

**(Mis)quoting Euripides: Playing the Language Game with Proverbs  
in Plato's *Republic* and *Gorgias***

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**1. Proverb Attributed by Socrates in Plato's *Republic* (8.568a11-b1) to Euripides:**

“σοφοὶ τύραννοί” εἰσι “τῶν σοφῶν συνουσία.”

Wise are the tyrants by converse with the wise.<sup>1</sup>

**2. Plato (*Resp.* 8.560b8-10):**

ἐπιτηδευμάτων καλῶν καὶ λόγων ἀληθῶν, οἳ δὴ ἄριστοι φρουροὶ τε καὶ φύλακες ἐν ἀνδρῶν θεοφιλῶν εἰσι διανοίαις.

. . . fine practices and discourses that hold true, which are the best sentinels and guardians of the thoughts of those beloved to the gods.

**3. Plato (*Resp.* 8.567d5-568a2):**

Ἄρ' οὖν οὐχὶ ὅσω ἂν μᾶλλον τοῖς πολίταις ἀπεχθάνηται ταῦτα δρῶν, τοσοῦτω πλειόνων καὶ πιστοτέρων δορυφόρων δεήσεται;

Πῶς γὰρ οὐ;

Τίνες οὖν οἱ πιστοί; καὶ πόθεν αὐτοὺς μεταπέμψεται;

Αὐτόματοι, ἔφη, πολλοὶ ἤξουσι πετόμενοι, ἐὰν τὸν μισθὸν διδῶ.

Κηφῆνας, ἦν δ' ἐγώ, νῆ τὸν κύνα, δοκεῖς αὖ τινάς μοι λέγειν ξενικούς τε καὶ παντοδαπούς.

Ἀληθῆ γάρ, ἔφη, δοκῶ σοι.

Τίς δὲ αὐτόθεν; ἄρ' οὐκ ἂν ἐθέλησειεν –

Πῶς;

Τοὺς δούλους ἀφελόμενος τοὺς πολίτας, ἐλευθερώσας, τῶν περὶ ἑαυτὸν δορυφόρων ποιήσασθαι.

Σφόδρα γ', ἔφη· ἐπεὶ τοι καὶ πιστότατοι αὐτῷ οὗτοί εἰσιν.

Ἦ μακάριον, ἦν δ' ἐγώ, λέγεις τυράννου χρῆμα, εἰ τοιοῦτοις φίλοις τε καὶ πιστοῖς ἀνδράσι χρῆται, τοὺς προτέρους ἐκείνους ἀπολέσας.

“And the more hateful he becomes to the citizens by doing these things, the more he'll need an armed bodyguard of more and more trustworthy men?”

“How could it be otherwise?”

“So what sort of men are to be trusted? And from where will he summon such men?”

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<sup>1</sup> All translations are mine.

“Many will come flitting in of their own accord,” he said, “if he pays them.”

“By the dog,” I said, “you seem to mean drones, an alien and motley gang of mercenaries.”

“You’ve got it right,” he said.

“But who from this country? Would he not want . . .”

“What?”

“To make the slaves freed from the citizens, once he freed them, members of his bodyguard?”

“Absolutely,” he said, “since these men would also be the most trustworthy for him.”

“What a blessed tyrant business you show this to be,” I said, “if he uses such men as his allies and confidants, given that he destroyed his former ones.”

#### 4. Plato (*Resp.* 8.568a3-b1):

Ἀλλὰ μὴν, ἔφη, τοιούτοις γε χρῆται.

Καὶ θαυμάζουσι δὴ, εἶπον, οὗτοι οἱ ἐταῖροι αὐτὸν καὶ σύνεισιν οἱ νέοι πολῖται, οἱ δ' ἐπεικεῖς μισοῦσιν τε καὶ φεύγουσι;

Τί δ' οὐ μέλλουσιν;

Οὐκ ἐτός, ἦν δ' ἐγώ, ἢ τε τραγωδία ὄλως σοφὸν δοκεῖ εἶναι καὶ ὁ Εὐριπίδης διαφέρων ἐν αὐτῇ.

Τί δὴ;

Ὅτι καὶ τοῦτο πυκνῆς διανοίας ἐχόμενον ἐφθέγγατο, ὡς ἄρα **“σοφοὶ τύραννοί” εἰσι “τῶν σοφῶν συνουσίᾳ.”**

“But of course,” he said, “he would make use of just such men.”

“And these companions,” I said, “admire 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.”

#### 5. Plato (*Resp.* 8.567b1-c1):

. . . καὶ ἔλεγε δῆλον ὅτι τούτους εἶναι τοὺς σοφοὺς οἷς σύνεστιν.

Καὶ ὡς ἰσόθεόν γ', ἔφη, τὴν τυραννίδα ἐγκωμιάζει, καὶ ἕτερα πολλά, καὶ οὗτος καὶ οἱ ἄλλοι ποιηταί.

