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Democracy in the *Republic*: Practical Support for an Imperfect Regime

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Abstract

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This paper launches the broad philosophical project of building a robust justification for the continued value of democracy in the rapidly changing world of the Information Age. This project proceeds by creating a dialogue between the great political theorists of antiquity and modernity. This paper provides the opening act of this conversation by exploring the treatment of democracy in the *Republic*, the Western world's foundational work of philosophy. It challenges the conventional wisdom that the *Republic* is simply undemocratic, and argues instead that Plato provides a qualified support for democracy. These conclusions are reached through a detailed analysis of the text's setting, historical context, dramatic elements, and philosophical content. Ultimately, these analyses suggest that Plato values democracy for its rhetorical usefulness, its political reality in Athens, and its philosophic virtue. Although the *Republic* clearly displays the imperfections of democratic government, this paper contends that Plato ultimately treats democracy as the practical regime most likely to provide good governance and as therefore the best realistic alternative to Socrates' ideal regime.

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Introduction: the Question of Democracy

The Normative Question of Democracy

Is democracy the best form of government? In the today's political climate, particularly in the United States, the answer to this question is so obviously yes that even raising it in the first place borders on the blasphemous. Unfortunately, however, this answer is much less obvious when viewed in its proper philosophic light as a normative question requiring rigorous examination. However much we like democracy and appreciate its benefits, popular opinion alone is insufficient evidence to answer this question fundamental to the existence and operation of democratic society. Yet this popular opinion does suggest a certain normative theory; namely that democracy is in fact the best form of government. Theories can be explored and tested; given the great importance of this hypothesis for the practical function of government and international institutions, it deserves constant and rigorous investigation. Such testing is dangerous, as it may bring up results with which we are uncomfortable or do not like; nevertheless, this question deserves serious study for multiple reasons.

On a personal level, the animating motivation for investigating the question of democracy is fundamentally the same motivation as that which drives all scientific inquiry: the desire to move from opinion to truth, to replace faith with knowledge. For those of us who identify with democracy, who passionately believe in democratic government and who see it as a tool for improving the conditions of human life, we require not only faith in the truth of our principle, but also rigorous philosophic confirmation of that truth. If democracy can hold up against repeated challenges and examinations, the more confidence we may have that our faith in democracy is correctly placed. For those who hold more skeptical views regarding democracy, this same level of rational inquiry is necessary to confirm or deny their views.

Additionally, from a scientific perspective, analyzing the question of democracy advances the discipline of political science. Experience in the undergraduate-level study of political science suggests that many political scientists share in the assumption that democracy is the best form of government. The post-Nietzsche movement away from political philosophy toward positivist social science may at least partially explain the widespread nature of this assumption (Weber 1946 [1918]): democracy is a highly prevalent form of government, particularly in the Western world, and therefore social science focuses on the empirical study of various aspects and effects of democracy while placing less emphasis on normative questions. Consequently, the normative questions receive much less rigorous analysis than other topics within political science. Debate rages about the proper goals of democracy, how to best structure democratic government, or even how democracy should be defined and measured (Coppedge et. al. 2011; Katz 2006), but with the decline of political philosophy the question of whether democracy is the best form of government receives much less attention (Strauss 1983, 29).

An additional possibility for why this is the case is the negative experiences so many people have suffered under non-democratic regimes, from European colonialism to Nazi Germany, the Soviet Union, and more recently Bashar al-Assad's Syria. In comparison to the "horrid excesses of [these] antidemocratic regimes… modern democracies can shine" (Santas 2007, 70). Additionally democratic concepts of equal rights, representation, and checks and balances appear to provide institutional means of preventing such atrocities. From this analysis it is fairly easy to jump to the conclusion that democracy is superior to authoritarianism and that therefore democracy is the best form of government. Unfortunately, however, showing that particular modern democracies are preferable to particular totalitarian regimes fails to show logically why democracy as such is superior to authoritarianism as such, much less why democracy is the best

of all possible regime types. Furthermore, the persistent existence of authoritarian government demonstrates that the superiority of democracy is not a universally accepted premise; at least some people must prefer authoritarianism to democracy for authoritarian regimes to remain in power. Consequently, it is a mistake to merely assume that democracy is the singular best regime for society without dedicating serious thought to this effort.

