

it cannot evade the task of finding an answer to it, the task which our human existence and our urge to think beyond the perceptible and proximate world assign to us. This fact is expressed in the linking of *psychē* and *eidos* in Plato's thought.

To be sure, Kant displayed the fallacy of the 'rational' demonstration which Mendelssohn developed in his rethinking of the *Phaedo*. But Kant's own philosophical insight comes very close to that of Plato's dialogue. Kant's critique 'proved' human freedom just as little as Plato proved immortality. But it did prove that the a priori validity of causality underlying all natural science could not disprove our human sense of being free. For Kant freedom was the only rational fact. Plato called that same fact something else: *idea*.

3

Plato and the Poets

Difficult though it might be to detect it, a certain polemical thread runs through any philosophical writing. He who philosophizes is not at one with the previous and contemporary world's ways of thinking of things. Thus Plato's discussions are often not only directed *to* something but also directed *against* it.

Goethe

In his *Republic*, a work which develops an ideal order for the state and for its program of education, Plato condemned Homer and the great Attic dramatists to permanent exile from the state.¹ Probably nowhere else has a philosopher denied the value of art so completely and so sharply contested its claim—which seems so self-evident to us—to reveal the deepest and most inaccessible truths. Perhaps the most difficult task to confront the German mind in its efforts to assimilate the mind of the ancient world (and perhaps the most unpalatable too given the self-image of the former) has been that of justifying Plato's critique of the poets and grasping its meaning. For it is precisely the art and poetry of the ancients which the aesthetic humanism of the German classical and romantic periods took to be the epitome of classical antiquity and which they made an obligatory paradigm

1. The following analysis was presented on January 24, 1934, at the meeting of the Society of Friends of the Humanistic Gymnasium in Marburg. The published version here is thus also directed to the wider circle of those interested in its subject matter. For that reason prefatory remarks and citations of supporting texts are omitted for the most part. Moreover the excerption of Plato's critique of the poets from the *Republic* as a whole makes it impossible to consider here some of the most central elements in its overall argument, e.g., the dialectical explication of the traditional concept of justice in book I, the Socratic transformation of the ancient doctrine of the virtues in book 4, and above all the doctrine of the ideas in books 5-7, which in proceeding beyond the doctrine of virtues, completes the definition of man and state. (Cf. chap. 4 below.)

for themselves. And Plato himself, the hostile critic of this art of classical antiquity, was felt by the romantics to be one of the most splendid embodiments of the poetic genius of the Greeks and was admired and loved from their time on just as much as Homer, the tragic poets, Pindar, and Aristophanes. Moreover the scholarly research which resulted from this revitalization of the classical ideal in Germany justified this response to Plato in its own way. It inquired into the particular law of form governing Plato's dialogical compositions and discovered in Plato's work the wonderfully artful synthesis of all the elements of form which had defined the development of literature from Homer through Attic tragedy and comedy. Indeed Plato himself proved to be the only one who meets the requirement which is established in the *Symposium* in the night-long discussion of Socrates with the tragedian Agathon and the comic poet Aristophanes, namely, that the true tragedian must be the true comic poet. Furthermore this situating of Plato in the history of developing poetic forms is supported by the ancient tradition, which tells us expressly that as a youth Plato himself composed tragedies.

But this same tradition also tells us that Plato burned these youthful attempts after he became a disciple of Socrates. He who understands this account understands Plato's critique of the poets. For certainly we cannot take it to mean (as the ancient authorities would suggest) that Plato, having been awakened by Socrates, abandoned the misguided ways of his youth. We cannot interpret it, in other words, as we would ordinarily interpret such a biographical account of a creative individual, i.e., as a report of his discovery of his own true talent. If this story is actually true and not in fact some fictitious formulation of Plato's later critique of the poets, the truth of it is not that Plato recognized that he did not have the *ability* to be a great poet but that he recognized that he did not have the *desire*. For the encounter with Socrates as a very epiphany of philosophy had brought home to him that being a poet was no longer worthwhile.

Obviously there must be a measure of the value of poetry besides the one with which we are familiar and which Plato uses to oppose the classical poets so sharply. In book 10 of the *Republic* we learn the reasons for Plato's rejection of the beloved Homer.

Homer, it is said, had not founded a better state than Charondas or Solon. Nor did he have any ingenious discoveries to show for himself like those of Thales or Anarcharsis. Nor was he influential in the private sphere; unlike Pythagoras, who established a Pythagorean way of life for the few, Homer created no Homeric life as the leader of a circle of followers. Nor could he even compare to the great sophists in being an effective and successful educator, but instead he found himself living an unstable rhapsodic existence. Now when we read this and hear what the standard is by which Homer's poetry is to be evaluated and rejected, how could *we* be won over to the philosophers and turned against the poets? For we, certainly, would no longer presume to apply this standard to either poets or philosophers or, in fact, to apply it at all as a measure of intellectual significance.

We must attempt, therefore, to reach a new understanding of Plato's standard if we intend to assess his decision against poetry and his criticism of the poets. It cannot be our purpose to dispose of Plato's decision by saying that it is merely the function of some particular distant and irrelevant moment in history. On the contrary we wish to make it possible for this decision of Plato's to mean something to us too. When Plato burns his tragedies, he does not settle an eternal dispute about the priority of philosophy over art or vice versa, by establishing which provides the deeper interpretation of life. Rather he recognizes that in the hour of his decision Socratic philosophy is not to be circumvented. And the poets fail just as much as anyone else to face up to this necessity.

I would call to mind here Socrates' remarks in the *Apology*, in which he relates how he had tested the saying of the oracle that no one is wiser than he. He examined statesmen, poets, and craftsmen and found them all to be ignorant. The interrogation of the poets, however, elicits something which distinguishes them from all the others. Although the poets themselves can give no answer to Socrates' question about what true virtue is, their *works* might contain a valid answer. The poets confirm the Delphic utterance only to the extent that they take themselves to be great knowers although they, like seers and interpreters of the oracles, say what they do only from divine inspiration. Though their

poetry might always be prophetic, Socrates' examination reveals that they themselves are less qualified to interpret it than any of their listeners.

The poet, when he sits on the tripod of the muses, is no longer in his right mind. Like a fountain, he willingly lets whatever enters him stream forth. And since his art is only imitation, he is forced to create characters which oppose each other and thus always to speak against himself (to contradict himself), and he does not know if the one thing or the other of that which he has said is true (*Laws* 719 c).

The poets say what they say, not from their own wisdom, but in being filled by the god and possessed. . . . They create their poems like Bacchants creating honey and milk out of rivers (*Ion* 534 a).

And they tell us,

that they harvest the honey of their songs from streaming well springs in the gardens and meadows of the muses and bring it to us like bees, they themselves being in flight. And they are right: the poet is something buoyant, winged and holy, and he cannot create until he is filled by the god and without consciousness and until there is no more reason in him (*Ion* 534 b ff.).

This acknowledgment of the poet's *enthousiasmos*² is fraught with the most dangerous ambiguity. Despite the glowing description of the poet, a basic tone of irony and criticism predominates. Although poetry might be divine madness and possession, it is in any case not *knowing*. It is no skill (*technē*) which could account for and justify itself and its truth. The pictures of life which the poet most powerfully evokes remain equivocal enigmas like life itself, and Socrates cannot learn the true art of living which he seeks from them. Thus it sounds like undisguised irony when Socrates advances the poets as "fathers of wisdom

2. Here to be taken literally as *en-thous-iasmos* or "being filled with the gods," *Götterfülltheit*. (Translator)

and leaders," and in fact he most sharply contests that Homer "educated all of Greece."

Nevertheless this is not all that lies in Plato's treatment of poetic *enthousiasmos*. Socrates really has no intention of settling whether the "divine men" say the truth or not, and whether in times which were nearer to the gods the truth of their poetry might in fact have been understood although it is no longer understood today. He knows only his own lack of knowledge and the lack of knowledge of those whom he can question. Thus the "yes and no" of the irony here in respect to the poets demands that we inquire philosophically into what might justify his critique of Homer.

