PLATO ON CORRECTING PHILOSOPHICAL CORRUPTION

ABSTRACT

Plato's Republic *VII suggests that if we ask someone to philosophize when they are too young, they can become corrupted (537e–539d).* Republic *VII also suggests that to avoid this corruption, we must not expose youth to argument (539a–b). This is not a reasonable option outside of Kallipolis, so a question arises: does Plato describe how to correct corruption if we do not manage to prevent it? This paper shows that a parallel between this passage from* Republic *VII and a passage from* Laws *X suggests that he does.* Laws *X describes an impious man who is corrupted in the same way as the youth exposed to philosophy prematurely in* Republic *VII. While we leave the youth to his corruption in* Republic*, the impious man is helped to overcome his corruption in* Laws *with a refutation followed by a myth (also called a charm). This paper analyses these steps in terms of Plato's psychology, showing that both corruption and correction require a destabilization of the soul, which in these passages is brought about through refutation. This destabilization allows for a reconfiguration, which, with something that can restabilize the soul (for example with myth), can be a reconfiguration for the better.*

Keywords: Plato; *Republic*; *elenchus*; refutation; myth; charm; education

1. INTRODUCTION

Philosophy, according to Plato, is dangerous business. *Republic* VII suggests this most clearly: if we ask someone to philosophize when they are too young, they can descend into lawlessness (537d–e). *Republic* VII suggests that to avoid this corruption we must ensure that a person is isolated from argument until they are mature and properly educated (539a–b). This precaution does not amount to a wholescale dismissal of argument, or even of a particular type of argument, however. The youth who are to *avoid* argument (λόγος, 539a5, which is first called dialectic, τὸ διαλέγεσθαι, 537e1) will eventually become the thirty-year-olds to whom we will be able to—and must, if they are to become philosophy-rulers—*introduce* arguments.

In Kallipolis, this means an educational programme involving carefully censured exposure to music, myths, gym, and mathematics. The real world does not look like Kallipolis, however, and it is no more possible to expect this censorship as it is to be able to prevent exposure to argument. It would be unfortunate if Plato left us, as it seems on the face of it he does, with merely preventative and not corrective measures.

Luckily, as I will point out, we can find the tools in Plato's works for such a corrective measure. I will show that a parallel between this passage from *Republic* VII and a passage from *Laws* X suggests a two-step approach: 1) argument (λόγος) and 2) charm (ἐπῳδή), which should be understood as: 1) destabilizing the soul and 2) restabilizing it for the better. *Laws* X describes an impious man who is corrupted in the same way as the youth exposed to philosophy prematurely in *Republic* VII. While we leave the youth to his corruption in the *Republic*, the impious man is helped to overcome his corruption by means of argument followed by myth (μῦθος) in the *Laws*. In determining how this correction works, I show that, puzzlingly, the first step, argument (in particular, refutation), is the same activity that corrupts the youth in *Republic* VII. To see how the same thing can corrupt and be the first step in correcting this same corruption, I analyse refutation in

terms of Plato's psychology, showing that it has a destabilizing effect on the soul. The destabilization of the soul allows for a reconfiguration of the soul, which, without proper attention (for example without charm), can be a reconfiguration for the worse, but with careful attention will be one for the better. Understood this way, we can see that Plato is concerned about the possibility of correcting corruption, and that he provides a method for doing so that is flexible and aimed at its underlying psychology.

2. PARALLEL CHARACTERS

In Book VII, where Socrates spells out the curriculum for prospective philosopher rulers, we are told that, currently, argument is introduced too early. When young people are exposed to argument, they are liable to mistreat it, argue for fun and become lawless (537e, 539b–c). Socrates provides an image to show how this happens, of a young man who is brought up from childhood by adoptive parents, surrounded by flatterers. We are asked to consider what will happen when this adopted son discovers that the parents with which he has been raised are not his biological ones.[1] Socrates suggests that if he cannot find his biological parents, though the adopted son honoured his adoptive parents before his discovery, he would not honour them after it. Instead, he would be led astray by the flatterers, honouring them in place of either type of parent.

So, taking the image and applying it to the topic it is meant to elucidate: the youth, after being repeatedly refuted, stops honouring his previously held beliefs (538c6–7, for example about just things); but, being unable to find the truth (specifically, truth about the Forms, for example the Form of the Just), turns to ways of life that flatter his soul (538d1–2). This amounts to corruption, which consists in the youth no longer believing what he believed before, and, for instance, going around arguing with everyone (538c–d, 539b).[2]

The Athenian tells us that there are three impious beliefs the impious man might hold: he might believe: 1) that the gods do not exist, 2) that they do exist, but they do not care about us, or 3) that they do care about us, but are easily bribed (885b).[3] The solution to corruption is presented to the second type of impious man, and thus the second type is the only one we need to keep track of. He is a version of what the adopted son of the *Republic* represents: a youth corrupted. There are three main similarities that show that they are corrupted in relevantly similar ways: 1) they both have undesirable beliefs, 2) they were both raised with lawful beliefs, and 3) contradiction causes them both to move from lawful beliefs to undesirable ones. Once we recognize

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[1] I call this son 'adopted' to avoid the implication, which comes from the perhaps more accurate translation 'supposititious' (ὑποβολιμαῖος), that the parents are duped. The image in *Republic* VII suggests that, if anyone is duped, it is the son—he is brought up thinking his adoptive parents are his biological parents, and the realization that this is not the case causes an upheaval. Despite this advantage of avoiding the term 'supposititious', 'adopted' is not ideal either. Unfortunately, we are supposed to think that adoptive parents are inferior. However, because this implication is already in the narrative regardless of the term used, the potential misleading nature of 'supposititious' is more important to avoid.

