"Since man received a portion of the divine, they were, first of all, the only living 322A
beings who worshiped the gods and undertook to set up altars and statues of the gods. Then, with their skill they quickly invented articulate speech and names for things, and they devised houses, clothes, shoes, beds, and nourishment from the earth. Having provided for themselves in this way, men at first lived scattered about; there were no cities. So they were constantly killed off by wild animals since they were weaker in every way than the beasts. Their technical skill was a suitable aid for sustaining themselves but was insufficient for warring against wild beasts. For they did not yet have political skill, and skill in war is a part of that. They tried to band together and protect themselves by building cities, but then, when they did band together, they injured each other since they did not possess any political skill. The result was that they dispersed again and were killed off.

"So Zeus, afraid that our race would be exterminated, sent Hermes to bring Shame and Justice to men so that there might be order in our cities and binding ties of friendship. Hermes asked Zeus how he was to bestow Justice and Shame onto mankind: 'Am I to distribute these as the other skills have been distributed? They have been distributed like this: A single man possessing skill in healing is sufficient for many regular people. The same goes for the other experts in the technical arts. Am I to ration Shame and Justice to men along these lines? Or should I distribute them to all men?'

"'To all men,' Zeus said, 'and give all men the chance to accept their share. For no cities would arise if few men have a share in these as they do in the case of other skills. And you will establish a law under my authority, that anyone incapable of accepting his share of Shame and Justice is to be killed as a plague upon the city.'"

FROM *REPUBLIC*

2.376d–2.380c The Role of Poets and Myth in an Ideal State

In the following excerpt from Republic *2 Socrates discusses with Glaucon and Adeimantos the creation of the ideal state, and they have come to the important topic of how its leaders are to be educated. Since myth and the poets who told myths were an important part of early Greek education, the subject of myth had to be dealt with in a systematic manner. Socrates argues that the myths of Homer and Hesiod are unsuitable for early education because they lead the young to improper behavior. It is also worth noting that in the discussion prior to the beginning of this excerpt Adeimantos himself had used the myths of self-serving gods as told by Homer and Hesiod to justify a self-serving lifestyle. This leads to Plato's contention that the storytellers must be censored for content, and he gives an account of individual passages from authors that prove his case. So powerful was Plato's condemnation of Homer that later thinkers such as Heraclitus sought to defend the epic poet against his denunciations.*

SOCRATES: Come, then, and just as if we had the leisure to make up stories, let's describe in theory how to educate our men.

ADEIMANTOS: All right. 376E

What will their education be? Or is it hard to find anything better than that that has developed over a long period—physical training for bodies and music and poetry for the soul?

Yes, it would be hard.

Now, we start education in music and poetry before physical training, don't we?

Of course.

Do you include stories under music and poetry?

I do.

Aren't there two kinds of story, one true and the other false?

Yes.

377A And mustn't our men be educated in both, but first in false ones?

I don't understand what you mean.

Don't you understand that we first tell stories to children? These are false, on the whole, though they have some truth in them. And we tell them to small children before physical training begins.

That's true.

And that's what I meant by saying that we must deal with music and poetry before physical training.

All right.

You know, don't you, that the beginning of any process is most important, especially for anything young and tender? It's at that time that it is most malleable and takes on any pattern one wishes to impress on it.

Exactly.

Then shall we carelessly allow the children to hear any old stories, told by just anyone, and to take beliefs into their souls that are for the most part opposite to the ones we think they should hold when they are grown up?

We certainly won't.

Then we must first of all, it seems, supervise the storytellers. We'll select their stories whenever they are fine or beautiful and reject them when they aren't. And we'll persuade nurses and mothers to tell their children the ones we have selected, since they will shape their children's souls with stories much more than they shape their bodies by handling them. Many of the stories they tell now, however, must be thrown out.

Which ones do you mean?

We'll first look at the major stories, and by seeing how to deal with them, we'll see how to deal with the minor ones as well, for they exhibit the same pattern and have the same effects whether they're famous or not. Don't you think so?

I do, but I don't know which ones you're calling major.

Those that Homer, Hesiod, and other poets tell us, for surely they composed false stories, told them to people, and are still telling them.

Which stories do you mean, and what fault do you find in them?

The fault one ought to find first and foremost, especially if the falsehood isn't well told.

For example?

When a story gives a bad image of what the gods and heroes are like, the way a painter does whose picture is not at all like the things he's trying to paint.

You're right to object to that. But what sort of thing in particular do you have in mind?

First, telling the greatest falsehood about the most important things doesn't make a fine story—I mean Hesiod telling us about how Ouranos behaved, how Cronos punished him for it, and how he was in turn punished by his own son.[1] But even if it 378A
were true, it should be passed over in silence, not told to foolish young people. And if, for some reason, it has to be told, only a very few people—pledged to secrecy and after sacrificing not just a pig but something great and scarce—should hear it, so that their number is kept as small as possible.

Yes, such stories are hard to deal with.

And they shouldn't be told in our city, Adeimantos. Nor should a young person hear it said that in committing the worst crimes he's doing nothing out of the ordinary, or that if he inflicts every kind of punishment on an unjust father, he's only doing the same as the first and greatest of the gods.

No, by god, I don't think myself that these stories are fit to be told.