Given that political science therefore generally operates under the assumption that democracy is the best form of government, examining and testing this assumption stands to benefit political science as a discipline. Despite the discomfort inherent in the process of critically examining a closely cherished ideal, political science needs to know whether the assumption under which it operates is correct. Furthermore, the critical examination of this assumption allows for the improvement of theories which rely upon it and for creating a stronger normative framework for evaluating empirical results.

Finally, there are compelling societal reasons to examine whether democracy is the best form of government. In the first place, recent events make the question of democracy an immediate concern. For example, issues such as partisanship and Congressional inaction in the United States, the rebirth of autocracy in Russia, and China's incredible economic success despite its lack of significant political freedom all raise questions regarding the role of democracy in the modern world. Furthermore, the impacts of globalization, increasing bureaucracy, and the rise of unelected technocrats have produced what "can only be called a global dissatisfaction with democracy" in which people feel "that periodic competitive elections, in fact, do not allow citizens to control politicians and do not align the preferences of elected leaders with the preferences of the electorate" (Holmes 2012). Understanding the normative condition of democracy would inform and add clarity to this debate.

Additionally, it is not difficult to imagine a future in which the idea of democratic government is under threat. Rapid technological advancement combined with globalization is remaking the way society functions. Considering that modern liberal democracy was itself born out of the upheavals of the Enlightenment and Industrial Revolution, it would not be unsurprising if the current period of change as society enters a post-Industrial future should also spawn new ideas regarding government. Furthermore, considering the unprecedented ease of communication and transportation made possible by this digital revolution, it also would be unsurprising if these technological advances enable the adoption of previously impossible political innovations. The possibility for such theoretical invention requires that society have a means of evaluating and juxtaposing democratic government with any new alternative proposals, and this evaluation requires a normative understanding of democracy. Rigorously exploring whether democracy is the best form of government therefore provides the initial framework for defending the continued use of democracy and preparing it for innovation.

Given that the normative question of democracy is therefore important, how does one go about answering it? What is democracy? What does it mean for a form of government to be the best? How does one test whether democracy is or is not the best form of government?

In this paper, I will use Plato's *Republic* as a means of approaching these questions. This text is a valuable launching pad for such investigation because in it Plato originates the philosophic quest for the best regime. As one of the foundational works of philosophy, the *Republic* holds a uniquely important place in the canon of political theory. Indeed, the *Republic* serves to establish "the relationship of the philosopher to the political community" and defend philosophy before a rightfully skeptical civil society (Bloom 1968, p. 307). Given this importance, the *Republic* stands as one of the first philosophic treatments of political society.

Consequently, it sets a standard against which all following political philosophy must measure. Thus, the *Republic* carries with it a certain degree of generality in that the theorists who follow Plato must respond to his arguments. As a result, to speak once again in terms of democracy, it is safe to assume that the Enlightenment thinkers who invented modern liberal democracy were familiar with Plato and aware of the apparent critique of democracy which occurs in the *Republic*. Consequently, later authors are expected to include in their works at least an implicit response to Plato, and failure to do so should be considered purposeful and therefore just as significant a statement as a response to Plato's arguments. Therefore, the *Republic* is the natural entry point into this philosophic debate between the Ancient and Modern political theorists.

Moving from an analysis of Plato in particular to a normative conclusive regarding democracy requires a synthesis of four separate research questions: First, what does Plato think of democracy? Second, to what extent is this analysis relevant to modern understandings of democracy? Third, do modern democratic theories respond to this analysis, and, if so, to what extent do they respond? And finally, fourth, what does this reveal about the strengths and weaknesses of democracy? Hence, this framework uses teachings about democracy from the *Republic* to evaluate modern democratic government, then turns to modern democratic theorists for a response and finally draws conclusions regarding the nature of democracy from this evaluation and dialogue. These conclusions therefore ultimately offer insight into answers to the question of whether democracy is the best form of government.

