

# Knowledge, art, and education in Plato's *Republic*

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## Abstract

In the present article, we investigate the relationship between art, education, and politics in Plato's *The Republic*, and study in what way Platonic gnoseological assumptions can clear tensions in this relationship. We seek to reconstruct Plato's main arguments for his criticism of the mythopoeic education. We defend the hypothesis that Plato, in *The Republic*, recognizes the formative potential of art, particularly poetry, although because of ontological and gnoseological reasons, he had to subordinate it to philosophy. The nature of this study's questionings and goals required consulting bibliographical sources for which we used hermeneutic reading techniques, with emphasis on apprehending the meanings of essential concepts based on their Greek origin. We present explanations and comments about *The Republic*, but also about *Ion*, *Hippias Major*, and critical literature selected as more relevant among the sources researched. Our conceptual, reflexive analysis showed that the mythopoeic culture is an indispensable concept to the general education found in Plato's *Republic*, although an insufficient one to achieve, by itself, the ideal of education expressed by the concepts of truth, goodness, and beauty. We conclude that only philosophy, as it overcomes the charms of language, senses, and the sensible world, can extend the limits and possibilities of art, particularly art that uses words. As the just city would only be possible by equating the king with the philosopher, there cannot be a true poet who is not also a philosopher.

## Keywords

Gnoseology – Art – Education – Platonic philosophy.

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# **Conhecimento, arte e formação na República de Platão**

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## **Resumo**

*Neste trabalho, investiga-se qual a relação entre arte, formação e política na obra República, de Platão, e estuda-se de que modo os pressupostos gnosiológicos platônicos esclarecem as tensões nessa relação. Busca-se reconstruir os argumentos centrais de Platão que sustentam a sua crítica à educação mitopoética. Defende-se a hipótese de que Platão, na República, reconhece o potencial formativo da arte, especialmente da poesia, embora, por razões de fundamentação ontológica e gnosiológica, tenha de subordiná-lo à filosofia. A natureza dos questionamentos e os objetivos da pesquisa exigiram a consulta de fontes bibliográficas, sendo que para análise e interpretação foram utilizadas técnicas hermenêuticas de leitura de textos, com destaque para a apreensão dos sentidos dos conceitos essenciais na sua proveniência grega. Procedeu-se à explicação e ao comentário da obra República, mas também de Íon e Hípias Maior e da literatura crítica, que foram selecionadas como mais significativas entre as fontes levantadas, tendo em vista o problema de pesquisa. A análise conceitual e reflexiva mostrou ser a cultura mitopoética um componente indispensável à formação na obra platônica analisada, embora insuficiente, por si, para atingir o ideal de educação que se expressa pelos conceitos de verdade, bondade e beleza. Conclui-se que somente a filosofia, por superar os encantos da linguagem, da sensibilidade e do mundo sensível, poderá entender os limites e possibilidades da arte, especialmente daquela que usa a palavra. Assim como a cidade justa só seria possível pelo equacionamento do rei e do filósofo, não é admissível um verdadeiro poeta que não seja filósofo.*

## **Palavras-chave**

*Gnosiologia – Arte – Educação – Filosofia platônica.*

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## Introducion

What type of relationship can we establish between knowledge, art, and education in the Platonic thinking found in *The Republic*? For unveiling the problem, we also relied on Plato's *Ion* and *Hippias Major*, as well as on commentators Giovanni Reale (1997), Werner Jaeger (1989), Ross (1976), Detienne (1988), among others. Starting with this question, we also attempted to understand the meaning an aesthetics could have, in *The Republic*, as a reflection on beauty, which is a fundamental concept for thoroughly understanding the ideal of education in Plato.

Based on the reading and interpretation of the texts mentioned, we sought to explicate how, in the *Republic*, art and education are connected, with the mediation of both gnoseology and the corresponding *metaphysics of beauty*. We can affirm, preliminarily, that the *Philosophy of beauty* is not the same thing as any possible *Philosophy of art*, understood as a philosophical knowledge of art.

We should emphasize that the approach to our questioning is markedly an epistemological one, as we defend that understanding the Platonic position of aesthetic phenomena – particularly poetic ones – in their relation with education can only be unveiled base on his theory of knowledge particularly developed in *The Republic*.

