

1. Introduction

While assessing Pindar's legacy for Greek literature, W. H. Race claims that "Plato shows admiration for Pindar's works and quotes him a number of times."¹ Plato certainly does quote Pindar a number of times. Although the exact number is disputed, it is at least eleven, since Plato quotes him exactly or paraphrases and cites him this many times, mentioning his name one more time without either quoting or paraphrasing him.² This number, twelve, marks Pindar as the fifth most often cited poet in the Platonic corpus, behind Euripides, and ahead of Aeschylus.³

Whether or not Plato shows admiration for Pindar's works – or for the works of any poet – is, however, controversial. On one side of this controversy is W. J. Verdenius, who claimed generally that "Socrate ni Platon n'ont pu avoir l'intention d'emprunter à leurs citations poétiques la moindre force de démonstration."⁴ This negative claim would seem to follow from Plato's notorious discussion of art in the tenth book of the *Republic*, which banishes poets from the ideal city.⁵ After all, poets are there scorned as mere imitators of a sensible world that is itself already one remove from the true world of Forms. But Plato's attitude to poetry is considerably more complex than *Republic* 10 alone would allow. Even in the earlier books of the *Republic*, Socrates made room for τὸν τοῦ ἐπεικοῦς μιμητὴν ἄκρατον.⁶ The *Symposium*, moreover, presents Socrates as asserting that humans rise to the contemplation of an abstract Form, τὸ καλόν, by first being

¹ Race 1986, 121

² *Gorgias* 488b3 mentions Pindar's name when it recalls the earlier passage (484b1) which both mentions and quotes him.

³ Here is a list of the major poets whom Plato cites, from most frequent to least: Homer (208 times), Hesiod (40), Solon (21), Euripides (19), Pindar (12), Aeschylus (11), Tyrtaeus and Archilochus (5 each), Anacreon (4), Theognis and Sophocles (3 each), and Sappho (2).

⁴ Verdenius 1944, 144.

⁵ *Republic*, 607a-b; cf. 595a.

⁶ *Rep.* 3.397d4-5; cf. 392d5-6.

summoned by the love of sensual beauties. Poetry, then, with its imitation of sensible beauty, if not also its instantiation of this beauty, may nevertheless summon its audience to the Forms it cannot itself describe.⁷

There is therefore room in Plato's austere philosophy for the respect of poetry that his own writings so often demonstrate. In addition, Race is not alone in observing Plato's admiration of Pindar. E. des Places, in his comparative study of just these authors, has found not only respect, but even deference, in Plato's attitude to Pindar:

Platon ne se contente pas, avec lui comme avec tant d'autres, de calquer certaines expressions ou de reproduire telle locution qui avait passé en proverbe. En plusieurs endroits, il insère la citation ou la paraphrase dans la trame de son argumentation, comme il ne le fait qu'une fois pour Tyrtaée et une autre fois pour Eschyle."⁸

But this positive claim goes too far. While it is true that Plato does sometimes insert passages of Pindar into the development of his argument, passages which we will examine in due course, he does not reserve this privilege for just Pindar, Tyrtaeus, and Aeschylus. After all, immediately after Socrates uses Tyrtaeus for his argument in the *Laws*, he then cites Theognis and incorporates his lines in a similar fashion.⁹

Verdenius and des Places thus occupy extreme positions, the one underestimating the general role of poetry in Plato's thought, the other exaggerating his use of Pindar's poetry in particular. In an attempt to chart a middle course between these extremes, this paper will survey each of Plato's citations of Pindar, necessarily emphasizing those

⁷ The argument is that of W. C. Greene. 1918. "Plato's View of Poetry" *HSCP* 29: 1-75.

⁸ des Places 1947, 178. The passage of Tyrtaeus is n.9 in the *Anthologia Lyrica Graeca* of Diehl and is quoted by Plato at *Laws* 629a-b. The passage of Aeschylus is *Seven Against Thebes* 592-594 and is quoted by Plato at *Republic* 2.362a-b. Although des Places's book *Pindare e Platon* would seem by its very title to obviate a paper of the present topic, his book deals mostly with affinities of outlook between these two authors, and not so much Plato's use of Pindar. He does devote his penultimate chapter to "Pindare chez Platon: Les Citations Expresses," but this short treatment is more concerned to prove that Plato quoted Pindar often, rather than distinguishing from these frequent quotations a pattern with which to evaluate Plato's attitude to Pindar, let alone his attitude to poetry in general.

⁹ *Laws* 630a quotes Theognis, lines 77-78. See J. M. Edmonds, *Elegy and Iambus* (Loeb), vol. 1, pp. 216-401.

which do indeed play roles in the development of an argument. Of these significant citations, it will turn out, there are three distinct types. The composite picture of Pindar in Plato with which this paper concludes will thus be complex: on one hand, Plato seems to respect Pindar's poetry as an art which, after being suitably edited by a philosopher, exceeds the limits of philosophy; on the other, he also seems to scorn this same art's limitation to the sensible world and its consequent instability.

2. Proverbial Uses

Before examining Plato's significant uses of Pindar in the development of an argument, a comprehensive treatment of this subject must first present his proverbial, uses, those which do not play roles in an argument. There are at least five of these: *Rep.* 5.457b; *Euthydemus* 304b; *Phaedrus* 227b; *Phaedrus* 236d; *Meno* 76d.¹⁰

In the *Republic* passage, Socrates proposes that the female guardians of his ideal city will strip and wrestle in the gymnasium alongside the males, since they will wear virtue as their clothing. Anticipating mockery of this unusual practice, Socrates imagines someone who ἀτελή τοῦ γελοίου σοφίας δρέπων καρπὸν. We know from Stobaeus that this is a playful adaptation of Pindar's original ἀτελή σοφίας καρπὸν δρέπειν), which is now Snell fragment 209.¹¹ Knowing this original line permits us to see how cleverly Plato has used

¹⁰ des Places sees in Plato six other paraphrases of Pindar: *Protagoras* 337d1-2; *Phaedrus* 245a5-7; *Euthydemus*, 292e3; *Republic* 8.565e7 and 10.613b10; *Laws* 754e4-5 and 10.890a4-5. Although Pindar's name is not mentioned in any of these passages, there are various degrees of similarity in phrasing with Pindar's known poetry. The best example is *Laws* 10.890a4-5: "All this, my friends, is the theme of experts – as our young people regard them – who in their prose and poetry maintain that anything one can get away with by force is absolutely justified (φασκόντων εἶναι τὸ δίκαιότατον ὃ τί τις ἂν νικᾷ βιαζόμενος)." This appears distinctly to be a paraphrase of *Fr.* 69, which Plato directly quotes twice in the *Laws* and once in the *Gorgias*. Since Pindar's name is not mentioned here, however, nor is the quote exact, it is debatable whether the coincidence of phrasing is accidental or intentional. So likewise for des Places's six other paraphrases. In examining the citations of Pindar in Plato, therefore, I restrict myself to those where his name is mentioned or he is quoted exactly, or both. Fortunately, there are enough examples of this sort (11) to see a few interesting patterns. As it turns out, des Places's other debatable citations confirm these patterns, indirectly strengthening his argument for counting them among the indubitable citations.

