

Diagnosing the Dissonance of Achilles

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Much has been said about Plato’s quarrel with poetry, but it may seem strange to claim that the *Republic* includes a “quarrel” with money as well. After all, money cannot talk. Yet money does *signify*, and in Book I Socrates shows that Cephalus’, Adeimantus’, and Thrasymachus’ understandings of justice rely implicitly on logics of “moneymaking” that belong to the sphere of market exchange. The invention and spread of coinage facilitated greater autonomy for such “transactional” relationships, but Plato sought to circumscribe transactional relationships within the civic relationship, the sphere of political justice.

Thus, there is a parallel between Plato’s treatments of poetry and money in the *Republic*. Broadly the parallel is as follows: Just as Plato’s philosophic critique of *mimēsis* establishes the strictures under which a domesticated version of poetry may be admitted to the Kallipolis, his analysis of the market in Books I and II prepares the reader for the proposal that coinage in the Kallipolis should be restricted to the “moneymaking” classes, and forbidden to the guardian or ruling classes (who are prescribed a communism of goods and families). In both cases a “quarrel,” or philosophic interrogation, serves as preamble for the philosopher-legislator’s assignment of poetry and money to their “proper” civic offices.

Like philosophy and unlike poetry, the logic of monetary exchange is abstract and rational. But, like poetry, philosophical discourse transpires in language. In the *Republic*, Plato draws on the power of philosophical analysis and poetic language to project a vision of the market domesticated by civic morality. Money’s function in the Kallipolis is the subject of two conceptual icons. The first is the “myth of the metals”—*the noble lie*—which is introduced at the end of Book III. This is the myth Socrates proposes to replace the authoritative stories told by the poets. The second icon is that of the “stinging drone” in Book VIII, whose appearance precipitates the decline from oligarchy to democracy, and finally, tyranny. The myth of metals illustrates the proper place of moneymaking in the Kallipolis, while the stinging drone associates political decline with an improper mixture of the logics of political justice and market exchange.¹ The latter part of this

article will address the myth of metals, in particular, but first it will be necessary to consider the impact of coinage and literacy, as well as Plato's general approach to poetry in the *Republic*.

Technologies of Abstraction and Individuation

Plato's treatment of poetry proceeds in two stages. The interrogation and rejection of *mimēsis* or "imitation" is the first stage, but the second stage is a rehabilitation of poetic symbol-making in the form of a "noble lie" (*pseudos gennaion*). Like mimetic poetry, a noble lie is "metaphysically false," but unlike mimetic poetry, such a fiction may be "noble" in the sense of being "'true to its birth,' the core meaning of *gennaios*, provided that it leads people to act more or less as they would act if they knew the truth."²

Students of political thought have grappled with Plato's advocacy of deception. However, my interest lies less in this question than in understanding the forces that compelled Plato to conceive the idea of a noble lie in the first place. Whether the medicine is administered or not, the content of noble lies implies a diagnosis of the maladies they seek to treat. Broadly, two phenomena contributed to the malady that Plato aimed to treat with noble lies. One was alphabetic literacy, the other, coined money. For all their differences, both social technologies promoted *abstraction* and *individuation*. Ultimately they facilitated a broadening of human association and a deepening of individual consciousness, but not without producing some dissonance along the way. In many respects, what Ong said of writing is true of coinage also: "[technologies] are not mere exterior aids but also interior transformations of consciousness, and never more than when they affect the word."³ Such transformations can be uplifting [...] Alienation from natural milieu can be good for us and is in many ways essential for human life. To live and to understand fully, we need not only proximity but distance."⁴

Platonic political philosophy can be understood (in part) as an effort to make sense of changes in society and consciousness wrought by coined money and alphabetic literacy. These technologies militated in favor of more abstract, individuated conceptions of social relations than obtained in "tribal" culture. The differentiation of social relations and individual consciousness deepened human experience but also produced a sense of dislocation. Coined money displaced relations of reciprocity and exchange from immediate and interpersonal contexts to the impersonal and abstract intermediary of the market. Writing displaced communication from the interpersonal context to

the intermediary of the text. Platonic philosophical writing involves an effort to reimagine, on abstract terms, a “total” social whole that the market and alphabet rent asunder.⁵