In the theoretical context of our object of investigation, we can see that Platonic philosophy's concern with *aesthetics* gets its sense only when understood as part of a reflection on the knowing faculties in connection with their objects. As a form of knowledge, *aesthetics* should be defined as superficial knowledge for devoting itself to the apparent, circumstantial, contingent, and accidental aspects of reality.

In case we admit that there is *beauty* in sensible beings – e.g., architectonic buildings, sculptures, vases, paintings, and even nature –, it is necessary to recognize, also, that there is a

*canon*, a form, a rational rule organizing their structure (Reale, 1997, JEAGER, 1989; NOËL, 1996), even when those who surrender to the sensible cannot grasp such laws.

For the problematic presented above, the concept of idea, which is key in the *Republic*, will be the linking thread of the *discussion*. It is noteworthy that *forma* [form] is the Portuguese word that best translates the Greek *eidos*, particularly in the Platonic sense (BRISSON; PRADEAU, 2010). *Eidos* is originally used to define the exterior aspects of sensible objects. Only later does it acquire, in Plato, the metaphysical sense of an intelligible essence (REALE, 1997).

Hence why the meaning of education contained in the Platonic *paideia* in *The Republic* cannot be restricted to the action of reproducing an existing *ethos*; rather, it refers always to an ought, a sort of regulating ideal that constitutes the horizon of educative actions.

In Plato, both the formative and the ethical-political presuppose philosophy's theoretical activity, from which emerges a higher epistemic knowledge which rises above opinions and technical knowledge.

In Book IV of *The Republic* (509a-511-e), Plato (2012) presents the pair of concepts *episteme* and *eide*, in opposition to *doxa* and *aistheta*. Each pair member admits a subdivision according to which both ideas and mathematic objects inhabit the intelligible world. Consequently, in the sphere of knowing are both the mathematic knowledge and dialectics. However, the model of knowledge that can found true politics is the *epistemic-dialectic*.

The latter pair of concepts is subordinated to the former, and the beings that inhabit the sensible world can be subdivided in *shadows* and *sensible objects*, to which correspond two forms of knowledge, i.e., conjecture and sensible intuition.

*Tecne*, as a productive knowledge, is not far from the sphere of the sensible either, therefore it cannot provide a foundation to political life. Although *tecne* is closely

connected to *common existence* and *doxa*, as it is so widely used, the city inhabitants cannot share the totality of technical mastery nor be universal technicians themselves.

Plato rejects any pretension of a *technocratic polis*, although he recognizes the importance of *tecne* in the organic composition of his Republic. He equally refuses the insufficiency of opinions (*doxa*) as the knowledge basis of the *polis*. Now, neither *episteme* nor *tecne* represent a widely shareable knowledge, a condition of possibility for political and knowledge equality to exist. By refusing *doxa* and “betting everything” on *episteme*, Plato is led to refute democracy, making the balance of inequalities the organic architecture that sustains and configures justice in *The Republic*. Therefore, one could say that the starting point and the finishing point of the Platonic educative project is inequality, although the ultimate goal proclaimed in *The Republic* is the common good.

Thus, we can see that equality and freedom do not go together in Plato. It is no longer the ‘blood’ aristocracy that is defended, but rather the excellence of spirit, founded on the inequality of intelligences. At any rate, education is the only way through which hierarchies should be established among men.

In light of the above, how can we understand the relationship, in Plato, between education, art, and politics? For what reasons should philosophy fight the artistic *ethos* and democratic sophistics’ ideas?<sup>1</sup>

## Education and beauty

Of all concepts referred earlier, *form* is definitely the one that best summarizes the meanings inherent to the reflection on beauty; it is also the link that approximates beauty to education. In this respect, Jaeger (1989) explains that the ideal of the Greek *Paideia* – which in the 18th century inspired German

<sup>1</sup> It is noteworthy that not all sophists defended democratic ideas – e.g., Thrasymachus and Critias.

thinkers’ understanding of *Bildung* – has one of its essential meanings linked to the concept of *eidos*, which we [Brazilians] usually translate as *idéia* [idea], but also as *forma* [form]. The latter echoes more clearly than the former the origin of the word ‘education’, or education as a formative action for body and spirit.

