

## RINGING THE CHANGES ON GYGES: PHILOSOPHY AND THE FORMATION OF FICTION IN PLATO'S *REPUBLIC*\*

**Abstract:** Glaucon's story about the ring of invisibility in *Republic* 359d-60b is examined in order to assess the wider role of fictional fabrication in Plato's philosophical argument. The first part of the article (I) looks at the close connections this tale has to the account of Gyges in Herodotus (1.8-12). It is argued that Plato exhibits a specific dependence on Herodotus, which suggests Glaucon's story might be an original invention: the assumption that there must be a lost 'original' to inspire Plato's story of the ring has never accommodated the possibility of Plato drawing, perhaps quite directly, from Herodotus. The next section (II) considers the function of that fable within the larger philosophical and aesthetic structure of the *Republic*. Appreciation of the entire dialogue as an exercise in fiction, as well as philosophy, helps to reveal the ways in which philosophical argument and fictional invention are closely bound up in the formation of Glaucon's fabulous anecdote. Finally (III), a reading of Cicero's treatment of the story in *De Officiis* confirms the degree to which philosophical reasoning and fiction can be quite generally interdependent. Although the arguments in Sections II and III are consistent with the opening contention that the ring story was invented by Plato, they do not presuppose it.

THE reading or writing of fiction is a philosophical activity, and fiction itself has always been a form of philosophy. Numerous philosophical systems (like Berkeley's solipsism) and hypothetical models (like Descartes' evil genius or the brain in the vat) involve the entertainment of scenarios which can only be called fictional. The influence of philosophical dialogue, particularly Plato, on the evolution of the Greek romance, was long ago recognized by Nietzsche, Rohde and Bakhtin among others.<sup>1</sup> However, the role of philosophy as a *practice* in the evolution of what is now deemed fiction has received less consideration. Conversely, the role of fictional invention – whether as a setting for a dialogue or an embedded myth – in the discourse of ancient philosophy still merits investigation.<sup>2</sup> Is fiction only supplementary, or does it have a more fundamental part to play in constituting and developing philosophical argument?

The short story about the ring of invisibility told by Glaucon in Plato's *Republic* will be examined here in the framework of those broader questions. The first part of what follows (§I) will look at the close connections this tale has to Herodotus' account of Gyges. It is argued that Plato exhibits a specific dependence on Herodotus, which suggests Glaucon's story might be an original invention. The next section (§II) will consider the function of that fable within the larger philosophical and aesthetic structure of the *Republic*. Appreciation of the entire dialogue as an exercise in *fiction*, as well as philosophy helps to reveal the ways in which philosophical argument and fictional invention are closely bound up in the formation of Glaucon's fabulous anecdote. Finally (§III), a reading of Cicero's treatment of the story in *De officiis* will confirm the

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<sup>1</sup> Nietzsche's recognition in *Birth of Tragedy* (ch.14) is grudging – contrast M. Bakhtin, 'Epic and the novel', in *The Dialogic Imagination* (Austin 1981), and E.

Rohde, *Der griechische Roman und seine Vorläufer* (Leipzig 1876). These conflicting perspectives all derive from F. Schlegel, *Kritische Ausgabe* II, *Lyceum*, 26: 'Novels are the Socratic dialogues of our day.' The influence dialogue exerted on the formation of fiction in sixteenth-century Italy, examined by J. Snyder, *Writing the Scene of Speaking* (Stanford 1989), is analogous.

<sup>2</sup> Existing treatments including J. Stewart, *The Myths of Plato* (London 1905); K. Gaiser, *Platone come scrittore filosofico* (Naples 1984); C. Gill, 'Plato on falsehood – not fiction', in C. Gill and T.P. Wiseman (eds.), *Lies and Fiction in the Ancient World* (Exeter 1993) 38-87; A. Wilson Nightingale, *Genres in Dialogue* (Cambridge 1995), and now K. Morgan, *Myth and Philosophy from the Presocratics to Plato* (Cambridge 2000), show how variously the philosophical use of fiction in Plato can be interpreted.

degree to which philosophical reasoning and fiction can be quite generally interdependent.<sup>3</sup> Although the arguments in Sections II and III are consistent with my opening contention that the ring story was invented by Plato, it should be emphasized that they will not presuppose it.

## I

Glaucon's story (*Rep.* 359d-60b) is part of his challenge to Socrates' view that justice (δικαιοσύνη) is profitable for whoever practises it.<sup>4</sup> Glaucon argues that just actions are not attractive in themselves, but only in so far as observation of justice prevents people from suffering wrong. The story of the ring of invisibility serves to illustrate this – if people actually had the power to act as they really wanted, they would choose to act unjustly. The account of Gyges in Herodotus (1.8-12) is of course the first detailed and dramatic narrative in the *Histories*. The 'first book' of the *Histories* is thought to have been current in 425 BC, perhaps some fifty years before the *Republic* was written, but a time much closer to the dramatic date of Plato's dialogue.<sup>5</sup>

The stories in Herodotus and Plato obviously share certain characteristics. Both are concerned with the successful usurpation of a monarchy by a man who uses stealth and special privileges to kill a king and take his wife. It is partly for this reason that classicists have long assumed that the two narratives have a source or sources in common.<sup>6</sup> This was the opinion of Kirby Flower Smith who, in a learned paper published in 1902, made a magnificent attempt to 'reconstruct the old popular tale of Gyges which appears to have been current in the times of Herodotus and Plato'.<sup>7</sup> Supported by a thesaurus of comparative material from Greek and Near Eastern literature, Smith's detective work culminates in an ingenious conflation of sources from Damascenus, Ptolemaeus Chennus and Philostratus, as well as Plato and Herodotus.<sup>8</sup> Here is a very brief summary of Smith's copious reconstruction:

<sup>3</sup> Cicero, *De Finibus* 2 is a parallel critique of the Epicurean view of the ethical issues raised by the story of Gyges, but does not engage with the story itself. P.A. Vander Waerd, 'The justice of the Epicurean Wise Man', *CQ* 37 (1987) 402-22, argues that Epicurus has been misrepresented by such criticism and offers a reconstruction of his position.

<sup>4</sup> R. Waterfield's translation of the *Republic* (Oxford 1993) of δικαιοσύνη as 'morality' might better signal the debate's relevance to modern readers, conveying something broader than the English 'justice': see e.g. Arist. *Nic. Eth.* 5.1129a-34; G. Vlastos, 'The theory of social justice in the *Republic*', in H. North (ed.), *Interpretations of Plato* (Leiden 1977) 1-40, discusses the problems. But 'morality' is not really a category pertinent to Plato and certainly not an ἀρετή (as δικαιοσύνη is) and 'justice' no less conveys the community of the Platonic debate with the concerns of Panaetius and Cicero set out in §III below.

<sup>5</sup> The opening chapters of Herodotus – which may have been in oral circulation – have long been deemed to be parodied in Aristophanes' *Acharnians* (425 BC): see (e.g.) W.W. How and J. Wells, *Commentary on Herodotus* 1 (Oxford 1912) 448. D. Asheri, *Erodoto: Le storie* 1 (Fond. Lorenzo Valla 1988) xv, dates Herodotus' death at 430 BC or after. R. Pichler, *Die Gygesgeschichte in der griechischen Literatur und ihre neuzeitliche Rezeption* (diss. Munich 1986) treats circulation of the Gyges story

in antiquity. Composition of the *Rep.* is generally set in the 370s BC; the dramatic dates in Plato can rarely be fixed with certainty.

<sup>6</sup> See J. Adam, *The Republic of Plato* 1 (Cambridge 1902) 126-7; Asheri (n.5) 269 notes: 'il tentativo a unire e integrare le versioni è vano'; A. Dyck, *Commentary on Cicero De Officiis* (Ann Arbor 1996) 539-40; H. Erbse, 'Die Funktion der Novellen im Werke Herodots', in G. Kurz, D. Müller and W. Nicolai (eds.), *Gnomosyne: Festschrift für Walter Marg* (Munich 1981) 251-69; E. Meyer, *Geschichte der Altertums* 3 (Stuttgart 1937) 133 n.1; 'Gyges und sein Ring', in K. Reinhardt, *Vermächtnis der Antike* (1966) for an interpretation of the stories in Herodotus and Plato; H. Stein, *Herodotus* 1 (Berlin 1893).

<sup>7</sup> K.F. Smith, 'The Tale of Gyges and the King of Lydia', *AJP* 23 (1902) 261-82, 361-87, at 263; cf. J.G. Pedley, *Literary Sources on Sardis* (Harvard 1972) 16-18.

<sup>8</sup> The sixth book of Nicolaus Damascenus' *Universal History*, which reputedly draws from the Lydian logographer Xanthus, is preserved in Porphyrogenetus' abstract – cf. K. Krumbacher, *Geschichte der byzantinischen Literatur* (Munich 1897) 252, and G. Hanfmann, 'Lydiaka', in *HSCP* 63 (1958) 65-88. Ptolemaeus Chennus' *Καινὴ Ἱστορία* is abstracted by Photius. Philostratus' *Apollonius* 3.2 refers to the dragon stone (found inside a dragon's head) which is 'invincible even against the ring they say Gyges possessed'.

