

DIALECTIC OF ASSENT

Response Formulae in *Republic I*

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This paper is a contribution to an on-going examination of Plato's use of response formulae in the early and middle dialogues, with particular attention to the *Republic*. The subject of the present essay is rather specific, being an exhaustive account of the formulae in the first book of the *Republic*. This telescopic concentration is justified by the functions of the response formulae themselves. As I intend to demonstrate, the formulae serve dramatic as well as dialectical ends, and their dramatic functions in particular are best observed as they appear, which is to say in context and in continuous relation to one another and the surrounding text. Thus an uninterrupted account of a single text will display the operations of the formulae to best effect. Book One of the *Republic* is worthy of special attention because as Socrates moves from Cephalus through Polemarchus to Thrasymachus both the dialectical and the dramatic elements are significantly transformed, progressing from benign and direct to confrontational and ironic.

As in the other dialogues, there are three standard response formulae in the *Republic* as a whole: ἀληθῆ λέγεις (you speak truly), καλῶς λέγεις (you speak nobly/well), and ὀρθῶς λέγεις (you speak correctly).¹ Book One is somewhat anomalous, in that ὀρθῶς λέγεις is underrepresented relative to the other two formulae, and the response εὖ λέγεις (you speak well), or some version thereof, which occurs only infrequently in the other nine books, is found five times in Book One.

I intend to demonstrate that the response formulae are more than perfunctory devices whose sole function is to keep a dialogue moving. They are in fact crucial to communicating a dialogues' dramatic and the dialectical intent.² For example, Socrates' interlocutor may employ the formula ἀληθῆ λέγεις to validate a premise, or set of premises, in the course of an argument that ultimately recoils against him. In doing so

(assuming the argument is, or is taken by the interlocutors to be, valid) he commits himself to the conclusion that refutes his own position. In this way the response formulae are logical devices and vehicles of irony at one and the same time.

In a related dramatic function, the formulae may serve as indirect commentary on the characters who utter them—a commentary that Plato, in other ways and in other places, expresses more directly. Plato reveals something about the character and intellect of a man by portraying him as one who accepts the conclusion of an argument whose premises he has affirmed as true, even if that argument is directed against him. He discloses something else about someone who both declares that his interlocutor has spoken truly and later denies a corollary of the statement he has previously affirmed, or grows angry and obstinate when confronted with the consequences of his affirmation.

Plato puts the response formulae to yet another dramatic use by employing them in such a way as to mirror the tone and progress of the dialogue itself. If in some part of the conversation there is little at stake philosophically, the formulae are straightforward and may come in response to relatively unimportant matters. When the argument is more complex Plato uses the formulae in a correspondingly complex manner. If the argument becomes even more intricate and the stakes are higher, or if the discussion grows more heated, he employs the formulae in such a way that their implications are broader and their irony more scathing. We find just this sort of progress in the course of Book One of the *Republic* as the discussion moves from Cephalus, whose role in the overall argument is minor, to Polemarchus, who, though he presents a provocative definition of justice, has an amicable and somewhat deferential relationship with Socrates, and finally to Thrasymachus, who attacks Socrates like a wild animal and is as savagely repelled by

means of the response formulae we are considering. Let us then attend more closely to this text, *Republic*, Book One.

Cephalus, though past the age at which he might devote himself to philosophy, and so unable to live the good life in its fullest manifestation, is nevertheless portrayed as a respectable old man. Plato affords Cephalus the honor of introducing, if only indirectly, the theme of justice, from which the rest of the *Republic* will unfold. When he has done so, Socrates exclaims “παγκόλως...λέγεις” (331c1). This may strike one as extravagant praise, and indeed it is. But Socrates makes it clear that he does not believe that Cephalus has successfully defined justice. We must remember, however, that no one has asked him to do so, and Socrates is of course aware of this. Cephalus will not participate in the conversation about justice. Though he may exemplify one type of good life, and though his reflections on old age provide the impetus for the conversation, he will not be present for the central dialectical encounter. The fact that he is peripheral to the primary investigation is illustrated by his twice using one of the more emphatic of the response formulae in such a way as to contribute nothing to the argument. Cephalus twice responds to Socrates with the phrase “ἀληθῆ λέγεις” (329e6 and 330c9). In the first instance he is replying to Socrates’ speculation that many people, believing that in riches there are many consolations, judge that Cephalus bears his old age easily not because of his character but because of his wealth. When Socrates observes that the rich are often difficult to be with because of their inclination to praise nothing other than wealth, Cephalus again remarks that he has spoken truly. These are not points that one should blithely dismiss. In many dialogues Socrates argues that a life directed primarily toward the acquisition of money and material goods is inferior to a life devoted to philosophy

and the virtues of the soul. So the fact that Cephalus declares Socrates' observations on these subjects *true* should not surprise us. He does not say that Socrates has spoken well. He has spoken the truth.

