

## Plato, Republic / Πολιτεία, Excerpts

### 414b-415d: Poetry in Education

<p>“What, then, is our education? Or is it hard to find a better than that which long time has discovered? Which is, I suppose, gymnastics for the body and for the soul music.”</p> <p>“It is.”</p> <p>“And shall we not begin education in music earlier than in gymnastics?”</p> <p>“Of course.”</p> <p>“And under music you include tales, do you not?”</p> <p>“I do.”</p> <p>“And tales are of two species, the one true and the other false?”</p> <p>“Yes.”</p> <p>“And education must make use of both, but first of the false?”</p> <p>“I don't understand your meaning.”</p> <p>“Don't you understand,” I said, “that we begin by telling children fables, and the fable is, taken as a whole, false, but there is truth in it also? And we make use of fable with children before gymnastics.”</p> <p>“That is so.”</p> <p>“That, then, is what I meant by saying that we must take up music before gymnastics.”</p> <p>“You were right,” he said.</p> <p>“Do you not know, then, that the beginning in every task is the chief thing, especially for any creature that is young and tender? For it is then that it is best molded and takes the impression that one wishes to stamp upon it.”</p> <p>“Quite so.”</p> <p>“Shall we, then, thus lightly suffer our children to listen to any chance stories fashioned by any chance teachers and so to take into their minds opinions for the most part contrary to those that we shall think it desirable for them to hold when they are grown up?”</p> <p>“By no manner of means will we allow it.”</p> <p>“We must begin, then, it seems, by a censorship over our storymakers, and what they do well we must pass and what not, reject. And the stories on the accepted list we will induce nurses and mothers to tell to the children and so shape their souls by these stories far rather than their bodies by their hands.</p>	<p>τίς οὖν ἡ παιδεία; ἢ χαλεπὸν εὐρεῖν βελτίω τῆς ὑπὸ τοῦ πολλοῦ χρόνου ἠύρημένης; ἔστιν δέ που ἢ μὲν ἐπὶ σώμασι γυμναστική, ἢ δ' ἐπὶ ψυχῇ μουσική.</p> <p>ἔστιν γάρ.</p> <p>ἄρ' οὖν οὐ μουσικῇ πρότερον ἀρξόμεθα παιδεύοντες ἢ γυμναστικῇ;</p> <p>πῶς δ' οὐ;</p> <p>μουσικῆς δ', εἶπον, τιθεῖς λόγους, ἢ οὐ;</p> <p>ἔγωγε.</p> <p>λόγων δὲ διττὸν εἶδος, τὸ μὲν ἀληθές, ψευδὸς δ' ἕτερον;</p> <p>ναί.</p> <p>παιδευτέον δ' ἐν ἀμφοτέροις, πρότερον δ' ἐν τοῖς ψευδέσιν;</p> <p>οὐ μανθάνω, ἔφη, πῶς λέγεις.</p> <p>οὐ μανθάνεις, ἦν δ' ἐγώ, ὅτι πρῶτον τοῖς παιδίοις μύθους λέγομεν; τοῦτο δὲ που ὡς τὸ ὅλον εἰπεῖν ψευδὸς, ἔτι δὲ καὶ ἀληθῆ. πρότερον δὲ μύθοις πρὸς τὰ παιδιά ἢ γυμνασίαις χρώμεθα.</p> <p>ἔστι ταῦτα.</p> <p>τοῦτο δὲ ἔλεγον, ὅτι μουσικῆς πρότερον ἀπτεόν ἢ γυμναστικῆς.</p> <p>ὀρθῶς, ἔφη.</p> <p>οὐκοῦν οἷσθ' ὅτι ἀρχὴ παντὸς ἔργου μέγιστον, ἄλλως τε δὴ καὶ νέω καὶ ἀπαλῶ ὄτρωον;</p> <p>μάλιστα γὰρ δὴ τότε πλάττεται, καὶ ἐνδύεται τύπος ὃν ἂν τις βούληται ἐνσημῆνασθαι ἐκάστῳ.</p> <p>κομιδῇ μὲν οὖν.</p> <p>ἄρ' οὖν ῥαδίως οὕτω παρήσομεν τοὺς ἐπιτυχόντας ὑπὸ τῶν ἐπιτυχόντων μύθους πλασθέντας ἀκούειν τοὺς παῖδας καὶ λαμβάνειν ἐν ταῖς ψυχαῖς ὡς ἐπὶ τὸ πολὺ ἐναντίας δόξας ἐκείναις ἅς, ἐπειδὴν τελεωθῶσιν, ἔχειν οἰησόμεθα δεῖν αὐτούς;</p> <p>οὐδ' ὅπως οὖν παρήσομεν.</p> <p>πρῶτον δὲ ἡμῖν, ὡς ἔοικεν, ἐπιστατητέον τοῖς μυθοποιοῖς, καὶ ὃν μὲν ἂν καλὸν μῦθον ποιήσωσιν, ἐγκριτέον, ὃν δ' ἂν μὴ, ἀποκριτέον.</p> <p>τοὺς δ' ἐγκριθέντας πείσομεν τὰς τροφούς τε καὶ μητέρας λέγειν τοῖς παισίν, καὶ πλάττειν τὰς ψυχὰς αὐτῶν τοῖς μύθοις πολὺ μᾶλλον ἢ τὰ σώματα ταῖς χερσίν:</p> <p>ῶν δὲ νῦν λέγουσι τοὺς πολλοὺς ἐκβλητέον.</p>
--	--

But most of the stories they now tell we must reject.”

