

Reinterpreting Platonic Mimesis through Vico's Imaginative Universals and Art of Topics

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Abstract

Among the most puzzling aspects of Plato's work is his banishing of the poets in the *Republic*. There has been little agreement on Plato's motivations in doing this. This paper employs a novel approach using Vico's *New Science* to understand the role of poetry and mimesis in Platonic education. It is argued here that poet is banished from the city because of their ability to directly influence the appetites. It is then derived from this initial conclusion, that engaging in poetry constitutes an unmediated ethical education. Since this education takes place without any rational mediation, the poet's ability is simultaneously powerful and dangerous. This conclusion is arrived at through an investigation of the language employed in reference to the poets, this investigation derives from Vico's work on the relations between the development of languages and the progression of thought from imaginative to universal. Though much has been written on Plato's influence on Vico, this is the first investigation of its kind – employing Vico's work as a hermeneutic aimed at interpreting puzzles within the Platonic corpus.

Keywords: Ethical Formation, Vico, Mimesis

Objective

The place of poetry (broadly construed and used interchangeably with literature) within Plato's work is widely contested. There exist seemingly contradictory accounts: in the *Ion*, Socrates calls it inspired, that the poet (ῥαψωδός) functions as a medium of divine wisdom; in Books II & III of the *Republic* we are told of the dangers it presents and only the 'good' poetry is to be preserved – that which includes only the accounts of Gods and Heroes as perfect; in book X of the *Republic* on the other hand the poets are banished from the *Καλλίπολις* entirely. Whether Plato wants no part of poetry or otherwise is beyond the scope of our current discussion. Instead through the course of this paper we ask why such an emphasis is placed on poetry's destructive potential. In this, a great strength is ascribed to poetry and understanding why remains the focus of this paper. To answer this, I invoke Vico's *universali fantastici*, the imaginative genera/universals. I hold that understanding the Vichian imaginative universal holds the key to understanding the role of

mimesis, and why poetry holds so significant a place that Plato dedicated a large portion of his work to banishing it. Not only does it demonstrate the power of poetry but also sheds light on the idea of its being divinely inspired. The focus of this paper is developing an understanding of why Plato attaches such an importance to literature and its relation to its capacity to affect the soul, of being ethically formative (it remains beyond the scope of this project whether poetry here plays an ultimately positive or negative role).

Method

Essential to understanding the Vichian metaphysic, that is being used as a hermeneutic to decode Plato is that we understand the origin of myth, its relation to the development of language, and the correspondence of the Vichian ages with the development of the tropes. The first section of this paper will therefore be dedicated to this discussion. Following this is ascertained the correspondence between Vico's use of *topos* which is central to his epistemology developed in his criticism of the Cartesian mode of thinking and Plato's use of *τόπος* and *τύπος*. This yields us a notion of the ethical as dealing with universals, an essential premise to our final argument – since the imaginative universal does not concern abstract particulars – along with the claim that the imaginative universals are a means to direct knowledge of universals.

For the latter of which we identify the Platonic forms as the type of universals that Vico describes – specifically the form of the Good. With this light we then analyze the Platonic works and certain parts of it that describe poetry (Plato, Republic II, III, and X), suggesting that *μίμησις* holds the power for an unmediated education. This brings is also to a problem raised in the secondary literature, that “Plato certainly never spells out the connection between the metaphysics of imitation and the charge of ethical harm,” (Moss 2007) answering which by affirming a clear connection we take as a primary goal in this paper.

Vico's Ages, Language, and Myth

The progression of the ages in Vico's *New Science* is closely linked with the development of language, each holding a close relationship to another, developing in concert. To begin with we must first understand what exactly the 'New Science' is. In §138 (B&F §#s) of the *New Science*, Vico explains, "Philosophy contemplates reason, whence come science about the true. Philology contemplates authority in human choice, whence comes consciousness of the certain," Vico's accomplishment is the combination of the two which Costelloe explains,

"Yields a full knowledge of facts where "knowledge" in the Vichian sense means to have grasped both the necessity of human affairs (manifest in the causal connections between otherwise random events) and the contingency of the events which form the content of the causal chains. Philosophy yields the universally true and philology the individually certain." (Costelloe 2022)