[2] By 'corruption' I do not mean anything technical, but rather mean to describe the move from being better to being worse. For example, the impious man used to not be impious, and the adopted son used to not honour his flatterers.

[3] At the end of Book X, we are given a further division: each of the three types is divided into two subtypes, one that is naturally just and one that is not. Throughout *Laws* X, it is unclear whether the Athenian is addressing both subtypes, one, or the other.

that these are parallel, we will see that the solution presented to the one, the impious man, can be applied to the other, that is, to those corrupted through argument.

The impious man from *Laws* X and the youth from *Republic* VII both have undesirable beliefs. In the image of the adopted son, this is represented by the youth's turn to flatterers. There is nothing to recommend the flatterers, and the text suggests that it would be preferable for the adopted son to keep searching for his biological parents and keep honouring his adoptive parents than turn to them—so, to keep searching for the truth while believing the things he was raised to believe (538b–d, 539c–d). The *Laws* outlines acts of wrongdoing and punishments that ought to accompany them, and *Laws* X focusses on acts of impiety. The impious man is someone the Athenian asks us to imagine so that we can provide arguments that the gods exist and care about us, giving this wrongdoer a chance to reform before we are forced to punish him.

The impious man and the youth both grew up with lawful beliefs. What I am calling lawful beliefs are ones that, in both dialogues, a typical person is said to be raised believing and which are endorsed by the lawmakers. In the *Republic*, the youth initially honours and obeys these beliefs, like the adopted son initially honours and obeys his adoptive parents. These are the beliefs of the youth's parents, and are heard from the lawgiver (νομοθέτης) (538d7–8). They have some similarity to the truth, like the adoptive parents have some similarity to the biological parents. In the *Laws*, we are not explicitly told anything about the beliefs with which the second type of impious man was raised, but we are told something about the upbringing of the first type of impious man that seems equally applicable. The Athenian says that it is 'necessary to hate and bear with difficulty' this man, because he now requires convincing when he was raised to know better (887d). The impious man was told stories (μῦθοι) from birth in things such as charms (ἐπῳδαί), prayers, and the actions of their parents (887d–e), which instilled pious beliefs. The frustration seems to stem from an imagined typical upbringing, and there is no reason to suppose that any of the impious men are unusual in this regard. It is reasonable to suppose, then, that a similar frustration is felt with the second type of impious man: given his upbringing, it is exasperating that we have to convince him that the gods care about us. Pious beliefs, then, are ones that the second type of impious man was brought up with, and, like the lawful beliefs of the *Republic*, are endorsed as lawful.

Finally, both the impious man and the youth go from lawful beliefs to undesirable ones because of contradiction. In the *Republic*, this contradiction comes in the form of argument, and the issue of corruption is presented as a problem with argument itself. When we look at how Socrates spells out the issue, we can see that at the heart of it is contradiction. After the youth is asked a question of the form, 'what is F', his answer (presumably something of the form 'x is F') is refuted, with the result that the youth thinks that x is no more F than not F, becomes confused and does not believe what he believed before (538d–e). Through argument, he is presented a contradiction that he is incapable of solving (x is F and x is not F).[4]

The second type of impious man is impious because of his inability to reconcile two beliefs: that the gods are good, and that bad people prosper (899d–900b). Though this impiety is not brought on by argument, as it is in the youth of the *Republic*, it is brought on by what seems to be the root of the problem with argument: inability to make sense

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[4] M. Heckel, 'Plato on the role of contradiction in education', *BJHP* 25 (2017), 3–21 analyses this passage along similar lines.

of (apparent) contradiction.[5] The Athenian even tells us that it is due to the impious man's lack of reasoning (ἀλογία) that he has reached his current impious belief (900a8). In the *Republic*, dialectic helps ensure that the rulers will not lack reasoning (ἄλογοι, 534d5), and the connection between being unskilled at argument and lacking reasoning is intuitive. The issue with the impious man is that his two beliefs are incompatible, and he, like the youth, is unable to make sense of such an incompatibility.

If we put these parallels together, we can see that the impious man is like the youth exposed to argument. The impious man grew up with pious beliefs, but was exposed to contradictions that made him turn to undesirable ones. While we are only given preventative measures against this corruption in *Republic* VII, we see the Athenian cure the impious man in *Laws* X. Because of the parallel between these two characters, this difference suggests we can fruitfully look at the *Laws* to gain insight into how the corruption that comes from premature exposure to philosophy is reversible.

3. THE METHOD OF CORRECTION

Partway through trying to convince the impious man that the gods exist and care about us, the Athenian notes a change in his method: the argument (λόγος) he has been using, apparently, will have convinced the impious man that he was wrong, but he will switch to providing a myth (μῦθος) so that the impious man can be charmed (ἐπῳδή) into agreement (903a–b). It seems we can use argument, followed by a myth, to correct the effects of premature exposure to contradiction. An exploration of these stages, and of the initial difficulty in understanding how argument works in correction, will show that the best way to understand them is in terms of their underlying psychological effects. The first step of correction involves destabilizing the soul, and the second step re-stabilizing it for the better.

