a1-608b2. Halliwell 2011: 180, 183, 190, deems this section an “epilogue” to the discussion of poetry’s banishment from the ideal state – indeed, an epilogue that is “remarkable yet relatively neglected.”
636 There is also the matter of the ban’s encompassing as much of poetry that is mimetic in character (Τὸ μηδήμῃ παραδέχεσθαι αὐτῆς ὀσία μιμητικη, 595a5). This proscription would seem to conflict with the allowance made in Book 3 for certain passages of mimetic poetry – e.g., Odysseus’ stirring self-admonition, “Bear up heart of mine. For you have endured far worse than this” (τέτλαθι δή, κραδίη· καὶ κόντερον ἀλλο ποτ’ ἐτής, Resp. 390d5 and Od. 20.18) – and the poet who “imitates the discourse of a good man (τὴν τοῦ ἐπιεικοὺς λέξιν μιμήτο, 398b1-2). I leave aside, however, this controversy over precisely how Book 10’s sense of mimesis squares with that discussed in Book
to be all but total. As Penelope Murray concludes, “What is clear . . . is that no existing poetry is acceptable (600e4-601c): all the great works of Greek literature are to be excluded.”

In recent years, however, scholars have begun to reassess what was formerly considered Plato’s uniformly hostile and monolithic antipathy towards poetry, as seemingly reflected in the banishment motif. Of these, Stephen Halliwell stands out in particular for the depth of his nuanced and highly sensitive reading of that motif. Halliwell argues that the verdict of exile “is dramatically undercut . . . by Socratic gestures of hesitation and ambivalence, in fact by indications of lingering if equivocal ‘love’ of poetry.” Yet even Halliwell remains perplexed by Socrates’ exclusion of the tragedians (presented at the close of Book 8, discussed above) “on the bizarre grounds that they praise tyranny,” as articulated in the proverb from Euripides (i.e., σοφοὶ τύραννοι εἰσὶ τῶν σοφῶν συνοισία, 568b1). But if such a verse is quoted (as I explained earlier) for the purpose of arguing that intelligent people always ensure that they are allied with those in power, the verse becomes in effect both a generalizing statement about how the world operates by a Machiavellian politics and an imperative that one act accordingly, i.e., expeditiously rather than morally. In other words, the verse becomes a proverb that affirms the practices of a society ruled by a tyrant. Such a reading might seem wildly at odds with the original textual context in which the Euripidean gnome first appeared, but as Adeimantus

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3, given that by the time we reach 10.603b4-c9, all ποίησις appears to be a form of μιμητική which is to be banned. As Halliwell 2011: 184, n. 54, observes, at this juncture “it is hard to see any difference between mimetic poetry and poetry tout court.” Moreover, the personification of poetry in the epilogue to the banishment motif (in particular at 607c4-5) seems to conceive of nearly all poetry as mimetic: ἢ πρὸς ἡδονὴν ποιητικὴ καὶ ἢ μίμησις.

637 Murray 1997: 229. Gould 1992: 17, puts it even more severely: Plato’s “aim is directed not at the marginal, the allegedly outrageous fringe art-works that offend his moral sensibility, but at the entire literary heritage, including all its master-works, from the Iliad onwards to the greatest masterpieces of fifth-century tragedy” (cited by Murray).

638 Halliwell 2011: 180-181, n. 45-46, provides an excellent summary of the state of the scholarship regarding readings of the banishment motif.


640 Halliwell 2011: 180, n. 44.
demonstrates in Book 2 with his claim that people use Hesiod’s “two roads” proverb to justify taking the easy road to vice rather than the hard road to virtue, it is the reception of a quotation, together with its appropriation and re-use in a new and different context, that is ultimately determinative. Halliwell himself rightly emphasizes that for Plato what matters is “the external context of ethical reception and influence.”641 We can, however, go further still, using Euripides’ (perhaps mis-interpreted) proverb as a jumping-off point for a larger reflection on the ambiguity inherent in Plato’s proposed banishment of poetry.

The seductive power of language framed in compelling modes of discourse – e.g., language enhanced with poetic features lending further memorability and authority to proverbial phrases such as Euripides’ own – cannot be underestimated. Indeed, in Book 10, Socrates cites the experience of being bewitched by poetry (κηλείσθαι, 607c7-8). As Halliwell observes, the word group of kêlein and kêlêsis was long associated in Greek thought with the psychotropic powers of poetry and song – powers that are usually thought to receive a “negative or uncertain shading in Plato’s work” insofar as they suggest a “non-rational susceptibility to the emotionally spellbinding qualities of language or music.”642

Not surprisingly, then, one needs to be on guard (εὐλαβητέον, 608a7) given such power and given the contingency of rival vocabularies competing for dominance in the language game. As Rorty explains, anyone who is aware of the contingency of discourse and its overarching importance to the constitution of both a healthy society and a healthy individual, necessarily worries that she “has been taught to play the wrong language game. She worries that the process of socialization which turned her into a human being by giving her a language may have given her the wrong language and so turned her into the wrong kind of human being.” Moreover, such

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641 Halliwell 2000: 112.
642 Halliwell 2011: 196.
an individual thinks of “vocabularies as poetic achievements rather than as fruits of diligent inquiry according to antecedently formulated criteria.”