¹¹ Stob. *ecl.* 2.1.21 (2.7 Wachsmuth-Henze).

Pindar here. For this original line was likely part of a serious reproach, resembling as it does *Olympian* 2.86-87.¹² If so, Plato inverted the joke: he himself has used a serious line humorously to anticipate the mockery of an idea which he seems to take very seriously, the gender equality of the guardians.

It is not known where in its original poem the line of fragment 209 fell. With all of the other proverbial uses, however, it is a matter of opening lines. In the *Euthydemus* (304b), for instance, Socrates is advising Euthydemus to be more jealous of his argumentative talents, exercising them in private but not so often in public for no fee. Otherwise, Socrates says, the audience will master his techniques and give him no credit. “For it is the rare thing,” he adds, “which is precious.”¹³ To bolster this advice he adapts the first half of the first line of Pindar’s first *Olympian* (ἄριστον μὲν ὕδωρ), which becomes now τὸ δὲ ὕδωρ εὐωνότατον, ἄριστον ὄν, ὡς ἔφη Πίνδαρος. There is nothing more in this quotation of Pindar than there would be of Shakespeare in a lover’s eager expectation of a tryst as “a consummation devoutly to be wished.”

The same is true of the two passages from the *Phaedrus*. In the first, 227b, at the opening of the dialogue, Socrates meets Phaedrus and flirtatiously asks him what he is doing. Phaedrus has been listening to Lysias all morning and seeks some repose outside the city walls. “You’ll hear about it,” he says, “if you are free to come along and listen.” Socrates replies that he considers the opportunity κατὰ Πίνδαρον καὶ ἀσχολίας ὑπέρτερον πρᾶγμα, echoing, with some changes, the beginning of *Isthmian* 1:

Μᾶτερ ἐμὰ, τὸ τέον, χρύσασπι Θήβα,
 πρᾶγμα καὶ ἀσχολίας ὑπέρτερον
 δήσομαι.

¹² σοφὸς ὁ πολλὰ εἰδὼς φυᾶ· / μαθόντες δὲ λάβροι / παγγλωσσίᾳ ὡς ἄκραντα γαρεύετον

¹³ All quotations of translated Plato are from the translations of Cooper 1997.

But Socrates means nothing more by the quotation than that he feels compelled to join Phaedrus, just as Pindar affects to feel compelled to turn his poetic attention from Delos to Thebes. Whereas Pindar's compulsion -- or, more precisely, his rhetorical posture of compulsion -- arises from his filial piety to Thebes, his hometown, Socrates' compulsion seems to arise from his customary blend of dialectical and erotic interest. If the quotation has any deeper significance, then, it is in this analogy of compulsion.

The second quotation of Pindar from the *Phaedrus*, at 236d, is the most proverbial of all. Phaedrus is trying to squeeze a speech out of Socrates, who coyly refuses. Phaedrus reminds him that they are alone in a deserted place, and that he, Phaedrus, is the younger and stronger of the two. From these obvious facts, Phaedrus urges him with the portentous opening words (*ξύνες ὃ σοι λέγω*) of fragment 105, which we learn from a scholion on *Pythian 2* (69) to have been the opening of a hyporchema sent *gratis* to Hieron along with that notoriously obscure poem:

*Σύνες ὃ τοι λέγω,
ζαθέων ἱερῶν ἐπώνυμε
πάτερ, κτίστορ Αἴτνας*¹⁴

In short, Phaedrus playfully threatens Socrates and compels him to speak. Several of these proverbial uses therefore have playful connotations.

The most playful of them all is another quotation of this same fragment in the *Meno* (76d). Socrates is there taking Meno through the rudiments of definition, teaching him, for example, that the *definiens* should elicit necessary conditions of the *definitum*. This rudimentary discussion is only a preliminary to the definition of virtue, the object of their original discussion; but before trying to define it, Socrates has Meno practice his new logical skills on the prosaic *definita* of shape and color. Socrates thus defines shape

¹⁴ This fragment is known in full from a scholion on *Nemean 7.1*. The *ἱερῶν* of the second line is a play upon Hieron's name, *Ἱέρων*.

as “that which alone of existing things always follows color.” (75b) Meno is unimpressed. When Socrates wonders what it is about the definition that fails to impress him, Meno does not object that it has failed to state a necessary condition. Instead, he protests captiously that it is no help to someone who does not know what color is, since it would define shape in terms which he could not understand.

As true as this may be, however, it soon becomes clear that this is not Meno’s real objection. Socrates plays along with Meno’s conceit and defines color for him. Instead of the straightforward but humble style of definition he chose for shape, though, this time he chooses a newfangled definition:

Socrates: Do you want me to answer after the manner of Gorgias, which you would most easily follow?

Meno: Of course I want that.

Socrates: Do you say that there are effluvia of things, as Empedocles does?

Meno: Certainly.

Socrates: And that there are channels through which effluvia make their way?

Meno: Definitely.

Socrates: And some effluvia fit some of the channels, while others are too small or too big?

Meno: That is so.

Socrates: And there is something which you call sight?

Meno: There is.

Socrates: From this *ξύνες ὅ τοι λέγω* as Pindar said; for color is an effluvia from shapes which fits the sight and is perceived.

Meno: That seems to me to be an excellent answer, Socrates.

Meno rejected the ‘obscurantism’ of a definition of shape in the everyday term of color; by contrast, he rejoices in a definition of color in the genuinely obscure terms of effluvia and channels. The difference is obvious. Although the second definition fails in precisely the way Meno complained of the first, the second is couched in the fashionable jargon of the Sophists and the pre-Socratic philosophers. It is just pretentious enough, therefore, to dazzle a mind like Meno’s. It would be easy to see Pindar’s name as just another flashy

lure alongside the names of Gorgias and Empedocles, and this is possibly how Plato intended it. But he may instead have chosen this proverbial expression ironically, and thus even more playfully. “Understand what I mean,” he adds, while elaborating an essentially meaningless definition.