3.1 Step 1: Destabilizing the soul

The argument the Athenian refers to extends from 900b to 903b, and is similar to what we see Socrates do in other dialogues. The Athenian assumes the role of questioner, questioning Clinias, who is standing in for the impious man. The impious man is presumed to have some basic pious beliefs about the gods, so Clinias agrees that the gods are virtuous (900c), omniscient (901d), and omnipotent (901d). Because of these qualities, the argument goes, the gods would not neglect human affairs. The Athenian takes Clinias through several options as to why someone might think the gods *do* neglect humans, and shows that no option is compatible with all of these agreed-upon qualities. At the end of the argument, the Athenian claims that the impious man 'has been forced by the argument to agree that he was not speaking correctly' (903a10–b1). He has been refuted.

That refutation leads to correction should be both unsurprising and surprising. It is unsurprising because it echoes accounts of refutation elsewhere in Plato. In perhaps

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[5] We are not told about the origin of the third type, but the Athenian attributes the corruption of the first type of impious man to contradiction in arguments. He makes a point of setting aside the poets as the cause of the corruption in the first type of impious man, instead, pointing the finger at philosophers (886a–e).

the most explicit description of refutation in the corpus, the refuted person is said to realize (like the impious man realizes) that though they thought they knew the things about which they have been refuted, they really did not (*Soph.* 230a, d). Refutation is thus 'the principal and most important kind of cleansing', which cleanses the soul of false beliefs (230c–d).[6] Given that refutation can cleanse the soul by making someone realize they do not know what they thought they did, it is easy to see how it could be used in a cure for the impious man's corruption.

However, that refutation should help cure the impious man should also be surprising, given the man's similarity to the youth prematurely exposed to argument, and given what we know about how both he and the youth become corrupted in the first place. It should be surprising because, in fact, as the *Republic* makes clear, corruption happens once arguments refute (ἐξελέγχω, 538d8) the youth's position, and refutation (ἔλεγχος, 538d9) makes him disbelieve what he believed before. So, it turns out the same thing that causes corruption is the first step of curing this corruption.

3.1.1 Inadequate explanations of refutation's role

One important difference between the passages that one might think explains the different effects refutation has is in the nature of the beliefs that refutation targets. The adopted son, before the refutation that corrupted him, had lawful beliefs; the refutation that helps correct the impious man's corruption happens when he has already turned to undesirable beliefs. Thus, in the *Republic*, the adopted son comes to question or disbelieve beliefs that are lawful, while in the *Laws*, the Athenian gets the impious man to question beliefs that are unlawful and false. Questioning false beliefs is important philosophical work, and so the Athenian is doing good by making the impious man question these.

This is an important difference, but cannot completely explain why the adopted son is corrupted and the impious man saved. We can see this explanation's inadequacy when we consider an important element of philosophical education: a person must question the beliefs they unquestioningly believed before.[7] Though the image of the adopted son is meant to make us wary of exposing people to argument, the message of the passage is not that we must not expose people to argument full stop, but that we must not expose them to argument prematurely.

Socrates emphasizes this by comparing the behaviour of an older man when exposed to argument to that of the youth: he will 'imitate the one who is willing to look into the truth dialectically, rather than the one who plays and contradicts for sport' (539c6–8). What the older man does is what we want someone to do. There is no difference between the types of beliefs that the older and the younger man have questioned— they both have their lawful beliefs questioned. The difference happens after refutation: the younger man, after being unable to find the truth, will turn to undesirable beliefs, while the older man will continue to search for the truth. So, the difference between the illicit use of argument in the *Republic* and its legitimate use in the *Laws* is not simply that it is bad to question lawful beliefs, but good to question the undesirable ones. In fact, a person *should* question their lawful beliefs—eventually.[8]

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[6] This is first called ἐλέγχω at 230d1, but it is also called διερωτάω and ἐξετάζω (230b4, 5).

[7] This point is made briefly at *Resp.* 534b–d, where Socrates says that in order to be considered dialectical, a person must survive refutation.

[8] This eventual aim of refutation is sometimes the only aim recognized by scholars. For instance, R. Robinson, *Plato's Earlier Dialectic* (New York, 1953), 17–18.

Since it seems safe to refute lawful beliefs when a person is ready, one might suppose that a complete explanation of why refutation is beneficial in the *Laws* but harmful in the *Republic* is a combination of the difference in the beliefs that are being overturned (lawful vs undesirable) and a difference in preparedness for that overturning. The reasoning behind this potential explanation would be: it is good to get rid of undesirable beliefs at any point in time, and it is only good to get rid of lawful beliefs at a late stage of education and/or maturity; the youth of the *Republic* is corrupted because he is not prepared to have his lawful beliefs overturned, while the impious man of the *Laws* is benefited because he is prepared to have his undesirable beliefs overturned.

This explanation does get an important aspect of the issue right: the difference between education and corruption does depend on a person's preparedness for refutation. However, this is not an adequate explanation of the difference between the corruption and correction of the youth and the impious man, because, it turns out, both are in the position of the young man of *Republic* VII, not the old man, and are similarly unprepared.

The impious man is straightforwardly called 'the young man' (νεός) at 900c, while his opponents, the Athenian and his interlocutors, are called a gathering of elders, or senate (γερουσία) at 905c. Moreover, recall that part of the reason for the impious man's brand of impiety is his lack of reason (ἀλογία), which makes him unable to reconcile evidence that unjust people seem to prosper in life with his belief that the gods are not unjust (900a–b). Compare this to the discussion of the misologist in the *Phaedo*. There, a person is said to become a misologist when they lack skill in argument (90b ἄνευ τῆς περὶ τοὺς λόγους τέχνης). A person without skill in argument is susceptible to misology because they will not be able to distinguish a good argument from a bad one. It is this inability that constitutes the youth's inability to discover the truth in the *Republic*. He falls into disbelief about his lawful beliefs and moves to undesirable ones because he is unable to discern which of the arguments, if any, is good, and is unable to independently form his own argument.