Such thinking mirrors that of Socrates in Book 10, when he worries about allowing the “honeyed Muse” (τὴν ἡδύσμενην Μοῦσαν) to rule as a king (βασιλέως) instead of “that discourse which from time to time appears best in general” (τὸ δὲ κοινῆ ἀεὶ δόξαντος εἶναι βελτίστου λόγου, 607a5-8). Particularly striking here is Socrates’ express recognition that the axiological component of any vocabulary (signified in this passage by the term βελτίστου) is necessarily contingent on how society as whole understands (or ultimately comes to understand) in common (κοινῆ) that vocabulary. Simon Goldhill makes the intriguing observation that the adverb κοινῆ (“in general” or “in common”) in this passage serves as a reminder of the backdrop to Plato’s text of democratic Athens, thereby suggesting the customary formula for recording state decisions: ἔδοξε τῇ βουλῇ καὶ τῷ δήμῳ. Put differently, Socrates’ view of the manner in which discourse operates in society makes no exceptions for the ideal polis. The vocabularies which come to prevail will ultimately be those approved within the context of the larger community, as signified by the adverb koinē. Such a view is remarkably consonant with Rorty’s vision of how language works in relation to society: “What binds societies together are common vocabularies” and, accordingly, “progress, for the community as for the individual, is a matter of using new words as well as arguing from premises phrased in old words . . .” Indeed, the fact that Socrates imagines the ideal state – what he calls here “the well-ordered polity” (πόλις εὐνομουμένη) – as necessarily subject to the contingencies of discourse like any other state, would seemingly afford justification for the

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643 Rorty 1989: 75, 76. Rorty calls such a person a “liberal ironist.”
position held by many scholars that Plato’s text prescribes poetry’s banishment tout court. If building a community – and we should remember that this occurs en logois, as the close of Book 9 makes clear – and whatever progress that community achieves is a function of “using words,” why should Socrates not banish discourse that is not salutary in his estimation, including whatever poetry he finds harmful, irrespective of the how broad or narrow the proscription ultimately turns out to be? However, as the epilogue reveals, outright banishment of even the poetry specifically targeted is a step that Socrates is simply unwilling to take. On the contrary, he expressly contemplates the possibility that he and his interlocutors would “gladly admit” (ἀσμενοι ἄν καταδέχοιντο) even poetry that is “pleasurable and mimetic” (ἡ πρὸς ήδονήν ποιητική καὶ ή μίμησις) into their “well-ordered state” (ἐν πόλει εὐνομομένη) if such poetry can provide some reason for her admission (τινα ἔχοι λόγον εἴπεῖν, 607c4-6). Moreover, he advises that even if such poetry is not able to mount a defense on her own behalf (δὲ ἂν μὴ οίᾳ τῇ ἁπολογήσασθαι), he and his fellows will continue to listen to her (ἀκροσαόμεθ' αὕτης, 608a2-3), as we shall see shortly.

Why does Socrates envision poetry’s continued presence in the ideal polity? It is because, he explains, “We know intimately that we have been bewitched by her” (ὡς σύνισμέν γε ἡμὶν αὕτοῖς κηλουμένους ὑπ’ αὐτῆς, 607c6-7). Now this is an extremely strange rationale. To cite the bewitching power of poetry as the very reason not to banish poetry outright would seem to be the precise opposite of what the Republic has traditionally been interpreted to aver, and not without reason. Earlier in Book 10, Socrates had singled out kêlêsis (“bewitchment”) as responsible for people’s misguided belief that what they hear the poets “color with words and phrases” (τοῖς ὀνόμασι καὶ ῥήμασιν ἐπιχρωματίζειν, 601a5-6) actually amounts to authoritative truth on any
However, one is reminded here that a vast number of proverbs qualify in large part as proverbs precisely because of their poetic, figurative language. It follows then that to outlaw, in effect, a writer’s (or speaker’s) efforts to make language more vivid – to paraphrase Socrates’ terminology, more “colorful” – by using certain “words and phrases” that “color” discourse, would entail the abolition of great deal of proverbial wisdom, in addition to poetry itself. It would also result in a more philistine and boorish world, devoid in large part of artistry, which Socrates acknowledges when he divulges his fear that he and his companions will be accused (καταγνωσθῆναι) of “coarseness and rusticity” (σκληρότητα . . καὶ ἄγροικία, 607b4-5) if they exile poetry from their ideal polis.⁶⁴⁷

