Listening to Socrates: Reevaluating Stephanus 327, Establishing Prefigurative Analysis, and Performing Dianoesis in Plato's Republic

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Book I of the *Republic* presents a number of problems and a wealth of information for Plato scholars. Historians can provide general readers with a sense of what Plato's contemporaries might have understood from it, as the characters introduced have real historical referents whose backgrounds seem suggestive for the *Republic*. Classicists have noted questions of transmission for Book I; stylometrically, it does not fit with later parts of the work and may have started as a separate dialogue from the larger *Republic* or a proto-*Republic*. Yet, the literary nature of Book I and its consequences for interpreting the remainder of the work have been insufficiently explored. I intend to focus my study on the style of Book I insofar as it influences interpretation of all that follows in the Republic with an emphasis on prefiguration in Stephanus 327. Dramatic prefiguration, as described in the *Republic* by George Rudebusch, "is the literary device, found in Greek tragedy, of using an

image at the beginning to represent or prefigure ideas developed later in the work" (Rudebusch 2002, 77). While claims of prefiguration have been made previously, Plato scholars generally seem reticent to accept the notion. This is understandable considering that many prefigured interpretations do not well adhere to the text of the *Republic*. Rather than use prefiguration in a balanced hermeneutical process, well-known scholars seem to read their preferred interpretations into Book I — a mistake I will try to highlight and correct. In this paper, I will demonstrate the importance and utility of prefiguration in Republic Book I, show how it may be employed for *interpretative* insight, and suggest a path forward for prefiguration in Republic scholarship.

I will briefly discuss what prefiguration is and how it is valuable for *Republic* interpretation. To demonstrate what is at stake and the extent to which *Republic* scholarship is dependent on Book I, I will provide a heterodox reading of 327 that seeks to reframe the *Republic* around a question of strength. Regardless of this reading's merits, I hope it will provoke reconsideration of Book I details and their consequences for greater interpretative claims. Subsequently, I will discuss general problems with prefigurative interpretation and show where previous scholarship makes unsubstantiated or weak prefigurative claims. I am not certain that there are any criteria sufficient for adjudicating the veracity

of prefigurative arguments but invite scholars to push against Book I readings, new and tired, with a view towards how they shape the remainder of the *Republic*. As we will see, establishing dramatic prefiguration is crucial for any strong, comprehensive study of the Republic. Even further, establishing dramatic prefiguration is to perform dianoesis, Socrates' method of reconciling faulty images in order to progress further towards knowledge of the forms — perhaps, to knowledge of any sort. This epistemological method is not only the key to a philosopher's education but to any reader's hermeneutic for the *Republic*.

I

Dramatic prefiguration holds that elements of Book I are used by Plato to foreshadow or indicate thoughts that will be developed later on in the Republic. As such, it is only useful if one determines that Book I was intended by Plato to be included with the *Republic* as it exists. Rudebusch notes that dramatic prefiguration was a common literary device in Greek tragedy, and provides the example of Aeschylus' Agamemnon:

> At the beginning of the play we are told of two eagles, one black, one white- tailed, who, in full view of the army, devour a pregnant hare with all her unborn young (lines 111– 120).

This image prefigures the main action of the play, the

murder of Iphigenia by two kings, her father and uncle, who sacrifice her, "stopping her from her course" before the birth of children (Rudebusch 2002, 77). The form of Plato's dialogues is important for the philosophic content. In Book VII, Socrates tells Glaucon that he cannot simplify the path to knowledge; it requires a journey of reconciling images towards knowledge — similar to the dianoetic method of the Divided Line. Recognizing the flaws or strengths of images is what enables a thinker to move towards recognition of knowledge itself. Socrates' method is to demonstrate that his interlocutors premises are faulty or incomplete, enabling subsequent refinement. Such a technique is employed throughout Book I as Socrates complicates each interlocutor's concept of justice. Through steady development, justice is better defined until Socrates begins the discussion of justice that occupies the remainder of the work, itself growing more complex and nuanced. Socrates' teaching could not occur via doctrine or treatise but only through a series of images.