The German word *Bildung* clearly indicates the essence of education in the Greek, the Platonic sense; for it covers the artist’s act of plastic formation as well as the guiding pattern present to his imagination, the *idea* or *typos*. Throughout history, whenever this conception reappears, it is always inherited from the Greeks; and it always reappears when man abandons the idea of training the young like animals to perform certain definite external duties, and recollects the true essence of education (JAEGER, 1989, p. 10).

In this perspective, *Bildung* could not be interpreted as *self-cultivation* in a heavily *individualistic, private* sense (PIEPER, 2010), as *Bildung* would always bring along a general, universal, humanistic component, thus identifying itself with the concept of *Paideia* in its Greek origin – therefore, still far from the modern notion of atomized subjectivity (OLIVEIRA, 1989).

The ideal of education represented in *Paideia* can only be sufficiently understood in the context of Greek culture as part of its organic view of reality, allied to a certain general plastic sense the Hellenes possessed, always in search of the *cosmos*, of a sort of legality in all realms of being. For this reason, it becomes understandable that the sensible image of human education concerning the relationships between generations and between social groups should be represented by an artisan’s activity: a potter’s action on his clay in order to give it a form of perfection that was anticipated in the intellect. A deep correlation can be found between the concepts of education and beauty in the Greek phrase *kalos kagathos* (*kalos kai*

*agathos* – ἀλός και ἀγαθός) which could be translated as *beautiful and good* (JAEGER, 1989; BRISSON; PRADEAU, 2010).

Education is prominently an activity that begins and is accomplished in man himself, regardless of further or external purposes (MONDOLFO, S.D.). It is not a training or skill one can acquire like an instrument for performing a technical or practical task, however important and necessary those skills may be to existence.

Educating is not reproducing the empirical, particular forms of humanity according to immediate customs and habits, but rather an attempt at reaching an elevated ideal of humanity, the essence of which is the search for perfection beginning in the connection and integration of truth, beauty, and goodness (ROSS, 1976).

Hence why the Greek notion of *anthropoplasty*, seen as a sort of common mentality that founds education, culture, and the ideal of beauty, does not exclude the realms of the non-human. On the contrary, there is a symmetric correlation between *microcosm* and *macrocosm*, *anthropoplasty* and *cosmoplasty*. However, the *anthropoplasty* contained in the *paideia* and in the *Bildung* can only be understood by taking the human component in its emblematicity (JAEGER, 1989).

Therefore, we can assert that the original understanding of education is essentially linked to the ideal of beauty, as the possibility of educating implies a certain “going beyond” merely empirical, objective goals, and points to a desirable human type, an ought.

Thus, if philosophy is incompatible or cannot identify with *aesthetics*, there would be no absurdity in admitting, from the beginning, a philosophy or even a *metaphysics of beauty*. The concern of philosophical thought essentially includes the anthropological and educational dimension, which points to the negation/overcoming of *aesthetics*, or, less radically, to recognizing the limits of merely sensible forms in the apprehension/constitution of truth, ethical life, and the ideal of existential perfection.

We could, therefore, affirm that there is an essential relationship between the concepts that constitute the ideal of beauty and the formative ought, which is embodied in an *ethos*, a certain attitude of disinterested care that is proper of the philosopher (ARENDE, 1988) and which, therefore, can only acquire its full meaning in his activity – an activity that becomes a model to education, as we will see below.

### **Knowledge, poetry (*poiesis*), and education in *The Republic***

No one has doubted or doubts the cultural and educational importance of mythopoietic existence and its productions in philosophy’s original scenery; in fact, philosophy as an instituting thinking, occupies itself, to a large extent, with the criticism of that tradition in its educational pretensions. It is in this context that Plato’s reflections, in dialogues such as *Ion*, *Hippias Major*, and *The Republic*, emphasize, among other themes, the excellence of philosophical education (PLATO, 1980a; 1980b; 2012). The philosopher claims to himself the role of *master of truth*, which was previously attributed to the poet (DETIENNE, 1988) and, consequently, contests the poet’s formative status, taking upon himself the task of properly educating the human beings.

Although the above-mentioned Platonic works do not agree in several aspects which we will not go into here, in all of these works the underlying concern is, primarily, a gnoseological one. Centrality is given to the ability to reveal truth as the first step to reach beauty, goodness, and justice. Hence emerge the limitations of the artistic activity and its productions in unveiling truth. It is also for this reason that the poetic existence is relativized, as it cannot by its own means reach the sense of being, in an *immediate rational (noetic) intuition*.