Exactly why does Plato reprove Homer? First, for his picture of the gods, i.e., the human appearance, so well known to us, which he gives the gods—gods who in the heights of their Olympian existence quarrel and transgress, plot and scheme in much the same way that men are forever doing. And second, he resists Homer's image of Hades, which must necessarily arouse the fear of death. He objects to the excessive bewailing of the dead, the excessive scorn and ridicule, and the wanton passions and desires in Homer's gods and heroes.

All this seems to be more a critique of myth such as it exists in Homer than a critique of poetry per se. And Plato is not alone in his criticism of myth. His predecessors here include philosophers such as Xenophanes, Heraclitus, Pythagoras, and Anaxagoras, all of whom had similar criticisms of Homer's theology. But above all it is the later poets, Pindar and the tragedians, who are in agreement with Plato. It is they who purified and exalted the imagery of the gods and heroes by building upon the old myths while expressly rejecting the traditional form of the legend. And they built upon the old myths and extracted new truths from them, new moral and political significances, not in opportunistically conforming to the fancies and expectations of their audiences but in following an intrinsic necessity in their poetic production, to which all their skills had to be subordinated. Poetry is finding the right myth, and as Aristotle says, myth is the soul of tragedy. Is Plato, then, the last in this line of

philosophical critics and poets who recast the old myths? Is he the most radical of those who purify the great tradition of myth and translate the ancient myths into a new ethos?

One might think so in view of his criticism of the Homeric gods and heroes. That criticism seems to be in the same vein as Xenophanes' attack on the crude anthropomorphic picture of the gods in Homer and as Heraclitus' assertion that Homer deserved to be banned from the competitions and flayed with sticks. But Plato also seems to be basically of one mind with the poets of the post-Homeric period insofar as they reject the traditional accounts of the misdeeds and vices of the gods as minstrels' lies, and thus it seems that Plato went beyond the poets only in the rigor of his adherence to a requirement which they themselves acknowledged. In fact even his motive for purifying the traditional myths seems to have been the same as theirs. Both Plato and the poets reject what is false, not just because it is false, but for *pedagogical* reasons. The poets themselves know that their greatest effect is on the youth. As Aristophanes puts it, anyone who tells little children some story can be their teacher. But the teachers of young men are the poets. Thus they may say to them only what is right.

But Plato's criticism goes infinitely further. Drama too falls before his critique, for he is as unrestrained in applying his immoderate critical standard to the form of poetry as he is in applying it to the form of myth. Poetry presents its content in narration, in direct imitation, or in a mixture of both forms as dithyramb, as drama, as epic. And now we are told that all imitative presentation, insofar as anything but an exemplary ethos is displayed in it, is to be discarded. Consequently next to nothing remains of Homer's poetry. In regard to Homer, in fact, Plato deliberately heightens the provocative element in his attack by changing the direct speech, at its first appearance in the classical beginning of the *Iliad*, to indirect speech:

Homer: A 33 ff.:

He having said this, Chrysēs was afraid and
did what he was told.

In silence he passed along the shore of the
murmuring sea;

And as he wandered on, now alone, the old
man
Implored Apollo, the son of long-locked
Letho, fervently.
Hear me, oh God, who with silver bow dost
bestride Chrysa
And holy Cilla, thou who art the mighty lord
of Tenedos.
Smintheus! If ever I have built a lovely
temple for you
If ever I have burnt for thee choice
shanks
Of bulls or of goats, then grant me this,
my desire:
May the Achaeans pay for my tears under
thy shafts.

Plato: *Republic* 394 a:

And the old man on hearing this was frightened and departed in silence, and having gone apart from the camp he prayed at length to Apollo, invoking the appellations of the god, and reminding him of, and asking requital for, any of his gifts that had found favor whether in the building of temples or the sacrifice of victims. In return for these things he prayed that the Achaeans should suffer for his tears by the god's shafts.

Of course this conversion is only meant to illustrate the difference between narration and imitation, but it is an intentionally malevolent example. For if the norm it establishes is strictly adhered to, the opening of the *Iliad* would have to be purified of all direct speech. Neither the imitation of Agamemnon's outbreak of rage nor the imitation of the priest's prayer for revenge could be allowed. Thus it is no longer in any way remarkable that Plato proceeds to reject Attic drama as a whole and that he just as ruthlessly censors the specifically musical elements of Greek music, melody (harmony) and rhythm, so that in the end nothing remains save dithyrambic songs in praise of the gods, heroes, and virtues, i.e., representation of the right ethos in a

simple, strict musical form.

And as if this censure of the poets were not enough, at the end of the *Republic* (the beginning of book 10) Plato specifically returns to the theme of driving the poets out of the state and repeats in an even sharper form his demand that they be exiled. To be sure, the grounds which he gives seem serious and compelling, but nonetheless they serve only to heighten, not diminish, the provocativeness of his argument. With great hesitancy (which Plato underscores) Socrates begins again to settle his accounts with Homer, inhibited as he is by a love for Homer which has been with him since childhood and by the awe and respect which he feels toward the poet, and enchanted as he still is by him. But this hesitancy only makes all the more clear the enormity and violence of this settling of accounts. The poet is classed among the handworkers. He is said to be a sophist and magician who produces only deceptive appearances of things. And what is worse, he ruins the soul by stirring up in it the whole range of its passions. Hence it proves necessary to exile all the "sweet muses" from the state, however poetic they might be.

That *in nuce* is Plato's position. It is clear that the reason for this shocking attack on Homer and the poets is more than the sense of pedagogical responsibility which had prompted previous philosophers and poets to purify the traditional myths. Plato's criticism is no longer poetic criticism of myth, for unlike the poets he does not preserve ancient poetry in a form purified by criticism. He destroys it. To that extent his criticism becomes an attack on the foundations of Greek culture and on the inheritance bequeathed to us by Greek history. We might perhaps expect something of this sort from an unmusical rationalist but not from a man whose work itself is nourished from poetic sources and who cast a poetic spell which has enthralled mankind for thousands of years. Although Plato assures us to the contrary, is not his inability to do justice to the poets and to the art of poetry nevertheless an expression of the age-old rivalry between poets and philosophers?

It is mistaken to try to minimize the provocative and paradoxical nature of Plato's critique in any way. Of course Plato himself alludes here to this age-old conflict between philoso-

phers and poets, and precisely in order to assure us that this longstanding enmity is *not* reflected in his criticism. And it is true too that his critique of Homer's myth is not without its equally radical predecessors. Furthermore there can be no doubt that Plato's arguments against the art of poetry are much more likely to sound strange to the reader of today, who is no longer familiar with the role of the poets in Greek education. It was the practice then to justify the whole of one's knowledge—in any area—by recourse to Homer (just as Christian writers justified their knowledge by recourse to the Bible). In addition, listening to poetry had often completely given way to fantastic allegorization and hairsplitting exegesis, and, given the dominance of the spoken word in the Greek world, a poetic formulation taken out of context as creed or maxim went from the ear to the soul without the poet's overall intention defining and limiting its application. But all these considerations in no way diminish the extraordinary strangeness of Plato's criticism. Also mistaken is the defense of Plato which would argue that his critique is not of poetry as such but only of a degenerate contemporary form of it which contented itself with mere imitations of scenes from real life. For it is precisely Homer and the great tragedians who enthral Socrates and his friends but who are criticized nonetheless. It is also of no help in understanding the matter if one presupposes Plato as the metaphysician of the doctrine of ideas and then demonstrates that his critique of the poets follows logically from his basic ontological assumptions. On the contrary, Plato's attitude toward the poets is not a consequence of a system of thought which prevented him from more fairly evaluating poetic truth. Rather, his position is the quite conscious expression of a decision—a decision made as a result of having been taken with Socrates and philosophy, made in opposition to the entire political and intellectual culture of his time, and made in the conviction that philosophy alone has the capacity to save the state. There is good reason that Plato places his critique of the poets in two prominent places in his *Republic* and explicitly elaborates it there. For the pedagogical significance of Plato's new and different philosophy becomes evident precisely insofar as that philosophy breaks with the poetic foundations of Attic edu-

cation and asserts itself against the whole of the tradition.