The impious man is in a similar position to the adopted son due to his immaturity and lack of reasoning skills. The impious man sees a contradiction in unjust people prospering and the gods being just, and is unable to come up with an explanation of how these seemingly inconsistent states of affairs might really be consistent. Thus, when the Athenian argues against him, the impious man is not in the position of the older man, but the younger man, and we should not think that the reason refutation leads to corruption in the case of the *Republic*, but to correcting corruption in the case of the *Laws*, is a difference in the characters's level of preparedness for refutation.

3.1.2 The real explanation of the difference

I will argue that we can understand how refutation plays a role in both corruption and correction by seeing it as producing a destabilizing effect on the soul. In particular, it will be useful to adopt the psychology-focussed method Plato adopts himself in the *Republic*, and apply imagery Plato uses to describe corruption to the case of refutation.

First, the basic picture of the soul in the *Republic:* the soul has different parts (rational, spirited, appetitive), and it can come in various configurations, in the form of hierarchies of these soul-parts. The ideal configuration of the soul puts the best part of us in charge (rational), controlling the lower parts of us (spirit and appetite). Whatever part of the soul is in charge, the person will behave in ways dictated by that part.

Republic VIII recounts four different unjust constitutions and their corresponding men. It describes how state and man can be corrupted from the just philosophic

condition to the timocratic, oligarchic, democratic and tyrannical (or from being ruled by the rational part to the spirited part and to three increasingly bad ways of being ruled by the appetitive part of the soul). These degenerations often involve some sort of conflict in a youth's life, where the youth initially has the constitution of his father, but some event or external influence shakes this. For instance, Socrates describes the young oligarch as growing up following in his timocratic father's footsteps, but he sees his father get disgraced: the father 'was a general or held some other high office, was brought to court by false witnesses, and was put to death or exiled or disenfranchised and has lost all his property' (553b2–5). Seeing his father disgraced upsets the timocratic constitution of the youth's soul and, as a result, he,

drives headlong from the throne in his own soul honour-loving and that spirited part. Humbled by poverty, he turns greedily to money-making and, little by little, by thrift and work, he amasses property. Don't you think that this person would then establish on that throne his appetitive and money-making part, setting it up as a great king within himself? (553b8–c6)

The first thing to note is the dethroning. This is caused by a loss of confidence in the initial ruling part of the soul. In the case of the young oligarch, he looked up to and tried to emulate his timocratic father, so the spirited part was sitting in 'the throne in his own soul'. The external representation of the youth's internal ruling soul-part, his timocratic father, falls into disgrace, which dethrones that part. There is, as it were, a vote of no confidence, and the soul can no longer be ruled by the part that did until confidence in its ability to do so has been restored. Unfortunately, this is when the oligarch's appetitive part gains control.

I want to propose that another thing to note is that the passage suggests that in the process of corruption, the turnaround of soul-parts need not be immediate. The sequence is: he drives the spirited part from his soul's throne, which happens immediately/ straightforwardly (indicated by εὐθύς, 553b8), then he starts amassing property, which is not an immediate or straightforward process (emphasized by κατὰ σμικρόν, 553c3), and then/at that time (τότε, 553c4) the appetitive part of his soul takes the throne.[9] This means there is a time when the throne is empty—the time between the dethroning and the rethroning, in which the youth amasses property.

What exactly does this empty throne look like? Is there truly no part of the soul in charge? Does some part have tenuous control? Is there a rapid succession of soul-parts? We can leave this open. The throne imagery is meant to help us think about types of people. The *empty* throne imagery is meant to help us think of times of instability in the soul and the accompanying ease of takeover by different soul-parts, in which the paths of thought and desires that were normal before the empty throne are no longer normal. The empty-throne imagery, then, is useful whether no part is in charge at all or whether the hierarchy is merely destabilized enough to say there is no true ownership of the throne.[10]

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[9] While it is possible to take the τότε to refer back to the dethroning that happens εὐθύς, this would require awkwardly ignoring the gradual process that follows this event. It is better to take the τότε to refer to the time in which it comes in the text: once the youth has gradually amassed property.

[10] Your view will depend partly on whether you think the soul-parts bear a resemblance to agents, and on whether you think a person can make decisions that originate from soul-parts that are not in charge. The idea of a completely empty throne will be more appealing to those who think actions and decisions can continue to be made despite one part of the soul not being in charge. See J. Whiting, 'Psychic contingency in the *Republic*', in R. Barney, T. Brennan and C. Brittain (edd.), *Plato and the Divided Self* (Cambridge, 2012), 174–208 for a discussion of these alternatives.

It is the empty throne that makes it easy for another part of the soul to gain control. When the soul-parts are in disarray, any and all of them can vie for the throne—just like the parts of the city might all vie for the throne during a time of civil unrest. Moreover, when the soul-parts are in disarray, there is no ruling part keeping the other parts from gaining influence, or at any rate the tenuously ruling part has significantly lost such power. In Book VIII, the timocrat's son becomes concerned with amassing wealth, and this turns him into the type of person who has an appetitive part of their soul in charge, valuing wealth and frugality. Prior to its dethroning, the son's spirited part would have provided some security from his appetitive part gaining such influence— just like in a timocratic city ruled by the militaristic auxiliaries, the ruled classes would not be able to go too far beyond what is prescribed by the auxiliaries.[11] When the throne is empty, there is no such restriction on the soul-parts.