Gyges discovers an invisible ring which he uses to enter the service of Candaules, who encourages him to look at his wife naked. Gyges falls in love with the queen; she possesses a dragon stone which counteracts the magic of Gyges' ring, so that she can see him. The two become lovers so that the queen has Gyges in her power which is as magical as it is erotic. She thus is able to force Gyges to kill her husband.<sup>9</sup>

But even so, Smith has to admit (in a discreet footnote) that 'the classical legend of a ring of invisibility comes to the surface only in connection with Gyges, and for the first time in the passage from Plato under discussion'.<sup>10</sup> Herodotus clearly used sources, of which something is known.<sup>11</sup> But the assumption that there must be a lost 'original' to inspire Plato's story of the ring has never accommodated the possibility of Plato drawing, perhaps quite directly, from Herodotus.<sup>12</sup>

The belief that Herodotus and Plato share a common source in the first place is grounded in perception of two clear connections between their accounts. First, similarity of theme: both stories, as noted earlier, are about men who kill a king, sleep with his queen and become king themselves. But this theme is hardly unusual or distinctive: characters such as Aegisthus and Oedipus who perform actions like these abound in ancient mythology and history. That first connection really depends on the second one: two of the proper names which are used by Herodotus are also found in Plato's tale – 'Lydia', the name of the kingdom, and the name 'Gyges'. Without that convergence of nomenclature, people would have been far less prone to make the connection of theme. Plato's use of these names then should prompt reflection.<sup>13</sup>

Glaucon, who is the narrator, says that his protagonist is 'an ancestor of Gyges the Lydian' (τῶι Γύγου τοῦ Λυδοῦ προγόνωι). This is preserved in all our early manuscripts of the *Republic*. The philosopher Proclus, writing on the Plato's Myth of Er in the fifth century AD, clearly had this in his text too.<sup>14</sup> Nonetheless, Glaucon's protagonist is frequently identified with Gyges himself, generally with little or no justification.<sup>15</sup> In a literary and philosophical study of Plato's myths published in 1930, Percéval Frutiger attempted to throw light on the recurrence of the word 'Gyges' in both accounts, by conceiving another kind of underlying connection between them: two separate stories might have been current in Lydia about two individuals with the same name – one legendary and one historical. 'Otherwise' wrote Frutiger, 'it would be difficult to explain why Plato would arbitrarily have given that name 'Gyges' to the hero of a story of which he invented every element, rather than a purely imaginative name – like that of 'Er', for example.'<sup>16</sup> A later reference in the *Republic* to Gyges' ring (and not to Gyges' ancestor's ring) has been used to add support to that hypothesis. But that reference is made by Socrates, not Glaucon:

<sup>9</sup> Smith (n.7) 383-5 provides the full version epitomized here. Again in Damascenus' account (which very roughly resembles Herodotus), Gyges kills the king Sadyattes because he has fallen in love with his queen.

<sup>10</sup> Smith (n. 7) 268 n.2. Cf. the passages assembled in S. Slings, 'Critical notes on Plato's *Politeia*, II', *Mnemosyne* 42.3-4 (1989) 382.

<sup>11</sup> As well as Asheri, Stein and Meyer (n.6), see J. Gould, *Herodotus* (New York 1989) 19-41.

<sup>12</sup> Dyck (n.6) 539-40 notes: 'It has long been recognized that Plato's folktale version... is original and Herodotus' version a secondary rationalization...'

<sup>13</sup> The significance of the Lydia connection in relation to the Myth of Er is suggested below (§II); 'Gyges' is discussed here.

<sup>14</sup> Proclus refers to the 'narrative about Gyges' ancestor' (τῶι κατὰ τὸν Γύγου πρόγονον διηγήματι) – the text is in W. Kroll (ed.), *Procli Diadochi in Platonis Rem Publicam Commentarii* 1 (Leipzig 1901) 111.

<sup>15</sup> Perhaps the best justification comes from Wiegand, 'Aehrenlese der Kritik und Erklärung der sieben ersten Bücher des platonischen Staats', *Zeitschrift für die Altertumswissenschaft* 107 (1834) 863, who suggests (on the basis of Cicero, *De officiis* 3.38 as well as *Rep.* 612b) that Γύγου in 359d is a gloss: the reference there would then be to Gyges as an (unnamed) ancestor of the Lydian [sc. Croesus]. Cf. Smith (n.7) in the reconstruction summarized above. Others prefer the *recentiores*: Γύγηι τῶι for τῶι Γύγου. Although Γύγηι τῶι Λυδοῦ, offered as a 'trial balloon' by Slings (n.10) 381-3, follows a salutary discussion, the Proclan reading may still be compatible with what Socrates says. See discussion of 612b in §II below.

<sup>16</sup> P. Frutiger, *Les mythes de Platon* (Paris 1930) 235. Note how even here Frutiger has lapsed into regarding Gyges and not Gyges' ancestor as Glaucon's protagonist.

οὐκοῦν ... αὐτὸ δικαιοσύνην αὐτῇ ψυχῇ ἄριστον ἤρομεν, καὶ ποιητέον εἶναι αὐτῇ τὰ δίκαια, ἔάντ' ἔχη τὸν Γύγου δακτύλιον, ἔάντε μή, καὶ πρὸς τοιούτῳ δακτυλίῳ τὴν Ἔιδος κυνῆν; (*Republic* 612b)

... Haven't we discovered that, when justice and the mind are both taken just in themselves, there's nothing better for the mind than justice, and that a person ought to behave justly whether or not he owns Gyges' ring, and Hades' helmet as well?

As a result of Socrates' apparent confusion here, the expression 'the ring of Gyges' came to enjoy proverbial status in Greek authors after Plato.<sup>17</sup> The almost universal assumption that Gyges himself, and not his ancestor, is Glaucon's protagonist has a long and respectable pedigree going back to antiquity: we shall see Cicero also subscribed to it. And most modern interpreters clearly regard this identification as being endorsed by Plato himself, in the passage of the *Republic* just quoted.

But this identification could still be wrong, and the implications of Glaucon's tale being about an *ancestor* of Gyges deserve some consideration. Herodotus, immediately prior to telling the story of Gyges, listed the dynasties in Lydia before Candaules and then Gyges came to the throne:

Agron, son of Ninus, son of Belus, son of Alcaeus was the first Heraklid king of Sardis; Candaules, son of Myrsus was the last. Those who had ruled this land before Agron were descendants of Lydus, son of Atys from whom the whole Lydian district was named – before that it was the land of the Meioi. From them, the Heraclidae, descendants of Heracles and a female slave of Iardanus, took and held power on authority of an oracle, ruling for twenty-two generations or five hundred and five years, sovereignty passing from father to son, down to Candaules son of Myrsus. (Herodotus, *Histories* 1.7)

Given all this, it would be extremely unlikely that an *ancestor* of Gyges, son of Dascylus, who was a bodyguard, could have held the throne in Lydia before Gyges did.<sup>18</sup> Thus not only would Glaucon's story diverge from Herodotus, it would also appear to be *inconsistent* with Herodotus' account of the royal succession in Lydia. If Gyges the bodyguard really had had an ancestor who possessed a magic ring and the kingdom of Lydia, why did Gyges not inherit both of them in the first place? The inconsistency highlights the three possible ways Glaucon's account of an ancestor might stand in relation to Herodotus: (i) Herodotus' account is not a literary model for Plato at all; (ii) Herodotus' account had only a limited bearing on Plato's; (iii) Herodotus is a central model for Plato, and there is a positive significance to this inconsistency.

The third form of relation is the one that holds.<sup>19</sup> In fact, the story in Plato need not have any model or source, apart from the account in Herodotus. This intertextuality is suggested partly by the corresponding positions these stories have in the larger works, and partly by further parallels of theme and symbolism. Ideas of vision and visibility connect both narratives. Herodotus' Candaules says (1.8.2): 'men find their ears less reliable than their eyes' (ὄρα γὰρ τυγχάνει ἀνθρώποισι ἐόντα ἀπιστότερα ὀφθαλμῶν) – echoing a dictum of the philosopher Heraclitus.<sup>20</sup> Gyges, in response to the suggestion that he should see his master's wife naked (ἐκείνην

<sup>17</sup> Frutiger (n.16) 235 n.2. An explanation for this remark in 612b will be offered below (§II).

<sup>18</sup> The note on Alexander Aetolus *fr.* 9, 5-6: καὶ Μούσας ἐδάην Ἑλληνίδας, αἶ με τυράννων / θῆκαν Δασκύλεω κρείσσονα καὶ Γύγω (= Plut. *De exilio* 599e) in J. Powell, *Collectanea Alexandrina* (1925) 127, confirms that this later testimony has no bearing on the case made here.

<sup>19</sup> Erbse (n.6) treats the role of the Gyges episode in the grander scheme of Herodotus' project; P. Schubert,

'L'anneau de Gyges: réponse de Platon à Hérodote', *Antiquité Classique* 66 (1997) 255-60, uses his perception of the parallels to examine the implications of H.'s Lydian history for the formation of Plato's political theory in the *Republic* as a whole. See also D.P. Fowler, 'On the shoulders of giants: intertextuality and classical studies', *MD* 39 (1997) 13-34 (= D.P. Fowler, *Roman Constructions* (Oxford 2000) 115-37).

<sup>20</sup> ὀφθαλμοὶ γὰρ τῶν ὄτων ἀκριβέστεροι μάρτυρες, *fr.* B101a (Diels-Kranz); *cf.* n.23 below.

