Danielle S. Allen. *Why Plato Wrote*. Malden, MA/Oxford/Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell. 2010. 232 pp.

This book, based on the author's Bristol-Blackwell lectures given in 2008, falls into two parts. The first, and longer, part explores the place of writing in Plato's thought, confronting both the title question, why Plato wrote, and the question of how he saw his work as being related to contemporary politics, especially that of Athens. Allen's answer to both questions is that he wrote in order to enable his thought to have a political impact, and to do so specifically through the power of language. In the second and shorter part she argues that his work did indeed have such an impact; in the years following his death, distinctively Platonic language can be seen appearing in the work of some orators, and political divisions of this time can be explained through his influence. Leading figures such as Aeschines, Eubulus and Lysurgus, she claims, can be seen as aligning themselves with Plato, while modifying his ideas in such a way as to make them compatible with democracy; others, notably Demosthenes, were opposed to a Platonic outlook.

In what follows, not being qualified to comment on Athenian politics, I will focus on the first part of the book.

Allen proposes that, while in the *Phaedrus* Plato argues against writing, in the *Republic* he argues for it, offering a defence of the philosophical use of symbols which includes written symbols. Plato distinguishes between two kinds of image: shadows or *eidola*, potentially deceptive images, which poets produce; and a more valuable kind of image, referred to by various terms including *eikones* and *paradeigmata*, which philosophers may use. Such images are found throughout the *Republic* and, despite the primarily visual language used of them, are actually given in words.

This distinction is worked out through an interpretation of the line simile in *Republic* 6. Allen points out that both the second level of the line, *pistis*, and the third, *dianoia*, involve a focus on concrete visible things, but while at the level of *pistis* these are objects of interest in their own right, at that of *dianoia* they are used as images or models, acting as a source of information about the Forms; this, however, still falls short of true knowledge of the Forms, achieved by the philosopher, which works without images. She argues that *dianoia* need not be confined to mathematics, though it is in that context it is discussed in the *Republic*, but can have a wider significance, being applicable to philosophically significant topics as well as elsewhere. Meanwhile, there is another kind of image, the shadows and reflections which are the objects of cognition at the lowest level, that of *eikasia*; these only tell us about appearances, and cannot be a source of information about reality.

In the light of this, Allen suggests, the arguments about poetry in book 10 may be seen, not as a condemnation of all writing, but rather of writing which focuses only on particulars, and is produced without awareness of reality; there may be another kind of writing, done with knowledge, which does provide a guide to reality, but only philosophers will be capable of this. She calls this second kind of writing model-making, by contrast with shadow-making; the 'constitution-painter' described at 500d-501c is taken as an example of it. The aim of the argument in book 10 is precisely to distinguish the deceptive kind of writing from this superior kind. The *Republic* itself, and in particular the many images found within it, are seen as examples of 'model-making'.

However, Allen goes on to argue, the philosopher according to Plato will, paradoxically, also engage in shadow-making; he will produce images which do not aspire to be a guide to the truth. While models claim both metaphysical accuracy and pragmatic efficacy, there is a kind of writing whose only value lies in its pragmatic efficacy. In some cases language and other forms of image can affect the soul by appealing to the non-rational faculties rather than to the reason; writing is capable of having this effect, and this would be so even if, as the *Phaedrus* suggests, only speech can convey truth. Since such a use of language can be dangerous when used by non-philosophers, philosophers need to use it in a beneficial way, inspiring good motives in their hearers and readers. The noble lie of *Republic* 3 is an example of this use of language. Allen goes on to suggest that many of Plato's dialogues can be seen as operating in this way, putting an image of Socrates before us as an example to imitate, even without understanding, though they can also be seen as models, using him, for those who understand, as an example of philosophy. Plato wrote with a view to affecting politics, both by providing models for those capable of understanding, and by affecting the souls of others in a non-rational way.

Allen concludes the philosophical part of her discussion with a brief argument that this approach is compatible with the way in which Plato viewed the political life; in this she makes use of the *Seventh Letter*, which (despite disclaimers about its actual authorship) she sees as accurately reflecting Plato's views.

I would now like to raise some queries about aspects of Allen's arguments. First, can we be sure that the claims Plato makes in the *Republic* about the value of images apply to written images? Certainly he uses the term *graphein* and its cognates frequently; but so far as I can see, in all the passages Allen cites (p. 30 and n. 17) as examples of this use, it means 'draw' or 'paint'. It is true that in some of these passages (notably 472d, on the image of a perfect human being) painting is being used as a metaphor for the creation of an image in words; but in the actual context of the dialogue these are spoken words, the words of Socrates' discourse.