This style of Socratic argumentation is present throughout the *Republic* and, combined with the dramatic style of the dialogue, makes the adoption of dramatic prefiguration intuitive. Socrates challenges interlocutors with an allegory or image of a concept he is trying to explain that seems to be defective but is heuristically useful. The tripartition of the soul hardly seems to be an ex-

act description of human motivation and behavior, but it is suggestive for a human psychology. The mapping of this tripartite soul to different types of political class is not exact either but provides useful understandings of how different societies might function. Likewise, the segments of ascent within the Cave or Divided Line are not equivalent metaphors, but the two in conjunction provide greater understanding for Plato's theory of knowledge. It would make sense that Plato writes to his readers as Socrates speaks to his interlocutors, with different sections of the work resembling one another while not being exactly equivalent. This inequivalence should be stressed, as I do not believe that the contents of Book I should be understood as perfect images of arguments made later in the work — rather, they are imperfect imitations like all images.

When re-reading the *Republic*, most readers are likely struck by the opening of Book I when Socrates and Glaucon are at the festival of Bendis. Socrates speaks of traveling down to the Piraeus, Polemarchus mentions performances with equestrians holding torches, and Socrates says that he and Glaucon are seeking to return to Athens — to ascend from the harbor. All of these images seem to be symbolic, representing a philosopher guiding a pupil out of the Cave. These dramatic images provide the easiest examples of prefiguration, although I will later show that interpreting what

they prefigure is controversial. In the sections that immediately follow, I will try to provide a close reading of the opening to the *Republic* in order to suggest that overlooked details may have significant interpretative consequences for the work.

II

In his portrait of philosophy and polis, Plato's art is nowhere more evident than in his beautiful opening: Setting up a dramatic stage for his teacher, who is recounting a tale to an unknown audience. With prefiguration in Stephanus page 327, careful readers can glean so much more than simple exposition for the *Republic*. 327 is where Socrates captures his audience and implores them — us — to listen.

I will examine three elements of 327: the ascent, justice of the strongest, and journey from both the beginning of the text and the home of Cephalus onwards. My intent is to show how dramatic elements provide a basis for reimagining and understanding what follows in the *Republic* via prefiguration. The style of Book I is unique in a way that should pique readers' attention. While the whole of the *Republic* does contain dramatic characters who speak with one another and perform some actions, Book I is the only section that seems to have a true dramatic structure; it has significant action and unfolds somewhat like a play. These elements of Book

I have not been sufficiently explored — especially beyond niche interests in political philosophy. I will also suggest corrections to some of the prefigurative literature that does exist. Regardless of these suggestions, I hope to demonstrate that future discussions of the *Republic* would benefit by inspiration from and reconciliation with Book I.

The central thesis of the *Republic* is often debated: should the treatise be considered a work of political science, moral psychology, or philosophic education? Readers with a good memory may recall that while Socrates has much to say on each of these topics, the initial and perhaps central challenge is to Socrates' autonomy: Polemarchus orders Socrates to halt and cease his return home (*Republic* 327b). Socrates went down to the harbor at Piraeus with Glaucon, son of Ariston and brother of Plato, to pray and observe. The goddess Bendis was to be celebrated for the first time and, having seen the Piraens and Thracians perform their rituals, the two journeymen set off to return to Athens before their interdiction. Thus, Polemarchus lives up to his namesake — first-for-fighting, the initiator of conflict in the *Republic* (Rudebusch 2002, 78).

Socrates holds no desire to remain, responding to his momentary captor:

> Polemarchus said, "Socrates, I guess you two are hurrying to get away to town." "That's not a bad guess," I said. (327c)

Socrates seems irritated by Polemarchus' arrest and requests emancipation. Polemarchus demurs and not-so-subtly threatens Socrates. Polemarchus subsequently makes suggestion of Socrates' ignorance of the festivities to follow, and Socrates flippantly responds about the novelty of the festivities. Polemarchus commands Socrates to remain throughout the night and Glaucon again acquiesces. At no point in the exchange does Socrates make a decision of action, accepting or rejecting Polemarchus' decrees. Glaucon is the one who always responds: "Of course we'll wait," "There's no way," "It seems we must stay" (327b-328a). Socrates resists and never assents to his captor, although he does comply. He expresses a desire to be on his way back to Athens. Before any determination has been made as to what justice is, a Socratic conception of justice has been violated. If the ascent from Piraeus in any way represents the acquisition of knowledge, then Socrates' existential desire has been violated — he has been pulled from philosophy and curiosity to the home of Cephalus, from elysium to the polis.

