

Reading Guide Censorship

Readings for 14 April 2011

READINGS (REQUIRED)

- [A] Plato, *Republic*
- READ: Books II, III & X, summaries. Grube/Reeve, pp. 32-33, 60 & 264.
 - READ: Book II, 376d-378e. Grube/Reeve, pp. 52-54.
 - SKIM: Books II & III, 378e-392c. Grube/Reeve, pp. 54-69.
 - READ: Book X. Grube/Reeve, pp. 264-292.
- [B] Alexander Nehamas, "Plato and the Mass Media" *The Monist* (1988), Vol. 71, pp. 214-234. (V*2)

[A] Plato, *Republic*, Book X (Grube/Reeve, pp. 264-292)

Background

For background information and general guidance on reading Plato and *The Republic*, see the Reading Guide from January 13th.

In the closing pages of Book II and the opening pages of Book III, we learn what education of the guardians would look like in Plato's ideal city.

In tenth and final book of *The Republic*, Socrates presents an argument for the earlier statement that imitative poetry should be banned in the ideal city. He says that poems, like paintings, are imitations of objects - which are themselves copies of the Forms. Because of this, he argues, poets are too far removed from what is real (the Forms) to convey the truth in their works. But because poems stir the irrational part of the soul, people will be affected by them, leading them astray. This is dangerous to the state when it leads people to have false beliefs about things such as virtue.

Plato then returns to the topic with which *The Republic* began: justice, completing his argument that justice is valuable both for its own sake, and for its consequences.

Passages to focus on/passages to skim

Summaries

- Read through all three of the Book Summaries (pp. 32-33, 60 & 264) to orient yourself.

Books II & III

- Begin reading at 376d “Come, then, and just as if we had the leisure to make up stories.”
- Read closely through 378e “are the best ones for them to hear.”
- Read quickly from here up through 392c, “This concludes our discussion of the content of the stories.” (If you are pressed for time, you may read through these pages *very* quickly.)

Book X

- Read carefully 595a-608b.
- Read 608b-616b, but don’t worry about the details of Plato’s argument for the immortality of the soul in 609a-610e.
- Skip 616b-617d.
- Read 617d-621d.

Reading Questions:

As you read, keep in mind the following questions:

- (1) How does Plato think the guardians should be educated (376d-392d)? Why does he think this is important?
- (2) Why does Plato say that paintings (and poems) are at a third remove from what is real (597e)?
- (3) Why does Plato say that poetry appeals to an inferior part of the soul (602c, 603c, 604)? Why does he think this makes it dangerous?
- (4) What does Plato mean by saying that he is taking back his earlier concession to Glaucon (612c)? What are the rewards that Plato says justice brings?
- (5) Why do you think *The Republic* closes with the myth of Er?

[B] Alexander Nehamas, “Plato and the Mass Media” *The Monist* (1988), Vol. 71, pp. 214-234. (V*2)

Background

Alexander Nehamas is a Professor of Philosophy at Princeton University. “Plato and the Mass Media” was originally published in the philosophy journal *The Monist* in 1988.

In it, Nehamas offers a reconstruction of Plato’s argument in book X for banning poetry from the ideal city, and he contends that people have made the same complaints about television that Plato made about poetry. He argues that the parallel is appropriate,

because in Plato's time poetry was popular entertainment, and popular entertainment has certain features that present just the dangers that Plato recognized.

Reading Questions:

As you read, please keep in mind the following questions:

- (1) Why does Nehamas say that Plato's argument about the harm of imitation may be especially accurate as far as children are concerned?
- (2) In what way does Nehamas think that popular entertainment is perceived as 'inherently realistic' (p. 223) by its audience, and why is this significant?
- (3) How, if at all, do you think Nehamas' article would have been different if it had been written in 2008 rather than 1988 (that is: if it had considered the role of the internet)?