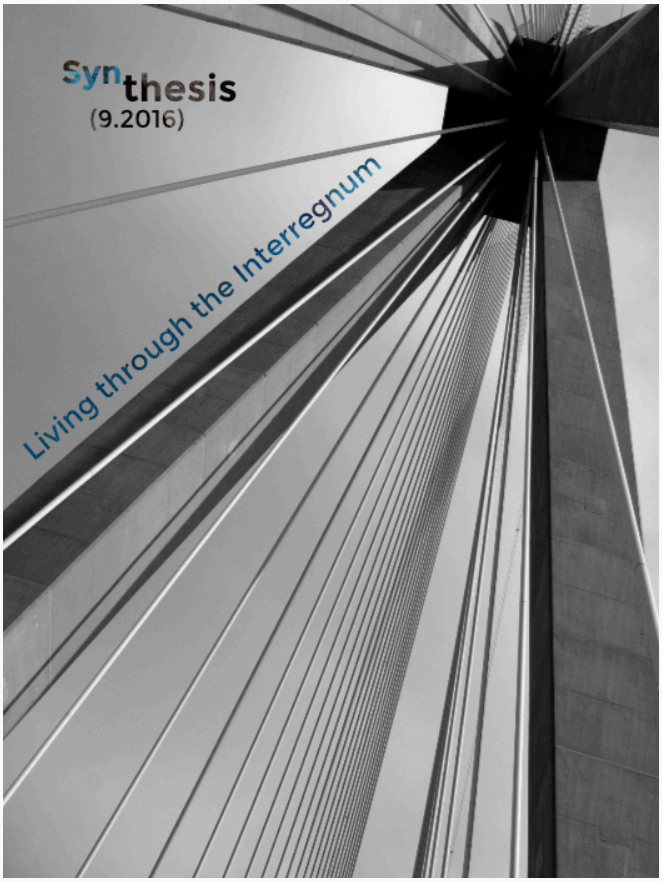
ePublishing

ΕΘΝΙΚΟ ΚΕΝΤΡΟ ΤΕΚΜΗΡΙΩΣΗΣ
EKT
NATIONAL DOCUMENTATION CENTRE

**Synthesis: an Anglophone Journal of Comparative Literary Studies**

No 9 (2016)

Living through the Interregnum




## Democracy in Republic: Plato's Contestation

*Ann R. Cacoullos*

doi: 10.12681/syn.16223

Copyright © 2016, Ann R. Cacoullos

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0.

https://epublishing.ekt.gr | **e-Publisher:** EKT | **Downloaded at:** 16/04/2024 19:34:16

# Democracy in Republic: Plato's Contestation

Ann R. Cacoullos

**Abstract**

Plato has been read as a virulent opponent of democracy, a common interpretation that, among other things, either ignores or dismisses his perceptive account of the ways democracy can be a mistaken political culture. In Books 8-9 where he designs other cities that are less than his ideal city, Plato tries to show how the whole manner of living and esteeming of a ruling class pervert the preferences and decision-making of everyone living in the city. Attention to this account can reveal Plato not so much rejecting but contesting the democracy he designs-in-theory. In the city he models, freedom and equality are misdirected, its own political culture ultimately betrays itself. I argue that, for Plato, democracy's failure is due largely though not exclusively to a remnant of oligarchy that remains within it —the underhanded and excessive pursuit of money— which undermine the freedom and equality that define its political culture.

## I. Introduction

Ancient Athens gave birth to democracy but also to its first critics. Argumentative Athenians in the fifth century BCE endlessly discussed their *politeia*; no issue or controversy was out of bounds. Aristophanes got some good laughs when a chorus sang of how the Athenian *demos*, an old man but a mighty ruler, is stupid, easily flattered and deceived, whose mind even though present absents itself, whenever it rules (*The Knights*, 1111-120. My rendering). Practically everyone who was writing in the fifth and fourth centuries —historians, orators, poets— remarked on weaknesses or failures in democracy without incurring either contempt or ridicule as "democracy was the matrix of theoretical debate" (Schofield 52). It is in this ebullient culture of free speech, argumentation, and satire or what survived of it in the fourth century BCE that Plato wrote his critique of democracy without bringing odium upon his head. While he is still viewed as anti-democratic both in the land of his birth and elsewhere, there are many current readings of *Republic* that argue against this assessment, raising questions that take us beyond the well worn was he or wasn't he

(a democrat)? Bearing in mind always that he is giving us a model of a city, not a depiction of an actual state though he may have had historical Athens in mind, I suggest it may be more useful to view Plato as contesting democracy rather than rejecting it. In fact the Greeks may have invented as well the idea that 'democracy' is an essentially contested concept. In any case, it is largely so today in contemporary political theory and political science