Why might Socrates not want to be drawn into Cephalus' home and into the ensuing debate? Socrates best offers evidence for this and his cagey behavior in Book

VII, when Glaucon affirms Socrates' explanation that:

> "those who have been allowed to spend their time in education continuously to the end... they won't be willing to act, believing they have immigrated to a colony on the Isles of the Blessed while they are still alive?" (519c)

Socrates certainly does not seem to desire to act or engage with the Book I interlocutors. Perhaps, even the agora-minded philosopher becomes caught up in the joy and excitement of his thoughts. There is, after all, a reason why Aristophanes lampoons Socrates. He is fond of intellectual engagement and sees little cause for other activity. One can scarcely imagine Socrates governing Athens. Still, it is curious that Socrates would avoid philosophizing with Cephalus and his sons, unless their time would be spent otherwise. Though, Socrates does mention that:

> "Then it's impossible," I said, "that a multitude be philosophic." ... "And so, those who do philosophize are necessarily blamed by them."(494a)

Is it possible for Cephalus, Polemarchus, and Thrasymachus to philosophize with Socrates? Do they even desire to do so? Perhaps not. Cephalus retreats as soon as he is bested by Socrates, who dispels Cephalus' concept of justice, and proceeds to pray despite

the exchange. Polemarchus appears more interested in Simonides than philosophy proper. Thrasymachus fades out of discussion after growing frustrated with his perception of Socrates manipulating the weaker argument for the stronger. Here, too, Glaucon endorses and bears forward what others would rather dismiss by forcing the conversation to continue. If Socrates is uninterested, it must be out of an unwillingness to return to Greece from the Blessed Isles of his thought and to be accosted by Polemarchus and company.

Why do Polemarchus and the other interlocutors desire discourse with Socrates? They must know that it is to their benefit that Socrates, perhaps Athens' strongest intellect, guides them. While they desire for Socrates to found or lead conversation, Thrasymachus accuses him of trickery despite knowing well that this is Socrates' modus operandi:

> "I certainly believe it," [Thrasymachus] said, "so that Socrates can get away with his usual trick; he'll not answer himself, and when someone else has answered he gets hold of the argument and refutes it." (337e)

Socrates refutes Thrasymachus into submission before ever asserting his own concept of justice, but Glaucon insists on the need to continue. The argument from Thrasymachus seems to be dismissed. Socrates

has persuaded each man that his concept of justice is faulty.

It is odd that Socrates' arguments are generally accepted by his interlocutors. That is, even if they were not convinced that Socrates was correct; they seem to believe that they were proven wrong whilst maintaining their previous behavior. What has Socrates done? Polemarchus confesses that Socrates should not expect being listened to. Polemarchus adequately predicts their unwillingness to listen in confrontation: Cephalus fleeing, Polemarchus being rebuffed and overtaken by Thrasymachus, Thrasymachus frustrated in the corner — at least, for the remainder of Book I. Even beyond closing their ears to Socrates' rebuttals, they certainly do not hear what Socrates seeks: not a manifestation of justice but the thing-in-itself. So, what then does Socrates achieve?

Polemarchus' initial challenge to Socrates is an appeal to force and number,

> "...Do you see how many of us there are?"
> "Of course."
> "Well, then," [Polemarchus] said, "Either prove stronger than these men or stay here." (327b)

Polemarchus challenges Socrates to prove stronger

than the mob. What Polymarchus' notion of "stronger" entails is unclear, and the extent to which the term is ambiguous later in the work has been discussed widely. How Polemarchus could expect Socrates to prove himself stronger is even more obscured, as Polemarchus presumably does not mean through an outnumbered brawl and Socrates later casts a doubt over the possibility of convincing a multitude (493c ff). Some may feel that my reading of the situation is too aggressive. Perhaps, Polemarchus is being more playful or friendly with Socrates than violent. Still, even if the exchange is light-hearted, an insincere threat of violence still constitutes a threat. Further, readers would be remiss to forget that Socrates' died at the hands of a stronger multitude.

