PHILOSOPHY OF LAW

CAVE ALLEGORY

THE REPUBLIC OF PLATO

TRANSLATED WITH NOTES AND
AN INTERPRETIVE ESSAY BY

ALLAN BLOOM

PUBLISHERS • NEW YORK • LONDON

BOOK VII

"Next, then," I said, "make an image of our nature in its education 514 a
and want of education, likening it to a condition of the following
kind. See human beings as though they were in an underground cave-like
dwelling with its entrance, a long one, open to the light across the
whole width of the cave. They are in it from childhood with their legs
and necks in bonds so that they are fixed, seeing only in front of them,
unable because of the bond to turn their heads all the way around. b
Their light is from a fire burning far above and behind them. Between
the fire and the prisoners there is a road above, along which see a wall,
built like the partitions puppet-handlers set in front of the human
beings and over which they show the puppets."

"I see," he said.

"Then also see along this wall human beings carrying all sorts of
artifacts, which project above the wall, and statues of men and other c
animals wrought from stone, wood, and every kind of material; as is to 515 a
be expected, some of the carriers utter sounds while others are silent."

"It's a strange image," he said, "and strange prisoners you're telling of."

"They're like us," I said. "For in the first place, do you suppose such men would have seen anything of themselves and one another other than the shadows cast by the fire on the side of the cave facing them?"

515 a "How could they," he said, "if they had been compelled to keep b their heads motionless throughout life?"

"And what about the things that are carried by? Isn't it the same with them?"

"Of course."

"If they were able to discuss things with one another, don't you believe they would hold that they are naming these things going by before them that they see?"[1]

"Necessarily."

"And what if the prison also had an echo from the side facing them? Whenever one of the men passing by happens to utter a sound, do you suppose they would believe that anything other than the passing shadow was uttering the sound?"

"No, by Zeus," he said. "I don't."

c "Then most certainly," I said, "such men would hold that the truth is nothing other than the shadows of artificial things."

"Most necessarily," he said.

"Now consider," I said, "what their release and healing from bonds and folly would be like if something of this sort were by nature to happen to them. Take a man who is released and suddenly compelled to stand up, to turn his neck around, to walk and look up toward the light; and who, moreover, in doing all this is in pain and, because he is dazzled, is unable to make out those things whose shadows he saw d before. What do you suppose he'd say if someone were to tell him that before he saw silly nothings, while now, because he is somewhat nearer to what *is* and more turned toward beings, he sees more correctly; and, in particular, showing him each of the things that pass by, were to compel the man to answer his questions about what they are? Don't you suppose he'd be at a loss and believe that what was seen before is truer than what is now shown?"

"Yes," he said, "by far."

e "And, if he compelled him to look at the light itself, would his eyes hurt and would he flee, turning away to those things that he is able to make out and hold them to be really clearer than what is being shown?"

"So he would," he said.

"And if," I said, "someone dragged him away from there by force along the rough, steep, upward way and didn't let him go before he had dragged him out into the light of the sun, wouldn't he be distressed and 516 a annoyed at being so dragged? And when he came to the light, wouldn't he have his eyes full of its beam and be unable to see even one of the things now said to be true?"

"No, he wouldn't," he said, "at least not right away." *516 a*

"Then I suppose he'd have to get accustomed, if he were going to see what's up above. At first he'd most easily make out the shadows; and after that the phantoms of the human beings and the other things in water; and, later, the things themselves. And from there he could turn to beholding the things in heaven and heaven itself, more easily at night—looking at the light of the stars and the moon—than by *b* day—looking at the sun and sunlight."

"Of course."

"Then finally I suppose he would be able to make out the sun—not its appearances in water or some alien place, but the sun itself by itself in its own region—and see what it's like."

"Necessarily," he said.

"And after that he would already be in a position to conclude about it that this is the source of the seasons and the years, and is the steward of all things in the visible place, and is in a certain way the *c* cause of all those things he and his companions had been seeing."

"It's plain," he said, "that this would be his next step."

"What then? When he recalled his first home and the wisdom there, and his fellow prisoners in that time, don't you suppose he would consider himself happy for the change and pity the others?"

"Quite so."

"And if in that time there were among them any honors, praises, and prizes for the man who is sharpest at making out the things that go by, and most remembers which of them are accustomed to pass before, which after, and which at the same time as others, and who is *d* thereby most able to divine what is going to come, in your opinion would he be desirous of them and envy those who are honored and hold power among these men? Or, rather, would he be affected as Homer says and want very much 'to be on the soil, a serf to another man, to a portionless man,'[2] and to undergo anything whatsoever rather than to opine those things and live that way?"