Accordingly, contrary to such a strict and austere vision of society, poetry, personified as a defendant in court of law (and an alluring female at that, even though women did not appear in Athenian courts), is granted the right to make a defense speech (ἀπολογεῖσθαι) and, moreover, one that is in “lyric or any other meter” (ἐν μέλει ἑ τινι ὁλλῳ μέτρῳ, 607d3-4). Additionally, poetry’s “advocates” (προστάται) are permitted to make a defense on her behalf without any poetic embellishment (ἄνευ μέτρου λόγων ὑπὲρ αὐτῆς εἰπεῖν, 607d7-8). Socrates and his companions “will gladly listen” (εὐενῶς ἀκούεισθαι) because they “will profit” (κερδανεῖν) if poetry proves not only to be “pleasurable” (ἡδεῖα) but also “beneficial” (ὠφελήμη) for both “the state and for human living” (πρὸς τὰς πολιτείας καὶ τὸν βίον τὸν ἀνθρώπινον (607d9-e2). In other words, Plato’s text holds out the express possibility that poetry can play a salutary role in

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⁶⁴⁶ Halliwell 2011: 196-7 explains this phenomenon and Socrates’ critique of it as follows: “Socrates directly connect[s] poetic bewitchment (κήλησις, 601b) with the integral musico-verbal fabric of poetry as opposed to its paraphrasable content: he suggest[s] that the effect though powerfully natural (operating ‘by nature’ φύσει), is suspect precisely because it cannot be traced back to a rationally transparent basis in what the poetry ‘says’.”

⁶⁴⁷ One is reminded here of Falstaff’s pointed observation in Shakespeare’s Henry IV, Part 1: “Banish plump Jack, and banish all the world” (Act 2, sc. 4).
the ideal state. Relevant to my thesis, a great many proverbs and gnômai are necessarily affected by this verdict, since so many have their origins in poetry, as I have attempted to show throughout this dissertation.

Something seems to be gained – something arguably even essential – from having poetry (and figurative, poeticized language in general) present in the ideal polity. We might restate this thought in two ways: (1) the ideal polis, existing as it does en logos, has need of poetic speech; and (2) the ideal state is impossible to conceive without poetic speech. Why? The first reason has to do with the kêlêsis (bewitching power) of such language, as Socrates points out. While its effects may pose at times an impediment to analytic thought, what Socrates calls dianoia (595b6) and the goal of which is to arrive at an understanding of truth in reference to the Forms, its power to equip rival discursive practices with the ability to compete ably in the language game is undeniable, even if poeticized language is not entirely amenable to analytic argument, as Halliwell argues. That same objection also holds true for proverbs, as Kathryn Morgan has explained: authoritative gnômai “are useful only as a starting point for philosophic investigation and are not an end in themselves.”

It appears, however, that language which both satisfies the demands of philosophic analysis and eludes its boundaries by virtue of its kêlêsis is foundational in constructing a society, including an ideal one. Understanding this aspect of language opens an entirely new window into Socrates’ famous, enigmatic description of “the old quarrel beween philosophy and

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648 This is not to suggest that Kallipolis is on the verge of allowing full-scale performances of Aeschylian tragedy. However, even tragic and epic verse, re-formed and re-imagined within the radically new context of a society transformed by philosophic discourse consistent with the form of the good (as I described at the close of Chapter 4), is potentially eligible for admission, as demonstrated by Socrates’ rehabilitation and re-use of Achilles’ pained underworld lament in Book 7, despite having previously been banned in Book 3 (386b5-6): Resp. 386e5-7; Od. 11.489-91 (βουλοίμην κ’ ἐπάροιμος ὅψις θητευέν άλλῳ / ἐπάροιμος ἐκάχληρῳ, ὃ μὴ βίοτος πολὺς εἶ ἐν / ἡ πάσιν νεκρώσας καταφθιόνοις ἀνάσσαιν). See my discussion in Chapter 4.2.7.

649 Halliwell 2011: 159.

650 Morgan 2009: 552.
poetry” (παλαιὰ μὲν τις διαφορὰ φιλοσοφία τε καὶ ποιητικῇ, 607b5-6). It is not required that one should ultimately triumph over the other. Rather, the discourses traditionally conceived of as “philosophy” and “poetry” are dialogic and dialectic partners (amounting to a veritable “yin and yang,” as it were) of discourse within the larger language game.

Which brings us to the second reason why poetry and figurative speech cannot be banished entirely from the ideal state. The language game is the template upon which society and its discourse are constructed. To imagine the language game without poetic language is to consider the impossible: stepping outside of the discursive frame of the language game itself. This Plato could not do, even had he so desired. Morgan makes a similar point in describing how what she calls “the inescapable framework of thought” represented by the authority of the poetic and mythological tradition was necessarily composed of “linguistic and literary resources” that were impossible for early philosophic writers to transcend. As Morgan puts it in describing philosophy’s relation to myth, “Language is a tool of this world, and is tied to its incapacies. It cannot be taken for granted.”