There is only one more proverbial use of Pindar in the Platonic corpus, and this occurs at *Theaetetus* 173e. Socrates and Theaetetus are comparing the philosopher – favorably, as always – with the dramatic poets. The philosopher, they agree, is superior because he is his own master, rather than serving an audience like the poets. Indeed, he is independent of all the distractions and compromises of political life as well.. “It is in reality,” says Socrates, “only his body that lives and sleeps in the city.” His mind, however, spurns all earthly concerns and instead flies throughout the universe, *κατὰ Πίνδαρον τᾶ<ς> τε γᾶς ὑπένεραθε . . . οὐρανοῦ τε ὑπερ*. This citation is the only source for this fragment, which becomes Snell *Fr.* 292. As a result, it is difficult to know, for example, whether the original Pindaric line referred to *ἡ διάνοια* or to something altogether unrelated. Consequently, it is impossible to know what deeper use Plato is making of it. To be sure, though, Pindar did not follow it with the gloss that Plato, ever the lover of mathematics, has Socrates add: “geometrizing upon the earth, measuring its surfaces, astronomizing in the heavens.”

3. Discursive Uses

This section discusses Plato’s six uses of Pindar that regard his poetry as something to be examined seriously rather than played with ironically. This is not to say that those other, proverbial, uses were insignificant, but only that they added flair to a discussion rather than premises to an argument. The uses of Pindar adduced below fall into the three types, according to their subject matter: theology, eschatology, and morality.

3.1 Theology

Of the first type, there is only one citation: *Republic* 3.408b. It is in this third book of the *Republic* that Socrates examines the poets and notoriously bowdlerizes some of their most interesting and moving passages. Among them is Pindar's discussion of Asclepius in *Pythian* 3 (55-58). In this poem as it has come down to us, Asclepius earns a lightning-bolt from Zeus for having accepted a bribe and having brought back to life a dead man. In a version which Plato either knew or, more likely, mistook, "Asclepius . . . was bribed with gold to heal a rich man, *who was already dying*, and he was killed by lightning for doing so."¹⁵ Plato attributes this version to "Pindar and the tragedians," but eschews it because it depicts the son of a god with a base motive, greed. The gods in Plato's ideal city, as well as their offspring it would seem, will be spoken of only with reverence. "We'll say," he adds, "that if Asclepius was the son of a god he was not a money-grubber, and that if he was a money-grubber, he was not the son of a god."

This citation of Pindar is instructive for at least two reasons. First of all, it shows Plato apparently distorting Pindar's poetry, something he may be doing in the *Gorgias* with more malice aforethought, as we shall see later. But secondly, it contradicts any expectation that Plato saw Pindar as the good poet, a composer of τὸν τοῦ ἐπεικοῦς μιμητὴν ἄκρατον. His work is as badly in need of censorship as that of the tragedians. The irony of Plato's censorious assessment, however, is that Pindar censored himself from speaking ill of the gods: ἔστι δ' ἀνδρὶ φάμεν εἰοικὸς ἀμφὶ δαιμόνων καλὰ· μείων γάρ αἰτία (*Olympian* 1.35). After all, rather than recount the impious version of the Pelops story transmitted by his predecessors – impious because it depicts gluttonous gods – Pindar chooses instead to purify it, making Pelops an object of Zeus' love and Tantalos an ambitious mortal who distributes his immortal gifts of nectar ambrosia too widely (*O*

¹⁵ Italics mine. The myth was also recorded in Aeschylus' *Agamemnon* (1022) and Euripides' *Alcestis* (3), although there is no warrant in either work for the alternative Plato introduces.

1.52-58). Des Places argues that this effort to purify the Olympian religion, while preserving its basic tenets, was one of the deepest affinities between Plato and Pindar.¹⁶ He is right, but the affinity seems to have escaped Plato.

3.2 Eschatology

On the other hand, Plato did not overlook his eschatological affinity with Pindar. Indeed, M. M. Willcock has argued that Plato inherited his eschatology, particularly his doctrine of metempsychosis, directly from Pindar, who in turn inherited it from the Pythagoreans and Orphics of Southern Italy.¹⁷ An alternate line of succession would run through Empedocles of Akragas, who was about twenty in 476 when Pindar wrote *Olympian 2*, which contains his most explicitly eschatological passage (51-83), for Theron of Akragas.¹⁸ Someone as widely read as Plato no doubt inherited the doctrine from both, as well as from his own travels to the region, if not from other sources now unknown.¹⁹ At any rate, Plato cites Pindar twice on the after-life. Both are substantial quotations for which Plato is our only source.

The most famous of the two has become Snell *Fr.* 133. In its context (*Meno* 81b), Socrates is beginning to solve the so-called “Meno-paradox”: that one cannot learn anything, since learning is a kind of seeking, and if one knows what one is seeking then one has already found the object of knowledge and cannot look for it, whereas if one does not know what one is seeking one cannot even begin to look for it. Socrates’ proposed solution, the doctrine of recollection, argues that we already know what we seek, we need only remember it. This forgotten knowledge was acquired in a past life, since the soul is immortal and has already glimpsed the Forms that are the genuine objects of knowledge.

¹⁶ Des Places 1949, 181-185.

¹⁷ Willcock 1995, 137-140.

¹⁸ Burnett 1920 notices verbal coincidences between Empedocles and the “Orphicising Odes” of Pindar that are addressed to Theron (198-200).

¹⁹ According to Herodotus (2.123), the Egyptians were the first to believe in metempsychosis.

To illustrate this belief in a past life, Socrates cites Pindar, saying first that the soul dies and is reborn, “but it is never destroyed, and one must therefore live one’s life as piously as possible”:

οἷσι δὲ Φερσεφόνα ποινὰν παλαιοῦ πένθεος
δέξεται, ἐς τὸν ὑπερθεὺν ἄλιον κείνων ἐνάτω ἔτει
ἀνδιδοῖ ψυχὰς πάλιν, ἐκ τᾶν βασιλῆες ἀγαυοί
καὶ σθένει κραιπνοὶ σοφία τε μέγιστοι
ἄνδρες αὖξοντ’· ἐς δὲ τὸν λοιπὸν χρόνον ἥροες ἀγνοὶ πρὸς ἀνθρώπων καλέονται.