Interestingly, this initial exchange precedes Thrasymachus' introduction into the work. Socrates seeks a way out of his arrest aside from competition:

> "Isn't there still one other possibility . . ." I said, "our persuading you that you must let us go?"
> "Could you really persuade," [Polemarchus] said, "if we won't listen." (327c)

Bringing the *Apology* to mind, Polemarchus places Socrates in a bind where he must prove himself stronger in action or in speech — but he cannot and does

not truly persuade a non-audience. What seems to have happened is that Socrates, desiring to leave, embraced Polemarchus' challenge as a means to hasten his departure. The competitive element of the initial debate has been discussed to varying extents, but Socrates does appear to be combating his interlocutors' notions. In Book I his arguments are exclusively negative and defensive, he demonstrates why others' arguments are weak. Socrates does not demonstrate that he or his arguments are strong. Book I ends as follows:

> Before finding out what we were considering at first — what the just is — I let go of that and pursued the consideration of whether it is vice and lack of learning, or wisdom and virtue. And later, when in its turn an argument that injustice is more profitable than justice fell in my way, I could not restrain myself from leaving the other one and going after this one, so that now as a result of the discussion I know nothing. (354)

Here Socrates admits that, rather than seeking to determine what justice is, he sought to break down the others' arguments. No positive argument is established, no strength qua strength is demonstrated as Socrates is on the defense. Rather, the weaknesses of Book I arguments are exploited by Socrates. Though Socrates believes he has earned his release, Glaucon calls Socrates' bluff:

> Now, when I had said this, I thought I was freed from argument. But after all, as it seems, it was only a prelude... [Glaucon said,] "Socrates, do you want to seem to have persuaded us, or truly to persuade us, that it is in every way better to be just than unjust?"

That Socrates considers himself freed from argument, without having to speak or respond in earnest, shows his disinterest in the discussion. Considering that his freedom was seized in order for the arguments to take place, this comment becomes even more striking. From this challenge, the rest of the Republic derives its momentum — yet, the impetus is still Polemarchus' initial arrest of Socrates. Glaucon's comment could suitably be rephrased: Socrates, do you want to pretend to be stronger or prove it? If Socrates had any intention to engage in meaningful philosophical discourse, to learn or to teach, he would not have described his thoughts as above. Socrates provides his account of what justice is, offering a positive and strong account of justice. If he left Piraeus, Socrates proved himself the stronger. Given that Socrates is able to recount his interactions from Cephalus' home, it must be assumed that he succeeded in Polemarchus' challenge.

After all, Plato has Socrates begins the *Republic*'s account of events as follows:

Socrates: I went down to the Piraeus yesterday... (327a)

When studies of the *Republic* do take Book I into consideration, they often start from Cephalus' household and the characters there within while ignoring this important introduction. While the characters' arguments and historical antecedents are interesting, a more logical and helpful start is the true beginning of the work. While the Bloom translation emphasizes with a colon, the original Greek makes clear that Socrates is the dialogue's reciter. Plato presents him speaking to an unknown audience, most likely himself, Plato, or the book's reader. I find the latter possibility to be most compelling and intuitive but I neither see adjudicating text in the *Republic* nor find much at stake as regards who Socrates' audience is so long as it is acknowledged that the dramatic interlocutors are not who Socrates is actually speaking to. That Socrates is speaking in recitation of the previous day's events has been discussed alongside questions of poetry and imitation within Book X, but not much further. Despite the clear division between narrative and imitative poetry described in the *Republic*, Plato blurs the line when he imitates Socrates providing narration rife with imitative metaphors. Readers may get lulled into the "I said/he said" dialogue of the *Republic*, but Plato's decision of style has consequences for how his thoughts should be considered — particularly regarding poetry.