Any interpretation of Plato's thinking here depends upon the context in which the expulsion of the poets from the sacred temple of Greek life occurs. Consequently any interpretation is wrong from the start which neglects this context and seeks to pass judgment on isolated statements which Plato makes. To do so would be to assume that Plato's position on art is explicitly articulated in these statements and that he means his argument as some sort of apology which would ultimately permit us to love the poets just as much as their adversaries. But the actual truth of the matter is that the meaning and intent of this critique of the poets can be established only by departing from the place where it occurs. It is found in Plato's work on the state within a program of education for the guardians of that state, a state which is erected before our eyes in words alone from the building blocks which alone suffice for it. The critique of the poets can be understood only within the setting of this total re-founding of a new state in words of philosophy, only understood as a radical turning away from the existing state. Only then does the quite simple purpose of it become plain.

Plato himself relates in his *Seventh Letter* (the famous autobiographical manifesto addressed to his political friends in Sicily) how he came to abstain from practical, political action and how, after a long wait for the right moment to act, he realized that a rebirth of the state could be brought about only by philosophy. For not only his father city but all existent states were poorly constituted and well nigh incurable. Plato's *Republic* is the expression of this insight. It stipulates that philosophers must become the rulers of the state since the affairs of the state are to be put in order only by philosophy.

Everything said in the *Republic* about the order of the state is subordinated to this requirement and serves as a justification for it. One misses the full seriousness and importance of that requirement, however, if one takes the projected educational program and the ordering of the state literally. This state is a state in thought, not any state on earth. That is to say, its purpose is to bring something to light and not to provide an actual design for an improved order in real political life. Plato's state is a "para-

digm in heaven" for someone who wants to order *himself* and his own inner constitution. Its sole raison d'être is to make it possible for a person to recognize himself in the paradigm. Of course the point is precisely that he who recognizes himself therein does not recognize himself as an isolated individual without a state. He recognizes in himself the basis upon which the reality of the state is built, and he is able to recognize that basis in himself however deformed and degenerate the actual state in which he lives may be. The proposed curriculum of education, which completely overturns the existing order of education, is actually only meant to remove the question of man's political nature, the question of the true essence of justice from any particular, relative form which the ordering of one's life might take and to transfer it to that ground in the soul of the individual which is the basis of the state insofar as it still exists and the basis of whatever state could come into being in the future.

Thus Plato's purification of traditional poetry can be understood only in relationship to the purpose of the whole of this paradigmatic constitution in the *Republic*. And the proposed purification of poetry, like the constitution, is not to be taken literally, i.e., as a set of instructions for reconstructing traditional education, a purification of the curriculum according to new standards. The very requirement with which it starts is seen to be totally unrealistic and immoderate when measured against the claims which one normally makes for the pedagogical importance of poetry. Any instruction in the ancient poetry was taken then and is to be taken now like any real instruction, i.e., as something auxiliary. In this case the heritage of the poetic tradition is applied in educating youth. What is of primary importance in education, however, occurs by itself. The most significant pedagogical results are never to be attributed to the specific means of instruction but to the "laws of the state" and above all to its unwritten laws, the ethos prevailing in the society which, though concealed, secretly molds human beings. Thus the secret pedagogical efficacy of poetry is due to the fact that in it something is expressed which reflects the ethical spirit prevailing in the community. Homer's effect on Greek youth was the same as that which he has in the youth of any individual today.

He provides magnificent paragons of heroic virtue—courage, honor, willingness to die, magnanimity, endurance, intelligence—and he does this without allowing the dissension among the gods, their deceit, base scheming, or cowardly weakness to influence us as negative models of behavior.

Given this fact, Plato's censorship of poetry seems to betray the moralistic bias of an intellectual purist. For here poetry is given a burden which it cannot carry and does not need to carry. Its content is to be purified so that it might attain an educational effect on its own. Through play, it is supposed to inculcate the genuine ethos in young souls and to do this by itself with no existing ethos in the communal life of young and old to guide and define the effect of the poetic word. That task amounts to an overburdening of the pedagogical function of poetry, an overburdening which is to be accounted for only by the critical motive behind what Plato says. Plato's Socratic insight was that a binding political ethos, which would assure the proper application and interpretation of poetry, no longer existed once sophism had come to define the spirit of education. To be sure, justice and the virtue of the political man were precisely what the sophists' education sought to inculcate too. But Socrates had uncovered the real content and dogma of their new ethos. For the sophists, justice is only the conventions of the weak which protect the interests of the latter. For the sophists, ethical principles are no longer valid in themselves but only as a form of our mutual "keeping an eye" on one another. The "just" is that by means of which one person can assert himself against another with help from everyone else and, as such, it is adhered to only out of mutual distrust and fear. It is not the justice intrinsic and internal to me myself. All the many variations of the sophists' theory of justice are alike in providing a 'foundation' for justice. And whether the sophists conceive of themselves as conservative or revolutionary, indeed even when the sophists think that they are giving a foundation to the authority of civil law, in principle they have already perverted the sense of justice. As judges of justice they fail to acknowledge it even if they "acquit" it. Thus Callicles' and Thrasymachus' declaration that might makes right only serves to disclose the mentality which prevails in all sophism: *No one does what is right voluntarily.*

When such a truth has suffused the spirit of a state, the positive pedagogical effect of poetry converts into its opposite. To the person with Thrasymachus' and the other sophists' teachings ringing in his ears, the world of poetry, which for generations had provided the models of higher humanity for youth, now is made to attest to the perverted spirit itself. Thus in the speech of Adeimantos at the beginning of book 2 the poets themselves are held accountable for the weakening of the proper sense of justice; they urge justice upon children not for its own sake but for the advantages and rewards which it brings. And all traditional poetry is guilty of this same thing. Beginning with the heroes and continuing to the present, injustice is never faulted on its own account and justice never praised for its own sake. But Adeimantos hints that this is not his own view on the truth of ancient poetry when he ends by saying that Thrasymachus or anyone else is able to state such a theory of justice and injustice only once he has brashly converted the real meaning of these concepts into its opposite.

Therefore it falls to Socrates to sing the true praises of the just and right. He must accomplish what no one else, especially the poets, can. Plato's "state" must now propound the true praise of a justice which will remain victorious evermore over the sophists' perversion of its meaning. What is just and right is not the right that someone *has* in opposition to another. Rather it is *being* just: Each *is* just by himself and all *are* just together. Justice does not exist when each person watches the other and guards against him but when each watches himself and guards the right and just being of his inner constitution.

Thus in the ideal state which Socrates now develops, the poetic tradition is purified to the point of totally eliminating the ancient heritage, for there must be no more witnesses in support of the sophists' perversions of the truth. The very excessiveness of this purification, which exceeds a thousandfold the boldest dreams of power ever entertained by any moralist-pedagogue, should teach us the point of a reordering of education such as Plato has in mind. *It is not intended to display how poetry would have to look in an actual state. Rather it is intended to disclose and awaken the powers themselves which form the state and from which the state as a whole derives. For that reason Socrates erects a state in*

words, the possibility of which is given only in *philosophy*. This state appears to be one which rests entirely upon the power of its educational system, i.e., to be a new beginning *ex nihilo* with no history which results solely from a rehabilitation of man. But actually it is a picture, justice "writ large," in which the soul can recognize what justice is. However, the soul on its way to knowledge must not be guided by traditional poetry and the traditional world of ethical custom. *Indeed, even this state of new habituation must be left behind* as the soul, in proceeding through mathematics, learns to distinguish between appearance and truth. The road back to real political action is open only to him who in philosophizing has transcended the shadow world of "reality." And only the philosopher is called upon to travel it.

