

Athens Institute for Education and Research

ATINER



ATINER's Conference Paper Series

PHI2014-1274

**Where are Poets in Plato's Political
Philosophy?**

Mai Oki-Suga

Researcher

Waseda University

Japan

An Introduction to
ATINER's Conference Paper Series

ATINER started to publish this conference papers series in 2012. It includes only the papers submitted for publication after they were presented at one of the conferences organized by our Institute every year. The papers published in the series have not been refereed and are published as they were submitted by the author. The series serves two purposes. First, we want to disseminate the information as fast as possible. Second, by doing so, the authors can receive comments useful to revise their papers before they are considered for publication in one of ATINER's books, following our standard procedures of a blind review.

Dr. Gregory T. Papanikos
President
Athens Institute for Education and Research

This paper should be cited as follows:

**Oki-Suga, M., (2014) "Where are Poets in Plato's Political Philosophy?",
Athens: ATINER'S Conference Paper Series, No: **PHI2014-1274.****

Athens Institute for Education and Research
8 Valaoritou Street, Kolonaki, 10671 Athens, Greece
Tel: + 30 210 3634210 Fax: + 30 210 3634209 Email: info@atiner.gr
URL: www.atiner.gr

URL Conference Papers Series: www.atiner.gr/papers.htm

Printed in Athens, Greece by the Athens Institute for Education and Research. All rights reserved. Reproduction is allowed for non-commercial purposes if the source is fully acknowledged.

ISSN: **2241-2891**

18/09/2014

Where are Poets in Plato's Political Philosophy?

Mai Oki-Suga
Researcher
Waseda University
Japan

Abstract

In this paper I inquire the rolls of poets in Plato's political philosophy.

Themes concerning poetry emerge as major concerns of his conception of the ideal polis, especially of its educational program. Although in the end of Politeia poetry seems to be banned from the polis, one can interpret that Plato recognizes the roll of poetry as education of souls of the citizens, as Gadamer and Halliwell have emphasized.

Staying in accord with their interpretation, however, I stress Plato's statements about poets. When he lets Socrates speak, "we are not poets, but founders of the polis" (Politeia, 378e7-9a1) or "writers of narratives should be censored" (377c1), the need for poets in his ideal polis is implied. The question is, then, why Plato needs not only poetry but also poets here. In order to examine this question, I focus on the special ability of poets, i.e. "inspiration" or "divine power", which is scrutinized in one of Plato's early dialogues, *Ion*. On the one hand, Plato criticizes the ignorance of poets about the nature of virtue etc., on the other hand he admits their divine power, which is given by Muses. This power produces effects on rhapsodes and audience as we see the metaphor of magnets; therefore, as long as poets make good and useful poetry, Plato regards them as useful to appeal to the souls of the audience or all citizens. Since the normal audience tends not to listen to good poetry, that is, poetry aiming at virtue, if they are not educated with good narratives in their childhood, it is questioned how good poetry fascinates such audience. I will argue that Plato's solution to this problem is the inspiration of poets, and that the audience comes to be willing to follow good poetry, when they are fascinated.

Keywords: Plato, Political Philosophy, Poetry.

Introduction

This paper investigates the role of poets in Plato's political philosophy. From ancient to modern times, various authors have discussed poetry in Plato's philosophy, and recent interpretations tend to argue that Plato sees poetry as useful in terms of education.¹ Halliwell argues, and I mainly agree, that representation (*mimêsis*) of good men in poetry can promote the citizenry's character formation.

However, how about poets themselves? Even if Plato perceives poetry as useful, this does not necessarily entail that he also views *poets* as necessary. One can find many passages that could be interpreted as Plato trying to banish poets from his ideal polis, or at least to extremely limit their roles. In Book 10 of *Politeia*, the character Socrates seems to purge poets and writers of tragedies, who are said to have educated people in the Greek world, from the ideal polis. In *Nomoi*, the Athenian Stranger does not develop as harsh an argument as Socrates' in *Politeia*. Nevertheless, he seems to regulate poets very strictly, as if poets exist only to write down what they are told to. However, it would be hasty to conclude that Plato does not need poets in his ideal polis at all. The Stranger surely limits the roles of poets but he also perceives their abilities as necessary. Socrates surely tries to banish poets, but he accepts some poetry, as well as that such writers are neither philosophers nor guardians but poets. Poets seem to be banished or strictly regulated but simultaneously necessary.