The noetic intuition allows immediate access to the original, in an apprehending act prior to language. The passing of judgments or the philosophical conceptual discourse is, in a

way, just a representation, a sort of *imitation* of the intuited, understood as a full presence. For this reason, the *discursive logos*, as it relies on the sense of words, cannot by itself be fully understood and experienced, except by those who had the noetic intuition of the represented being (PLATO, 2012). There is no authentic experience of truth in the sphere of representation, in the realm of language.

All the limitation of poetic productions, as signs of beings, lies in the fact that both producers and admirers lack the experience of an originary noetic intuition to make a representation filled and whole with sense. In the poetic realm, we can expect at best a sensible intuition as correlate of the sign.

The Platonic criticism of poetic activity and sophistic rhetoric relies on the argument of the insufficiency of a *representation* by hearsay or based on a mere sensible, apparent image – therefore with no guarantees of having the intelligible foundation, which is apprehensible only by philosophical activity, carried out by a dialectical movement of the soul. There is no second-order experience that could replace this personal effort.

The philosophical experience of truth is pre-linguistic, therefore no communicational process can convey truth in itself. The difference of the philosopher in relation with other intellectuals is partially explained by the way he understands signs and the relation between thought, language, and reality.

Platonic dialogues insist on comparing the potential to promote a beautiful education in philosophers' activities with the activities carried out by other human groups in the Greek *polis* war commanders, politicians, doctors, rhapsodes, aoidos, comedy and tragedy playwrights, literates, artisans, tradesman, merchants, slaves, sophists, rhetors, etc. In order for a refutation to be strong, Plato was interested in questioning not just any representative of these groups, but those individuals who were deemed the best, the excellent among the others.

The theoretical dispute engendered by philosophy intends to request from its own realm the conceptual arguments that can show the relevance of the other groups concerning the unveiling of truth, the primary, founding task to any other human initiative that seeks the greatest perfection possible within its own sphere.

The forcefulness and intensity with which Plato criticizes poetic activity has one strong justification: the social relevance that tradition granted poets and poetry, to the point that Homer became known as the educator of the whole Greece. Obviously, from the philosophical viewpoint, and with a view to the search of truth, the privilege granted to mythopoeic culture might be, perhaps, undeserved.

*The Republic* starts with two interesting discussions: one about the confrontation between speech and physical force; the other brings up the meaning of old age and how it favors the activities of the soul, of thinking, to the detriment of instinctive passions that are stronger in a body enjoying youth's full vitality.

In the anthropological dimension, the body is confronted with the soul, the latter being educated by music, the former by gymnastics, thus taking as the basis of body education the principles of harmony, rhythm, i.e., of order, from musical education. The word 'music' should not, however, be understood in its current sense, as in *The Republic* it represents the totality of the formative means for the soul, translatable into notions such as harmony, melody, rhythm, order, measure, and number, which form the *beautiful education*, the crowning of which occurs with philosophy.

With regard to the relation of these formative components, Plato is very clear:

And as there are two principles of human nature, one the spirited and the other the philosophical, some God, as I should say, has given mankind two arts answering to them (and only indirectly to the soul and body), in order that these two principles

(like the strings of an instrument) may be relaxed or drawn tighter until they are duly harmonized. (PLATO, 2012, p. 118).

There is a clear hierarchy in the soul-body relationship, in which the latter is subordinated to the former, although, at the same time, there is a mutual dependence, albeit unequal, due to the very differentiation found in this subordination relationship. The realm of the animic – the place of wisdom and courage – is the principle that governs the idea of harmonization in search of a true, just, and beautiful education.

The ideal of beauty and education appears in the dialogue between Glaucon and Socrates, when the latter rhetorically inquires his interlocutor: “Thus much of music, which makes a fair ending; for what should be the end of music if not the love of beauty?” (PLATO, 2012, p. 107). Earlier, he had affirmed about the purpose of several *poietic* activities in the *polis*, as well as of nature’s very constitution, that they should be appreciated by taking beauty, the expression of proportion and harmony, as the criterion:

[...] And surely the art of the painter and every other creative and constructive art are full of them, –weaving, embroidery, architecture, and every kind of manufacture; also nature, animal and vegetable, –in all of them there is grace or the absence of grace. And ugliness and discord and inharmonious motion are nearly allied to ill words and ill nature, as grace and harmony are the twin sisters of goodness and virtue and bear their likeness. (PLATO, 2012, p. 104).