All thinking is conceptual, but literacy intensifies the capacity for abstraction. Far more than oral culture, literate culture militates toward abstract notions of society and self-consciousness. Plato’s metaphysical idealism and Aristotle’s logical syllogism are exemplary fruits of the intellectual changes wrought by literacy, but they are the culmination of a long development that began with the introduction of alphabetic script. Indeed, “formal logic is the invention of Greek culture after it had interiorized the technology of alphabetic writing, and so made a permanent part of its noetic resources the kind of thinking that alphabetic writing made possible.”⁶ Alternatively, “[oral] cultures tend to use concepts in situational, operational frames of reference that are minimally abstract in the sense that they remain close to the living human lifeworld.”⁷

Literacy also promotes a deeper sense of interiority. Again the difference from orality is a matter of degree, not of kind. “[Everyone] who can say ‘I’ has an acute sense of self. But reflectiveness and articulateness about the self take time to grow. Short-term developments show its growth: the crises in Euripides’ plays are less crises of social expectations and more crises of interior conscience than are the crises in the plays of the earlier tragedian Aeschylus.”⁸

Along with literacy, the spread of coinage and markets pushed consciousness in the direction of abstraction and individuation. However, monetization seems more likely to have disturbed rather than deepened the “interior conscience.” As Shell has observed, pre-platonic Greek literature already displayed signs of

discomfort with the institution of coinage, which, in the sixth and fifth centuries B.C., came to pervade Greek economic and intellectual life. For the Greeks coinage coincided with such political developments as tyranny and such aesthetic ones as tragedy. Some thinkers, moreover, came to recognize interactions between economic and intellectual exchange, or money and language. (*Seme* means “word” as well as “coin”).⁹

Just as writing displaced language from the concrete contexts of oral performance and verbal discourse, coinage displaced the exchange of goods from the contexts of gift-exchange and centralized (“palatial”) distribution. Coinage—a concrete token of value serving as universal and

abstract intermediary between hitherto incommensurable goods—widened the sphere of commercial relationships. In tandem, it encouraged thinking about reciprocity in more calculative or “transactional,” rather than personal, terms. This “crisis of reciprocity”¹⁰ was most significant in relation to ceremonial gift-exchange, in which the personal status of the giver (and receiver) is identified with the gift. “The implication of the giver in the thing given is not a metaphor: it involves a transfer of soul and of substantial presence. It translates the fact that the bond between giver and recipient is personal, exclusive and intense. The community is the global fabric of these unique and local relationships.”¹¹

Seaford sees Achilles’ dissonance as a reflection of the crisis of reciprocity brought about by coinage, and a prefiguration of pre-Socratic philosophy. Achilles’ rejection of the gifts offered by Agamemnon,

in combining the logic of money with aristocratic superiority to it, has two unusual (for Homer) consequences. Firstly, it induces the expression, in concrete terms, of something close to the idea of an *unlimited* amount of goods. Secondly, it makes Achilles separate his own *psuchē* with its supreme value (*timē*) from the various material manifestations by which it may seem constituted but with which it is in fact incommensurable. In thus putting his soul beyond an innumerable amount of goods, i.e., beyond all exchange value, he prefigures both the Heraclitean unlimitedness of the soul and the sublimating separation by Parmenides and Plato of abstract being, exclusive to the isolated mind or *psuchē*, from the unlimited circulation of goods (12B). This prefiguration occurs nowhere else in Homer.¹²

In gift-exchange the giver’s identity is implied in the thing given. In oral culture the singer and the muse are virtually identical because the muse’s authority is manifested in and through the singer’s memory. Havelock describes the epic poem itself as a “tribal encyclopedia,” made alive in “a performative utterance on an ambitious scale which both describes and enforces the overall habit pattern, political and private, of the group [...] To become and remain standardized it had to achieve preservation outside of the daily whim of men.”¹³ However, just as the transactional logic of commerce subverted the traditional identity between Achilles’ *psuchē* and “the various material manifestations by which it may seem constituted,” the logic of writing subverted the traditional

identity between the epic singer and the muse, as well as the identity, in tribal culture, between *nomos* (law) and *ethos* (folk-way). These developments reveal the same processes of abstraction and individuation at work.

