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**Simonides’ *Ode to Scopas* in Plato’s *Protagoras* and the Value of Poetic Interpretation in Book 10 of the *Republic***

**Part 1 – Socrates, Protagoras and Simonides’ *Ode to Scopas***

1. *Protagoras*, 338e – 339a – The value of poetic exegesis for Protagoras:

ἡγοῦμαι, ἔφη, ὦ Σώκρατες, ἐγὼ **ἀνδρὶ παιδείας μέγιστον μέρος** εἶναι περὶ ἐπῶν δεινὸν εἶναι: ἔστιν δὲ τοῦτο τὰ ὑπὸ τῶν ποιητῶν λεγόμενα οἷόν τ᾽ εἶναι συνιέναι ἅ τε ὀρθῶς πεποίηται καὶ ἃ μή, καὶ ἐπίστασθαι διελεῖν τε καὶ ἐρωτώμενον λόγον δοῦναι

I believe, Socrates, that **the greatest part of a man's education** is to be skilled in the matter of verses; that is, to be able to apprehend, in the utterances of the poets, what has been rightly and what wrongly composed, and to know how to distinguish them and account for them when questioned[[1]](#footnote-1).

1. Simonides Fr. 37.1.11 = Fr. 542 PMG

 ἄνδρ᾿ ἀγαθὸν μὲν ἀλαθέως γενέσθαι χαλεπὸν It is difficult to become a truly good man

 χερσίν τε καὶ ποσὶ καὶ νόῳ in hands and feet and mind

 τετράγωνον ἄνευ ψόγου τετυγμένον· 3 built four-square without blame.

 *desunt septem (vel septemdecim versus)*

οὐδέ μοι ἐμμελέως τὸ Πιττάκειον νέμεται, Nor Pittacus’ saying seems to me in tune,

 καίτοι σοφοῦ παρὰ φωτὸς εἰ- although said by a wise man

 ρημένον· χαλεπὸν φάτ᾿ ἐσθλὸν ἔμμεναι. it is hard – he said – to be good.

θεὸς ἂν μόνος τοῦτ᾿ ἔχοι γέρας, ἄνδρα δ᾿ οὐκ 14 God alone could have this privilege.

 ἔστι μὴ οὐ κακὸν ἔμμεναι, A man, however, cannot be but bad

ὃν ἀμήχανος συμφορὰ καθέλῃ· When irreversible misfortune pulls him down

πράξας γὰρ εὖ πᾶς ἀνὴρ ἀγαθός, For when things are good, every man is good

κακὸς δ᾿ εἰ κακῶς < - 18 and bad when things are bad [

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τοὔνεκεν οὔ ποτ᾿ ἐγὼ τὸ μὴ γενέσθαι δυνατὸν 21 Thus, searching for what cannot come into being,

 διζήμενος κενεὰν ἐς ἄ- vainly, I will never throw away in an

 πρακτον ἐλπίδα μοῖραν αἰῶνος βαλέω, impracticable hope the space of my life

πανάμωμον ἄνθρωπον, εὐρυεδέος ὅσοι 24 a totally blameless man, among those of us

 καρπὸν αἰνύμεθα χθονός· who feed on the fruits of broad-based earth

ἐπὶ δ᾿ ὑμὶν εὑρὼν ἀπαγγελέω. but if I find one I will announce it

πάντας δ᾿ ἐπαίνημι καὶ φιλέω, 27 I praise and love anyone

ἑκὼν ὅστις ἔρδῃ whoever willingly does

 μηδὲν αἰσχρόν· ἀνάγκᾳ δ᾿ nothing bad: necessity

 οὐδὲ θεοὶ μάχονται. 30 not even gods fight

 *desunt tres vel tredecim versus*

 Â Â - Â - > μηδ᾿ ἄγαν ἀπάλαμνος εἰ- 34 ] someone who is not too helpless,

 δώς τ᾿ ὀνησίπολιν δίκαν, conscious at least of the justice profitable to the city,

 ὑγιὴς ἀνήρ· †οὐ μὴν† ἐγὼ a healthy man. I shall not

 μωμήσομαι· τῶν γὰρ ἠλιθίων 37 blame him, because fools

 ἀπείρων γενέθλα. are a species that never ends.

 πάντα τοι καλά, τοῖσί˂ν˃ All things, you know, are beautiful with which

 τ᾿ αἰσχρὰ μὴ μέμεικται. 40 bad things are not mixed.