To offer a brief note on scope, this paper deals primarily with Question One ("what does Plato think of democracy?"). Each of the four questions offered in this framework deserve and require a full research project in order to adequately answer them. Given the time constraints to which this project is subject, addressing more than one of these questions in this work is simply

not possible. Therefore, this thesis does not offer an answer to the normative question of democracy but rather serves as the launching point into the philosophic examination of democracy necessary to reach such a conclusion.

An Opponent of Democracy

Although the question "what does Plato think of democracy?" seems straightforward enough, answering it is anything but simple. Deciphering what Plato says is made difficult by the fact that he never uses his own voice but rather writes a dramatic dialogue complete with characters and a setting. The task is made more difficult by the fact that the text of the *Republic* sends conflicting messages about democracy. At face value, the *Republic* contains a critique of democracy; however, on closer examination a more complicated picture regarding democracy is revealed.

The first step in deciphering these complications and discovering Plato's true teachings requires actually defining democracy. In Book VIII of the *Republic*, Plato offers such a definition: democracy is a regime ruled by the people which values freedom and equality above all else. The people "share the regime and the ruling offices… on an equal basis" and, "for the most part, the offices in it are given by lot" (Plato 557a). This democratic city is "full of freedom and free speech" and "each man [can] organize his life in it privately just as it pleases him" (Plato 556b). Additionally, the democratic city dispenses "a certain equality to equals and unequals alike" (Plato 558c). Given these characteristics, Plato's definition of democracy actually seems quite familiar to the experience of democracy in the twenty-first century. Indeed, analyzing this definition from a modern standpoint reveals that even after more than two millennia it does a good job capturing the essence of democracy. As Coppedge et. al. explain, "democracy, understood in a very general way, means rule by the people… all usages of the term

also presume sovereignty" (Coppedge et. al. 2011, 248). Plato's definition certainly provides for this requirement that "a polity, however large or small, must enjoy some degree of self-government in order for democracy to be realized" (Coppedge et. al. 2011, 248).

However, even under more nuanced modern definitions Plato's description of democracy still passes muster. Coppedge and his fellow authors go on to distill from the literature six models of democracy, "electoral, liberal, majoritarian, participatory, deliberative, and egalitarian," that each capture "a different way of understanding what 'rule by the people' means": (Coppedge et. al. 2011, 253). Electoral conceptions posit that "competition among leadership groups… before a broad electorate" is a sufficient condition for democracy. The liberal conceptions judge "the quality of democracy by the limits placed on government" in addition to the presence of political competition (Coppedge et. al. 2011, 253). Majoritarian democracy "reflects the principle that the will of the majority should be sovereign" (Coppedge et. al. 2011, 253). Participatory conceptions of democracy emphasize that "direct rule by citizens is preferred, wherever practicable" (Coppedge et. al. 2011, 253). Deliberative approaches desire political decisions motivated by "public reasoning focused on the common good" (Coppedge et. al. 2011, 253). Finally, the egalitarian conception of democracy seeks to achieve "the goal of political equality" (Coppedge et. al. 2011, 254).

Although the definition of the *Republic* does not fit nicely in any single one of these categories, it does capture the underlying goals of many of them. Plato's definition of democracy is liberal in its emphasis on freedom, majoritarian in that there is no higher sovereign than the people, participatory in that it is a direct democracy with offices assigned on the basis of lot, and egalitarian in its insistence on "dispensing a certain equality to equals and unequals alike" (Plato 558c). Thus, Plato's definition of democracy resonates across the ages to remain

relevant in the modern era. Plato's understanding of democracy is almost identical in several key conceptual regards to that of a resident of a modern democracy. Even the most outlandish and unfamiliar parts of Plato's definition, direct democracy featuring selection of government officers by lot, continues to have some relevancy in modern democracies in the form of referenda, ballot initiatives, and jury duty. Given this consistency between the Platonic and modern definitions of democracy, Plato's treatment of democracy in the *Republic* takes on a greater degree of relevancy: one cannot simply dismiss theoretical or normative critiques of democracy by Plato as arguments against a flawed system of ancient democracy. Plato's teachings regarding democracy may continue to offer important insights regarding governance even in the twenty-first century, and this lends extra importance to the project of solving the puzzle of democracy in the *Republic*.

