

Plato on Democracy

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Plato is often hailed as the first philosophical critic of democracy and the ideal city of his *Republic* is easily seen as a paradigm of an anti-democratic constitution. While it is true that Plato objected to much about how democracy was practised in his own time, especially after his mentor Socrates was sentenced to death by the democratic vote of an Athenian jury, Plato's political theorizing also reveals an interest in improving and rehabilitating democratic institutions. This chapter seeks to tease apart the threads of Plato's thinking about democracy by separating three issues: firstly, Plato's insistence on rule by knowledgeable people and his claim that most people are politically incompetent (§1); secondly, Plato's criticisms of oratory and the corrupting effects of public rhetoric (§2); thirdly, Plato's incorporation of democratic institutions in the second-best city of the *Laws* (§3). Once we appreciate the nuances of these different evaluations of democracy and related political practices in Plato's corpus, we can see that Plato was not simply 'anti-democratic' or 'pro-democratic,' but rather that he envisaged a number of creative ways to reform democracy in light of his own critiques while arguing that some central democratic institutions be abandoned or seriously altered.

It is worth noting from the outset that there simply is nothing close to a scholarly consensus on what Plato's 'view' on democracy is, nor even a widely accepted methodological approach for moving from difficult, distinct, often metaphorical dialogues in which the author never speaks to a determination of Plato's own political position or to a verdict about what Plato was trying to achieve in writing these texts. Relatedly, there are varying accounts of what

democracy is, what institutions Plato might have thought were democratic, and what the components of democratic ideology consist in, both now and historically. It follows, then, that there are many ways to use Plato's dialogues to think about democracy and to situate Platonic political thinking in the history of ideas. Readers of this volume will make many fruitful connections far beyond what I cover here. Nonetheless, my goal is to present what I take to be the core of Plato's engagement with democracy by focusing on one way of reconstructing his critique of Athenian democratic institutions, highlighting the enduring allure of these arguments, while drawing attention to his less well known but philosophically significant reworking of democratic institutions in a practical political context.

1. Skilled Rulers, Ignorant Voters, and Political Order

One of Plato's major critiques of democracy is epistemic: rulers ought to be knowledgeable, and most people lack either the knowledge to rule or the ability to identify knowledgeable people reliably. In the *Republic*, it is the philosopher-rulers of the guardian class who uniquely possess knowledge of the Forms, and it is because of this knowledge that they can rule well. On the basis of this, contemporary writers regularly identify Plato as an *epistocrat*.¹ Such a reading of Plato is often taken to entail a pernicious kind of elitism and intellectual snobbery: not only do you need arcane knowledge of abstract subjects to rule, you actually have to be a *philosopher*; but because most people aren't philosophers, most people should be barred from holding office and from voting.

¹ E.g. J. Brennan, *Against Democracy* (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2017), p. 14

While it is true that Plato emphasizes knowledge as a crucial component of the best kind of rule, knowledge is situated within the larger concept of *skill* (*technê*). So we should get clear on what Plato means by ‘skill’, looking first to his own historical context, and then to his development of the idea of political skill. With this framework in place, we will be in a better position to assess how Plato’s claims about political expertise target particular democratic assumptions and practices, specifically the use of random lottery to appoint officials (which implies that anybody can do the job) but also a more general faith in the ability of the many to make good judgements.

In Plato’s context, someone’s *technê* was their profession, their full-time job, their trade.² It is not surprising, then, that some of Plato’s main examples of skills are shoe-making, weaving, navigation, and medicine. These are not hobbies that one does on the side in one’s spare time (*parerga*); these are specialized activities that one has worked at for many years and on which one can speak authoritatively, often having first worked as an apprentice or with a teacher proficient in the trade before making it one’s own profession.³ The orator Isocrates emphasizes three key components to skill: nature, training, and knowledge.⁴ Nature is important because some people are better suited to certain skills than others—orators and opera singers need loud voices; tall basketball players are going to have fewer obstacles to success than short ones; pianists cannot play Rachmaninov without large hands. Training is important because natural talent can only take you so far, and at some point you have to put in the hours to get the requisite

² I am deeply indebted to Emily Hulme’s work here and in what follows. See E. Hulme, *Philosophia and Philotechnia: The Technê Theme in the Platonic Dialogues* (Dissertation: Princeton University 2019), also her manuscript in preparation for publication, *Philosophy Among Professionals: Plato on Technê*.

³ Hulme, *Philosophia and Philotechnia*, pp. 13, 58, emphasizing Thucydides 1.142.9 and Xenophon, *Memorabilia* 4.2.6. See also J. Ober, ‘Wealthy Hellas’, *Transactions of the American Philological Association* 140/2 (2010), pp. 271–273 for specialization of trades as an explanation for the success of the Greek economy.

⁴ *Against the Sophists*, 16–17; Hulme notes the features in medical treatises (*Philosophia and Philotechnia*, p. 59n77).

experience, know-how, and familiarity with the tools and subject-matter of the skill to become proficient. Knowledge is what makes the difference between someone who genuinely has a skill as opposed to someone who is a quack, or who is engaging in guesswork, or who happens to have stumbled across a method that frequently gets the right result but without being able to explain why their method is effective. This last feature is often explicated in classical texts in terms of being able to provide a *logos*—a rational account of the subject matter—specifically with respect to the relevant causes and right explanations (*aitiai*), and the right procedure practitioners of the skill should follow.⁵

Plato is thus not doing anything new in the *Republic* when he establishes various principles about specialization and the division of labour in the establishment of an ideal city.⁶ One person will not try to farm and make shoes and build houses, but rather each person will specialize in a particular skill (369e3–370a4);⁷ next, tasks are assigned on the basis of who has a nature best fitted for that task (370a7–b2). With each person focusing on one skill, everyone will do a better job at their task, be less likely to spoil their product by missing the right moment to do the work, and in general the goods of the city will be more plentiful, of better quality, and

⁵ E. Hulme [Kozey], ‘The Good-Directedness of Τέχνη and the Status of Rhetoric in the Platonic Dialogues’, *Apeiron* 52/3 (2019), pp. 226–227, 235–238; *Philosophia and Philotechnia*, pp. 61–64, citing *On the Sacred Disease* I.4 and similar evidence from ceramics and metalworking. In Plato’s *Apology*, Socrates is most impressed by the knowledge of the craftspeople, despite them overstepping once they were no longer talking about their domain (22a–e).

⁶ I take Plato’s views to be primarily put forth by Socrates, the Eleatic Visitor, and the Athenian Visitor in the respective dialogues. Readers who do not share this assumption should substitute my use of ‘Plato’ for the relevant speaker.