1. Distortion 1 – The difference between γενέσθαι and ἔμμεναι:

1. Simonides

ἄνδρ᾽ ἀγαθὸν μὲν ἀλαθέως γενέσθαι χαλεπόν = It is truly difficult to *become* a good man

2. Pittacus

χαλεπὸν φάτ᾽ ἐσθλὸν ἔμμεναι = It is difficult, he said, to *be* good.

1. Hesiod, *Works and Days,* 289–292:

τῆς δ᾽ ἀρετῆς ἱδρῶτα θεοὶ προπάροιθεν ἔθηκαν

ἀθάνατοι: μακρὸς δὲ καὶ ὄρθιος οἶμος ἐς αὐτὴν

καὶ τρηχὺς τὸ πρῶτον: ἐπὴν δ᾽ εἰς ἄκρον ἵκηται,

ῥηιδίη δὴ ἔπειτα πέλει, χαλεπή περ ἐοῦσα.

The immortal gods placed sweat before virtue / long and steep is the path towards it / and rough in the first place; / but when a man has reached the top, then it is easy, though before it was hard.

1. Distortion 2 - By saying χαλεπός, Simonides meant κακός.

ἄνδρ᾽ ἀγαθὸν μὲν ἀλαθέως γενέσθαι **χαλεπόν** = ἄνδρ᾽ ἀγαθὸν μὲν ἀλαθέως γενέσθαι **κακόν**,

1. Distortion 3 – Socrates forces his ideas into Simonides’ poem.

*1. Socrates’ doctrine of ἐπιστήμη* (*Protagoras,* 345b)*:*

αὕτη γὰρ μόνη ἐστὶ κακὴ πρᾶξις, ἐπιστήμης στερηθῆναι

For there is only one sort of ill fare, the deprivation of knowledge.

*2. Socrates’ moral intellectualism:*

πάντας δ᾿ ἐπαίνημι καὶ φιλέω

**ἑκὼν** ὅστις ἔρδῃ

μηδὲν αἰσχρόν

Socrates believes that ἑκὼν “willingly”, goes with ἐπαίνημι καὶ φιλέω “I praise and love willingly” instead of ἔρδῃ μηδὲν αἰσχρόν, “does nothing bad willingly”.

1. *Protagoras,* 347c – 348a:

καὶ γὰρ δοκεῖ μοι τὸ περὶ ποιήσεως διαλέγεσθαι ὁμοιότατον εἶναι τοῖς συμποσίοις τοῖς τῶν φαύλων καὶ ἀγοραίων ἀνθρώπων. καὶ γὰρ οὗτοι, διὰ τὸ μὴ δύνασθαι ἀλλήλοις δι᾽ ἑαυτῶν συνεῖναι ἐν τῷ πότῳ μηδὲ διὰ τῆς ἑαυτῶν φωνῆς καὶ τῶν λόγων **τῶν ἑαυτῶν ὑπὸ ἀπαιδευσίας** […] οὕτω δὲ καὶ αἱ τοιαίδε συνουσίαι, ἐὰν μὲν λάβωνται ἀνδρῶν οἷοίπερ ἡμῶν οἱ πολλοί φασιν εἶναι, οὐδὲν δέονται ἀλλοτρίας φωνῆς οὐδὲ ποιητῶν, **οὓς οὔτε ἀνερέσθαι οἷόν τ᾽ ἐστὶν περὶ ὧν λέγουσιν**, ἐπαγόμενοί τε αὐτοὺς οἱ πολλοὶ **ἐν τοῖς λόγοις οἱ μὲν ταῦτά φασιν τὸν ποιητὴν νοεῖν, οἱ δ᾽ ἕτερα, περὶ πράγματος διαλεγόμενοι ὃ ἀδυνατοῦσι ἐξελέγξαι**: ἀλλὰ τὰς μὲν τοιαύτας συνουσίας ἐῶσιν χαίρειν, αὐτοὶ δ᾽ ἑαυτοῖς σύνεισιν δι᾽ ἑαυτῶν, ἐν τοῖς ἑαυτῶν λόγοις πεῖραν ἀλλήλων λαμβάνοντες καὶ διδόντες**. τοὺς τοιούτους μοι δοκεῖ χρῆναι μᾶλλον** **μιμεῖσθαι** ἐμέ τε καὶ σέ, καταθεμένους τοὺς ποιητὰς αὐτοὺς δι᾽ ἡμῶν αὐτῶν πρὸς ἀλλήλους τοὺς λόγους ποιεῖσθαι, **τῆς ἀληθείας καὶ ἡμῶν αὐτῶν πεῖραν λαμβάνοντας**.

