

This paper will examine the apian imagery that runs throughout Plato's *Republic* in order to show how Socrates exploits traditional bee-related metaphors to strengthen his case against poetry. But for a cursory treatment in a dated article (Tarrant, 1946), Socrates' rhetorical use of bee imagery has been largely ignored in modern scholarship. I will argue that Socrates transvalues the traditional association between poetry and honey by conflating the image of the bee-poet with that of the parasitic drone-citizen, thus using poetry's own value terms to critique it on political grounds. The traditionally ideal aspects of the hive's economy are suppressed to further this negative transvaluation. By reconfiguring sweetness in all forms as a toxin inimical to a healthy state and incommensurate with the philosophic values of purity and moderation, Socrates turns the poetic tradition against itself. Once sweetness and benefit are understood to be mutually exclusive, poetry's apian "virtues" become political liabilities.

Traditional apian metaphors include the attribution of sweetness to poetry and its comparison to honey (Hesiod, Alcman, Pindar), the projection of the hive as an ideal economy (Semonides, Xenophon), and the use of the drone as a figure for the social parasite (Hesiod, Euripides, Xenophon). In the *Republic*, sweetness first appears in the admittance of "relishes and desserts" into the otherwise wholesome city of pigs (372d-e). The city soon becomes "gorged" with vanities that include poets and entertainers, and degenerates into a corrupt and "feverish" city that Socrates must purge to achieve his ideal state (373b). Socrates thus bans sweets from the guardians' diet not only to preserve their physical condition, but because eating sweet food leads to a "feverish" way of life devoted to variegated and immoderate pleasures (404c-e). Such are the pleasures pursued by the "drones" of society in Socrates' narrative of regime change, who figure both as quintessential parasites ("a disease of the hive" 552c) and as dangerous hedonists trafficking pleasures. The oligarch's son turns into a democratic man once he "tastes the drones' honey" (559d-e). The drones of democratic society make up "that class of idle and extravagant men" who blight the city and ought to be "cut out as quickly as possible, cells and all" (564b-c). Rich men are called "the drones' pasture" because of the "honey" that the masses manage to "squeeze" out of them (564e). Finally, the malcontents of democracy implant *erôs*, "a great winged drone," in the soul of the tyrant, thereafter controlled and consumed by this most insatiable of parasites.

Socrates' suspicious attitude towards sweetness *per se* as a kind of gateway drug to hedonism explains why he refers to those parts of Homer that he censors as "the most poetic and sweet" (387b), and why he concludes that what is sweet cannot be beneficial (607e). By reconfiguring sweetness, in both literal and figurative manifestations, as a poison that corrodes men's physical and spiritual constitution, Socrates negatively transvalues poetry's traditional value terms. He thereby undermines the ideal of the hive as a political model, since it is organized, on his account, to maximize the production of a toxin. Socrates also compounds the corruption conventionally ascribed to the drone since it not only drains the city of its resources, but stimulates the traffic of honey as a drug. The "bee-like" poet turns out to be a hedonistic dilettante that thrives in democracies, and the honey of his poetry is the opiate of the "drone-like" masses. This blithely corrupt state of affairs allows the tyrant to emerge unchecked, goaded by the great drone within him to pursue every kind of destructive pleasure. Thus Socrates' case against poetry emerges, ironically, from poetry's own rhetorical posturing.