I would modify Morgan’s assessment only to the extent that “language” and the “world” are more mutually interdependent than even the tool analogy suggests.

There is no society, no polis – ideal or otherwise it may even be argued – which exists apart from that “established in discourse (τῇ ἐν λόγοις κειμένῃ, 592a11), subject to the language game and all of its component, competing discursive practices, including poetry, myth, and –
relevant for my thesis – gnômai and proverbs. These practices, linked as they are with a larger poetic tradition, are not – per Halliwell’s formulation – “wholly amenable to rational analysis.”653 This is not to say that they are non-rational, only that they cannot be strictly bounded by analytic thought (διάνοια, in Socrates’ parlance). But why are such practices included within the scope of allowable discourse, as Book 10’s epilogue reveals? It is because of the bewitching power in their kêlêsis – a quality that I maintain Plato himself is keen to draw upon in his attempt to establish philosophy as a prevailing discursive practice and thereby reform society according to its vision of a just polis.

One must be careful here not to assume that Plato draws upon discursive practices that contain kêlêsis simply because he is following the celebrated “honeyed-cup” approach to philosophic writing. As Morgan explains in describing myth’s own role in the creation of philosophy as a literary genre and how the standard, timeworn mythos-logos divide nearly amounts to a false dichotomy, the “honeyed-cup” writerly strategy presumes that traditionally non-philosophic discourses like poetry and myth add “colour to dry, technical, and forbidding material.” Any philosopher left to her own devices “would prefer to speak only in strictly analytic terms.”654 This, I maintain, does not account for Plato’s use of poetic speech, including the large number of proverbs and gnômai that permeate his work.

Rather, Plato is following what Morgan describes as a “second approach” to philosophic writing, one that does not concede that discursive practices which transcend the boundaries of analytic reason (in Morgan’s analysis, myth) are “merely a reflex of literary ornamentation or audience expectation” but instead play a vital, philosophical role by “express[ing] what rational

653 Halliwell 2011: 159.
654 Morgan 2000: 3-4.
and scientific language cannot .... This is the upshot of Book 10’s enigmatic epilogue and its evocation of the old quarrel.

Certain discursive practices transcend purely analytic discourse because of their power to charm, to bewitch (κηλεῖν). Within this power reside both their potential danger and their potential utility to the ideal state. The danger is that such discourse – e.g., Euripides’ verse that is itself also a proverb (i.e., σοφοὶ τύραννοι εἰσὶ τῶν σοφῶν συνουσία) – might “incite us to be careless of all righteousness and all excellence” (ἄξιον ἀμελησαί δικαιοσύνης τε καὶ τῆς ἄλλης ἀρετῆς, 608b7-8). Nonetheless, the “pleasure” (ἡδεῖα) afforded by a discursive practice such as poetry, by virtue of its κηλέσις, cannot be jettisoned indiscriminately without reducing society’s discourse to the level of the “coarse and boorish” (σκληρὸς καὶ ἄγροικος), thereby depriving that society of the potential “benefit” (ὠφέλεια) of such discourse. The bewitching power of “Wise are tyrants by converse with the wise” results in harm to the body politic, whereas the proverbial verse attributed to Solon, “Hard is the good” (χαλεπὰ τὰ καλὰ) proves of fundamental value to the task of achieving a just society, as I have outlined earlier. The conflict between the potential harm represented by the former and the potential benefit represented by the latter encapsulates, I maintain, the “old quarrel,” which Socrates essentially renames at the close of the epilogue as a “great struggle” (µέγας . . . ἀγών, 608b4). That struggle is to reconcile the bewitching power of discursive practices like poetry and proverbs, that cannot be strictly confined within the bounds of analytic argument (whose goal is the understanding and definition of truth), with philosophy that, as a literary genre, is itself inextricably bound with discursive reason and which relies heavily upon analytic terms. Plato demonstrates a steadfast refusal in his

656 Trans. Shorey.
657 Halliwell 2011: 159.
philosophical writing to be constrained by and limit himself solely to the latter, a trait that has bedeviled scholars since at least the fifth century CE when the Neoplatonist philosopher Proclus famously remarked that judging by Plato’s own writing, we are required to “banish not only Homer but Plato himself from the state.”

Enclosed within Plato’s very act of positing the “old quarrel” between poetry and philosophy appears to be the simultaneous aspiration of transcending it. As Halliwell notes,

Plato’s own engagement with poetry is unending; . . . Far from banishing poetry, . . . Plato’s writing constantly responds to it and lives with it on every level from verbal texture via characterization and thematic development, to the creation of large-scale dramatic, narrative, and mythological structures.