It is impossible to cull a consistent eschatology from Pindar’s Odes, as Bowra has observed.²⁰ Often he assumes a more traditionally Homeric worldview, according to which the hope of immortality rests with the fame propagated by ancestors and poets.²¹ And yet the above passage finds company in several of the other *Threnoi*, as well as *Olympian 2*, from which Bowra distinguishes three eschatological beliefs. First, “after death there is a judgment in which some spirits are rewarded and others are punished.”²² Second, “the good are rewarded and the evil are punished.”²³ And third, “the belief in an after-life may be connected with reincarnation.”²⁴ This last belief alone of the three is unprecedented in Greek literature.

Plato adopted all three, with some adaptations. For instance, whereas *Fr.* 133 says that Persephone returns souls to life on earth after nine years in the world below, Plato puts the sojourn in the underworld at one thousand years. Or again, in *Olympian 2* (68-83) Pindar describes the rewards meted by Rhadamanthys to those who have lived blamelessly three times in both realms – above and below – as an everlasting vacation on the Isle of the Blessed. Plato adopts this very image in the *Gorgias* (523e – 524a), but he

²⁰ Bowra 1920: 90-95.

²¹ cf. *Fr.* 94; *Nemean* 11.15-16.

²² Bowra 1920: 90; cf. *Fr.* 131, *O.* 2.59; precedents in Greek poetry are found in Aeschylus (*Supp.* 230; *Eum.* 273 ff.; *P. Oxy.* 2256 fr. 9a, 17-19) and references to Pythagoras (*Iambl. Vit. Pyth.* 155, 179; cf. *Diog. Laert.* 8.35).

²³ Bowra 1920: 90; cf. *O.* 2.61-67; precedents are found in Hesiod (*Op.* 170-173), the Homeric Hymn to Demeter (480-482), and Democritus (frs. 199, 297 DK).

²⁴ Bowra 1920: 90.

reserves its element of reincarnation for his three other eschatological myths: *Republic* 614b, *Phaedo* 70c, and *Phaedrus* 248e – 249c. But it is only in the last of these, the *Phaedrus*, that he incorporates the notion of three trips to this world, making the man who has lived three philosophical lives sprout wings at the end of the third and leave this tedious cycle of mortality.

Read in the light of these Platonic appropriations of Pindar’s eschatology, the other passage of his poetry that Plato’s cites which alludes to the after-life (*Fr.* 214) carries more significance than at first it might seem to bear. In the first book of the *Republic* (331a), Cephalus is describing his devotion to justice in instrumental terms, arguing that his fidelity in financial matters in this life will guarantee him a better judgment in the after-life – “as Pindar says, for he puts it charmingly, Socrates, when he says that when someone lives a just and pious life” . . .

γλυκεῖά οἱ καρδίαν
ἀτάλλοισα γηροτρόφος συναορεῖ
Ἐλπίς, ἃ μάλιστα θνατῶν πολύστροφον γνώμαν κυβερνᾷ

Cephalus will soon exit the stage of the dialogue in order to attend to a sacrifice, nursing the very hope of which he speaks here. And although his over-estimation of the value of wealth will be rejected later as a symptom of an inferior type of soul, his belief in an after-life where justice – however conceived – is rewarded will be revived as the Myth of Er and close the dialogue itself. Despite his bowdlerization of Pindar’s reference to the son of a god, therefore, even in the *Republic* Plato preserves an admiration for Pindar’s general religious vision. Philosophical argument cannot pierce the veil that shrouds the next life, and Plato seems acutely aware of this fact. When philosophy meets its limits, then, he turns to poetry, and especially the poetry of Pindar.

3.3 Morality

Plato's admiration of Pindar ceases, though, whenever he stops thinking of the effect of morality upon the after-life and turns instead to the substance of morality in this life. In this connection there are four quotations of Pindar, although three of them cite the same fragment, Snell 169. *Republic* 2.365b alone quotes *Fr.* 213, which we also know from Maximus of Tyre's *Philosophical Lectures*. He introduces his quotation of the fragment with this amusing preface, "Do you, O Pindar, dispute with yourself over deception and justice, comparing gold to bronze?"

πότερον δίκᾳ τεῖχος ὕψιον
ἢ σκολιαῖς ἀπάταις ἀναβαίνει
ἐπιχθόνιον γένος ἀνδρῶν,
δίκᾳ μοι νόος ἀτρέκειαν εἰπέῃ

Adeimantus, Plato's brother, introduces part of this fragment while illustrating the deliberation of a young man who wavers between the life of justice and the life of injustice, weighing the costs and benefits of each. "He would surely ask Pindar's question," adds Adeimantus, *Πότερον δίκᾳ τεῖχος ὕψιον ἢ σκολιαῖς ἀπάταις ἀναβάς*. Taken from its context like this, a context no longer extant, Pindar's lines can be used to express an indifferent consideration of life's two paths, the very indifference Adeimantus wishes to evoke. But acquaintance with the grave moral concerns and the reverence before Olympian deities evident in Pindar's his extant poems should leave no doubt as to the path he himself recommended. As we have seen Plato mistaking Pindar before (in his innocuous change of the Asclepius myth), so now we see him probably distorting the intent of one of Pindar's rhetorical questions. Both of these distortions lend credence to the hypothesis that Plato has distorted Pindar in the most famous and controversial of all his citations of him, *Gorgias* 484b.

In this dialogue, Socrates clashes with a series of Sophists over the value of rhetoric and justice. He makes quick work of Gorgias, who withers like Cephalus in the presence of the Socratic *ἔλεγχος*. Next comes Polus, who does not fare much better. Last of all comes Callicles, who is among the most vivid characters in the Platonic corpus. Differing in a few subtle ways from Thrasymachus, of *Republic* 1, he too criticizes conventional justice, since it is a tool of the weak for suppressing the strong, who might otherwise rise to mastery. He champions instead a natural justice, according to which might makes right. The doctrine is familiar enough from Thucydides and the extant writings of Sophists like Antiphon.²⁵ In the midst of expounding it, however, Callicles cites Pindar as an advocate of his position:

*νόμος ὁ πάντων βασιλεύς
θνατῶν τε καὶ ἀθανάτων·*

At this point he interrupts his delivery to add *οὕτως δὲ δή, φησὶν*, and then continues . . .

*ἄγει βιαίῳν τὸ δικαιότατον
ὑπερτάτῃ χειρὶ· τεκμαίρομαι
ἔργοισιν Ἡρακλέος, ἐπεὶ ἀπριάτας --*

Here he breaks off, claiming that does not know the poem well. Nevertheless, he accurately paraphrases a portion of it that has recently become available again from the *Oxyrhynchus Papyrus* 2450 fr. 1 (26, 1961). In short, as Callicles tells it, Heracles steals Geryon's cattle *ὡς τούτου ὄντος τοῦ δικαίου φύσει*. Moreover, as Callicles elaborates this natural justification, Heracles is in the right because, “cattle and all other possessions of those who are worse and inferior belong to the one who's better and superior.”