"Yes," he said, "I suppose he would prefer to undergo everything *e* rather than live that way."

"Now reflect on this too," I said. "If such a man were to come down again and sit in the same seat, on coming suddenly from the sun wouldn't his eyes get infected with darkness?"

"Very much so," he said.

"And if he once more had to compete with those perpetual prisoners in forming judgments about those shadows while his vision was still dim, before his eyes had recovered, and if the time *517 a* needed for getting accustomed were not at all short, wouldn't he be

517 a the source of laughter, and wouldn't it be said of him that he went up
and came back with his eyes corrupted, and that it's not even worth
trying to go up? And if they were somehow able to get their
hands on and kill the man who attempts to release and lead up,
wouldn't they kill him?"

"No doubt about it," he said.

"Well, then, my dear Glaucon," I said, "this image as a whole
b must be connected with what was said before. Liken the domain revealed
through sight to the prison home, and the light of the fire in it
to the sun's power; and, in applying the going up and the seeing of
what's above to the soul's journey up to the intelligible place, you'll
not mistake my expectation, since you desire to hear it. A god doubtless
knows if it happens to be true. At all events, this is the way the
phenomena look to me: in the knowable the last thing to be seen, and
c that with considerable effort, is the *idea* of the good; but once seen, it
must be concluded that this is in fact the cause of all that is right and
fair in everything—in the visible it gave birth to light and its sovereign;
in the intelligible, itself sovereign, it provided truth and intelligence
—and that the man who is going to act prudently in private or in
public must see it."

"I, too, join you in supposing that," he said, "at least in the way I
can."

"Come, then," I said, "and join me in supposing this, too, and
don't be surprised that the men who get to that point aren't willing to
mind the business of human beings, but rather that their souls are always
d eager to spend their time above. Surely that's likely, if indeed this,
too, follows the image of which I told before."

"Of course it's likely," he said.

"And what about this? Do you suppose it is anything surprising,"
I said, "if a man, come from acts of divine contemplation to the human
things, is graceless and looks quite ridiculous when—with his sight still
dim and before he has gotten sufficiently accustomed to the surrounding
darkness—he is compelled in courts or elsewhere to contest about
the shadows of the just or the representations of which they are the
e shadows, and to dispute about the way these things are understood by
men who have never seen justice itself?"

"It's not at all surprising," he said.

518 a "But if a man were intelligent," I said, "he would remember that
there are two kinds of disturbances of the eyes, stemming from two
sources—when they have been transferred from light to darkness and
when they have been transferred from darkness to light. And if he held
that these same things happen to a soul too, whenever he saw one that
is confused and unable to make anything out, he wouldn't laugh

without reasoning but would go on to consider whether, come from a brighter life, it is in darkness for want of being accustomed, or whether, going from greater lack of learning to greater brightness, it is dazzled by the greater brilliance. And then he would deem the first soul happy for its condition and its life, while he would pity the second. And, if he wanted to laugh at the second soul, his laughing in this case would make him less ridiculous himself than would his laughing at the soul which has come from above out of the light." *518 a* *b*

"What you say is quite sensible," he said.

MINOS

MINOS;
or, On Law

Translated by THOMAS L. PANGLE

Socrates, A Comrade

313a SOCRATES: What is law, for us?[1]

COMRADE: And what sort of laws are you asking about?

SOC.: What? Is there some way in which law differs from law in regard to this very thing, in regard to its being law? For just consider what I now happen to be asking you. I am asking this just as if I had asked, "what is gold?"—if you thus asked me what sort of gold I was speaking of, I think you would not be asking a correct question. For b presumably gold doesn't differ from gold, or stone from stone, at least in regard to being stone and in regard to being gold. And thus neither does law, presumably, differ at all from law, but they are all the same thing. For each of them is law to the same degree—not one more so and another less. This is the very thing I am asking: what is law as a whole? So if you have the answer at hand, speak.

COM.: What else would law be, Socrates, except the things that are lawfully accepted?[2]

Minos was the legendary founder of Crete and the bitter enemy of Athens. As the dialogue indicates, the accounts surrounding him are of two sorts. According to one tradition, he was tyrannical, harsh, and imperialistic; according to another, he was the greatest of lawgivers, inspired directly by Zeus, his father. See *Laws* 624–25, 706; Plutarch *Theseus* xv–xvi; Strabo *Geography* X iv 8, 19; Diodorus Siculus IV 60 and V 78.

