

Civilized communication of culture: παιδεία and πειθώ in the *Republic*

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I have never seen the *Republic* referred to as a treatise on rhetoric, nor is it the first, or the second, place one would look for a Platonic account of the concept of persuasion. We are fortunate to possess the *Gorgias* and the *Phaedrus*, where the art of rhetoric is treated at length, although ἡ λόγων τέχνη must compete for the title of primary subject in both works. Disregarding the question of art, the concept of ‘λόγος’ receives its fair share of attention in both the *Theaetetus* and the *Sophist*. In the *Republic* the art of persuasion works in subtler ways, but it still plays an important role, as I hope to show presently.

My point of departure is the concept of persuasion (πειθώ). I shall briefly consider the boundaries of the concept as employed in the *Republic* before I attempt to connect the concept itself with the education of the guardians by way of the notion of cultivation.

In the *Gorgias*, Socrates makes a distinction between two forms of persuasion: one will produce belief (πίστις) without knowledge, and the other will in fact produce knowledge (ἐπιστήμη); in the latter sense, ‘to persuade’ (πείθειν) is synonymous with ‘to teach’ (διδάσκειν), while ‘to be persuaded’ (πειθεσθαι) equals ‘to learn’ (μανθάνειν) (*Grg.* 454c7–5a7). The distinction is repeated in the *Theaetetus*, the only difference being that ‘belief’ is exchanged for ‘opinion’ (δόξα).¹ The *Gorgias* is not concerned with elaborating on this distinction through an exploration of the nature of knowledge or the difference between knowledge and belief, while the *Theaetetus*, as we know, does not succeed in defending a definition of knowledge, even though it is precisely this division within the category of persuasion which leads Socrates to discard the second definition and Theaetetus to propose the third and final definition: true opinion based on *logos* (μετὰ λόγου ἀληθῆς δόξα).²

We stumble across a similar categorization of persuasion – although more or less incidentally – in *Resp.* 3.412e5–13c4, during the separation of the guardians proper from the auxiliary guard. Socrates tries to illustrate the different ways in which opinion may exit someone’s thought (διάνοια). The only voluntary exit occurs when false opinion is changed by way of learning

1 *Tht.* 201a4–c7. Similarly we find δοξάζειν instead of πιστεύειν. Since the reference to persuasion is made during a discussion of δόξα and the proposed definition of ἐπιστήμη as δόξα ἀληθῆς, it would be silly to read much into this difference.

2 The distinction is also alluded to in *Pl. Plt.* 304b1–d10 and *Phdr.* 277e5–8a5.

(μεταμανθάνειν). Involuntary loss of opinion befalls *true* opinion in particular,³ and there are three possible ways this can happen:

1. Theft:⁴ Opinion is removed by stealth, in one of two ways:
 - a. Persuasion (μεταπειθείν) through the agency of speech (λόγος),
 - b. Forgetting (ἐπιλανθάνεσθαι) through the agency of time (χρόνος).
2. Violence: Pain makes one change one's opinion.
3. Sorcery: This category comprises change of opinion in those who are:
 - a. Spellbound by pleasure,
 - b. Seized by fear.

Although voluntary change through learning is not referred to as a form of *πειθώ* in this passage, it is easy to recognize that this way of changing opinion corresponds to epistemic persuasion in *Grg.* and *Tht.* Of the involuntary modes only 1a is entitled persuasion, and the question is whether this category is congruous with the 'pistic' form of persuasion in *Grg.* It all depends on what – and how much – one reads into the qualification 'by stealth' (λανθάνειν). There is a difference between being unaware of changing one's opinion and being ignorant of exactly *how* one was induced to change it. If one is unable to render account of one's change of heart, even if the change is for the better, Socrates would hardly consider it a case of 'learning'. Moreover, although it is presented as a form of *involuntary* change, being unable to prove the rational basis for one's conviction would certainly make it count as involuntary from the Socratic perspective, considering the lack of self-transparency, i.e. the lack of self-knowledge.