Thus the exposition of this ideal state in the *Republic* serves in educating the political human being, but the *Republic* is not meant as a manual on educational methods and materials, and it does not point out the goal of the educational process to the educator. In the background of this work on the state is a real educational state, the community of Plato's academy. The *Republic* exemplifies the purpose of that academy. This community of students applying themselves rigorously to mathematics and dialectic is no apolitical society of scholars. Instead, the work done here is intended to lead to the result which remained unattainable for the current sophistic *paideia*, with its encyclopedic instruction and arbitrary moralistic reformulations of the educational content of ancient poetry. It is intended to lead to a new discovery of justice in one's own soul and thus to *the shaping of the political human being*. This education, however, the actual education to participation in the state, is anything but a total manipulation of the soul, a rigorous leading of it to a predetermined goal. Instead, precisely in extending its questioning behind the supposedly valid traditional moral ideas, it is in itself the new experience of justice. Thus this education is not authoritative instruction based on an ideal organization at all; rather it lives from questioning alone.³

3. In *Wahrheit und Methode* Gadamer elaborates on the priorities of the *question* over the *answer* in Plato in particular, and in authentic discourse in general, a priority which

Plato's critique of the poets is thus to be interpreted in terms of the two faces which the *Republic* presents: on the one hand, the strict utopian constitution of the state and, on the other, a satirical criticism of existing states. The very immoderation of this critique of the poets gives us tangible evidence of the purpose which Plato has in mind. It is his aim to bring about the possible, i.e., the actual, education of the political human being by providing a picture of the impossible, i.e., an organized *paideia* whose unlimited capability derives entirely from itself and in no way from a given ethos. This *paideia* must be understood as the antithesis of what the Greeks of that time had taken *paideia* to be and of what we today, as heirs of Greek humanism, conceive of under the headings of education and culture, namely, the "cultivation of what is specifically and purely human in all spheres of life," "the development of the harmonious human being."⁴ To be sure, when Plato, at the beginning of his critique of the poets, reviews the forms of *paideia*, he declares that one could not find better forms than those which the past has made available: music for the soul, gymnastics for the body. But this pious adherence to the long tradition of Greek education actually carries concealed within itself that impious and inflexible censorship of the grand Greek tradition of poetry which has been the object of our investigation up to this point. And now, when we ask what could justify this inflexibility, we come to see clearly what an unbridgeable chasm separates Plato's *paideia* from all other existing education—be it through the mores and customs of the forefathers, the wisdom of the poets, or the instruction of the sophists. *Paideia* for Plato is not the traditional cultivation of musical facility and physical agility in the child. Nor is it the heightening of

distinguishes Plato's philosophy from that which follows him and which keeps his thinking closer to the natural movement of discursive inquiry. The opposite position is that occupied by Hegel, whose extraordinary insight into the dialogical, dialectical movement of thinking is blunted, Gadamer argues, by the goal which Hegel sets for himself of closing the system. Hegel's idea of a completed system must necessarily suppress the open-endedness of thinking, in which alone the question can maintain its priority over the answer. (Cf. *WM* 344 ff. on the hermeneutic priority of the question and chap. 5, n.11, below.) (Translator)

4. This formulation is Werner Jaeger's. Cf. *Platos Stellung im Aufbau der griechischen Bildung* (Berlin, 1928), p. 17.

enthusiasm and spirit in the young by the use of hero-models from myth and poetry, nor the cultivation of political and practical wisdom by the use of such a reflection of human life as myth and poetry provide. Rather it is the shaping of an inner harmony in the soul of a person, a harmony of the sharp and the mild in him, of the willful and the philosophical.

Such a description seems reminiscent of the humanist ideal of the "harmonious personality" which is to be formed by developing the whole range of one's human potential—an aesthetic ideal to be achieved by a proposed "aesthetic education of the human race." But for Plato harmony means the tuning of a *dissonance* which is inherent in man (*Republic* 375 c).⁵ Education is the unification of the irreconcilable: the schism of the bestial and the peaceful in the human being. The guardians of the state, whose education alone is the concern, are not by nature just, so that one need only develop their "potential." Paideia is essential in order to fit together in a unified ethos what, according to their potential, has necessarily split in two. And as a matter of fact, the class of the guardians is, properly speaking, the class of all human beings.⁶

The "city of pigs," that idyll of a healthy vegetative state which Plato describes with an inimitable mixture of nostalgia and satire, and in which peace and pacifism are automatically present because each in doing what is right and necessary for all does

5. The point is even clearer in the *Republic* at 410 c ff. and is most sharply accentuated in the *Statesman* at 306 ff.

6. Of course the guardians are only the class of the leaders in a state which is made up for the most part of people with "professions." But it is significant that paideia as such, i.e., the paideia which leads to knowledge of justice, becomes thematic only when the class of guardians comes under consideration. This should suffice to make clear that justice in the professions, *idiopragem*, is only a shadow-image of true justice. Of course the "truth" of justice is not found only in the guardians. But only in starting with the guardians, and only in reference to them, can the "professional" man be seen to take part in true justice. For the latter, *idiopragem*, doing one's own job, means not intruding in the business of the other *classes*, i.e., of the warriors and guardians, more than it means not intruding in the work of other *professions* (434 ab). Hence it means letting oneself be guided. And ultimately this whole picture of the state is to be applied in interpreting "the inner state," the constitution of the soul of each individual, whose justice as inner action provides the norm for whatever he does, be this in the acquisition of wealth, in his providing for bodily needs, or in his political or private transactions (443 de).

what is just—this state, tightly organized as it is for the provision of needs, could never exist in human history and is thus no genuine ideal for mankind. For since it is without history, it is without human truth.⁷ Unlike socially organized animals, ants, for instance, whose social drives could be satisfied with purposive order providing only the necessities of life, man is not merely a natural creature. Man is a profligate being who desires to progress beyond his present circumstances. Thus quite by itself his state transcends itself as his needs increase. And as the ultimate consequence of this wild growth, the class of warriors emerges and within it the new, specifically human phenomenon: political existence.

For the warrior's work is the only work not aimed at the production of something which one needs and which does not consist in merely performing a skill. On the contrary, it is demanded of the warrior that he be free and detached from his

7. The "city of pigs" (*Republic* 369 b–374 e) is only an ironic counterimage to the reality of human political life. For there is no human state in historic or even prehistoric times which did not go beyond providing for the necessities of life and which, in precisely so doing, did not enter the realm of history, where there are flourishing and decay, corruption and recovery. However for Plato this fact means that in all states everything depends on the right paideia. The healthy mode of living enjoyed by the inhabitants of the city of pigs is in essence completely ahistorical in the transmission of this healthy life from one generation to the next (372 d). Thus no real answer to the question of what justice is, is to be found in this image of the state; the question of right has no actuality here. For the interaction of its people with one another is limited to the reciprocal need they have of one another in the production of what is needed by all of them, and thus their relationship to one another fulfills itself in the consumption of their products. The shift in style to irony at 372 a is specifically intended to indicate that in Plato's view the matter cannot rest with this hypothetical construction. The just state is not to be found in this condition of "good health." *The question of justice arises only once injustice has also become possible*, i.e., once society has progressed beyond merely regulating and organizing the production of necessities. It arises in a state where there are lords and servants, where there is the beautiful and noble (*to kalon*), and where there is the desire to invade the sphere of another (*pleonektein*), where there is war. The just state is the state which has been brought back to moderation (399 e: *diakathairontes*) from a historical excess.

