

Narrative and Dramatic Presentation in *Republic* III: Theory and Practice
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(A shorter session will suffice)

At 392a Socrates begins to consider the respective merits of two kinds of literary forms, narrative and dramatic. His state will avoid the latter kind for educational purposes. Though both involve mimesis, the dramatic form has the unacceptable consequence that the reader, who will speak aloud as normal in the ancient world, will imitate the style of speech adopted by the characters, whereas the narrator is able to employ a single voice throughout. Since the state is founded on the principle of each person playing his/her own role, only one voice is acceptable. The guardians must, in particular, avoid the imitation of anything that falls short of the ideal required.

Actors are well aware that a convincing performance requires ‘getting into character’ in order to resemble the character being played. Assuming that Plato had often read his own work aloud among friends, he had surely felt the desire to portray his characters convincingly and hence to imitate them in some sense. In theory, *Charmides* avoids the reader having to imitate Critias by adopting narrative presentation, as *Republic I* avoids his having to imitate Thasymachus. Many dialogues in the period leading up to the completion of the *Republic* employ narration, a form also associated with Aeschines and Xenophon. Plato was serious enough about its merits to employ it throughout the *Republic*, even though the later material would have been well suited dramatic presentation and employs no obviously inferior characters.

The brief proem of the *Theaetetus* describes the book to be read. It has been written in dramatic form, with all paraphernalia stemming from narration by Socrates (the form apparently expected by Terpsion) removed. It in fact avoids the problems posed by *Republic* III in two ways: by idealizing both questioner and interlocutors, and by having a slave (and hence a non-guardian) read it. Some (e.g. Thesleff) have assumed 143b-c to be a rejection not only of narrated form but also of an earlier narrated form of this very dialogue. Computer-managed study of the working vocabulary (independent of subject matter, and with verbs of saying and vocative O excluded) of the *Theaetetus* and nine early-middle dialogues in fact place all parts of the *Theaetetus* among the narrated dialogues rather than the dramatic. No part of any other dramatic dialogue in the sample behaves similarly, though three parts (of 17) of narrative dialogues are misplaced among the dramatic. Stylistically *Theaetetus* is a narrative dialogue, in spite of its dramatic form. There are less obvious hints in the data that the same might apply to parts of *Gorgias*. I discuss the implications of this for understanding the composition of the *Republic* and other works.

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