*The Republic* is no doubt a work essentially imbued with political concerns – reflections are made on the concept of justice, of the just *polis* – but we cannot fail to consider that the political education for building the city is the correlative and equally important subject

matter. The *polis*, its education, art, poetry, all these elements can only be understood and integrated based on the ontological and gnoseological comprehension of Platonism, the basis of which is the already known *theory of ideas*.

It is in Book II of *The Republic* that Plato first remarks clearly on the place of artists and poets in an unhealthy *polis*. By a sort of *family resemblance*, they are grouped together with a series of other characters that form a city where education is damaged. This, on the contrary, reveals the philosopher’s criticism of the existing estate of things, through the disharmony and disproportion of the components of the city:

Then we must enlarge our borders; for the original healthy State is no longer sufficient. Now will the city have to fill and swell with a multitude of callings which are not required by any natural want; such as the whole tribe of hunters and actors, of whom one large class have to do with forms and colours; another will be the votaries of music-poets and their attendant train of rhapsodists, players, dancers, contractors; also makers of divers kinds of articles, including women’s dresses [...] (PLATO, 2012, p. 67).

The status of existing poets is refused, as they would only suit the unhealthy city. However, the debate cannot conclude that poets are dispensable, as long as they stay within the limits set by the new *Paideia* proposed by Plato in *The Republic*. Poets have their place as part of the set of other artists, artisans, and technicians who will help form the political body in its organic totality.

To the contemporary eye, which is used to seeing the artist, particularly the poet, as some sort of genius, an extraordinary being, the Platonic view certainly causes a strong sense of strangeness. Perhaps it was shocking even to Plato’s contemporaries, to whom poetry was the

source of education, wisdom, and even general guidance about people's conducts and the world.

As Datienne (2010) shows, Greek archaic tradition considered the poet a master of truth, close to the soothsayer and the king. As to Plato's view (1980a), in *Ion*, divinity, expressed in inspiration and enthusiasm, is susceptible to be used by Socrates' irony rather to minimize the importance of the poet in a context of philosophical rationalization than to stress a superior position.

Nor does the approximation between king and poet make sense in the *polis* proposed by Plato. The truth of the city is not constituted as a divine revelation, but must rather be sought by man the way a philosopher would, and this, in turn, is the only acceptable model for a king, as Plato acknowledges in Book V of *The Republic*.

In a State dominated by the Platonic philosophical rationality, poetry and all its traditional meanings would only continue to play a formative role if they could be redefined. Therefore, it is not entirely true that Plato simply expels poets from his *Republic*, as is commonly said. It is necessary to stress the Platonic recognition of poets' distinguished place, with a higher status than all who use words as their raw material: the poet is not equal to any artisan or technician, he is different in degree from the others. Hence why Plato treats these as a set that shares one same nature: poets, dancers, actors, artificers, and merchants.

It seems clear that philosophy feels more *threatened* in its role of speaking the truth by an art of the word such as poetry, which can arm itself with seductive garnishes that envelop *logos* and deviate it from its commitment to truth. All the other forms of expression, such as figures, colors, and sounds are competitors to philosophy, but with a lower threat potential.

It is only within this philosophical and educational context that the Platonic criticism of poetry becomes understandable. It is a matter, to a lesser degree, of refusing poetry and, more precisely, refusing a crystalized image of

poetry-making and its political-educative role. The poet, with his linguistic resources, is also a dangerous distraction against logical reason in its search of truth.

It is in the name of philosophical truth as the guide of human education that Plato will censor poetry and its fabulating potential. The poetic word reveals both falseness and truth. Therefore, it is up to philosophy to filter out falseness and avoid, particularly in early education, that by way of amusement and distraction, children be educated according to values that can harm the characters the *polis* needs if it is to be just.