We see an illustration of this at the close of the Republic, in Socrates’ telling of the famous Myth of Er. Such a story does not satisfy the demands of analytic thought. However, attempting to conceive of the immortality of the soul in purely analytic terms would seem to push language to its breaking point. It would be the equivalent of attempting to view the original nature (ἀρχαίαν φύσιν) of the sea-god Glaucus, whose original body parts (τὰ τε παλαιὰ τοῦ σώματος μέρη) have been broken up and crushed and entirely pulled asunder by the waves (ἐκκεκλάσθαι, τὰ δὲ συντετρῖφθαι καὶ πάντως λελωβῆσθαι ύπὸ τῶν κυμάτων) while other encrustations such as oyster shells, sea weed, and rocks have become attached (ἄλλα δὲ προσπεφυκέναι, ὀστρέα τε καὶ φυκία καὶ πέτρας, 611d1-5). Thus, a myth is required. Despite lacking the qualities of analytic argument, the Myth of Er, as Morgan persuasively argues, provides in language “an analogue for the unimaginable internal benefits of the soul.”

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658 In R. 1.161.9-11: ὁ αὐτός οὖν λόγος καὶ τὸν Ὄμηρον ἡμᾶς ἐκβάλλειν τῆς πολιτείας καὶ τὸν Πλάτωνα αὐτὸν . . .

659 Halliwell 2011: 204.

660 Morgan 2000: 207.
Plato employs a similar writerly strategy in the *Phaedo*. Socrates, imprisoned and about to be executed, constructs a transporting myth about the nature of the cosmos and the immortality of the soul, so as to comfort and reassure friends who have come to visit him before his death. Socrates first acknowledges that he, as a philosopher, is “not a maker of myths” (*οὐκ ἦ μυθολογικός*, 61b5), but then proceeds nonetheless to expound a mythological account of the soul’s immortality, asserting that “it is especially fitting for a man about to go to the other world both to examine and mythologize about it” (*μάλιστα πρέπει μέλλοντα ἐκεῖσε ἀποδημεῖν διασκοπεῖν τε καὶ μυθολογεῖν περὶ τῆς ἀποδημίας τῆς ἐκεῖ, 61e1-2). After relating the myth, Socrates first cautions his listeners that it is “not fitting for a man of sense to affirm that such matters are just as I have narrated” (*Τὸ μὲν οὖν ταῦτα διασχιρίσασθαι οὕτως ἔχειν ὡς ἐγὼ διελήλυθα, οὐ πρέπει νοῦν ἔχοντι ἄνδρι, 114d1-2) but urges them nevertheless “to run the risk of believing . . . something like this, as the risk is noble” (*κινδυνεύσαι οἰομένῳ οὕτως ἔχειν – καλὸς γὰρ ὁ κίνδυνος, 114d5-6) and to “sing such things to himself as if they were incantatory charms” (*τὰ τοιαῦτα ὡσπερ ἐπάθειν ἑαυτῷ, 114d6-7).

To say that people quote and repeat proverbs as virtual “charms” (*ἐπορθοί*) in order to make sense of their lives and impel themselves and others to act in ways consistent with the lessons they impart, even if wrongheaded, is a just description of how proverbs operate. Proverbial phrases like *chalepa ta kala* and *koina ta philôn* are quoted often in Plato’s corpus, but they obviously have no more claim to accuracy than do the Myth of Er or the myth of the immortal soul in the *Phaedo*. Rather, they are quoted and repeated – one could reasonably say “sung as an incantation” (*ἐπάθεσθαι*) – for their generalizations about how the world works and

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661 *χαλεπὰ τὰ καλὰ* appears at Resp. 4.435c8 and 6.497d10), Crat. 384b1, and Hipp.Ma. 304e8; *κοινὰ τὰ φίλων* appears at Resp. 4.424a1 and 5.449c5, Leg. 739c2, Lys. 207c10, and Phaedr. 279c6.
their hortatory force. Of course, proverbs like *sophoi tyrannoi tōn sophōn synousia* function in the same way, despite their deleterious consequences, as alleged by Socrates.

Accordingly, toward the close of the epilogue, Socrates announces how even if poetry (in the continued personification of an alluring woman on trial, but now analogized to a former lover) “is unable to defend herself, we shall listen to her, singing as an incantation to ourselves the *logos* that we repeat, this charm, being on our guard not to fall back into the boyish desire of the multitude” (ἂν μὴ οἷα τ’ ἡ ἀπολογήσασθαι, ἀκροσαόμεθ’ αὐτῆς ἑπάδοντες ἦμιν αὐτοῖς τούτον τὸν λόγον, ὅν λέγομεν, καὶ ταύτιν τὴν ἐπωφήν, εὐλαβούμενοι πάλιν ἐμπεσεῖν εἰς τὸν παιδικὸν τε καὶ τὸν τῶν πολλῶν ἔρωτα, 608a2-5). During the course of the epilogue, Plato’s text has thus disclosed a parallel between some sort of *logos* likened to a “charm,” which is to be incanted, and poetry, whose bewitching power (κήλησις) constitutes the very reason not to ban it altogether. Significant here is the seemingly non-epistemic character of the *logos* suggested by the participle *epadontes* (“chanting as an incantation”) and the noun *epoidê* (“charm” or “spell”). It is as if Socrates is prescribing a type of discourse that, like poetry, while not wholly amenable to analytic thought, nevertheless remains necessary in what Socrates describes as his continuing engagement (ἀκούσεσθαι) with poetry.