Plato's *Republic* designs cities, the beautiful and just *Kallipolis,* and four other kinds that are less than the ideal city: timocracy, oligarchy, democracy and tyranny. The modeling or designing is based on two suggestive ideas: first, each city is created by our needs, *ἡμετέρα χρεία* (2:369d) given that we are not self-sufficient; second, differences between cities are due to the *ἤθη,* the manner of living and mores of its citizens (8:544ε). A recent commentator has remarked that in designing an ideal city and contrasting it with the corruptions of other cities, "you need to think about much more than political institutions in a narrow sense. You need to think about all the influences, all the ideas, images, and practices that make up the culture of the society" (Burnyeat 217). It is true that Plato attends to this wider area but he goes still further as I shall urge: he portrays a dominant culture in each city that either promotes or weakens individual self-examination or the determination of one's own best interests and real needs, an *elenchos* in tune with the Socratic dictum that the unexamined life is not worth living. In *Kallipolis* culture promotes the best interests of its citizens; but in the other cities it is otherwise. Here Plato's narration secretes a theory/drama of cultural power: the ways the pervasive values of a ruling class exert influence on citizens such that they come to adopt preferences and interests they would not otherwise have chosen. The designing of the other cities suggests strongly that Plato is portraying political cultures not just wider than the units of government but also more powerful and conflicted.

Ancient Greek political thinkers assumed interdependence between city and citizen, a relation Aristotle summed up neatly in "man is a *zoon politikon*" (*Politics* I 1253a). Human beings make cities and are made by them as Plato maintained in what has been called the "city-soul analogy"—a sort of isomorphism between the inner world of the *psyche* and the outer world of the *polis* (Lear 185). In the model of the ideal city, the souls of citizens reflect the moderation and sobriety, *σωφροσύνη*, of the city that is ruled by philosopher-kings but in the models of the lesser cities there is dissension in the individual soul that parallels faction in the city. It has been observed that in Books 8 and 9 of the *Republic* "the city side of the analogy takes over" and "the city and soul are increasingly fused"; the tri-partite soul (Plato's brilliant construct in his moral psychology) is pictured "as if it were a city in which the three parts struggle for dominance over each other" (Burnyeat 226). The soul is

in dissension as is the city where political culture influences human preference, choice and decision-making, creating conflict that is surely more familiar to us today than the harmony of *Kallipolis*.

In this paper I look at democracy, with a brief review of oligarchy: I will try to show that when a political culture like democracy does not change some ingredients of oligarchy which remain within it, like poverty and dependency, and unrestrained appetites either for money or spending and consuming, democracy converts freedom and equality into something else, namely license or anarchy and inequality. The result is a contradictory manner of life. Plato's quarrel with democracy may derive more than is commonly supposed from its failure, as he sees it, to regulate *πλοῦτος*, wealth, and *ἀπορία,* poverty that are consequences of the excessive pursuit of money. Throughout the *Republic* Socrates rails against inordinate money seeking; recall that the philosopher-king and guardians of *Kallipolis* have neither money nor property, these are distributed among the third class of farmers and workers. Thus it may be fair to say that Plato does not so much reject the hallmarks of democracy, freedom and equality, but contests what they become. Before turning to these matters I attend to some key words Plato uses in the Republic and the meanings they had for him in section II.B below. Further, since it is good to be aware, as some have recommended, that the text is a dramatic narration of Socrates's remembered conversation during a longish day and night he spent in the Piraeus, I recount a 'story' in section II A about how it all started, a brief retelling of Book 1 of the *Republic*. But first some remarks on Plato's writing.

## II. Poet or Philosopher: Plato's mansions

In recent years, the 'way to read' Plato has become again a topic of lively debate: poet or philosopher or both? With many others, I am opting for both though I will not argue that case here except to say that in Plato's house there are many mansions. Plato's style of writing —the dialogue form, with characters, history and setting in dramatic distancing— filter and illuminate ideas as in poetry "fairer than prose" whose "windows are numerous/Superior to doors," to borrow from Emily Dickinson. He is also a philosopher —a maker of questions, concepts and theories— so Plato should be viewed as both a dramatic and committed writer.

In Book 1 we encounter culturally influential Greeks who unwittingly evidence the kind of mistakes that will be the focus of Book 8. The narration is full of dramatic irony that is lost in a simple summary of its content and so I retell the action of Book 1 very briefly in the short story below.