In the end, however, these observations about wealth do not contribute directly to the development of the arguments about justice. They are true but, at least in the context of this dialogue, they are inconsequential. However relevant such evaluations of material prosperity may be to the arguments of other dialogues, they form only a minor subset of the topics with which the *Republic* is concerned. Moreover, and more relevant here, Socrates' discussion with Cephalus (on its surface anyway) is not a philosophical examination of wealth's bearing upon the good life, but an informal exchange concerning the attitudes of Cephalus' circle of friends. Socrates makes use of the exchange to raise the question of justice, but the specific content of his palaver with Cephalus, like Cephalus himself, has no place in the ensuing investigation. Thus Cephalus' use of the response formula “ἀληθῆ λέγεις” mirrors his character and his function in the work as a whole: though it is noble, it is not profound.³

There remains a final point to notice with regard to Socrates' discussion with Cephalus. Cephalus associates himself with the sentiments of two famous poets. He agrees with Sophocles' remark that it is good to be free of the sex drive (329c); and he approves of Pindar's verse in praise of a just life (331a). Expressing themselves as they did on these matters, Cephalus says, these men spoke “εὖ.” They spoke, that is, well. Did they not speak truly? Cephalus admires their sentiments; indeed, he subscribes to them himself. But he reserves the denomination “ἀληθῆ” for Socrates' words. In this first section only Socrates speaks the truth. And as is the case throughout all of Book One,

only he speaks correctly. Thus, when he issues his final rejection of Cephalus' account of justice, the old man admits that he speaks "ὀρθῶς."⁴

At this point Cephalus bequeaths the argument to his son Polemarchus, and departs. The discussion immediately becomes more consequential, for Polemarchus attempts to defend the pervasive opinion that justice is helping friends and harming enemies. He does not employ precisely these words from the beginning. He says, rather, that it is just to give to each what is owed. Socrates extracts the help friends/harm enemies formulation through his investigation into the meaning of Polemarchus' original expression. Before we consider Socrates' refutation of this position, we should note the care with which Socrates treats his young interlocutor. Throughout their discussion Socrates dissociates Polemarchus from the position he is defending. To begin with, he addresses Polemarchus as the heir of the argument (331e1).⁵ To be sure, in doing so he adopts the language that Cephalus and Polemarchus had themselves just employed (331d6-8). But by referring to Polemarchus as the heir of the argument Socrates stresses the fact that Polemarchus was not himself its originator. Moreover, Socrates regularly presents himself as disagreeing with people other than Polemarchus. His response to Polemarchus' first definition of justice is to remark that it is not easy to disbelieve *Simonides* (331e5-6), to whom Polemarchus attributes the definition. When Polemarchus explicitly defines justice as helping friends and harming enemies Socrates himself attributes the definition to Simonides (332b9-c3). When he leads Polemarchus to the strange conclusion that according to his own premises justice turns out to be a sort of thievery, he blames this on Homer (334a11). Finally, when Socrates completes his

refutation he associates Polemarchus with his own view and attributes the original, mistaken view to others (336a5-7).

In the course of this discussion Polemarchus never commits to the *truth* of Simonides' definition, nor even to its correctness. He begins in the conditional mode, defending his father's account "if it is at all necessary to believe Simonides." When Socrates asks Polemarchus what Simonides spoke ὀρθῶς (331e2) the young man, after restating (and varying) the definition, says that the poet seems to him to have spoken καλῶς (331e4). Polemarchus admires what he regards as the nobility of Simonides' definition. Still, he declines the opportunity presented by Socrates to affirm its correctness. He never asserts its truth. Socrates uses this to his advantage. For, as we shall see, Polemarchus does affirm the truth of premises crucial to Socrates' refutation; and, having done so, he accepts the consequences and abandons Simonides' definition.