Let us return with these insights to the case of the youth prematurely exposed to argument in Book VII. This youth goes through the same sort of degeneration as all the youths do in Book VIII, in which he is said to honour the ways of life he was raised in until something (in his case, argument) precipitates a lack of faith in these ways, after which he turns to a worse way of living.

Understanding this process through the throne imagery, we see that after being refuted, the youth's soul is dethroned, becoming destabilized and lacking leadership. Refutation acts as an upheaval that precipitates dethroning, because it does not merely bring into question the lawful beliefs the youth held, but also what might reasonably be held accountable for these beliefs: the soul-part that was in charge. This dethroning means the throne is empty, and that the youth is more susceptible to turning to a way of life characterized by undesirable beliefs.

Here we must delineate refutation, its immediate effect and possible downstream responses. Refutation amounts to showing a person a contradiction resulting from prior belief.[12] The immediate effect of refutation, and what shows it has been successful (what shows you can say that the person has been refuted), is puzzlement.[13] Because everything that leads to a contradiction cannot be true at once, if a person has truly recognized that a contradiction has been presented, even for a brief moment, then they will not know what to do: they think, surely something is not true.[14] The immediate

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[11] 553d describes the parts not in charge as enslaved. This is not unique to the oligarchic man, but rather a consequence of the hierarchical view of the soul. For instance, in an ideally configured soul, it is still true that the lower parts will do only what the rational part deems appropriate.

[12] M. Carpenter and R. Polansky, 'Variety of Socratic elenchi', in G.A. Scott (ed.), *Does Socrates Have a Method?: Rethinking the Elenchus in Plato's Dialogues and Beyond* (University Park, PA, 2002), 89–100, at 90–1 and H. Benson, 'A note on eristic and the Socratic elenchus', *JHPh* 27 (1989), 591–9, at 592 suggest this can be uncontroversially said about refutation. There are some scholars that think that Socratic *elenchus* can also provide positive beliefs, especially the belief that the original belief you presented is false, e.g. G. Vlastos, 'The Socratic elenchus', *OSAPh* 1 (1983), 27–58. While giving up a belief is compatible with believing it to be false or believing its opposite to be true (and thus compatible with a positive view of *elenchus*), it does not entail it, and there is no reason to assume that the interlocutors take that extra step in the passages I am considering. The youth believes things like 'the fine is no more fine than shameful', which, if his prior belief is that the fine is fine, does not mean he has come to believe that this is false, but rather that he believes it is just as true (and just as false) as 'the fine is shameful'. In the *Laws*, the impious man is 'forced to agree that he was not speaking correctly' (903a10–b1). For the impious man, because he is said to be in need of some further charm in order to agree with the Athenian about pious beliefs (903b), he likewise has not undergone any positive form of refutation.

[13] See Heckel (n. 4) for a discussion of puzzlement resulting from contradiction.

[14] I take this to be a standard understanding of how *aporia* is connected to *elenchus*. This is, for

effect of refutation, the feeling of puzzlement, with its sense of not knowing how to proceed, is a reflection of the rudderlessness of having an empty soul-throne. It is this puzzlement that indicates that the soul is primed for a reconfiguration—that the throne of the soul is empty and up for the taking.

There are multiple possible downstream responses to refutation-induced puzzlement. A person could decide the argument is better than their reasons for holding their initial belief, and thus take that belief to be false;[15] they could decide that they had good reason to believe their initial belief, and thus dismiss the argument that refuted it (as Adeimantus does, *Resp.* 487a–d); or they even could decide the initial belief and its negation are equally plausible (like the youth exposed to argument, *Resp.* 538d–e).[16] Any of these options follow puzzlement and involve an additional step proceeding it. So, refutation creates puzzlement, and it is up in the air how the puzzled person might react to it. Correction and corruption are two main categories of reaction, and can be thought of as a better soul-part and a worse soul-part taking the throne, respectively.

How does this analysis of refutation in terms of dethroning help us determine why the adopted son is corrupted and the impious man corrected by refutation? As I argued, the difference in the *Republic* and *Laws* passages between corruption and correction cannot be explained by the fact that refutation makes the adopted son question true beliefs while it makes the impious man question false beliefs; nor can the difference be explained by a relative difference in ability to strive for the truth after refutation, as they are both young and lack a maturity in reasoning. Recall how these two characters are similar. At the beginning of *Laws* X, the impious man is in the position of the corrupted youth of the *Republic:* they both no longer believe the lawful beliefs they grew up with and they no longer honour them; they instead believe and honour undesirable beliefs. To take the imagery of *Republic* VIII, lower parts of their souls are sitting in the thrones of their souls. If we think of correcting corruption using this throne imagery, we can see that what we want is to dethrone this lower part of their souls and reinstate a higher part. There might be numerous ways to dethrone a soul (as we saw, the oligarchic youth's soul was dethroned through seeing his father disgraced), but luckily, we now know we have an easily accessible method for destabilizing the soul: refutation.