[1] This sentence is ambiguous; it could also mean, "What is the law among us?" In the Greek, the first words in the dialogue are "The law."

[2] The word I have translated "lawfully accepted" is a participle formed from the verb *nomizō*, which has the same root as *nomos* ("law"). Like *nomos*, *nomizō* has a wide

SOC.: And so is speech in your opinion the things that are spoken, or
sight the things that are seen, or hearing the things that are heard? Or
c does speech seem something different from the things that are spo-
ken, and sight something different from the things that are seen, and
hearing something different from the things that are heard, and law,
indeed, something different from the things that are lawfully accept-
ed? Is this the way it seems to you, or how else?

COM.: Now it does appear to me different.

SOC.: So then law is not the things that are lawfully accepted.

COM.: It doesn't seem to me to be.

SOC.: So what then would law be? Let's investigate it in the following
way. If someone had asked us, in regard to the things said just now,
314a "Since it is by sight that you declare that the things that are seen are
seen, by the sight's being what are they seen?"—we would have
replied to him that it is by its being this perception that shows
matters[3] through the eyes. And if, again, he had asked us, "What
then? Since it is by hearing that the things that are heard are heard, by
the hearing's being what does this take place?"—we would have
replied to him that it is by its being this perception that makes voices
manifest to us through the ears. In the same way, then, if he should
ask us, "Since it is by law that the things lawfully accepted are
b lawfully accepted, by the law's being what are they lawfully accept-
ed? Is it by its being some perception, or some showing, as the things
that are learned are learned by the science that shows them, or some
discovery as the things that are discovered are discovered—for in-
stance, the things pertaining to health and sickness by the medical art,
and, on the other hand, the things the gods think (as the diviners
claim) by the divining art? Since for us art is presumably a discovery
of things; isn't it?"

COM.: Certainly.

SOC.: So which of these would we especially take law to be?

c COM.: In my opinion at least, these official opinions and decrees

---

range of possible meanings, including "practice or use customarily," "be legal or customary," "enact as legal or as legal custom," and "acknowledge, accept, or believe"—often "in the lawful or customary way." In order to highlight the connections with law and with belief or opinion that are paramount in this dialogue, I have usually translated *nomizō* as "lawfully accept"; where it was not possible to do so, I have placed an asterisk after the word or words that translate *nomizō*. The reader should bear in mind that the word may have a more active connotation than the English "accept" might suggest.

[3] Two lesser manuscripts read: "shows *colors to us*."

passed by votes; for what else would one declare law to be? So as a result it's likely that what you've asked about, this whole, law, is the official opinion of the city.

SOC.: What you're saying, it is likely, is that law is political opinion.

COM.: I do say so.

SOC.: And perhaps what you say is nobly put. But probably we will know better by proceeding as follows. You say some are wise?

COM.: I do say so.

SOC.: Aren't the wise wise through wisdom?

COM.: Yes.

SOC.: What then? The just are just through justice?

COM.: Certainly.

SOC.: And aren't the lawful lawful through law?

COM.: Yes.

d SOC.: And the lawless lawless through lawlessness?

COM.: Yes.

SOC.: And the lawful are just?

COM.: Yes.

SOC.: And the lawless unjust?

COM.: Unjust.

SOC.: Aren't justice and law most noble?

COM.: That is so.

SOC.: And injustice and lawlessness most shameful?

COM.: Yes.

SOC.: And the one saves cities and everything else, while the other destroys and overturns?

COM.: Yes.

SOC.: So then one ought to think about law as being something noble and seek it as good.

COM.: How could one not?

SOC.: Didn't we declare law to be the official opinion of the city?

e COM.: We did so declare.

SOC.: So what then? Are not some official opinions worthy but others wicked?

COM.: That is the case.

SOC.: And now law, at any rate, was not wicked.

COM.: No, indeed.

SOC.: So then it is not correct to answer thus, without qualification, that law is the official opinion of the city.

COM.: Not in my opinion, at least.

SOC.: So then it wouldn't fit harmoniously for the wicked official opinion to be law.

COM.: Certainly not.