Socrates begins the discussion by repeating his objection to Cephalus' account of justice, namely that one must not give back what is owed to a man if he demands it back when he is not in his right mind. To this Polemarchus responds "ἀληθῆ" (332a6). This reply fortifies Cephalus' "ὀρθῶς...λέγεις" in response to the same point (331d1). More importantly, it provides Socrates the opportunity to develop the help friends/harm enemies formulation, which will become the central focus of their investigation. After Polemarchus further explains, in response to Socrates' questions, that a man is most able to help friends and harm enemies in war, Socrates begins his refutation. He uses Polemarchus' "ἀληθῆ" in response to the claim that a physician is useless to one who is not sick (332e6-8) to generate the surprising conclusion that justice is useless for useful things and useful for useless things (333d-e). Since this idea of uselessness was

introduced by Polemarchus' claim that justice applies to money that has been deposited and is being guarded (333c), when it is combined with that part of his definition according to which justice involves harming others, it generates the bizarre conclusion that justice is a kind of thievery (334a10ff). Here we see Socrates employing Polemarchus' affirmative responses to steer the conversation toward a particular definition of justice, and to develop his refutation of that definition. Thus Polemarchus finds himself in the ironical position of declaring true the very arguments that undermine his own case. This understandably causes him some confusion. He knows he has gone wrong; but he neither retracts his earlier agreements nor attempts to deny their consequences.⁶ Polemarchus is educable. Even so, he is not yet ready to abandon Simonides' definition.

Socrates continues his critical examination of the definition by developing an argument that relies on a distinction between seeming and being. He asks Polemarchus whether our friends are those who seem to be good or those who really are good. Polemarchus supposes that they are those who seem to us to be good. Socrates couples this statement with Polemarchus' admission that humans sometimes make mistakes about this very point (i.e., which people are in fact good) to derive the result that it is just to harm those who are good. Polemarchus' half-hearted reply (φάινεται, 334d2) suggests that he is not comfortable with this idea. Socrates presses the issue further. From Polemarchus' ἀληθῆ in response to his interrogative observation that the good are such as not to do injustice (334d4) he derives the conclusion that it is just to treat badly those who have done nothing unjust. Polemarchus, not at all liking this result, alters his account. Friends, he says now, are those who really are good. The definition, he says,

would seem to him to be said καλῶς if this correction were added (335b1). We notice that, once again, Polemarchus emphasizes the nobility of Simonides' definition. Socrates must teach him more respect for the truth.

With these preliminary clarifications out of the way Socrates presents his main argument against the definition, namely that a just man would harm neither a friend nor an enemy. To harm a thing makes it worse with respect to its specific virtue. The specific virtue of man is justice. Therefore harming a man would make him worse with respect to justice—it would, that is, make him less just. But, Socrates asks, is it possible for a just man to make others unjust by means of justice? Polemarchus declares this impossible (335d2). When Socrates draws the final conclusion, namely that it is not the role of the just man to harm either a friend or anyone else, Polemarchus affirms that Socrates speaks absolutely truly (παντάπασι...ἀληθῆ λέγειν, 335d13). And he agrees (συγχωρῶ, 335e6) to Socrates' addition that anyone who defines justice as helping friends and harming enemies does not speak the truth (οὐ γὰρ ἀληθῆ ἔλεγεν, 335e4). Finally, when Socrates attributes this view to tyrants and despots Polemarchus responds with the superlative response formula, “ἀληθέστατα λέγεις” (336a8). The conclusion of the argument is thus marked by three distinct uses of ἀληθῆ, two of them superlatively emphatic and pronounced by Polemarchus, the other agreed to by him. Socrates has converted Polemarchus; he has made him his ally (335e7 and 10). Polemarchus is the sort of man who can recognize and be guided by the truth.⁷ Throughout their exchange only Socrates' words ring true to him. In the end, therefore, he abandons Simonides' account of justice and thereby improves his soul.⁸

Socrates' argument with Thrasymachus is the longest and philosophically the most significant part of Book One. It is fitting, therefore, that in this section Plato employs the response formulae in a manner that is both wonderfully subtle and rhetorically powerful in its implications. Most noteworthy is Socrates use of variants of ἀληθῆ λέγεις in his conversation with Thrasymachus in such a way that in context they imply precisely that Thrasymachus is *not* speaking the truth. Thus, an expression regularly employed to convey unqualified agreement with Socrates is employed by Socrates to express the strongest condemnation of a dialectical opponent.