Plato's Treatment of Poetry

Plato did not reject poetic or symbolic expression as such. His objections pertained specifically to imitative expression (*mimēsis*). Plato's rejection of *mimēsis* is bound up with the philosophical critique of oral consciousness. As an articulate representative of literate consciousness, which privileges abstraction and "objectivity," Plato recoiled at the "total loss of objectivity" necessitated by practices of "poetic memorization" which were essential in oral culture.¹⁴ Per scholars like Havelock, and Ong, "Plato's entire epistemology was unwittingly a programmed rejection of the [...] mobile, warm, personally interactive lifeworld of oral culture [...] Platonic form was form conceived of by analogy with visible form. The Platonic ideas are voiceless, immobile, devoid of all warmth, not interactive but isolated, not part of the human lifeworld but utterly above and beyond it."¹⁵

From Havelock's and Ong's perspective the literacy-driven evolution from concrete to abstract consciousness was a deterministic process and Plato was its amanuensis: "Plato of course was not at all fully aware of the unconscious forces at work in his psyche to produce this reaction, or overreaction, of the literate person to lingering retardant orality."¹⁶ This determinism helps account for the vehemence of Plato's rejection of poetry, which seems extreme to many modern readers. But this perspective plays down the evidence that Plato was consciously aware of the differences between orality and literacy and that it informed his philosophical writing. Such evidence is available in the *Phaedrus* and the "Seventh Letter," among other texts.

Allen has offered a more sophisticated reading of Plato's critique of *mimēsis*, one that draws on Havelock's insight but gives more weight to Plato's literary and political agency. Instead of construing Plato's project as the creation of a "text-based culture of his own devising" to rival that of the poets, Allen sees Plato's writing as an effort "to change Athenian culture and thereby transform Athenian politics"¹⁷ by reforming "the Athenian 'system of value,' that is, the ethico-political nexus of concepts that organized Athenian political life."¹⁸

For a few reasons, Allen's reading improves on Havelock's. First, orality and literacy are taken up explicitly in some Platonic writings, suggesting that Plato was not wholly unwitting in his

reaction against *mimēsis*. Second, poetry took both oral and written forms, and although certain “features of the oral universe align well with the targets of Platonic philosophical and cultural critique [...] this is an accidental rather than a necessary alignment.”¹⁹ Third, by the time Plato wrote, there was a small but significant circle of readers whose literacy had developed beyond merely utilitarian functions such as recordkeeping; Plato hoped to leverage the durability of writing to influence this audience as well as future audiences. “Plato could imagine a general reader for his dialogues, and [...] [develop] a mode of philosophical writing that anticipated such readers even in advance of their general emergence.”²⁰

Plato’s writing, then, was not merely a representative literate’s reaction to the oral predecessor culture but also a conscious effort to enlist the “surplus power” of language in a text, in service to Plato’s overall ethico-political project. Like Havelock, Allen affirms that Plato’s “political” project aimed chiefly at Athenian educational culture (*paideia*). “What is political in the *Republic*, and the rest of the dialogues, is not Plato’s creation of a utopian plan but his effort to refashion Athenian political language. The utopian image is a tool used for the latter purpose.”²¹

Plato consciously exploited linguistic power, drawing upon the unique possibilities of literacy to reform Athens’ existing “system of value” from within. In the *Republic*, Plato’s linguistic pragmatism is manifest in his construction of literary models designed to leverage the efficacy of symbols to produce social meanings and influence action. For Allen, this is the essence of Plato’s “pharmacology,” and it “entails above all understanding how abstract concepts and their rhetorical conveyance [...] shift the horizons of understanding and expectation and the normative commitments both of the individual and the social group with consequences for lived experience.”²²

Although they are poetic models rather than dialectical practices, Platonic noble lies do offer an alternative means of conveying philosophical truth. The basic notion is that certain fictions can produce the truth-effect of philosophical dialectic in spite of the reader being unaware of philosophic truth and the fiction being literally false. The efficacy of such fictions testifies by itself to the pragmatic insight that language can have political effects through its power to shape beliefs. But only certain types of fiction can have this effect.