θεήσσαι γυμνήν), says ‘one should only look at what is one’s own’ (σκοπέειν τινὰ ἑωυτοῦ).<sup>21</sup> After Gyges sees the queen (ἐθηεῖτο), she catches sight of him (ἐπορῶι). Summoning him, she wants to ensure he will never again be persuaded ‘to see the things he should not’ (ἴδηις τὰ μὴ σε δεῖ). This in turn causes Gyges to ‘see’ the necessity lying before him (ῶρα): he is then told to attack the king from the place in which he allowed the queen ‘to be seen naked’. In the *Republic*, Glaucon’s protagonist is portrayed as a viewer: he was ‘fascinated by the sight’ of the chasm (ιδόντα δὲ καὶ θαυμάσαντα) in which he ‘saw’ (ιδεῖν) various wonders, and ‘looked through’ (ἐγκύψαντα) the windows on the horse to ‘see’ (ιδεῖν) a corpse. Rather like Gyges in the queen’s bedroom, Glaucon’s character, by wearing the ring, becomes first invisible, and then visible again.<sup>22</sup>

Ethical instruction provides another thematic connection between the two stories. Problems of morality are no less central to Herodotus’ story than they are to Plato’s. In fact, questions of moral principle are raised far more pointedly by Herodotus than they are by Glaucon. For example, in his response to the king’s scandalous suggestion, Herodotus’ character says:

ἅμα δὲ κιθῶνι ἐκδυομένῳ συνεκδύεται καὶ τὴν αἰδῶ γυνή· πάλαι δὲ τὰ καλὰ ἀνθρώποισι ἐξεύρηται, ἐκ τῶν μανθάνειν δεῖ· ἐν τοῖσι ἐν τῷδε ἐστὶ, σκοπέειν τινὰ τὰ ἑωυτοῦ. ἐγὼ δὲ πειθομαι ἐκείνην εἶναι πασέων γυναικῶν καλλιστήν, καὶ σεο δέομαι μὴ δέεσθαι ἀνόμων. (Herodotus 1.8.3-4)

As soon as a woman strips off her tunic she also lays bare her honour. The right principles for people were discovered a long time ago, and it is necessary to learn from them. One of them is this: one should only look at what is one’s own. Anyway I believe she is the most beautiful of all women, and I ask of you not to ask for lawless acts.

Gyges’ words here have an obviously gnomic tone: right behaviour consists in following certain rules. His reliance on conventional wisdom is not dissimilar to that held by Cephalus and Polemarchus at the beginning of the *Republic* (331c-36a). Their hitherto unchallenged view of justice (as being truthful and returning what is borrowed) provoked the questioning from Socrates that launched the opening discussion of justice. Herodotus next tells us that Gyges opposed the king because ‘he feared that from all this something bad would happen to him’. This exemplifies the conception of justice Glaucon sets out, as devil’s advocate, to Socrates – a conception which Glaucon illustrates with his own story about the ring: justice is never freely chosen. People act justly because they fear the consequences of not getting away with acting unjustly.

Moral considerations are again foregrounded in Herodotus when Gyges is summoned by the queen:

Νῦν τοι δυῶν ὁδῶν παρεουσέων, Γύγη, δίδωμι αἴρεσιν, ὀκοτέρην βούλεια τραπέσθαι· ἢ γὰρ Κανδαύλεα ἀποκτείνας ἐμέ τε καὶ τὴν βασιλιήν ἔχε τὴν Λυδῶν, ἢ αὐτόν σε αὐτίκα οὕτω ἀποθνήσκειν δεῖ. (Herodotus 1.11.2)

Now Gyges, I am offering the choice which you wish to take between two roads which lie ahead of you. Either kill Candaules, and take me and the rule of Lydia, or you must die straight away.

This is a profound moral dilemma: the stark choice between life and death means that if Gyges chooses life, it will be a particular kind of life. It may be pertinent that the traditional image of the road (to represent the kind of life one leads) which was employed by the sophist Prodicus is

<sup>21</sup> For discussion of propriety in Hdt. 1.8.3, see A.E. Raubitschek, ‘Die schamlose Ehefrau’, *Rh.Mus.* 100 (1957) 139-40 = Raubitschek, *School of Hellas* (Oxford 1991) 330-1.

<sup>22</sup> Herodotus and Plato use different words for seeing; moreover Plato’s ἀφανής and φανερός do not occur in Herodotus. M. Shell, *The Economy of Literature*

(Baltimore 1978) 30-6, discusses this, pointing out an association in Greek thought between invisibility and tyranny. To supplement Shell’s cross-cultural comparisons: the *New York Times* for 20 April 1999 reported that the renovated Reichstag was ‘topped with a glass dome to symbolize the political transparency on which Germany has based its post-war revival’.

also used twice at this stage in the debate on justice, as well as elsewhere in the *Republic*.<sup>23</sup> Herodotus' Gyges is fully aware of the gravity of the dilemma:

ὁ δὲ Γύγης τέως μὲν ἀπεθώμαζε τὰ λεγόμενα, μετὰ δὲ ἰκέτευε μὴ μιν ἀναγκαίη ἐνδέειν διακρίναι τοιαύτην αἴρεσιν. (Herodotus 1.11.3)

Gyges was astonished at these words, and then he begged her not to force on him such a choice.

But it is clear from the way Herodotus tells the story that Gyges has no option but to confront that choice:

οὐκ ὦν δὴ ἔπειθε, ἀλλ' ὦρα ἀναγκαίην ἀληθέως προκειμένην ἢ τὸν δεσπότεα ἀπολλύναι ἢ αὐτὸν ὑπ' ἄλλων ἀπόλλυσθαι· αἰρέεται αὐτὸς περιεῖναι.

He could not persuade her and saw the necessity lying before him – either to kill his master or himself to be killed by others. He chose to live himself.

This is emphasized a second time. Herodotus makes it clear that even as Gyges followed the queen into her chamber he still 'could not contrive anything and there was no way out; either he or Candaules had to die'.

All this is important for showing that – in addition to resembling Glaucon's story in terms of theme (usurpation) and symbolism (vision and invisibility) – Herodotus' account also bears on the whole *context* in which Glaucon's story is told: the context of a debate on the nature of justice and the conditions in which just or unjust behaviour is displayed. Whilst the episode recounted in Herodotus' *Histories* 1.8-12 cannot of course anticipate with precision the direction and nuances of the early part of the debate on justice in Plato's *Republic*, its concerns are strikingly similar. The assertion, made earlier, that Herodotus could provide the central source, and, in all likelihood, the only source for the story told by Glaucon might now look far more plausible.

But, it may be objected, the tenor and tone of Glaucon's tale, with its fantastic and magical elements, is still very different. The Tolkienesque conceit of a ring which confers invisibility is a far cry from Herodotus' account: Plato, it could be countered, must have got that from somewhere else. This is what everyone has always thought: a ready response to this objection would be to reaffirm the fact that there is *no evidence at all* for any legend involving a ring which confers invisibility before this story in the *Republic*.<sup>24</sup> Should we begrudge a virtuoso author, who can compose the allegory of the Cave and conceive the mind as an aviary in the *Theaetetus*, the ability to invent a ring which makes its owner invisible? But my considered response is that the ring could, after all, come from somewhere. The ring itself might also come from Herodotus, paradoxically providing a missing link between Glaucon's tale and the historian's earlier narrative of Gyges: Plato's word for 'ring' (δακτύλιος) has an uncanny assonance with Δόσκυλος – the name Herodotus gives for Gyges' father.

This observation may offend some sensibilities, even though Plato's dialogues show a propensity for this sort of wordplay, which is often only apparently idle.<sup>25</sup> A celebrated French

<sup>23</sup> Prodicus' myth of Heracles at the crossroads is related in Xenophon, *Memorabilia* 2.1.20-4 (fr. 84B2 Diels-Kranz). See M. Untersteiner, *The Sophists* (New York 1953) 216-21. The road as life figures in *Rep.* 328e2 and 364d: see Adam (n.6) *ad loc.* for comparison with Hesiod, *Works and Days*.

<sup>24</sup> In addition to Smith (n.7), see G. Bernhardt, *Suidas' Lexicon* (Halle 1853) s.v. Γύγου δακτύλιος. W.

Fauth, 'Zum Motivbestand der platonischen Gygeslegende', *Rh.Mus.* 113 (1970) 1-42, fails to prove it was not Plato's invention.

<sup>25</sup> The etymologies in Plato's *Cratylus* (e.g. 437b) often depend on what F. Ahl, *Metaformations* (Cornell 1985) 54, calls 'anagrammatic rearrangements'. Ahl discusses the wordplays in *Cratylus* 439c at 286; *Cratylus* 405d-e at 129 n.; Plato, *Minos* 315c at 73-4, and *Rep.*

academic has at least made the association between *φαρμακός* and *φάρμακον* in the *Phaedrus* – a well-known example – and there are many other parallels.<sup>26</sup> Through a subtle lexical connection, then, the Herodotean text prompts Plato's fictive invention of the ring. The name of Gyges' father in Herodotus might also throw light on the riddle of nomenclature in Glaucon's story which was raised earlier. Glaucon's protagonist is a forefather of Gyges who owns a ring (*δακτύλιος*); Herodotus' protagonist is Gyges himself who has a father called *Δάσκυλος*. Plato has taken Daskylus' name and slightly transformed it to construct an implicit aetiology for the story Herodotus tells.<sup>27</sup> Again, there are parallels in Plato for this discreet kind of aetiologizing.<sup>28</sup>

At the same time, Plato is signalling to his audience, via Glaucon, that this story is invented because it is about the ancestor of a character who does not himself appear to have had any eminent ancestors:

εἰ αὐτοῖς γένοιτο οἷαν ποτέ φασιν δύναμιν τῷ Γύγου τοῦ Λυδοῦ προγόνῳ (*Republic* 359c-d)

They'd have the scope I'm talking about especially if they had the kind of power which, they say, an ancestor of Gyges of Lydia once acquired.