That Socrates recites the previous day to us, the readers, requires interpretative consequences. Dialogue should proceed between Socrates/Plato and their readers as soon as the long soliloquy that is the *Republic* continues. If this is true, then certain interpretations of the *Republic* must be immediately elevated. One such example is Smith's paper "Plato's Book of Images," which treats Plato's *Republic* as a series of images that readers must reconcile and develop, if readers are participants in a Socratic dialogue then this didactic effort is both reasonable and worthwhile. Scholarship that seeks to integrate Thrasymachus' Argument of the Stronger with the remainder of the work also gains importance with Socrates' demonstration of strength to Polemarchus. Some problems may also stem from this, primarily that Socrates may be an unreliable narrator of the previous day's events from poor memory or otherwise and may be underplaying the arguments of others. This seems particularly true for Thrasymachus, as the negative portrayal of both the character and his arguments could be exaggerated in Socrates' hindsight.

III

It should be clear that Plato took great care in his crafting of the *Republic*, particularly Book I with its dramatic layering and strength as a referent. I believe that the work is best understood as it relates to the initial action of descent/ascent and Polemarchus' arrest of and

challenge to Socrates. Understanding the remainder of the *Republic* as it extends from the dramatic beginning or even from the home of Cephalus will benefit scholarship by grounding textuality and appreciation Plato's literary style — hopefully, interpretations will be able to find prefigured antecedents in Book I. However, some attempts to do this have not been inaccurate due perhaps to confirmation bias in finding antecedents or insufficient reliance on the text, thus discouraging the study of prefiguration.

It is important to note that Socrates' dramatic journey in the *Republic* is his descent to Piraeus and then his arrested attempt and eventual ascent back towards his home in Athens. Brann has emphasized this in her study of the Republic, and she discusses that Books I and X both work as descents into Piraeus as a symbolic Cave and then into Hades, with a super-cave zenith in Books V and VI (Brann 2004). Brann's concentric ring theory and other exposition-heavy interpretations of the Republic often emphasize the first book's descent to the Piraeus. But this is a misplaced focus. Though the descent to Piraeus hangs over the Republic, it is not an action that occurs in the work — akin to the Sphinx's Riddle in *Oedipus Rex*. Book I cannot function as a narrative of descent, as it is about what occurs afterwards. The focus of scholarship should be an inversion of Brann's reading, more akin to Seth Benardete's discus-

sion of the ascent from Piraeus (Benardete 1989). How one reads the direction of this vector should have consequences for understanding not just the characters' journey but also the later images of the Divided Line and the Cave, along with their substantive arguments. Particularly, the notion of what it means to be "like us" as Socrates discusses at 514.

Another image that has been thoroughly discusses it the festival of Bendis, which has been a historical source for studies on Bendis in Athens. Some scholars have noted that the torch race on horseback prefigures the Allegory of the Cave, an example that epitomizes the difficulties of interpreting prefiguration. While it is not clear that Socrates or any of the other characters actually attend the race or any festivities after the initial departure, it is not a parallel presentation of images to the Cave if the horsemen provide both the images from which shadows are drawn and the flame that casts shadows. This is perhaps a quibble, but a much more logical referent for the Cave's images is the part of the festival Socrates did attend. Socrates describes:

> Now, in my opinion, the procession of the native inhabitants was fine; but the one the Thracians conducted was no less fitting a show. (327a)

The description of a show implies entertainment or per-

formance before an audience, roughly but more approximately a Cave-like description. Furthermore, the act of a procession brings to mind a steady march of figures that is much more recognizable as Cave imagery than a horse race. But this also does not purely map onto the Cave allegory with its procession of statues. Leo Strauss has mentioned that as opposed to natural light or the festival's torchlight, the conversations that take place within Cephalus' home are amongst artificial light (Strauss 1997, 64). Rudebusch finds yet another torch in Book I, explaining that the name "Glaucon" should be understood as "gleaming" or torch-like (Rudebusch 2002, 79-80). If taken this way, Glaucon may provide a constant source of shadows no matter how far he and Socrates go in their ascent. It is difficult to determine which one of these Book I images ought to serve as the prefiguration for the procession of images within the Cave, possibly all of Book I is imbued with general reference to these lowliest images and serves as a general prefiguration rather than a particular device. How one determines to best interpret this problem changes what it means to be "like us" and also should change how the scenes of Book I can be reimagined as a Cave.