### A. A Story

Once upon a time, long, long, ago, an Athenian stonemason by the name of Socrates decided to descend to the Piraeus with his friend Glaucon where a festival was on and Socrates wanted to check this out. He was not too impressed with the festival but paid his devotions anyway and was on his way back home to Athens when he met a number of supporters of the new democratic regime in the Piraeus who insisted vehemently that he stay to observe the night festival and talk with them. Now these were influential fellows in the city who would not take no for an answer. Socrates did not have to be forced to stay since he had a real love of talking maybe more so than most Athenians; he especially loved to converse with people who thought their lifestyle, *tropos tou biou*, entitled them to strong opinions about various matters. Socrates was turned on by such strong opinions so it was a real bonanza for him especially since they started to talk about justice and what makes for a good and happy life. Cephalos, the old host, owned a shield making factory, he was an arms manufacturer who made a lot of money by keeping his contracts and delivering weapons on time, so it was no surprise that he thought justice was about keeping promises or contracts that one has made. He also said that his wealth had secured for him a good and happy life. His son Polemachos, also happily wealthy and with his brother Lysias known for ransoming prisoners of war, thought naturally that justice was about helping friends and harming enemies for that is what they did with their money. Thrasymachos, an eristic sophist, went about winning debates and enjoying that sort of power, so he thought that justice was about whatever interests the stronger in society. When each of these chaps told the audience what he thought the just and happy life was all about you can imagine the reaction of Socrates! His dramatic irony came into full gear and he moved swiftly to refute each in turn. How was he able to do this? Did he use logical argument alone or did he also rely on some common knowledge? Well, he used both.

Glaucon later told his brother Plato about the Socratic bonanza and the latter, admiring Socrates as he did, wrote *Politeia* where he recorded the long conversation Socrates had during those many hours in the Piraeus. Now, here is something you may or may not know: like the great tragic poets of the day who assumed the audience knew the Homeric myths so they were familiar with Agamemnon and others, Plato relied on people of his time knowing about war machines and Athenian imperialism (that, among other things, bothered Sparta so much it warred against Athens and crushed it). What he did then was to use this knowledge to write up the conversations of Book 1 dramatically: just as many heroes in ancient Greek tragedy do not really know the score and make terrible mistakes, so too no one in Book 1 (except Socrates) really knows what he is talking about. Plato does not *say* this, rather he *shows* their ignorance ironically: the tragic

irony of Cephalos as an arms manufacturer is that he does not see the possible disconnect between a just life and a life devoted to making weapons for war and killing that brought him a lot of money. How can he feel happy about that and believe he has acted justly? Keeping contracts and promises does not automatically make him a just man for it all depends on what kind of contracts you make, right? Cephalos dies of old age but his son Polemarchos who with his money helps friends and harms enemies also thinks he is a just man. Socrates asks whether justice can involve any kind of harm and everybody agrees the answer is no. Polemachos is betrayed eventually and executed by the Thirty Tyrants as is well known —so much for harming enemies and helping friends! The other character, loud and feisty Thrasymachos, turns the talk upside down when he says injustice is better than justice, and the strong, perfectly unjust fellow is happiest of all. Socrates turns it right up again and refutes the sophist but who knows, maybe the eristic sophist knew what he was talking about? Glaucon and Adeimantus, another brother of Plato, dare Socrates to prove Thrasymachos wrong. And, you see, this is what happened. Socrates talked well into the night to satisfy Plato's brothers, and all of us know what came of this conversation that Socrates said he had "yesterday," which is the second word he spoke when the dialogue begins, (R1: 327a).

So we have to guess about dates mostly. And maybe Plato was out to do his own *politeia* writing anyway; others were doing it after all, why shouldn't he? One thing is for sure: Plato did not get a prize for his piece but then there were no festivals for philosophy in those days so he could not even enter a contest. Come to think of it, maybe Plato wrote his dialogue to give philosophy its own turf. Who knows?

B. Key words: translation and commentary

1. *ΠΟΛΙΤΕΙΑ*: Plato's original title is rendered in English by words like 'republic,' 'constitution,' and 'government'; "*politeia*" however has a wider range of meanings in ancient Greek that can be found in Herodotus, Thucydides and the Old Oligarch among others. In these texts, the word clearly refers to (1) the relations-transactions between citizen and city, and (2) the ways of living, the *πῶς οἰκήσει* or 'manner of life, of rulers and ruled. Plato I believe is using this larger, thicker sense of *politeia* to refer to the *οἶκος* or abode, generally the style of human life that he investigates in all the cities he designs including early upbringing and child education; division of labor in the community reflecting the interests and desires of citizens as well as the place of private property, wealth and productivity; women's role in leadership; human choices —rational and irrational. To convey this wide range, I have chosen "political culture" to translate *πολιτεία*.