We are witness here to what seems almost an equivalence between (1) the *logos* to be incanted as a charm (ἐπῳδεῖ) by those who listen to a poetry unable to defend herself along the lines prescribed (i.e., proving herself to be a benefit [ὠφελίμη] for human living, not just a source of enjoyment [ἡδεῖα], 607d8-9) and (2) that same type of poetry herself, to which one is necessarily both attracted and resistant at the same time, on account of poetry’s *kēlēsis*. The seductive quality of the *logos* to be used as a charm (ἐπωφή) parallels poetry’s *kēlēsis*, which

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662 Given the strangeness of such a suggestion, at odds with what one normally associates with *logos* rendered as “argument,” I have deliberately left *logos* untranslated.
itself paradoxically constitutes the reason both why poetry is suspect in the ideal *polis* and why Socrates refuses to banish it.

Indeed, the correspondence between the two mirrors the same relationship that exists within the conceit of a trial and legal defendant(s), as portrayed in the epilogue. What begins as a legal proceeding with the “gravest” accusation having been leveled first against poetry (μέγιστον κατηγορήθαι, 605c6) then evolves into the opposite scenario. Socrates suddenly occupies the position of defendant against charges of “coarseness and rusticity” (σκληρότητα. . . καὶ ἄγροικία, 607b4). The scene then reverses back to poetry playing the role of defendant, pleading on her behalf a defense that, counterintuitively, Socrates and his companions would gladly accept (“we would be glad to receive her back into the city” [ἀσμενοι ἀν καταδεχοίμεθα, 607c6]) because they recognize that they are subject to her “bewitchment” (ὡς σύνισμεν γε ἣμιν αύτοῖς κηλουμένοις ὑπ᾿ αὐτῆς, 607c6-7). Halliwell rightly notes that “the imagery expresses the idea of an unfinished series of trials and retrials with accuser and accused changing places” with the additional surprising image of “Socrates behav[ing] quite unlike a real defendant by hoping for his opponent’s *success.*”

However, the conceit’s conclusion proves even stranger. Socrates imagines poetry as incapable of defending herself (μὴ οὖ ἀν ἀπολογήσασθαι, 608a2), but with himself and his companions nevertheless continuing to act as willing auditors of poetry (ἀκροσαόμεθ᾽ αύτῆς, 608a2) so long as they incant to themselves *logos* in the form of a charm to themselves (ἐπάθοντες ἣμιν αύτοῖς τοῦτον τὸν λόγον, ὃν λέγομεν, καὶ ταύτην τὴν ἐπιρρήν, 608a3-4). In other words, not only does Socrates hope for his rival litigant’s success, he further contemplates in the alternative what amounts to a de facto (if not de jure) acquittal, where poetry is allowed to

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663 Halliwell 2011: 194 (emphasis in original).
remain, even if she proves incapable of defending herself. Moreover, we witness in the conclusion of the conceit not just the equivalency of accuser and defendant but also of their respective means of communicative engagement with one another: poetry “bewitches” (κηλεῖν) and Socrates’ logos “charms” (ἐπαθένειν). Furthermore, neither κῆλεσις nor ἐποίδαι are encompassed fully within the bounds of analytic argument. Indeed, we may well ask whether anything necessarily precludes the ἐποίδαι that Socrates and his companions incant (ἐπαθένειν) from constituting lines of poetry in their own right – more specifically, verses that double as gnōmai and proverbs.

I suggest that the engagement described here by Socrates, between bewitching poetry and her charm-incanting auditors, illustrates in its own way the encounter of the proverbs that are employed approvingly by both Socrates and his interlocutors throughout the course of the dialogue with those instances of discourse that are deemed potentially harmful to the ideal polis and its realization en logos. For example, in response to the proverb attributed to Simonides “Wise are they who go to the doors of the rich,” Socrates speaks – indeed, we might well say “incants as a charm” (ἐπαθένειν) – his own logos, “All in need of rule go to the doors of those who can rule.” 664 Neither of these phrases has any ultimate claim to accuracy or is otherwise subjected to rigorous philosophic inquiry during the course of the dialogue. However, the salutary nature of the latter, as we gather from the text, is to be used as a counter – one could well say a “charm” (ἐπωδῆ) – in response to the deleterious effects attributed to the former. Along similar lines, Socrates makes clear his intention to use Odysseus’ stirring self-admonition in Book 20 of the Odyssey (“Bear up heart of mine; for you have endured far worse than this” (τετλάθη δῆ, κραδίη· καὶ κόντερον ἄλλο ποτ’ ἔτλης, Resp. 390d5 and Od. 20.18) as one of the