There are on the one hand shadows or *eidōla*, which are what poets produce. Socrates repudiates these. But there are also useful and valuable images, which he

endorses. Socrates refers to the latter with terms like: theoretical models (*paradieigma logōi*, 472c), paradigms (*paradeigmata*, 361b, 472c), types (*tupos*, 443c), images (*eikones*, 487e, 488a, 588b–c), paintings (*zōigraphiai*, 472d, 488a, 501a–b), sculptures (*andriantopoiōi*, 540c, also 420c–d), patterns after the divine pattern (*paradeigmata en ouranōi*, 592b), and diagrams (*diagrammata*, 529d–e). Socrates himself produces such images and teaches his interlocutors to do so also. But for all his emphasis on visibility, Socrates produces these images with words, as the poets do their shadows.²³

Plato's word-images serve to make visible what is invisible.²⁴ They may take the form of schemata such as the tripartite division of the soul, or they may take the form of imitation, so long as only or virtuous characters and actions are imitated. In other words, the purpose of platonic fictions is to body forth invisible principles such as justice and virtue. Literary images and theoretical models are two means of conveying concepts; but the latter appeal to our sensuous experience and the former, our intellectual senses. Plato's dialogues include both conveyances.²⁵ In either case, philosophical writing is more than an "unwitting" reaction against poetry. For Plato aimed not only to critique the poets but "to displace [them]. And he expected this displacement to have cultural effects and, because cultural effects, political effects."²⁶

Allen's reading of the *Republic* looks forward to the effects of Plato's writing. What follows is informed by this reading but it looks in the opposite direction. What made Plato's writings appeal to the nascent community of readers? Plato's writing certainly had an impact on subsequent cultural and political discourse, but it was also a response to semantic innovations led by pre-Socratic philosophers and early historians—especially Herodotus²⁷—who were themselves grappling with the consequences of revolutionary changes brought about by literacy and coinage. If epic performances and gift-exchanges were indeed "total" social phenomena that sustained the community's identity over time through rituals and relationships involving immediate, personal, presence then we might say that literacy and coinage "split the atom" of tribalism by disembodiment of the discursive order and disembedding the distributive order. It seems likely that these two developments are deep sources of Achilles' dissonance. If the *Iliad* presents Achilles' symptoms, the *Republic* proposes an implicit diagnosis in the form of a remedy (*pharmakon*): the noble lie.

The Noble Lie: Plato's Myth of the Metals

The *Republic* is replete with literary images, and in a sense the entire dialogue may be an elaborate “noble lie.” However, only one fiction is designated in the dialogue as *the* noble lie (414c)²⁸ and that is the “myth of metals.” After purging the city of the old poetry, Socrates entertains the possibility of instituting a new myth “to persuade, in the best case, the rulers, but if not them the rest of the city” of their duty to “guard over enemies from without and friends from within—so that the ones will not do harm and the others will be unable to” (414b–c).

The content of the myth of metals is as follows:

All of you in the city are certainly brothers [...] but the god, in fashioning those of you who are competent to rule, mixed gold in at their birth; this is why they are most honored; in auxiliaries, silver; and iron and bronze in the farmers and the other craftsmen. So, because you're all related, although for the most part you'll produce offspring like yourselves, it sometimes happens that a silver child will be born from a golden parent, a golden child from a silver parent, and similarly all the others from each other. Hence, the god commands the rulers first and foremost to be of nothing such good guardians and to keep over nothing so careful a watch as the children, seeing which of the metals is mixed in their souls. And if a child of theirs should be born with an admixture of bronze or iron, by no manner of means are they to take pity on it, but shall assign the proper value to its nature and thrust it out among the craftsmen or the farmers; and again, if from those men one should naturally grow who has an admixture of gold or silver, they will honor such ones and lead them up, some to the guardian group, others to the auxiliary, believing that there is an oracle that the city will be destroyed when an iron or bronze man is its guardian. (415a–d)

The myth of metals plays upon a “language of metals” that was already well established. Hesiod had spoken in this dialect of ages and races of men that corresponded to a hierarchy of metals from gold to iron. Although it does not rely on abstract concepts, it is fair to call Hesiod's metaphorical system an aristocratic “ideology.” Later, “Herodotus, at least in part, seems to appropriate the traditional aristocratic system, appropriating metals and coinage as signifiers within a moral

discourse based on essentialism. Yet while the text of Herodotus exploits the signifying value of the language of metals, the narrator tends to maintain an ironic distance from his characters' metallic forays."²⁹

