

Plato's *Republic*

An Introduction

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Sean McAleer, *Plato's Republic: An Introduction* (Cambridge, UK: Open Book Publishers, 2020), <https://doi.org/10.11647/OBP.0229>

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ISBN Paperback: 9781800640535

ISBN Hardback: 9781800640542

ISBN Digital (PDF): 9781800640559

ISBN Digital ebook (epub): 9781800640566

ISBN Digital ebook (mobi): 9781800640573

ISBN XML: 9781800640580

DOI: 10.11647/OBP.0229

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7. Questions about the Ideal *Polis*

The Three Waves

Book V

Having answered the *Republic's* first question, Plato has Socrates immediately start in on its second: 'whether it is more profitable to act justly, live in a fine way, and be just, whether one is known to be so or not' (4.445a). Since his method is to work with claims that his interlocutors believe, we might have expected Socrates to pause and ask if anyone has any questions about the definition of justice they have arrived at, but instead he immediately starts in on the *Republic's* second question on the final page of Book IV. But as Book V begins, Polemarchus, who has been silent since Book I, jumps back into the fray, piping up with some questions which will lead to a 'digression' (8.543c), as Socrates later puts it, that comprises Books V, VI, and VII, taking up about one hundred pages of the Greek text.

Literary Artistry as a Way of Doing Philosophy (5.449b-d)

The opening of Book V is subtly but strikingly similar to the opening of Book I, and it is worth pausing to consider Plato's literary way of making a philosophical point. Book I, readers will remember, begins with Socrates and Glaucon returning to Athens proper from its port, the Piraeus. Polemarchus' unnamed slave bids them to wait for his master, after the slave 'caught hold of [Socrates'] cloak' (1.327b). In

the banter that follows, Socrates playfully asks if Polemarchus will let them go (1.327c). It is striking and clearly no accident that this scene is more or less repeated with the same vocabulary at the beginning of Book V: Polemarchus 'took hold of [Adeimantus'] cloak' asking, 'Shall we let it go?'. When Adeimantus replies in the negative, Socrates asks, 'What is it that you will not let go?', to which Adeimantus replies, 'You' (5.449b). What is Plato up to here? Why does he reprise the beginning of Book I here at the outset of Book V, with the same vocabulary? Although it may be just pleasing literary symmetry enjoyable for its own sake, I suspect there is more to it than that. I think that Plato is using literary form to make a substantive point about the nature of philosophy: philosophy is always starting over, always examining its foundations. Though we have travelled quite a distance from the opening scene, the conclusions it ultimately led to, especially the account of justice as each part of the soul doing its own work, need to be scrutinized. Doing so is important given the method Socrates and company have adopted, which relies on shared agreement about premises to derive conclusions. Plato might have made this point more directly, but making the point so subtly as almost certainly to be missed the first time around seems not just a more elegant but a more effective way of making the point that doing philosophy well invariably involves examining one's conclusions and starting points. It is more effective, I think, since he lets his readers make this point for themselves, by prompting us to ask why he rhymes the beginnings of Books I and V. And indeed the conclusion I have drawn, that he is making a point about the nature of philosophy, is one that should itself be revisited, as there may be more going on than that—or he might be making a different point altogether. We will not pursue it any further, but I hope at least that this discussion helps readers to appreciate not just the literary quality of the *Republic* but also the way in which Plato seamlessly joins literary form and philosophical content. It is one of the reasons that the *Republic* is a treasure that bears repeated re-reading.

The Three Waves (5.450a–451c)

Adeimantus and Polemarchus are prompted by the implications of a nugget of commonsense Greek wisdom that Socrates utters in Book IV after giving the rulers of the ideal city their charge to guard above everything else the program of education and upbringing they worked out in Books II and III: ‘all the other things we are omitting, for example, that marriage, the having of wives and the procreation of children must be governed as far as possible by the old proverb: Friends possess everything in common’ (4.424a). While Socrates wants to avoid exploring such details, Adeimantus and Polemarchus insist that he do so. It is not that they disagree with the proverb Socrates has appealed to, but rather that it ‘requires an explanation (λόγος [*logos*])’ (5.449c): they want its implications explained and justified, since they run so contrary to Athenian social arrangements and customs. When even Thrasymachus agrees, Socrates has little choice but to accede to their wishes, even though he would prefer to avoid this ‘swarm of arguments’ his friends have stirred up. As at the beginning of Book II, Glaucon and Adeimantus agree with Socrates, but they are sufficiently self-aware to see that their belief is unjustified; hence their insistence that Socrates provide an explanation—a *logos*.