*For it seems to me that arguing about poetry is comparable to the wine-parties of common market-folk. These people, owing to their inability to carry on a familiar conversation over their wine by means of their own voices and discussions—* ***such is their lack of education****— […] And so a gathering like this of ours, when it includes such men as most of us claim to be, requires no extraneous voices, not even of the poets,* ***whom one cannot question on the sense of what they say****; when they are adduced in* ***discussion we are generally told by some that the poet thought so and so, and by others, something different, and they go on arguing about a matter which they are powerless to determine****. No, this sort of meeting is avoided by men of culture, who prefer to converse directly with each other, and to use their own way of speech in putting one another by turns to the test.* ***It is this sort of person that I think you and I ought rather to imitate****; putting the poets aside, let us hold our discussion together in our own persons,* ***making trial of the truth and of ourselves.***

**Part 2 – The *Protagoras* and Book 10 of the *Republic***

1. *Republic,* 10.598a:

ἀκούομεν ὅτι οὗτοι πάσας μὲν τέχνας **ἐπίστανται**, πάντα δὲ τὰ ἀνθρώπεια τὰ πρὸς **ἀρετὴν** καὶ κακίαν […]

We hear that these poets **know** all the arts and all human things pertaining to **virtue** and vice […].

1. Imitation and poetry as deception.

*Republic,* 10.598b:

**πόρρω ἄρα που τοῦ ἀληθοῦς ἡ μιμητική ἐστιν** καί, ὡς ἔοικεν, διὰ τοῦτο πάντα ἀπεργάζεται, ὅτι σμικρόν τι ἑκάστου ἐφάπτεται, καὶ τοῦτο εἴδωλον

**Then the mimetic art is far removed from the truth** and, as it seems, for this reason it can produce everything, because it touches a small part of each object and that is a phantom.

*Republic,* 10.598a–599a:

δεῖ δὴ ἐπισκέψασθαι πότερον μιμηταῖς τούτοις οὗτοι ἐντυχόντες **ἐξηπάτηνται** καὶ τὰ ἔργα αὐτῶν ὁρῶντες οὐκ αἰσθάνονται τριττὰ ἀπέχοντα τοῦ ὄντος καὶ ῥᾴδια ποιεῖν μὴ εἰδότι τὴν ἀλήθειαν—φαντάσματα γὰρ ἀλλ᾽ οὐκ ὄντα ποιοῦσιν—.

It is necessary to consider whether men, coming across such imitators, **have been deceived by them**, so that looking upon their works they do not realize that these are three times removed from reality, and it is easy to produce without knowledge of the truth – because they produce phantoms, but not reality -.

 *Republic,* 10.600e:

οὐκοῦν τιθῶμεν ἀπὸ Ὁμήρου ἀρξαμένους **πάντας τοὺς ποιητικοὺς μιμητὰς εἰδώλων ἀρετῆς** εἶναι καὶ τῶν ἄλλων περὶ ὧν ποιοῦσιν, **τῆς δὲ ἀληθείας οὐχ ἅπτεσθαι**;

Shall we then suppose, beginning with Homer, that **all the poets are imitators of images of excellence** and of the other things they create, and **they do not touch upon the truth**?

1. *Republic,* 10.600c–d:

ἀλλ᾽ οἴει, ὦ Γλαύκων, εἰ τῷ ὄντι οἷός τ᾽ ἦν παιδεύειν ἀνθρώπους καὶ βελτίους ἀπεργάζεσθαι Ὅμηρος, ἅτε περὶ τούτων οὐ μιμεῖσθαι ἀλλὰ γιγνώσκειν δυνάμενος, οὐκ ἄρ᾽ ἂν πολλοὺς ἑταίρους ἐποιήσατο καὶ ἐτιμᾶτο καὶ ἠγαπᾶτο ὑπ᾽ αὐτῶν, ἀλλὰ **Πρωταγόρας μὲν ἄρα ὁ Ἀβδηρίτης καὶ Πρόδικος ὁ Κεῖος** καὶ ἄλλοι πάμπολλοι δύνανται τοῖς ἐφ᾽ ἑαυτῶν παριστάναι ἰδίᾳ συγγιγνόμενοι ὡς οὔτε οἰκίαν οὔτε πόλιν τὴν αὑτῶν διοικεῖν οἷοί τ᾽ ἔσονται, ἐὰν μὴ σφεῖς αὐτῶν ἐπιστατήσωσιν τῆς παιδείας […]