SOC.: And yet even to me law comes to sight as being *some* opinion; but since it is not the wicked opinion, then hasn't this now become manifest, that it is the worthy—if law is indeed opinion?

COM.: Yes.

SOC.: But what is worthy opinion? Is it not true opinion?

315a COM.: Yes.

SOC.: Isn't the true, the discovery of what is?

COM.: It is indeed.

SOC.: Law, then, wishes[4] to be the discovery of what is.

COM.: How is it then, Socrates, if law is discovery of what is, that we don't at all times use the same laws in the same matters—if the things that are have indeed been discovered by us?

b SOC.: The law wishes, nonetheless, to be the discovery of what is, but the humans who, in our opinion, do not at all times use the same laws are not at all times capable of discovering what the law wishes—what is. For come, let's see if from this point onward it becomes manifest to us whether we at all times use the same laws, or different ones at different times, and whether all use the same or different peoples use different ones.

COM.: But this at least, Socrates, is not difficult to know—that the same people do not at all times use the same laws and that different peoples use different ones. Because, for example, among us it is not the law to sacrifice humans, but it is instead impious, while the
c Carthaginians do perform the sacrifice as something that is pious and legal for them, and some of them even do these things with their own sons, for the sake of Kronos[5]—as perhaps you too have heard.[6] And

---

[4] "Wishes to be" is a literal rendering of a phrase (*bouletai einai*) that usually has the colloquial meaning of "tends to be"; this helps explain the companion's response. But as Socrates makes clear in his next utterance, he means to bring to the surface the literal meaning (Aristotle sometimes does the same—see, e.g., *Politics* 1259b6 and context).

[5] Kronos was the father of Zeus and came to power by leading a revolt of his brothers and sisters ("the Titans") against his father, Ouranos. It was prophesied that he in his turn would be overthrown by a son of his own, and to forestall the prophecy he ate his own children, but his wife, Rhea, hid the baby Zeus from him, and Zeus lived to fulfill the prophecy (see Hesiod *Theogony* 131–38, 207–10, 453–506, 629–735). Diodorus Siculus (XX 14) tells how the Carthaginians sacrificed their noblest sons in honor, and in imitation, of Kronos.

[6] One of the major manuscripts reads, "as perhaps you have *not* heard."

it's not just barbarian human beings who use laws different from ours, but these people in Lycaea[7] and the descendants of Athamas[8]—what sort of sacrifices do they perform, even though they're Greeks! As to ourselves, presumably you too know, from having heard yourself, what sort of laws we used to use in regard to the dead, slaughtering the sacred victims before the carrying out of the corpse and sending for the women who collect the bones in urns; and again, the
d people who lived still earlier used to bury the dead where they were, in the house. But we do none of these things. Someone could tell of ten thousand such things; for there's plenty of room for a demonstration that neither we among ourselves nor mankind at large at all times lawfully accept the same things.

SOC.: It's no wonder, best of men, if what you say is correct, and this has escaped my notice. But so long as you tell how things seem to you by speaking in your own manner, with lengthy speech, and I in
e turn do so, we will never get together on anything, I believe. If, on the other hand, the investigation is set forth as a common one, perhaps we would come to agree. So if you wish, investigate in common with me by asking me something; or if you wish, do the answering.

COM.: But I'm willing, Socrates, to answer whatever you wish.

SOC.: Come then, which do you believe—that the just things are unjust and the unjust things just, or that the just things are just while the unjust things are unjust?

COM.: For me it is that the just things are just and the unjust things unjust.

316a SOC.: And isn't it believed in this way by everyone, as it is here?

COM.: Yes.

SOC.: And isn't it so among the Persians?

[Lacuna][9]

---

[7] Lycaea was a town in Arcadia, near a mountain that was one of the places supposed to be Zeus's birthplace. It was the site of an important sanctuary and cult founded by Lycaon. In founding the cult, Lycaon sacrificed a boy to Zeus. This offering angered Zeus, but despite the punishments he sent, the inhabitants continued the practice, and it was said that every nine years a boy was sacrificed and his flesh eaten (cf. *Republic* 565d; Pausanias VIII ii 1–2 and VI viii 2; Apollodorus III vii 1).

[8] Herodotus (VII 197) tells of human sacrifices offered by Greeks who lived in the area of the town of Alus in Achaea, in connection with a cult of the hero Athamas; Athamas was supposed to have founded Alus and, through a complicated intrigue, was deceived into attempting a human sacrifice. One of Sophocles' lost tragedies was about him (cf. Pausanias I xliv 11 and IX xxxiv 4–5; Apollodorus I vii 3 and III iv 3).