²⁵ Thucydides, e.g., the Melian Dialogue (5.85-113); Antiphon, e.g., “the demands of the laws are artificial, but the demands of nature are necessary” (Col. 1 (1-33H)).

This citation has puzzled commentators since antiquity, for three reasons. First of all, each of the extant manuscripts of the *Gorgias* reads *βιαίων τὸ δικαιοτάτον* in the third line of the fragment, which most commentators and textual critics have emended to *δικαιῶν τὸ βιαιοτάτον*.²⁶ Secondly, Callicles' explanation of Heracles' justification mentions *φύσει*, whereas nature is mentioned by neither the citation of Plato nor the fuller fragment supplied by *P. Oxy.* 2450. And finally, it is by no means clear what Pindar means by *νόμος* in this fragment. No decisive answers are available to these knotty questions. For some of them, however, provisional answers are available that necessarily draw upon wider concerns of both Pindar and Plato. Attempts to provide such answers, tenuous as they must be, therefore make a fitting conclusion to this study of Pindar in Plato.

3.3.1 *BIAIΩN TO DIKAIOTATON* or *DIKAIΩN TO BIAIOTATON*

Beginning with the first knotty question of *Gorgias* 484b, everyone agrees that there is at least a mistake in the acute accent that has been placed over the second iota of *βιαίων*. In the very least, the manuscripts should be emended to *βιαιῶν τὸ δικαιοτάτον*. For this is what the 4th century A. D. commentator Libanius found even in his manuscripts.²⁷ He thought, however, that this text had been corrupted by Polycrates, a contemporary of Plato who wrote an accusation against the memory of Socrates. According to Libanius, Polycrates tried to free Pindar from the impious claim that extreme violence could be justified (the presumed meaning of *δικαιῶν τὸ βιαιοτάτον*). From this speculation seven centuries after the fact, Wilamovitz added his own sixteen centuries later: it was not Polycrates who changed the Pindar fragment but rather his rival, Plato.

²⁶ As we shall see, there are several reasons for doing so. Most salient of them all is that Pindar himself wrote *δικαιῶν τὸ βιαιοτάτον*, which we know from two scholia: one on Aelius Aristides' *On Rhetoric* (Dindorf 3.408.20-21), and another on *Nemean* 9.35.

²⁷ *Apol. Socr.* 87. Libanius paraphrases *βιαιῶν τὸ δικαιοτάτον* as *βιάζεται τὸ δικαιοτάτον*.

The best evidence for this speculation comes at *Laws* 890a4, where Plato has the Athenian mention writers of prose and poetry who claim that there is nothing just according to nature, *φασκόντων εἶναι τὸ δικαιοτάτον ὅ τί τις ἄν νικᾷ βιάζόμενος*. Plato does not mention Pindar by name, but the words in bold do seem to echo the wording of the fragment preserved by the extant *Gorgias* manuscripts (i.e., *βιαιῶν τὸ δικαιοτάτον*). For one of them is the nominal form *τὸ δικαιοτάτον* and another is a participial form of *βιάζω*. Although *βιάζω* is not exactly the verb of *Gorgias* 484b, *βιαιῶω*, nevertheless it seems close enough to it to pass as a paraphrase by Plato. After all, we have twice already seen Plato paraphrasing loosely.²⁸ This parallel, combined with his fanciful speculation, was sufficient to convince Wilamowitz to defend the unanimous manuscripts as authentic preservations of Plato's, though not Pindar's, original text. A. E. Taylor joined him,²⁹ adding that the character of Callicles would very likely have misquoted the poem since he himself admitted *τὸ γὰρ ἕσμα οὐκ ἐπίσταμαι* (484b10). According to both, therefore, Plato intentionally misquoted Pindar. Few, however, have followed them.

Many have balked at *βιαιῶν* (whose first principal part would be *βιαιῶω*), since it is a *hapax legomenon*. In addition, E. R. Dodds (1959) later made three apparently decisive arguments against these defenses of the manuscripts. First of all, he argues that Plato could hardly have considered *βιαιῶν* Pindaric Greek. Secondly, Socrates does not explicitly notice any misquotation by Callicles, even though he himself seems to return to the opposite reading of *Fr.* 169 shortly afterwards.³⁰ And finally, *Laws* 4.715a1 again quotes the same passage, but with the participle and the noun reversed from the

²⁸ *Fr.* 213 at *Rep.* 2.365b and *Pyth.* 3.55-58 at *Rep.* 3.408b. Nor should it be forgotten that Libanius also paraphrased the *βιαιῶν τὸ δικαιοτάτον* that he found in his manuscript as *βιάζεται τὸ δικαιοτάτον* (*Apol. Socr.* 87).

²⁹ Taylor 1929: 117-118, n.2.

³⁰ Socrates asks Callicles at *Gorgias* 488b1: *πῶς φῆς τὸ δίκαιον ἔχειν καὶ σὺ καὶ Πίνδαρος τὸ κατὰ φύσιν*; Dodds thinks (271b) that this question implies that Pindar's poem said something about justice, which is true of the version in which justice is the participle ("justifying the most violent") but not of the version in which it is the noun ("doing violence to the most just"). I am not myself convinced, since the nominal version also has says something about justice – viz., that it suffered violence at the hands of Heracles. But perhaps Dodds is right if he believes that the participial version says more about the *activity* of justice. Unfortunately, he is too brief make the exact nature of his argument clear.

manuscript version: ἔφαμεν που κατὰ φύσιν τὸν νόμον ἄγειν δικαιοῦντα τὸ βιαιότατον, ὡς φάναι <Πίνδαρον>. Dodds called the reversal of the meaning of the participle and the noun a ‘spoonerism’ (“where two successive words begin with the same sequence of vowel-sounds”) and attributed it to a scribe between the time of Aristides and Libanius.³¹

Despite appearances, however, none of Dodds’s arguments is decisive; in fact, each is consistent with the most recent defense of the manuscripts offered by D. Grote.³² Grote argues, with Wilamovitz and Taylor, that Plato intentionally misquoted Pindar – or rather, more precisely, that Plato intentionally had Callicles unintentionally misquote Pindar. To begin with, there is certainly more to Plato’s presentation of Callicles than meets the eye. For example, while leading up to his (mis)quotation of Pindar, Callicles mentions two historical precedents of men who recognized that might makes right: Xerxes when he invaded Greece, and his father Darius when he invaded Scythia (483d-e). But these expeditions were disastrous for both father and son. Callicles’ choice of examples thereby spoils the appeal of the philosophy he advocates.