Here arises the question: where are poets in Plato's political philosophy? Precisely speaking, one must ask whether Plato sees poets as necessary in his ideal polis, and if he does, what their particular roles are. This paper addresses these problems mainly via interpreting *Politeia* and *Nomoi*, each of which addresses political matters in terms of the government of citizens and their souls.

Comparison of Homer with Lawgivers

This inquiry will begin with Socrates' imaginary question to Homer in Book 10 of *Politeia*.

Oh dear Homer, ... tell us which polis has been governed (ᾠκησεν) better by you, just as Lacedaemon [Sparta] is due to Lycurgus, and many other poleis [plural of *polis*], big and small, are due to others? Which polis thinks that you have become a good lawgiver (ἀγαθός

¹ Three representative authors who hold this view can be identified. Annas and Gadamer emphasize that one should understand poetry in the context of Plato's educational program, not in the context of the banishment of poetry (Annas 1981; Gadamer 1934/1985). Halliwell focuses attention on the role of character formation, which is developed mainly in Book 2 and 3 of *Politeia* (Halliwell 2002, 2011).

νομοθέτης) and benefitted them? ... There is Solon among us [Athenians]. (599d-e)

In some ways, this imaginary question is surprising to modern readers, since they understand Homer, the author of *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, not as a lawgiver but rather as an epic writer. This ancient writer remains well-known even today because of his excellent literary works. However, although he was also regarded as prominent during Plato's time, Socrates shows that the reason for Homer's fame does not only depend on his literary skill. Rather, according to Socrates, Homer was "the leader (ὁ ἡγεμῶν)" of the poets at that time, who ordinary people believe "know every art, all human affairs concerning virtue and vice (ἀρετή καὶ κακία), and also things as to gods" (598d-e). The common view is, therefore, that poets, and especially Homer, do not only have outstanding literary skill but also know everything. Socrates uses Homer as an example, because, if this extraordinary leader is revealed not to have such knowledges, it goes without saying that other poets do not have it either. Therefore, one must ask whether Socrates' only intention in this imaginary question is the refutation of the common view about poets.

In order to carefully read the imaginary question above, and detect what will surprise modern readers, three points must be considered.

The first striking point is that the question to Homer concerns governance ("which polis *has been governed* better by you?").¹ Although Homer is a poet, what matters to Socrates is not his literary skill as much as his polished expressions. This indicates that one of the roles of poets is to offer the foundation for governance of the polis; this is not merely governance but "better (βέλτιον)" governance. One must then ask what better governance is. Socrates does not explain it clearly, but one can imagine that for Socrates a well governed polis is the polis conforming to justice as harmony, which Socrates and his interlocutors have investigated from Books 1 to 9 of *Politeia*. It is too difficult to briefly define a just polis, but the most important aspect for this discussion is that the just polis is governed better, and that poets serve this better governance.

The second notable point is that Socrates compares the achievements of Homer with those of Lycurgus and Solon, who are generally regarded as lawgivers. It is therefore obvious that the second sentence ("which polis thinks that you have become a good *lawgiver*?") concerns legislation or lawgiving. Here Socrates expresses the view that the comparison of Homer with historical lawgivers is appropriate, and that poets can be the source of good lawgiving. It is natural to assume that the "governance" mentioned in the previous sentence is connected to the lawgiving, since one needs good laws in order to govern a polis well.

¹ The original Greek word for what is here translated into "govern" or "governance" is οἰκεῖν (the present infinitive form of ὄκησεν), rather than ἄρχειν.

Finally, although it is included in the second sentence, the phrase “to have benefitted (ὠφελῆκέναι) them (σφῶς)”¹ should be understood as independent from the second point, that is, lawgiving. The “benefit” that poets would bring to the polis can be seen as including victorious battles or agricultural profit, as shown by the discussion just after this citation. However, the benefit mentioned here seems to have a broader sense; benefitting people is equal to “making people better (βελτίους ἀπεργάζεσθαι).”