⁷ Line numbers in Plato are taken from the Oxford Classical Text editions as follows: *Republic* (Slings); *Gorgias*, *Phaedrus*, *Theaetetus* (Burnet); *Statesman* (Robinson). For the *Laws*, I use the Budé editions by Diès and Des Places.

more easily produced (370b5–c6).⁸ The principle here is *one person, one job*.⁹ Later Plato explicitly justifies this in terms of meeting the three criteria for a skill:

We prevented a cobbler from trying to be a farmer, weaver, or builder at the same time and said that he must remain a cobbler in order to produce fine work. And each of the others, too, was to work all his life at a single trade for which he had a natural aptitude and keep away from all the others, so as not to miss the right moment to practice his own work well.... Is fighting a war so easy that a farmer or a cobbler or any other craftsman can be a soldier at the same time? Though no one can become so much as a good player of checkers or dice if he considers it only as a sideline and doesn't practice it from childhood. Or can someone pick up a shield or any other weapon or tool of war and immediately perform adequately in an infantry battle or any other kind? No other tool makes anyone who picks it up a craftsman or champion unless he has acquired the requisite knowledge and has had sufficient practice. (374b6–d6)¹⁰

Here Plato emphasizes that people should practice a *single* trade, *from childhood*, and should work at it *all his life*. Plato was aware that people could change professions over the course of a life, but even outside Kallipolis—the ideal city of the *Republic*—changing jobs was expensive, inefficient, and risky, as you not only had to re-train (which took many years, during which you would not be producing quality goods) but also buy new tools and work out if you were any good at the new job.¹¹ Ideally, then, one would find the craft for which one was suited and stick

⁸ For further discussion, see S. Meyer, 'Class Assignment and the Principle of Specialization in Plato's *Republic*', *Proceedings of the Boston Area Colloquium in Ancient Philosophy* 20/1 (2005), 229–263 with T. Brennan's response.

⁹ A similar idea is expressed with less fanfare in Aristophanes, *Wasps*, 1431, after a bad driver causes a chariot accident.

¹⁰ Trans. Grube-Reeve.

¹¹ E. Hulme [Kozey], 'Another Peri Technes Literature: Inquiries About One's Craft at Dodona', *Greece & Rome* 65/2 (2018), pp. 214–215.

with it, developing one's skill over one's lifetime. The *Republic* boldly hypothesizes a society in which this job assignment could be done almost always reliably.

Plato's application of the principle of specialization to the auxiliaries (the class of soldiers) is also unremarkable in the historical context. Athenians, who usually appointed public officials by random lottery, made an exception for the appointment of generals, who were elected by majority vote, on the grounds that generalship was a skill and required expertise.¹² Moreover, Plato was hardly alone in thinking that citizen-soldiers needed a more comprehensive military training and a quality of virtue greater than the average craftsman. Sparta's legendary military prowess was partly due to the fact that their training in warfare was more integrated into their way of life than it was in other Greek city-states. Plutarch reports that Spartan citizens were forbidden from practising the 'base' professions, i.e. manual trades, so that they could focus on their civic duties. In a memorable scene, Plutarch describes how the Spartan allies had complained that Sparta had not sent enough soldiers to aid in a conflict; in response, the leader Agesilaus had the Spartans sit apart from the allied troops, then asked all the potters to stand up, then the blacksmiths, then the carpenters and builders, and so forth; with most of the allied troops standing and all of the Spartans still sitting, Agesilaus said, "See, men, how many more soldiers we sent than you."¹³ Being a soldier is a profession, and you cannot have two professions at once. Thus, the fact that Plato in the *Republic* has those in the auxiliary class have a different way of life than those in the producer class is a reasonable application of the point that

¹² M. Hansen, *The Athenian Democracy in the Age of Democracy* (Blackwell, 1992), pp. 269–270; Aristotle, *Politics*, IV.14, VI.2.

¹³ Plutarch, *Life of Agesilaus*, 26.5; see also Herodotus 2.167, Plutarch, *Comparison of Lycurgus and Numa*, 2.3. and Xenophon, *Constitution of the Spartans*, 2.7–8, 4.7, 8.3, 9.1, 11–13 for how Spartan culture and education contributes to military prowess; Isocrates claims that these specialization practices were in turn adopted from the Egyptians (*Busiris* 11.17–18); further discussion can be found in N. Humble, 'Sparta in Plato and Xenophon', in G. Danzig, D. Johnson & D. Morrison (eds), *Plato and Xenophon: Comparative Studies* (Brill, 2018), pp. 556–557.

professionals need to spend their time honing their craft and need to have the strength of character their job demands.

The Socratic contribution to this thinking about skill is reported by Xenophon: Socrates noticed that Athenians exempt *politics* from their general model of expertise and specialization (*Memorabilia* 4.2.6). In the *Protagoras*, Protagoras suggests that politics is a skill that everybody has, making it a rare exception to the general model of expertise and specialization (320c8–328d2). But we can read the *Republic* as rejecting this move, instead applying the normal logic of skill to politics: ruling and holding office should be considered professions, and require a great deal of time and dedication from their practitioners. Just like architecture or navigation or medicine, politics is a specialized domain for which one must train over the course of a life, and it is not true that anybody can do it well whenever they wish. Being a statesman, then, is a profession, and it is a profession for which philosophers will turn out to be uniquely suited.¹⁴

But ‘philosophers’ is a term of art in the *Republic* and philosophers are explicitly characterized along the three dimensions of skill: nature, training, and knowledge. First, a philosopher’s *nature* is marked by a love of learning in all its varieties, but they particularly love learning unchanging truths (485a10–b3); philosophers are without falsehood and hate it (485c3–4); they are moderate and are in no way money-lovers (485e3–5); they are not slavish, petty, cowardly, or attached to life, but rather seek to understand divine things and have no fear of death (486a4–b4); they are orderly, do not boast, are reliable (486b6–8); from youth, they have been just and gentle, rather than harsh, savage, and unsociable (486b10–12); they are quick to learn and have an excellent memory (486c3–d2); they are musical, graceful, drawn to due

¹⁴ For an elucidation of this point in the *Statesman*, see M. Lane, “‘Emplois pour philosophes’: l’art politique et l’Etranger dans le *Politique* à la lumière de Socrate et du philosophe dans le *Théétète*’, *Les Études philosophiques* 3 (2005), 325-45.

measure, and easily grasp the form of things (486d4–11); they are persistent and enjoy hard work (535c1–4; see also *Theaetetus* 143e4–144b6). Notably, many of these traits are explicit goals of the musical and gymnastic education introduced earlier in the *Republic* (e.g. 410a7–412a7); thus these traits are not necessarily innate but are rather well directed and well cultivated natural tendencies. Importantly, the philosophical nature includes both ethical and intellectual elements—philosophers have the ideal dispositions for learning difficult material quickly and for becoming good people. They will both know and love justice.