Disregarding the case of memory lapse for now, the categories of violence and sorcery are significant in their own right, particularly in relation to a wider concept of persuasion than that which is invoked in the category of theft. There is no reason to doubt that persuasion is indelibly tied to the medium of *logos*, but *logos* in the strict sense of speech or argument rests on a more elusive foundation. When Aristotle makes his clear distinction between λόγος, ἦθος, and πάθος, he emphasizes that these are all modes of persuasion (πίστεις) which affect the audience *in the medium of speech*. By means of speech alone

3 One could get the impression that Socrates considers false opinion immune to involuntary exit, but there is no reason why his categories should not apply equally well to the change from false to true opinion, or to the exchange of one false opinion for another. Involuntary loss of false opinion is of no importance in the context because the discussion concerns the ability of the potential guardian to hold onto true opinion.

4 In *κλαπέντες* we can note a toying with the poetic use of this verb in the sense of 'deception'. That Plato intends this becomes quite obvious with Socrates' confession that *πραγτικῶς ... κινδυνεύω λέγειν* (*Resp.* 3.413b4), although this should *also* be understood as an apology for the use of metaphors. Adam 1963², I, 191 correctly refers to *κεκλέμμεθα* in *Soph. Ant.* 681.

the speaker can convey an impression of his own character, leading the auditor to put more, or less, faith in what he hears *regardless of the strength of the actual rhetorical syllogism*. This attuning of trust is not usually something which the auditor is able to account for, and if he is, it is doubtful whether his account could ever reach ‘straight to the bottom’, achieving complete transparency. Then again, the speaker can construct his speech so as to more directly affect the mood of the auditor, raising his spirits or striking fear into him. His mood, and his reaction to the perceived character of the speaker, will determine the extent to which the auditor is taken in by the speech, what weight he puts on particular arguments, strictly speaking, and perhaps even his capacity to appreciate argument. The truly good speech leaves the audience entranced, spellbound, and captivated.

In all probability, *these* modes of persuasion are already included in category 1a above. The reason he considers pain, pleasure, and fear separately is that he has in mind instances where these emotions are *not* aroused by speech, but rather by exposure to bribery (pleasure) and afflictions upon the battlefield (pain, fear). Even when they are not conveyed by speech, character and passion can lead to involuntary change of opinion. This does not mean they are not at work in speech.

It is therefore all the more interesting that violence (*βία*) and persuasion form an inseparable pair of contrasts, popping up throughout the entirety of the *Republic*.⁵ In a passage from book 8, Socrates describes the psyche of the oligarchic person:

Is it not clear from this that such a person, in other transactions, where he enjoys the reputation of being a just man, suppresses other base appetites residing in him by means of a so to speak decent act of violence (*ἐπιεικεῖ τινὶ ἑαυτοῦ βίᾳ*): that he does not attempt to convey through persuasion that it is not the better choice, nor does he cultivate by means of words, but through necessity and fear (*οὐδ’ ἡμερῶν λόγῳ, ἀλλ’ ἀνάγκῃ καὶ φόβῳ*), as he is himself anxious for his remaining fortune?⁶

⁵ Most noticeable are *Resp.* 3.411d7–e2 and 8.554c11–d3, but the contrast is present at 3.399a5–c4, 3.403b6, 7. 519e4 and arguably in the passage where Socrates envisages persuading the philosophers to return to the cave (7. 520a6–e3). Cf. 2.359c5–6, where *βία* is applied – but not by Socrates – to νόμος as opposed to φύσις.

⁶ *Resp.* 8.554c11–d3. Translations are my own, based on the text of Burnet 1900–1907.

This less-than-honourable display of self-restraint is a fascinating illustration of self-cultivation. One is reminded of the vulgar virtue in the *Phaedo*, where desire restrains desire and fear repels fear.⁷ What is of particular interest here is the contrast between two modes of cultivation.