Thus, it is no mere coincidence that the same thing, refutation, leads to corruption and is the first step of correcting that corruption. If refutation leads to dethroning, and dethroning allows for a different soul-part to take charge than the one which was in charge before, then we have an activity that could equally lead to change for the better or the worse. The Athenian makes use of the refutation to destabilize the impious man's soul, so he no longer believes that the undesirable, impious, beliefs are true and worthy

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instance, what M. Frede, 'Plato's arguments and the dialogue form', in J.C. Klagge and N.D. Smith (edd.), *Methods of Interpreting Plato and his Dialogues* (Oxford, 1992), 201-19 describes: 'Clearly some belief needs to be discarded. But at the moment he is in no position to identify the belief, or the beliefs, which are the cause of the problem. This is what causes the *aporia*' (211–12).

[15] This could lead the refuted person to search for the truth, as the older man does (*Resp.* 539c). Note that this search is not necessitated by refutation. You do need to realize you do not have the truth to search for it, but multiple other reactions are possible downstream of being shown an inconsistency in your beliefs.

[16] People may not have much agency in these decisions. For instance, it is plausible that our youths did not consciously decide to turn to undesirable beliefs, but rather their psychology, including their preferences, desires, etc., as well as being surrounded by 'flatterers' made them turn to undesirable beliefs.

of honour. Then there is a void of honouring that must be filled—there is an empty throne over which the soul-parts can vie. What is important is that, at this point, soul-parts are in a position to gain influence—and it is at this point that the second step of the method of correction becomes essential. The difference between the impious man and the youth exposed to argument is not in the refutation itself, but in how they are influenced after being refuted.

3.2 Step 2: Restabilizing the soul for the better

The second step in the impious man's correction is a myth, which the Athenian also calls a charm. In the myth, the gods look after the balance of everything as a whole, and, as a result, souls that are virtuous are moved to good regions of the universe and souls that are vicious are moved to bad regions. This means that though it might seem like vicious people sometimes succeed in life, ultimately they are moved to these worse regions, have worse things happen to them and the balance of good wins out (903b–905d). This myth is a fairly typical eschatological myth for Plato,[17] and myths are elsewhere referred to as charms or charm-like.[18] However, I will not ask generally what a myth is or what a charm is, nor aim to give comprehensive analyses of these in Plato's works. Rather, I will show that given what I have shown about the underlying psychology of corruption and the first step of correction, Plato's myths serve what is psychologically required by a second step of correction, and calling them charm-like emphasizes this. This is compatible with common understandings of myth and charm in Plato.

The second step is based on the idea that there are things we can do to help the right soul-part gain influence in a dethroned soul—once a person has a destabilized soul, we can go some way to ensuring that the soul-part that takes the throne after this destabilization is the soul-part we want. In the case of the youth prematurely exposed to argument, no aftercare is provided by those (unspecified people) who refuted him. In the image of the adopted son used to illustrate this situation, this is what the flatterers take advantage of.[19] The difference with the impious man is that the Athenian does not abandon him. Rather, the Athenian provides this myth after his refutation. The Athenian wants to convince this man not only that there is a problem with saying that the gods do not care about us, but also that it is true that the gods care about us.

For this second goal he needs to ensure the right soul-part takes the throne, and this is, vitally, what makes the difference between corruption and correction. This points to the main feature the second step of correcting must have: it must influence soul-parts such that a higher soul-part gains power. It also seems reasonable that it will not ask the person to do what led them to their corruption in the first place. The youth

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[17] See, for example, *Resp.* 614a–621d, *Grg.* 523a–524a and *Phd.* 108e–114c.

[18] See especially *Phd.* 77e–78a, but also *Laws* II. For discussions of these *Laws* passages, see G.R. Morrow, 'Plato's conception of persuasion', *PhR* 62 (1953), 234–50; W.A. Welton, 'Incantation and expectation in *Laws* II', *Ph&Rh* 29 (1996), 211–24, and C. Helmig, 'Die Bedeutung und Funktion von ἐπῳδή in Platons *Nomoi*', in S. Scolnicov and L. Brisson (edd.), *Plato's* Laws*: From Theory Into Practice* (Sankt Augustin, 2003), 75–80.

[19] Thus, we can speak of soul-parts gaining influence as well as being influenced. This might be deliberate or not. The influence of the flatterers sounds deliberate, but take, for instance, tragic poetry: it will influence the appetitive part of the soul to become stronger (*Resp.* 560a–b). Even though the tragic poet might not be deliberately trying to corrupt a person to their way of thinking like a flatterer is, they are no less influencing the person.

prematurely exposed to argument and the impious man wound up corrupted because they were unable to resolve contradictions. Moreover, the impious man has gone through the first phase of correction for the same reason. Presenting him with more contradictions is unlikely to solve the problem. Thus, we have a specific feature we know the second step must not have in the case of the youth corrupted through premature exposure to argument and of the impious man: it must not ask them to resolve apparent contradictions.

Even with a range of scholarly interpretations of myth, a myth would have/lack these important features. The traditional view is that, for Plato, myth is opposed to and inferior to argument, deals with fictions instead of truths and is irrational instead of rational.[20] Most scholars have maintained that even if a subtler picture than the traditional view is required, there is something to this last part, and one contrast between myth and argument is that myth is emotional or appeals to the non-rational soul in some way.[21] Though there is some debate over whether the rational part of the soul is meant to play *some* role in how myth affects someone, there is nevertheless an important element of myth that is consistent with even this: myth does not ask us to think critically.[22] Thus, a myth, being tied up with emotions and/or being non-rational, or at the least asking us to think in a way distinct from argument, will be free from what caused our two men's corruption in the first place.