[9] The manuscripts lack any reply from the comrade: some brief reply has probably been lost, though one cannot rule out the possibility that the companion simply remained silent.

SOC.: But at all times, surely?

COM.: At all times.

SOC.: Is it believed here that the things that weigh more are heavier, and the things that weigh less lighter, or the opposite?

COM.: No—but that[10] the things that weigh more are heavier and the things that weigh less lighter.

SOC.: And isn't it so in Carthage and in Lycaea?

COM.: Yes.

b SOC.: The noble things, as is likely, are everywhere lawfully accepted as noble and the shameful things as shameful but not the shameful things as noble or the noble things as shameful.

COM.: That is so.

SOC.: And it is the case, to speak universally, that the things that are are lawfully accepted as being, not the things that are not—both by us and by all the others.

COM.: That is my opinion, at least.

SOC.: So then he who errs about what is, errs about the legal.

COM.: Thus, Socrates, as you say, the same things come to sight as c legal, both for us at all times and for the others. But when I reflect that we never stop changing the laws, this way and that, I can't be persuaded.

SOC.: Perhaps because you do not reflect that these things, being moved as draughts pieces, remain the same. But join me in observing the things in the following way: now, have you ever encountered a writing about the healing of the sick?

COM.: I indeed have.

SOC.: You know, then, to what art this writing belongs?

COM.: I do know: medicine.

SOC.: Don't you call "doctors" the men who have knowledge about these things?

COM.: So I declare.

d SOC.: Is it the case that the same things are accepted*, about the same matters, by those who have knowledge, or different things by different ones?

COM.: The same things, it seems to me at least.

SOC.: Is it the case that the same things are accepted* only by the Greeks among Greeks or also by the barbarians among themselves and among the Greeks as well—in regard to matters they may know?

[10] One of the two best manuscripts has "No—but it is believed* here that (etc.)."

COM.: Surely there is a great necessity that those who know—Greeks and barbarians as well—agree with themselves in accepting* the same things.

SOC.: You're answering nobly. And isn't this the case at all times?

COM.: Yes, at all times.

e SOC.: And don't doctors write, about healing, things that they accept* as being so?

COM.: Yes.

SOC.: Then medical, and medical laws, is what these writings of the doctors are.

COM.: Medical they indeed are.

SOC.: So then, too, agricultural writings are agricultural laws?[11]

COM.: Yes.

SOC.: Whose, then, are the writings and legal customs concerning the working of gardens?

COM.: Gardeners'.

SOC.: So then for us these are gardening laws.

COM.: Yes.

SOC.: Belonging to those who have knowledge of how to rule gardens?

COM.: Who else?

SOC.: And it is the gardeners who have knowledge.

COM.: Yes.

SOC.: And whose are the writings and legal customs concerning the preparation of cuisine?

COM.: Cooks'.

SOC.: So then these are cooking laws?

COM.: Cooking.

317a SOC.: Belonging, as is likely, to those who have knowledge of how to rule the preparation of cuisine?

COM.: Yes.

SOC.: And the cooks, as they claim, have the knowledge?

COM.: For they do have the knowledge.

SOC.: Well, and whose, indeed, are the writings and legal customs concerning the organizing of a city? Don't they then belong to those who have knowledge of how to rule a city?

COM.: In my opinion, at least.

---

[11] Two lesser manuscripts have "geometrical" (*geometrika*) instead of "agricultural" (*georgika*).

SOC.: Are they who have the knowledge any others except the statesmen and the kings?

COM.: These are indeed the ones.

SOC.: So then these things which human beings call laws are political writings—the writings of kings and good men.

b COM.: What you say is true.

SOC.: Well those, certainly, who have knowledge will not write different things at different times about the same things?

COM.: No.

SOC.: Nor will they ever, concerning the same matters, change one set of legal customs for another.

COM.: No indeed.

SOC.: So if we see certain persons doing this anywhere, will we declare the ones doing this to be those who have knowledge or those who lack knowledge?

COM.: Those who lack knowledge.

SOC.: And won't we declare that which is correct to be the legal custom for each—either medical or cooking or gardening?

c COM.: Yes.

SOC.: But that which is not correct, this we will no longer declare to be the legal custom?

COM.: No longer.

SOC.: So then it becomes lawless.