Against this definitional backdrop, the text of the *Republic* seems to offer a harsh criticism of democracy. The ideal regime described by Socrates and his interlocutors is far removed in every way from democracy. From Book II of the *Republic* through Book VII, the dialogue centers on a discussion of the just city, ultimately culminating in a highly structured regime subject to the rule of philosopher-kings (Plato). This is the ideal city; since it features the rule of the best with the presence of the philosopher-kings, Socrates refers to it as "aristocracy" (Plato 544e). It is nondemocratic in every conceivable way. Whereas democracies are ruled by the people, the ideal regime is ruled by a small number of philosopher-kings. Whereas democracy promotes freedom in every way, the ideal regime features strict laws on every topic ranging from property ownership and marriage to poetry and religion. Whereas democracy embraces equality for all, the ideal regime embraces inequality and strict hierarchy. The structures of the democratic and aristocratic regimes are far removed from each other. Plato displays this distance in a literal

sense as well - Book VIII of the *Republic* describes the devolution of regime types away from aristocracy in a descent which seems to illustrate “how cities and men are progressively made worse, less just, and less well off, by progressive deviations from the strictures governing Plato's own city” (White 1979, 25). Aristocracy eventually falls into timocracy (rule of the honorable), which falls into oligarchy (rule of the wealthy), which falls into democracy (rule of the many), which in turn falls into tyranny (rule of the worst). Thus, not only is democracy not the best regime, but it is one removed from being the worst. Thus, the arguments surrounding democracy in the *Republic* paint it in a very negative light; based upon this evidence alone, Plato seems decisively anti-democratic.

That Plato is anti-democratic certainly is the prevailing viewpoint among scholars. In most of the literature, scholars simply accept that the aforementioned passages are indicative of Plato’s stance toward democracy and leave the question there. Many dig no deeper than to say that “[Plato] describes four inferior types of city, and four inferior types of individual that correspond to them… democracy and the democratic individual, [have] no fixed aims but flirt with one kind of life after another, and [are] ruled by 'unnecessary' appetites” (Rowe 2006, 13). In contrast to the philosophically-minded elevated soul of the aristocrat, “[the democrat] plainly lacks… a dominant object of pursuit, something in subordination to which his life's various concerns and projects are organized and ordered… the democrat simply satisfies any desire that arises precisely until it is fully satisfied and then turns to something else” (Lorenz 2006, 164 n. 20). Furthermore, “In a democratic soul, these are 'false and braggart words and opinions,' which have come to be in part because of the young man's associations with others who are unjust” (Anagnostopoulos 2006, 179). Eventually, “democracy is destroyed by excessive indulgence in

what it defines as the good, namely, liberty or freedom… this excess of liberty leads, in dictatorship, to an excess of slavery" (White 1979, 216).

Generally, therefore, there is wide agreement among scholars that Plato "thinks that democracy prizes freedom far too much and knowledge far too little" (Santas 2007, 70). The notion of justice presented by Socrates in the *Republic* "is not only antilegal, but is, in particular, antidemocratic, because it looks to the few wise rather than the many free" (Bloom 1968, 326). R. C. Cross and A. D. Woozley agree: "[Plato's] quarrel with the Athenian democracy and the democratic politicians is that they fail to recognize… that the art of ruling is something only to be acquired by such studies as the philosopher undertakes" (Cross and Woozley 1964, 198). Cross and Woozley further argue that Plato's views of democracy are inextricably linked with his philosophy: "if we feel that [Plato's] present condemnation of democracy is harsh and mistaken, we must also be prepared to suggest what is wrong with the philosophical views which lie behind it" (Cross and Woozley 1964, 199). The prevailing opinion among scholars is that, "Plato's theory of social justice in the *Republic* is antidemocratic, by his own lights as well as by historical and contemporary consensus" (Santas 2007, 70).

The Task at Hand

This paper challenges the notion that Plato is antidemocratic, and argues instead that the *Republic* offers a qualified support democracy for rhetorical, political, and philosophical reasons, with the most emphasis placed on understanding what philosophical value Plato assigns to democracy. Ultimately, it contends that Plato presents democracy as the best practical alternative to the ideal regime. This conclusion is reached over the course of four chapters. Chapter One uses the historical context of the *Republic* and the information about setting and characters conveyed by Plato in Book I to build the case that Plato is not simply antidemocratic.