2. *ΗΘΟΣ ΗΘΗ*: Translating *ἤθη* as "moral qualities" (Shorey 243), or "characters of the people" (Grube-Reeve 215) is again to limit the wider range of meanings of this protean Greek term that Plato uses. The word appears in Homer and Hesiod to mean the place, abode, custom, habit of beasts notably pigs; in Herodotus and Thucydides it refers to habits of human beings with or without a moral connotation. The term "character" implying "moral quality" is only one dimension. In Plato, *ἤθη* has a wider sense that includes the manners, customs, habits of human beings, as well as whatever they esteem, thus he is able to focus on both moral character as well as social and political practices from which a political culture (or city) arises as Socrates states clearly in Book 8 (544d-e).
3. *ΗΜΑΡΤΗΜΕΝΑΣ ΠΟΛΕΙΣ*: Plato's word for the other cities that are less than ideal, *"τὰς ἄλλας ἡμαρτημένας,"* (8:544a) derives from the verb *ἁμαρτάνω*, which means miss the mark, fail of one's purpose, err. These are the cities that have been called "deviant," "degenerate," "fallen" even "sinful" in most translations. I have chosen "mistaken" to convey what Plato has in mind as more consistent with his belief that erring is caused by want of education, ἀπαιδευσία, and lack of harmony, *ἀμουσία*. Errors and erring arise through poor upbringing and absence of things beautiful and good, *mousikē*; they lead to wrong esteeming and unlimited or excessive pursuits of any kind. But human erring is not innate; Plato believed, whether rightly or wrongly, that it is correctible through *mousikē* and he offered the elaborate program of education in the ideal city—from the nursery to higher studies—as evidence.

## III. Book 8: Mistaken *Politeiai*

The first item Socrates recalls in Book 8 is that cities arise from the manner of living, the ways of life and esteeming, of those living in the city, *ἐκ τῶν ἠθῶν τῶν ἐν ταῖς πόλεσιν* (544d-e). Change both within the city and transformation to another city occurs when faction arises within the ruling class, *πάσα πολιτεία μεταβάλλει ἐξ αὐτοῦ τοῦ ἔχοντος τὰς ἀρχάς, ὅταν ἐν αὐτῷ τούτῳ* <u>στάσις</u> *ἐγγένηται* (545d, emphasis added). '*Stasis*' is another one of those Greek words with a wide range of meanings. I have chosen to translate it "faction" rather than "dissension" (Shorey's close choice) since Socrates is not just talking about disagreement or discord but also about two positions each of which *excludes* the other as irreconcilable, uneven and incongruous (547a). There is no chance of compromise, something has to give and usually does: there comes a change in *ἤθη,* and a dominating of one side over the other that is no longer an option. This may result in loss as well as gain though for Plato there is mostly loss. A plausible instance of faction could be the partisan contentiousness in, say, the U.S. Congress today.

Battle reigns in the dramatic narrative of the mistaken cities: the interdependence between city and citizen is portrayed as a dominance of the ruling political culture. The moral psychology of the tri-partite soul elaborated in the earlier books of *Politeia* resurfaces in Books 8 and 9 to provide this time a psychic mapping of desires —a distinction between necessary and not necessary ones, *τάς τε ἀναγκαίους ἐπιθυμίας καί τάς μή* further distinguished as productive, *χρηματιστικάς*, and wasteful or profligate, *ἀναλωτικάς* (8.559c)— as well as a differentiation between pleasures that correspond to each part of the soul and determine personality types. Thus there is the lover of gain, *φιλοκερδές*, the lover of victory, *φιλόνικον*, and the lover of wisdom *φιλόσοφον*; each defends as most valuable the life-style, *βίος και πολιτεία*, that arises from the pursuit of his/her particular pleasure (9.581c-d). In the mistaken cities, the pleasure of the *philosophos* has no chance of respect since it is viewed as smoke and nonsense, *καπνός και φλυαρία* (581d). Within each individual in these cities various desires and ends fight for dominance, and the soul resembles the contesting sides of political and economic factions in the city. In viewing the soul as a permanent rather than occasional battleground, Plato launches a drama of power in Book 8 where we can *see* (as in a tragedy) subjects of the polis participating in a political culture only to become subjected to, and made abject by, the dominant *ἤθη*. There are four mistaken political cultures but it is the two that draw Plato's most incisive criticism that I focus on: oligarchy and democracy, for Plato more related than is usually supposed.

A. Oligarchy

Oligarchy is a divided city of the rich and the poor who live together while always plotting against each other. Its dominant *ἦθος* of unrestrained money making renders it a defective culture of wide *ἀπαιδευσία καί κακή τροφή,* lack of education and bad upbringing that Socrates elaborates in his description of the oligarchic type of individual (553e-555c). The gory details of this type's venality (which I do not elaborate here) read like a 19th century gothic novel in the manner of Sheridan Le Fanu's *Uncle Silas*. Oligarchy's dominant *ἦθος* —the excessive love or esteeming of money— creates a practice that Socrates calls the greatest of all bad things, *πάντων τῶν κακῶν* (552a-b). It is worth quoting the passage (Shorey translation 267. Greek terms added):

> Consider now whether this polity is not the first that admits that which is the greatest of bad things...allowing a man to sell all his possessions which another is permitted to acquire, and...go on living in the city, but as no part of it, neither a money-maker, nor a craftsman, nor a knight, nor a foot-soldier, but shut up or confined, *κεκλημένον*, as a poor man, without resources and not knowing what to do, *πένητα καί ἄπορον*.

