

manifestly comprehensive grasp of ancient culture and ability to bring it to life, *Nemesis* gives us merely the Hollywood version of Alcibiades: edge-of-your-seat fun, but in only two dimensions.

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Jill Frank: *Poetic Justice: Rereading Plato's "Republic."* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2018. Pp. xi, 251.)

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How should we read Plato's dialogues? Are they authoritative texts from which to extract knowledge, or playful works that invite readers to experience a more participatory form of learning? Weighing in on this central debate, Jill Frank's *Poetic Justice: Rereading Plato's "Republic"* offers a provocative yet highly persuasive defense of the latter mode of reading Plato's dialogues. On her account, Plato's dialogues stage occasions in which characters treat philosophical figures as authoritative dispensers of doctrine, despite myriad argumentative failures, inconsistencies, and deceptions made plainly visible to readers. By glutting his dialogues with missed opportunities to wonder, Plato prompts readers to judge for themselves and thereby cultivates an education in self-governance that "seeks to redistribute authority back to those who grant it to Athens' traditional figures and institutions in the first place, namely, the people of Athens" (15).

In uncovering how the very act of reading Plato's dialogues can help readers become better democratic citizens—ones who do not "alienate their self-rule to those with privileged expertise," including philosophers—*Poetic Justice* makes a noteworthy contribution to recent efforts to unsettle conventional readings of Plato as antidemocratic (77). Yet Frank's argument is much more radical than that. In the course of the book, Frank challenges several major assumptions in Platonic scholarship, including Plato's alleged hostility to poetry, subscription to the theory of Forms, and promotion of reason over desire and the senses. Bound to arouse controversy, this bold, new reading casts Plato more as a proto-Nietzschean than a Platonist. If it does not fully succeed in defending this portrayal, it is nonetheless a work to be reckoned with and reread.

The book begins by showing how the *Republic* underscores the *value* of mimetic representation. Frank's argument hinges on a distinction she traces between *mēchanē*, or contrivance, and *mimēsis*. Whereas the text presents

makers of contrivances as aiming to deceive, it depicts makers of mimetic representations as making no claim to truth. In fact, by presenting themselves as partial or perspectival representations of truth, mimetic images can operate to liberate audiences from deception: "Wearing their falsity on their face, mimetic representations, unlike contrivances, ... prompt attention to, rather than covering over, gaps between truth and representation" (65). When mimetic representations deceive, it is therefore due to an inability on the part of the audience to distinguish fact from fiction (64). It is not Homer who is under scrutiny, then, but Homer's interpreters, who lack knowledge of *mimēsis*, that is, awareness of the distinction between representation and truth (70–71).

Calling Plato a "mimetic poet" whose writing "is at a third remove from the truth," Frank suggests the same critique applies to some of Plato's interpreters (26). However tempting it is to treat Plato as a proclaimer of truth, Frank contends that Plato's dialogues make no pretense of supplying truth. Rather, like a mimetic poet, Plato builds contradictions into his writing to help readers "cultivate an awareness of the perils and fallibility of authority of *all* kinds, including that of philosophy" (13). To substantiate this representation, Frank engages in a close rereading of Plato's *Republic* throughout which she calls attention to various reasons to indict the beautiful city in speech. Positioning herself against what she identifies as the Straussian interpretation, Frank sees these tensions "in what appears on the text's surface" (39n71). For example, by casting the noble lie as a contrivance (*mēchanē*), Plato's Socrates implies that the city's education will bring about deception in the souls of its students and thus foster ignorance (88). Such contradictions alert readers that neither the educational program of *kallipolis* nor, Frank maintains, the Socratic elenchus itself can truly persuade; they can only secure obedience (123–27).

By staging these failures of persuasion, however, Plato provokes readers to wonder and thereby awakens their *love* of learning. Challenging interpretations that take the *Republic* to advocate the eradication or suppression of *erōs*, Frank demonstrates that Platonic philosophy depends on the internal compulsion *erōs* provides. Yet, turning to Plato's *Symposium*, she cautions that we must not understand philosophical *erōs* as a means of securing knowledge, for this "spells the death of *erōs*" (167). Marking the "ladder of love" as a contrivance (*mēchanē*), Plato gestures towards a conception of *erōs* in which what is desired is not to sit atop the ladder, but to ceaselessly desire truth—an experience "bound up with mortality" (167). In fact, against traditional accounts of Platonic thought as hostile to sensation and perception, Frank's Plato treats engagement with the sensible as "a condition of *logos*"; the sensible is not separate from and subordinate to an invisible world of ideas (173). As Frank puts it, for Plato "knowledge is perspectival, partial, provisional, revisable, and integrally bound to speech" (202). *This* realization, she argues, undergirds the dialogue's ultimate political teaching: "Learning that doing justice is by way of the always fallible authority of one's own

experiences, perceptions, opinions, imagination, and conversation is what I take to be the *Republic's* education to ethical, political, and philosophical self-governance" (224).