This reconciliation is the foundation of the *New Science* and is the product of the *verum/factum* principle first described in his *Of the most ancient wisdom of the Italians, unearthed from the origins of the Latin language*. Simply put the principle states that the true is the made, and conversely the made is the true, the work in which this principle is derived from a philological study of Latin, the precedent for which Verene explains (Verene, 2015) is Plato's *Cratylus*; Vico, he explains takes the procedure that Socrates attempted "that a science of the correctness of names can be established by going back to the original meanings of words." Vico explains in the first axiom of the *New Science* that "Man, on account of the indefinite nature of the human mind, whenever that mind is overthrown by ignorance, makes himself the measure of all things," (Vico 1744) from this he later derives the distinction between rational metaphysics and his imaginative metaphysics: the former teaches that "man becomes all things by understanding them," while the latter teaches that "man becomes all things by not understanding them," for "when man

understands he extends his mind and takes in the things, but when he does not understand he makes the things out of himself and becomes them by transforming himself into them.” (Vico 1744, 405)

The Mythical and The Rational

From this we can understand the progression of the ages and their relation to the ages, the vichian cycle of history moves through the ages of Gods, Heroes, and Men. The last of these is characterized by reflection, it is in the last of these periods that irony originates, as Vico explains, “irony, certainly, could not have started before times in which there is reflection, for it is formed, on the strength of reflection, from a falsehood that takes on the mask of truth,” it is from irony that conceptual thought is born. The ages extend beyond merely the history of nations, they equally describe the growth of the individual (Vico 1744, §699), as is evident from Vico’s criticism of Descartes in *On the Study Methods of Our Time*, where he explains the mistake of the rationalist is in their failure to realize that imaginative thought is prior to rational conceptualization. He argues contrary to Descartes’s prescription in *Discourse on Method* and *Meditations on First Philosophy* (Descartes famously rejects the education of histories and fables in his *Discourse on Methods* and in the first of his *Meditations* tells us that he has to “raze everything to the ground.”) that education must begin with the *ars topica* (we return to this in the second part of this paper)- the art of finding the middle term - which can only be gained through fable. Only after this education has taken place can one properly engage in λόγος. *Topos*, he says, is responsible for “the invention of arguments which is by nature prior to the judgment of their validity.” (Vico 1709, §15) Verene explains this by observing that “logic does not create the meanings of its terms; it uses them,” that before a mind can make logical inferences, it must first create the point where two concepts touch; creating such a point requires imagination, through metaphor (Verene 1981, 41).

Education then must first be mythical and only later logical and from this we are taught in §51 of the *New Science* that “the first science to be learned should be mythology or the interpretation of fables,” (Verene 1981, 70) these fables, Vico defines as imaginative genera (Vico 1744, §209 & §403). The imaginative universal is to poetic thought what concepts are to abstract (rational) thought, Verene helpfully explains,

“Vico’s discovery of the imaginative universal is the discovery of a principle of identity that is linked with the notion of metaphor as the fundamental epistemological element. The metaphor is that by which identity is originally achieved in perception. It is the form perception most immediately takes. Metaphor is the first of the tropes and the first of the operations of mind in the act of knowing.” (Verene 1981, 79-80)

From this we understand Plato’s failure in the *Cratylus* to derive the natural speech which Vico explains:

“Logic comes from the term λόγος, which in its first and proper sense, signifies myth [favola] which is translated in Italian as “speech”[favola], and myth in Greek is also called μῦθος, from which comes the term in Latin, *mutus*; in mute times, what came into being was a mental λόγος, which...existed before a spoken – that is, an articulated one. Hence λόγος signifies both “idea” and “word” ... Hence, that earliest language in those earliest mute times of nations... must have started with signs, gestures, or objects which have a natural correspondence to their ideas... to this we can add the definition of μῦθος as a *vera narration*, or true speech. This was the natural speech that, first, Plato... said was spoken at one time in the world...it turned out that Plato’s toil to find it in the *Cratylus* was empty... For the first speech belonging to the theological poets was not a speech according to the nature of the things themselves (...). Rather, it was an imaginative speech through animate substances...” (Vico 1744, §401)

Though in the *Cratylus* Plato fails to discover the natural speech, it is not difficult to argue that the relation between μῦθος and λόγος was one that Plato was not unaware of. This relation of the terms is evident if we look to the *Protagoras*, here Protagoras asks the assembly if he should give his account as a μῦθος or λόγος, to which “several of the company answered that he should choose for himself,” (Plato, 320c) in response Protagoras chooses the μῦθος. It is of great relevance to us here that the account which Protagoras is about to provide is a response to Socrates who asks whether

ἀρετή can be taught. Plato's decision here to choose to use a μῦθον instead of λόγῳ suggests at least that a μῦθος holds a capacity for education and perhaps that it may be preferable to a λόγος.