The social arrangements proposed or implied in the design of the ideal city will be scrutinized by two questions: ‘Is it possible?’ and ‘Is it optimal?’ The kind of possibility in question here is not *logical* possibility but rather something more along the lines of practicality: could this arrangement be realized in an actual city? If the answer is ‘yes’, they turn to the second question, which asks whether this arrangement would be optimal or at least beneficial. In a nutshell, the questions can be collapsed into one: *Could* we really live this way, and if so, *should* we—would it be good for us if we did?

In one of his not infrequent confessions of pessimism or trepidation, Socrates is leery of the line of inquiry Adeimantus and company are insisting on, since mistakes about what is the best way for humans to live—and here it is good to remember that their discussion ‘concerns no ordinary topic but the way we ought to live’ (1.352d)—can be disastrous. A mistake here will likely lead to a true falsehood, the very worst thing to believe. But Socrates fares forward, facing each of the Three Waves. The

metaphor of the wave is a powerful one for the residents of a sea-faring *polis*, especially as the discussion that constitutes the *Republic* takes place in the Piraeus, the port of Athens. The waves come in order of increasing severity: the first concerns whether women can be guardians; the second concerns the abolition or de-privatization of the traditional family; the third concerns the ideal city itself. We will look at the first two in this chapter and explore the third in the next, since Socrates takes the end of Book V and the whole of Books VI and VII to address it.

The First Wave: Can Women Be Guardians? (5.451c–457c)

Since friends have all things in common and the citizens of the ideal *polis* are friends—bringing about this friendship should be one of the fruits of the Noble Falsehood—the citizens will share the same upbringing and education, as well as the same jobs. There is no reason, Socrates thinks, why being female is by itself a disqualifier. Like the people listening to Socrates, many readers will be surprised by this, though probably for different reasons. Indeed, Glaucon and company find the very idea ‘ridiculous’, a complaint one encounters at least half a dozen times in one page of the Greek text (5.452). Physical education is an important part of the would-be guardians’ education, and by Athenian custom much of this, especially wrestling, occurs when the participants are naked. Thus they find it difficult to take Socrates’ proposal seriously.

As is often the case in the *Republic*, in addition to the issue immediately at hand—here, whether women can participate in the education required of would-be guardians—there are deeper issues which transcend the boundaries of the *Republic* and which should be of interest even to those who regard the ideal *polis* as decidedly dystopic. One, of course, is the status of women; another is the status of societal norms. As Socrates diagnoses Glaucon’s reasoning, the idea of women wrestling naked is ridiculous because ‘it is contrary to custom (*παρὰ τὸ ἔθος* [*para to ethos*])’ (5.452a). But why, Socrates asks, adhere to local custom? After all, at one point it was contrary to custom for *men* to wrestle naked, and that probably incited ridicule then, too. Since customs can change over time, perhaps we will give up the custom barring women from wrestling naked, too.

But Socrates has a deeper point to make than that, one that challenges the normative force of cultural customs, and one that should not surprise us, given his commitment to philosophical reflection. A cultural relativist holds that an action is right (and, alternatively, wrong) if and only if one's culture approves (or, alternatively, disapproves) of it. That is all there is to rightness and wrongness; there is no culture-transcending standard by which to assess the norms of one's own culture or those of another. One problematic consequence of cultural relativism—and remember that one way to test a claim is to consider its implications—is that it makes the idea of moral progress nonsensical. Sure, we now disapprove of slavery and thus regard it as wrong, but that is not an *improvement* on the earlier standard; it is just a different standard. And what goes for one culture viewed over time goes for different cultures viewed at the same time: your culture holds that women should not vote, mine holds that they should. One is not better than another, on the relativist's view: they are different, not better or worse—because to hold that anti-slavery or pro-female suffrage norms are better than their opposites requires a higher, culture-transcending standard by which to assess those cultural standards, and these are the very things denied by the cultural relativist. The argument pattern here should be familiar: *A* implies *B*, and *B* is false—or, at least, the person we are talking with regards it as false—so *A* must also be false. Consider this argument:

- P1 If (*A*) cultural relativism is true then (*B*) the idea of moral progress is incoherent.
- P2 (*not-B*) The idea of moral progress is *not* incoherent.
- C Therefore, (*not-A*) cultural relativism is not true.