Thus the very beginning of the story conveys its fabulous quality. The impact could be comparable to that of someone nowadays telling an anecdote about how excessive money and power were acquired by an *ancestor* of Howard Hughes (when Hughes himself is proverbially famous for the amount of money he made in his lifetime). One would be very likely to think that anyone telling such a story would be inventing it.<sup>29</sup>

Overall, the intimate connections between the two narratives indicate that Herodotus is far more likely to be the principal model for Glaucon's anecdote than any parallel version drawn from a similar source or group of sources. I suspect the attraction of the prevalent hypothesis that this story draws from some other tradition as well as, or instead of, Herodotus, is that such a hypothesis does not involve countenancing the embarrassing possibility that Plato actually made at least part of it up. The acknowledgement and manipulation of Herodotus is the very thing to signal the fictionality of Glaucon's tale.<sup>30</sup> It only remains to consider the possible roles these manipulations could play in the design of the *Republic*. Why did Plato not have Glaucon

620a at 190-1. D. Sedley, 'The etymologies in Plato's *Cratylus*', *JHS* 118 (1998) 140-54, provides an important defence of Plato's etymologies. Many involve words with fewer sonic or literal elements in common than there are between *Δασκύλος* and *δακτύλιος*.

<sup>26</sup> J. Derrida, 'La pharmacie de Platon', in *Dissémination* (Paris 1972) 69-197. The significance of the juxtaposition of *Διός* and *δῖον* in *Phaedrus* 252e is discussed in M. Nussbaum, *The Fragility of Goodness* (Cambridge 1986) 228-9.

<sup>27</sup> The earnest response of Plato's ancient readers to his etymologies would support this. The art of etymology, Sedley (n.25) points out at 143, was 'an exercise, not in linguistic science, but in the recovery of ancient thought'.

<sup>28</sup> For instance, the possibility that Critias the elder referred to in *Timaeus* 20e might be Plato's great-grandfather has been recognized by K. Morgan, 'Designer history: Plato's Atlantis story and fourth-century ideology', *JHS* (1998) 118, at 101-2 n.3, and C. Osborne, 'Creative discourse in the *Timaeus*', in C. Gill and M.M. McCabe (eds.), *Form and Argument in Late Plato* (Oxford 1996)

179-211, at 182 n.8.

<sup>29</sup> *Phaedrus*' accusation that Socrates *makes up* his stories from Egypt and elsewhere (*ραϊδίως σὺ Αἰγυπτίους καὶ ὀποδαπούς ἂν ἐθέλητις λόγους ποιεῖς*) in *Phaedr.* 275b3 is pertinent: Socrates playfully (?) replies that the provenance of a story (*τίς ὁ λέγων καὶ ποδαπός*) is not as important as its truthfulness. On Egyptian 'authority', see C. Gill, 'Plato's Atlantis story and the birth of fiction', *Ph&Lit.* 3 (1979) 75, and again Morgan (n.28) 104, 110. This exchange in the *Phaedrus* confirms my view of the hopelessness of trying to answer an interesting question put to me by Greg Woolf: does Glaucon's tale give any indication of Plato's conception of Herodotus' truthfulness?

<sup>30</sup> Such manipulation is a recurrent feature of our own category of fiction. Examples abound of 'original' works conceived after models: John Fuller, *Flying to Nowhere* epitomizes *The Name of the Rose*; the title of *Ulysses* signals a relation to the *Odyssey*; Kate Chopin, *The Awakening*, Fernando Alas, *La Regenta* and Henry James, *Portrait of a Lady* emulate *Madame Bovary*.

tell the story of Gyges just as it was told by Herodotus? After all, we have seen that Herodotus' story bears so closely on the ethical issues treated in the *Republic* that it could provide almost exactly the same motions for debate as the tale of the ring. Moreover, Herodotus was already effectively canonical for Plato's readers – and the story of Candaules and Gyges would probably have been regarded as true. Wouldn't it therefore have been better for Glaucon to cite a 'real life' history to strengthen his case, instead of an invented one? Perhaps Plato did not want Glaucon to tell a *true* story to illustrate a position that Socrates regards as false: that immorality might pay. Another possibility is that the structure of Glaucon's tale provides a better illustration of a particular individual's capacity to act justly or unjustly: the kind of crises of moral choice which involve Candaules, his wife and Gyges in Herodotus are, in Glaucon's story, more instructively centred on one person.<sup>31</sup>

However, the conflicts and inconsistencies with Herodotus' account that help determine the fictionality of the story might appear to be in tension with a device Glaucon twice uses to lay claim to the traditional authority of his story:

the kind of power which, *they say* (φασί) an ancestor of Gyges of Lydia once acquired...

he went down into the chasm and, *they recount that* (μυθολογοῦσι) he saw there, as well as other marvels, a bronze horse...

The whole story is rendered as reported speech governed by two declarative verbs (φασί and μυθολογοῦσι). The verbs occur at the beginning of the narration, and the subsequent constructions of reported speech serve to emphasize throughout the tale that Glaucon is relaying discourse which is supposedly not his own.<sup>32</sup> The rhetorical effect of this device is to distance Glaucon's hearers – as well as Plato's readers – from what is told (whether it is legitimate or not) and to enhance the credibility of the narrator. The suggestion is that Glaucon is faithfully relaying the story he has heard, regardless of the truth-status of its contents.

That rhetorical effect has clearly worked successfully. It might account for the widespread presupposition that there must be a source, possibly an oral source, for this story which is independent of Herodotus. But this rhetorical effect is best seen as an index of realism rather than truth – the two things are far from the same. Overall, this sort of rhetorical device, in which a narrator seeks credibility by claiming a debt to an earlier source, is a common feature of fiction both ancient and modern, and Plato uses it to open a dialogue on more than one occasion.<sup>33</sup> Glaucon's narrative also contains a great deal of descriptive detail, apparently superfluous for the ends to which the story is told. Such detail increases in richness and specificity as the story goes on, notably as the declarative verbs signalling its traditional quality are left behind. At the very least, this suggests that the story is very much subject to Glaucon's manipulation and narrative design. The historian Ephorus, a contemporary of Plato, wrote:

τοὺς ἀκριβέστατα λέγοντας πιστοτάτους ἡγοῦμεθα, περὶ δὲ τῶν παλαιῶν τοὺς οὕτω διεξιόντας ἀπιθανωτάτους εἶναι νομίζομεν, ὑπολαμβάνοντες οὔτε τὰς πράξεις ἀπάσας οὔτε τῶν λόγων τοὺς πλείστους εἰκὸς εἶναι μνημονεύεσθαι διὰ τοσούτων. (Ephorus *FGrHist* 70 F 9)

<sup>31</sup> Compare the observations on Plato's story in J. Tatum, *Xenophon's Imperial Fiction: On the Education of Cyrus* (Princeton 1989) 266.

<sup>32</sup> Cf. K. Dover (ed.), *Plato: Symposium* (Cambridge 1980) 80 on this practice. L. Brisson, *Plato the Mythmaker* (Chicago 1998) 149-51, usefully lists occur-

rences of the declarative μυθολογέω. Osborne (n.28) 183 notes the number of such declarative verbs in the *Timaeus* which suggest verbal (oral) narration.

<sup>33</sup> See A. Laird, *Powers of Expression, Expressions of Power* (Oxford 1999) 76-8, on this feature in Platonic dialogue.



Those who give the most precise account of things which happen in our time are those whom we consider very believable, but we regard as very unbelievable those who thus rehearse events in the distant past, as we assume it is not possible at such a distance to recall every action or most of what was said.

On the basis of Ephorus' common sense discrimination, the form of Glaucon's tale alone is very *unbelievable* and suffices to advertise its fictionality.

## II

The tale of Glaucon does not exist *in vacuo*. Its larger context in the *Republic* helps to throw some light on the philosophical significance of the *construction* of this piece of fiction. My purpose is not to debate the moral of the story or to review its role in the debate about justice between Socrates and his interlocutors. Those questions have received abundant coverage elsewhere. Rather, the aim here is to explain why a narrative like Glaucon's is present in a philosophical debate in the first place.

Much depends on what is to be understood by philosophical discourse and whether fictions and other forms of literary creation are regarded as a natural element of it. Pre-Platonic notions and practices of philosophy (φιλοσοφία) were supple.<sup>34</sup> Plato's dialogues also endow 'philosophy' with a rich range of meanings.<sup>35</sup> If Plato deemed his writings to be philosophical, the unconditional application of today's technical categories of philosophy to the interpretation of those writings is bound to be anachronistic.<sup>36</sup> For Plato, *all* the elements in his philosophical dialogues – including, say, inherited myth, invented fiction, or *mise en scène* – could well constitute philosophical discourse, *de facto*. This obtains even if Plato's dialogues often appear to constitute philosophy in a 'weaker' or more open sense than current 'standards' permit.