Metaphor and the Tropes

It is important we note that the metaphor that Vico speaks of is as Vico explains something that we can only with great difficulty comprehend and cannot at all understand as the first men did (Vico 1744, §338) since we moderns operate through reflective thought, whereas the metaphor is a product of imaginative thought. We understand the metaphor only in terms of analogy, whereas in poetic thought metaphor created imaginative genera - In imaginative thought, the metaphor served the function of creating imaginative genera, fantastical universals, the equivalent of what in reflective thought is a concept. Heroic thought operates on imaginative genera, which actualize as poetic characters. Verene's example of Hercules, to be understood as identical with courage, illustrates imaginative genera: to the mind that operates on particulars, Hercules is at best an analogy for courage; to the imaginative mind, Hercules is courage. In this mode of thought imaginative genera occupy the conceptual place that concepts do in rational thought. Unlike concepts though, imaginative genera have the distinctive feature of having the capacity to be represented. For instance, the heroic character of Hercules once grasped is seen in every instance of courage, and to demonstrate courage one need only paint a picture of Hercules. This feature of imaginative genera is beyond the capacity of reflective thought, for in vulgar language we can at best point at an instantiation of a concept such as courage, but never to courage itself.

This brings us to the *Ion*, in which arrives the conclusion that the rhapsode since he does not hold the knowledge of the poetry he recites must be divinely inspired. A curious conclusion that finds an explanation if we are to look at Vico's work who explains that "the human mind, which is indefinite, being constricted by the vigor of the senses, cannot otherwise express its almost

divine nature than by thus enlarging particulars in the imagination,” that it is through the imaginative universals that poetry is conceived. It is from the same lines that we understand the first theological poets whose speech was an imaginative speech (Vico 1744, §401).

In this discussion we have focused primarily on metaphor, while hinting at why irony does not concern our current purposes. A discussion of Synecdoche and Metonymy has been omitted since for our purposes it is sufficient to know that in the Vichian framework, the age of Gods and the age of Heroes both operate in imaginative thought. The distinction in these stems from the elevation of particulars to universals, but the mode of thought remains largely the same. Since in the age of Gods, “their minds were so limited to particulars that they regarded every change of facial expression as a new face,” (Vico 1744, §700) in the subsequent age, these particulars are elevated to universals with synecdoche and later metonymy, but without the reflection of the age of men the heroic age too conceived of these in the same manner in which those of the age of gods understood through metaphor. As consequence, our explanation of the imaginative genera applies equally to the age of heroes as it does to the age of gods, and we will continue to use metaphor to include also synecdoche and metonymy.

We know now the origin of myth, its relation to the development of language, and the correspondence of the Vichian ages with the development of the tropes. This yields us what is the key to our argument, Vico's discovery of the imaginative universal. The Vichian imaginative universal is equally the key to understanding the *New Science*. The imaginative universal is what the poetic characters are and Vico tells us in the *Explication of the Frontispiece*, “This discovery of poetic characters, which is the master key of this science, has cost us the stubborn research of almost an entire lifetime,” (Vico 1744, §34) and with this we conclude our current discussion.

Topos and τύπος

To begin this discussion returning to the *ars topica* which explains the mode of the first thought of those ancient people. We must understand whether such a mode of thought exists in Plato's works. For this is necessary a Vichian etymology for which we will use the Vichian etymology for law which is taken as the starting point of the reasoning in the *Scienza Nuova* as a paradigm,

“We take our start from that earliest most ancient point of all in reasoning about law (in Latin, law is called *ius*, a contraction of the ancient word Jove, *Ious*) – that is, from the moment when the idea of Jove came to be in the minds of the princes of the Gentiles.” (Vico 1744, §398)

From this, Vico continues explaining a convergence between the Latin and the Greek word for Jove which is Διός, crediting the *Cratylus* for the etymology (Plato, 412d-e) which traces from it δίκαιον which is the word for law. The method of deriving such etymologies for our current purposes is affirmed by the fact that Plato uses the same one. Jove thundered, and this utterance from the heavens is what came to us to be the law. The law is the original voice of God, for it impressed on the first humans a manifestation of divine order. The law begins as a sign where divine order is first felt before it is conceptualized –recall that the first men understood particulars only as symbols before these symbols were later abstracted into rational class concepts.