“What sort of stories?” he said.

“The example of the greater stories,” I said, “will show us the lesser also. For surely the pattern must be the same and the greater and the less must have a like tendency. Don't you think so?”

“I do,” he said; “but I don't apprehend which you mean by the greater, either.”

“Those,” I said, “that Hesiod and Homer and the other poets related.

These, methinks, composed false stories which they told and still tell to mankind.”

“Of what sort?” he said;

“and what in them do you find fault?”

“With that,” I said, “which one ought first and chiefly to blame, especially if the lie is not a pretty one.”

“What is that?”

“When anyone images badly in his speech the true nature of gods and heroes, like a painter whose portraits bear no resemblance to his models.”

“It is certainly right to condemn things like that,” he said; “but just what do we mean and what particular things?”

“There is, first of all,” I said, “the greatest lie about the things of greatest concernment, which was no pretty invention of him who told how Uranus did what Hesiod says he did to Cronos, and how Cronos in turn took his revenge; and then there are the doings and sufferings of Cronos at the hands of his son. Even if they were true I should not think that they ought to be thus lightly told to thoughtless young persons. But the best way would be to bury them in silence, and if there were some necessity for relating them, that only a very small audience should be admitted under pledge of secrecy and after sacrificing, not a pig, but some huge and unprocurable victim, to the end that as few as possible should have heard these tales.”

“Why, yes,” said he, “such stories are hard sayings.”

“Yes, and they are not to be told, Adeimantus, in our city, nor is it to be said in the hearing of a young man, that in doing the utmost wrong he would do nothing to surprise anybody, nor again in punishing his father's wrong-doings to the limit, but would only be following the example of the first and greatest of the gods.”

“No, by heaven,” said he, “I do not myself think that they are fit to be told.”

“Neither must we admit at all,” said I, “that gods war with gods and plot against one another and

ποίους δὴ; ἔφη.

ἐν τοῖς μείζουσιν, ἦν δ' ἐγώ, μύθοις ὀψόμεθα καὶ τοὺς ἐλάττους. δεῖ γὰρ δὴ τὸν αὐτὸν τύπον εἶναι καὶ ταύτων δύνασθαι τοὺς τε μείζους καὶ τοὺς ἐλάττους. ἢ οὐκ οἶε;

ἔγωγ', ἔφη: ἀλλ' οὐκ ἐννοῶ οὐδὲ τοὺς μείζους τίνας λέγεις.

οὐς Ἡσίοδος τε, εἶπον, καὶ Ὀμηρος ἡμῖν ἐλεγέτην καὶ οἱ ἄλλοι ποιηταί.

οὔτοι γὰρ που μύθους τοῖς ἀνθρώποις ψευδεῖς συντιθέντες ἔλεγόν τε καὶ λέγουσι.

ποίους δὴ, ἦ δ' ὅς,

καὶ τί αὐτῶν μεμφόμενος λέγεις;

ὄπερ, ἦν δ' ἐγώ, χρὴ καὶ πρῶτον καὶ μάλιστα μέμφεσθαι, ἄλλως τε καὶ ἐάν τις μὴ καλῶς ψεύδηται.

τί τοῦτο;

ὅταν εἰκάζη τις κακῶς οὐσίαν τῷ λόγῳ, περὶ θεῶν τε καὶ ἡρώων οἷοί εἰσιν, ὥσπερ γραφεὺς μηδὲν εὐοκίοντα γράφων οἷς ἂν ὁμοία βουλευθῆ γράψαι.

καὶ γὰρ, ἔφη, ὀρθῶς ἔχει τά γε τοιαῦτα μέμφεσθαι. ἀλλὰ πῶς δὴ λέγομεν καὶ ποῖα;

πρῶτον μὲν, ἦν δ' ἐγώ, τὸ μέγιστον καὶ περὶ τῶν μεγίστων ψεῦδος ὁ εἰπὼν οὐ καλῶς ἐψεύσατο ὡς Οὐρανός τε ἠργάσατο ἅ φησι δρᾶσαι αὐτὸν Ἡσίοδος, ὃ τε αὖ Κρόνος ὡς ἐτιμωρήσατο αὐτόν.