Chapter Two builds upon this foundation to offer three interpretations explaining what value or usefulness Plato assigns to democracy. Chapter Three develops more deeply the third of these interpretations, using a juxtaposition of the actions of characters in the *Republic* with the speeches they give to develop an understanding of the Principles of Good Government. Finally, Chapter Four applies these principles to the imperfect regimes described in Book VIII of the *Republic* to acquire an understanding of which best provides good government. This paper thus seeks to build up from the beginning a strong argument for a more favorable interpretation of democratic government in the *Republic*, supported by historical context, dramatic action, and philosophical reasoning.

Chapter One: The *Republic* in Context

Introduction

This investigation into democracy begins, quite literally, at the beginning. Seeking to build a comprehensive and well-supported interpretation of the *Republic* that may either support or reject the scholarly consensus regarding the Platonic treatment of democracy, this analysis begins where Plato begins – with an introduction of the setting within which the dialogue takes place and the characters who participate in it. Operating from the assumption that Plato purposefully includes and places every detail in the *Republic*, then the information he provides about setting is also important. Laying out the details of this setting, understanding the historical context implied by these details, and analyzing the impact of this context upon the setting strongly indicate that democracy in the *Republic* is more important than the text initially would suggest.

The setting in which the dialogue occurs provides important clues for understanding Plato's arguments. After all, Plato need not give the *Republic* any particular setting – one can imagine the conversation just as easily taking place in a meadow or on a hilltop as it could in Cephalus's living room. Indeed, after Book I, details about the setting completely drop out of the text. Socrates and the interlocutors apparently remain in the same location, no new speakers arrive, no one leaves, and no elements of the time, place, or contemporary setting get discussed. Details about the setting after Book I are so sparse that it is even unclear how long the conversation lasts, save for the assumption that it would take a minimum of many hours to complete a discussion as long and rigorous as that contained in the *Republic*. For all practical purposes, therefore, the dialectical examination of justice presented in Books II – X and the conclusions drawn therein are completely separate from the dramatic reality in which the discussion takes place.

Despite this apparent irrelevancy of place for the conversation, Plato makes specific efforts in Book I to identify a setting and cast of characters who will be present at the discussion. In turn, these details allow the reader to infer approximately when the dialogue occurs. The first line of text begins with Socrates saying "I went down to the Piraeus yesterday with Glaucon, son Ariston, to pray to the goddess" (327a). The very first pieces of information Plato provides his audience in the *Republic* are that the conversation takes place in the Piraeus region of Attica and that two key figures of the dialogue will be Socrates and Glaucon. Over the course of the next several lines, Plato further fills out the contextual details of the setting. At 327c Polemarchus, Glaucon's brother Adeimantus, and Niceratus are introduced, while at 328b Polemarchus' brothers Lysias and Euthydemus, along with Thrasymachus, Charmantides, and Cleitophon are also introduced. Additionally, Plato further specifies at 328b that the conversation will take place at Polemarchus' home within the Piraeus. Finally, at 328c Plato introduces Polemarchus' father Cephalus, with whom Socrates begins the discussion of justice.

Furthermore, based upon these details, the approximate time at which the conversation occurs can be inferred. The historical record indicates that at the end of the Peloponnesian War in 404 B.C., a pro-Spartan junta known as the "Thirty Tyrants" came to power in Athens (Krentz 1982). Glaucon and Adeimantus have relatives who join this oligarchy (Ferrari 2005, 11), while Polemarchus and Lysias both suffer at the hands of the Thirty (Ferrari 2005, 11; Strauss 1964, 63). As a consequence of the friendly relationships among all these characters during the *Republic*, it is safe to assume that the dialogue takes place sometime during the Peloponnesian War prior to the establishment of the Thirty Tyrants. Scholars generally believe the conversation takes place several years before the establishment of the Thirty during the Peloponnesian War (Ferrari 2005, 11; Nails 2002, 324; Strauss 1964, 63), while Bloom estimates the dialogue occurs

"around 411 B.C." (Bloom 1968, 440n3). Given this time frame and the centrality of Polemarchus, Lysias, and the house of Cephalus in establishing the setting, the pending arrival of the Thirty Tyrants looms large over the characters and conversations of the *Republic*.