On similar lines we approach the Greek τύπος. We find that the Greek τύπος is translated as ‘A blow’ or ‘the effect of a blow’, and ‘a model for imitation’, ‘a pattern or mold’, ‘the forms of grammatical cases’, or ‘a style of writing’ (LSJ, s.v. ‘τύπος’. Only including translations most relevant to this discussion), the latter group of translations holding a close resemblance what rhetoricians call *topos*. Now *topos* as Vico describes in *The Art of Rhetoric*, “point out the common loci.” (Vico 1711-1741, 29) In the *New Science*, Vico explains that “the earliest authors of

humanity gave their attention to an art of topics for the senses...as a result... the first age of the world can truly be said to be occupied with the first operations of the human mind...first of all, it started by roughing out a crude art of topics,” (Vico 1744, §404. Notice here that “roughing out a crude art of topics” is almost interchangeable with τύπος as signified by Plato’s use in *Philebus*, 61a1-b6) from what we have discussed, it follows doubtlessly that the poet-lawgiver (who characterizes the mode of thought of the age of Gods) strikes meaning into the world just as Jove struck the heavens, their each ‘utterance’ leaving a physical impress or alternatively that the *topos* is the common space where Jove’s mark repeats, which later came to mean the commonplaces that underlie the syllogism. τύπος then is the mark that shapes thought and similarly τόπος, the common space where this mark repeats. This is evidenced from its the Proto-Indo-European cognates for τόπος: *tep-*, ‘to hit’ and *tep-* ‘to be hot’ (compare to τύπος, ‘a blow’). Like *Ius* and *Ious*, *topos* and τύπος both evolve from an original sacred act, that of Jove, and are abstracted in the modern age into rhetoric in the former case and law in the latter.

Ars Topica

There remains one further piece of evidence to this, consider the explanation of the loci which shows the idea of an essence being contained in them, closely mirroring the Essential Outline Reading (Slabon 2023) of Plato’s use of the term τύπος, which Vico provides in Chapter 13 of his *Rhetoric*:

These loci are like the elements of argumentation (*elementa arguendi*); unless you enrich them with ample and varied learning, you will be like the one who indeed knows all of the letters of the alphabet but, when he combines them in written words, they have no meaning. It is necessary that you exercise yourself in these elements by lengthy practice in discussion so that you will be spoken of as having achieved facility in the art of topics (*facultas topica*) that is, so that regarding whatever question is proposed on the spur of the moment, you can go through all of the loci as swiftly as you would go through all of the letters of the alphabet when you read. This is so not that you will find arguments in all of the loci (indeed, you

do not choose all of the letters in reading a word, but select only some of them), but *rather that you will be certain you have considered everything which is contained in the question proposed and is relevant to it.* (Vico 1711-1741, 29. My emphasis)

Continuing on similar lines, there is a clear parallel between the way Vico when in the chapter on *topos* provides etymology as a type of *loci* in the *Art of Rhetoric* and Plato's standard of correctness being identified with *typos* in the *Cratylus* (Plato 423d11-433a2). Furthermore, Chapter 14 of Vico's *Rhetoric* lists examples of *loci* from the *ars topica* - a quick look of whom reveals that every one of the *loci* Vico lists is equally well described as a *τύπος* as is used by Plato.