The philosopher's *training* is a lifelong enterprise. When young, they will play mathematical games (536d4–e3).¹⁵ Along with the auxiliaries, they will have around 18 years of 'musical' education—exposure to and engagement in ethically valuable poetry, drama, narrative, and music proper—then around two years of 'gymnastic' education, which includes physical exercise, military training, and dieting (537b1–5).¹⁶ From the ages of 20 to 30, the philosophers will begin their formal training in mathematics, systematizing the lessons they had learned during their earlier games (537b7–c3); from 30 to 35, they will begin their training in dialectic and argument (539a8–e3); from 35 to 50, the philosophers gain experience in the practical matters of the city, holding public office in both military and civic capacities, and getting tested in their ability to perform their roles effectively and virtuously in the face of trials and temptations (539e3–540a4). Finally, at 50, assuming they have passed their previous tests in both politics and science, these people begin the final dialectical ascent to the Forms, and should they reach the Form of the Good and understand it, they are then ordered to rule in the city (540a4–c2).

¹⁵ M. Jenkins, 'Early Education in Plato's *Republic*', *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 23/5 (2015), 843–863.

¹⁶ R. Kamtekar, 'Plato on Education and Art' in G. Fine (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook to Plato* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 336–359.

The result of all of this education is *knowledge*. Famously, philosophers know the Form of the Good, but also Forms of the Beautiful and the Just. The point here is obvious but important: if you are trying to make a city just, you need to know what justice is.¹⁷ For Plato, reaching the lofty heights of this knowledge requires moving through increasingly difficult and abstract branches of learning, from arithmetic and geometry, to idealized models of harmony and astronomy (522b7–531d3).¹⁸ But we should not underemphasize the various kinds of know-how that the philosophers learn during their 15 years of practical training in warfare and politics. Plato’s philosophers are not pure mathematicians dragged from ivory towers into unfamiliar senate-chambers; they have demonstrable records of competency and success in less important offices before taking up the mantle of kingly rule.¹⁹

Plato thus sets a demanding standard for expertise in ruling, and the stakes are especially high given the concentration of power in Kallipolis. It also follows unsurprisingly that basically everyone will count as incompetent and ignorant (in the sense of unskilled in the relevant domain) by this standard. But most people aren’t skilled at most things and, as Plato bluntly puts it in the *Statesman*, in a city of a thousand people you’d be lucky if you found a hundred or even fifty experts of checkers (*petteia*) let alone experts of politics (292e6–293a1). Now we can see clearly the criticism of democratic appointment by lottery: picking people at random is not likely to result in a skilled person holding office, especially in the absence of a system of education which trains people in that skill.

¹⁷ Compare e.g. the *Laches*, where the general Nicias doesn’t know what courage is.

¹⁸ M. Burnyeat, ‘Plato on Why Mathematics is Good for the Soul’, *Proceedings of the British Academy* 103 (2000), 1–81.

¹⁹ A contemporary analogue, then, may be Daniel Bell’s proposal in *The China Model* (Princeton University Press 2015), where public officials must demonstrate excellence in Confucian philosophy but also work their way up through the rural magistracies before being given higher-level positions.

There are also more subtle implications about the collective judgements of the many and appointment by election that come out through the Ship of State analogy in *Republic*, Book VI.²⁰ The Ship of State is intended to show why philosophers are thought to be useless in actual cities (487d3–e3). In the analogy, the shipowner is the biggest and strongest person on the ship, but he is “hard of hearing, a bit short-sighted, and his knowledge of seafaring is equally deficient” (488a8– b2); the shipowner is surrounded by quarrelling sailors, each of whom thinks that they deserve to steer the ship even though they are not skilled in navigation and deny that such a skill can be taught. The sailors try to persuade and drug the shipowner into accepting them as captain, calling this ability the true art of navigation, and they think that anybody is useless if they’re not helpful in manipulating the shipowner. Because the sailors don’t see the value in knowing about the weather, the winds, or the stars, they call anybody engaged in studying such practices a good-for-nothing stargazer (488b2–489a2). The shipowner here represents the many (i.e. the people of the city as a collective), the sailors represent those who rule in the city at present (i.e. the orators and politicians), and the captain represents the philosophers (489c3–6). Thus the many do not understand what the political skill consists in or appreciate those who genuinely practice that skill, and they get led astray by the persuasive speech and coercive tricks of politicians. Simply put, the many lack the ability to make good political judgments or reliably identify those who can.

Note, though, that this argument is neither introduced nor flagged as a targeted critique of democracy; rather, its implications are for *any* mode of political appointment that isn’t determined on the basis of skill. In fact, the Ship of State is later alluded to in the discussion of

²⁰ It is worth noting that Aristotle takes election to be a paradigmatically oligarchic institution (*Politics* IV.9, IV.15), but given that contemporary readers are likely to take public elections to be central to democracy it is worth including them, with the proviso that lottery should be understood to be more paradigmatically democratic than election.

oligarchy, when Socrates criticizes the oligarchy for instituting a property restriction on eligibility for office, which would exclude skilled poor people (551c1–4). Moreover, most Greek oligarchies comprised of a ruling class of about 10–20% of the population, with extreme oligarchies having hundreds of rulers and more moderate oligarchies having a few thousand rulers; thus the swipe in the *Statesman* about not being able to find even 50 checkers experts hits oligarchic constitutions nearly as hard as democratic ones, as in both cases the ignorant would outvote the skilled.²¹

Nonetheless, there is a more targeted critique of democracy introduced in *Republic VIII*, but it is best understood as a criticism of democracy's lack of *order*.²² Order is a central political value for Plato, and Kallipolis is rigidly structured on the basis of its class system and principle of specialization. Plato's *Statesman* gives us further clues as to how a skilled statesman brings about order in the city and what order amounts to. The statesman has knowledge of how the parts of the city should work together: shepherds may be experts in how to care for sheep, but the statesman knows whether the wool needs to be used for making clothes or sails, or the sheep slaughtered for mutton (308d1–e2). A crucial part of statesmanship is knowledge of the *kairos* or right moment: generals may know how to fight wars and win battles, but they lack knowledge of whether a war is worth fighting, or whether now is the time for violence or diplomacy.²³ We can see Plato here reflecting on another point about skills, that most skills contemplate only their own domain, but the skill of politics involves knowing how the city's trades fit together and when they each ought to be used. Finally, the statesman is to arrange marriages to ensure that the

²¹ M. Simonton, *Classical Greek Oligarchy* (Princeton University Press, 2017), p. 52n219. We could make a similar skill-based critique of hereditary monarchies.