Herodotus' ironic distancing from Hesiod's metallic dialect reflects the revolutionary effects of both writing and coinage. For, writing introduces a gap between the narrator and the text that enables ironic distancing. While Herodotus, through his characters, does imitate the traditional system he also occupies a narrative persona, which allows the historian's "position [to shift] and [waver] with different anecdotes and narratives."³⁰ Within that gap, Herodotus plays on the social tensions brought about by coinage. In particular, Herodotus' portrayal of characters illustrates the tension between a "hard" aristocratic ethos (associated with gift-exchange) and a "soft" demotic ethos (associated with commercial calculation). "The 'hard' and uncomplicated Scythians maintain the pure affinity between talismanic gold [Hesiodic *agalmata*] and kingship, while the Lydian king Kroisos (at the 'soft' end of the spectrum) incongruously links the symbolism of gold with the precise calculations of the *kapēlos* [retailer]."³¹

Herodotus' audience included aristocrats and democrats opposed to one another in a discursive conflict over coinage. The gap between narrator and character, and the implied equality of reader and author, make space for Herodotus to approach the conflict ironically. Importantly, ironic distancing allowed Herodotus to abstract from the conflict between aristocracy and democracy, or gift and commerce, to the ultimate conflict over which side may lay claim to the "embedded," long-term transactional order, as opposed to a short term, "disembedded" order. The embedded order is positively valued, the disembedded, negatively valued. Traditionally, aristocratic or "heroic" gift-exchange was associated with the long-term order, while the innovations of coinage and *kapēlia* belonged to the short-term order. But the rise of the *polis* intensified the confusion between transactional orders and with it the discursive struggle over money's meaning.

Traditionally, commerce was associated with the short-term order, but, as *nomisma*, coinage encouraged an association between commerce and the long-term transactional order represented by the *polis*.³² "For every Greek *polis* that issued its own coin asserted its autonomy and independence from every other Greek city, while coinage also functioned as one institution among many through which the city constituted itself as the final instance against the claims of an internal elite."³³ Thus, as Herodotus shows us, "[both] the aristocratic elite and the *polis* lay claim to the good, 'embedded' economy for themselves, and both vilify the other side by representing it not as

an alternate order but as disorder—socially ruinous disembedding perpetrated by selfish economic interests.”³⁴

The myth of metals is Plato’s main intervention in this discursive conflict. What literary device does he employ? In the *Phaedrus*, Socrates lamented the confusion and “madness” that result from literacy’s unmooring of the word from its oral context. But rather than attempt to put back together what our tools have rent asunder, he suggests that philosophical discourse can reconcile the effects “bad carving” through techniques of “good carving.” These discursive techniques are, “[first], the comprehension of scattered particulars in one idea [...] which whether true or false certainly [gives] clearness and consistency to the discourse [...] The second principle is that of division into species according to the natural formation, where the joint is, not breaking any part as a bad carver might” (265d).

Plato’s myth of metals is understood best as a philosophical exercise in good carving. The myth aims to reconcile in discourse three orders of value—commodity, honor, and intelligence—whose autonomy was intensified by literacy and coinage. This differentiation sowed confusion, but also offered the opportunity to judge more clearly among the orders, in terms of the goods appropriate to each and their proper relations to one another. Philosophical discourse does this by gathering the “scattered particulars” comprising the city/soul under the comprehensive idea of political justice, and assigning to each part (moneymakers, auxiliaries and rulers, in the city) its appropriate virtue (prudence, courage and wisdom). The comprehensive idea of justice pertains to the relations among these parts and their respective virtues, and the philosophic “constitution painter” takes care to arrange each particular “according to its natural formation.”

As a philosophical text, Plato’s myth illustrates *in extremis* the ironic and transvaluative power of both literature and money. The language of metals on which the myth relies obviously belongs to an aristocratic imaginary but Plato’s revisionism turns that dialect on its head. The myth teaches that every citizen of the Kallipolis is “earth-born,” affirming the isonomic logic of the *polis* and the market. The hierarchical logic of aristocracy is retained along with the language of metals, but more importantly the link between abstract and concrete *agalmata* is severed.