This is total abjection; for the ancient Greek, living in a shame-culture, there is nothing worse for one both is and is not a citizen, neither in nor out, an aberration. Poverty and *ἀπορία,* the lack of means and resources, are indisputably *bad* (not evil as *κακός* is often translated the bleakest scenario for the individual and the city. Poverty turns those without any resources into drones (male bees) or parasites in the city: some drones are stingless like the penniless beggars, but some with stings become creators of crime, *κακῶν δημιουργοί*, and cause great trouble for everybody by living on the labour of others (552c-e). Plato's narration is relentlessly grim as he recounts other lamentable practices of oligarchy that reduce many highly respected citizens to homelessness and poverty who become *ἄτιμοι,* that is, deprived of their privileges, and place or role in society. The rich become richer, the poor poorer and estranged in their own city (555e-556a-b). When the starving, sinewy poor come to view the rulers as good for nothing whose power is due mainly to the cowardice of the poor, they engage the rich and overthrow them in battle (556c-d). The winners grant an equal, *ἐξ ἴσου,* share in citizenship and offices to all, and *demokratia* arises (557a).

In the construct of oligarchy Plato strongly suggests that the city's esteeming is *created* by the rulers, who exemplify the oligarchic type or soul corresponding to the city. By watching and imitating each other —forming a world of wealth— rulers draw the majority to their way of thinking or esteeming, *τὸ πλῆθος τοιοὐτον αὐτῶν ἀπειργάσαντο* (550e), and so all people in the city come to pursue wealth. It could be said of this political culture, defined by the unrestrained pursuit of wealth, that it is the people who make the culture but this would be to gloss over the fact, clearly stated by Socrates in the above passage that it is the influence or power (of imitativeness perhaps?), exerted by the rulers that causes the wide esteeming of wealth. Even those who sell their properties in order to make more money, becoming poor as a result, do not reject the dominant esteeming of wealth until they realize that the rule of the rich is due not to the benefits they bestow but to the cowardice of the poor (556c-d). So while it may be true to say that the majority *sustains* the culture, *they do not make but rather are made by it*. Plato does not hold that people are born with a love of money or a desire for unlimited acquisition; unlike the desire for food and shelter which is among the necessary desires, the desire for wealth is among the unnecessary desires that are learned through *ἀπαιδευσία και κακὴ τροφὴ* in the culture in which one lives. Once unnecessary desire arises and

remains unrestrained it is the source of all bad things in society as Socrates remarks in several contexts of his long conversation.

Unlike the ideal city built on persuasion oligarchical power is exerted in the city to alter the preferences and life-styles of its citizens. Most people have become poor and abject by the very *ἤθη* of this political culture in which they have participated. It is in this construct that Plato expresses his deep venom towards unrestrained money-making which we may well understand and appreciate today as we observe contemporary practices of money-making — whether legally or illegally— and their global celebration.

B. Democracy

Freedom and equality are the esteemed ἤθη in this *politeia*: the city is full of freedom, especially of speech, *παρρησία*, and all persons have license or power, *ἐξουσία*, to do as they like. Life-styles that exist in the city are likened to buildings, *κατασκευές*; everyone has the *exousia* to make, *κατασκευάζειν*, the furniture of an individual life, as it were, and so various "abodes" fill the city. Democracy is comparable to an Everything Store, *παντοπωλεῖον,* as it features samples, *παραδείγματα*, of all kinds and ways of living (557b-d). Since the political culture is diversified, *ποικίλη*, democratic man is manifold, like the city he too is full of many styles and manners, *παντοδαπόν τε και πλείστων ἠθῶν μεστόν*, entertaining a variety of ways of living, fashions and customs, *παραδείγματα πολιτειῶν τε και τρόπων* (561e). A caveat here: the city is not full of different kinds of people, or people with shifting and unsteady character as Bernard Williams notoriously argued (163), but rather of people whose fellow-feeling and tolerance, *συγγνώμη*, allows heterogeneity in ways of living. Some readers see this variety as Plato's articulation of a pluralist society (Schofield 113), but for Plato such diversity may compound more than ameliorate difficulties in choosing rulers and ruling itself. The democratic political culture, he designs, with its excessive pursuit of freedom and equality seems to esteem everything equally, it does not prioritize, and this can be a problem. Anyone who favours the freedom and equality of the people can hold office whatever their usual occupation or training (558b-c). Thus in democracy there is complete indifference to the political culture of *Kallipolis* and the way of life of the one who deals in political matters, *πράττειν τά πολιτικά* (to recall Plato's *Gorgias*, 521d). It may be that "Plato's fundamental charge against democracy is its failure…to provide a role for knowledge or expertise in government" (Schofield 63). This is certainly one serious charge but I'm not sure it is the most critical one; greater mistakenness may lie in the fact that the freedom and equality that pervade

the city in Socrates's narration eventually come to mean very little for the demos itself since its *ἤθη* lack definition and delimitation.