In his instructive treatment of the city of pigs (*Platon* [Berlin, 1919], 2: 214 ff.) Wilamowitz correctly identifies Plato's dissatisfaction with this "ideal" condition as the reason for the irony and caricature. But he did not see that in this first division of human professions it is not the *external* threat which is omitted and, as a consequence, the class of warriors but rather the *internal source of that threat*, namely, human discontent. For this reason Wilamowitz failed to see the necessity of a detour through healthy and rampant states in coming to an insight into what justice is.

work. He must be able to distinguish between friend and foe. In essence then, his skill is knowledge, i.e., knowledge of when and where and against whom he should or should not apply his craft. His being, therefore, is that of a guard: the warrior is also a guardian. Now guarding is both guarding *for* someone and guarding *against* someone. Guarding for someone, however, means having power over him and using this power and one's strength for him and not against him. Thus being a guardian is something different from practicing handwork. Guarding requires reliability and self-restraint in addition to carrying out the work of the warrior. But this constancy implies still more: namely, loving the friend just because he is a friend (and not because, or to the extent that, he does good things for you but even when he does something bad) and conversely, hating the enemy even when he does something good, just because he is the enemy. Plato characterizes the new element which now emerges alongside the force of the warrior's will as man's philosophical nature and he depicts the unity of these opposite natures in the metaphor of the loyal watchdog. In that the dog is friendly to the houseguest simply because the guest is known to the household, the dog is a friend of what is "known," which is to say, of knowledge. He is quite literally a philosopher. Thus the guardian, which is to say man, must cultivate the philosophical nature in himself while at the same time reconciling this nature with the violent drives in himself of self-preservation and the will to power.

It is the goal of paideia to bring about this unification which keeps the human being from becoming either a tame herd animal (a slave) or a rapacious wolf (a tyrant). For the potential of the human being to be a human being among other human beings, in short, to be a political being, depends upon this unification of the philosophical and martial natures in him. But this potential for political existence is not given to man by nature, for even if both these elements in him are natural and necessary, man becomes a political being only *insofar as he resists the temptations of power which arise from flattery* (cf. Alcibiades, *Republic* 492 ff.). This means, however, that he must learn to distinguish the true friend from the false one and what is truly just from

flattering appearances. It is philosophy which makes such distinguishing possible, for philosophy is loving the true and resisting the false. Thus philosophy is what makes man as a political being possible. Paideia, consequently, is not the cultivation of some skill; rather it produces this unity of power and the love of knowledge. It only calms the inner strife which, though dangerous, is nonetheless essential to man. For although that strife will always prevent his pacification, it provides the energy proper to each man individually and common to all. Only a life with this dynamic tension is a human life.

Thus Plato's idea of paideia incorporates within itself the insights of the sophist enlightenment into the dangerousness of man, insights into his tyrannical will to independence. But Plato demonstrates as well that the philosophical potential of man is just as fundamental.⁸ Thus in Plato justice of the state is not founded negatively on the weakness of individuals whose prudence leads them into a contract. Instead the human being is political in a positive sense because he is capable of rising above his insistence on himself, capable of being for others. Indeed, the yardstick against which the guardians are measured proves to be whether they hold to and guard this principle: that not their own well-being is to be preserved but the well-being of the state. The guardian is the guardian of justice only when he guards himself.

Thus in Plato the conflicting elements in man are to be reconciled and unified without robbing him of his power and the poets evaluated, and their "lies"—for they only tell lies—adjudged beautiful or not, on the basis of whether they bring this reconciliation about or hinder it. Hence they should no longer be allowed to sing Homer's and Hesiod's tales of how the gods quarrel and deceive both one another and man. And they should not sing either of anything discouraging or immoderate in heroes or in men, lest someone, taking these tales as his exam-

8. *gleichursprünglich*. The word is one which Heidegger often uses to indicate the essential and inevitable concomitance of Being and Not-being, e.g., in being authentic and being inauthentic, being in truth and being in error (guilt). Gadamer finds acknowledgment of this same insurmountable duality in Plato's anthropology. For Plato man is "always already" (*je schon*) both philosophical and tyrannical. Thus the task of paideia cannot be to eradicate the "tyrannical" but to harmonize it with the "philosophical." (Translator)

ples, might become tolerant of his own unjust actions. The true poetic singing of human life must always proclaim the truth that the just man alone is happy. All imitation of an unjust ethos must, therefore, be excluded. For to the degree that imitation is anything other than play which preforms one's own character, it always loosens the precarious tuning of the harmonious soul and dissipates the soul in the all-absorbent medium of appearance, in which it is lost to itself. And when communal property, communal living, communal women and children are made the rule for the guardians and for all education, musical and gymnastic, and when finally even the begetting of proper new generations is to be determined by a number calculated in some profound and mystic way (and when the decay of the state is said to begin with a mistake in the calculation of the calendar of wedlocks)—all this is *supposed* to make one aware that this educational state is not meant as a proposal for some actual new ordering of man or the state. Instead it teaches us about human existence itself and the basic impulses in the latter which make it possible to establish a state: The state is possible only when the difficult and delicate tuning, the aforementioned harmonization of the schism in man, succeeds.

Plato's paideia is thus meant as a counterweight to the centrifugal pull of those forces of the sophist enlightenment being exerted upon the state. His critique of poetry develops this counterweight in the form of an explicit critique of existing paideia and of its trust in and reliance upon human nature and faith in the power of purely rational instruction. In opposition to this sophist paideia, Plato advances an arbitrarily and radically purified poetry, which is no longer a reflection of human life but the language of an intentionally beautified lie. This new poetry is meant to express the ethos which prevails in the purified state in a way which is pedagogically efficacious.

* * *

In book 10 Plato repeats his critique of poetry and justifies banning all imitative poetry from the state. The critique of poetry here is simultaneously an ultimate justification for Plato's writings. *Prima facie* it seems that this last critique is directed at

the very idea of poetry, and it uses arguments which are even more foreign to modern consciousness than the moralism of the preceding strict pedagogical purification of poetry. For modern consciousness holds that in the symbolic presentation of art one finds the deepest revelation of a truth which no concept can grasp. Thus however compelling the train of thought of Plato's critique might be, its presupposition is bound to put one off. He sees art as essentially nothing but imitation. The distinguishing feature of this critique is that Socrates develops his argument throughout in departing from the painter, and he even places the poet together with painter under the rubric of "hand-worker." In the representative arts a relationship does indeed exist between the picture and a "reality" which is pictured—although the essence of these arts is by no means exhaustively defined by this relationship. Numbered among such "realities" are the things which the handworker "really" produces, and insofar as the handworker for his part looks to the "idea" of the implement which he produces, the reality of the picture may be said to occupy the third and lowest level of a hierarchy leading up to the idea, viz., picture, implement produced, idea. For the individual implement which the handworker produces is itself only a darkened rendering of the idea, a mere "something of the sort like" the true being of the thing, and one among many exemplars. Thus the painter who copies such an exemplar and copies it not even as it is, but only as it appears in one specific respect among many possible others, is most certainly an imitator of mere appearance and not of the truth. The better his rendering is, the more "deceptive" it is. Such art has an unlimited capacity of rendering the shape of anything in the medium of appearance since it aims at nothing more than mere deception. The artist is like a man who can do anything, like a magician or sophist.

But Plato's argument is not intended as a theory of the plastic arts, and whether they might be essentially different from a copying of the appearance of reality is thus not the issue here. Even so—and whatever the answer to this question might be—Plato's criticism of *the poets* requires precisely *this* illuminating analogy with the plastic, formative arts. The claim

which poetry makes for itself is a most exalted one. Poetry is not a plastic art, which is to say that it does not form its picture of things in shapes and colors in a foreign material. The poet turns *himself* into the tool of his art. He forms by speaking. But instead of things, what the poet forms is more often than not the human being himself as the latter expresses himself in his existence, as he experiences himself in action and suffering. And the pedagogical claim of the poet is based upon this fact. But once such a pedagogical claim is made it must be questioned. Does the poet, who is a good talker himself and who knows how to make any man who understands some particular thing sound good, compose his poems with knowledge of all the human sciences and, above all, with knowledge of man's self-knowledge (*paideia*, *aretē*), or not? The analogy with the mimetic copying of the painter which aims solely at rendering the mere appearance of one aspect of the thing provides us with a prefiguration of the answer to this question.