²² M. Johnstone, 'Anarchic Souls: Plato's Depiction of the Democratic Man', *Phronesis* 58 (2013), 139–159; M. Lane, 'Antianarchia: interpreting political thought in Plato', *Plato Journal* 16 (2016), 59–74.

²³ M. Lane, *Method and Politics in Plato's Statesman* (Cambridge University Press, 1998), 139–145.

citizens have the best natures, and to arrange education so that cities may be unified in their beliefs and values (308e4–310b5). The Platonic statesman thus looks at the city as a whole, seeks to bring about its unity, and considers what is good for all.²⁴

The democratic constitution described in *Republic VIII* is, by contrast, *disorderly* insofar as it prioritizes freedom, understood as giving everyone the “license to do what he wants” and to “arrange his own life in whatever manner pleases him” (557b4–10). It is also disorderly insofar as it treats all people as equals, in the sense that there are no distinctions made on the basis of merit, skill, or worth (558c1–4). This has important consequences for how the democracy runs: ruling is granted to whomever wants it, as those who are capable of ruling don’t have to and those who want to can, even if they’re incompetent (557e1–558a2); structured education falls apart and the benefits of consistent years of habituation never accrue (558a10–b7); people make no distinctions between the various kinds of pleasures and desires, acting on the basis of whatever desires come along, and call all pleasures equal (561b3–c4). Nobody seems to be thinking about anything other than what they want, and the democracy lacks any mechanism for considering what is best for the city as a whole; it is thus not a unity, but a haphazard mess. Most importantly, the democracy in *Republic VIII* is seriously unstable insofar it is the breeding ground for tyranny; by overvaluing freedom and destroying systematic ethical education, the constitution allows a space for someone controlled by the worst motives to arise and seize power (562a7–564a8). The central political principle of democracy—that everyone should be free to do what they desire—thus risks destroying the city entirely, and allows for the worst kind of political subjugation.

²⁴ See R. Singpurwalla, “Unity and the Happiness of the City: Plato’s Political Ideal in the *Republic*” (ms.)

2. Democracy, oratory, and the conflict between the pleasant and the good

Plato's second major critique of democracy concerns the place of oratory and the dynamics of public rhetorical contest. The core of this critique is that orators do not have knowledge of the subject matters that they speak about, and so rather than guiding the audience to what is true and beneficial for the polis, they instead pander to the audience by appealing to what most find pleasant. Thus the system is geared to have laws, decrees, and judicial judgements passed because they are *liked* rather than because they are *good*. Given the prominence of oratory in the democratic institutions of Athens, particularly in the assembly and courts, we can see this critique as attacking central pillars of democratic practice.

We must be careful, however, to distinguish Plato's criticisms of how oratory was practised by actual orators from a critique of oratory as such. The *Gorgias*, *Phaedrus*, and *Statesman* all make clear that there could be a place for those skilled in persuasion in a good polis. In the *Gorgias*, Socrates says that there are two parts of oratory: one is aimed at flattery, the other is focused on trying to get the characters of the citizens to be as good as possible and strives to say what is best; but neither Socrates nor Callicles has actually seen the second kind of oratory practiced (502d10–503b9; 504d1–e5). Similarly, in the *Phaedrus*, oratory is taken to be the art of persuasion—skill in leading the soul through words (261a7–8)—but it is done well when the speaker is persuading somebody of something the speaker actually knows.

Knowledgeable speakers can speak the truth with proper philosophical order and they use persuasion to produce true convictions in the audience (260d4–e7). Finally, in the *Statesman* we get a slightly more complicated picture in that it is not orators who know what they are persuading their audience of, but the statesman who directs the orators (303a10–304a2; 304c7–

e1); nonetheless, the view is essentially the same but with a division of labour: the statesman knows *what* the citizens need to be persuaded of and *when* they should be persuaded, but the orators know *how* to persuade the citizens. Orators, then, can be good and beneficial for the city when they are appropriately directed because the orators either know what they are talking about, or are directed by somebody who does. Thus Plato's issues with oratory clearly concern how oratory was in fact practiced, not with just any use of persuasive speech in the public sphere.

The critique of oratory *as it is practiced* comes in two parts: Plato first criticizes its goal, taking it to be a form of flattery or pandering; then he shows how making orators subject to the judgement of the many causes orators to take on whatever beliefs and values most people hold. There is thus a self-perpetuating cycle whereby orators win their contests by telling the audience what they want to hear and in turn produce stronger convictions in more people of what most people already believe. Given that people tend to be appetitive and overvalue bodily pleasures and money, this process is fundamentally degenerative rather than beneficial. Plato's account of the dynamics of oratory also amounts to a critique of a central part of Athenian democracy, as oratory was integral to the functioning of Athenian institutions of collective deliberation in public assemblies and of the administration of justice in the courts.

During the refutation of Polus in the *Gorgias*, Plato has Socrates introduce a distinction between a genuine skill (*technê*) and a knack (*empeiria*, 462b3–c7). Politics, legislation, medicine, and gymnastics are all counted as skills that always provide care, either for the body or for the soul, and aim for what's best in their respective domains, employing knowledge of that domain (464b2–c5). By contrast, oratory, sophistry, pastry baking, and cosmetics are all knacks that pretend to provide care for body or soul, masquerading as authorities in the same domains as genuine skills (464c5–465c7); importantly, rather than aiming at what's best, knacks aim at

gratification and pleasure (462c7). Socrates then says that if the doctor and the pastry baker had to compete “in front of children, or in front of men just as foolish as children” to determine who has genuine expertise about what is good for the body, the doctor would lose (464d5–e2). The implication is that orators claim to know what’s good for the city and its people, but in fact are just pandering to the desires of the voters. Consequently, like children voting on whether or not to have ice cream for dinner, popular assemblies vote in favour of policies that are the most appealing and pleasant to them, rather than the ones that are objectively best or most beneficial for the city as a whole.²⁵ This, Socrates claims, is not the skill of politics, but elaborate popular flattery (see also *Republic* 426b8–d5).