In democratic political culture rules of all sorts, where they exist, are rather lax: for example, no one is required to hold office even if qualified, or make war or keep the peace unless one really wants to; conversely if it occurs to one to be in office or sit on juries one can do so even in defiance of a particular rule that forbids one to do so (557e-558a). No regulations, rules, or laws that limit freedom are allowed; if some attempt any such regulation they are accused of being pestilential fellows, while those who obey the rules are considered willing slaves (562d). So far it appears that Plato's democratic city upholds "minimal government" as is promoted by the metropolitan centre (though perhaps less so in the periphery). Moreover equality, *ἰσότητα*, of equals and un-equals alike —*ἰσότητα τινὰ ὁμοίως ἴσοις τε καὶ ἀνίσοις*— is on the face of it a peculiar kind of equality as Socrates implies (558c). There is no special treatment for anyone in the culture and this is evidenced in private and public ways: a father tries to resemble his son who in turn likens himself to the father; elders in the family and society imitate the young in dress and bearing for fear they may be thought masters, *δεσποτικοί*; resident aliens and foreigners count themselves equal to citizens. Other such trifling, *σμικρά,* details, as Socrates ironically calls them, include teachers fawning upon their pupils while the latter pay no heed to the teacher, and generally ape their elders (562e-563ab). Purchased slaves are no less free than the owners who paid for them and an important fact, almost forgotten as Socrates says, men and women have equal rights (563b)! The feverish esteem of equality extends to the animal kingdom, and here Plato becomes positively Rabelaisian: dogs in their gait come to resemble their mistresses —preening and sassing, horses and asses walk with dignity and do not step aside but bump into everyone who meets and blocks their way (563c). This description of life in the democratic city —a caricature of democracy as many readers have argued— has its exaggerations to be sure but also scenes and practices neither unfamiliar nor unacceptable to us today, in spite of the tension they continuously conjure in existing democracies.

Everyone is cocooned in freedom and equality, bedecked in baubles as it were. For in Plato's model, freedom yields license that leads to anarchy, and equality simply does not mean much; it is an odd distribution for what kind of equality is it that treats equals and un-equals as the same, *ὅμοιοι*? Since there are no regulations that limit freedom those who have not been allotted their fair share of the city's goods and services, the un-equals, are treated as though they have equality of rights, *ἰσονομία* and *ἰσοπολιτεία*, when in fact they do not. Socrates does not elaborate his important question that is really about the justice of programs like,

say, affirmative action or reverse discrimination promoted from time to time in America though recently struck down by US Supreme Court decisions in the name of equality and justice. The question, as put by an acute reader of Plato's work is, "would anyone wish to say that there are no just inequalities?" (Vlastos 33). This is Plato's challenge to adherents of equality who deny "the limits and contradictions of claims of equality" (Saxenhouse 274). To be sure egalitarians today do not agree about what equality is or what its practices require; perhaps it should be considered an essentially contested concept, as I have argued elsewhere, for the sake at least of making the contesting sides clearer (Cacoullos). Plato believed equality was formless in the city he designs, there are no perceived unequal claims, thus is democracy mocked and reduced —a phenomenon we are witnessing today. But Plato's charge goes even further: it turns out that the *demos* do not have enough money to meet in assembly where they can exercise their ruling, *kratein*, of *democratia* (565a). This inversion of freedom, clearly suggested in the three-class structuring of the city (564c-565c), undermines democracy. Just as the insatiable desire for wealth to the neglect of everything else, *ἀπληστία* and *ἀμέλεια*, causes the transformation and fall of oligarchy so the unrestrained, all-consuming desire for freedom in democracy with its consequent neglect of other things prepares, *παρασκευάζει*, tyranny (562c). By now Plato is calling the political culture "democratized," *δημοκρατούμενη,* which in Plato's language suggests subtly that it is in siege by its own ruling *ἤθη* (562c).