COM.: Necessarily.

SOC.: And then in the writings about the just and unjust things, and in general about ordering a city and about how a city ought to be organized, what is correct is kingly law, while what is not correct—what seems to be law to those who don't know—is not. For it is lawless.

COM.: Yes.

d SOC.: So then we were correct in agreeing that law is the discovery of what is.

COM.: So it appears.

SOC.: But further, let's look into the following aspect of it: who has knowledge of distributing[12] seeds on the earth?

---

[12] The word for "distributing" (*dianeimai*) has the same root as the word for law (*nomos*). The original meaning of this root seems to have been the idea of appointing pasture to herds, and the Greek word for "law" seems to have retained an echo of this original notion of fair or reasonable distribution. The word for "distributing" also means "pasturing," and the word for "herdsman" or "pasturer" is the same as the word for "distributor" (see Emmanuel Laroche, *Histoire de la racine NEM en Grec ancien* [Paris, 1949]).

COM.: The farmer.

SOC.: And this man distributes the suitable seeds to each part of the earth?

COM.: Yes.

SOC.: The farmer, therefore, is a good distributor of these things, and the laws and distributions of this man, to these things, are correct?

COM.: Yes.

SOC.: And who is a good distributor of notes to songs, and distributes the suitable ones, and whose are the correct laws?

e COM.: Those of the aulist and the citharist.

SOC.: The most knowledgeable about law, then, in these matters, is the one who is most knowledgeable about the aulos.

COM.: Yes.

SOC.: And who is best at distributing food to the bodies of humans? Isn't it he who distributes what is suitable?

COM.: Yes.

SOC.: So then the distributions of this man, and the laws, are the best, and whoever is most knowledgeable about the law concerning these things is also the best distributor.

COM.: Certainly.

SOC.: Who is this?

318a COM.: The trainer.

SOC.: This man is the most capable of pasturing the human herd of the body?[13]

COM.: Yes.

SOC.: And who is the most capable of pasturing a herd of sheep? What is his name?

COM.: Shepherd.

SOC.: So then the laws of the shepherd are the best for the sheep.

COM.: Yes.

SOC.: And those of the cowherd for the cattle.

COM.: Yes.

SOC.: And whose laws are best for the souls of humans? Aren't they those of the king? Declare it!

COM.: I do declare it.

b SOC.: Now you're speaking in a noble fashion. Would you then be able to say who among the ancients became a good lawgiver as regards the laws of the art of aulos playing? Perhaps you don't have it in mind, and want me to remind you?

---

[13] W. R. M. Lamb, the translator of the Loeb edition, points to this line as perhaps the strongest stylistic evidence that Plato could not have written the *Minos*. E. B. England, on the contrary, uses this line as a basis for introducing an emendation into the *Laws*: see his authoritative philological commentary, *The Laws of Plato* (Manchester, 1921) at 808d3.

COM.: By all means.

SOC.: Well, then, is Marsyas spoken of, and his boyfriend Olympos, the Phrygian?[14]

COM.: What you say is true.

SOC.: Their aulos tunes are indeed most divine, and alone move and reveal those who are in need of the gods. And now they alone still c remain, because they are divine.

COM.: These things are so.

SOC.: And who of the ancient kings is said to have become a good lawgiver, whose legal customs even now remain, as being divine?

COM.: I don't have it in mind.

SOC.: Don't you know who among the Greeks use the most ancient laws?

COM.: So then you're speaking of the Lacedaemonians and the lawgiver Lycurgus?

SOC.: But these, at any rate, are not perhaps three hundred years old, d or a little more. But where do the best of these legal customs come from? Do you know?

COM.: They claim, at any rate, from Crete.

SOC.: Then don't these latter people use the most ancient laws among the Greeks?

COM.: Yes.

SOC.: Do you know, then, who were the good kings of these people?—Minos and Rhadamanthus, the sons of Zeus and Europa:[15] these are their laws.

COM.: They claim that Rhadamanthus, at least, was a just man, Socrates, but that Minos was someone savage, harsh, and unjust.

SOC.: Best of men, you're telling an Attic myth, from tragedy!

e COM.: What? Aren't these things said about Minos?