Two Interpretations

The three points discussed in the previous section lead to two possible interpretations of the roles that Homer should have fulfilled and that the poets in the ideal polis should fulfill.

First, one could understand this imaginary question as an expression of the view that poets are equal to polis-governors and lawgivers. This might be a natural conclusion, if one interprets the comparison of Homer with historical lawgivers literally. Homer should have fulfilled his duty as a governor and a lawgiver in a polis, just as Lycurgus in Sparta and Solon in Athens had done. Poets are both able and also obligated to make at least one polis well governed. In accordance with this interpretation, which this paper will refer to as “the literal interpretation,” poets do not *help* lawgivers or governors make a polis well governed; rather they *themselves* establish laws, just as Lycurgus or Solon did, in order to govern the polis. According to the literal interpretation, “poet” is merely a different name given to a lawgiver or a governor.

However, this comparison also leads to a less literal interpretation. The second possibility is the interpretation that poets are not the same as lawgivers and governors, but rather that they help lawgivers and governors in polis governing and lawgiving. In this second interpretation, which is contrasted to the first, the words “govern” or “lawgiver” in the imaginary question are not to be understood literally. In fact, Socrates asks Homer whether he has governed a polis better and if he has been a good lawgiver, but one can regard these questions as exaggerated expressions, and instead assume that he really implies the similarity of the *raison d'être* of poets to that of lawgivers. Poets should fulfill their duty, which is similar to the duty of lawgivers and governors. The crucial point is to construe the third point, that is, what “benefit” means.

This paper adopts the less literal interpretation, as some passages prove that poets and lawgivers are not the same. This point will be explained in close detail in the next section.

¹ I understand “them” as inhabitants of the polis. It is difficult to understand it as *poleis*, i.e., many city-states, because Socrates mentions only “a polis.”

Are Poets Lawgivers?

It is reasonable to discard the literal interpretation if one takes Socrates' following statements into account.

- [3-1] Apparently we must supervise (ἐπιστατέον) the story makers (μυθοποιοί) and we must pass what they do well and we must reject what they do not. (377c)
- [3-2] We must compel (ἀναγκαστέον) the poets to keep close to this [the idea that no citizen ever quarreled with his fellow-citizen] in their compositions (λογοποιεῖν). (378d)
- [3-3] Oh Adeimantus, at present, we, you and I, are not poets but founders of a state (οἰκισταὶ πόλεως). [...] The founders are not required themselves to compose stories. (378e-9a)

These statements are all found in Book 2 of *Politeia*, where Socrates and his interlocutors discuss the right (ὀρθός) education through poetry and story (*mythos*). Passage [3-1] implies the existence of someone who supervises the story makers or poets.¹ One role of the “supervisors” mentioned in [3-1] is to judge which poetry or stories are appropriate to be told to children. However, this is not the only role of supervisors. As point [3-2] shows, they also compel the poets to compose apt poetry as a part of education. The supervisors mentioned here are, as statement [3-3] shows, “we” or “you and I,” namely Socrates and Adeimantus. They are “founders,” and founders do not compose stories or poetry.

[3-1], [3-2], and [3-3] therefore demonstrate that the supervisors of poets are identical to the founders of a polis, and that poets are differentiated from the founders of a polis. Since “founders” are defined as “those who frame constitutions or characters for a city,”² it is appropriate to argue that poets are differentiated from the lawgivers of a polis. Hence, this paper rejects the literal interpretation comparing of Homer with lawgivers. Now it will examine the less literal interpretation by questioning how poets contribute to the work of lawgivers or governors.

Poets and Lawgivers in *Nomoi*

The rejection of the view that poets are identified as lawgivers is also supported by the following passages found in *Nomoi*, which is the last of Plato's dialogues.

¹ Socrates' statement, “those [stories] that Hesiod, Homer, and other poets told us” (377d) obviously shows that “story (μῦθος)” can be seen as equal to poetry (ποίησις). Therefore, “story makers” can be also seen as equal to poets.