But perhaps the question about how fiction suits the philosophical purpose of the *Republic* can be more firmly answered with a 'strong' definition of philosophy – as it might be understood by the *conoscenti* of current academic practice who regard 'good' philosophy as the pursuit of difficult philosophical issues.<sup>37</sup> Apparently tautologous definitions of this kind in fact signal something quite specific to those *conoscenti*: namely, investigation, within curricular boundaries and according to accepted methods of argument, of fields such as epistemology, ethics, aesthetics and philosophy of mind. Glaucon's story is told in the midst of a debate about ethics: we should consider then why an enquiry into the nature of justice should bring about the invention of a fantastic story. What Glaucon himself says, to preface his own story to Socrates and Adeimantus, is significant:

As for the fact that people only ever do good unwillingly out of the inability to do wrong – we would most clearly perceive this (μάλιστ' ἂν αἰσθοίμεθα), if we made the following thought experiment

<sup>34</sup> Diog. Laert. 1.12 recounts Pythagoras was the first to use the term *philosophia* (love of wisdom) because no mortal can actually *be* wise. This suggests religious and ethical overtones to the word. Cicero's account of the same conversation with Leon (*Tusc. Disp.* 5.3.8) reports that Pythagoras also likened those engaging with philosophy to the audience of a *spectacle* (cf. the points to come and nn.37-9 below): 'so there were a few rare people who counting all else as nothing studiously scanned the nature of things' (*rerum naturam studiose intuerentur*). Pythagoras' notion has been contrasted with Croesus' neutral use of the word in Hdt. 1.30, which seems to be about acquiring knowledge. Croesus juxtaposes φιλοσοφῶν with θεωρίη in that very passage.

<sup>35</sup> Socrates' view of the philosopher in *Phaedo* 62c-69e can be read as a development of the usage in Hdt. 1.30.

<sup>36</sup> R. Rutherford, *The Art of Plato* (London 1995), and C. Kahn, *Plato and the Socratic Dialogue* (Cambridge 1998), demonstrate the importance of literary artistry for appreciation of Plato's philosophy; the essays in C. Griswold (ed.), *Platonic Writings, Platonic Readings* (London 1988), point out the drawbacks of divorcing literary and philosophical readings of Plato. Nightingale (n.2) goes further in showing Plato's role in transforming philosophy into a genre.

<sup>37</sup> Consider J. Annas, *An Introduction to Plato's Republic* (Oxford 1982) 1: '[Plato] is too good a philosopher not to raise difficult and important philosophical issues...!'

(τοιόνδε ποιήσαιμεν τῆι διανοίᾳ). Suppose we grant each type of person – just and unjust – the licence to do whatever he wants, and we then follow each of them in our gaze (ἐπακολουθήσαιμεν θεώμενοι) to where desire will lead them. We'll catch our just person red-handed: his desire for superiority will point him in the same direction as the unjust person, towards a destination which every creature naturally regards as good and aims for, except that people are compelled by convention to deviate from this path and respect equality. They'd have the kind of licence I am talking about especially if they acquired the kind of power which, they say, an ancestor of Gyges of Lydia once acquired... (*Republic* 359b-c)

This of course explains why he tells the story, but some of the expressions used in this passage also show how the very process of philosophical thought here becomes expressed in fictional discourse. The expression τοιόνδε ποιήσαιμεν τῆι διανοίᾳ, translated here as 'if we made the following thought experiment', literally means 'if we made something like this in thought'.<sup>38</sup> The verb ποιεῖν ('make') is celebratedly used for poetic fabrication.<sup>39</sup> Glaucon says that the making of something in thought ensures we *most clearly perceive* (μάλιστα ἄν αἰσθοίμεθα) his general point – that people only ever do good unwillingly, out of their inability to do wrong. The scenario he proposes (of a just and unjust person being given equivalent licence) is thus figured as a manufactured projection, one which once we have generated it, we can then *look at* (θεώμενοι) and learn from. θεᾶσθαι is another significant verb: Plato elsewhere uses it to signify intellectual contemplation as well as the act of gazing.<sup>40</sup> Both senses obviously seem to be connoted in this passage – and it is worth noting that the participle form employed here routinely serves as a noun meaning 'spectators', as well as the etymological connection with θεωρία – 'theory'.<sup>41</sup>

To conceive of the initial scenario as a *spectacle* involves a leap of imagination as well as intellect. That scenario then takes a more specific shape: the story to come is really a refinement, a more precise qualification of the simple idea Glaucon first posits: 'They'd have the kind of licence I am talking about', he explains, 'especially if they acquired the kind of power which, they say, an ancestor of Gyges of Lydia once acquired...' Glaucon, in effect, transforms a hypothesis devised for the sake of argument into an act of conjury: a philosophical speculation is taking us into a fictional situation. The connections between the full-blown story, even as it develops, and its genesis in philosophical argument are never lost: the emphases on vision, sight and perception in the tale of the ring in themselves reflexively connect the fiction with its function. In particular, these emphases could even hint at an implicit analogy between the ancestor of Gyges who beholds the marvels in the story and the story's teller and audience who scrutinize the story and its protagonist's behaviour. Thus iconicity *in* the tale is bound up with the iconicity *of* the tale as an object of philosophical speculation and as a virtual spectacle.

<sup>38</sup> 'Thought experiment' is the translation of *Rep.* by R. Waterfield (n.4). N. Rescher, 'Thought experimentation in Pre-Socratic Philosophy', in T. Horowitz and G. Massey (eds.), *Thought Experiments in Science and Philosophy* (Maryland 1991) 31, defines the term as 'an attempt to draw instruction from a process of hypothetical reasoning that proceeds by eliciting the consequences of an hypothesis, which for aught that one actually knows to the contrary, may well be false. It consists in reasoning from a supposition that is not accepted as true – perhaps is even known to be false – but is assumed provisionally in the interests of making a point or resolving a conclusion.' There are further accounts in Horowitz and Massey; see also D. Nails, *Agora, Academy and the Conduct of Philosophy* (*Philosophical Studies* Ser. 63) (Dordrecht 1995) on the Derveni papyrus.

<sup>39</sup> There are many discussions: see e.g. S. Halliwell, *Aristotle's Poetics* (London 1986) 9, 56-9. A. Ford, *Early Greek Terms for Poetry: Aoide, Epos, Poiesis* (diss. Yale 1981), shows usage of ποιητής for poet (as distinct from αὐδός) converged with the gradual conception of poetic representation as a τέχνη or professional art.

<sup>40</sup> Contrast e.g. *Rep.* 402d4 and 480a where the verb has a more innocent sense of 'gaze' with the curious wordplay of *Rep.* 511c8: ἀναγκάζονται... θεᾶσθαι οἱ θεώμενοι, replayed in 611c (for contemplation of the soul).

<sup>41</sup> See e.g. Ar. *Frogs* 2 and *Clouds* 518, and Hdt. 8.116. Work is forthcoming from Andrea Wilson Nightingale on Platonic *theoria*, and from Ian Rutherford on *theoria* in Greek culture and religion.

This use of what has been called the ‘hypericon’ is neither unique in Plato, nor unique to Plato.<sup>42</sup> The ekphrasis of the Cave later in the *Republic*, accounts of description and mnemotechnical *loci* and *imagines* in ancient rhetorical theory provide various examples.<sup>43</sup> Such ‘meta-ekphrasis’ might well have a role in the development of fiction as an independent genre: the Chinese box effect in the opening of Longus’ *Daphnis and Chloe* is one example.<sup>44</sup> However, this discussion seeks to demonstrate not just a parallel, but an intimate involvement between philosophical thought and the creation of fiction.

The purely philosophical significance of Glaucon’s tale as an imaginary story is considered by Julia Annas:<sup>45</sup>

We live in a world where we have to take into account the natural and artificial consequences of injustice, and it is merely silly to ask what we would do if we escaped these by having magic rings. It isn’t a fault in a defence of justice that it doesn’t apply to someone who *ex hypothesi* escapes all those features of the human condition that make justice important to us. A realistic moral theory doesn’t have to cope with fantastic examples. They fall outside the area that it purports to cover. Further, a theory that *is* designed to cope with them is likely for that very reason to be unrealistic, and not give the right answer in central everyday examples.

What Annas calls the ‘realistic response’ is very clearly articulated here, but she is cautious about subscribing to it herself: Plato, she holds, is aware of this kind of response. It is certainly true that the greater part of the *Republic* has been devoted to showing how there are grounds for being just even if being so brings no hope of gain or reward:

‘Haven’t we discovered that, when justice and the mind are both taken just in themselves, there’s nothing better for the mind than justice, and that a person ought to behave justly whether or not he owns Gyges’ ring, and Hades’ helmet as well?’

‘You’re quite right’, said Glaucon. (Plato *Republic* 612b)

As we have seen, it is *Socrates* here who names Glaucon’s protagonist as ‘Gyges’. This does not in itself give grounds for assuming any identification of that protagonist with Herodotus’ Gyges or for positing an archetypal ‘Gyges myth’ which must have inspired both Plato and Herodotus, as many have thought.<sup>46</sup> By ignoring Glaucon’s subtle discrimination of his character as an ancestor of Gyges, Socrates is in fact using affected carelessness to display his indifference to Glaucon’s whole story. He further maintains his distance from it, as he cheerfully conflates Glaucon’s carefully crafted exemplum with the tradition (from Homer *Iliad* 5.844) of Hades’ helmet which made Athene invisible.<sup>47</sup> More impertinently still, Socrates teases Glaucon with a mischievously hyperbolic conceit of his own, pointedly futile for any ethical argument or

<sup>42</sup> W.J.T. Mitchell, *Iconology: Image, Text, Ideology* (Chicago 1985) 5-6, 158.