Thrasymachus' entry into the conversation is marked by several long passages in which Socrates relates his impressions of him. We learn, for example, that Thrasymachus had to be held back from interrupting the conversation; that he behaved like an animal; that his behavior struck panic into others. Socrates observes that Thrasymachus pretended not to want to answer questions even though it was evident that he desired to do so. He hoped to win a good reputation from what he believed to be an ἀπόκρισιν παγκάλην to the question about the nature of justice (338a5-7).⁹ This word, παγκάλην, recalls the beginning of Book One and the first mention of justice. When Cephalus indirectly raised the issue Socrates replied “παγκάλως...λέγεις” (331c1). There was something ironic in that “παγκάλως,” to be sure; Socrates did not in fact believe that Cephalus had defined justice completely well. Yet he may have regarded his thoughts about it thoroughly noble. He certainly does not believe this about Thrasymachus. Thus he does not say any such thing either to or about Thrasymachus. Instead, he says to his anonymous auditor that Thrasymachus *thought* he had an ἀπόκρισιν παγκάλην. Plato's use of indirect speech here is significant for the rest of the section, for it marks an irony that he will

employ relentlessly against Thrasymachus throughout his discussion with Socrates. This is particularly true with respect to the response formula “ἀληθῆ λέγεις.” Plato rarely puts these words into *Socrates*’ mouth. Usually they are said not *by* but *to* Socrates. Yet in this section Socrates speaks these words, or versions of them, several times. But, as we shall see, each time he speaks them he does so in order to undermine rather than validate Thrasymachus’ position.¹⁰

Only once does Socrates state directly that Thrasymachus speaks truly, namely in reply to Thrasymachus’ charge that Socrates learns (μανθάνειν, 338b2) from others but never gives them thanks.¹¹ Socrates says that with respect to the claim that he learns (μανθάνω, 338b4) from others Thrasymachus spoke truly (ἀληθῆ εἶπες, 338b4-5). With respect to the claim that he never gives thanks, on the other hand, Socrates says only, “ψεύδη,” you speak falsely (338b6).¹² Thus Socrates turns even a seemingly straightforward affirmation of his interlocutor’s words into a vehicle for irony. With his “ἀληθῆ” Socrates validates none of Thrasymachus’ philosophical commitments. Rather, he adopts the very words Thrasymachus had intended as an insult in order to compare Thrasymachus invidiously to himself. Socrates learns from others; Thrasymachus deceives them. In just three lines Plato uses a variation of a standard response formula to reveal a fundamental difference between the dialogue’s principle antagonists.

The contrast between the two men is developed even further through the ironical variation of yet another response formula. Immediately following his characterization of Thrasymachus as a peddler of falsehoods and of himself as a truth seeker, Socrates says that Thrasymachus will soon know well (εὖ) how eagerly he (Socrates) praises those who speak well (εὖ λέγειν) when he (Thrasymachus) speaks well (εὖ ἐρεῖν), as Socrates

expects him to do (338b8-9). Thrasymachus then delivers himself of his ἀπόκρισιν παγκάλην: the just, he proclaims, is the advantage of the stronger (τοῦ κρείττονος, 338c1-2). When he asks why Socrates does not praise him (implying that he has indeed spoken εὖ), Socrates says that he must first learn (μάθω, 338c4) what Thrasymachus means. This remark, as well as Socrates' later complaint (339a6ff) that Thrasymachus has responded in a manner that he himself had explicitly condemned (at 336c6-d4), reminds the reader of the earlier distinction between Socrates as a man who loves to learn and Thrasymachus as fundamentally deceitful.

When, after a brief exchange, Socrates feels he has learned (ἔμαθον, 339a5) the meaning of Thrasymachus' definition, he says that he will try to learn (μαθεῖν) whether or not it is true (ἀληθὲς, 339a5-6).¹³ At the beginning of his investigation Socrates addresses to Thrasymachus the locution “ἀληθὴ λέγεις.” He does so, however, only indirectly. The whole of what he says is this: “it is clear that it must be investigated *whether* ἀληθὴ λέγεις” (339b2-3). He then proceeds to dismantle Thrasymachus' definition in approximately thirty lines. In his refutation he makes use of the contrast between seeming and being by securing Thrasymachus' agreement that the stronger occasionally make mistakes about what is to their advantage. Whenever they make such a mistake, it will be just to do the opposite of the advantage of the stronger. Socrates had employed a similar contrast between seeming and being in his conversation with Polemarchus. But Thrasymachus, despite all his intellectual blustering, is blind to Socrates' intention. His failure to foresee and guard against Socrates' refutation, the refutation itself, and the oblique use of a powerful response formula with which it begins, enable Plato to limn significant features of Thrasymachus' character without putting this

explicitly into words. We already know that unlike Socrates, who loves to learn, Thrasymachus speaks falsely. Now we understand that unlike Socrates, who investigates the truth of things, Thrasymachus lacks understanding and traffics in false ideas.