Therefore, there is an important correlation between the citizens' souls and the constitution of the *polis*. Because the *polis* that Plato intends and *imagines* does not exist, he fashions it in *reasoning*. Thus, it will also be necessary to plan the educative conditions that can build the types of man that will make it possible. In this context, both the existing art and its place in the education of the equally existing *polis* are redimensioned in order to avoid the vices already known, and create a new situation in accordance with, and subordinated to, philosophic rationality.

Fabulation and fiction represent a particular risk to those who are still incapable of a judgment according to which truth can be discerned from falseness, appearance from reality, as with the children who are to be properly educated for the new *polis*.

Ultimately and decisively, the philosopher is the only who strictly discerns sensible appearance from intelligible essence. Hence why he is qualified to censor poetic falseness and select truth-bearing elements according to the educational stage of each member of the *polis*. As for the other citizens, because they lack philosophical discernment, they are to be spared of vicious contacts with the seductive poetic falseness, lest they should fall for its charms, allow it to invade them, and once they are thus educated, their *ethos* can hardly be shifted towards goodness.

Existing and past poetic and artistic productions are to be censored and selected. The ones that do come into being in the *city* imagined by Plato should already be fitted to the principles of truth of the new policy.

Certainly, poetic activity would then lack autonomy, freedom of creation, insofar as the subordination of poetry to ethic, moral, political and educational determinants is defended. This can sound strange to our contemporaries, to whom art is a free, singular activity not subordinate to any values except strictly *aesthetic* ones.

However, to Plato, in *The Republic*, art is an imitation in which the reality engendered can never present itself innocently, indifferently, or as a simple exercise of imagination that would invite receptors to experience possible ways of life, by taking them off their everyday routine and widening their horizons.

With regard to poetry, the notion of imitation is related to that of narrative. The least the real author appears, assuming representations as his own, the greater the power of *dissimulation* of the appearance created. With regard to narratives' classification, Plato expresses himself as follows:

[...] poetry and mythology are, in some cases, wholly imitative – instances of this are supplied by tragedy and comedy; there is likewise the opposite style, in which the poet is the only speaker – of this the dithyramb affords the best example; and the combination of both is found in epic, and in several other styles of poetry. [...] (PLATO, 2012, p. 95).

Therefore, we can see Plato's greater resistance to drama, in which characters, speeches, gestures, and environments are produced with no sign that there is a fabulating, fictional voice – here, the effect of reality is more intense and, consequently, so is the formative power over spectators.

In his dialogues, Plato represents characters and directly reproduces their speeches; he describes the spaces where the action takes place, and at times narrates indirectly a few dialogical actions. *The Republic* itself fits in the narrative genre, since Plato recounts, in this dialogue's ten books, the story of the meeting of Socrates, Polemarchus, Cephalus, Adeimantus, and Thrasymachus.

Would Plato be imitating the characters' actions and characteristics, the aspect of cultural spaces and natural environments? *Could his philosophical works, since they are organized in dialogues, with characters, be legitimately considered poetic?* Is it possible to deny the creative talent of the Platonic writing, the beauty of the images created in his works, the seduction of his metaphors?

Apparently, the philosopher does not consider a dialogue a fictional imitation, but the account of an event. Most important, however, is not the description of a particular narrative as such, but the problems presented to thought in their universality, the concepts and definitions. Certainly, the experience of thinking cannot be reproduced and fully understood through the dialogue – which is but an image, an imitation –, hence why *written* philosophy is combined with the philosophy that is *spoken, said, and experienced* in the real meetings of Plato and his interlocutors, and this has been highly valued by way of understanding the Platonic thought (REALE, 1997).

It could even be said that there is an insufficiency inherent to every representation, to every sign, in relation to immediate experience, to noetic intuition. The spoken, and even more the written word, is unfit for describing the act of thinking. The philosopher is aware that any speech is only an *imitation*, an *image*, hence why he has no pretension to establish any truth in the strict dimension of language, which, by itself, cannot found anything.

## Final considerations

What grants truth to philosophy is not language, but the pre-linguistic, the ontological sphere that precedes even thought as a way of reasoning, an operation of combination of speech elements. This can be verified in the dialogue of Adeimantus and Socrates about the knowledge of good:

[Adeimantus] How ridiculous! [Socrates] Yes, I said, that they should begin by reproaching us with our ignorance of the good, and then presume our knowledge of it—for the good they define to be knowledge of the good, just as if we understood them when they use the term 'good'—this is of course ridiculous. (PLATO, 2012, p. 239).