For the poet who really understood education and human *aretē* would dedicate himself fully to them instead of contenting himself with ineffectual laudations. Thus only the poet who was really an educator and who really shaped human life could play the game of poetry in real knowledge of what it was about: Only those poets can be taken seriously who do not take their poetry writing to be ultimate. For this reason Homer fails the test which Solon, for instance, passes: the test of having been effective in shaping human life. Homer's poetic play turns out to be the mere pretense of knowledge which dazzles us with the colorful splendor of its poetic language. But when the decorative poetic speech is stripped away by a Socrates, who asks the poets what they really mean, it is shown that poets actually understand nothing of what they present so forcefully. Then their wisdom looks like those faces which appeared to be beautiful when young but which prove to be not really beautiful once the charm of youth has departed. Here Socrates' imagery points to the real object of Plato's polemical, dialectical critique of poetry: Socrates' argument causes not only poetry to lose its charms; those forms of *morality* which the poets' colorful decorative art made appear so beautiful now display their decrepitude.

Here indeed we have the "second half" of the argument to be advanced against the pedagogical claim of the poets. It is not only the case that they have no real knowledge of men and of the Beautiful. In that regard they are no different from handworkers who must first learn the guidelines of their craft and what is correct and proper from someone who knows how to use the tools of the trade. But in contrast to the handworkers, the poets do not even know how to do what they do correctly in the areas where they claim to be knowledgeable. They do not present something, e.g., human existence, as the beautiful or bad thing which it *is* but only as it appears beautiful to the *polloi*, who themselves know nothing. Thus just as the painter takes the guidelines for his copying not from the real measurements of things but from the appearance which the things display to the crowd from a distance, so too the poet's portrayal of human existence is shifted away from the real dimensions of human nature to the false forms of morality which appear beautiful to the crowd to which he presents them.

Although Plato does not specifically say so, this critique of the art of poetry implies a break with the entire tradition of education which had always presented the moral truths of any given time using models taken from the heroes of Homer's world. The break is made manifest by the critical conclusion which Plato draws and in his subsequent exposition of the effect which poetry has. The real object of Plato's criticism is not the degenerate forms of contemporary *art* and the perception of the older, classical poetry which the contemporary taste in art had defined. Rather it is the contemporary *morality and moral education* which had established itself upon the basis of the poetic formulations of the older morality and which, in adhering to aging moral forms, found itself defenseless against arbitrary perversions of those forms brought on by the spirit of sophism.⁹ Accordingly Socrates

9. In his *Platon* (Berlin, 1954), 2: 138 ff., Friedländer (whose earnest discussion of the motives for Plato's *mimēsis* critique is to be recommended on the whole) seems to me to have gone against his own insights. It is of course true that here, and in what follows, the way in which Plato speaks of painting and the illusions which it creates leads one to think of the art which predominated in his time, just as what he says of poetry reminds one of Euripides and popular drama. But that only explains why Plato *could* argue in the

rejects the current interpretations of poetry and questions whether we still understand the wisdom of the ancient poets at all. It may be that in a world defined by binding actions and definitely prescribed morals the words of these “divine men” were the most noble and powerful statement of the moral world which fathers could speak to their children for their moral edification. But in a time of decline a message which could stop the advancing corruption of the political spirit was not to be found in even the loftiest poetry of the past.

Therefore when Plato asserts that poetry falsifies and deceives, he means it primarily as a critique of the aesthetic reality of artworks, which would measure these against the concept of true reality. Above all, this apparently ontological critique of the art of poetry is aimed at the content of poetry, the ethos which it represents, wherein, fatefully, virtue and happiness are placed in opposition to each other. Such a juxtaposition can result only from a false conception of virtue and happiness which makes them seem incompatible.

Socrates thus buttresses and completes his critique of poetry with a critique of its *effect*, a critique which repeats and deepens the motifs of the preceding critique of the poets. Socrates points out that it is the very power which poetry has to enchant and impress us which makes poetry inimical to the true purpose of education and destructive of the right ethos.

For corruption of the soul is the inevitable consequence of deceit. The illusion which the painter creates bedazzles one’s vi-

way he does, not why he did argue this way against art. The decisive point is that this critique is valid for the classic ancient art as well; for ultimately it does not bear upon the conception of art which Plato’s contemporaries had but upon the *moral content* of art. The research of Werner Jaeger collated in his *Paideia* (Berlin, 1959) makes clear just how fitting it is that Homer becomes the object of Plato’s critique of the poet’s vision of *aretē*. All *aretē* without *phronēsis* is of Homeric origin, and throughout all the changes in Greek political life Homeric *aretē* preserved its role as a paradigm. This fact makes all the more evident, it seems to me, that the Socratic-Platonic critique of this *aretē*-ideal is a plea for a *δικαιοσύνη μετὰ φρονήσεως* (justice by means of *phronēsis*) (*Republic* 621 c) precisely in opposition to this powerful Homeric tradition. He who in an earlier life shared in virtue through “custom without philosophy” (ἔθει ἄνευ φιλοσοφίας) chooses the life of a tyrant in the new allotment of lives! (619 b ff.). This mythical motif restates symbolically what had been worked out in the long dialectical movement of the *Republic* and completed with the critique of the poets (cf. *Phaedo* 82 bc!).

sion and makes the thing appear now one way and now another—until a man of mathematical science, for instance, arrives on the scene and establishes the true dimensions of the thing by measuring, counting, and weighing. Like the painter the poet is ignorant of the true measures of the thing which he portrays, ignorant of the measures of good and bad. And just as the painter raises doubts about what is real and what is not, the poet creates disconcertion and an enervating lassitude in the soul of the spectator when he conjures up outbursts of the volatile human passions. Here Socrates is painting the effect of all imitative poetry in the colors of the Athenian teatrocracy. The poet, who wants to impress the crowd, is led by both the taste of his audience as well as his own nature to whatever is opulent and vivid and can be portrayed as such, that is, to the shifting storms of human feelings. Conversely he is put off by the constant disposition of those who, whatever their fate, preserve that quiet energy which grows from resolve. That which lends itself to poetic representation, gestures and expressions of the passions, is, if measured against the true ethos, superficial and untrue. Thus art repeats what in reality is already the “hypocrisy of life” (Hegel).

Art repeats it, however, in an ingratiating way, i.e., in an apparently innocuous “mere” imitation. Hence the decisive thing wrong with imitation is found in the ill effect of its charms on the human soul. All imitation is imitation of something else and, in particular cases, of *someone* else. The intention of the imitation can, of course, not really involve the person imitated and be reflected back upon the imitator himself, for imitation of another person can have the formal structure of appropriation of something for myself. In that case the imitation is not aimed at the other at all. Rather the interest in the other is actually an interest in how one does a certain thing. What a person learns from someone’s “showing him how” and in the imitation thereof is not so much something which belongs to the other as something which I can appropriate for myself. The purpose of such imitation is thus not to imitate but to learn how to do something myself.

In contrast, he who really imitates and only imitates, in

mime, is no longer himself. He gives himself an alien character. But even so he only *imitates* the other, which is to say that while he is not himself, he is not the other either. This imitation thus implies a split in the self. That a person is himself but still imitates another means that he imitates the other from outside and seeks to become what the other is externally by shaping his own exterior to match the exterior of the other. But orienting oneself toward the exterior of someone else, copying his superficial accidental gestures (if it is done earnestly and not consciously as a game for the sake of demonstrating something) implies turning oneself away from oneself, away from that which one is inwardly. Such imitation is thus carried out in forgetfulness of oneself. Insofar as the intent of the imitation, making oneself like someone else, is fulfilled in looking exactly like that individual (as occurs, for instance, when an actor has fully immersed himself in his role), we no longer have simply the imitation of an alien exterior in which the imitator, even if oblivious to himself, could be said to preserve himself. Here imitation has become self-exteriorization, self-estrangement. Thus the actor does not merely act out someone else's gestures. On the contrary, all his expressions are the display of an inner nature which is nevertheless not his own human nature. All forgetfulness of self in imitation fulfills itself, therefore, in self-alienation. And even he who merely watches such imitation without acting himself yields to the thing imitated in sympathy, which is to say that he forgets himself in vicariously experiencing through the other whom he sees before him. Thus even looking on, to the extent that it is the self-forgetful yielding of oneself to the vibrations of an alien emotion, always implies at least some self-alienation.