Indeed, only the bronze and iron souls—the “moneymakers”—are permitted to acquire actual gold and silver.

We'll tell [the auxiliaries] that gold and silver of a divine sort from the gods they have in their soul always and have no further need of the human sort; nor is it holy to pollute the possession of the former sort by mixing it with the possession of the mortal sort, because many unholy things have been done for the sake of the currency of the many, while theirs is untainted. But for them alone in those of the city it is not lawful to handle and touch gold and silver, nor to go under the same roof with it, nor to hang it from their persons, nor to drink from silver and gold. And thus they would save themselves as well as save the city. (416e–417b)

As the final sentence indicates, Plato's myth retains the traditional association between coinage and the short-term transactional order; however, the market is subordinated to the long term order circumscribed by the comprehensive virtue of political justice. The hierarchical relation among the Kallipolis' constituent parts reflects their division "into species according to the natural formation, where the joint is."

The strikingly unworkable suggestion that children born to parents of differing "metals" should be reassigned to the appropriate class indicates the limits of philosophical myth-making. In terms of the myth the policy makes sense, and it reinforces the association between *isonomia* and social mobility. Still, to carve the classes of the city/soul along the appropriate metaphysical "joints" without interfering with the articulation of the whole body is much more easily accomplished in speech than in deed. The same goes for the radical proposal that auxiliaries and rulers should live communally, sharing property, wives and children, and never touching earthly silver or gold. When Adeimantus suggests that "you're hardly making these men happy" (419a), Socrates reminds him that in "founding the city" in speech "we are not looking to the exceptional happiness of any one group among us, but as far as possible, that of the city as a whole" (420b).

The Kallipolis is a speculative "tyranny of the good" in which each subject's happiness is sacrificed to the whole city's happiness, as prescribed by the ruling philosophical *logos*. Because of this, the "social mobility" allowed within the Kallipolis is for the city's benefit not the subject's. Plato proffers the "noble lie" as the sort of "strong medicine" needed to facilitate such a tyranny. But it is unlikely that Plato aimed to institute this regime in practice; it is more plausible to read the myth as a literary paradigm of political justice whose "vividness" lies chiefly in its diagnostic and therapeutic usefulness.³⁵

Within the broader context of the *Republic* the myth serves to clarify the confusions over “justice” raised earlier in the dialogue. In Book I, the relations of justice were confused with more narrow relations characteristic of commercial partnerships (by Cephalus) and martial alliances (by Polemarchus). These confusions culminate in Thraymachus’ exasperated rejection of the idea of political justice and his claim that “justice” is merely a rhetorical means of legitimating predation upon the weak by the strong. If the *Republic*’s first book portrays the dissonance resulting from differentiations in social relationships that were intensified by literacy and coinage, then the myth of metals is an imaginative reconstitution of the social whole, on the ideal plane.

Conclusion

One measure of an institution’s claim to embody the long-term good is its ability to compel sacrifices. The myth of metals portrays the Kallipolis as free and happy precisely because its members are enslaved to the good. In other words, the myth envisages the whole array of sacrifices that a radical tyranny of the good would require. But the myth is only one vision, and it comes at the end of a series of representations of sacrifice.

The first representation of sacrifice comes out in Socrates’ interrogation of Cephalus. Socrates asks about the value of wealth. Cephalus, an old man, replies that wealth is most valuable for settling debts with gods and men: “To the man who is conscious in himself of no unjust deed, sweet and good hope is ever beside him—a nurse of his old age, as Pindar puts it [...] The possession of money contributes a great deal to not cheating or lying to any man against one’s will, and, moreover, to not departing for that other place frightened because one owes some sacrifices to a god or money to a human being” (330e–331b).