The verb ἡμεροῦν means ‘to make ἡμερος’, ἡμερος being an adjective which was applied to ‘tame’ animals and ‘cultivated’ plants. There is, in other words, a strong connotation of subduing or bringing under control. But more importantly, there is a connotation of organization and society, of cooperation, and of a way of being which makes cooperation possible. The opposite of ἡμερος is ἄγριος, the wild, the savage, the loner, lacking in shame and devoid of respect for others: the lion, the wolf.⁸ The social sense of ἡμερος is effectively illustrated when Socrates in the *Phaedo* groups together bees, wasps, ants, and humans as πολιτικὰ καὶ ἡμερα γένη, to which those who have practised the vulgar (δημοτικὴ καὶ πολιτικὴ) non-philosophical virtue will return via reincarnation.⁹ In the famous passage in *Pol.* 1.2 where Aristotle proclaims the human being a political animal, the bee, along with ‘every other gregarious animal’, is recognized as possessing a lesser share of the political.¹⁰ What renders the human being so outstandingly political is, based on the most natural interpretation of the text, its capacity for *logos*. It is no coincidence that *logos* in the above quote follows immediately after ἡμερῶν, while necessity and fear – although dependent on the same verb – are separated in an elliptical clause of their own: the latter terms connect only with one half of the concept of cultivation.

7 I agree with Adam 1963², II, 228 that this is how we should understand this passage, hence the superiority of reading ἐπιεικεῖ τι as an attribute of βίη, rather than as a self-contained expression (‘a decent element’). See *Phd.* 68b8–9d6, with a description of vulgar σωφοσύνη as appetite conquering appetite at 68e2–9a5, and 82c2–4a2, where there is a mention of the money-lover’s fear for his fortune at 82c5–6.

8 The spirited element is likened to a lion in *Resp.* 9. 588d3–5, harbouring the possibility for savagery, in which case the wolf is the more appropriate image (3. 416a2 – b4), or for civilized loyalty in the manner of the dog (ibid. cf. 2.376a2–c6). The tyrant is likened to a wolf in 8.565d4–6a5. See ὀφειδὲς at 9.590b1 with Adam’s note 1963², II, 365–6.

9 *Phd.* 82a10–b9. Also worth noting, with a view to the opposite ἀγριότης, is that 81a3–a6 suggests that τούς ... γε ἀδικίας τε καὶ τυραννίδας καὶ ἀρπαγὰς προτετιμηκότας εἰς τὰ τῶν λύκων τε καὶ ἱεράκων καὶ ἰκτινῶν γένη [sc. εἰκὸς ἐνδύεσθαι]. In *Resp.* tyranny, lawlessness (παρανομία, see esp. 4.424d1–5a1, 9.571a5–2b9), injustice, violence and savagery are intimately connected concepts. In *Dem.* 21.49 ἡμερος is coupled with φιλόανθρωπος, with reference to the Greeks, in spite of experiencing many an injustice at the hands of the barbarians, in spite of being born into enmity with them, still forbidding violence against (barbarian) slaves. Moreover, the fact that ἡμερότης in *Resp.* is so obviously associated with σωφοσύνη, which is defined in Book 4 as ‘friendship’ between the political classes/psychic elements, further strengthens my claim that there is a social connotation to the concept.

10 The image of the bee and the beehive is moreover strongly ingrained in the *Republic* itself. The philosopher rulers are likened to ἐν σμήνεσιν ἡγεμόνας τε καὶ βασιλέας at 7.520b6, and then the hive and, more importantly, the drone (κηφήν) is the primary simile employed during the description of degenerate regimes and persons in Books 8–9.

Let us now take a closer look at how this cultivation operates in the Platonic soul. In *Resp.* 3.410a7–12b1, as the education in music and gymnastics culminates, all eyes are on ἀγριότης and ἡμερότης, savagery and culture. Although these two qualities are initially paired with σκληρότης and μαλακία, hardness and softness, at 3.410e1–3 it is made clear that softness is the *excess* corresponding to culture, while savagery seems to be more like the raw material for, or the obscure origin of, the mean courage and excess hardness (3.410d6–9). Culture is naturally associated with the philosophical aspiration of the soul (3.410e1), while savagery originates in the spirited element (3.410d6–7). In fact, in Book 9 (588b1–92b6), as the main argument of the *Republic* reaches its climax – a chunk of text which should be read in conjunction with this part of Book 3 – the philosophical or ‘logistic’ element of the soul is actually referred to as τὸ ἥμερον (9.589d2, 591b3). One might say it is *the* cultured element, since in the same passage Socrates also applies this term attributively both to the spirited element and to parts of the desiderative element: when a person is punished for an unjust deed, ‘the spirited element is calmed and tamed (ἡμεροῦται), while the cultured element is set free (ἐλευθεροῦται)’ (9.591b2–3). Two pages earlier, Socrates compared the ‘materialist’ desires to a multiform beast with a circle of heads ‘of other animals, *both wild and tame* (ἥμερα)’ (9.588c8–9), before he went on to liken the rational element – when it functions at its best – to a farmer ‘nurturing and domesticating (τιθασεύων) the cultivated (ἥμερα), while hindering the growth of the wild ones’ (9.589b2–3). Whatever the nuance of τιθασός,¹¹ in my opinion this apparent ‘doubling’ of cultivation suggests that some desires already possess an affinity with the cultured element in the strict sense of the word, an affinity which may be further cultivated. As for the members of this group, one should refer to the distinction between ‘necessary’ or ‘lucrative’ and ‘unnecessary’ or ‘wasteful’ desires in 8.558d8–9d3, and the further isolation of certain ‘perverse’, ‘lawless’, ‘beastly’ and ‘savage’ desires within the group of unnecessary desires at 9.571a5–2b9.