The argument is logically valid, so a die-hard relativist wishing to deny its conclusion must either reject P1, holding that cultural relativism does not imply that moral progress is incoherent, or reject P2, conceding that the idea of moral progress is not coherent, after all. These are both tall orders, for relativism, holding that what one's culture approves of is right, implies that there is no standard by which to judge one culture's standards to be better than another culture's—and there is no standard by which to assess my culture's former standards and its current standards. No standard is better; they are just

different. Since progress means change for the better, it is difficult to see how a cultural relativist could regard moral progress as coherent, given their insistence that there are no standards by which to assess a culture's standards.

Socrates does not make the moral progress argument, but it is presumably something he would endorse, since he rejects the cultural relativism that takes one's culture's standards as sound just because they are one's culture's standards. 'It is foolish', he thinks, turning Glaucon's objection back on him by employing the same word (*γέλοιος* [*geloios*]), 'to think that anything besides the bad is ridiculous [...] and it is foolish to take seriously any standard of what is fine and beautiful other than the good' (5.452de). Socrates is not a nihilist or anarchist; he is not opposed to cultural norms and standards *per se*—it would be odd if he were, given the amount of time he has so far devoted in the *Republic* to an educational program designed to cultivate the right ones. What he is opposed to is uncritical acceptance of one's culture's norms, to regarding them as correct or beyond question merely because they are the norms of one's culture. That fact that one's culture approves of *x* and *y* and disapproves of *z* is one thing; whether one's culture *ought* to do so is a different matter entirely. The subsequent books in the *Republic* will reveal something of what Socrates takes the good to be, but even if we find ourselves disagreeing down the road with his particular version of moral realism, we can agree with him about the role that critical reflection and reasoned argument ought to play in determining which norms a culture ought to possess. 'What was ridiculous to the eyes', Socrates says, 'faded away in the face of what argument showed to be the best' (5.452d). Women wrestling naked seems ridiculous to Glaucon and his friends, but until one has scrutinized one's culture's standards, it is not clear that it really *is* ridiculous.

Socrates' critique of Glaucon's appeal to what seems ridiculous echoes his earlier remarks on disgust and cultivating the right distastes. Finding something ridiculous differs from finding it disgusting: laughing at something is a much weaker form of disapproval than being nauseated by it. But they are both modes of disapproval, ways of registering *that* something is improper. These modes of disapproval are typically not rational: we are raised to find certain things ridiculous and certain things disgusting while we are 'young and unable to grasp

the reason' (3.401a). Socrates calls on reason to help determine whether what *seems* absurd or disgusting really *is* absurd or disgusting, and if so, why. If we cannot justify our tastes and distastes, perhaps we ought to give them up. In his ideal *polis*, no one needs to give up the norms they have absorbed from their culture, because the educational system is supposed to guarantee that the only norms and values available for absorption are correct. But those of us not raised in utopias will need to scrutinize our culture's norms and values, since we cannot be sure those norms and values are correct. To my mind, the value of liberal education, and especially philosophical education, is to be found in their enabling us to better scrutinize and evaluate the norms, values, and beliefs we were raised to have, so that we are in a position to endorse some and reject others, thereby making our norms, beliefs, and values truly our own. Without critical scrutiny, these norms, values, and beliefs are not really our own, and we are not fully free: we might be free of interference, but we lack the freedom that comes from genuine, deep self-direction. (We will return to this distinction between negative and positive freedom below, in Chapter Twelve.)

Having made his general point about cultural norms, Socrates brings the argument back to the question of whether having women as guardians is possible. In a move that is a model of intellectual fairness, Socrates decides to 'give the argument against ourselves' (5.453a). That is, he articulates what he takes to be the best argument against the view he holds. It is worth pausing to admire this kind of intellectual fairness, especially as it seems in such short supply these days. How many of us, after all, are willing or able to give a fair hearing to political and moral arguments we disagree with, let alone give them a reasonable reconstruction? As we noted earlier, much political and moral debate traffics in the production and consumption of strawmen: we caricature the views of our opponents and then think we have refuted our opponents by knocking down these caricatures. A quick glance at the 'comments' section of most online newspapers should provide ample evidence for the prevalence of strawmen.