τὰ δὲ δὴ τοῦ Κρόνου ἔργα καὶ πάθη ὑπὸ τοῦ υἱέος, οὐδ' ἂν εἴ ἦν ἀληθὴ ὤμην δεῖν ῥαδίως οὕτως λέγεσθαι πρὸς ἄφρονάς τε καὶ νέους, ἀλλὰ μάλιστα μὲν σιγᾶσθαι, εἰ δὲ ἀνάγκη τις ἦν λέγειν, δι' ἀπορρήτων ἀκούειν ὡς ὀλιγίστους, θυσασμένους οὐ χοῖρον ἀλλά τι μέγα καὶ ἄπορον θῦμα, ὅπως ὅτι ἐλαχίστοις συνέβη ἀκοῦσαι.

καὶ γὰρ, ἦ δ' ὅς, οὔτοι γε οἱ λόγοι χαλεποί.

καὶ οὐ λεκτέοι γ', ἔφην, ὦ Ἀδείμαντε, ἐν τῇ ἡμετέρῃ πόλει. οὐδὲ λεκτέον νέῳ ἀκούοντι ὡς ἀδικῶν τὰ ἔσχατα οὐδὲν ἂν θαυμαστὸν ποιῶ, οὐδ' αὖ ἀδικοῦντα πατέρα κολάζων παντὶ τρόπῳ, ἀλλὰ δρῶν ἂν ὄπερ θεῶν οἱ πρῶτοί τε καὶ μέγιστοι.

οὐ μὰ τὸν Δία, ἦ δ' ὅς, οὐδὲ αὐτῷ μοι δοκεῖ ἐπιτήδεια εἶναι λέγειν.

οὐδέ γε, ἦν δ' ἐγώ, τὸ παράπαν ὡς θεοὶ θεοῖς πολεμοῦσί τε καὶ ἐπιβουλεύουσι καὶ μάχονται—οὐδὲ γὰρ ἀληθῆ—εἶ γε δεῖ ἡμῖν

contend—for it is not true either— if we wish our future guardians to deem nothing more shameful than lightly to fall out with one another; still less must we make battles of gods and giants the subject for them of stories and embroideries, and other enmities many and manifold of gods and heroes toward their kith and kin.

But if there is any likelihood of our persuading them that no citizen ever quarrelled with his fellow-citizen and that the very idea of it is an impiety, that is the sort of thing that ought rather to be said by their elders, men and women, to children from the beginning and as they grow older, and we must compel the poets to keep close to this in their compositions.

But Hera's fetterings by her son and the hurling out of heaven of Hephaestus by his father when he was trying to save his mother from a beating, and the battles of the gods in Homer's verse are things that we must not admit into our city either wrought in allegory or without allegory.

For the young are not able to distinguish what is and what is not allegory, but whatever opinions are taken into the mind at that age are wont to prove indelible and unalterable. For which reason, maybe, we should do our utmost that the first stories that they hear should be so composed as to bring the fairest lessons of virtue to their ears.”

“Yes, that is reasonable,” he said;

τοὺς μέλλοντας τὴν πόλιν φυλάξειν αἴσχιστον νομίζειν τὸ ῥαδίως ἀλλήλοισ ἀπεχθάνεσθαι— πολλοῦ δεῖ γιγαντομαχίας τε μυθολογητέον αὐτοῖς καὶ ποικιλτέον, καὶ ἄλλας ἐχθρας πολλὰς καὶ παντοδαπὰς θεῶν τε καὶ ἡρώων πρὸς συγγενεῖς τε καὶ οἰκείους αὐτῶν— ἀλλ’ εἴ πως μέλλομεν πείσειν ὡς οὐδεὶς πώποτε πολίτης ἕτερος ἐτέρῳ ἀπήχθετο οὐδ’ ἔστιν τοῦτο ὅσιον, τοιαῦτα λεκτέα μᾶλλον πρὸς τὰ παιδία εὐθύς καὶ γέρουσι καὶ γραυσί, καὶ πρεσβυτέροις γιγνομένοις καὶ τοὺς ποιητὰς ἐγγὺς τούτων ἀναγκαστέον λογοποιεῖν.

Ἦρας δὲ δεσμούςσιν ὑπὸ ὑέος καὶ Ἡφαίστου ῥίψεις ὑπὸ πατρός, μέλλοντος τῆ μητρὶ τυπτομένη ἀμυνεῖν, καὶ θεομαχίας ὅσας Ὀμηρος πεποίηκεν οὐ παραδεκτέον εἰς τὴν πόλιν, οὐτ’ ἐν ὑπονοίαις πεποιημένας οὔτε ἄνευ ὑπονοιῶν. ὁ γὰρ νέος οὐχ οἷός τε κρίνειν ὅτι τε ὑπόνοια καὶ ὁ μῆ, ἀλλ’ ἅ ἂν τηλικούτος ὦν λάβῃ ἐν ταῖς δόξαις δυσέκνιπτά τε καὶ ἀμετάστατα φιλεῖ γίνεσθαι: ὦν δὴ ἴσως ἔνεκα περὶ παντὸς ποιητέον ἅ πρῶτα ἀκούουσιν ὅτι κάλλιστα μεμυθολογημένα πρὸς ἀρετὴν ἀκούειν.

ἔχει γάρ, ἔφη, λόγον