While Frank makes a compelling case for reading Plato's dialogues as works of art that invite readers to question the dialogues' own theses, this particular argument is, like the noble lie, "nothing new." It is found, for instance, in Stanley E. Fish, *Self-Consuming Artifacts: The Experience of Seventeenth-Century Literature* (University of California Press, 1972), 5–21; John Evan Seery, "Politics as Ironic Community: On the Themes of Descent and Return in Plato's *Republic*," *Political Theory* 16, no. 2 (1988): 229–56; Charles L. Griswold Jr., *Platonic Writings, Platonic Readings* (Pennsylvania State University Press, 1998); and Diskin Clay, *Platonic Questions: Dialogues with the Silent Philosopher* (Pennsylvania State University Press, 2000)—though these are not works that Frank takes up. What is new and distinctive about Frank's approach emerges from what she thinks citizens learn by "disidentifying" with Plato's characters: that all authority is fallible and therefore one must judge for oneself, while also recognizing one's own fallibility. As fresh as it is provocative, this insight elucidates how the structure of Plato's writing may itself reveal his affinity for democratic politics, insofar as dialogue is a form of writing especially conducive to rousing individual judgment. By calling attention to moments where Plato uses the literary license that the dialogue form affords him to provoke readers to question the judgments even of "authoritative" characters, Frank further establishes the connection between Plato's mode of writing and democratic education.

Overall, Frank's analysis lends much credence to this conclusion. Yet, in the spirit of her argument, I would like to pose a few questions about her interpretation. First, does recognizing the fallibility of human knowledge necessarily mean Plato does not believe in objective truth or endorse political hierarchies? Socrates may not have all the answers, but, having given deeper consideration to the issues at hand, he may, as he implies, be closer to the truth than other human beings and therefore may be more qualified to rule (506e). Moreover, is it really true that Plato himself makes no claim to provide readers with the truth? Though he may not speak directly, surely Plato speaks in other ways. One might argue, for instance, that Plato deliberately builds contradictions into his dialogues so that careful readers will discover for themselves the truths he wishes to convey, such as the truth that *kallipolis* is in fact an "uglytown." To be sure, Frank justly, in my view, characterizes Platonic philosophy as eternal wondering derived from an awareness of the provisional nature of human knowledge. But perhaps she too quickly dismisses the impetus across the dialogues to build a body of knowledge that, while always open to question, is well-founded and surpasses that of the average citizen.

Frank's claim that "Plato targeted a broader, more inclusive readership" beyond the elite circle of interlocutors his dialogues depict (46) also raises some questions. Setting aside the matter of historical accuracy, this claim

rests on the assumption that contradictions such as those Frank highlights in her analysis are readily apparent to anyone. Why, then, have generations of readers overlooked them? It seems more accurate to say that Plato's dialogues present readers with the intellectual equivalent of optical illusions: if one does not look closely and for long enough, one will miss the true picture. At times, Frank seems to admit as much—for example, when she writes that Plato's dialogues require a reader “who can read and reread, forward and backward, with a view to looking at everything everywhere, at the things that appear, at their images and representations, and who can also imagine what does not appear, all without losing her place” (219–20). This sounds little different from the demands of a Straussian reading. If seeing the dialogue's inconsistencies requires the time-intensive and intellectually arduous task of rereading, then isn't it more likely that Plato's efforts to provoke independent thought are targeted at the few, not the many?

Nevertheless, Frank does an excellent job of bringing to light Plato's entanglements—to borrow S. Sara Monoson's term—with some of the elements banished or subdued in *kallipolis*. Indeed, any reader who thinks Plato advocates a life without poetry, *erōs*, persuasion, and the senses will need to grapple with this important book. Perhaps acknowledging these entanglements is itself enough to give one pause before taking as Plato's final word the impulse in *kallipolis* to silence the *demos*.

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Gregory Bruce Smith: *Political Philosophy and the Republican Future: Reconsidering Cicero*. (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2018. Pp. 424.)

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Gregory Bruce Smith's new book seeks to rescue both republicanism and political philosophy. Republicanism is threatened by moral relativism, the bureaucratization of life, and technology that operates free from moral and political constraints, while the threat to political philosophy comes from “‘constructivist’ political theory—which either starts in midair or constructs its own foundations *ex nihilo*,” which began with Descartes and culminated in Nietzsche and Heidegger (40). The threats are related, Smith claims, in that constructivism proceeds from a “self-legislating ego” that wills abstractly and finds no need for political participation (41). Smith admires both ancient and modern republicanism: he champions the civic dedication and striving