<sup>43</sup> *Ad Herennium* 3.16-24; Cic. *De oratore* 2.86.351-6; Quint. *Inst. Or.* 11.2.17-22. Cf. H. Blum, *Die Antike Mnemotechnik* (Hildesheim and New York 1969); the articles entitled ‘Memory and the study of classical antiquity’ by J.P. Small and J. Tatum in *Helios* 22.2 (1995) 149-77, with bibliography at 174-7; J.P. Small, *Wax Tablets of the Mind: Cognitive Studies of Memory and Literacy in Classical Antiquity* (London 1997); on the Cave, see K. Gaiser, *Il paragone della caverna: variazioni da Platone a oggi* (Naples 1985).

<sup>44</sup> See F. Zeitlin, ‘The poetics of *Eros*: nature, art and imitation in Longus’ *Daphnis and Chloe*’, in D. Halperin et al. (eds.), *Before Sexuality* (Princeton 1990) 417-64. On meta-ekphrasis in Horace, *Ars poetica* 14-19, see my

discussion in J. Elsner (ed.), *Art and Text in Roman Culture* (Cambridge 1996) 91-4. Embedded openings in Greek fiction recall the beginnings of Platonic dialogue (cf. n.33 above and B.E. Perry, *The Ancient Romance* (Berkeley and Los Angeles 1967) 325).

<sup>45</sup> Annas (n.37) 69.

<sup>46</sup> E.g. Adam (n.6) 126-7; Frutiger (n.16) 235. This passage along with Cic. *De officiis* 35 was the basis for Wiegand’s conjecture (n.15 above).

<sup>47</sup> See W. Leaf (ed.), *The Iliad* 1 (Amsterdam 1971) 251: ‘The name Ἄϊδος here evidently preserves something of its original sense, the Invisible (Ἄφιδος).’ Contrast Socrates in *Cratylus* 404b: ‘And the name “Hades”, Hermogenes, is not at all derived from the invisible (ἀίδοῦς), but far more likely from knowing (εἰδέναι) all fine things.’

even for a good story: the idea of someone having a ring which confers invisibility as well as a helmet which does exactly the same thing. Here as often, the subtlety of Plato's character delineation far exceeds the capacity of his interpreters.<sup>48</sup>

What Socrates says next in this final part of the dialogue further addresses the problem of the 'realistic response' to fantastic or fictional examples. (This applies even though Socrates is not specifically commenting on the tale of the ring here, but on the hypothetical situations Glaucon went on to raise in 360e-361d):

'Surely, Glaucon', I said, 'it would not then be objectionable, in addition to those things, now *to give back dues and reward for justice and other virtue* (τοὺς μισθοὺς τῆι δικαιοσύνηι καὶ τῆι ἄλλῃ ἀρετῆι ἀποδοῦναι), presenting every variety of reward for the soul from men and gods, both while a person is alive and after his death.'

'Certainly not', he said.

'So then, will you both *give back to me what you borrowed* (ἀποδώσατέ μοι ἃ ἐδανείσασθε) in the argument?'

'What do you mean?'

'I allowed you a just man with a reputation for injustice, and an unjust man with a reputation for justice. You were asking for this concession to be made *for the sake of the argument* (τοῦ λόγου ἕνεκα) because you thought, even though it might be possible for the true state of affairs not to be known by gods and men, it would still help *justice in itself* (αὐτῆ δικαιοσύνη) be judged in relation to *injustice in itself* (ἀδικίαν αὐτῆν). Or do you not remember?'

'I would be doing wrong', he said, 'if I did not.' (ἀδικοῖην μέντ' ἄν, ἔφη, εἰ μή)

'Well our assessment has been made', I said, 'and so I am now, *on behalf of justice, asking back* (πάλιν ἐπαίτῳ ὑπὲρ δικαιοσύνης) that we agree, along with everyone else, that justice does have the reputation it enjoys among gods and men.' (*Republic* 612b-d)

Socrates here marks a change of course for the rest of the work from what has preceded: in effect he has argued throughout, right up to this point, that even someone in the unlikely position of Gyges should behave justly; from now he is going to apply the more conventional wisdom of the 'realistic response' to show that ordinary people will benefit by acting justly. So that 'realistic response' is acknowledged in the end, but the lion's share of the dialogue has been devoted to debate about concerns which were more theoretical. So for Plato, in the *Republic* at least, philosophical argument is principally applied to deal with cases its speakers raise that are hypothetical, and indeed fictional.

But there is a further complication. After the transition marked in the passage quoted here, Socrates does indeed go on to supply evidence for the benefits that fall to those who act justly. But that evidence comes first in the form of appeals to theology (612d-613e: the gods favour those act morally) and then in the form of a *fiction* (614a-621d: the Myth of Er), and *not* by 'philosophical argument' in the strong sense. The striking central point here is that, even after he has paid heed to the 'realistic response' to fantastic scenarios such as Glaucon's, Socrates' ultimate answer to Glaucon comes itself in the form of an exotic and fantastic narrative. Its protagonist, Er, is a Pamphylian, and so, just like Glaucon's Lydian ancestor of Gyges, comes from Asia Minor. Moreover, Socrates addresses his story exclusively to Glaucon: even though Adeimantus is still present, he uses the singular 'you' prior to his narration. And once the narration of the Myth of Er is under way, Glaucon is apostrophized on three occasions (614a, 618b, 621b) whilst Adeimantus is not named.

The passage quoted above shows in another way the complementary nature of the stories of Socrates and Glaucon. Socrates says the new turn he wants to give to the discussion is some-

<sup>48</sup> The importance of characterization is noted in two recent studies: Kahn (n.36) and J. Beversluis, *Cross-Examining Socrates: A Defence of the Interlocutors of Plato Early Dialogues* (Cambridge 2000).

thing owed to him: his insistence that they now *give back* (ἀποδοῦναι) the rewards due to people for justice actually rests on his interlocutors themselves *giving something back* (ἀποδώσετε) that they borrowed – namely the consideration of hypothetical situations for the sake of understanding justice in itself. Socrates now calls in this debt ‘on behalf of justice’ and then proceeds with his theological argument and then the narrative, which functions as a kind of rejoinder to Glaucon’s. Philosophers nowadays are unlikely to attach any profound significance to the kind of symmetry detected here – between the story of the ring at the beginning of the debate and the story of Er at the very end of it. They will see such symmetry as purely poetical, a feature of literary ornamentation.

However, that symmetry may not be quite so incidental because this passage also underpins the connection both these fictions have with the central philosophical debate of the *Republic* on justice. Socrates holds that while Glaucon incurred his debt ‘for the sake of the argument’ about justice, the repayment he demands is ‘on behalf of justice’, i.e. justice *tout court*. This means that Glaucon’s reply to Socrates when Socrates asks him if he remembers the concession made to him – ‘I would be doing wrong if I did not’ – consists of more than an empty idiom.<sup>49</sup> The use of the verb ἀδικοῖην for ‘I would be doing wrong’ cannot be merely fortuitous in this context: it is *just* to be concerned with the actual nature of justice (and not merely to argue about it). And even though commentators do not notice it, all the figures here which involve borrowing and paying back have a vital significance. They obviously draw a connection with the whole debate on justice in another way, by bringing us back to Socrates’ question which first set that debate in motion:

‘You put it beautifully Cephalus’, I said. ‘But that very thing you mention, “justice” (δικαιοσύνην): shall we say without qualification that it is truthfulness and *giving things back, if someone has borrowed something from someone* (τὸ ἀποδιδόναι, ἂν τίς τι παρά του λάβῃ), or might these very actions sometimes be performed rightly and at other times wrongly?’ (*Republic* 331c)

This connection simultaneously highlights both the fictional construction of the *Republic* and the construction of the philosophical argument in the dialogue as a whole. The two designs are disconcertingly interdependent. The consequence of the reading of 612b-d in its larger context seems not just to counter the ‘realistic response’ to a story like Glaucon’s and various hypothetical scenarios which could not practically obtain. It also undermines the framework that allows a ‘realistic response’ to be distinctly articulated. Socrates’ apparent application of such a ‘realistic response’ to Glaucon’s challenge in fact allows him to embark on a narrative of his own – the story of Er, which a Lucianic scholiast and Colotes considered to be beyond the pale.<sup>50</sup> But for Plato it seems that fictional and philosophical supposition turn out to be effectively indistinguishable as well as interdependent.

### III

The treatment of the ring story in the last book of Cicero’s treatise *De officiis* (‘On Moral Duties’), written in 44 BC, serves to provide some independent confirmation for this kind of conclusion. The treatise is a rather personal and prescriptive introduction to ethics which the author, *prima facie* at least, directs to his son Marcus. The first two books draw heavily from a lost work

<sup>49</sup> For the idiom, P. Shorey (ed.), *The Republic* 2 (Cambridge, MA 1935) 485 n. compares εἰ μὴ ἀδικῶ earlier at 608d, and on 608d *ad loc.*, compares *Rep.* 430e, *Charmides* 156a and *Menexenus* 236b. In *Rep.* 430e the wordplay expressly features in a discussion of justice (δικαιοσύνη).