Scholars have become increasingly uncomfortable with other aspects of the traditional view, however, and a renewed interest in myth has resulted.[23] The new consensus seems to be that the traditional view simply does not make sense with Plato's frequent use of myth, and though myth does not get at truth like argument does, it can get at something approaching truth or can get at truth in a way that can still be useful for education and/or philosophy.[24] This seems to be what is happening in the *Laws*, where the myth is supposed to convince the impious man of an important truth (piety).

It is in myth's ability to connect to truth that it can function to support a reconfiguration of the soul for the better. Recall that when we first considered the parallel corruption in our two passages, both the youth and the impious man begin with lawful beliefs and are corrupted into having undesirable ones. In the *Republic*, the youth recognizes his beliefs, though approximations of the truth are not really the truth, which he cannot find (538e6). His story of corruption, then, is tied up with getting further from the truth.

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[20] This is the orthodox view argued against in J. Annas, 'Plato's myths of judgement', *Phronesis* 27 (1982), 119–43.

[21] e.g. C. Collobert, 'The Platonic art of myth-making: myth as informative *phantasma*', in C. Collobert, P. Destrée and F.J. Gonzalez (edd.), *Plato and Myth: Studies on the Use and Status of Platonic Myths* (Leiden and Boston, 2012), at 87; L. Brisson, *Plato the Myth Maker*, trans. G. Naddaf (Chicago, 1998), at 81.

[22] *Pace* M.M. McCabe, 'Myth, allegory and argument in Plato', in A. Barker and M. Warner (edd.), *The Language of the Cave* (Edmonton, AB, 1992), 47–67, who argues that myths fit as one side of a refutation.

[23] Thus, Annas (n. 20) begins, 'the myths in Plato's dialogues have been in general neglected by philosophers' (119), and since then there have been several monographs and collections published on the subject, including Brisson (n. 21); C. Partenie (ed.), *Plato's Myths* (Cambridge, 2009); C. Collobert, P. Destrée and F.J. Gonzalez (edd.), *Plato and Myth: Studies on the Use and Status of Platonic Myths* (Leiden and Boston, 2012).

[24] e.g. Annas (n. 20), 121; P. Murray, 'What is a muthos for Plato?', in R. Buxton (ed.), *From Myth to Reason?: Studies in the Development of Greek Thought* (Oxford, 1999), 251–62; Collobert et al. (n. 21), 99.

A myth, in getting at something like the truth, is part of his correction. Going through a myth is not as ideal as going through dialectic, which would get to the full truth (just as the image assumes the adoptive parents are not as ideal as the biological ones), but it can help return the soul to a pre-corruption state.

Is myth the only thing that can work to correct corruption? I do not believe so, and I take it the Athenian's describing the myth as a charm suggests this.[25] There is less literature on charm than on myth. What literature there is tends to distinguish metaphorical charms from literal ones, where literal ones fit a traditional notion of what counts as magical (for example an incantation to charm a snake [*Euthyd.* 289e]), and metaphorical ones do not.[26]

Myth is a prime example of the metaphorical kind;[27] others include music and rhetoric. Some of these others show up earlier in the *Laws*, where charm is used in multiple descriptions of educating the young. *Laws* II says that children will use charms because they cannot tolerate more serious study—there, charms seem to take the form of song (659d, 664a–b), and are said to help a person experience pleasure and pains at the right things.[28] We even have seen charms mentioned in a passage we already considered. In considering the similarity between the youth prematurely exposed to argument and the impious man, we saw that the Athenian was annoyed at having to convince the impious man of the existence of caring gods given that he was raised with pious beliefs. The impious man was told stories (*muthoi*), or charmed (*epôdê*) from birth. These stories come in the form of things like prayers and the actions of their parents (887d–e), and instilled pious beliefs.[29] This is suggestive of the fact that it is through all these things that the young are charmed.[30]

Scholars seem to agree, similar to the case of myth, that charms are ways of influencing the soul through emotions rather than reason,[31] though there are a few that claim charms will involve rationality. Bobonich,[32] for instance, argues that the

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[25] It is also possible to have a myth with falsehoods rather than truths, so not all myths will help correct corruption.

[26] An exception is M. Gellrich, 'Socratic magic: enchantment, irony, and persuasion in Plato's dialogues', *CW* 87 (1994), 275–307, who argues against the metaphorical sense she sees in P. Laín Entralgo, *The Therapy of the Word in Classical Antiquity*, trans. L.J. Rather and J.M. Sharp (New Haven, 1970) and J. de Romilly, *Magic and Rhetoric in Ancient Greece* (Cambridge, MA, 1975). Gellrich takes these scholars to be denying that there is a deep similarity between the metaphorical and non-metaphorical charms; this seems to be more of a problem with how the distinction is treated than with the distinction itself.

[27] The *Laws* is not the only place a myth is said to work like a charm in Plato (see e.g. *Phd.* 77e–78a).

[28] As Welton (n. 18), 214 points out.

[29] For discussion of *epôdê* in early education, see e.g. Morrow (n. 18), especially 238–40, Welton (n. 18), and Helmig (n. 18), especially 77. For discussion of early education in the *Laws* (but without mention of *epôdê*), see R.F. Stalley, *An Introduction to Plato's Laws* (Indianapolis, 1983), especially 123–36.