² This is one of the definitions of οἰκιστής (founder) in LSJ.

- [4-1] Do we think that it is allowed for poets to teach in the dance anything which they themselves like in the way of rhythm, melody, or languages (ῥυθμὸς ἢ μέλος ἢ ῥῆμα) to the children of any well-conditioned parents? (656c)
- [4-2] The right lawgiver (ὁ ὀρθὸς νομοθέτης) will persuade [...] or compel [...] the poet to express ... gestures and melody (σχήματα καὶ μέλη) of temperate and brave and in every way good men in rhythm and harmonies (ἁρμονίαι) (660a).

The statement in [4-1] is a question raised by the main character, the Athenian Stranger (hereafter: the Stranger), and put to his interlocutor Cleinias. As one might imagine, Cleinias' answer is negative. Being similar to [3-1], [4-1] hints that there is someone who allows or forbids poets to make some kind of poetry. Point [4-2] indicates that this "someone" is a right lawgiver. Although they were written in different times, these perspectives on the roles of poets shown in *Politeia* remain the same in *Nomoi*: poets have to follow the standards of right poetry, as defined by lawgivers.

However, statements [4-1] and [4-2] are more striking in their reference to musical elements. Both agree that what poets compose is strongly connected to rhythm, melody, languages, or harmonies. It is thus not surprising that the Stranger connects poetry with musical performances, because there is less of a boundary between poetic words and music in Plato's times than in the present. The Greek word *mousikê* (μουσική), which is used before and after [4-1] to describe musical performances, including poetry as a whole, means "a seamless complex of instrumental music, poetic word, and co-ordinated physical movements."¹ Therefore, one should read statements [4-1] and [4-2] in the light of this historical and linguistic background. However, even if this contextualization makes the connection between poetry and musical elements natural, it is still unclear why lawgivers would have to care about *mousikê*.

Lawgiving and *Mousikê*

Both of the main characters in *Politeia* and in *Nomoi* express a high interest in *mousikê*. This is demonstrated not only by the quantity of the discussion over *mousikê*, including tragedy (in *Politeia* Books 2, 3, and 10, in *Nomoi* Books 2, 7, and partly 8 are devoted to it), but also by the discussion of the Egyptian system in *Nomoi*. In Egypt, according to the Stranger, young citizens must habitually practice fine gestures and fine melodies, as specified by their ancestors, and they are neither permitted to bring anything new, nor to deviate from these strictly defined patterns (656d-7a). The Stranger describes this Egyptian system as having been sustained for ten thousand years through

¹ Murray and Wilson 2004: 1. *Mousikê* was understood the "realm of the Muses", who are, according to ancient Greek myth, daughters of the supreme god Zeus and the goddess of memory Mnemosyne (*ibid.* 1-4). Therefore, the Stranger calls the education through *mousikê* also as the education of Muses (656c).

“the excellent work in lawgiving and political arts” (657a). According to him, the establishment and preservation of rules concerning “*mousikê* altogether (μουσική ξυμπάση)” is the work of lawgiving and political arts.

One must ask why the Stranger regards the defining models of *mousikê* and of making people follow them as the work of lawgiving and political arts? To answer this question, one must keep in mind the Stranger’s fundamental proposition, which has been maintained from the early works of Plato such as *Gorgias*: caring for souls (θεραπεύειν) is the political art (*Gorgias* 521d; *Nomoi* 650b). One of the aspects of caring for souls is “character formation” in childhood, which is achieved by education in *mousikê*.

Education (τροφή) in *mousikê* is most decisive, because more than anything else rhythm and harmony *penetrate* (καταδύω) *the innermost soul* and take the strongest hold upon it, bringing with them and imparting fineness if one is rightly (ὀρθῶς) raised, and otherwise the contrary. (*Politeia* 401d, emphasis added)

The important point here is the power of penetration, which makes an education in *mousikê* decisive. The word “penetration” seems to imply that, if rhythm and harmony have already penetrated into souls in childhood, it is later extremely difficult to deprive adults of them. This is because they pervade “the innermost soul,” which cannot easily change. This experience is quite common, as even as an adult one remembers songs and music learned in early years. This penetration has both its strength and weakness. If one is “rightly” educated through virtuous *mousikê*, his/her character will be virtuous. However, if one is educated through vicious *mousikê*, his/her character will become vicious. There is a strong correlation between the education in *mousikê* and overall character formation. Hence, for Plato those things concerning *mousikê* are unquestionably the work of lawgiving and political arts.