Moreover, shortly after he has (mis)quoted Pindar, Callicles says that he feels toward Socrates the same way Zethus felt towards his brother Amphion. These were characters in Euripides’ *Antiope*, and although the text has been lost, enough is known of its plot to reveal another irony of Callicles’ speech.³³ Zethus stood for the active life, Amphion for the contemplative, and they clashed in a famous ἄγων which Zethus won. By the end of the play, however, it is Amphion who is ultimately victorious, when Hermes vindicates him with an appearance *ex machina*. Again, therefore, Callicles’ choice of analogy undermines his own position in his rivalry with Socrates.

His speech is certainly energetic and captivating, but it is also off-the-cuff, and he loses control of it whenever he reaches for examples, analogies, or quotations. At the very least, he must interrupt his delivery of Pindar’s poem twice, once to catch his breath,

³¹ Dodds 1959: 272.

³² Grote 1994.

³³ Nightingale 1992.

and a second time to revert to paraphrase. It would thus be consistent with his flawed performance to misquote the original text. Plato might therefore have been aware, as Dodds argued, that *βραιῶν* was not Pindaric Greek; indeed, this very awareness might have been his reason for inserting the mistake into Callicles' mouth. Neither would it be an objection that Socrates does not explicitly notice the misquotation, as Dodds observed. For if Callicles' verbal blunder had been as obvious to Plato's audience as the other historical and literary blunders must have been, there would have been no need to do so. Finally, *contra* Dodds, it would be no objection that Plato elsewhere quotes the same Pindaric lines correctly, since it is crucial in this instance that it is *Callicles* who misquotes them. As Grote argues, Plato may be thereby not only ridiculing Sophistic arguments by his presentation of them, and thus subtly defending Socrates from the charge levelled against him in the *Apology* (23e4-5) that he abused the poets – by making his opponents do this instead.

So far Grote is right. But he goes too far when he claims that it would have been characteristic of a Sophist of Callicles' intensity to have misquoted Pindar in precisely the way that the manuscripts report.³⁴ The might-makes-right philosophy that obsesses Callicles, Grote concludes, would have lead him unintentionally to attribute to an authority such as Pindar the view that “*Nomos* [that is, the *nomos* of nature, not the conventional *nomos* of mankind] makes justice violent.”³⁵ This thought, however, is no more, and no less, consonant with the might-makes-right philosophy than a paraphrase of the emended reading: “[natural] *Nomos* justifies the most extreme violence.” The two paraphrases are equally consonant with Callicles' philosophy, that is to say, so long as the

³⁴ A connected exaggeration is his claim that Callicles is so obsessed by the distinction between *νόμος* and *φύσις* that “he gets off to a bad start by falsely accusing Socrates of having refuted Gorgias and Polus with a deliberate equivocation on the meaning of *δικη* – sometimes meaning *κατὰ νόμον* and at other times *κατὰ φύσιν* (482e3 – 483a7).” (26) But this *is* how Socrates refutes both Gorgias and Polus, by appealing to their sense of shame, which is to say their persistent respect for *νόμος*, and yet simultaneously presuming that he is speaking of something more in his arguments than mere *νόμος*, namely *φύσις*.

³⁵ Grote's paraphrase ignores the superlative *τὸ δικαιότατον*. A better paraphrase that took this into account would read: “*Nomos* makes the most extreme justice violent.”

justification mentioned is natural. But neither does so unless the *nomos* mentioned is indeed the *nomos* of nature, a condition Callicles takes for granted in his paraphrase (ὡς τούτου ὄντος τοῦ δικαίου φύσει), even though neither the Pindar he quotes nor the Pindar we have from *P. Oxy.* 2450 speaks of nature, natural justification, or natural *nomos*.

3.3.2 ΚΑΤΑ ΦΥΣΙΝ

his is the second knotty problem with *Gorgias* 484b. Why does Callicles feel entitled to read a reference to nature into *Fr.* 169? Making matters more complicated still, why does Plato interpolate a reference to nature into his other citations of the fragment, even as far afield as the *Laws*? For we have already seen *Laws* 4.715a1 with this same interpolation:

ἔφαμεν που κατὰ φύσιν τὸν νόμον ἄγειν δικαιούντα τὸ βιαιότατον, ὡς φάναι <Πίνδαρον>.

Indeed, it occurs at *Gorgias* 488b, although this is more understandable, since Socrates is there recalling Callicles' earlier quotation: πῶς φησὶ τὸ δίκαιον ἔχειν καὶ σὺ καὶ Πίνδαρος τὸ κατὰ φύσιν; But it also occurs again, at least two times, in the *Laws*. At 3.690b8, for

instance, the Athenian is describing six rights of political rule, of which the fifth – τὸν

κρείττονα μὲν ἄρχειν, τὸν ἥττω δὲ ἄρχεσθαι – cites Pindar *Fr.* 169: καὶ πλείστην γε ἐν

ξύμπασι τοῖς ζώοις οὔσαν καὶ κατὰ φύσιν, ὡς ὁ Θηβαῖος ἔφη ποτὲ Πίνδαρος. Additionally, this

citation is immediately followed by another (at 3.690c1) which enumerates a sixth right

of political rule, that of the wise over the foolish, which the Athenian asserts to be, *pace*

Pindar, κατὰ φύσιν, and thus rule over willing subjects rather than by force. The

implication here is that Pindar believed in a rule of force that was nonetheless κατὰ

φύσιν.³⁶

³⁶ At *Laws* 10.890a as well there is a debatable citation – debatable because it does not mention Pindar's name, but only certain writers of prose and poetry – which blames these writers for the impiety of the youth because they have persuaded them of a might-makes-right philosophy, by ἐλκόντων πρὸς τὸν κατὰ ὁρδὸν βίον, ὅς ἐστι τῆ ἀληθείᾳ κρατοῦντα ζῆν τῶν ἄλλων καὶ μὴ δουλεύοντα ἐτέροισι κατὰ νόμον.