All cities and the human beings who live in them seek the beautiful and the good, as Plato fervently believed. But there are useful and useless ways to investigate what is beautiful and good (7:531c), as he tries to demonstrate throughout his *Politeia*. When Socrates continues to be fully absorbed describing the practices of democracy, Glaucon apparently reminds him of the point he has been urging all along, and this might be the useless way of pursuing the good evidenced in the mistaken cities. There appears to be a malady, *νόσημα*, common to both oligarchy and democracy, and that is the presence of lazy and extravagant men, *ἀργῶν και δαπανηρῶν ἀνδρῶν* (564a-b). Socrates proceeds to clarify by positing a tri-partite division of classes in democracy that in fact composes the *politeia* (564a-565c). In the depiction of these classes, we encounter finally who rules and who is ruled in a democracy, as well as the sorts of contests that arise between rulers and ruled. More importantly, we see freedom as the province of one class only, and equality betrayed. The disorder or malady that comes to afflict oligarchy is recalled by Socrates: there arises from the poverty created by oligarchical rulers a group of idle men he calls "drones," the more manly, *ἀνδρειότατον*, who have stings lead the less manly, *ἀνανδρότερον,* the stingless

(555d-e). This group is kept out of office in oligarchy since office holding is the privilege of the rich; lacking exercise, it does not grow vigorous, *ἀγύμναστον καὶ οὐκ ἐρρωμένον γίγνεται* (564d).

In democracy, however, the drones become a class that is stronger, *δριμύτερον*; it constitutes in effect a speech-making class, administering practically everything in the city, whose strongest members transact policy while the weaker (stingless) toe the line, standing around the speaker's stand, buzzing, *βομβεῖ,* and not allowing other speech of dissent, *οὐκ ἀνέχεται τοῦ ἄλλα λέγοντος* (564d-e). This is a clear instance of the inversion of freedom and (I would say) equality of speech orchestrated by a political machine, a veritable example we might say of Tammany Hall in the twenties of twentieth century New York City. Does this class have money? It surely does not have its own resources, inherited (they are not aristocrats) or otherwise; but, being a drone group, it does manage very well to get money from another source. Given that everyone in the political culture is about making a bundle or enriching themselves, *χρηματιζομένων τῶν πάντων* —a fact casually mentioned by Socrates— a second group, most well-ordered by nature, *κοσμιωτάτῃ φύσει*, separates itself from the multitude, *πλῆθος*, and becomes the rich, *πλούσιοι* or the capitalist class (564e). Its freedom to pursue money is guaranteed by the well-ordered nature of its members but the class is also named the pasture of the drones since the latter constantly take money from the rich (564e). The third class is the *demos*, the people who cultivate their farms and have little or no property of their own. This is the largest and the most potent group in terms of numbers when it meets in assembly or acts collectively (565a). But, it is observed by Glaucon, the *demos* will not act collectively unless it can get some of the h(m)oney. Socrates responds all too swiftly by saying that they do get some money from the first class of politicians or speech-makers who give to the people, the have-nots, what they take from the haves, while keeping the largest share for themselves (565a). This appears to be the usual agenda, which is not an equal distribution by any means. So much for the esteeming of equality in the culture. We now get a fuller idea of the peculiarity of equality in Plato's democracy: children and adults are alike so are animals who act like people, diverse life-styles are equally recognized, but there is no equal or even regulated distribution of wealth and so in effect there is no equal access to office. And it is clear that, for all the freedom that pervades the city, the largest group of citizens lack freedom because they generally lack money or property and have to rely on small handouts from the politicians to enable them to act collectively in assembly; they are thus not free to do so whenever they want to but only if and when they get their small take of the h(m)oney from the drones. I submit that here is a very early account, fully implied

by Glaucon's observation and Socrates' ironic rejoinder, of the important *relation* between freedom and money, which has been validated philosophically in recent times and with elegant logic by G.A. Cohen. In the experience of the bulk of humanity today, mostly poor, the relation is confirmed consistently and painfully.

Plato's democracy does not overcome the insidious inequality that pervades it, rather it succumbs to it: the wealthy from whom monies have been taken try to save their riches and defend themselves by speeches in the assembly; in doing so, they are charged with being against the *demos*, and called oligarchs even though they may not be engaging in any alteration of the political culture, for example, a reinstating of oligarchy (565b). When the rich finally see that the people are deceived utterly, though unwillingly*, οὐχ ἑκόντα,* by the false accusers and slanderers, they react and become true oligarchs not willingly but being stung by the drones (565c). Lawsuits from each side ensue and the *demos* as is its wont seek a leader, a protector, *προστάτης*, to solve the problem. The outcome of the search, however, is not a philosopher king but a tyrant (565d). This section, 565b-d, generally suggests that it is not just the un-propertied people who have been led astray and act unwillingly and unwittingly; the rich have also been misled and act accordingly though unwillingly. In the word of a later critical thinker, Karl Marx, both have been 'alienated.' Inequality of wealth has led once again to faction, *στάσις*, between rich and poor, which produces losers rather than winners, as Plato acutely observes. Both unpropertied and propertied citizens have been manipulated by the ruling speech-makers, the dominant esteemers of freedom and equality —politicians and busy bodies— who use the money of others for their own ends. The charge against oligarchy, annotated in the case of democracy remains: *where* wealth is the exclusive province of either politicians (Plato's speech-makers) or capitalists (Plato's second class), with poverty of the many as a consequence, *there* freedom and equality are without substance.