In *The City and Man*, Strauss also poses Polemarchus' challenge as fundamental to political philosophy. He argues that the *kallipolis* must follow a model of persuasion and compulsion. The philosopher persuades all

others, via the noble lie and otherwise, that the regime is just and ought to be embraced, at least in part as a means of securing the safety of philosophy. Yet, the philosopher does not want to rule the city so the multitude most compel the philosopher to rule as they have been persuaded he or she must. This is exemplified by Book I. Yet, this duality of persuasion and compulsion as a governing principle does not seem to withstand the multitudes' avowed refusal to listen in theory or practice despite Socrates' eventual departure. I admit that Socrates does speak of both persuasion and compulsion in a unified manner, but Strauss's reading does not appear to meet the test of a prefigured Book I. Even with its controversies and my own disagreements with aspects of the work, more attention should be given to *City and Man* insofar as it acknowledges this question of strength in Book I. If the reading of Book I presented above is accepted, prefiguration may develop a different understanding of what Socrates advocates with the *kallipolis*.

As was noted earlier, Socrates is challenged to prove himself stronger than Polemarchus and his companions prior to Thrasymachus' introduction and as a prerequisite to continue the ascent home. I sought to lay a foundation for challenging the bulk of existing literature on Thrasymachus — regardless of whether he and Socrates are engaging in formal debate or agree on a

definition of justice, Socrates seems to adopt Thrasymachus' formulation of justice as nothing but the will of the stronger. Socrates goal amongst the dramatic interlocutors should be best understood as seeking reprieve from his capture, and to develop a theory of justice insofar as he can prove himself the stronger to Glaucon, Thrasymachus, and all of the others. Socrates is successful at this, he is presumably released and Glaucon — alongside the majority of Plato's readers — seem to be persuaded at least in part by Socrates speech. Socrates has subsequently proven himself the strongest philosopher in a long history of thought, not just as the strongest in the Republic. His winning argument, presenting the city-in-speech, provides Socrates, or philosophers like Socrates, the responsibility of governing a city and crafting its laws. Thus, by all of Thrasymachus' metrics, Socrates demonstrates himself the stronger — with justice to his own advantage. But this interpretation seems to devalue the *kallipolis* as an earnest proposal and makes many of Socrates' arguments appear purely instrumental. Separately, if one elevates the importance of Polemarchus' "arrest" of Socrates, then the Republic may draw closer to the *Apology* in providing Socrates with more than just one day to defend himself and the philosophic life. If this interpretation stands and bears fruit, then to read the Republic without the dramatic prefiguration of Book I in mind is to read the Republic erroneously.

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Greater reference to the prefiguration of Book I in general and 327 in particular will serve to firmly root scholarly discussions in the dramatic text that Plato has provided us. Interpretation rooted in this prefiguration can provide novel and compelling evidence for resolving debates about how to understand later passages in the *Republic*. But prefiguration is insufficient and needs to be one element of a balanced hermeneutic, as it is too easy to read an interpretation into Book I. Nonetheless, the dramatic nature of the *Republic* is too widely ignored, to the detriment of its readers. I believe that insufficient attention has been given to Polemarchus' challenge to Socrates, a reframing of the *Republic* provides alongside this effort by Socrates may not be preferable but should serve to elucidate certain aspects of the work.

Once prefiguration is recognized, readers have a greater ability to comprehend not only the work's discussion of justice but its radical epistemology. As Socrates insists on the importance of dianoesis in discerning knowledge from the images in the world, so too has Plato constructed a work that requires dianoesis to interpret. Book I provides both a microcosm of the work's contradictions and competing truths, while constructing a lens through which the work must be read and reconciled. Plato's *Republic* is therefore both a treatise

on how to understand a concept justice and an exercise in the practice of learning to understand the world of concepts we find ourselves in. The *Republic*'s ability to provide such a deep theory of knowledge within literary elements that in turn interrogate justice has to represent the zenith of philosophy and literature. It demonstrates how inextricable questions of politics are from ethics, ethics from knowledge, and knowledge from the way we reconcile images and descriptions of the world.

Prefigurative scholarship extends beyond just reading Plato's masterpiece, encouraging Socrates' audience to listen. To do otherwise is to ignore the work's beauty and depth, to misunderstand its discussion of justice, and to reject the very method of dianoesis and pedagogy that Socrates presents throughout the *Republic*.

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