It is clear that this effect of mimetic representation remains fundamentally the same even in other modes of poetic portrayal less suggestive than acting. And it is in this light that Plato's *Republic* presents the effect of imitation. The charm of imitation and the joy taken in it are a form of self-forgetfulness which is most pronounced where what is represented is itself self-forgetfulness, i.e., passion.

Thus this critique of mimetic poetry cuts much deeper than it had at first appeared. It not only criticizes the false and dan-

gerous contents of mimetic art or the choice of an unseemly mode of representation. *It is at the same time a critique of the moral consequences of "aesthetic consciousness."*¹⁰ The very experience which is had in delusory imitation is in itself already the ruination of the soul. For the deeper analysis of the inner constitution of the soul has made evident that aesthetic self-forgetfulness opens the way for the sophists' game with the passions to infiltrate the human heart.

The question arises, accordingly, whether there is any poetic representation at all which is immune to this danger. And when Plato, in holding to the idea of education through poetry, affirms that there is, the further question arises in what sense this new poetry can be said to be imitation. The key to this last question—one which we shall see is decisive for all of Plato's work—is to be found in Plato's observation that the only poetry which withstands his criticism is hymns to the gods and songs in praise of good individuals. To be sure, something "unreal" is poetically represented in these; gods and men themselves appear as speakers here in an imitation in the strictest sense. Nevertheless such poetry differs from the powerfully suggestive representation of the rest of poetry. It is representation in praise of someone. But in the song of praise and in the form thereof which transcends the human realm, i.e., the hymn to the gods, there is no danger of that self-estrangement induced by the potent magical play of poetry. In praising, neither the one who praises nor the one before whom the praise is made is forgotten. On the contrary, at every moment both are present and expressed as

10. *ästhetisches Bewusstsein*. A central theme of Gadamer's *magnum opus*, *Wahrheit und Methode*, is announced here, i.e., Gadamer's own critique of "aesthetic consciousness" and the subjectification of the art work which is its correlate (cf. *WM* 77 ff.). Gadamer is arguing that in effect Plato foresaw the moral consequences of the subjectification of art which Kant and post-Kantian philosophy were later to complete. For aesthetic consciousness our encounter with the work of art becomes an inner experience, or *Erlebnis*, which for its duration falsely dissociates us from the practical world (cf. Gadamer's analysis of Schiller's *Über die ästhetische Erziehung des Menschen* [*WM* 77–78]). Plato sees the deleterious effect of such an aesthetic *Erlebnis* on the soul of the individual who cultivates it in *mimēsis*. Hence for Plato the aesthetic education (*Erziehung*, *paideia*) which Schiller advocates would be ruinous. For it is the very antithesis of true *paideia*, which far from deepening the soul's obliviousness to itself, raises it to the clarity of Socratic self-knowledge. (Translator)

they are in themselves. For praising is not a representation of what is laudable. Of course the song of praise will always contain an element of representation of the laudable, but in essence it is something distinct from this representation. He who praises addresses both himself and the one before whom he praises (and in a certain sense even the one who is being praised), for he speaks of that which binds them all to one another and gives them all a common obligation. He who praises avows his commitment to something, for in praising, the standard by which we evaluate and comprehend our existence is made manifest. Now representation of an example in which the standard which we all share becomes evident is certainly more than drama and more even than the representation of something exemplary. It is a way of giving the model new efficacy, i.e., in and by representing it.

In essence, then, the song of praise in the form of poetic play is shared language, the language of our common concern. It is the poetic language of the citizens of Plato's state. To be sure, even this mimetic representation would be subject to the previous ontological argument, for like all poetry, it is mimesis of something which has been produced. It itself does not produce the true ethos; it only represents it poetically. But in the true state, the state of justice, such a representation would be an avowal of commitment to the spirit shared by all, an avowal which in lighthearted play would celebrate that which is taken truly seriously.

But what poetic form should praise of true justice take when the communal bond formed in the practices, customs, and patterns of life in the state is no longer felt and when allegiance to it thus can no longer be pledged in a song of praise? What form should the song of praise take in states which in fact are "almost incurable"? What form must it take so that even as representation it might be genuine praise, a language of what is of concern to everyone? As a matter of fact, in raising this question we have done nothing less than uncover the locus of Plato's dialogues in his intellectual enterprise. For when justice remains only as an inner certitude in the soul and is no longer to be clearly identified with any given reality, and when knowledge of it must be defended against the arguments of a new "enlightened" con-

sciousness, a *philosophical discussion* about the true state becomes the only true praise of justice. And the only valid way to represent that discussion becomes Plato's dialogue, that song of praise which affirms what is of concern to everyone and which throughout the "play" which represents the educational state does not lose sight of the serious issue: the cultivation of the political human being and of justice in him. Plato's critique of poetry, a critique which culminates in his rejection of aesthetic consciousness, is intended to support the claim which he makes for his own dialogues. Plato does not simply put a new incantation into the field against the aesthetic forgetfulness of self and the old magic of poetry; rather he advances the antidote of philosophical questioning. One must do what one who has fallen in love does when he recognizes that his love is bad for him and forces himself to break away from it. The critique of the poets which Plato assigns to Socrates in his discussion of the state is intended as just such an antidotal spell which—out of concern for the condition of one's own soul, the inner state, the state in oneself—one casts upon oneself to rid oneself of the old love.

Thus the poetry of Plato's dialogues is certainly not the model for that poetry which would be allowed in the ideal state. But it is the real poetry which is able to say what is educational in actual political life. And just as poetry in the ideal state must fend off aesthetic misinterpretations of its mimesis, Plato's dialogical poetry must resist any aesthetic misinterpretation. Thus there is complete conformity between the norms which Plato establishes for poetry and his own dialogical compositions, a conformity which is hinted at, in fact, at the end of the *Republic*.

This conformity can even be found in the Platonic form of composition closest to the traditional concept of poetry: Plato's myths. It is self-evident that the content of his myths, the images of the gods, of the beyond, of the afterlife of the soul, all adhere strictly to the theology set up in the *Republic*. But the power which Plato draws upon and the means which he applies in charging the mythical subjects of the previous age with new mythical luminosity (those very mythical subjects which his critique had purified of their magic) are significant. The content of his myths is not made to fade away into the glorious twilight

of some primordial past, nor does it close into a world unto itself whose inscrutable meaning, like an alien truth, overwhelms the soul. Instead it grows up out of the center of the Socratic truth itself in a play in which the soul recognizes itself and the truth of which the soul is most certain. That its happiness lies in justice alone clearly echoes back to the soul from all distant horizons toward which it resounds. All the mythical content which Plato appropriates, belief in the beyond, in the transmigration of souls, in the superterrestrial governance of eros, in the cosmic interrelationship between the soul and the stars and between the world of the state and the world of the stars—all these mythical powers are not conjured up so that they might cast their own spell. Rather they derive their existence from the inner certainty of the soul insofar as they are linked to the truth which the soul discovers in philosophizing. Thus essentially the soul receives no new truth from outside itself here. Plato's myths are therefore not *mythos* and not poetry, if *mythos* means the undeciphered truths of ancient belief, and poetry the soul's representation of itself in the mirror of an exalted reality. There can be no interpretation of Plato's world of myth since the world made of *mythos* here is not a world at all but the projection into the cosmic of the lineament of the soul's interpretation of itself in the logos. Plato's myth is not to be experienced as an ecstasy which transports one to another world. Instead by being tied back into man's experience of himself, the old legendary material of these myths acquires new meaning as magnifications, inversions, views from afar, and ironic counterimages of the real world. Thus these myths are in no way representation and theater whose mere charm delight us and the mere viewing of which could satisfy us.