The argument Socrates considers is a powerful one, since it appeals to the Specialization Principle, which structures the economic life in the ideal *polis* and indeed is the basis of the definition of justice, in arguing against the view that women can be guardians. The Specialization

Principle implies that 'each must do his own work in accordance with his nature' (5.453b). But of course, 'the natures of men and women are different' (5.453e), so how can Socrates hold that men and women may perform the same tasks? Socrates' position is self-contradictory, argues the imagined opponent: he can't endorse the Specialization Principle *and* hold that women can be guardians, since the former implies that the latter is false.

It is a powerful argument, of just the sort that Socrates regularly gives against others. Although he acknowledges the argument's rhetorical force, he finds it philosophically unsatisfying, since it is an example of *eristic*, which was discussed briefly in Chapter Two. The opponent, perhaps unwittingly, is quarrelling or wrangling (ἐρίζειν [*erizein*]), aiming to win the argument, rather than to get at the truth of the matter. The argument's main fault is that it fails to make a relevant distinction and so arrives at its conclusion illegitimately. Although it gets the Separation Principle right, it fails to distinguish different kinds of nature and employ the one that is relevant to the argument. Consider bald and long-haired men, for example *Seinfeld's* George Costanza and the supermodel Fabio. Clearly their natures are different, but from that it does not follow that George cannot be a cobbler if Fabio is, because whether one is bald or has a full head of lustrous hair is irrelevant to the craft of cobbling. It is not that the bald and the tricho-luscious are not different, but rather that the difference between them—between their natures—is not relevant to the issue at hand. Thinking otherwise, Socrates says, is 'ridiculous' (5.454d).

What is distinctive of a guardian-ruler is the kind of soul they have, a soul capable of wisdom, of knowledge of what is best for the city as a whole. The primary difference between men and women is biological or physical ('somatic' might be more precise): 'they differ only in this respect, that the females bear children while the males beget them' (5.454d). There is no reason to think, Socrates insists, that this physical difference must make for a psychic difference. Consider a female doctor, a male doctor, and a male cobbler. If asked, 'Which two are more similar to each other than to the other?', you would rightly respond that you cannot answer the question until you know the relevant parameter of comparison. *Physically*, the male doctor and male cobbler are more similar to each other than either is to the female

doctor. *Psychologically*, the male doctor and female doctor are more similar to each other than either is to the male cobbler. The souls of cobblers differ in nature from the souls of doctors, being susceptible of acquiring a different kind of skill—perhaps this is a difference between iron and bronze souls. But as naturally different as cobblers' and doctors' souls are from each other, they are more like each other than they are like the souls of guardians, who, rather than possessing a skill or craft, possess a virtue. All three possess knowledge, but the objects of knowledge—how to make shoes, how to cure the sick, what is best for the city as a whole—are strikingly different, and, as we saw earlier, skills are fundamentally different from virtues, insofar as skills are morally neutral while virtues are not.

The upshot of all this is that men and women having all tasks in common, and especially the task of guardianship, is possible: it is not contrary to nature. While men may on average be physically stronger than women, this difference in physical strength is not relevant to ruling or soldiering, since it may well not hold in particular cases. As I write this, the world record for the marathon for men is roughly twelve and a half minutes faster than the world record for women (2:01:39 versus 2:14:04), but the fastest women's time is *really* fast, and is much, much faster than the overwhelming majority of men can run. It was the twenty-third fastest time run that day (13 October 2019) in the Chicago Marathon, faster than 24,604 of the men who completed the race. That men on average run or swim faster or lift more weight than women is irrelevant to what this particular woman and that particular man can do, and it is the particular person's qualifications that are relevant, not the average qualifications of groups they belong to.

Having shown that it is possible for women to be guardians and to receive the same education as their male counterparts, Socrates makes short work of the other question, whether it is optimal. Given that the only thing standing in its way is unreasoned cultural prejudice, it is no wonder that Socrates regards this arrangement as for the best. After all, he reasons, why would you not have golden-souled guardians in charge, whatever their sex, given that physical difference is irrelevant to the task of ruling?

Is Plato a Feminist?

Plato's perhaps surprising insistence that women can be guardians prompts us to ask, 'Is Plato a feminist?' To answer this question, we need to know what it is to be a feminist, a thornier task than it might at first seem. The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (an excellent, free, online resource) has half a dozen entries for different kinds of feminism and half a dozen again for feminist approaches to various philosophical topics such as knowledge, the self, science, ethics, etc. I am going to make the simplifying assumption—hopefully not an over-simplifying one—that at feminism's root is a belief in and commitment to gender equality. The idea here is that men and woman are morally equal, that being a woman is never in itself a reason to give a woman's interests less weight. We know that Plato is not an egalitarian, but importing a contemporary moral principle (one animating the work of Peter Singer, among others) can shed helpful light on this section's question.