Why Are Poets Required?

One might now assume that lawgiving concerns *mousikê*, to which poets dedicate themselves. However, the emphasis on the importance of *mousikê*, especially poetry, would lead us to a very natural inquiry into why poets are required.

If lawgivers or founders were to strictly define the content and musical elements of poetry, they would also be able to make poetry by themselves. However, this possibility is excluded, as has been seen in [4-2]: lawgivers will persuade or compel poets to express gestures and melody. While lawgivers are concerned with poetry, they will never compose poetry by themselves. One might assume that lawgivers also engage in the composition of poetry, because they are the authorities that decide which poetry is fine. Indeed, it would likely be easier for lawgivers or governors to compose the “right” poetry by themselves rather than to censor it. Similarly, it could be possible to think that

they in fact only require a layperson to write down exactly what they command. Given these possibilities, one must inquire why Plato requires poets at all.

One possible answer to this question is that poets have something that lawgivers do not. The following words from the Stranger offers a clue.

We take the advice of poets and musicians as well and we *make use of their ability* of composition (αὐτῶν αἰ δυνάμεις τῆς ποιήσεως) but we do not entrust their flavors and wishes. (*Nomoi* 802b-c, emphasis added).

The last sentence, indicating that “flavors and wishes” of poets should not be involved in fine poetry, has been stated repeatedly in [3-1] and [4-1]. However, the first half contains something new, as it suggests that poets possess a special ability of composition that normal human beings, even lawgivers, cannot have. Although lawgivers are illustrated as if they are superior human beings, they do not have this ability. The question therefore becomes what this ability is and why Plato assigns it only to poets.

Charm of Poetry

In order to examine what these special abilities are and why Plato assigns them to poets, this study will first begin with an examination of the peculiar power possessed not by poets, but rather by poetry, or the more generic concept of *mousikē*.

In *Nomoi*, a song (ᾠδή) composed by poets is called an “incantation” or “charm” (ἔπωδή) (659e).¹ This song can “enchant (ἐπάδειν)” the souls of citizens (664b), which illustrates its mysterious power over or effect on peoples’s minds, which cannot be explained by a logical and causal relation. In *Politeia*, Socrates tries to inquire about the attractiveness of poetry from the perspective of its influence on souls. He observes the state of the audience’s souls during their enjoyment of poetry.

The best men (βέλτιστοι) of us, I imagine, when we hear Homer or one of the tragedy writers imitating some hero in a state of grief, as he drags out a long speech of lamentation, or even breaks into song, or starts beating his breast. ... We enjoy it, as we surrender ourselves (ἐνδόντες) to it, and we follow, as we sympathize with them (ξυμπάσχοντες) ... (*Politeia* 605c-d)

According to Socrates, it is hard for the audience, and even the best men in it, to avoid falling into the state of surrendering and sympathizing with the poets and the characters they illustrate. When he writes “we surrender

¹ In *Politeia* Socrates also mentions the “charm” of poetry (608a).

ourselves and sympathize with the characters,” Plato depicts the audience as using their sensory organs to perceive the gestures, voices, atmosphere, and the temperatures of people—both the actors and the audience—in theaters or houses. The influences upon these bodily perceptions are much more effective and less resistible than those acting on reason (*logos*), because the sensory organs are related to the most primitive perceptions.¹ This irresistibility is the reason why the poets’ productions are called “incantations” or “charms.”

Although the fundamental reason human beings cannot resist the “charm” of poetry is the nature of poetry and *mousikê* itself, not of its composer, people still believe that poetry is given its special “charm” by the power of its writers.