While the notion of culture is explicitly connected with the philosophical element in Book 3, the emphasis is on *origin*: culture *springs from* the philosophical element. But the very point of the education, as is reaffirmed in Book 9, is to *harmonize* the elements. Even if culture and civilization primarily

11 Chantraine 2009, 1077 has some interesting comments on the application of ἥμερος vs τιθασός, with reference to this passage. It is also worth noting that he follows Adam 1963², II, 364 in taking ὡσπερ γεωργός as belonging to the following clause, not to the one preceding. Hence ‘*il s’agit de plantes*’, with Shorey 1930–1935, II, 403, but *contra* Ferrari and Griffith 2000, 309, Grube and Reeve 1997, 1197, Emlyn-Jones and Preddy 2013, II, 379. In my opinion, the image of the γεωργός loses much of its *raison d’être* if one does not consider the following clause an expansion on the image.

originate with the capacity to reason, once present they may affect the rest of the soul. And when they do, when a man cultivates his own spirit and his own desires, or when he educates a child who ‘is not yet able to seize λόγος’ (3.402a2), this process of cultivation need not be a matter of force (βία), but it can be – and it should be – one of *logos* and persuasion, πειθῶ διὰ λόγων (3.411d8). Not only spirit, but also a certain part of the large, desiderative element of the soul, should not simply be repressed, but rather appealed to with words. The possibility of this scenario hinges on the fact that although the soul *may* consist of sharply distinct and even contrary ‘parts’, it is *qua* possibility a more or less unified whole. One could even add that it is unified with the rest of the ‘logical’ world – how else could a child not yet itself in command of *logos* (cf. 9.590e2–1a4) be amenable to education?

This originary unity is designated throughout with the word ἡμερος. It depends on the possibility of communication, which reaches its most extreme form in human *logos*. This *logos* is not only a medium for outward communication, but a basic determination of the human soul. Hence Aristotle (*Eth. Nic.* 1.1102b25–03a3) allows the psychic aspect originally entitled *alogon* a share in *logos*, in a passage adorned with a string of words which evoke the notion of persuasion.¹² The same logical relationship of persuasion, I contend, is present in the account of the human being in the *Republic*. And just as in Aristotle the practical *logos* is conceptually inseparable from character as seated in desire (ὄρεξις), we may entertain the idea that also in Plato’s *Republic* reason’s capacity for persuading desire rests upon an affinity between thought and that aspect of character which is expressed in spirit and the lower appetites, with the implication that reason does not enjoy the complete conceptual integrity suggested by the digression on philosophy in Books 5–7. The affinity reaches perfection in the fully cultivated soul, when all the psychic elements are united in the ‘friendship’ that constitutes *sophrosyne* (4.430c8–2b1, 4.442c10–d3), based not on force, but on mutual respect. In Kallipolis it may very well be this friendship which in the end persuades the philosophers to temper their philosophical *eros* and return for a while to the world of politics and social interaction.

¹² πειθαρχεῖ, εὐηκόότερον, ὁμοφωνεῖ, κατήκοον, πειθαρχικόν, τοῦ πατρὸς καὶ τῶν φίλων ἔχειν λόγον, πείθεται πως ὑπὸ τοῦ λόγου τὸ ἄλογον, ὅσπερ τοῦ πατρὸς ἀκουστικόν τι.

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