The Principle of Equal Consideration of Interests (PECI, for short) holds that the interests of all parties affected by an action or decision ought to be given equal consideration *unless* there is a morally relevant fact or difference that justifies *unequal* consideration. The first thing to notice about the PEGI is that it is a moral principle; it is not attempting to describe how people actually act and decide; rather, it is a principle about how we *ought* to act. A second thing to notice is that its currency is *consideration*, which is different than *treatment*. A teacher who gives every student the same grade treats the students equally, but this is not what the PEGI demands. Instead, it demands that the teacher give equal consideration to all: they use the same standards to evaluate their work, do not play favorites, etc. There is a clear sense in which such a teacher is also treating their students equally, but it is worth noting how *consideration* and *treatment* differ. If there are 200 applicants for a job, the only way to treat all applicants equally in the strict sense is to hire all of them or none of them. What the PEGI requires is that the prospective employer use fair standards and apply those standards equally. That is what I take a commitment to equal consideration to require.

A third point worth mentioning is that the PEGI mandates presumptive rather than absolute equality of consideration. It recognizes that there may be times when *unequal* consideration is called for—but

as the fourth point makes clear, unequal consideration is permissible only if there is a *morally relevant* difference between parties or a *morally relevant* fact that would justify unequal consideration. Psychologists are adept at discovering the factors that decision-makers take to be *psychologically relevant* and which *explain* why we often do not give equal consideration to all parties affected by our actions. But the PEGI is a normative principle, not a descriptive one: it requires a morally relevant fact that justifies unequal consideration, not a psychologically relevant fact that explains it.

A racist violates the PEGI by taking racial difference to justify giving unequal consideration to the interests of those affected by their actions. They violate the PEGI because, with very few exceptions, racial difference is not a morally relevant difference. Racial difference is clearly—and sadly—psychologically relevant to racists, since it helps to explain why they act and think as they do. But it is rarely morally relevant: other things being equal it does not *justify* giving unequal consideration based on race. In parallel fashion, a sexist takes sex-difference to be a morally relevant difference when it presumptively is not. This is not to say that race- and sex-differences are never relevant. If Brad Pitt complains to *Variety* that the director of an upcoming film about the life of Martin Luther King, Jr. is racist because they would not even consider him for the part, we might think he is joking, since in this instance racial identity seems quite morally relevant, not least because it would be offensive to have a white actor appear in blackface to play Dr King. More seriously, this is not to say that race- and sex-based affirmative action policies cannot be justified, but rather that they stand in need of justification: since the presumption is that race and sex are not morally relevant, the burden of justification falls on the person or policy appealing to them.

Although Plato is no egalitarian, there is a sense in which he accepts the PEGI. He takes the kind of soul one has—gold, silver, bronze, iron—to be relevant to whether one is eligible to participate in governing the *polis* and indeed whether one's thoughts about governing the city should be given any consideration. Readers who are egalitarian democrats—and that is 'democrat' with a small d, implying not party affiliation but rather a view about who is entitled to have a say in how one's community is governed—will think that Plato is mistaken about this: every competent adult should have equal rights to political

participation. But that point aside, it is clear, I think, that Plato certainly accepts the PECI with respect to sex-difference: 'there is no way of life concerned with the management of the city that belongs to a woman because she is a woman or to a man because he is a man, but the various natures are distributed in the same way in both creatures. Women share by nature in every way of life just as men do' (5.455d). In the lingo of the PECI, for Plato sex-difference is not a morally relevant difference that would justify giving unequal consideration to the interests of men and women.

We should note that the attitude that Plato has Socrates express here is deeply at odds with Athenian attitudes of their day. Women played no role in governing Athens, and well-to-do women would never be seen by themselves outside the home. His attitude would have seemed less radical in Sparta, where women were sufficiently engaged in public life for Plutarch to be able to compile a volume entitled *Sayings of Spartan Women*.

That certainly inclines us toward a 'yes' answer to the question of whether Plato is a feminist. Affirmative support can also be found in the Second Wave, which we will get to shortly. Put briefly, Plato de-privatizes and indeed abolishes the traditional nuclear family, doing away with traditional marriage and child-rearing, and instead having children raised communally by people with a natural aptitude for it. To the extent that the traditional family can be a site of patriarchal oppression, limiting which roles and opportunities are available to women, Plato's doing away with it lends support to the judgment that he is a feminist.

