

The Two Endings to the Argument of Plato's *Republic*

A persistent tension runs throughout Plato's *Republic*, between i) the dramatic conceit that Socrates narrates the conversation as it unfolded, as a hunt for justice that takes surprise twists and turns (357a, 362d, 432b-e), avoiding pitfalls but sometimes permitting digressions (449c-451b, 543c), and (ii) the readerly impression that Plato/Socrates presents a sustained argument in response to Glaucon's challenge in Book 2, to defend justice as a good-in-itself (in addition to being good for its consequences or rewards) (358d). Glaucon's challenge is accompanied by a thought-experiment, a vivid story about a poor shepherd who came into possession of the proverbial ring of Gyges, with its power to turn a person invisible. This thought-experiment illustrates the claim that human nature and psychology is such that people practice justice only reluctantly and not as a good-in-itself (359b-360d).

On a common understanding of the structure of *Republic*, Book 9 presents the culmination of the Platonic/Socratic answer to Glaucon's challenge. Though initially Socrates appears to be narrating the tail-end of the devolution of regimes and individuals, a topic previously said to *follow* the consideration of justice and the just life (445b-449b, 543c-544b), in fact Book 9 provides the most forceful response to Glaucon's view of human psychology, through its final cashing out of the city-soul analogy in the three proofs that the tyrant's unjust life is the most wretched. These proofs depend in different ways on the correct ordering and functioning of the soul - in other words on the operation of justice without any of the external consequences or rewards that may follow the soul's correct functioning.

On this understanding of the structure of *Republic*, supported by the concluding language at 588b and 591a-592b, the new inquiry into imitation in Book 10 (595a-596a) – or rather, a

revision of the inquiry into imitation in Book 3 – seems tacked-on to the argument of *Republic* as a whole. Indeed, Book 10 has been referred to as a “coda,” an “appendix,” and an “excrecence” (Annas 1981), and its seemingly piecemeal construction has continually provided grist for the mill in the debate concerning the unity and composition of *Republic* (Else 1972, Nails 1998). On this account, it is perhaps only the dramatic conceit that Socrates is narrating the meanderings of a late-night conversation that establishes a unity between Book 10 and the rest of the work.

This paper proposes, instead, that we should view Books 9 & 10 as a structured response to the joint challenge of Glaucon and his brother Adeimantus in Book 2. For, where Glaucon presents a challenge to Socrates that is rooted in human nature and psychology, Adeimantus’ challenge is rooted in human culture, particularly in the traditional wisdom of epic and Archaic poetry (362d-367e). On Adeimantus’ account, this traditional wisdom is full of mixed messages, from which it is only natural to conclude that it is worthwhile to reap the rewards of injustice and then to use them to pay one's debts to gods and humans. Adeimantus’ challenge gives rise to Socrates’ censoring of the poets in Books 2-3, and it likewise accounts for the revisiting of imitation in Book 10. Similarly to how the account of Book 9 subtly morphs into a direct response to Glaucon’s challenge, the inquiry started in Book 10 morphs into a direct response to Adeimantus’s challenge (albeit addressed to Glaucon). This view is bolstered by accounts of the theory of imitation in Book 10 that bring it into alignment with the theory in Book 3 (Moss 2007), as opposed to accounts that find a radical disconnect between the two treatments of imitation (Urmson 1982). When Book 10 is seen as a definitive answer to Adeimantus’ challenge, it makes sense of the concluding language at 612bc, and also of the introduction of a new myth about rewards in the afterlife - the Myth of Er - whose telling is possible only now that

Socrates has been freed from the strictures placed on his argument by Glaucon's and Adeimantus' joint challenge in Book 2.

Bibliography

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