<sup>50</sup> The scholia to Lucian, *Ver. Hist.* Praef. 1.3-4 interpret the passage as a retort to Plato’s use of myth in *Rep.* 10: 614a. Cf. Macrob. *In Som. Scip.* 1.1.8-2.5 for Colotes’ attack on Plato: *a philosopho fabulam non oportuisse confingi*.

by the Stoic philosopher Panaetius.<sup>51</sup> Thus Cicero's first book looks at the notion of what is moral (*honestum*), and its elements; the second reviews what is practically beneficial or 'expedient' (*utile*). The third and final book is concerned with the conflict between morality and expediency. There Cicero advances on Panaetius' doctrine and explicitly fanfares the independence of his own position. In Cicero's view the conflict is an illusory one: Panaetius in advocating the preferability of morality to expediency, saw an opposition between what is moral and what is only apparent expediency. For Cicero there is no such opposition: expediency and immorality (*turpitude*) are incompatible, so that what is morally right is good, and must be expedient (3.35).

Although the *De officiis* draws from a range of philosophical traditions (chiefly Stoical), its field of enquiry does converge with a major concern of Plato's *Republic* – namely the relationship between 'justice in itself' and the 'artificial' consequences of justice. So perhaps it is no surprise that, so shortly after announcing his advance on Panaetius, Cicero appeals to Plato and reviews the story of the ring from the *Republic*. The immediate context for Cicero's review is his identification of immorality in cases where people act immorally and yet believe that they are acting expediently. In fact such people have failed to recognize the true nature of expediency, which is really always moral. Cicero provides some examples of this *error*:

hinc sicae, hinc uenena, hinc falsa testamenta nascuntur, hinc furta, peculatus, expilationes direptionesque sociorum et ciuium, hinc opum nimiarum, potentiae non ferendae, postremo etiam in liberis ciuitatibus regnandi exsistunt cupiditates, quibus nihil nec taetrius nec foedius excogitari potest. (*De officiis* 3.36)

From this error derives the use of daggers, poison and forged wills; from here come thefts, embezzlements, exploitation and plundering of citizens and allies; from here come those desires for excessive wealth, for excessive power, and even for despotic rule of nations which are free. Nothing more foul or disgusting than these things can be conceived.

He reproaches those who actually take the trouble to deliberate about the choice between moral conduct and crime. Such *deliberation* is criminal even if it does not result in criminal action. Moreover, Cicero notes, any contemplation of, or aspiration to, secret or furtive conduct should be removed from our moral deliberation (*atque etiam ex omni deliberatione celandi et occultandi spes opinioque remouenda est*). It is this train of thought that leads to the retelling of Plato's story:

satis enim nobis, si modo in philosophia aliquid profecimus, persuasum esse debet, si omnes deos hominesque celare possumus, nihil tamen auare, nihil iniuste, nihil libidinose, nihil incontinenter esse faciendum. hinc ille Gyges inducitur Platone...(*De officiis* 3.37-8)

For only having made some progress in philosophy, we should be sufficiently convinced that, even if we can escape the detection of gods and men, we must still not ever act in a greedy, unjust, lustful or intemperate way. This is why that figure of Gyges is introduced by Plato...

Thus, Cicero sees the story as illustrating the immorality of secret or furtive behaviour. The sentence following the retelling also confirms that this is very much bound up with the moral of the story for Cicero:

hunc igitur ipsum anulum si habeat sapiens, nihilo plus sibi licere putet peccare, quam si non haberet; honesta enim bonis uiris, non occulta quaeruntur (*De officiis* 3.38)

So then if a wise man had a ring just like this, he would no more think that he would be able to do wrong than if he did not have it: for good men seek what is moral, not what is secret.

<sup>51</sup> The Greek title *περὶ τοῦ καθήκοντος* ('On appropriate action') corresponds to *De officiis*. Dyck (n.6) 17-

28 gives a valuable assessment of the relation between Panaetius' lost treatise and Cicero's work.

The question of secret or furtive behaviour is not so explicitly discussed in the *Republic*: but it is definitely there. If, as I have tried to show, Plato uses Glaucon as a mouthpiece for a story he invented himself, he could have imagined (or borrowed from poetry or myth) any one of a variety of superhuman attributes that would enable his character to get away with immoral behaviour. Like Heracles he could be strong (but invincibly), or like Circe he could have the magical capacity to turn anyone who threatened his progress into a pig (but always successfully), or he could even have infallibly effective powers of hypnosis or rhetorical persuasion. For Plato's fictional case, the advantage of conceiving the power to be invisible is that it prompts us to envisage far more directly the scenario of escaping detection and not being found out: to see and yet not be seen.

The idea of seeing and yet not being seen, and indeed seeing what it is like to see and not to be seen, bears on the very construction of the narrative of the story in both the *Republic* and the *De officiis*. In both tellings the story is *focalized* through the protagonist, told from the protagonist's 'point of view'.<sup>52</sup> The adoption of this feature illustrates the proximity of Cicero's account to Plato's text:<sup>53</sup>

qui, cum terra discessisset magnis quibusdam imbribus, descendit in illum hiatus aëneumque equum, ut ferunt fabulae, *animaduertit*, cuius in lateribus fores *essent*; quibus apertis corpus hominis mortui *uidit* magnitudine *inuitata* anulumque aureum in digito; quem ut detraxit, ipse induit (*erat autem regius pastor*), tum in concilium se pastorum recepit. ibi cum paleam eius anuli ad palmam conuerteterat, a nullo uidebatur, *ipse autem omnia uidebat*; idem rursus uidebatur, cum in locum anulum inuerteterat. itaque hac *opportunitate* anuli usus reginae stuprum intulit eaque adiutrice *regem dominum* interemit, sustulit, quos ob stare arbitrabatur, nec in his eum facinoribus quisquam potuit uidere. sic repente anuli *beneficio* rex exortus est Lydiae. (*De officiis* 3.38)

When the earth opened in consequence of heavy rains, he went down into the chasm, and noticed, as the accounts go, a horse of bronze, in the side of which were doors. Having opened them, he saw the the body of a dead man of remarkable size with a gold ring on his finger. He removed it, put it on his own hand, and then took himself off to an assembly of the shepherds, for he was one of the king's shepherds. There, whenever he turned the bezel of the ring inwards towards the palm of his hand, he was seen by no one, while himself saw everything; but he became visible again, whenever he turned the ring back to its proper position. And so, with the advantage which the ring gave him, he corrupted the queen, and with her assistance he murdered his royal master and removed all those who he thought stood in his way, and no one could see him commit these crimes. Thus, by virtue of the ring he shortly rose to be king of Lydia.

The italicized Latin words highlight the extent to which this narrative can be read from the protagonist's point of view: there are three verbs of seeing (*animaduertit* 'he noticed'; *uidit* 'he saw'; *uidebat* 'he could see') which govern and introduce to us important elements of this narrative as they were apparent to the character. That is a feature of the Platonic narrative, but here in Cicero the information about his status (*erat autem regius pastor*, 'for he was one of the king's shepherds') also seems to be presented from his perspective – the character himself seems to set

<sup>52</sup> For a standard accounts of focalization and its relation to 'point to view', see G. Genette, *Narrative Discourse* (Oxford 1980) 161-211. Genette made the important distinction for narrative theory between 'who speaks' and 'who sees'. S. Hornblower, *Greek Historiography* (Oxford 1994) 131-6, and D. Gribble, 'Narrator inventions in Thucydides', *JHS* 118 (1998) 41-67, consider focalization in Thucydides.

<sup>53</sup> K. Abel, '100 Jahre hekaton-Forschung', *Würzburger Jahrbücher* N.F. 13 (1987) 111, concurs that Cicero drew directly from Plato for his account of the story rather than from any intermediate source. Cicero's *ut ferunt fabulae* as a translation of *μυθολογοῦσι* confirms this.

his lowly job in contrast to the grandeur of the ring he has pilfered.<sup>54</sup> Again, the king is presented from that agent's viewpoint as his 'master' (*regem dominum*). We are told what the character himself could see on becoming invisible (*omnia uidebat*). The ring provides him with an *opportunitas* and performs a *beneficium*: these words present the point of view of the protagonist, not the morally scrupulous perspective of Cicero who is the narrator.

Such sustained focalization through a principal character is of course a celebrated feature of fictional narrative.<sup>55</sup> Although the category of fiction itself is modern, such typological identification can still be successfully applied to ancient texts. When sustained focalization does occur in ancient genres of third-person narrative such as historiography or epic, it serves as a register which endows them with a fictional tone. A fictional tone is not purely a matter of style that is only subjectively observed. In third-person narrative, focalization (or narration by presenting what a character 'sees') – like free indirect discourse (narration by presenting what a character thinks) – involves epistemological issues. Accounts of a character's undocumented thoughts, perceptions or attitudes are characteristically fictional. The problem of 'evidential accountability' means that a character's thoughts, perceptions or attitudes cannot be consistently presented in third-person, factual narrative. Invention, or, at the very least, conjecture would have to be involved, because narrators of true events in the real world cannot be privy to those thoughts, perceptions or attitudes without verbal testimony of them from the character himself in some form or other.<sup>56</sup> The distinction between fictional and factual narrative can therefore be seen in terms of linguistic competence: speakers or writers who do not want to make things up are confined to certain language forms.<sup>57</sup> Thus focalization achieves realism at the expense of reliability.

The focalization through the character in the ring story which was an element in Glaucon's telling is retained (and perhaps developed) in Cicero's version. Its employment has the standard rhetorical effect – to ensure that the reader sees the events related from the perspective of the principal character. But that rhetorical effect converges with a philosophical agenda: the readers or hearers of the story can 'virtually' experience for themselves the temptations, the choices which befall that character. So here we see not just a convergence between philosophy and fiction as types of discourse, but also a convergence between philosophy and a specific fictional *technique*. The philosophical agenda, which requires hearers or readers of the story to see it as relevant to their own experiences and approaches to ethical decision making, is what gives birth to focalization – and focalization is at least a sufficient condition of fictional narrative.