At this point Polemarchus reenters the conversation. After Socrates explains to Thrasymachus that his definition has turned into its opposite Polemarchus interjects, “σαφέστατά γε” (340a1-2). Having been cured of his false ideas, Polemarchus now sees more clearly the truth of Socrates’ position—and the falsity of Thrasymachus’. By reminding the reader that there are others listening to the conversation, Plato highlights the fact that Thrasymachus is not just advocating falsehoods, but that he is doing so in the presence of young men who are trying to learn about the most significant matters in life. Through his combination of ignorance and brashness Thrasymachus is recklessly endangering their well-being.

But Thrasymachus will not concede defeat so easily. Even though it requires him to revise a main point in his argument, he denies that he has been refuted. He now claims that those who make mistakes are not the stronger (κρείττω, 340c6-7). Socrates points out that he had asked Thrasymachus directly whether the stronger make mistakes, and that he had admitted that they do (340c8-9).¹⁴ Thrasymachus attempts to justify his revision by insisting that they speak precisely. According to precise speech, he says, the stronger are not stronger at the moment they make mistakes. This rather disingenuous attempt to salvage his argument is unsuccessful. Socrates allows him to alter his position and then proceeds to use the precision Thrasymachus has insisted upon against him. He demonstrates that, speaking precisely, every τέχνη, which is stronger than that of which it is the τέχνη, looks after the well-being of that over which it is set, not of itself. The

stronger, therefore, seeks the advantage of the weaker. One of the many ironies in this section is that Socrates' argument, the conclusion to which clearly infuriates Thrasymachus, hinges on the notion of a τέχνη. And this word, τέχνη, is first introduced in a statement that turns out to be an important premise of the argument against Thrasymachus—a premise that Thrasymachus himself validates with the emphatic response, “ἀληθῆ” (341d4). Socrates then introduces another crucial premise regarding the nature of a τέχνη, and asks Thrasymachus whether in doing so he speaks ὀρθῶς (341e7). “ὀρθῶς,” Thrasymachus replies (341e9), and thereby contributes yet again to his own dialectical defeat.

At this stage of the discussion Socrates employs yet another variant of the phrase ἀληθῆ λέγεις. Its function on this occasion is even more indirect, and thus more forcefully ironic, than the first. Socrates does not just speak it indirectly *to* Thrasymachus, as in the previous example (339b2-3). Instead, he addresses it to someone else *about* Thrasymachus. This time he does not just say that it must be investigated whether Thrasymachus speaks truly. He asks Glaucon whether they should persuade Thrasymachus that “οὐκ ἀληθῆ λέγει” (348a4-5).¹⁵ This follows upon Thrasymachus' declaration that the perfectly unjust life is more powerful, better, and happier than the just life. In the course of the ensuing discussion Socrates is surprised that Thrasymachus places injustice in the camp of ἀρετή and σοφία. When he notes that this is what Thrasymachus is doing Thrasymachus replies, “ἀληθέστατα...μαντεύη” (349a3). The use of μαντεύη is striking in itself.¹⁶ But Socrates' response is even more so, for in it he employs all the ambiguity of an oracle. What he says is this: “...one ought not hesitate to attack the argument, investigating it, as long as I assume you are saying things that you

really think. For you seem to me, Thrasymachus, really not to be jesting now, but to be saying τὰ δοκοῦντα περὶ τῆς ἀληθείας” (349a4-8). There is much in this passage that is difficult to translate. But the last phrase is especially puzzling. Socrates does not exactly say that Thrasymachus is saying things that seem to him (Thrasymachus) to be true. The expression he uses is more ambiguous. “The things that seem concerning the truth.” There is an obvious sense in which this means “things that seem to you to be true,” and Thrasymachus’ response makes it clear that this is how he takes it. But there is more in play here. The juxtaposition between τὰ δοκοῦντα and τῆς ἀληθείας brings out yet again the theme of seeming vs. being. Since this is a characterization of the intention behind Thrasymachus’ statements, we are reminded of the earlier contrast between Socrates as a true learner and Thrasymachus as deceptive. Thrasymachus’ unreliability is stressed again when he asks Socrates what difference it makes whether or not he really believes these things—just refute the argument, he says.