But this very same point also provides a reason to doubt that Plato is a feminist. In addition to its commitment to gender-equality, feminism is plausibly characterized as committed to recognizing and overcoming gender-based oppression, where oppression is the systematic disadvantaging of one group for the benefit of another. Although Plato has Socrates argue that it is both possible and optimal for suitable women to be guardians in the ideal *polis*, there is no hint that he recognizes that his culture oppresses women; nor does he aim to liberate the women of the ideal *polis* from oppression: his motivation in advocating gender equality is that it benefits the *polis*, not that doing so is a matter of social justice or fairness. If women are liberated from oppression, it is accidental rather than intentional, which is a point in favor of a negative answer to the question of whether Plato is a feminist.

Another Second Wave issue that counts against Plato's being a feminist is what we can call *the asymmetry of possession*. Possession is an asymmetrical relation: except in a metaphorical sense, I possess my possessions: they belong to me, I do not belong to them. Some relations, such as *being siblings*, are symmetrical: if Mary is my sibling, I am her sibling. But other relations, such as *being a sister of*, are asymmetrical: if Mary is my sister, it does not necessarily follow that I am Mary's sister. Given that possession is asymmetrical, Socrates' saying that 'all these women are to belong in common to all the men' (5.457c [literally, they are to be κοινάς (*koinas*): shared in common]) is problematic for thinking him a feminist. If Plato really were committed to gender equality, we would expect Socrates to then say something like, 'and of course all the men belong in common to all the women.' But he does not, which suggests that women are *not* after all to be thought of as fully equal to men.

The last reason against thinking that Plato (or at least Socrates, if I can depart for a moment from my practice of not worrying about distinguishing them) is not a feminist is one that many readers will already have noticed for themselves: the *Republic* is sprinkled with misogynistic remarks. For example, when discussing the irrational, appetitive part of the soul, Socrates says, 'one finds all kinds of diverse desires, pleasures, and pains, mostly in children, women, household slaves, and in those of the inferior majority who are called free' (4.431c). Later in Book V he will characterize stripping corpses on the battlefield as 'small minded and womanish' (5.469d). In both cases (and many others) he seems to be operating with a male-female binary in which the female pole is decidedly negative. This is perhaps the kicker: in Book VIII when disparaging democracy he bemoans 'the extent of the legal equality of men and women and of the freedom in the relations between them' (8.563b). Could a real feminist regard equality before the law as a *bad* thing? It is hard to see how this could be the case.

The conclusion, I think, is that although there are good points to be made on the other side, Plato is not, all things considered, a feminist. Given his time and place, his insistence that there can be philosopher-queens as well as philosopher-kings (7.540c) is surprising and laudatory, even if it falls short of what those of us today who are committed to gender equality and equity would hope for.

The Second Wave: Extending the Household to the *Polis* (5.457c–471b)

When discussing whether Plato was a feminist, I described the Second Wave as the abolition of the family. This is not quite accurate, since the operative notion for Plato is the notion of the household (οἰκία [*oikia*]), a wider notion than our notion of the family, though they are clearly related. Plato's plan is to obliterate the boundaries between households so that the *polis* becomes one large *oikia* or household. There is some scholarly controversy about whether the extension of the household applies to everyone in the *polis* or just the auxiliaries and guardians. Much of what Socrates says suggests the latter, but since bronze and iron parents can have gold or silver children, it is hard to see how de-privatizing the family could work unless the city is one large household. Similarly, the seriousness with which he takes the city-soul analogy, when coupled with his view that the best city is most like a single person (5.462c), suggests the ideal of the *polis* as one big household. This is an interesting question, though perhaps of interest mainly to specialists, so, having raised it, I will set it to one side.

We saw above that the women are 'to belong in common to all the men' and, a related point which we did not mention above, 'none are to live privately with any man' (5.457c). We met this absence of privacy earlier, when toward the very end of Book III Socrates described what life is like for guardians and auxiliaries in the ideal *polis*: they live a barracks life, 'like soldiers in a camp' (3.416d), having no private property 'beyond what is wholly necessary' (a qualification that allows a guardian to say things like, 'hey, that's *my* toothbrush') and no private dwellings. The end is nigh when guardians possess 'private land, houses, and currency' (3.417a), since this will distract their focus away from what is good for the community and toward what is good for them individually. The Greek phrase being translated as 'private' is a form of ἴδιος (*idios*), from which the English word 'idiot' derives. But the implication is individuality in opposition to what is common or shared (κοινός [*koinos*]) or public, rather than some sort of mental thickness or incapacity, though even our word retains a bit of this when we think of an idiot as 'living in his own world.' We should try to avoid reading our modern notion of privacy into the text here; 'individual property' would