A crucial assumption in Socrates’ refutation of Polus is that there is a distinction between what is genuinely good for people (in both body and soul) and what is pleasant to them (*Gorgias* 513d3–4). If pleasure and goodness are different goals, and oratory aims at pleasing the populace while true politics aims at goodness, then oratory will be harmful in cases where pleasure is opposed to the good. Hence the next interlocutor in the *Gorgias*, Callicles, attempts to *identify* the good with pleasure. In aiming for what is pleasant to people, orators would then also be aiming what is good for people. In more general terms, Callicles’ response is that it’s not *bad* when politicians give people what they want—that’s their *job*. A major question of the *Gorgias*, then, hinges on whether giving people what they want is equivalent to acting in their best interest, as most people think that what’s good for them just is what they find pleasant. The political point here is that decision by popular vote is only going to have beneficial outcomes if people aren’t systematically mistaken about what’s good for them. But most people wrongly think hedonism is true, so most people will not actually vote in their own best interest.

²⁵ Famous Athenian politicians are all described as having satisfied the citizens’ appetites but making none of them better people (517b5–c1).

A further piece to this puzzle is that Socrates attributes Callicles' own hedonism to Callicles' love of the people and suggests that orators have to become like the many and internalize their beliefs in order to succeed.²⁶ This provides the second prong of the Platonic critique of oratory as it is practised: not only does oratory pander to the pleasures of the many, public rhetorical contests corrupt the character and conception of goodness of those who participate in it. In other words, oratory both fails to aim at goodness and also instils false beliefs about goodness in its practitioners, such that orators couldn't even work out what's good for people if they tried.

Socrates illustrates this by saying that both he and Callicles are doubly in love: Socrates is in love with Alcibiades and philosophy, whereas Callicles is love with a young man named Demos and the Athenian *demos* [people]. Convenient punning aside, Socrates' point is that neither he nor Callicles is able to contradict their beloved, and so they say whatever their beloved wants to hear (481d5–482a4). But while philosophy always likes and asks for the same thing, the *demos* is fickle, approving of one thing at one time and approving another thing at another time; so Socrates always says the same things to anybody he speaks to, but Callicles shifts back and forth in his speeches in the assembly, depending on how the people respond and what he thinks they want (482a5–482c3).²⁷ Callicles' inability to be persuaded by Socrates toward the end of the refutation is also attributed to Callicles' love for the people, which prevents him from changing his mind about the issues in their discussion (513c7–8).

²⁶ Here I follow closely R. Kamtekar, 'The Profession of Friendship: Callicles, Democratic Politics, and Rhetorical Education in the *Gorgias*', *Ancient Philosophy* 25 (2005), 319–339; see also J. C. Shaw, *Plato's Anti-Hedonism in the Protagoras* (Cambridge University Press, 2015), chapter 5, for an excellent account of this dynamic in the *Protagoras*.

²⁷ Alcibiades is surely less constant than philosophy, so presumably we are to think that Socrates' love for philosophy and Callicles' love for the *demos* is stronger than for their particular beloveds. Plato's invocation of Alcibiades here may be to remind us of Alcibiades' dual love for Socrates and the people (a conflict central to his speech in the *Symposium*), in which the people seem to have won out; see also J. Wilburn, 'The Problem of Alcibiades: Plato on Moral Education and the Many', *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* 49 (2015), 1–36.

The core of the problem is that if Callicles is to win the love of the people in return, it is not enough merely to imitate them or to please them—he has to *become like them* (513a1–b8). People most enjoy hearing speeches that reflect values similar to their own and resent the opposite (513b8–c3). But orators who genuinely share the values of their audience are more likely to win the love of the people in the long run because they can speak sincerely, whereas those orators whose values in fact diverge from the opinions of the people will have to prevaricate and dissemble. Ideally, then, the person who wants to become a powerful orator in the city should begin from youth to train himself in the habits of the city, liking and disliking the same things that they do (510d6–8; *Republic* 493a6–d8). Public oratory then has a kind of internal mechanism for weeding out people who might say things that the *demos* doesn't want to hear and for granting success to anybody who reliably gratifies the *demos*. So rather than being an arena in which the truth emerges through rational argumentation, public speaking is a spectacle where victory is granted to the person who is the most similar to and thus the most pleasing to the masses.

Given that this reading of the *Gorgias* emphasizes the sense in which orators are subservient to the people, it is worth taking a moment to reflect on how demagogues might fit into this picture. During the degeneration of democracy into tyranny in *Republic VIII*, the democratic city is described as having a culture in which teachers are afraid of and flatter their students, and the old imitate the young “for fear of appearing disagreeable and authoritarian” (563a5–b3). Moreover, in this city there is an especially fierce class of people without jobs who spend their time on public oratory, speaking in front of an audience who won't let other speakers contradict their values; these orators are said to run the city (564d7–e2).²⁸ This in turn creates an

²⁸ See J. Ober, *Mass and Elite in Democratic Athens* (Princeton University Press, 1989), p. 167 for how the dynamics described in the *Gorgias* leave no room for legitimate debate, noting this trend in Demosthenes.

environment in which somebody could come along who acts as a champion of the people, and who gains support because he does what the people want, banishing some people, killing others, cancelling debts, and redistributing land (565e3–566a2). Things spiral out of control when this leader ends up consolidating power for himself and tyrannizes over the people, but we should note that the leader gains power by satisfying people’s desires in particularly violent ways. The *demos wanted* those people banished and exiled, and *wanted* their money and property. We can thus see that demagogues can be dangerous insofar as they encourage people to act on illicit desires that they might otherwise suppress, and this can be a catalyst for violence and constitutional change.²⁹ So while it is not the case that orators shape public opinion—quite the opposite—orators may nonetheless play an important role in fanning the flames and in turning public opinion into collective action.

How, then, does this account of oratory deepen Plato’s critique of democratic practices? The problem from §1 was that we have no reason to believe that any individual is going to be competent in domains where skill is required, and politics requires skill; by contrast, the problem here is that the judgements of the many are likely to be *anti-reliable* insofar as they systematically result in decisions that aim at what is pleasing to most people rather than what is good for each individual and for the polis as a whole. Specifically, for Plato, the anti-reliability is generated because what is pleasurable is regularly at odds with what is objectively good; both the masses and orators are unable to determine what is good, and even if some Socrates managed to widen their perspective, they would still be more motivated by what is pleasant. Insofar as the Athenian assembly and Athenian courts relied on winning the popular vote through persuasive

²⁹ See R. Balot, ‘Democracy and Political Philosophy: Influences, Tension, Rapprochement’, in J. Arnason, K. Raaflaub, P. Wagner (eds) *The Greek Polis and the Invention of Democracy* (Wiley Blackwell, 2013), p. 186 for further discussion of the manipulation of the democracy process through oratory.

oratory, Plato's critique of the goals and methods of oratory as it is practised should make readers question the legitimacy and effectiveness of those institutions.