Poets’ Divine Power

It is difficult to ascertain whether Plato also cedes that poetry affects souls just as much as charm, because the characters—mainly the Stranger and Socrates—espouse often-ironic attitudes toward this power. One cannot easily determine Plato’s actual opinion on the matter. Based on the articulations above, it is certain that the people believe that poets have something special and share something divine with gods and goddesses.

In *Ion*, one of his earlier dialogues, Plato allows Socrates to mention “inspiration (ἐνθουσιάζειν)” in the discussion on poets. Although *Ion* is neither a political nor a later dialogue, the description of the divine power of poets and rhapsodes is quite suggestive. The main question explored throughout the whole work is why Ion, an apparently talented rhapsode, is able to recite Homer’s works so well, even though he does not have art (τέχνη) and knowledge (ἐπιστήμη) of Homer and poetry. Socrates first addresses this problem through an examination of poets, rather than rhapsodes. He pays attention to the “divine power (θεία δύναμις)” or “divine gift (θεία μοίρα)” that only poets and people who have connection with them possess. “All the good epic poets [and the good lyric poets as well] utter all those fine poetries not from art but as inspired (ἐνθεος εἶναι) and possessed” (533e). Here Socrates repeatedly uses words concerning gods and divineness, as he believes that a divine power enables poets to compose beautiful and fine poetry.

According to Socrates, this divine power comes from the Muses, the goddesses of *mousikê*. They put poets in a state of inspiration because the Muses are in the need to make the poets interpret (ἐρμηνεύειν) their own messages (534e). Poets are “interpreters” or “messengers” (ἐρμηνεύς: *hermêneus*).² *Hermêneus* originates from the messenger of Zeus, Hermes, who delivers the words of Zeus to human beings. *Hermêneus* illuminates enigmatic

¹ See *Nomoi* 653e.

² Murray translates *hermêneus* here into “mouthpiece,” because at 534e-5b it “convey[s] the idea of passive transmission” (Murray 1996: 121). Surely, the poets depicted here are the receivers of the words of gods rather than makers of words. Plato tries to maintain a place for poets through the reinterpretation that poets do not have knowledge itself, but rather hold a connection with gods or divine things.

words and substitutes them with understandable words for them. The original possessors of poetical words are the gods and goddesses themselves, but since their divine words are hard for ordinary people to understand, people are in need of the poets to interpret. However, the words of poets are still not close enough to their recipients. They thus require someone who illuminates words of poets via the appropriate method of appealing to their souls; namely, the audience needs rhapsodes. Poets are the *hermêneus* of gods and rhapsodes are the *hermêneus* of poets.

The explanation of the divine power could be construed in various ways. On the one hand, one can imagine that Plato actually admits the special divine ability of poets and rhapsodes, but also imagine, on the other hand, that this description expresses his critical view of poets that have no particular art and knowledge. Even though Plato's true intention in these arguments is unclear, one should note that this is a widespread opinion about poets. People in the polis and audiences of such poetical works acknowledge the divine power and perceive the poets and rhapsodes as special and talented human beings.

Sacredness in Lawgiving

One might object to this interpretation of poets as introduced in the previous section, because it is based on *Ion*, which was likely written much earlier than *Politeia* and *Nomoi*. While I admit that it is perhaps rash to connect the discussions in *Ion* with those in *Nomoi*, the description of poets' divine powers can nevertheless help one to understand some important passages in *Nomoi*.

Turning Book 7 of *Nomoi*, the Stranger and his interlocutors examine the appropriate poetry that young citizens should listen to, and try to define the criteria of fine poetry. They inquire whether there is any "model" or "pattern" (παράδειγμα) for fine poetry, and the Stranger answers affirmatively.

In looking back now at the discussions which we have been pursuing from dawn up to this present hour, and that, as I fancy, *not without some inspiration of gods* (τις ἐπίπνοια θεῶν), it appeared to me that they were framed exactly like poetry. (811c, emphasis added)

The Stranger argues that the model of fine poetry is used in their dialogue presented thus far, not only because they have discussed the important themes using a well-constructed and logical argumentation, but also because they are "inspired." In fact, if one reads *Nomoi* carefully, one can find several passages where the divine power or the gods are closely related to lawgiving or education. First, *Nomoi* begins with the word "god (θεός)." ¹ When he explains "the excellent work in lawgiving and political arts" in Egypt, the Stranger refers to such work as something made by gods or extraordinary men (664d).