do just as well as a translation, especially as *idios* often means simply 'individual' elsewhere in the *Republic* (e.g., Thrasymachus argues that injustice is beneficial to the individual (ἰδίᾳ [*idia(i)*]) (1.344a) or 'unique or peculiar' (e.g., Socrates insists that 'each craft benefits us in its own peculiar (ἰδίᾳ [*idian*] way' (1.346a), though 'peculiar' has its own misdirecting connotations).

The children too will be 'possessed in common' (5.457c), though here the rationale is quite surprising: they are possessed in common 'so that no parent will know his own offspring or any child his parent' (5.457d). Socrates thinks that it is obvious that de-privatizing the family would be beneficial, thinking he need only address whether it is possible to put this arrangement into practice. In an all-too-rare expression of disagreement, Glaucon thinks that Socrates is mistaken on this score and insists that he justify his claim that doing away with the family is a good thing.

Given the centrality of *family* to everyday, commonsense, moral thinking and to many readers' conceptions of what a happy, well-lived life centers on, Socrates faces an uphill battle. Few readers, I suspect, will find what he says fully convincing and follow him all the way to the *community* pole of the individual-community duality we have seen at play in the *Republic*, but many will be willing to move the arrow a bit more in that direction if they give Socrates a fair hearing. There is a lot to dislike in what Socrates says here. Talk of eugenics and racial purity (5.460c) is beyond being merely creepy in a post-Holocaust world, and raising children in rearing pens (5.460c) seems to fail to do justice to human dignity, just as reducing marriage to state-sanctioned sexual hook-ups for the purposes of producing citizens fails to do justice to the dignity of marriage. The amount of deception guardians will use to rig the procreation lotteries (which determine who will have sex with whom, and when) will probably seem to most readers to be not merely innocuous verbal falsehoods, but rather indicative of governmental moral depravity. One need not think lying is absolutely forbidden—few of us do, really—to be troubled by lies that might even be beneficial. And many readers will doubt that the guardians' lies will be beneficial, even if they are efficient.

But there are also things to like in what Socrates says. He is concerned with civic unity, with the integrity of the ideal *polis*. The worst thing that

can happen to a city, he argues, is for it to be divided rather than united; whatever divides and dis-integrates a city is the greatest evil, he says at 5.462a, reprising and modifying a point he made when he defined political justice (4.434bc). We might disagree that this is the *worst* thing that can happen while conceding that Socrates has a point, that a fragmented, divided city or nation is in bad shape, not functioning well, not politically healthy. His concern with faction and internal strife was certainly shared by America's founders, as for example one finds in *Federalist* #10, by James Madison (though readers familiar with the history of the early United States know how strife- and faction-ridden political life then was). A *polis* in which citizens say 'mine' about the same things is a *polis* that is unified: if all the children are *my* children, I am unlikely to favor some over others; I will want all of the city's children to flourish and succeed, since I think of all of them as *mine*.

It is because Socrates thinks that 'the best-governed city is one in which most people say 'mine' and 'not mine' about the same things in the same way' (5.462c) that he thinks that an arrangement in which 'no mother [or father] knows her own child' (5.460c) is optimal: it unifies the city, making it 'most like a single person' (5.462c). In my state of Wisconsin, about 15% of the children live in poverty (there are disputes about the correct number, since there are disputes about the proper way to measure poverty). If everyone in Wisconsin thought of these children as their children, I doubt that we would find it tolerable. We would be less likely to think it is someone else's problem to solve or to donate a few canned goods to the local food pantry and be done with it. This, it seems to me, is the viable, contemporary take-away from Socrates' communitarianism. Many readers will look upon the familial arrangements in the ideal *polis* with horror, regarding them as dystopic rather than utopic. But one can be a bit more community-minded and a bit less individualistic without following Socrates all the way. If thinking about the Second Wave leads readers to reflect on where they land on the *community-individual* spectrum, and if that landing spot is where they think they *ought* to be landing, then we are doing what Plato really wants us to be doing: thinking for ourselves. We might find ourselves agreeing with Socrates that a life or culture too far to the *individual* side of the spectrum embodies 'a silly, adolescent idea of happiness' (5.466b).