In all of Plato's paraphrases of *Fr.* 169, then – whether spoken by Callicles or by the more 'Platonist' characters of Socrates and the Athenian – Plato includes the qualification *κατὰ φύσιν* which does not occur in either *Gorgias* 484b, the scholion to Aristides, or *P. Oxy.* 2450. There are two possible solutions to this problem, each of which introduces its own new problem. For either the original Pindar text did mention nature or it did not: if it did, one must explain why this mention dropped out of the fuller versions; if it did not mention nature, alternatively, one must explain why Plato (or perhaps just Plato's characters) so often assumed that it did.

E. B. England advocates the first answer, calling to witness Hesychius (5th century A. D.), who has *Νόμος πάντων ὁ βασιλεὺς κατὰ τὴν φύσιν*.³⁷ England explains the disappearance of *κατὰ τὴν φύσιν* upon textual grounds. Agreeing with Boeckh, he supposes that *φύσιν* would naturally have dropped out after the *φήσιν* with which Callicles first interrupts his quotation at 484b. But there are two problems with this supposition. Primarily, it does not explain the disappearance of *κατὰ τὴν*. Nor does it seem likely, as de Geer and Ast thought, that an expression so prosaic as *κατὰ τὴν φύσιν* would have appeared in so lofty a proem as the beginning of *Fr.* 169. To answer the second objection, both de Geer and Ast proposed *φύσει* instead of *κατὰ τὴν φύσιν*. It is not unlikely, after all, that Pindar would have attributed such power to nature, since he elsewhere ascribes much power to nature, and, further, does so with datives: *O.* 2.86 *σοφὸς ὁ πολλὰ εἰδὼς φυῶ*, and *O.* 9.100 *τὸ δὲ φυῶ κράτιστον ἅπαν*.³⁸ But even if this answers the objection that *κατὰ τὴν φύσιν* would be too prosaic, it does so at the expense of weakening the explanation of its disappearance from the text, since *φύσει* does not so closely resemble *φήσιν* as does *φύσιν*.

³⁷ England 1921: v.1, 381. England does not notice that Hesychius has *κατὰ τὴν φύσιν*, whereas Plato mentions *κατὰ φύσιν*. So small a detail as a definite article would not merit notice were the question at hand not a matter of the precise accuracy of paraphrases. Ostwald 1969: 109 notes that Hesychius' lexicon contains twenty-two references to the passage, "and the manner in which many of these are made suggests that the beginning of the poem may have become proverbial soon after Pindar wrote it and remained so throughout antiquity."

³⁸ *O.* 2.86 *σοφὸς ὁ πολλὰ εἰδὼς φυῶ* *O.* 9.100 *τὸ δὲ φυῶ κράτιστον ἅπαν*

By default, more plausible is the second approach to this problem, the approach which denies that the original Pindar poem mentioned nature. The burden of this approach is that it must explain why Plato (or perhaps just Plato's characters) so often assumed that it did. Grote supplies a modern example that helps explain this phenomenon:

Arguing that American foreign policy should limit its intervention only to regions where its vital interests are at stake, one participant paraphrased an idea in John Kennedy's inaugural address to the effect that America will protect its interests anywhere in the world. But that is not what Kennedy said. He said that we will protect the interests of *freedom* anywhere in the world, an entirely different policy altogether. I do not think that Kennedy was being deliberately misrepresented, but the speaker remembered Kennedy saying what he wanted and needed him to say.³⁹

In the same way that Kennedy could become known in our own time as an advocate of *Realpolitik*, were this mistake propagated widely enough, Pindar could have become known in the second half of the fifth-century, and even into the early fourth, as an advocate of natural justice, the might-makes-right philosophy of which Callicles is such a colorful, if also flawed spokesman – all through a misreading of his one poem, the one we know now as *Fr.* 169.

For we read *Fr.* 169 twenty-five centuries later and wonder how Callicles could have misunderstood it so badly. Whatever νόμος means in this poem – and it is the third problem of *Gorgias* 484b to say what it does mean – it is universally agreed that it cannot mean ὁ τῆς φύσεως νόμος which Callicles thinks it means.⁴⁰ To have qualified νόμος with either φύσει or κατὰ τὴν φύσιν would have made Pindar, spokesman *par excellence* in his other poems of the archaic worldview,⁴¹ anticipate by half a century or more the boldest of Sophistic doctrines. How could someone like Callicles have made such a mistake?

³⁹ Grote 1994: 30.

⁴⁰ *Gorgias*, 483e.

⁴¹ Cf. *Pythian* 1: e.g., 40-43, 60-65

Quite simply, intellectuals of his generation were embroiled in the νόμος-φύσις controversy, and controversies are like that: when they are most intense, their participants draw unrelated material into the service of one side or the other.

In this way, for example, during the Second World War Karl Popper drew Plato's *Republic* into the struggle between the democratic and totalitarian systems of government and made of Plato just one more enemy, alongside Stalin, of the "Open Society". Not surprisingly, his interpretation of the great dialogue now appears anachronistic, overlooking subtleties that do not fit his polarized reading of political philosophy. Similarly, Sophists who were more eager to draw poetic prestige upon their shocking doctrine of ὁ τῆς φύσεως νόμος than they were concerned to maintain hermeneutic fidelity, seem to have misread Pindar's *Fr.* 169. Whether Plato himself misread Pindar in the same way, or whether he merely presents characters who do, cannot be determined; fortunately, it need not be determined in order to answer the question at hand. What can be said, however, is that the occurrence of φύσει or κατὰ τὴν φύσιν in Plato's paraphrases of Pindar *Fr.* 169 may say nothing about Pindar's original text, but everything about how this text was read by opponents in the νόμος-φύσις controversy of his lifetime.

3.3.3 ΝΟΜΟΣ ΒΑΣΙΛΕΥΣ

The meaning of the particular νόμος that begins *Fr.* 169 was as hotly debated before the discovery of *P. Oxy.* 2450 as it has been since. At both times, however, there have been the same two dominant camps: those who believe it to mean 'custom,' on the one hand, and those who prefer to understand 'fate,' 'cosmic law,' or even 'the will of Zeus' on the other. Before E. Lobel's publication of the papyrus in 1961, the first camp included Wilamovitz, Ehrenberg, and Pohlenz; the second, Schroeder, Stier, Lesky, Gigante, and Dodds. After 1961, the controversy resumed with new material but nothing secure enough to settle the controversy. Since then, the first camp has included Theiler, Bowra,

and Ostwald; the second, Treu, Lloyd-Jones and Grote.⁴² According to M. Ostwald's own estimate, "few fragments, apart from those of the Presocratics, have been discussed by modern scholars with the same frequency and intensity as this one."⁴³ With so many fine scholars so evenly divided, it would be rash to say that either answer could be more than tentative, let alone decisive. Indeed, it is likely that the question cannot be settled at all with our present evidence.