Indeed, if we want the guardians of our city to think that it's shameful to be easily provoked into hating one another, we mustn't allow *any* stories about gods warring, fighting, or plotting against one another, for they aren't true. The battles of gods and giants, and all the various stories of the gods hating their families or friends, should neither be told nor even woven in embroideries. If we're to persuade our people that no citizen has ever hated another and that it's impious to do so, then *that's* what should be told to children from the beginning by old men and women; and as these children grow older, poets should be compelled to tell them the same sort of thing. We won't admit stories into our city—whether allegorical or not—about Hera being chained by her son, nor about Hephaistos being hurled from heaven by his father when he tried to help his mother, who was being beaten, nor about the battle of the gods in Homer. The young can't distinguish what is allegorical from what isn't, and the opinions they absorb at that age are hard to erase and apt to become unalterable. For these reasons, then, we should probably take the utmost care to insure that the first stories they hear about virtue are the best ones for them to hear.

That's reasonable. But if someone asked us what stories these are, what should we say?

You and I, Adeimantos, aren't poets, but we *are* founding a city. And it's appropriate for the founders to know the patterns on which poets must base their stories and 379A
from which they mustn't deviate. But we aren't actually going to compose their poems for them.

All right. But what precisely are the patterns for theology or stories about the gods?

Something like this: Whether in epic, lyric, or tragedy, a god must always be represented as he is.

Indeed, he must.

Now, a god is really good, isn't he, and must be described as such?

What else?

[1] See Hesiod, *Theogony* 137–187, 458–508.

And surely nothing good is harmful, is it?
I suppose not.
And can what isn't harmful do harm?
Never.
Or can what does no harm do anything bad?
No.
And can what does nothing bad be the cause of anything bad?
How could it?
Moreover, the good is beneficial?
Yes.
It is the cause of doing well?
Yes.

The good isn't the cause of all things, then, but only of good ones; it isn't the cause of bad ones.

I agree entirely.

Therefore, since a god is good, he is not—as most people claim—the cause of everything that happens to human beings but of only a few things, for good things are fewer than bad ones in our lives. He alone is responsible for the good things, but we must find some other cause for the bad ones, not a god.

That's very true, and I believe it.

Then we won't accept from anyone the foolish mistake Homer makes about the gods when he says:

> There are two urns at the threshold of Zeus,
> One filled with good fates, the other with bad ones. . . . [2]

and the person to whom he gives a mixture of these

> Sometimes meets with a bad fate, sometimes with good,[3]

but the one who receives his fate entirely from the second urn,

> Evil famine drives him over the divine earth.[4]

We won't grant either that Zeus is for us

> The distributor of both good and bad.[5]

And as to the breaking of the promised truce by Pandarus,[6] if anyone tells us that it was brought about by Athena and Zeus or that Themis and Zeus were responsible

[2] *Iliad* 24.527–24.528.
[3] *Iliad* 24.530.
[4] *Iliad* 24.532.
[5] This quotation comes from an unknown source.
[6] *Iliad* 4.

for strife and contention among the gods, we will not praise him. Nor will we allow the young to hear the words of Aeschylus: 380A

> A god makes mortals guilty
> Men he wants utterly to destroy a house.[7]

And if anyone composes a poem about the sufferings of Niobe, such as the one in which these lines occur, or about the house of Pelops, or the tale of Troy, or anything else of that kind, we must require him to say that these things are not the work of a god. Or, if they are, then poets must look for the kind of account of them that we are now seeking, and say that the actions of the gods are good and just, and that those they punish are benefited thereby. We won't allow poets to say that the punished are made wretched and that it was a god who made them so. But we will allow them to say that bad people are wretched because they are in need of punishment and that, in paying the penalty, they are benefited by the gods. And, as for saying that a god, who is himself good, is the cause of bad things, we'll fight that in every way, and we won't allow anyone to say it in his own city, if it's to be well governed, or anyone to hear it either—whether young or old, whether in verse or prose. These stories are not pious, not advantageous to us, and not consistent with one another.

10.614a–10.621d The Myth of Er

At the end of the Republic, *Plato rounds off his discussion of justice by having Socrates narrate the famous myth (as Socrates calls it) of Er. Er was a man who, after having been wounded in war and thought dead, traveled into the beyond only to return to tell what he had seen of the afterlife. It is uncertain whether Plato invented this myth entirely or adapted it to fit his own purpose. What is certain is that the myth is forcefully employed to drive home the importance of justice on earth since punishments and rewards in the afterlife are meted out based upon the extent to which one has lived a life of wickedness or justice. The philosophical conception of the afterlife was influential for later authors, not least of whom was Vergil (*Aeneid *6).*

SOCRATES: Then these {good reputation, chance to rule in their cities, etc.} are the prizes, wages, and gifts that a just person receives from gods and humans while he is alive and that are added to the good things that justice itself provides. 614A

GLAUCON: Yes, and they're very fine and secure ones too.

Yet they're nothing in either number or size compared to those that await just and unjust people after death. And these things must also be heard, if both are to receive in full what they are owed by the argument.

Then tell us about them, for there aren't many things that would be more pleasant to hear.

It isn't, however, a tale of Alcinoos that I'll tell you but that of a brave Pamphylian man called Er, the son of Armenios, who once died in a war. When the rest of the

[7] It is uncertain from which play of Aeschylus this quotation comes.