3. Re-working democratic institutions: Plato's political theory in practice

There are a number of ways we might respond to Plato's critiques of democracy, but Plato appears to have had his own concerns about the political ideals espoused in the *Republic* and *Statesman*. Most importantly, it is not clear that it is *possible* for a mortal human to rise to the heights of an incorruptible philosopher-ruler, and this fact risks making political proposals which depend on such wondrous people unfeasible (*Laws* 713c2–714b1, 875c3–d4). But if there isn't a way to get the requisite level of expertise in people reliably such that skilled rulers could form a stable basis for government, we have to find a realistic way to *approximate* rule by the skilled. In order to see how Plato's critiques of democracy are consistent with a more positive evaluation of some of its aspects, we should turn to the *Laws*. The *Laws* has long hidden in the shadows of its more famous siblings, but its importance is being increasingly recognized—especially for understanding Plato's political philosophy generally, and his attitudes towards democracy in particular. In the *Laws*, an unnamed Athenian Visitor lays out the constitution for a new colony in Crete, called Magnesia. According to Aristotle, Plato's goal in the *Laws* was to make the ideals of the *Republic* practicable (*Politics* II.6). Previous scholars have noted that Plato relies heavily on Athenian democratic institutions in the *Laws*, and more recent scholarship has continued to fill out this picture.³⁰ We must consider the *Laws*, then, if we want to see what Plato considers valuable about democracy in practice. Plato finds much to commend in the Athenian

³⁰ G. Morrow, *Plato's Cretan City* (Princeton University Press, 1960).

constitution (especially in its putatively Solonian form), while also proposing novel ways to modify democratic institutions.³¹

Why think that Plato finds *anything* valuable about democracy at all? The fact that there must be a place for some democratic ideals in Plato's second-best city is made explicit in the discussion of the goals of legislation in *Laws* III. The best constitution is said to come about through the mixing of what Plato calls the monarchical principle and the democratic principle, in order that the city may be wise, free, and friend to itself (693d7–e1, 693e5–694a5, 698a5–b2, 756e8–757a1). A plausible way of understanding what the monarchical and democratic principles amount to is in terms of self-rule and other-rule; the principle of monarchy is that somebody else tells you what to think and do (such that an excess of monarchy leads to the slavery of the people ruled, thus producing extreme hierarchy), whereas the principle of democracy is that you decide for yourself what to think and do (such that an excess of democracy leads to everybody deciding for themselves what is best and refusing to recognize authorities, thus producing extreme equality).³² One upshot of framing the principles of the Magnesian constitution in this way is that it makes clear why the citizens' education partly consists in learning how to rule and be ruled with justice (643e6), as citizens need to learn both how to recognize and follow legitimate authorities, and how to be autonomous enough that they can run their own households and participate in the governance of the city.³³ In other words, free citizens shouldn't just be told what to do all the time, but they also shouldn't think so highly of their own views that they rely solely on their own judgements about what is best.

³¹ Cf. D. Cammack, 'Plato and Athenian Justice', *History of Political Thought* 36/4 (2015), p. 612 for a more skeptical view.

³² This is not uncontroversial, but I defend my reading in J. Reid, "The Mixed Constitution in Plato's *Laws*", *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 99/1 (2021), 1–18.

³³ See also J. Annas, *Virtue and Law in Plato and Beyond* (New York, Oxford University Press, 2017), p. 37.

So has Plato abandoned the principle from the *Republic* that the skilled should rule? It is true that one of the most striking features of the *Laws* is that philosopher-rulers are entirely absent, so skill is not manifested through a ruling philosophical elite.³⁴ But there is still a source of rational ordering in the city that comes about from the laws themselves, which embody the prescriptions of reason (644d1–3). This source of orderly rule is explicitly said to be a second-best option given that the ideal of philosopher-rulers cannot be realized (875c3–d4). Magnesians act in accordance with reason, then, primarily by following the dictates of the laws and by diligently defending the constitution in their capacity as office-holders (715b5–d6). Moreover, the absence of philosopher-rulers does not entail that there is no place for learning. Some Magnesian citizens learn advanced topics in mathematics, astronomy, and philosophy in the ‘Nocturnal Council’ (so called because its members meet early in the morning before dawn), but the function of the Nocturnal Council is educative, not executive.³⁵ Citizens are not given political authority because of their superior performance in a life-long series of exams administered by the Nocturnal Council; instead, additional education is one way of supplementing the work that some—notably, not *all*—office-holders already do, giving them an appreciation of the city’s laws that goes beyond mere habit (951a7–c5).

It is likely, then, that there isn’t the high level of skill and knowledge in Magnesian citizen as there is in the Philosopher-Rulers of Kallipolis. But this doesn’t mean that there is no place for incremental progress towards skilled governance. In Magnesia, the citizens’ skill is citizenship itself: they are instructed to spend their time learning and practising how to preserve the order of the city, and are forbidden from practising other *technai* (806d7–e2, 846d1–e2).³⁶

³⁴ M. Schofield, *Saving the City* (Routledge, 1999), chapter 2.

³⁵ J. Reid, ‘Changing the Laws of the *Laws*’, *Ancient Philosophy* (forthcoming).

³⁶ S. Meyer, ‘The Moral Dangers of labour and commerce in Plato’s *Laws*’, in L. Brisson & S. Scolnicov, *Plato’s Laws: From Theory into Practice. Proceedings of the VI Symposium Platonicum* (Academia Verlag, 2003), 207–14.

Citizens cultivate virtue through their participation in the city, running their family farms, holding public office, and engaging in politics through the institutions that require citizen participation, such as sitting on juries, voting for office-holders, or attending the assembly.³⁷ Thus every citizen's skill in politics is cultivated over the course of their whole life and it is for them a full-time job, which is why they cannot occupy themselves with other trades or professions. Magnesia, then, fosters political competence, but never relies on there being people so outstanding in virtue and political skill that the city could be entrusted solely to their rule.