In antiquity, Herodotus was a proponent of the former, 'custom,' interpretation. At 3.38 he cites Pindar approvingly in order to provide a moral to his famous story of Darius confronting the Greeks and the Kallatai with each other's burial *customs*, to the scandal of both: *καὶ ὀρθῶς μοι δοκεῖ Πίνδαρος ποιῆσαι νόμον πάντων βασιλέα φήσας εἶναι*. Because Herodotus was roughly thirty years younger than Pindar, and thus of the generation just after him, his interpretation of Pindar's poetry is not to be dismissed lightly, especially since scholars generally agree that *Fr.* 169 comes late in the Pindaric corpus.⁴⁴ But then again, we have seen how quickly the poem's meaning seems to have been distorted by the next generation, who read it as a contribution to their own *νόμος-φύσις* controversy. The poem's meaning therefore seems to have divided ancient interpreters as thoroughly as it has divided moderns.

Of these moderns, Ostwald has offered the fullest exposition of the 'custom' interpretation. According to him, the problem Pindar tried to address in *Fr.* 169 was the inconsistency between Heracles' traditional status as a hero and the unprovoked and savage violence with which he attacked Geryon and Diomedes. As Ostwald observes, unprovoked violence was considered to be the opposite of justice, even by the Greeks.⁴⁵ Moreover, Geryon is not described by Pindar as a monster, as so often elsewhere he is, and Diomedes is said here to have offered resistance by his *ἀρετή*. Taken together, these

⁴² A complete bibliography appears in Lloyd-Jones 1972: 55.

⁴³ Ostwald 1965: 109.

⁴⁴ Ostwald 1965: 130.

⁴⁵ Ostwald 1965: 120, n.43, "See, e.g., *Iliad* 16.387-388; Hesiod, *Works and Days* 275; and Solon, frg. 24.16 (Diehl), where the opposition is implied."

details suggest that Pindar was sympathetic to these victims. How, then, could Heracles' attacks on them be still esteemed the actions of a glorious hero? Pindar's straightforward answer is νόμος, although, as we have seen, it is by no means straightforward what he means by this word.

Any candidate for its meaning must satisfy the conditions Pindar sets for it in this fragment: namely, it will need to be something that can be “king over mortals as well as immortals,” make “the most violent things just,” and be something “of which the two labors of Heracles cited provide a fitting explanation.”⁴⁶ After careful and persuasive argumentation that eliminates several candidates – including communal law, fate, a norm, a law of nature, and even custom – Ostwald settles on the “attitude traditionally or conventionally taken to a norm by those to whom it applies,” which turns out to mean nothing more than firmly-rooted custom.⁴⁷ According to Ostwald, then, Herodotus was right after all. For Pindar it is the firmly-rooted custom of Greeks that Heracles is a hero which justifies his aggression against Geryon and Diomedes.

Lloyd-Jones champions an interpretation that Ostwald mentioned in passing but just as rapidly dismissed: νόμος means ‘the will of Zeus.’ *Dithyrambs 2, Fr. 81* concludes with references to both Geryon and Zeus that may signal a discussion of the same subject as *Fr. 169*:

σὲ δ' ἐγὼ παρὰ μιν
αἰνέω μὲν, Γηρυόνα, τὸ δὲ μὴ Δί
φίλτερον σιγῶμι πάμπαν·

Pindar proposes to praise Geryon – something he nearly does in *Fr. 169*, as we have seen – but restrains himself lest he offend Zeus by mentioning something which is unpleasant to him. Any reading of these patchy lines must be tenuous, and one which applies their

⁴⁶ Ostwald 1965: 120.

⁴⁷ Ostwald 1965: 124. Lloyd-Jones (55) had as much trouble as myself distinguishing it from the candidate of custom that Ostwald nevertheless dismisses. As Lloyd-Jones says, “‘the attitude traditionally or conventionally taken to a norm’ . . . seems to me much the same thing.”

isolated references to another poem altogether must be more so. But Lloyd-Jones is willing to take the risk. He infers that in *Fr.* 169 Pindar is speaking of the same will of Zeus which justifies violence, however mysteriously.

Ostwald, by contrast, rejects this inference as dubious, adding the objection that the will of Zeus cannot be king over *all* mortals and immortals, as required by the first two lines of *Fr.* 169, since it cannot be king over Zeus himself. Guthrie makes the same objection at the conclusion of his discussion of the problem.⁴⁸ To this objection, Lloyd-Jones makes two replies: first, that Zeus can subject himself to his own settled will, as when he declines to save Sarpedon, in the *Iliad*, despite his own desire to do so; and second, that ὁ βασιλεὺς θνατῶν τε καὶ ἀθανάτων is a title commonly given to Zeus, so that the inference of Zeus' will as the meaning of νόμος would have been a natural one for Pindar's audience to have made, and thus for Pindar to have intended.⁴⁹

Between Ostwald and Lloyd-Jones, or between the two camps of interpretation over *Fr.* 169 more generally, it is difficult, if not impossible, to decide. Fortunately, it is not necessary to do so in order to accomplish the task at hand. At issue in this paper, after all, is not the ultimate meaning of Pindar's original poem, but instead Plato's use of that poem. Needless to say, knowing Pindar's original text and meaning helps to establish Plato's precise use of them. Even though there is this dispute about the meaning of νόμος in *Fr.* 169, however, there is much about it with which scholars can agree.

As we have seen, for instance, whatever νόμος means, scholars agree that it must meet the three criteria listed by Ostwald. Whether it means 'custom' or 'the will of Zeus,' it must be a certain something which both has universal power and justifies violence. Plato had Callicles – who seems to have represented for him the excesses of the whole Sophistic movement – interpret Pindar's νόμος in such a way that this certain something became the law of nature, ὁ τῆς φύσεως νόμος. In this way, Callicles, despite the

⁴⁸ Guthrie 1969: v.3, 133.

⁴⁹ Lloyd-Jones 1972: 56.

anachronism of his interpretation, is not so far from Pindar's meaning in the end. To be sure, Callicles has misunderstood this meaning. Nevertheless, by the proximity of his irreverent reading to it, and thus to Pindar's piety, Plato may be telling us something not only about the flawed literary criticism of his father's generation, but also about the flaws of literary art itself; he may have been implying, in conclusion, that the meaning of poetry is inherently unstable. And when its instability wavers over a subject as important as justice, as it did in *Fr.* 169, Plato may have been implying that poetry itself is inherently dangerous.

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