[30] Discussion of the *Charmides* will no doubt seem conspicuously absent, since Socrates' claim to having a charm that instils temperance is integral to the framing of that dialogue. Most suppose that the *elenchus* Socrates provides in the dialogue is this charm, but this cannot be right for reasons internal to that dialogue and independent of the argument in this paper. For the view that the *elenchus* is *not* the charm, see M.L. McPherran, 'Socrates and Zalmoxis on drugs, charms, and purification', *Apeiron* 37 (2004), 11–33. Since we never see the charm in the *Charmides*, we cannot extract much useful information here.

[31] e.g. Welton (n. 18), Morrow (n. 18) and E. Belfiore, '*Elenchus, epode*, and magic: Socrates as Silenus', *Phoenix* 34 (1980), 128–37. De Romilly (n. 26) sees a role for both the irrational and rational. She focusses on Socrates, arguing that the irrational aspect is the divine inspiration he receives and the rational is the unyielding logic he uses (36–7).

[32] C. Bobonich, 'Persuasion, compulsion and freedom in Plato's *Laws*', *CQ* 41 (1991), 365–88.

charm in *Laws* X is rational persuasion, meaning at least that the Athenian tries to convince the impious man that pious beliefs are true 'by appealing to good evidence' (375). Bobonich tries to draw a firm distinction between the kinds of myths told as charms to children elsewhere in the *Laws* and the charm given in Book X, admitting that the former may be non-rational.

Though I do not agree that the eschatological myth in Book X is an 'appeal to good evidence' any more than the myths told to children, it is not important in the context of correcting corruption whether charms are 'rational' in this way. Even under Bobonich's reading, this myth does not ask the person being charmed to think critically about an issue or reconcile conflicts. There is a difference between reconciling conflicts on our own and being responsive to evidence, though both tasks might be properly labelled 'rational'. Even if Bobonich is right and the myth in Book X requires someone to be responsive to evidence, the myth still requires a different activity than the activity that led to corruption. Thus, it is still consistent that a charm will be a thing that satisfies the conditions needed to correct corruption.

In *Laws* II, the Athenian says (right before describing how the choir must charm children) that the lawmaker 'must discover all possible devices' to preserve unanimity in the community's 'songs, myths and doctrines' (664a). We can approach an instance of instability of the soul similarly opportunistically and use whatever is available to influence the soul for the better. What seems important is that these forms of influence, like the forms of influence that set up the lawful beliefs to begin with, do not involve attempting to reconcile contradiction. When we are considering people who have been corrupted, we are considering people who are not yet skilled in argument—whose critical thinking skills were not prepared for refutation when they were first introduced to it, and their period of corruption has made them no more prepared.[33] Myths and other things that could metaphorically be called charms are perfect for the job because they can influence people in positive ways through emotions or otherwise without asking people to perform an activity that would only lead to corruption.[34]

4. CONCLUSION

Now we can see that Plato is concerned about correcting corruption and that he provides a method for doing so that is flexible and aimed at corruption's underlying psychology.

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[33] Thus, flattery (what corrupts the adopted son in *Republic* VII) and charms are parallel—they both simply influence the soul in a way that gives a particular part of the soul a leg-up in the contest for the throne.
[34] Compare E. Wasmuth, 'ΩΣΠΕΡ ΟΙ ΚΟΡΥΒΑΝΤΙΩΝΤΕΣ: the Corybantic rites in Plato's dialogues', *CQ* 65 (2015), 69–84, which analyses passages, such as at the end of the *Crito*, which liken argument to the sounds made in Corybantic rites. Wasmuth points to a three-step process in the rites, which includes two stages very like my two: someone being prepared for a cure or initiation (the 'chairing' stage [θρόνωσις]), followed by the cure/initiation. *Logoi* are used in both stages (75) and can be used in my charm phase, though myth is safer, since it is less likely to prompt trying to solve contradictions. The arguments 'buzzing' in a way that prevents Socrates from hearing anything Crito would say in the *Crito* suggests they are not being used in the way they are used in a typical refutation and compatible with my view. The fact that Wasmuth and I both talk about chairs/thrones is coincidental, however, since the word refers to the seat of the soul and comes from *Republic*, whereas in Wasmuth's view the word comes from the stage of Corybantic rites, where a person would sit in a chair and be danced around, and does not have the same metaphorical significance.

In the *Republic*, Socrates described a preventative measure for corruption: do not expose youths to arguments; in the *Laws*, we see this corrective measure: give the corrupted person an argument, then a myth. Understanding the process of both corruption and correction in terms of a destabilization of the soul that is then stabilized for the worse or better, respectively, helps us see that the way these processes affect the soul is what is important. Though there are a number of things that can affect soul-parts, we can always have an argument and a myth at hand.

We can also now see how interconnected the dangers and successes of philosophy are. Refutation can educate, corrupt, and help correct corruption. It is an important part of dialectic and coming to know the forms in the educational programme of the *Republic*. However, if a person is not properly prepared for this, refutation can lead to their corruption. They will be thrown into confusion, and their soul will become destabilized. This destabilization allows for a reconfiguration of the soul, which, without proper attention, can be a reconfiguration for the worse. Finally, refutation can also correct. It corrects through the same mechanism through which it corrupts, and can destabilize the soul and prime it for a reconfiguration. If a soul's reconfiguration is to be for the better, then it must be provided with sufficient after-care. One way to ensure this is with a charm. A charm, such as a myth, with the right content will be able to reinforce the soul-part that needs reinforcing, and this reinforced part will be able to regain control of the soul. With these insights in hand, we should be reassured: though philosophy is dangerous, its possible negative effects are not irreversible.

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