The very form of narrative is also determined by the fact that the soul cannot and must not forget itself in illusory flights of fancy. Plato tells his tale "poorly," showing no concern for the requirements of any narrative which is intended to absorb the narrator and listener alike in the spell cast by the shapes which it conjures up. Indeed, it is astonishing how much indirect discourse there is in these myths. The myth at the end of the *Republic*, for instance, is related almost entirely in indirect discourse.

This practice allows us to see in retrospect the deeper meaning of Plato's critique of the poets, which in regard to Homer appeared at first to be little more than malevolent nonsense. Everything is so designed that the mythic fable cannot remain in the distance which a lovely fairy tale preserves for itself. In the middle of a surge of poetic ecstasy we are suddenly made to recognize (sometimes only by a genuinely Socratic phrase) that we are enveloped in Socratic air here and that the age-old legend supposedly being rescued from oblivion is not a resurrected ancient myth at all but a Socratic truth which rises up in front of us in three dimensional presence while the illusory fable completely recedes before it. Plato's myth is an elegant demonstration of Socrates' argument that appearance is false and a confirmation of Socrates' paradoxically inverted measuring of the real world against another, "true" world. But even so it is suffused with irony, which should warn us never to forget that it is not by fortunate coincidence alone that we shall attain to the noble truth and escape the serious consequences of Socrates' criticisms.

Nevertheless, one cannot say that the sole function of such myth is to make Socratic truth understandable by expressing it allegorically. Of course one should never be in doubt here about who is speaking and about the knowledge which underlies what the speaker says. But the fact that this Socratic knowledge of one's own self is expressed in the form of a play of mythical images tells us something about the kind of certainty which this knowledge has. Socrates encounters in his soul something inexplicable which resists illumination by the enlightenment that had succeeded in clearing up and destroying mythology. We should not interpret the limits which Socrates sets to such explanation as a vestige of a faith to which the soul clings despite the success of the enlightenment in explaining mythical apparitions and events as natural processes, and in thereby eliminating the magical element in them. When the enlightenment tries to explain the soul itself and to eliminate the mystery which surrounds the powers of justice and love by reducing them to clever (or weak) contrivances or infirmities, Socrates emerges opposite its so readily understandable accounts as the visionary who sees his own soul. And in images of the judgment of the dead and the hierarchy of

worlds and with the open eye of the seer and the wry smile of the man of irony he proclaims an inexplicable certainty which the soul has—a certainty which establishes the limits of human philosophizing as well as its dimensions and horizons. To be sure, in these poetic myths the soul does not transform itself into a variety of figures which assert themselves against us while keeping us in ignorance of their truth. But the soul does return from its journey through the surreal realms of myth in which Socratic truth rules as the real law of things chastised and set right in its beliefs. These worlds make all too obvious the importance of its philosophizing, a task from which no revelation there sets it free.

In the dialogues themselves the difference from mimetic poetry is even clearer than in the mythical tales, embellished as the latter are with a curious, elusive poetic charm. The dialogues are, of course, “representations” of real people, Socrates and his partners. But the important feature of these figures is not the powerfully graphic representation of them and not the invention of speeches which are in accord with the character of each and which give each his due. Ultimately these dialogues are more than philosophical dramas and Socrates is not the hero of these poetic compositions. Even the representation of Socrates is meant as an inducement to philosophize. The intent and purpose of these discussions are neither to portray human beings nor to recount statements and responses. It is not coincidental that Plato is fond of representing these discussions in a recapitulation and he does not even hesitate to have Socrates repeat the ten-book-long discussion of the *Republic* on the following day. Plato is not concerned with vivid and forceful accounts but with what makes any such repetition worthwhile: the maieutic power of these discussions (*Theaetetus* 149 c ff.), with the movement of philosophizing which redevelops in every repetition. Precisely because of the seriousness of his purpose, Plato gives his mimesis the levity of a jocular play. Insofar as his dialogues are to portray philosophizing in order to compel us to philosophize, they shroud all of what they say in the ambiguous twilight of irony. And in this way Plato is able to escape the trap of the ever so vulnerable written work, which cannot come to its own defense, and to create a truly philosophical poetry which points beyond itself

to what is of real consequence. His dialogues are nothing more than playful allusions which say something only to him who finds meanings beyond what is expressly stated in them and allows these meanings to take effect within him.

However, the theme voiced continually in Plato's critique of the poets is that they take seriously what is not worth being taken seriously. Here and there Plato gives us indications that his own creations, because they are in jest and are only meant to be in jest, are the true poetry. In the *Laws* the Athenian, in whom more than anyone Plato has most obviously hidden himself, says that he is in no need of a model for the right poetry for educating the young:

For if I should look back over the speeches which we have been making from this morning on—and not, it seems to me, without a touch of the divine spirit—these would seem to me to be spoken as a kind of poetry. . . . For in comparison with most of the speeches which I have read or heard, in poetry or prose, these seemed to me to be the most appropriate and best for the young to hear. Thus I know of no better example to recommend to the guardian of the laws and education, and he should stipulate that the teachers teach these to the children. And he should apply them as a standard to evaluate whatever other poetry might be suitable. And above all he must compel the teacher to learn them and to value them (811 c ff.).

And if tragic poets should come into the city and wish to perform their plays, we would say to them: oh best of the foreigners, we are poets ourselves, who have composed the best tragedy which there can be. For our state is nothing but an imitation of the most beautiful and best life and that indeed is the truest of all tragedy. You are poets and we are poets too, your rivals and competitors in composing the most beautiful drama. And only the true law—that is our hope—can succeed in composing the most beautiful drama (817 b ff.).

How Plato conceives of his own literary work and how he envisions the subject matter which is his real concern are mir-

rored in the mimetic sphere in such passages—passages from a discussion which is to provide the foundation for a new state. Plato is guided by the one important task of creating the inner constitution of mankind on the basis of which alone the order of human life in the state could be renewed. And for Plato the literary dialogues, including the representation of the just state and the just legislation, are only a *prooimion* to the true laws: “a prelude and preface, most artfully prepared, to that which must be completed subsequently.” No one yet, he says, has created such preludes to the laws of the state which, like the introduction to an anthem, move the soul to open itself willingly to the laws. Plato’s work is just such a true prelude to the true law of human existence. His clash with the poets is an expression of this, the exalted claim which his work makes for itself.

4

Plato’s Educational State

Plato research in Germany after World War I indeed uncovered a fruitful point of departure by using Plato’s political life as a basis to reach an understanding of his works and his philosophy.¹ As a consequence of this approach the *Republic* came to occupy a more central position than it had ever held before. But although one can find many specifics situated in the huge edifice of the *Republic* which bear on Plato’s later political theories, doctrines regarding an actual structure of the state or its institutions are in fact not basic to this earlier work. Indeed the concern here is not even with the right laws for the state but solely with the right education for it, education in citizenship. Ultimately, however, the latter is education in philosophy. This dialogue is a philosophical discussion in which an ideal state is constructed, a utopia which lies far removed from any reality. For here Plato demands a state in which philosophers rule and rulers are taught by philosophy how to rule.

We know from Plato’s biography and above all from the unique testimony which he himself gives us in the *Seventh Letter* that Plato by no means used abstract theory to deduce this requirement that philosophers rule. On the contrary, it arose as the natural consequence of the political experiences of his youth. Also, we know that his entire life’s work is rooted in the conclusion to which he came, that there is an indissoluble tie between political and philosophical activity. Thus like any other of Plato’s writings, the *Republic* belongs not only to his philosophical but also to his political life, and its special character must be defined starting with that fact.

1. Cf. among others Wilamowitz, op. cit., and K. Hildebrandt, *Platon* (Berlin, 1933).