After some preliminary discussion Socrates formulates the general principle upon which his refutation will depend. To his interrogative observation that the just man gets the better not of the like but of the unlike, whereas the unjust man gets the better of both, Thrasymachus responds, ἄριστα...εἴρηκας (349d2).¹⁷ He then pronounces εὖ the thought (expressed by Socrates, but inspired by himself) that the unjust man is prudent and good, whereas the just man is neither (349d5). With these two affirmations in hand Socrates begins to develop his refutation. In the course of the discussion Socrates tells Thrasymachus that he speaks well (349d10) and Thrasymachus tells Socrates that he speaks truly (353a6 and 353c8) at moments that are crucial to securing the argument’s conclusion. In the first instance, Socrates says “καλῶς” to Thrasymachus’ assent that a

man is like men who are of the sort that he is. That is to say, if a man is good, he is like good men. He then proceeds to use Thrasymachus' agreement to this point to refute his claim that injustice is virtue and wisdom. Socrates says that Thrasymachus has spoken καλῶς, but he means that his response was well said for the purpose of falsifying his own position. There is irony here, but it becomes apparent only at the end of the refutation.

Before beginning his direct assault on Thrasymachus' definition, Socrates develops the irony even further. He asks Thrasymachus whether a city, to become powerful (κρείττων), must be just or unjust. Thrasymachus maintains his position and insists that the powerful city will be that which is unjust. To this Socrates responds that Thrasymachus answers very well (351c5). The expression he uses here is significant, for it recalls the very beginning of their encounter. At that time Socrates remarked that Thrasymachus believed he had an ἀπόκρισιν παγκάλην. His present response employs precisely the same root-words: ἀποκρίνη πάνυ καλῶς, he says. The argument has come full circle. Thrasymachus' original ἀπόκρισιν παγκάλην was that the just is the advantage τοῦ κρείττονος (338c1-2); with the introduction of the κρείττων polis in relation to the question of justice, Socrates alludes to this earlier formulation. Once again, his declaration that Thrasymachus has spoken καλῶς is ironic: Thrasymachus has spoken well only in the sense that he has provided Socrates with the statements he will use to refute him. The apparently noble must give way to the true.

At this point, having proven that justice rather than injustice is excellence and wisdom, and having suggested a connection between the present exchange and Thrasymachus' original formulation of the definition, Socrates directly attacks

Thrasymachus' claim that injustice is more powerful than justice. He does this by securing Thrasymachus' agreement that groups of men who are unjust toward one another develop hatreds and factions among themselves and so are incapable of successfully undertaking any action in common. Thrasymachus then agrees that the same holds in the case of two men, and even in the case of one. If no one who is unjust can act successfully, then injustice cannot be more powerful than justice. Socrates points this out by remarking that when they said earlier that men who are unjust accomplish something in common with each other, “τοῦτο οὐ παντάπασιν ἀληθὲς λέγομεν” (352c2-3). Once again we see a version of the standard response formula used in a non-standard manner. Plato employs it not to affirm the truth of an assertion, but to point out that a claim has been shown to be false.

Socrates then addresses Thrasymachus' claim that the unjust life is better and happier than the just life. Here again he uses Thrasymachus' assertions that Socrates has spoken truly against him. Thrasymachus' “ἀληθῆ” at 353a6 commits him to the view that each thing has a specific function. His “ἀληθὲς... τοῦτό γε λέγεις” at 353c8 commits him to the view that a thing can fulfill its function well only by means of a specific virtue. Each of these points is a key premise in Socrates' argument that the just man lives better than the unjust man. We need not examine the argument in detail here. Suffice it to say that Thrasymachus' assertion that the premises are true commits him to the view that the conclusion they produce is true as well, whether he likes it or not. He does not like it, of course. But he is helpless to resist. He has emphatically accepted the premises; now he must accept the conclusion. He knows this. He sees it coming, but too late, always too

late. This is his problem throughout the book. And this is why he so often becomes sullen and refuses to answer.