664 As I argued in Chapter 4.7.1, Socrates’ new proverb sounds less artful in English than in the original Greek, where it enjoys grammatical parallelism in a quadripartite structure – archesthai deomenon, archein dunamenou – and a generalizing term, pavta.
critical *legomena* to be stored up in one’s soul (“λαμβάνειν ἐν ταῖς ψυχαῖς, 377b7) from the extant corpus of Greek poetry. It is to be used to inspire young men to rise to the challenges of a world in which Hesiod’s two-roads proverb has been distorted (as Adeimantus demonstrates) to champion taking the easier road to vice rather than the harder road to virtue.\(^665\) As I argued in Chapter Three, Odysseus’ self-exhortation constitutes a proverb in Socrates’ use of it, consistent with the revelation by modern paroemiology and the work of literary theorist Jan Mukařovský, that “theatricalization of an utterance” occurs when a quotation is deployed in a new and different context from that of the original, thereby transforming the words quoted into a proverb. Whatever *kēlēsis* this particular line from Homer’s *Odyssey* possesses, Socrates clearly desires its continued presence in the ideal *polis*, “banishment” of poetry notwithstanding.

The use of such proverbial discourse in Plato’s *Republic* in furtherance of the ideal state affords added textual support for the provisional answer that Halliwell offers in response to the question of why Socrates wants to retain *kēlēsis* as part of any discursive practice:

> If poetry can seduce the soul with a sort of rapture in words and images . . ., it has a psychagogic power which Platonic philosophy would ideally like to make its own. . . . Control of ‘bewitchment’ is indeed part of the quarrel between philosophy, but a quarrel played out in the soul of Plato’s own writings.\(^666\)

Not only is it impossible for Plato to exempt his own writing from the language game and jettison entirely discursive practices that are presently established, Plato demonstrates a keen awareness of the persuasive power inherent in such practices that can assist his own philosophical discourse in competing against rival “vocabularies” so that his own discourse might become a prevailing vocabulary. Philosophy just might become the prevailing discursive practice with the help of such discourse. Nothing less than the realization of the ideal *polis* in

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\(^{665}\) Resp. 2.364c5-d2.

\(^{666}\) Halliwell 2011: 206.
logos rests upon that possibility. Furthermore, to whatever extent the ideal state is achieved and rival discursive practices continue to operate within such a community that might prove harmful, Plato’s own proverbs – not to mention his philosophic writing as a whole – ought to be chanted just like a talismanic charm in the ongoing discursive engagement that constitutes the language game. Proverbs and gnôme, eminently memorably and quotable phrases possessed of their own këlësis, have a significant role to play within Plato’s own generic participation in the never-ending language game by which a society is constituted.

5.3. Epilogue

In Tom Stoppard’s The Real Thing, an exchange occurs between the comedy’s protagonist, the playwright Henry and his daughter, Debbie, a teenager about to run off with her boyfriend, which illustrates in miniature the complex dynamic of how proverbs operate in discourse and why they might prove attractive to, yet also elicit antipathy from, any wordsmith who chooses to employ them. The Real Thing, like most of Stoppard’s other stage works, displays a manipulation of language and meta-theatricality to confront philosophically vexing questions. In this play, the question of what constitutes the proverbial “real thing” is taken up – most specifically, in the context of the principal plot, what constitutes the “real thing” in romantic love and, on a more linguistic level, how can the “real thing” ever be expressed in language?

Henry is in the process of giving his daughter some parting advice. He grows increasingly troubled by his daughter’s revelations of her early and repeated sexual promiscuity – in particular the disclosure that she lost her virginity at an elite private school with the Latin instructor “in the boiler room.” Debbie responds to Henry’s discomfort with a proverb, one
seemingly of her own coinage, as she playfully chastises her father for naïveté in making “such a mystery” of sex:

Debbie. Why would you want to make it such a crisis?
Henry. I don’t know, why would I?
Debbie. It’s what comes of making such a mystery of it. I was like that when I was twelve. Everything was sex. Latin was sex. The dictionary fell open at *meretrix*, a harlot. You could feel the mystery coming off the word like musk. *Meretrix*! This was none of your *amo, amas, amat*, this was a flash from the forbidden planet, and it was everywhere. History was sex, art was sex, the bible, poetry, penfriends, games, music, everything was sex except biology which was obviously sex but not really sex, not the one which was secret and ecstatic and wicked and a sacrament and all the things it was supposed to be but couldn’t be at one and the same time – I got that in the boiler room and it turned out to be biology after all. *That’s what free love is free of – propaganda.*

Henry. Don’t get too good at that.
Debbie. What?
Henry: Persuasive nonsense. Sophistry in a phrase so neat you can’t see the loose end that would unravel it. It’s flawless but wrong. A perfect dud. *You can do that with words, bless ’em.* How about, “What free love is free of, is love”? Another little gem. You could put a ‘what’ on the end of it, like Bertie Wooster, “What free love is free of is love, what?” – and the words would go on replicating themselves like a spiral of DNA. . . “What love is free of love? – free love is what love, what?”