It is necessary to understand the criticism of imitation and fiction as the refusal to grant language the power and legitimacy to create *reality* or take appearance as the foundation of itself. It is true that Plato does use allegoric, figurative phrases to refer to the ontological level. The best known of such is the comparison between the sun – sensible – and the good – intelligible:

[Socrates] This eye of the day or sun is what I call the child of the good, standing in the same relation to the visible world as the good to the intellectual. (PLATO, 2012, p. 243).

However, the philosophical discourse is also just an image, it bears no truth by itself. It works as a didactic resource, a sort of transposition device for an extra-linguistic content which, to the philosopher, does not work as a sign of equivalence, but can only cause in the soul a desire to behold the original.

Contrarily to philosophy's use of images, metaphors, and allegories, both poetry and sophistics threaten the *polis* for the same reason: they intend to make *imitation*, speech-created appearance, a reality that stands by itself in an autonomous, sufficient way, as a sign of itself.

Therefore, it can be said that poets will pose a risk to the *Republic* if they keep on their pretension of mastering a universal art, encompassing all the others. Insofar as each individual or group needs to fulfill their own duty, without interfering in the domains of others, the poet will only be tolerated if he limits himself to the specificity that concerns him in the social whole. In this consists the concept of justice, i.e., that each man attends to what falls to him in the *polis*, just as each part of the soul must limit itself to its own sphere.

The main problem, common to sophists and poets alike, consists in their difficulty to define their activity as an art, and their concomitant tendency to see themselves as bearers of a universal, general knowledge, which would be a claim proper of philosophy. In the dialogues analyzed here, the Socratic-Platonic habitual structure of refutation of these mentioned arts is repeated.

Therefore, both sophistics and poetry are denied competence to speak knowledgeably of objects and practices pertaining to the various *professional* roles that should form the *polis*. Likewise, they cannot occupy themselves with totality and unity, which can only show in the intuition of essences, because poets and sophists deal but with particular intuitions and sensible appearances.

Plato speaks about arts and the fine arts – the sensible beauty – as the realm of appearance, diversity, and multiplicity, on an ontological level, and of opinion, on a gnoseological level. He counters them with the being and *episteme*, a concern of philosophy, the only that occupies itself with beauty in itself (PLATO, 2012).

It is in the name of philosophy and the space it reserves in the political life to be established – by means of a strictly planned form of education – that the Platonic philosophy presents itself as a criticism of the position granted to art and poetry by the Greek tradition then in effect.

In the end of Book VII of *The Republic*, as he concludes the discussion on the forms

of government and how these forms relate with the soul and the virtues, Plato, speaking through Socrates, ironically identifies tragedy with a *school of wisdom* – quoting Euripides as its emblematic author – but which, in fact, would contribute to raise tyranny and, consequently, democracy as its originary, adjacent counterpart.

Still in the perspective of a usual opinion with which neither Plato nor Socrates agree, the dialogue of the latter with Adeimantus thus reads:

Verily, then, tragedy is a wise thing and Euripides a great tragedian. [...] Why, because he is the author of the pregnant saying, 'Tyrants are wise by living with the wise;' and he clearly meant to say that they are the wise whom the tyrant makes his companions. Yes, he said, and he also praises tyranny as godlike; and many other things of the same kind are said by him and by the other poets. (PLATO, 2012, p. 319).

This is another argument, a factual one, given in order to justify refusing the poetic and tragic tradition in the education of the *polis*. Hence why it appeared as a necessary outcome, susceptible of consensus even with poets, that poetry was incompatible with the *polis* imagined by Plato.

Therefore, Plato concluded that poetry's political culture and its agent, the poet such as existed then, obviously not educated in the *Republic*, were not to be received there. With regard to these tragic poets, the philosopher says:

[...] But they will continue to go to other cities and attract mobs, and hire voices fair and loud and persuasive, and draw the cities over to tyrannies and democracies. (PLATO, 2012, p. 319).

Book X, the last one of *The Republic*, deals to a great extent with poetry in general, i.e., tragic and comic poets; it also highlights

the greatest icon of this sector of Greek culture and education: Homer. The ground of the argument is the refusal of *mimesis* (the imitative poetry), because of its ambiguity, because it is a *pharmacon*: it can vary from soul remedy to soul poison, depending on the level of global knowledge of the appreciator and his capacity to discern essence from appearance, paradigm from copy.