Having argued that converting the *polis* into one large household is beneficial, Socrates then starts to argue for its possibility. He focuses on warfare, which we will discuss briefly in a moment, but we might hope for more argument about whether dissolving the private family or household is psychologically possible for creatures like us. The worry is that Plato's plan assumes that the intense affection parents typically feel for their children can be spread to all the children of the community. If this affection and instinct to protect one's offspring is a matter of biology, a cultural arrangement that does away with it might have trouble gaining traction. From a certain evolutionary perspective, parents love their children and seek to protect them because those children carry their DNA; we might well wonder whether this strong parental love can be extended to those with a different genetic make-up. While this is a question that Plato cannot be faulted for not answering, it is a question *we* might want an answer to as we reflect upon the meaning Plato's proposal might have *for us*. Though Plato stressed human malleability in his account of education and enculturation, it is doubtful that humans are infinitely malleable, and our biology might put the brakes on his plan to household the *polis*, so to speak. There is more to be said about this, but for now we will just note it and move on to Socrates' remarks on the ethics of warfare.

Crucial to this discussion is a distinction between war (πόλεμος [*polemos*]) and civil war or faction (στάσις [*stasis*]). War occurs between parties that are naturally enemies, while faction occurs between natural friends. Greeks and non-Greeks—barbarians—are natural enemies; non-Greeks are fundamentally different and other, being 'foreign and strange' (5.470b). Greeks, by contrast, are 'one's own and akin' (5.470b) and thus natural friends. Greekness does not seem to be a racial notion in the modern sense; Greeks are united by a shared language, cosmological mythology, and poetic tradition rather than biology. When Greek city-states fight each other, Socrates thinks, they should do so knowing that they will one day be reconciled. They should not, for example, burn houses or ravage fields. The trouble, as Plato sees it, is that Greeks fail to distinguish between Greeks and non-Greeks in warfare, fighting against each other the way they should fight only against non-Greeks. There is a moral distinction they need to make: 'they must treat barbarians the

way [they] currently treat each other' (5.471b), and stop treating other Greeks as they currently do.

We saw in the First Wave that, in the language of the PECE, sex was not a morally relevant difference that would justify giving unequal weights to the interests of men and women. Here, in the Second Wave, however, Socrates insists that race or ethnicity *is* morally relevant to the weighting of interests while engaging in warfare. The trouble, Socrates argues, is that Greeks are acting as though Greekness is not a morally relevant difference. They weigh the interests of Greeks and non-Greeks equally, but they should not be doing this: Greeks should give Greek interests greater weight than non-Greek interests, and thus change the ways in which they conduct the warfare that seems so inevitable in their world.

It would be interesting to explore why for Plato race or ethnicity is a morally relevant difference while gender is not, but in the interest of moving forward we will set that issue aside and move on to the Third Wave.

Some Suggestions for Further Reading

Readers interested in the status of women and the nature of the family in classical Athens should see Sarah Pomeroy, *Godesses, Whores, Wives, and Slaves: Women in Classical Antiquity* (New York: Schocken Books, 1975) and Pomeroy, *Families in Classical and Hellenistic Greece* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997). Plutarch's *Sayings of Spartan Women* can be found in Plutarch, *Moralia*, vol. 3, trans. by Frank Cole Babbitt (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press [Loeb Classical Library], 1931), pp. 453–69.

There has been much discussion of the question of Plato and feminism. Interested readers might start with Julia Annas, 'Plato's *Republic* and Feminism', *Philosophy*, 51 (1976), 307–21 (reprinted in *Plato: Ethics, Politics, Religion, and the Soul*, ed. by Gail Fine (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999) and C.D.C. Reeve, 'The Naked Old Women in the Palaestra', in *Plato's Republic: Critical Essays*, ed. by Richard Kraut (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1997), pp. 129–41, which is written as a dialogue.

Readers interested in the ethics of war might start with the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy article by Seth Lazar (<https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/war/>), which gives an excellent overview and a full bibliography. Michael Walzer, *Just and Unjust Wars: A Moral Argument with Historical Illustrations*, 5th ed. (New York: Basic Books, 2015), is a contemporary classic.

The philosophical literature on equality is vast, but Peter Singer's *Practical Ethics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), <https://doi.org/10.1017/cbo9780511975950>, is an excellent starting place. Though some of Singer's views are controversial, he is philosophically astute and a very clear writer.