---

[14] Marsyas was a satyr who was supposed to have invented the first music for the aulos. He challenged Apollo to a musical duel, claiming his new music was superior to Apollo's; he lost and was flayed alive for his impudence. Olympos, his lover, invented a number of songs and melodies. Both are mentioned prominently in the *Laws* (677d; cf. *Symposium* 215b, c, e; *Republic* 399e; *Euthydemus* 285d; *Ion* 533b). Phrygia was a country in Asia Minor, and the Phrygians were not Greeks.

[15] Europa was the daughter of Phoenix; Zeus fell in love with her and carried her off to Crete, where she bore him the three sons, Minos, Rhadamanthus, and Sarpedon. See *Iliad* XIV 321.

SOC.: Not, at any rate, by Homer and Hesiod, and yet they, indeed,
are more trustworthy than all the tragic poets taken together, from
whom you have heard the things you're saying.

COM.: But what, then, do these say about Minos?

SOC.: I shall certainly tell you, so that you will not also be impious, as
the many are. For there is nothing more impious than this, nothing
more to be guarded against, than to err in speech and deed regarding
the gods and, second, regarding divine human beings. Nay, it's nec-
319a essary to exert very great foresight every time you go to blame or
praise a man, so that you won't speak incorrectly. This is why it's
necessary to learn how to distinguish worthy from wicked men. For
the god is indignant[16] when someone blames a man who resembles
him or praises a man who is the opposite of him: and the former is the
good man. For you shouldn't suppose that, while stones are sacred,
and pieces of wood, and birds, and snakes, human beings are not.
Rather, of all these things,[17] the most sacred is the good human
being, while the most polluted is the wicked.

Now then, as regards Minos, this is why I'm going to explain how
b Homer and Hesiod eulogized him: in order to prevent you, a human
being sprung from a human being, from erring in speech regarding a
hero who was a son of Zeus. For Homer, in saying about Crete that
many human beings are in it, "and ninety cities," declares:

> And among them is the great city of Knossos, where Minos
> In the ninth season reigned as king, the confidant of great Zeus.[18]

c Now this is a Homeric eulogy regarding Minos, spoken with bre-
vity, the likes of which Homer has not composed for a single one of
the heroes. For that Zeus is a sophist and that the art itself is entirely
noble he makes clear in many other places and especially here. For he
says that in the ninth year Minos got together with Zeus to talk, and
visited him to get educated—as though Zeus were a sophist. Now,
that this prize, of being educated by Zeus, is not distributed by

---

[16] The word for indignation, *nemesis*, has the same root as *nomos* (see n. 12 above).

[17] One of the two best manuscripts has "of all things."

[18] *Odyssey* XIX 172–79. The speaker is the hero Odysseus, who is telling a long and convincing lie to his wife in which he claims to be the grandson of Minos. Socrates omits several lines between the beginning and the ending of the section he quotes and fails to complete Homer's sentence. The translation "in the ninth season" renders a phrase whose meaning is somewhat obscure.

d Homer to any other hero except Minos—this is amazing praise. And in the raising of the dead spirits in the *Odyssey*,[19] he has portrayed Minos, not Rhadamanthus, holding the golden scepter and judging; he hasn't portrayed Rhadamanthus judging these, and he nowhere portrayed him getting together with Zeus. It's because of these things that I assert that Minos was eulogized more than all others by Homer. For to be the child of Zeus, the only one to have been educated by Zeus, is praise that cannot be surpassed, and this is what is signified by the verse

> In the ninth season reigned as king, the confidant of great Zeus

e —that Minos was a disciple of Zeus. For "confiding" is talking, and a "confidant" is a disciple in talking, so Minos visited the cave of Zeus at intervals of nine years, on the one hand to learn things, and on the other hand, to show things—the things he had learned from Zeus in the previous nine-year period. There are some who take "confidant" to mean drinking companion and playfellow of Zeus, but one may use the following evidence to show that those who take it thus are
320a saying nothing: of the many human beings both Greek and barbarian, none refrain from drinking parties and from this play that takes place where there is wine except the Cretans, and second the Lacedaemonians who learned from the Cretans. And in Crete this is one among the laws which Minos established—not to drink together with one another to the point of drunkenness. Yet it is manifest that the things he lawfully accepted as being noble were the things he established as
b legal customs for his citizens as well. For surely Minos did not, like a paltry human, believe* some things but create others contrary to the things he believed*. Rather, this intercourse was, as I say, one that took place through talking, with a view to education in virtue, whence he established for his citizens these laws, by means of which Crete—as well as Lacedaemon—is happy for all time, ever since it began to use them, for they are divine.