Throughout the course of Book One Plato inserts response formulae (or variations of these formulae) into the dialogue at such times, and in such a way, as to contribute to both the dialectical and the dramatic presentation. He thereby develops a contrast between Socrates, who is presented as good and true, and his interlocutors, each of whom falls somewhere short of Socrates as measured with respect to either his character, his philosophical commitments, or his dialectical performance. No one in the dialogue other than Socrates speaks correctly. Polemarchus, though he attempts to defend Simonides' definition of justice, declines to pronounce it correct, even when Socrates offers him an opportunity to do so. Socrates alone speaks truly (sometimes even altogether truly, or most truly). The sole exception to this is Thrasymachus, whose only true statement is that Socrates learns from others, a remark with which he originally intended to insult Socrates, but which Socrates reworks into praise of himself and a condemnation of Thrasymachus. On the few occasions that Socrates uses a response formula of the εὖ or καλῶς variety, or some version thereof, he does so either ironically or (what often comes to the same thing) to set up a refutation or to redirect the course of the discussion.

I hope with this essay to have presented a persuasive case that in composing this dialogue Plato employed the response formulae with great care and intentionality.¹⁸ In conclusion I would like to note one other function performed by these phrases, this perhaps the subtlest and most powerful of them all.¹⁹ In Book Three of the *Republic* Plato discusses compositions in which the poet makes his words as like as possible to those of the characters he is depicting (392c-398b). The reader who pronounces these words,

assimilating his speech to that of the character, engages thereby in a form of imitation. Such imitation, especially if practiced consistently, has the power to shape the soul of the one who engages in it. The imitator becomes like the character whose role he himself is enacting. This is true to such a degree that Plato expressly forbids those who would become good to imitate the words of base or slavish men (395cff). If one must imitate at all, he says, one should limit oneself to imitating the words and deeds of good men (396c5ff). The *Republic* is precisely the sort of composition that involves its readers in this kind of imitation. When an interlocutor remarks, for example, that Socrates has spoken truly, the reader himself speaks these words. This is true whether one speaks them silently to oneself or utters them aloud, as many of Plato's ancient readers would have done. Of course, the reader is always at liberty to disengage from the text and reject the statement. Nevertheless, Plato's style of presentation makes this difficult, it entangles his readers in the words of his characters to such a degree that the readers' thoughts are shaped by what the characters say. Thus the response formulae not only contribute to the development of the dialogue, they draw us into it, cause us to participate in it. *We* pronounce Socrates' words true; *we* say to Thrasymachus, "you speak falsely." In this way, Plato maneuvers us into adopting Socrates' point of view. And if we consider that the whole of the dialogue is actually spoken by Socrates alone, our reading of it actually constitutes a prolonged imitation of a very good man. We imitate, moreover, not only the conversation Socrates is recounting, but also his later reflections on its progress and significance. Thus are we drawn even more deeply into his mind, assimilated even more closely to his likeness.²⁰

¹ Scholars of Platonic stylometry draw sharp distinctions between variations of the response formulae. They distinguish between ἀληθῆ λέγεις, and ἀληθῆ; they count as different still usages including various particles, such as, for example, ἀληθῆ γε λέγεις. For a general overview of this work see Leonard Brandwood, *The Chronology of Plato's Dialogues* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990). For my purposes I shall consider each of these, and similar variations, including (but not limited to) the neuter ἀληθές and the superlative ἀληθέστατα, examples of the same formula. There is of course a difference of emphasis between, say ἀληθῆ and ἀληθέστατα or παντάπασι ἀληθῆ. This and similar examples of variation of emphasis or nuance are relevant to my argument and will be given due consideration.

² Virtually all of the meager literature on this subject either affirms or simply assumes the irrelevance of the response formulae. Dorothy Tarrant was the one scholar whose work brought her closest to this area of research; but even she minimized the significance of the response formulae. See, for instance, her remarks in “Style and Thought in Plato's Dialogues,” *Classical Quarterly* 42 (1948): 28-34. “In the main body of a discussion...the recurrence of the formulae of question and answer may become non-significant or even tedious.” Though she acknowledges the occasional contribution of “the actual give and take of conversation,” Tarrant never investigates that give and take as reflected in the response formulae.

Translations of the dialogues provide indirect evidence of scholars' assessment of the significance of the response formulae. Consider F. M. Cornford's translation of the *Republic* (*The Republic of Plato* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1945]), in which Cornford conducts what Tarrant (Op. cit.) calls the “bold experiment...of suppressing many of these [formulae of question and answer].” C. D. C. Reeve's new translation pays more respect to the response formulae (*Republic* [Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 2004]). Nevertheless, there are inaccuracies, and these reveal Reeve's lack of feeling for the function of the response formulae. Note, for instance, how his imprecise translation of 338b4-6 obscures the contrast between Socrates as a speaker of truth and Thrasymachus as a speaker of falsehood (p. 14).