Cephalus’ reply to Socrates demonstrates the relationship between human morality, which compels sacrifice, and the “imperceptible goods” that legitimately merit sacrifice. Allen glosses this passage:

Stories of the after-life [...] provide the first example of cognizable conceptions about imperceptible things; such conceptions have a controlling influence on human morality [...] Socrates jumps on [Cephalus’] connection between the fear of death and a desire to meet obligations and claims that the issue at stake is whether Cephalus understands justice rightly. Socrates thus draws out a subtle point. When

human beings begin to wonder whether stories about what happens at or after death are true, their minds also turn to questions of justice and injustice. The question of life after death raises the prospect of punishment after death. In the face of epistemological uncertainty about any afterlife, human beings lose hold of whatever peace of mind they may have achieved, the dialogue suggests. Cephalus clearly has only one resource to help him contemplate what happens at death: poetry[.]³⁶

This is a powerful insight. Yet Allen overlooks that Cephalus has one other means to the peace of mind he seeks: coin. In its mute signification of value, coinage supplied the peace of mind that poetic invocations of afterlife spurred Cephalus to seek. For Cephalus, then, poetry and coinage close the moral-metaphysical circle that inscribes mortal life without the intervention of philosophical discourse. As soon as Socrates abstracts from Cephalus' remarks the assertion that justice is "speaking the truth and giving back what one takes," Cephalus himself departs "to look after the sacrifices" rather than remain for the dialogue, as if he has no need for the discussion and the mythmaking that follows.

Perhaps this is because, for Cephalus, money also puts gods and mortals on a curiously equal footing, since debts to both gods and men may be discharged in coin. Here we glimpse the radically leveling implications of market rationality. Yet as the dialogue progresses an opposing implication emerges: that the wealthy are to the poor as gods are to mortals. For the wealthy can afford "sacrifices" or can pay others to sacrifice on their behalf, while the poor face poetically-heightened anxieties of mortality without any such consolation.

Book I presents a series of incommensurable understandings of justice, beginning with the moneymaker's justice, proceeding through the warrior's justice, and concluding with the sophist's denial or rejection of justice as a comprehensive idea. The flawed definitions of justice in Book I expose the fault lines created (or at least, considerably deepened) by coinage and literacy. Thrasymachus finally articulates a predatory vision of human association: whether the power backing it is physical or intellectual, he claims, "[justice] and the just are really someone else's good, the advantage of the man who is stronger and rules, and a personal harm to the man who obeys and serves. Injustice is the opposite, and it rules the truly simple and just; and those who are ruled [...] make him whom they serve happy but themselves not at all" (343c-d).

Thrasymachus' sophistic argument suggests a paradigm of social relations where intellectual, physical, and economic predation is the metaphysical norm. In this paradigm rulers are "wolves" rather than "sheepdogs." But, as Socrates exposes, this is to deny any distinction between justice and the art of gain. Thrasymachus' tangled argument is structurally similar to the dissonance of Achilles. Like an intellectual Achilles, Thrasymachus' position "[combines] the logic of money with aristocratic superiority to it." When Socrates exposes his confusion Thrasymachus is enraged, just like Achilles.

In the *Iliad*, Achilles' dissonance "[combines] [...] the logic of money with aristocratic superiority to it." In a different way, so does the unbridled sophism of Thrasymachus in the *Republic*. For, Thrasymachus' claim that "justice is the good of the stronger" combines the logic of the *polis* with the intellectual's superiority to it. Unlike the aristocratic Achilles, Thrasymachus is a new man and a sophist, comfortable in the "human" world of the *polis*, but apt to put himself outside the community on account of his superior cleverness. If Achilles' alienation from the human community reflects his sense of semi-divine superiority, Thrasymachus is alienated for the opposite reason: too clever to accept the claim of political justice, he likens the mass of men to sheep, while clever men are like wolves that prey upon them in the guise of protecting them.

The myth of metals completes Socrates' answer to Thrasymachus. Practically, its utopian "tyranny of the good" is no more workable (and barely more desirable) than Thrasymachus' dystopian tyranny of predation. But it is not a practical plan; it is a hypothetical paradigm. Hypothetically, the myth saves [the guardians] as well as the city by persuading each class to make the sacrifices necessary for the whole to be just and happy. "Surely the most terrible and shameful thing at all is for shepherds to rear dogs as auxiliaries for the flocks in such a way that due to licentiousness, hunger or some other bad habit, they themselves undertake to do harm to the sheep, and instead of dogs, become like wolves" (416a).

Notes

1. At the extreme this mixture terminates in tyranny, which erases the boundary between wealth and political authority.
2. Allen 21.