c Rhadamanthus was indeed also a good man, for he had been educated by Minos. To be sure, he had been educated not in the whole of the kingly art but in the art of ministering to a king—enough to preside in the judicial courts. It was for this reason that he was said to

[19] *Odyssey* XI 568–72. Odysseus is the speaker, describing what he saw in his trip to the underworld.

be a good judge. For Minos used him as a guardian of the laws for the town and Talus[20] for the rest of Crete. For Talus made a circuit three times a year through the villages and guarded the laws in them by having the laws written down on bronze tablets—as a result of which he was called "brazen."

d Hesiod too has said things akin to these about Minos. For when mentioning his name he declares:

> Who came to be the most royal of mortal kings,
> and held sway over the most neighboring humans,
> possessing the scepter of Zeus; and by it he reigned over cities.[21]

And when he speaks of the scepter of Zeus, he means nothing other than the education which came from Zeus, by which he governed Crete.

COM.: On account of what, then, Socrates, has this report ever gotten
e spread about concerning Minos, that he was an uneducated and harsh fellow?

SOC.: On account of something that will make both you, best of men, if you are sensibly moderate, and every other man who cares for good repute, guard against ever incurring the hatred of any poetical man. For the poets wield great power over opinion, whichever sort they create among human beings, either by eulogizing or by pronouncing evil.[22] This, indeed, was where Minos erred: in warring against this city here, in which there exists much other wisdom and all sorts of poets, of tragedy especially, along with the rest of poetry.
321a Now tragedy is an ancient thing here; it did not, as they suppose, originate with Thespis or with Phrynichos, but if you're willing to reflect, you will discover that it's a very ancient discovery of this city here.[23] And the poetry that is the most pleasing to the populace and the most soul-alluring is tragedy—which, indeed, is the kind of verse

---

[20] According to the other mythic traditions that have come down to us, Talus was a bronze man given to Minos by Zeus to help guard Crete from enemies. See Apollonius of Rhodes IV 1639ff. and Apollodorus I ix 26.

[21] These verses are nowhere to be found in our texts of Hesiod; the meter of the first line is imperfect.

[22] One of the two best manuscripts has "accusing" instead of "pronouncing evil."

[23] Thespis was the traditional founder of Attic tragedy, supposedly the first poet who introduced an actor in dialogue with the reciting chorus. Phrynichos was another early contributor to the emergence of the actor; he lived in the late sixth and early fifth centuries, and only the titles of some of his plays survive.

we stretch Minos on the rack of, in retribution for his having compelled us to pay those tributes.[24] So this was where Minos erred—incurring our hatred, from whence, indeed, comes what you asked b about, his having gotten a worse reputation. For the greatest evidence of his having been good and lawful—as we said earlier, a good pasturer—is this: his laws are unchanged, since they belong to one who discovered well the truth of what is, in regard to organizing a city.

COM.: You seem to me, Socrates, to have found[25] a likely account.

SOC.: Then if I'm saying what's true, don't the Cretan citizens of Minos and Rhadamanthus seem to you to use the most ancient laws?

COM.: They do appear to.

c SOC.: So then these were the best lawgivers among the ancients, and pasturers and shepherds of men—just as Homer declared the good general to be "shepherd of peoples."[26]

COM.: By all means.

SOC.: Come then, in the name of Zeus, the god of friendship! If someone should ask us: "In the case of the good lawgiver and pasturer for the body, what are these things he distributes to the body in making it better?"—we would say, replying in a noble and brief fashion, that they are food and toils, by the former of which he makes the body itself grow and by the latter of which he exercises and makes it firm.

COM.: Correctly put, indeed.

d SOC.: If, then, after this he should ask us: "And whatever, indeed, are those things which the good lawgiver and pasturer distributes to the soul in making it better?"—by answering what, would we not be ashamed of ourselves and of our years?

COM.: This I can no longer say.

SOC.: But surely it is shameful for the soul of either of us to be manifestly ignorant of those things in it in which good and base inhere, while having investigated the things that pertain to the body and the rest!

---

[24] Minos compelled the Athenians to send seven maidens and seven youths to Crete every year, to be eaten by the Minotaur.

[25] In Greek, the word for "found" can also mean "invent." I have here adopted the reading agreed upon by six secondary manuscripts; the two best manuscripts read "uttered" (*eirēkenai*) rather than "found" (*heurēkenai*).

[26] A frequent epithet for kings and princes in Homer.