There is of course a paradox here; it is actually as written words that we, and all Plato's readers, are experiencing these images. But this is equally true of all Plato's works, including the passage in the *Phaedrus* which seems to disparage writing. Clearly Plato did in fact perceive value in writing, since he practised it; but it is not clear that these passages help to explain just what that value was.

Secondly, those passages which speak most clearly of images as allowing us some access to truth seem to refer to concrete images, actual sensible objects which are instances of the Forms about which we may learn through them. This is certainly so in the line simile, where mathematicians are described using diagrams to help them think about the relevant realities; these diagrams are actual examples of shapes, angles and so on. Likewise in *Republic* 3 (399d ff.), where craftsmen are described producing works which will predispose the young towards the good, these works are concrete objects—buildings, furniture, clothes and so on—which instantiate Forms such as grace, harmony and simplicity. In book 10, of course, the imitative artist is explicitly contrasted with the craftsman who, looking to the Forms, makes actual instances of them—beds, bridles and the like. It is not clear that any of these passages give any support to the idea that an image in words can give us access to truth in the way that concrete images can.

A passage on which Allen lays a lot of emphasis is *Republic* 500d-501c, which describes the philosophers constructing the ideal state as 'painters who use the divine model [*paradeigma*]'; she refers to this at many points, and regularly uses the term 'constitution painters' for the creators of the higher kind of images. She interprets the passage thus (p. 45): 'The original definition of the constitution-painter turns out to have captured just the task recommended by the line analogy, where the artist pivots between imperceptible and perceptible domains, and *finds a way of linking them* through symbols that convey true concepts' (emphasis mine). Thus, it seems that we are to see the constitution-painters as looking both to the intelligible world and to the people they are trying to organise into a state, and creating a third thing, an image—presumably in words—which the people can use as guidance.

However, this interpretation of the passage is questionable; the painters are described (501a) as taking the city and the characters of people as the tablet on which they draw, first wiping it clean before sketching in the new constitution. Hence, it seems they are not creating an image which can be used by people for guidance in finding the truth; rather the people actually constitute the image that they are making. They look back and forth between the intelligible world and the people, not to create a third thing, but simply to form the people in the likeness of the intelligible. Once again, what they produce is a concrete image, the state itself. (The 'divine paradigm' which they use should therefore probably be seen,

not as a sketch created by them, but as the intelligible reality which they copy. Allen argues in Appendix 1 that 'paradigm' is not used of Forms in the *Republic*, but it certainly seems to be so used at least at 540a, 'looking at the good itself and using it as their paradigm'.)

None of this, of course, rules out the possibility that images in words may have some value, and give some access to truth; and Plato clearly does value them; in a sense the whole of the *Republic* is such an image, and it contains many lesser ones. But these images seem to work in a different way from concrete images, and to be less directly related to the Forms. Allen makes (p. 73) a fruitful suggestion as to how the dialogues can work as paradigms, giving us access to truth; they do so by putting before us the figure of Socrates, who acts as an example, for instance, of justice. But even so, there is a difference between a dialogue which presents Socrates and Socrates himself; Socrates, like diagrams, craftworks and the ideal state, is an actual example of the Form whose nature he illustrates; a dialogue about Socrates shows us what such an example might be like, but at a further remove.

I agree with Allen that the argument of *Republic* 10 leaves room for a kind of speech or writing different from the imitative kind condemned there. As she points out, an absence of knowledge is seen as distinctive of imitation; Homer is condemned as an imitator because he lacks knowledge. This seems to allow for a use of language which, though like imitation in that it describes particulars, differs from it in being informed by knowledge; and it is plausible that this is what Plato is attempting to do in many of his dialogues. However, I differ from Allen in that I do not think the *Republic* gives any clear account of this use of language.

My last query is rather different in nature. I fully accept Allen's view that Plato intended his work to have a political impact; his writings draw many links between philosophy and politics, and he clearly does not see the philosophical and political lives as wholly separate. The contrast drawn in the *Theaetetus* between the philosopher and the man of affairs is surely, as Allen suggests (pp. 79-80) something of a caricature. But Allen assumes that Plato was seeking specifically to have an impact on *Athenian* politics. This is perhaps more doubtful. He seems to have been involved in politics through his activities at Syracuse, and perhaps also by educating the sons of Greek rulers; but was he concerned with the politics of his native city?

Allen (p. 76) quotes Diogenes Laertius as saying '*In his own city* ... Plato was a politician or a political leader, a *politikos*, to judge from his writings' (emphasis Allen's). But what Diogenes wrote, more fully, was '*In his own city* he did not meddle with political affairs, but he was a *politikos*, to judge from his writings'. '*In his own city*' may be interpreted as belonging only with the first part; Plato was

not involved in politics at Athens, but through his writings sought a wider political impact. Although of course his Athenian experience informs much of what it writes about politics, it is perhaps dangerous to understand what he is doing too much in Athenian terms.

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