But do you think, Glaucon, that, if Homer had really been able to educate men and make them better and had possessed not the art of imitation but real knowledge, he would not have acquired many companions and been honored and loved by them? On the contrary, **Protagoras of Abdera and Prodicus of Ceos** and many others are able, by teaching privately, to convince their contemporaries that they will not be capable of governing their homes or the city unless they put them in charge of their education […].

1. *Republic* 10.607b

ταῦτα δή, ἔφην, ἀπολελογήσθω ἡμῖν ἀναμνησθεῖσιν περὶ ποιήσεως, ὅτι εἰκότως ἄρα τότε αὐτὴν ἐκ τῆς πόλεως ἀπεστέλλομεν τοιαύτην οὖσαν. ὁ γὰρ λόγος ἡμᾶς ᾕρει. προσείπωμεν δὲ αὐτῇ, μὴ καί τινα σκληρότητα ἡμῶν καὶ ἀγροικίαν καταγνῷ, ὅτι **παλαιὰ** μέν τις **διαφορὰ φιλοσοφίᾳ τε καὶ ποιητικῇ.**

Let us then, he said, conclude our return to the topic of poetry, saying that we are justly dismissing it from our city, since such is her character. For reason constrained us. Let us further tell her, lest she condemns us for harshness and rusticity, that this is a sort of **old quarrel between philosophy and poetry.**

1. *Republic,* 10.606a–606b:

τὸ δὲ φύσει βέλτιστον ἡμῶν, ἅτε οὐχ ἱκανῶς πεπαιδευμένον λόγῳ οὐδὲ ἔθει, ἀνίησιν τὴν φυλακὴν τοῦ θρηνώδους τούτου, ἅτε ἀλλότρια πάθη θεωροῦν καὶ ἑαυτῷ οὐδὲν αἰσχρὸν ὂν εἰ ἄλλος ἀνὴρ **ἀγαθὸς φάσκων εἶναι** ἀκαίρως πενθεῖ, τοῦτον ἐπαινεῖν καὶ ἐλεεῖν ἀλλ᾽ ἐκεῖνο κερδαίνειν ἡγεῖται, τὴν ἡδονήν, καὶ οὐκ ἂν δέξαιτο αὐτῆς στερηθῆναι καταφρονήσας ὅλου τοῦ ποιήματος.

The best element in our nature [i.e. the soul], since it has never been properly educated by reason or even by habit, then relaxes its guard over the plaintive part, inasmuch as it contemplates the misfortunes of others and there is no shame in praising and pitying another man who, **claiming to be good**, abandons himself to excessive grief; but it thinks that this pleasure is a gain, and would not accept to be deprived of it by disdaining the whole poem.

1. *Republic,* 606d:

καὶ περὶ ἀφροδισίων δὴ καὶ θυμοῦ καὶ περὶ πάντων τῶν ἐπιθυμητικῶν τε καὶ λυπηρῶν καὶ ἡδέων ἐν τῇ ψυχῇ, ἃ δή φαμεν πάσῃ πράξει ἡμῖν ἕπεσθαι, ὅτι **τοιαῦτα ἡμᾶς ἡ ποιητικὴ μίμησις ἐργάζεται**: τρέφει γὰρ ταῦτα ἄρδουσα, δέον αὐχμεῖν, καὶ ἄρχοντα ἡμῖν καθίστησιν, δέον ἄρχεσθαι αὐτὰ **ἵνα βελτίους τε καὶ εὐδαιμονέστεροι ἀντὶ χειρόνων καὶ ἀθλιωτέρων γιγνώμεθα.**

And in regard to sex and anger and the appetites and pains and pleasures of the soul, which we say follow every action, **the effect of poetic imitation on us is the same**. For it nourishes and waters these feelings, although we should dry them up, and it establishes them as our rulers, although we should be the ones ruling them, **to the end that we may be better and happier men instead of worse and more miserable.**

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1. All translations are mine. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)