There remains now one last step in this philological investigation, the relation of the terms has been found but the order of derivation is to be ascertained. The most straightforward way we find this answer is by looking at the way the words are used by Vico and Plato. Vico never uses the word *typos* in the way that Plato does, he does though use *topos* throughout his work. While Plato uses *τύπος* he uses it in a (seemingly) literal sense to mean place, even in his discussions of the forms, he says they exist in a *τύπος*. Consider for instance in *The Allegory of the Cave* where we are told that the soul ascends to the *νοητὸς τόπος* (Plato 505c & 517b) or in the *Phaedrus* when he speaks of the soul which sprouts wings, that it goes to a *ὁ ὑπερουράνιος τόπος* (Plato 247c-d). Vico on the other hand uses it in a very distinct sense, by the time Vico writes, *topos* comes to mean something entirely distinct, for he uses it in a conceptual sense. Vico's use of *topos* signifies a common place within arguments, an understanding that could only be later, since the first words do not consist of abstracted meanings, which as we describe are the product of the increasing use of irony in the reflective ages. It is remarkable for us that the shift in the use of *topos* can easily be traced almost up to the time of Plato (it is possible that Isocrates did, but there is no uncontested evidence to the claim). The use of *τύπος* that we find in Vico is found in the works of Aristotle who in his *Topics* presents us with *ἔνδοξα* which are the premises and function on the forms of

argument, the latter being called τόποι. In fact we can find in Aristotle that even when he uses τόπος in a sense like that of Plato's we still find the use of metaphor (signifying that the conceptual sense develops only after Aristotle's time. It is perhaps Aristotle's work which contributes to the sense it eventually acquires), in *De Anima* when he describes the soul as the place of forms we are told, “καὶ εὖ δὴ οἱ λέγοντες τὴν ψυχὴν εἶναι τόπον εἰδῶν, πλὴν ὅτι οὔτε ὅλη ἀλλ’ ἡ νοητικὴ, οὔτε ἐντελεχεία ἀλλὰ δυνάμει τὰ εἶδη.” (Aristotle 429a) On the other hand, his use of τόπος in a completely abstracted sense is evident in his discussions on logic and rhetoric, here the τόποι take on a new sense as ‘the place to find arguments’. From this we conclude that τύπος came prior to τόπος which then became *topos*.

In this etymology, our justification is found in two places: 1. That this method is applicable to the *New Science* since we not only derive it from its own principles but also that it is employed in exactly this manner by Vico. 2. That this is a method which is not unique to Vico, but one for whose development Vico credits Plato himself (who additionally influences the writing of Vico's *Ancient Wisdom* and *New Science*, evidenced from his autobiography). Given the method is itself a commonplace between Vico and Plato, our etymology – though beyond the scope of this work may not hold – certainly bears the credibility necessary to forward our argument.

So far, we have identified two of the three premises that will complete our argument, 1. That the imaginative universal is the mode of instruction prior to reflection, and that the imaginative universals form the *topos* through which rational activity is possible. And 2. That Vico's use of *topos* can be identified with Plato's use of τύπος – the former of which is in rational thought merely an alteration of the latter. With this we now look at a section of *Republic* III where Plato speaks of a good person who encounters a bad character, he says:

But when he comes to someone unworthy of himself, he will not wish to liken himself in earnest to one who is inferior, except in the few cases where he is doing something good, but will be embarrassed both because he is unpracticed in the mimicry (τοὺς τῶν κακίωνων τύπους) of such characters, and also because he shrinks in distaste from molding and fitting himself the types of baser things (τοὺς τῶν κακίωνων τύπους) (Plato 396d)

On the understanding of τύπος as *topos* that has been explained we read this to mean that he does not wish to acquire the commonplaces of the bad people, that he does not want to acquire the character traits of the baser people and that this goes hand in hand with his incapacity to imitate (μίμησις) these sorts of people. This reading is in line with what we have said of the means of acquisition of knowledge that Vico describes, that prior to rational thought one acquires an understanding of the world through an imaginative education.

Mimesis and Metaphor

From this we are free to identify mimetic activity with the metaphorical activity of the pre-rational mode of thought. This understanding of τύπος as providing an underlying structure which is developed through μίμησις, allows an identification for the Vichian distinction of the modes of thought with that of Plato's. The imaginative universal then operating on the pre-rational part of the soul and forming the *topos* on which logical reasoning functions can be likened to Plato's explanation of tragedy corrupting the soul:

“Precisely in the same manner we shall say that the mimetic poet (μιμητικὸν) sets up in each individual soul a vicious constitution by fashioning phantoms far removed from reality, and by currying favor with the senseless (ἄνοήτω) element that cannot distinguish the greater from the less, but calls the same thing now one, now the other (τὰ αὐτὰ τοτὲ μὲν μεγάλα ἡγουμένω, τοτὲ δὲ σμικρά).” (Plato 605c-d)