Seth Bernardete, in “The Right, the True, and the Beautiful,” *Glotta* 41 (1963): 54-62, finds no dramatic function for the response formulae. This is to be expected, however, since he investigates them from a narrowly logical perspective and confines his evidence to two late dialogues in which, as he puts it, the dramatic elements are irrelevant to “the course of the argument” (p. 55).

³ It is noble because Cephalus admits that (his) wealth raises issues concerning (his) character, and because he is attempting to address these issues at least in part by means of his sacrificial devotions. It is not profound because the conflicts among his wealth, character, and devotions are not directly engaged. Compare Socrates' description of Cephalus as speaking παγκάλως (331c1) with his use vis-à-vis Thrasymachus of παγκάλην (338a7) and πάνυ καλῶς (351c5).

⁴ Polemarchus will later pronounce this very point ἀληθῆ (332a6).

⁵ Polemarchus' role is to advance the argument to a state somewhat beyond that which he inherited, as his father increased the wealth he inherited (330a-b).

⁶ Thrasymachus, in a similar position later in the dialogue (340cff), *will* attempt to evade the inevitable conclusion.

⁷ This is so even though upon his encounter with Socrates on the road to Athens in the beginning of the dialogue he comes across as motivated by sentiments inspired by Thrasymachus, stressing strength (κρείττους, 327c9) over persuasion. See Thrasymachus' uses of κρείττων beginning at 338c.

⁸ In this section Socrates and Polemarchus expose some of the flaws in the standard account of justice. Thrasymachus will take up and defend this account, but now with certain interpretations of it ruled out of bounds. In short, the argument, or the interlocutors' position to assess its merits and demerits, is now improved. Thus Polemarchus, like his father before him, has improved his inherited patrimony.

⁹ Thrasymachus, like Polemarchus before him, begins by emphasizing nobility over truth.

¹⁰ On three separate occasions (at 339a5, 339b3, and 348a5) Socrates incorporates some variation of the response formula ἀληθῆ λέγεις into an indirect statement or question concerning Thrasymachus. In this way the phrase becomes much more than a mere appendage to the dialogue. It is embedded in the very structure of the argument. The truth-status of Thrasymachus' words becomes itself the object of investigation.

¹¹ This is the *only instance* in Book One of Socrates' pronouncing true the words of *any* of his interlocutors.

¹² Socrates' question of Thrasymachus at 337b7-c1, "...ἀλλ' ἔτερον εἶπω τι τοῦ ἀληθοῦς," suggests that Thrasymachus would even like to make a liar of Socrates!

¹³ Again we are reminded of Socrates' desire to learn. This desire is now directed toward the truth-status of Thrasymachus' remarks. But we have already been told that Thrasymachus speaks falsely. Does Socrates really expect to discover that he speaks the truth?

¹⁴ Here we have yet another illustration of Thrasymachus' deceitful character. Polemarchus never resorted to such disingenuous attempts to preserve his account.

¹⁵ Again the reader's attention is drawn to those listening to, and hoping to learn from, the conversation.

¹⁶ There is a similar formulation (the only other instance in the *Republic*) at 506a8. Adeimantus there responds "καλῶς...μαντεύη" to Socrates' divination (μαντεύομαι) that whoever is ignorant of the good will lack sufficient knowledge of just and noble things.

¹⁷ This unusual response formula occurs only here in the *Republic*.

¹⁸ This scope of the present article is restricted to Book One of the *Republic*. However, my research has convinced me that Plato makes similarly ingenious use of the response formulae throughout the whole of the *Republic*, and in several other dialogues besides.

¹⁹ The following comments are not meant to suggest that a reader's participation in the dialogue constitutes a proof of the arguments presented. The idea, rather, following Plato's account of the effects of mimesis, is that the reader may come to experience within himself the sort of alterations and reverses to which the opinions of the characters in the dialogue are subject when confronted by Socratic interrogation. Mimetic participation in the discussion enables the reader to learn something first hand, as it were, about the consequences of specific combinations of intellectual commitments and character types.

Note, also, that the truth or falsity of Plato's account of the effects of mimesis is independent of my thesis concerning his use of the response formulae. That is to say, the formulae may function—and Plato may have intended them to function—as the sort of dramatic and dialectical markers I have described whether or not they affect the reader in the manner implied by Plato's account of mimesis.

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