The parallel with what we witness at various places in Plato’s *Republic* is striking: a proverb is deployed in support of what may be presumed from textual context to be a morally dubious position. For example, one recalls Adeimantus reeling off proverb after proverb in Book 2 to illustrate how varied and numerous *legomena* are used in support of behavior that is precisely the opposite of justice pursued as an end in itself, rather than for its rewards.\(^{668}\)

A little further on in the exchange between Henry and his daughter, Debbie irritates her father yet again when she casually suggests that it would not be wrong for Henry’s current romantic partner, Annie – an actress, for whom Henry left Debbie’s mother, another actress who

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\(^{667}\) Stoppard 1984: Act 2, sc. 3.

\(^{668}\) Resp. 3.365b1-366b2; see my discussion in Chapter 2.2.
recently starred in Henry’s latest play and had her own history of adultery – to take another lover in addition to Henry. In advancing this argument, she seems to coin another proverb:

Debbie. (pause) Has Annie got someone else then?
Henry. Not as far as I know, thank you for asking.
Debbie. Apologies.
Henry. Don’t worry.
Debbie. Don’t you. Exclusive rights isn’t love, it’s colonization.
Henry. Christ almighty. Another ersatz masterpiece. Like Michelangelo working in polystyrene.

We detect in Henry’s annoyance the hostility that Plato’s text evinces at times toward lines of verse, mythological accounts, gnōmai and proverbs – in general, legomena of whatever sort – that are contrary to the ideal of justice envisioned as the foundation for the ideal state. Moreover, to the extent that such discourse lacks a claim to accuracy and cannot be encompassed exclusively within analytic thought, it courts the opprobrium leveled by Henry: “sophistry in a phrase so neat you can’t see the loose end that would unravel it” and “ersatz masterpiece,” a mere imitation of “the real thing” accomplished by mimesis. Substitute Plato’s notion of the “Forms” for Stoppard’s “real thing” and the parallel becomes clearer still. To “unravel” such legomena would require philosophic examination and scrutiny under the elenchus.

However, Henry, not unlike Socrates and the highly-nuanced attitude toward poetry and its attendant kēlēsis that he demonstrates during Book 10’s epilogue to the discussion about poetry, cannot help but express admiration for the attraction that such discourse unceasingly exerts over its listeners: “You can do that with words, bless ‘em.” He understands full well the power of language that possesses kēlēsis. Henry’s admission in this regard parallels the rhetorical question that Socrates poses to Glaucon during the epilogue, “Are you yourself not bewitched by her [i.e., poetry] and especially when you contemplate Homer (ἳ γάρ. . .οὔ κηλῇ ὑπ’ αὐτῆς καὶ
σύ, καὶ μᾶλλα ὅταν ὁ Ὅμηρος θεωρήσῃ αὐτήν; 607c8-d1)?” Glaucos does not miss a beat: “Absolutely” (Πολύ γε, 607d2).

Any wordsmith with aspirations to prevail in the language game ought not divest himself of the discursive tools required to compete ably in that game. Κêlêsis is too powerful a property of certain discursive practices to be abandoned entirely, including, of course, poetry and its subset of gnômai and proverbs within the larger Greek literary corpus that Plato draws upon frequently and abundantly. Nor could one dispense with such discourse even if one so desired, given that no individual speaker or writer gets to decide in advance the rules of the language game – in other words, to decide unilaterally which discourses may compete within it. Such authority belongs to the language game alone.

And so, it is not surprising that Henry, like Plato, makes use of what might be considered questionable discourse from the perspective of one who would seek to express his ideals solely by means which satisfy the demands of analytic argument. After rebuking Debbie for the “sophistry in a phrase” that her newly-minted proverbs display – themselves, “ersatz masterpieces” – Henry ends his parting advice with some very familiar legomena:

Henry. There; my blessing with thee. And these few precepts in thy memory. . .
Debbie. Too late, Fa. Love you.

Henry’s last words are an invocation of the lines that introduce some of the most memorable and famous proverbs in all of Western literature: Polonius’ proverb-rich, parting advice to his son, Laertes, in Shakespeare’s Hamlet, replete with such “gems” as “Neither a borrower nor a lender be” and “the apparel oft proclaims the man.”669 Henry is not going to let what he views as his daughter’s misguided proverbs be the last word. So too, neither in the Republic is Plato about to be outdone by the eminently memorable and quotable legeomena of his literary rivals – kompoi

669 Hamlet, Act 1, sc.3.
who understand precisely how the language game is played. Plato has a few of his own “precepts,” right up his proverbial sleeve.
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