Notice here the language, mimetic poetry caters to that part of the soul, which is ἄνοήτω, and compare this language to that of the *allegory of the cave* which we spoke of earlier, where the soul reaches a νοητὸς τόπος. The goal is to reach latter τόπος which here we understand as the

rhetorician's *topos*, whereas mimetic poetry holds the power to form a *τόπος* of the opposite kind. This is in line with Burnyeats's interpretation who tells us that "Book X confirms what we should have suspected all along that sense-based thinking is at work in each and every embodied soul," (Burnyeats 2022) we differ though from Burnyeats in our understanding of sense-based thinking. The reading of mimesis in this section of the *Republic* also sheds greater light on the final part of the explanation that Socrates gives, notice now that the senseless element, τὰ αὐτὰ τοτὲ μὲν μέγαρα ἡγουμένῳ, τοτὲ δὲ σμικρά, that it judges something now one way, now the other is coherent with the imaginative activity that Vico describes. Since the metaphor acts prior to any rational activity, there cannot be judgements that distinguish the good from the bad, or here, the greater from the lesser, but instead understands them as is represented in whatever particular (poetic character) is present at the time.

Thrice Removed

The discussion in Book X begins with the example of a painted couch (Plato 596e), the painted couch is explained, like mimetic poetry, to be thrice removed from the actual form of the couch and understanding this imagery has been troubling throughout the secondary literature. The view proposed in this paper though provides a clear reconciliation of the painting with mimetic poetry. Here literature is seen as operating on the imaginative universals, the imaginative universals are understood as particulars embodying universals, whereas the forms so far have been understood strictly as universals.

Since the imaginative universal permits, a particularization of the universal, it is necessarily three steps removed from the form itself. Further explanation is necessary here, so let us translate the steps to arrive at the painting of the bed into the new vocabulary that Vico introduces. 1. The first is the ideal couch, here the form itself understood as the universal, which can only be grasped

but escapes all attempts of having a term fully describing it. 2. On the second level, we have the couch, the couch is a particular instance of the form of the couch, corresponding to the reflective concepts we may hold of couches (i.e., what allows you to understand what it is that is being spoken of when the word couch appears, a product of the ironic capacity of the rational age.) 3. Finally, we have the painting of the couch, which is an inversion of the second into the first, the painting of the couch is the form of the couch – a universal but embodied in a particular. So that when the painting of the couch is seen it is translated not by the rational part of the soul, but instead by the appetitive parts which embody a differing mode of thought and operate only in universals, and it magnifies this particular into the universal, through the metaphorical activity which characterizes the appetitive mode of thought.

This allows us to accept the view that the painting of the couch, like mimetic poetry, is thrice removed from the actual couch. This makes poetry dangerous, but not in virtue of a deficiency contained in it and instead because of its power to bypass the rational element. With this we resolve also the question of whether Plato considers that the painting of a bed even if thrice removed still holds some likeness to the original (Moss 2007), the answer is affirmative. It is not a perversion of the form that Plato fears, but rather the very likeness formed by the mind's unmediated activity which is the source of concern.

Not Just Vico

This understanding of art is not unique to Vico's work, but one that is recurrent in the history of philosophy. To take an example, the imagery is very vivid in Freudian thought, who in *Totem and Taboo* describes the omnipotence of thought as a primitive mode of thinking which is a product of the id/unconscious, escaping the suppression of the rational part (super-ego) of the psyche, the omnipotence of thought we are told is present in primitive people and children, and of

our modern age he tells us, “in only a single field of our civilization has the omnipotence of thoughts been retained, and that is in the field of art,” (Freud 1913) this recognition of the imaginative activity is what causes Plato to fear mimetic poetry, for it is wholly unconstrained. For a second example consider Shelley who arguing on lines very similar to ours places the language of poets as that of metaphors and explains that these form associations which we have described through the rhetorician's use of *topos* tells us the necessity of poetry to language,

“Their language is vitally metaphorical; that is, it marks the before unapprehended relations of things and perpetuates their apprehension, until the words which represent them, become, through time, signs for portions or classes of thoughts instead of pictures of integral thoughts; and then if no new poets should arise to create afresh the associations which have been thus disorganized, language will be dead to all the nobler purposes of human intercourse.” (Shelley 1821)

There are no safeguards or logical arguments that can reshape the opinions formed from myth, for metaphor marks the “before apprehended relations of things and perpetuates their apprehension,” a consequence of which is the danger of such education. This explains why in *Republic* Book III, only the good poetry is to be retained, which represents the heroes and gods as perfect in every way, for it is formative in a way that rational argument cannot be. It remains a curiosity that by the end of Book X, all mimetic poetry is to be removed from the city, perhaps this is Plato being cautious; and yet from what we have uncovered it appears as though poetry is necessary in the strictest sense to human discourse, but answering this remains beyond the scope of our current investigation (this response must be found in the progression of the Vichian ages).