Τοιγάρτοι, ἔφην, ἄτε σοφοὶ ὄντες οἱ τῆς τραγωδίας ποιηταί συγγινώσκουσιν ἡμῖν τε καὶ ἐκείνοις ὅσοι ἡμῶν ἐγγὺς πολιτεύονται, ὅτι αὐτοὺς εἰς τὴν πολιτείαν οὐ παραδεξόμεθα ἄτε τυραννίδος ὑμνητάς.

Οἶμαι ἔγωγ', ἔφη, συγγινώσκουσιν ὅσοι ἐπὶ 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.”

**6. Plato (*Resp.* 2.364-65) and Hesiod (*Op.* 287-9):**

τὴν μὲν κακότητα καὶ ἰλαδὸν ἔστιν ἐλέσθαι  
 ῥηϊδίως· λείη μὲν ὁδός, μάλα δ' ἐγγύθι ναίει·  
 τῆς δ' ἀρετῆς ἰδρῶτα θεοὶ προπάροιθεν ἔθηκον

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.

**7. Hesiod (*Op.* 290-92):**

ἀθάνατοι· μακρὸς δὲ καὶ ὄρθιος οἴμος ἐς αὐτὴν  
 καὶ τρηχὺς τὸ πρῶτον· ἐπὴν δ' εἰς ἄκρον ἵκηται,  
 ῥηϊδίη δὴ ἔπειτα πέλει, χαλεπή περ ἐοῦσα.

And the way to it [Virtue] is long and steep and rough at first. But when one arrives at the summit, then it is easier, even though remaining difficult.<sup>2</sup>

**8. Plato (*Gorgias* 492e3-4):**

Οὐκ ἄρα ὀρθῶς λέγονται οἱ μηδενὸς δεόμενοι εὐδαίμονες εἶναι.

So those who are in need of nothing are not rightly said to be happy.

**9. Plato (*Gorgias* 492e5-6):**

Οἱ λίθοι γὰρ ἂν οὕτω γε καὶ οἱ νεκροὶ εὐδαιμονέστατοι εἶεν.

No, for in that case, corpses and stones would be the happiest of all.

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<sup>2</sup> I omit from my translation ἀθάνατοι, as it belongs to the previous line, which Adeimantus cropped.

**10. Plato (*Gorgias* 492e7-11):**

Ἀλλὰ μὲν δὴ καὶ ὥς γε σὺ λέγεις δεινὸς ὁ βίος.  
οὐ γάρ τοι θαυμάζοιμ' ἂν εἰ Εὐριπίδης ἀληθῆ ἐν τοῖσδε λέγει, λέγων –  
τίς δ' οἶδεν, εἰ **τὸ ζῆν μὲν ἔστι 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?"

**11. Plato (*Gorgias* 493a1-5):**

καὶ ἡμεῖς τῷ ὄντι ἴσως τέθναμεν· ἤδη γάρ του ἔγωγε καὶ ἤκουσα τῶν σοφῶν ὡς νῦν ἡμεῖς τέθναμεν καὶ **τὸ μὲν σῶμά ἐστὶν ἡμῖν σῆμα,** τῆς δὲ ψυχῆς τοῦτο ἐν ᾧ ἐπιθυμῖαι εἰσὶ τυγχάνει ὄν οἷον **ἀναπειθεσθαι καὶ μεταπίπτειν ἄνω 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 . . .

**12. Plato (*Gorgias* 493a5-b7):**

καὶ τοῦτο ἄρα τις μυθολογῶν **κομπὸς** ἀνὴρ, ἴσως Σικελὸς τις ἢ Ἰταλικός, **παράγων τῷ ὀνόματι** διὰ τὸ **πιθανόν τε καὶ πειστικόν** ὠνόμασε πίθον, τοὺς δὲ ἀνοήτους ἀμύητους, τῶν δ' ἀνοήτων τοῦτο τῆς ψυχῆς οὗ αἱ ἐπιθυμῖαι εἰσὶ, τὸ ἀκόλαστον αὐτοῦ καὶ οὐ στεγανόν, ὡς τετρημένος εἶη πίθος, διὰ τὴν ἀπλησίαν ἀπεικάζας. τούναντίον δὴ οὗτος σοί, ᾧ Καλλίκλεις, ἐνδείκνυται ὡς τῶν ἐν Ἄιδου – τὸ αἰδὲς δὴ λέγων – οὗτοι ἀθλιώτατοι ἂν εἶεν, οἱ ἀμύητοι, καὶ φοροῖεν εἰς τὸν τετρημένον πίθον ὕδωρ ἐτέρω τοιούτῳ τετρημένῳ κοσκίνῳ.

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.