3. Etymology attests to the similarity between money and language; for example, *logos* is translated as “account” and even today modern Greeks call an invoice “*to logoriasmo*.”
4. Ong 81.
5. To emphasize the simulative role played by material culture does not necessarily imply cultural materialism. Rather, it can shed light on some peculiar and defining features of Plato’s moral and intellectual project. Among these are Plato’s interrogations of money as a measure of all value and of poetry as the chief vehicle of Greek *paideia*.
6. Ong 51.
7. Ong 48.
8. Ong 174. Beyond alphabetic literacy, the introduction of print in the early modern era and, today, digital computing has intensified further the sense of subjectivity, even as it has knit humanity together through ties of institutional interdependence and instantaneous communication. Still, in the sweep of humanity’s existence on earth, the most radical change in consciousness was wrought by alphabetic writing.
9. Shell continues:

Heraclitus, for example, described the monetary exchange of commodities in a complex simile and series of metaphors whose logical exchanges of meaning define the unique form of simultaneous purchase and sale of wares that obtains in monetary transfer. And Plato criticized the Sophists and pre-Socratics as merchants of the mind [...] because they were producers of a discourse whose internal exchanges of meaning were identical to the exchanges of commodities in monetary transactions. Plato feared the political tendency of their moneyed words, and represented their discourses in his dialogues as the audible symptom of an invisible invasion into language of a tyrannical form destructive of wisdom. Plato’s critique extended to the ideal Form itself: Was not even Socratic dialectic, he wondered, pervaded by the monetary form of exchange? Was not dialectical division a kind of money changing, and dialectical hypothesizing a kind of hypothecation, or mortgaging? The upsetting confrontation of thought with its own internalization of economic form motivated thought to become the self-critical discourse of philosophy. (2)

10. Seaford 34.
11. Henaff 127.
12. Seaford 302.
13. Havelock 42.
14. Havelock 45.
15. Ong 79.

16. *Ibid.*

17. Allen 4.

18. Allen 162. This is not to deny the influence of literacy. “In an oral culture, Havelock argues, one can remember say, an epic poem only by ‘learning the lines’ as an actor does; in Havelock’s view, Plato saw this feature of an oral culture as giving oral poets excessive power to shape the souls of their fellows.”

19. Allen 172.

20. Allen 5.

21. Allen 18.

22. Allen 21.

23. Allen 29.

24. Allen 35, 57–59, 73–76.

25. Allen 74–77.

26. Allen 77.

27. According to Kurke,

Herodotus preserves oral tradition of approximately one hundred years preceding his researches (so, 550–450?) on *both* sides of the struggle [over the meaning of coinage]. Furthermore, Herodotus offers us a text that is uniquely capacious in content as well as in sources: thus he explicitly discusses many of the topics central to our inquiry for the first time. This can be demonstrated in miniature simply by a list of relevant words that occur for the first time in Herodotus’ text: in addition to *nomisma*, Herodotus gives us our earliest extant instances of *banausiē* (together with Sophocles’ *Ajax*), *dokimos*, *hetaira* used for a courtesan, and *kapēlos/kapēleuō* (aside from a single occurrence in Hipponax)” (31).

28. Allan Bloom translates the relevant phrase (*ti hen pseudomenous*) as “some one noble lie.” All quotes from the *Republic* are from Bloom’s translation.

29. Kurke 60.

30. Kurke 60–64.

31. Kurke 63–64.

32. “[Whether] we etymologize it [...] as ‘process or result of lawful distribution’ or [...] as ‘convention,’ the term *nomisma* points to the political function of coinage, either as a means of effecting retributive justice or as an institution of consensus. This political

function [...] is what crucially distinguishes coinage from other forms of wealth (both of which are designated indiscriminately by *chrēmata*)” (Kurke 41).

33. Kurke 13.

34. Kurke 32.

35. This is not to suggest that the myth offers a “yardstick,” if a yardstick is an absolute standard or template for measuring justice. It is more like a paradigm or heuristic to aid in understanding various socio-political relations.

36. Allen concludes: “The opening scene of the *Republic* thus presents poetry as dwelling in the cognitive space where human psychology and epistemology combine to generate metaphysical conclusions that sustain particular notions of justice” (33–34).

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