Result

We can now bring our argument together and on a final note understand why poetry is seen as ethically formative. Prior to continuing, it is helpful to summarize the argument: 1. We understand first that the mode of thought both of children and primitive people is the same (i.e.,

poetic) forming from the imaginative universals a *topos* (place where two concepts touch) which underlies syllogistic reasoning (the mode of reasoning in the reflective age relying on abstracted concepts) – an education which operates in poetic thought is necessary. 2. Such an education is characterized by the use of metaphor and thanks to the passage from *Republic* III (Plato 396d) along with the establishment that Plato is using τύπος here in the sense in which Aristotle, and later Vico use *topos* we are justified in understanding the use of μίμησις to mean something on the lines of Vico's imaginative universals (which are poetic characters and/or fables formed by metaphor as for the first peoples). 3. From this we understand other uses of μίμησις within Plato's work as speaking of a type of education which pertains to the appetitious part of the soul and does so by bypassing the rational part.

Our reasoning so far has brought us all of the necessary material or as Plato puts it so far we have spoken ὡς ἐν τύπῳ, μὴ δι' ἀκριβείας and we may now fill in the details (ἀναγράφαι). To put it together then we need to make explicit that ethical education constitutes an education of universals. From what has been said, it is clear that the goal of Platonic education is to grasp the form of the Good. That the forms are manifested only in an intelligible place (In *Republic* VII: νοητὸς τόπος) which is beyond the heavens (In the *Phaedrus*: ὁ ὑπερουράνιος τόπος) is clear from Plato's work. What remains to be spelled out is that this speaks of universals; to make this claim we must make the claim that Plato too at times used τόπος in the sense that Vico and Aristotle do. This claim presents itself when we look at the accounts of mimetic education which put together μίμησις and τύπος both of which are used in reference to the same type of things that Plato is talking about in the *Phaedrus* and in *Republic VII*, we may argue thus that Plato himself used τύπος and τόπος in the same sense, and Aristotle later takes up the 'metaphorical' use of τόπος more

explicitly and founds its use in rhetoric which eventually results the commonplace sense that Vico and modern rhetoricians continue to use.

Clearly then the forms must be universals, for the *ars topos* Vico describes is an education that is grasped through the imaginative universals which present themselves as poetic characters. It follows from this that the mimetic education is in fact an education of forms, certainly not the only one (Since based on our understanding of mimesis being thrice removed, concepts too permit this education – the difference being that this may be mediated by the rational activity) but the most direct one. Since the goal is grasping the form of the Good which results in a perfectly constituted and harmonious soul, and since the mimetic education provides this, the mimetic education necessarily constitutes an ethical education.

Conclusion and Future Work

From what we have discussed, we see how Vico's work sheds light on a new understanding of Platonic mimesis. That poetry's unmediated access to the appetites permits an ethically constitutive education. It has been hinted throughout this work that such an education might be necessary, but it is at this point unclear whether this is the case. It remains ambiguous why Plato though initially preserves the noble lie ultimately banishes all poetry. Under this new approach it may be argued that he feared the poet's power to bypass the rulers, one must remember that this discussion occurs within the city-soul analogy. If we are correct in our understanding, then this confusion may be resolved – since the soul equivalent of the poet must necessarily be a threat to the ruling element – though this remains an avenue for future exploration.

Concerning future exploration, there is much that follows. The object of this paper has been multifold; on the one hand it puts forth a novel conclusion concerning the status of Plato's poets

and makes assertions concerning a means of an ethically formative education. Beyond the explicit conclusions of the paper though is something far more fascinating, this paper explores a new method of interpreting ancient texts – using a modern thinker's ideas as a hermeneutic. Vico in specific through his reconstituted epistemology allows a number of new approaches, some of which have been alluded to during this paper. For instance, concerning the status of the etymologies in the *Cratylus*.

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