The institutions of Magnesia thus reflect the idea that all citizens should participate in politics, but Plato implements this kind of equality of opportunity for citizens consistently with the idea that some people are more skilled and more virtuous than others. In the first place, while Plato thinks that the education system of Magnesia will be largely effective, some people will still turn out bad and others will need incentives to be law-abiding (853b6–854a3). Because of this ethical reality, the *Laws* contains an extensive penal code and every office-holder must undergo a scrutiny (*dokimasia*) before holding office, and is subject to an audit (*euthuna*) after their term is complete (761e5–6). Failing to be law-abiding is grounds for preventing somebody from holding office—the unvirtuous should not rule or be given power or be entrusted with public funds. Similar mechanisms for accountability and for examining officials were present in democracies and oligarchies alike, but scholars have seen these institutions as providing an

³⁷ For a summary of the offices and duties in the *Laws*, see J. Reid, 'The Offices of Magnesia', *Polis* 37/3 (2020), 567–589.

important way for the public to exercise oversight of officials.³⁸ In Magnesia, nobody is above the law and citizens hold each other accountable.³⁹

Another democratic feature of Magnesia can be seen in its relatively egalitarian levels of wealth. Equality is a central pillar of democratic ideology (exemplified by the use of lottery), and democratic attitudes towards wealth equality can be understood as counterbalance to the disproportionate levels of power that the wealthy usually have. In oligarchies, your level of wealth directly determines your position in society, as you are barred from ruling or citizenship if you do not meet a particular property threshold. But in democracies, too, there is an ongoing concern that the wealthy are hostile to the poor and that the wealthy seek opportunities to use their money to consolidate power. In the *Laws*, Plato makes explicit that ideally everybody would have the same amount of property; however, because people will inevitably arrive at the colony with different amounts of money, he institutes four property classes as a second-best solution to this problem (744b1–d1). Those in the first class, however, cannot be more than four times wealthier than those in the fourth class, and those in the fourth class cannot fall below a certain level of wealth, insofar as ownership of their family land is inalienable (744d3–745a3). Importantly, with only minor exceptions, offices are not restricted on the basis of one's economic class.⁴⁰

³⁸ E. Robinson, *The First Democracies: Early Popular Government outside Athens* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1997), pp. 50, 63, 126; Balot, 'Democracy and Political Philosophy', p. 188; M. Landauer, 'Parrhesia and the Demos Tyrannos: Frank Speech, Flattery, and Accountability in Democratic Athens', *History of Political Thought* 33/2 (2012), pp. 194–200. See also M. Landauer, *Dangerous Counsel: Accountability and Advice in Ancient Greece* (University of Chicago Press, 2020), chapter 6 for how these accountability practices intersect with the problems raised in the *Gorgias*.

³⁹ It is significant that the accountability mechanisms in Magnesia are tiered in that citizens are not uniformly accountable to the *demos* as a whole; rather, sometimes citizens are subject to the judgment of a court of their fellow-citizens, and sometimes they are subject to the expert judgment of the auditors. The public has a role to play in collective accountability, but more complex accountability practices need to be left to experts. For a nuanced analysis of these different accountability practices in Plato and their significance for our understanding of Plato's view on democratic accountability, see M. Landauer, 'Democratic Theory and the Athenian Public Sphere', *Polis* 33 (2016), pp. 31–51.

⁴⁰ The exceptions are all relatively minor magistracies: the offices of temple treasurer and city warden are limited to the top property class (760a1, 763d4–e3); the market wardens are limited to the top two property classes (763e4–764a2); officers of the athletic competitions are chosen from the middle two property classes (765c1–d3).

Consistent with what we saw in the *Republic*, wealth is no guide to character or competence in ruling, and the poorest citizens can become one of the thirty-seven Guardians of the Law, an Auditor, or the Officer of Education—i.e. they could occupy *any* of the most important political positions in Magnesia. Plato thus acknowledges the inevitability of differential levels of wealth, while trying to sever the connection between wealth and power.

Plato also makes political innovations on the basis of what he takes to be a central democratic value: freedom. The citizens of Magnesia are free and it is not appropriate, we are told, for free citizens to be ordered and forced around like slaves; rather, free citizens should be persuaded to be obedient to the laws (720a2–e8).⁴¹ Subsequently, various portions of the lawcode are preceded by persuasive preambles or ‘preludes’ that motivate the citizens to comply with what the law orders. This is an important way that Plato takes one aspect of freedom seriously as a normative political ideal, and even when Plato does endorse paternalistic uses of force, persuasion should be used first.⁴²

Democratic institutions are also modified in various ways throughout the *Laws*. In the first place, the only offices filled by random lottery alone are priesthoods (so that the relevant god might have a say in the process, 759b7–c6), and positions on public juries (768a1–7, 768b5). Insofar as lottery exemplifies the principle that anybody can do the job, whereas election implies that some skill is required, Plato’s choices here are telling—there probably aren’t many civic

⁴¹ There is a debate as to whether the preludes operate by appealing to our rationality, or by appealing to non-rational motivations like fear. I believe that the goal of the preludes is to produce obedience in the citizens, and that different citizens will be motivated to be obedient in different ways, hence we need to be ecumenical about the methods by which persuasion can be achieved; I follow here A. Greene, ‘Freedom and Legislation in Plato’s *Laws*’ (ms.) and H. Fossheim, ‘The *proimia*, Types of Motivation, and Moral Psychology’, in C. Horn (ed.) *Platon: Gesetze/Nomoi* (Akademie Verlag, 2013), 87–104.

⁴² M. Lane, ‘Persuasion et force dans la politique platonicienne’, in A. Brancacci, D. El Murr & D. Taormina (eds) *Aglaiā: autour de Platon. Mélanges offerts à Monique Dixsaut* (Paris: Vrin, 2011), 133–66; F. Trivigno, ‘Above the Law and Out for Justice’, in P. Dimas, M. Lane, and S. Meyer (eds) *Plato’s Statesman: A Philosophical Discussion* (Oxford University Press, forthcoming).

duties that just anybody can perform well. That being said, many offices are filled through a process that combines stages of nomination and election, with lottery being used to determine the final selection once the candidates have been whittled down. The use of lottery is said to be a compromise to democratic conceptions of equality (757d5–758a2), but it would also have the effect of spreading office-holding to more citizens and making it such that the ability to win votes does not guarantee political power.⁴³

Indeed, the lingering danger of public oratory has not left Plato's mind, as rhetoric is entirely banned in a judicial setting (937d6–938a8), with defendants answering questions from professional judges rather than giving extended speeches; Plato thus replaces the Athenian adversarial model with a more inquisitorial model.⁴⁴ Moreover, despite its presence in the *Statesman*, there is no office of the orator implemented in Magnesia, and the political duties of the assembly are curtailed to such a degree that there is effectively no place where a budding young orator would even be able to show off their skills. It is possible that Plato says so little about the Magnesians council and assembly because he simply assumed that they will do many of the same things that they did in Athens. But these political institutions underwent numerous significant changes during Athens' history, so Plato's readers wouldn't have simply known which of these versions he had in mind. Therefore, given that many of the duties that would otherwise be performed by the assembly are performed by the Guardians of the Law (most notably, all legislative functions), the best explanation is that Plato intentionally left the assembly and council without much to talk about. Mass deliberation on important political issues has been largely replaced by the judgments of a small group of experienced and time-tested magistrates.