¹ "To god or to some man, do you ascribe the authorship of your laws, Stranger?" (624a)

It is important to remember that in *Nomoi* and *Politeia* the Stranger, Socrates, and their interlocutors are playing the roles of the founders of the ideal polis constructed via speech. They know that they have invented fine poetry and its criteria as human beings, not as gods or goddesses, although they call for gods or divinities in order to give authority to the poetry they make. As observed in the previous sections, the depiction of the poets' divine power is intended to make the audience consider their works as gifts from gods. The audience would thus admire poetry, assuming that poets interpret the divine words of gods, because usually ordinary people could not create such work. The audience therefore give authority to the words written by the poets and recited by the rhapsodes. This is the reason why Plato requires poets in his ideal city; they provide authority for the laws that Plato defines through the mouths of the Stranger and Socrates. Poets who are able to create beautiful moving poetry are required in order to assure the sacredness of *mousikē* in the laws of the ideal polis.¹

Concluding Remarks

This paper has tried to explain where are poets are in Plato's political philosophy. Its solution is derived from the discussion that poets are located in a special position for giving authority and sacredness to the polis and its laws.

Plato's attempt in his political philosophy—at least in the discussions in *Politeia* and *Nomoi*—is to find the ideal political system that is both stable and well governed. From Plato's perspective, the genuine stability of the well governed polis cannot be acquired without paying attention to “the innermost souls” of the citizenry. The ideas of the rule by philosopher-kings in *Politeia* and the rule of laws in *Nomoi* are the means by which to achieve the stability of the well governed polis. Both philosopher-kings and laws are the expressions of reason that every human possesses, and can help people follow his/her own reason. However, reason itself, or at least the appeal to reason, is too weak to motivate people to follow the orders of philosopher-kings or laws, as they are too overwhelmed by pleasure. This is the reason why Plato requires poets. Poets are necessary in Plato's political philosophy because they provide the missing element needed to achieve a sustainable well governed polis, that is, the motivation and grounds for the people to follow their reason and thus abide by the laws of the polis. If people regard the poets and their productions as sacred, due to the special divine abilities of the poets, those people would be naturally motivated to listen to the right kind of poetry. Poets therefore impart their poetry with authority and sacredness, and ultimately help educate people in the polis and assist lawgivers and governors in governance. If people are

¹ Asmis shows an opposite view on the relation between divine power and poetry. “Plato indicates that divine possession is a bad reason to regard anyone—even “the best and most divine of poets,” Homer—as an authority.” (Asmis 1996: 344) However, should one negatively interpret divine possession, the Stranger's description of gods or inspiration from gods (cf. 624a, 811c) would become problematic.

given the right laws by the right lawgivers and are governed rightly, they will finally realize “the end of evils (κακῶν παῦλα) of both polis and human race.”¹

Texts

Burry, R. G., ed. 1926. *Plato Laws*. Harvard University Press.
Slings, S. R., ed. 2003. *Platonis Respublica*. Oxford University Press.
Flashar, H., ed. 1988. *Platon Ion*. Philipp Reclam.

References

Annas, J. 1981. *An Introduction to Plato's Republic*. Clarendon Press.
Asmis, E. 1996. Plato on Poetic Creativity. In *The Cambridge Companion to Plato*, ed. R. Kraut. Cambridge University Press.
Gadamer, H. G. 1985 [originally 1934]. Plato und die Dichter. in Hans-Georg Gadamer *Gesammelte Werke* (5). Tübingen Mohr.
Halliwell, S. 2002. *The Aesthetics of Mimesis*. Princeton University Press.
———. 2011. Republic's Two Critiques of Poetry. In *Platon Politeia*, ed. O. Höffe. Akademie Verlag.
Murray, P., ed. 1996. *Plato on Poetry*. Cambridge University Press.
Murray, P. and P. Wilson, ed. 2004. *Music and the Muses*. Oxford University Press.

¹ *Politeia* 473d.