The phrase *ille Gyges inducitur a Platone* ('that figure of Gyges is introduced by Plato') has already indicated that Cicero believes the story *is* fictional. The verb *inducere* is commonly used by Roman playwrights for the introduction of invented characters in comedies.<sup>58</sup> Cicero's use of

<sup>54</sup> Dyck (n.6) 541 has a less favourable view of Cicero's manipulation of Plato's version here: 'Cicero inserts this piece of information only at the point where it becomes vital to the story to explain Gyges' connection with the court, whereas both Herodotus and Plato had more artfully explained Gyges' position upon first mention of his name...'

<sup>55</sup> Numerous studies of fictional narrative such as D. Cohn, *Transparent Minds* (Princeton 1978), and Genette (n.52) provide circumstantial evidence to bear this out; accounts like M. Riffaterre, *Fictional Truth* (Baltimore 1990), and D. Cohn, *The Distinction of Fiction* (Baltimore 1999), are more specifically concerned with identifying actual formal features of fiction.

<sup>56</sup> Ancient narrative practice bears this out even if ancient literary criticism is reticent about it: epic and Greek prose romance employ soliloquy, focalization and indirect discourse to present characters' thoughts in con-

trast to historiography and 'factual' reportage. Cf. T. Hågg, *Narrative Techniques in the Early Greek Romances* (Stockholm 1971), and Laird (n.33) 102-10.

<sup>57</sup> This criterion for distinguishing fictional from factual narrative is meant to complement the more traditional kinds set out in Gribble (n.52) 49-50, based on responses and expectations of readers and hearers.

<sup>58</sup> Compare Cic. *De Amicitia* 1.3: *Quasi enim induxi loquenter ne inquam et inquit saepius interponerentur, atque ut tanquam a praesentibus coram haberi sermo uideretur* ('I have as it were brought the speakers on stage in person, avoiding a frequent insertion of "I said" and "he said", so that the conversation might seem to be held by people as if they were actually present.'). J.G.F. Powell (ed.), *Cicero: On Friendship and the Dream of Scipio* (Warminster 1990) 78, notes that *induxi* ('I brought [the characters] on [stage]') is a theatrical word.



the expression *ut ferunt fabulae* ('as the accounts go') in fact further confirms this suggestion that the story he tells originates with Plato. That expression is inserted at the point in Cicero's story that corresponds to Glaucon's 'they recount that' (μυθολογοῦσι) in Plato. The claim that the story comes from a prior mythological tradition itself comes from Plato – it is just a characteristic of the way Plato tells his own story. After Cicero himself relays the tale and draws the moral noted above – that secrecy (*occulta*) is not part of morality (*honestata*) – his discussion in *De officiis* moves on to address directly the usefulness of a fictional example for philosophical investigation:

atque hoc loco philosophi quidam, minime mali illi quidem, sed non satis acuti, fictam et commenticiam fabulam prolatam dicunt a Platone; quasi uero ille aut factum id esse aut fieri potuisse defendat! haec est uis huius anuli et huius exempli: si nemo sciturus, nemo ne suspicaturus quidem sit, cum aliquid diuitiarum, potentiae, dominationis, libidinis causa feceris, si id dis hominibusque futurum sit semper ignotum sisne facturus. (*De officiis* 3.39)

Yet on this point, certain philosophers, people who are not at all bad (morally) but who are not very bright, say that the story proffered by Plato is fictitious and fabricated – as if Plato himself would ever plead that it had happened or ever could have happened! The real force of that ring and of that illustration is this: if no one were to know or even to suspect when you did something for the sake of wealth, power, sovereignty or lust, and if that action were always to be undetected by gods as well as humans, would you do it?

Cicero is dealing with the 'realistic response' to the ring story. In his view, such a response comes from incompetent and stubborn philosophers who cannot distinguish between two quite different questions: (i) how one should act in a given scenario, and (ii) whether or not that scenario is possible. He continues:

negant id fieri posse. nequaquam potest id quidem; sed quaero, quod negant posse, id si posset, quidnam facerent. urgent rustice sane; negant enim posse et in eo perstant; hoc uerbum quid ualeat, non uident. cum enim quaerimus, si celare possint, quid facturi sint, non quaerimus, possintne celare, sed tamquam tormenta quaedam adhibemus, ut si responderint se impunitate proposita facturos, quod expediat, facinorosos se esse fateantur, si negent, omnia turpia per se ipsa fugienda esse concedant.

They say that this cannot come about. Certainly there is no way it can – but I am asking what they would *do* if what they say cannot happen did happen. They press their point in an openly idiotic way: they just say it cannot happen and persist in this. But they do not see the force of the argument. For when we are asking what they would do if they could not be found out, we are not asking whether they could be found out, but we are putting them as it were upon the rack: so that if they should answer that if impunity were assured they would do what would suit their own ends, they would be admitting their criminal nature; if they should say that they would not do so, they would be granting that all things in and of themselves immoral should be avoided.

For Cicero, an impossible scenario enables some questions about moral behaviour to be asked and answered. In this way he is able to use the tale of the ring to illustrate the concern which is actually central to the third book of the *De officiis* – that what is morally right is also expedient. The tale and its interpretation, which is packaged as a digression at its close in 3.39, is thus more crucial to the purpose of this treatise than is immediately obvious. It is interesting though, that, even in the passage quoted above where he gives a clear commentary on his procedure and justifies the use of an imaginary exemplum, Cicero is compelled to employ another imaginary scenario: the application of torture on the rack to elicit an honest response from those stubbornly idiotic philosophers who will not otherwise answer his question. In effect, the use of one fictional vehicle in philosophical argument is validated by an appeal to another.

Long after Cicero, the story in *Republic* 359-60 has engaged the attention of both philosophers and novelists.<sup>59</sup> For example, in *Les Rêveries du Promeneur Solitaire* (1782) – essays which themselves combine philosophical thought with stylized, autobiographical fiction – Jean-Jacques Rousseau considers what he would do if he owned a ring of invisibility before he decides that owning such a ring would ultimately have a bad effect, even on someone with such good intentions: ‘Tout bien considéré, je crois que je ferai mieux de jeter mon anneau magique avant qu’il m’ait fait faire quelque sottise.’ Rousseau’s meditation on the ring shows how Plato’s invented story can provide a vehicle for still more speculation in the realm of political philosophy.

The fact that Plato’s story *is* invented is best demonstrated by its intertextualities with Herodotus. The fictionality of the ring story is also suggested by certain formal features, as well as by its fantastic content. More importantly, this discussion has sought to show that Glaucon’s anecdote has a central role in the intellectual and artistic design of the *Republic*. But most important of all, Glaucon’s story is useful as a paradigm – to emphasize that the suspension of disbelief is as necessary for philosophical debates as it is for the successful appreciation of fiction. The importance of Plato’s practice of storytelling for subsequent works of Greek fiction, along with all the epistemological and ethical issues those works raise, still remains to be explored.<sup>60</sup> And in the realm of philosophy, Plato’s practice of storytelling is far from idiosyncratic: it is all too easily forgotten that even Aristotle used the fictional vehicles of dialogue and myth.<sup>61</sup> The arguments and achievements of many philosophers depend on their own ability, and on the disposition of their readers and audiences, to countenance and work with situations that are purely imaginary.<sup>62</sup> Cicero recognized this, and saw the importance of asking people what they would do, if what they thought couldn’t happen did happen.

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<sup>59</sup> Shell (n.22) 14 n., who at 11-88 offers a Marxist allegorization of the Gyges story, lists writers (including Rousseau) who treat the myth: Hans Sachs, Montaigne, La Fontaine, Friedrich Hebbel, Quevedo y Villegas, Théophile Gautier, Addison, Beaumont and Fletcher, Hugo von Hoffmanstal and André Gide. More recently, Mario Vargas-Llosa and Frederic Raphael have provided novelistic retellings with elements from Herodotus as well as Plato.

<sup>60</sup> Perry (n.44) has been influential in eschewing the philosophical dimensions of Greek romances; their interpretation as *religious* texts by (e.g.) K. Kerényi, *Die griechische-orientalische Romanliteratur* (Tübingen 1927), and R. Merkelbach, *Roman und Mysterium* (Munich and Berlin 1962), has enjoyed far more currency.

<sup>61</sup> For a translated selection of fragments of Aristotle’s dialogues, see J. Barnes (ed.), *Complete Works*

*of Aristotle* 2 (Princeton 1984) 2389-426. An Aristotelian ‘myth’ in which Silenus converses with Midas – fr 44 in V. Rose (ed.), *Aristotelis Fragmenta* (Leipzig 1886) – is better termed ‘dialogical fiction’. Ar. *Poetics* 9.1451b5 (διὸ καὶ φιλοσοφώτερον καὶ σπουδαιότερον ποιήσις ἱστορίας ἐστίν) is a classic articulation of the philosophical value of fiction.

<sup>62</sup> Examples range from Boethius to Thomas More and Nietzsche. T. Nagel, *What is it Like to be a Bat?* will appear fictional to the ‘man on the Clapham omnibus’, who risks being fictional himself. As well as thought experiments (n.37 above), theories of ‘possible worlds’ involve fabrication; whilst H. Vaihinger, *The Philosophy of As-If* (London 1924), suggests that traditional discourses of philosophy are themselves ‘fictions’. Richard Rorty’s neo-pragmatism can be seen as a more recent version of this position.