⁴³ S. Monoson, *Plato's Democratic Entanglements* (Princeton University Press, 2000), p. 92 argues that lottery had an important anti-corruption function in Athens (see also pp. 102, 127, 158). This is a likely consequence of Plato's employment of lottery, but it is apparently not one of his explicit justifications.

⁴⁴ G. Morrow, *Plato's Cretan City*, chapter 6.

The *Laws*, then, demonstrates a nuanced attitude about democracy. On the one hand, Plato has no time for the idea that just anyone can rule and so he employs the lottery sparingly, favouring instead complex election mechanisms to better ensure that competent people hold office; similarly, there is no place for public oratory, and persuasion is relegated to the relatively sterile context of written prelates to parts of the lawcode. On the other hand, Plato does think it important that freedom be a part of his second-best constitution, explicitly making it a goal of legislation, trying first to persuade rather than just using force to generate compliance, and cultivating the citizens' abilities to rule themselves in addition to being good at following authorities. Plato consistently thinks that wealth has little to do with political ability and he strives towards an egalitarian distribution of property to avoid wealth being a source of power. The *Laws* is a complex work from a sophisticated political theorist, but even a brief survey of some of the important features of the constitution detailed in its pages reveals that Plato sees democracy as something to be re-worked rather than abandoned entirely.

4. Conclusion: Plato's Legacy

While there is much more to be said, I have tried to explain here what I take to be central to Plato's engagement with democracy, explaining the underlying logic of his most famous critiques from the *Republic* and *Gorgias* while drawing attention to the complex implementation of his views in the *Laws*. When we consider the legacy of Plato's thought, we should keep both of these threads in mind. Plato is a powerful critic of some central pillars of democratic thinking, and while we now have at our disposal more sophisticated ways than he did for assessing political expertise in rulers and in the citizenry at large, it is not implausible to think that those

who hold power over others should be demonstrably competent in character, experience, and knowledge. Similarly, while we have more complicated models for explaining voter behaviour and for assessing the impact of orators on public opinion, Plato rightly prompts us to think about the strong incentives orators have for saying what their audience wants to hear, and urges us to consider how cycles of confirmation bias can arise when orators dress up in more persuasive garb what their audience already thinks.

Even though readers will likely be reminded of passages of Plato when reading various anti-democratic arguments in later political theorists (especially arguments that disparage the cognitive abilities of ordinary voters and even office holders elected from the citizenry), it is important to remember that Plato also made good headway in addressing his own objections by framing a good workable constitution as a mixed constitution, where monarchical, aristocratic, and democratic elements are somehow balanced, combined, or moderated. Aristotle's discussion of what most cities should aim for shows a similar deployment of constitutional blending, especially throughout Book IV of the *Politics*; we know little of Stoic political philosophy in practice, but we do know that they endorsed a version of the mixed constitution (Diogenes Laertius, *Lives*, VII.132.); most importantly, Cicero's development of the mixed constitution and his application of it to his analysis of the Roman constitution relies on Platonic theorizing about politics (*On the Republic* I.34, I.54, I.69–70, II.42–43, II.65).⁴⁵ Contemporary theorists about democracy might do well, then, to see some of our own problems through a Platonic lens, where the fundamental problem is determining how to institute the ideals of skilled and virtuous governance in a community of free but fallible people.

⁴⁵ J. Powell, 'Philosophizing about Rome: Cicero's *De re publica* and *De legibus*', in G. Mueller & F. Zini, *Philosophie in Rom – Römische Philosophie?* (De Gruyter, 2018), 249–267.

Select Guide to Further Reading

The most famous critique of Plato's political theorizing is K. Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies* (Princeton University Press, 1945). There is a cottage industry of articles critiquing Popper's interpretation, but it is still the seminal work for scholars who view Plato as a proto-totalitarian.

For more literary interpretations of Plato's political thought which rest on the impossibility of the political proposals in the *Republic*, readers should begin with L. Strauss' *The City and Man* (University of Chicago Press, 1964) and A. Bloom's massive interpretative essay in his translation of Plato's *Republic* (Basic Books, 1968).

Other scholars have taken inspiration from an ancient tradition of commentators who understood Plato's *Republic* as primarily an ethical treatise rather than a political one, in that its main question is about individual—not political—justice. This reading was defended by Julia Annas in her *Introduction to Plato's Republic* (Oxford University Press, 1981), in *Platonic Ethics: Old and New* (Cornell University Press, 2000), and in 'Politics in Plato's *Republic*: His and Ours', *Apeiron* 33/4 (2000), 303–326. Her more recent work in *Virtue and Law in Plato and Beyond* (Oxford University Press, 2017) has emphasized continuities between the political proposals in the *Republic* and *Laws*.

Much work has also been done situating Plato's thought in an ideological dialectic with democracy and democratic practice in Athens. Recent contributions to this include D. Allen, *Why Plato Wrote* (Wiley-Blackwell, 2012); S. Monoson, *Plato's Democratic Entanglements* (Princeton University Press, 2000); A. Saxonhouse, *Athenian Democracy: Modern Mythmakers and Ancient Theorists* (University of Notre Dame Press, 1996); J. Thakkar, *Plato as Critical Theorist* (Harvard University Press, 2018).

The most detailed studies of the political proposals of Plato's *Laws* are G. Morrow, *Plato's Cretan City* (Princeton University Press, 1960), M. Pierart, *Platon et la cité grecque* (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, [1974] 2008), and K. Schöpsdau's magisterial three volume *Platon: Nomoi, Übersetzung und Kommentar* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, vol. 1 1994, vol. 2 2003, vol. 3 2011). See also S. Meyer's ongoing translation and commentary project with Oxford University Press (volume one, on Books 1–2, published in 2015).

Recent scholarship that attempts to interpret Plato's political thought in light of its historical and intellectual context include M. Schofield, *Plato: Political Philosophy* (Oxford University Press, 2006); G. Klosko, *The Development of Plato's Political Theory* (Oxford University Press, 2006); X. Marquez, *A Stranger's Knowledge: Statesmanship, Philosophy, and Law in Plato's Statesman* (Parmenides Publishing, 2012); C Bobonich, *Plato's Utopia Recast* (Oxford University Press, 2002); C. Arruzza, *A Wolf in the City: Tyranny and the Tyrant in Plato's Republic* (Oxford University Press, 2018); L. Brisson & J.F. Pradeau, *Les Lois de Platon* (Presses Universitaires de France, 2007), D. El Murr, *Savoir et gouverner: essai sur la science politique platonicienne* (Vrin, 2014); A. Laks, *Médiation et coercition. Pour une lecture des Lois de Platon* (Presses Universitaires du Septentrion, 2005), modified and translated into English as *Plato's Eumenides: An Essay on his Laws*.

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