Here, the supreme artificer (demiurge), who was supposed to have created the universal paradigms of things, is compared with the philosopher, who intuits them as they are, in a first level of *reflection*; then, the ordinary artificer makes particular things according to the universal paradigms, such as a bed or a table, in a second level imitation; finally, there is the painter who imitates the particular sensible bed or table, in a third level or reflection (imitation of imitation). The work of the imitative artist can be compared to the passive, inert *reflex* produced by a mirror as it reflects, like an illusion, the image of sensible things.

Before any formal qualities inherent to the poetic work and its linguistic structure, Plato submits, in *The Republic*, the determination of value of such production to the ideal of truth, i.e., a greater or smaller proximity to the points of reference of what things are in themselves, i.e., the universal forms.

The Platonic judgment is not centered in accepting the idea of autonomy of art, nor in a scale of aesthetic values inherent to the internal structure of the artwork. No sufficient justification is to be found in its effects of *beauty* created by images and metaphors, or by metre and harmony of sound.

For reasons identical to the ones presented thus far, Plato reproaches even more intensely images that are not imitations on any level, such as dreams and delusions, or the mere *wonderful* inventions of imagination. Through these, monstrous, invisible, and hybrid beings are conceived – the anthropomorphization of gods, animals, or any other type of character composition, as well as the conception of

impossible, absurd, and contradictory scenes, events, or plots.

Poetry can serve as an important didactic instrument to convince citizens about certain truths that might otherwise be out of reach for the majority who did not and will not achieve the rigor of ontological contemplation, linguistic expression and the arguments of philosophical demonstrations.

However, if it is admissible to make a pedagogical use of the allegorical, figurative, and metaphoric instruments of poetry to *translate* ideal truths in order to reach non-philosopher, the purpose will by no means be to produce *delight* or sensible pleasure.

Platonic allegories, which abound in dialogues, particularly in *The Republic*, aim to educate in the truth of *things that are always equal to themselves* and that ultimately and decisively serve reason, not the sensible passions of the soul.

In the name of reason, Plato condemns both tragedy and comedy:

[...] there is a principle in human nature which is disposed to raise a laugh, and this which you once restrained by reason, because you were afraid of being thought a buffoon, is now let out again; and having stimulated the risible faculty at the theatre, you are betrayed unconsciously to yourself into playing the comic poet at home. [...] And the same may be said of lust and anger and all the other affections, of desire and pain and pleasure, which are held to be inseparable from every action—in all of them poetry feeds and waters the passions instead of drying them up [...] (PLATO, 2012, p. 371).

It is therefore a matter of restraining and controlling passions by means of reason and a philosophy-based education. Tragedy, comedy, and all the other arts harm education as they

awaken and develop pleasure and pain to the detriment of what transcends such sensible aspects and represents the true measure of man's essence and happiness.

We could question whether poetry would have no other way out, and to what extent is it unsuitable to man's improvement. Plato seems to admit the pedagogical use of poetry subordinated to philosophy, as it allows an easier approximation to the popular soul.

Consistently with the assumptions of *The Republic*, arguments are made against poetry for political reasons. The poet as such is allowed to defend the place of his own activity, with the sensible means – figured and imagetic – he has at his disposal. As for non-poets, the argumentation suitable to them would be made with common language, without measure or rhythm features. In both cases, the assumptions of the discussion are already in place in *The Republic*, both for affirming and denying justice, goodness, beauty, and truth.

Poetry, with its means and from its position, would hardly be able to show philosophers a *paideia* sufficiently formative as a *tecne* which could dispense with the philosophical education. As for appreciators of art works, taken over by a non-technical motivation, they could, as Plato had already been doing in *The Republic*, find formative potentialities in those works – non-technical or sensible potentialities, that is.

All this leads to the conviction that the only way to overcome the negativities of poetry as a whole would not consist, therefore, in engendering a superior form of poetry-making, since poetry-making is essentially limited to the sensibility of sensible passions. The truth of poetry, in the condition of sensibility, could only be reached in philosophy. It is not only the king who must become a philosopher in the *Republic*, but also the poet.

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**2** - See Plato.