## IV. Un-concluding Conclusion

Is Plato a closeted egalitarian? Not likely, but in his "brilliant forays" into democracy, where there is no "magisterial final statement" (Schofield 2007:62), he turns all stones over and incites further questions and concerns about freedom and equality that suggest there is still a great deal to consider about their nature as ideals and practices. Thus his model is not a rejection of democracy but a contestation of its mistaken political culture. The mistakes (of all the *ἡμαρτημένας πόλεις*) are powerful and manipulative as well, or so I have been arguing. Much of what I have been saying here, following Plato's own words closely, is probably neither new nor startling to veteran readers of *Politeia* but rather a reminding. As

the late Gerald Cohen observed, "reminders affirm what we already know, not new insights" and he quoted Wittgenstein who claimed that philosophy "consists in assembling reminders for a particular purpose," (2, note 3). In his long conversation Socrates too speaks as though he were reminding Glaucon and Adeimantos of what they know or can affirm, hence their assent to what Socrates is saying most if not all of the time. Socrates's particular purpose as always is to ponder the good life for the city and the soul.

A final remark: Plato is not dumping money; it has its uses, as he admits in his model of *Kallipolis* where the posited third class of economists" or "agrarians" is allowed to have money and property. But where freedom becomes a license for the unrestrained pursuit of wealth Plato objects both to the freedom to pursue riches, and the accumulation of massive amounts of money. Plato does not like diversity for its own sake either for this too constitutes excess that ultimately invites a mindless imitativeness, a largely thoughtless act as presented and celebrated for example in the various technologically empowered media today. If Plato were asked today what would constitute democracy for him he might cite his ideal city and defend his choice on these grounds: first it promotes a common good taking into account the needs and interests of all its citizens (except maybe the interest of the philosopher-king who would rather do philosophy than rule, but); second, all its citizens have *sōphrosynē,* a moderation of desire and action which means they are not out to lord it over anyone else, so there are no victims in the culture. The uses and abuses of freedom and equality that he contests dramatically and ironically, can very well contribute to the contemporary debate on democracy both theoretical and practical. His critique with its numerous windows and reminders is yet another tool, I believe a powerful one, for securing a meaningful democracy in the land of his birth and elsewhere.

**Note**

In this paper I have tried to stay close to the text and to Plato's own language, using the Paul Shorey translation with my emendations. The numbers in parentheses e.g., (555a), indicate passages in the original Greek text. For my 'short story' I have drawn great inspiration and benefit from the comments of Professor Robert Talisse of Vanderbilt University, Tennessee, USA where I delivered another version of this paper on 18 March 2014 and from Mark Gifford's article "Dramatic Dialectic in *Republic* Book 1."

## Works Cited

Aristotle. *Politics*. Trans. H. Rackham. 1932. Cambridge: Loeb-Harvard UP, 1977.

Burnyeat, Myles F. "Culture and Society in Plato's *Republic*: The Tanner Lectures at Harvard" 20 (1999). 215-314. Web.

Cacoullos, Ann R. "The Idea of Equality Once Again: A Plea for Contestability." *Philosophical Inquiry* 15. 1-2 (1993): 59-75.

Cohen, Gerald A. "Freedom and Money" 2001: 1-32. Web.

Gifford, Mark. "Dramatic Dialectic in *Republic* Book 1." Ed. David Sedley. *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* XX. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2001. 35-106.

Lear, Jonathan. "Inside and Outside the *Republic*." *Phronesis* 37. 2 (1992): 184-215.

Plato. *Republic*. Trans. Paul Shorey. 1935. 2 vols. Cambridge: Loeb-Harvard UP, 1970.

—. *Republic*. Trans. G. M. A. Grube. 1974. Rev. ed. C. D. C. Reeve. Indianapolis: Hackett 1992.

Saxenhouse, Arlene W. "Democracy, equality and *eide*: a radical view from Book 8 of Plato's *Republic*." *The American Political Science Review* 92. 2 (Jun 1998): 273-83. ProQuest

Schofield, Malcolm. *Plato: Political Philosophy*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2006.

Vlastos, Gregory. "Justice and Equality." Ed. Richard Brandt. *Social Justice*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, A Spectrum Book (1962). 31-72.

Williams, Bernard. "The Analogy of City and Soul in Plato's *Republic*." 1973. Ed. Ellen Wagner. *Essays on Plato's Psychology*. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2001. 157-168.

Wittgenstein, Ludwig. *Philosophical Investigations*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1958. par. 127, p.50e.