Thus, in the first handful of paragraphs of the *Republic* Plato paints a very detailed picture of the setting in which Socrates and his interlocutors converse. The dialogue takes place at Cephalus' house in the Piraeus of Athens, primarily involves ten named interlocutors, and occurs in the relative calm before a time of great political upheaval. Before the reader has in any way delved into the substance of the *Republic*, he is faced with these contextual facts. Consequently, even though the setting has no explicit impact on the conversation beyond Book I, the primacy and detail Plato dedicates to describing setting indicates that the contextual details of time, place, and character are in fact important for understanding the *Republic*. These details frame the coming discussion of justice, government, and philosophy, and tether the theoretical conclusions therein derived to the reality of politics. A thorough examination of these contextual details reveals many connections to democratic Athens, thereby providing the first indications that Plato's teaching regarding democracy in the *Republic* is much more nuanced and potentially much less negative than it initially appears.

Thirty Tyrants

Places and people connote different meanings at different times; consequently, understanding the setting and characters of the *Republic* requires first understanding the time in which it is set. Doing this, in turn, requires examining the impact of the Thirty Tyrants upon Athenian political life. Although they would eventually become reviled, initially the Thirty enjoyed support among the Athenian elite. Although Athens had a strong democratic tradition, support for the democracy was far from uniform, and many viewed oligarchic Sparta as offering a better ideal

for good government. Supporters of oligarchy recognized that although poor and wealthy citizens shared political equality under democracy, wealthier citizens contributed more to the city; consequently oligarchic theory argued that "[the wealthy's] greater financial and physical stake in the future of the polis earned them a greater share in the decision-making process" (Krentz 1982, 20). Oligarchy was also justified from the perspective of virtue: "the [Spartan] system was believed to develop good citizens and good fighters" by imposing upon all Spartans a "well-ordered life" that taught them to "respect and obey their laws and customs" (Krentz 1982, 21). When compared against this favorable view of Spartan oligarchy, the equality of Athenian democracy seemed not only politically unfair but also poorly suited for producing good citizens.

The influence of pro-oligarchic sentiment among the Athenian elite is best displayed by the nearly successful attempt to establish an oligarchic government in 411 B.C., six years before the Thirty came to power in 404 B.C. After oligarchic conspirators murdered several champions of democracy, they convinced the assembly to restrict full citizenship to "not fewer than 5,000" men who were "best qualified physically and financially to serve the state" and to establish a council of four hundred with "full powers to govern" (Krentz 1982, 24). However, a series of political miscalculations and military defeats caused the government of the Four Hundred to collapse after only four months, following which "power was given to the so-called 5,000, the hoplites" (Krentz 1982, 26). This government quickly collapsed back into full democracy (Krentz 1982, 27).

Thus, when Athens surrendered to end the Peloponnesian War in 404 B.C., the supporters of oligarchy were primed to once again attempt to build an oligarchic regime in Athens. Terms of the peace treaty required the demolition of Athens' walls and the return to Athens of those exiled

during the war (Krentz 1982, 44). These exiles "as a group were pro-Spartan and eager to reassert political influence in Athens" (Krentz 1982, 44). They joined with remaining supporters of the previous revolution in 411 to advocate for the establishment of oligarchic government in Athens. These supporters of oligarchy were divided between supporters of Theramenes, who sought to establish a broader government along the lines of the 5,000 who took power after the collapse of the Four Hundred in 411, and Critias, who argued that a broad oligarchy could too quickly revert to democracy and therefore supported establishing a narrow oligarchy with a small ruling junta (Krentz 1982, 48). However, neither leader could succeed in establishing their version of oligarchy because the supporters of democracy still held too much political power. These democrats "not only refused to change the constitution, but even delayed in destroying the walls, as the peace treaty required" (Krentz 1982, 48). This intransigence invited Spartan intervention, with the Spartan commander Lysander requiring "the Athenians to choose thirty men to head the government and to manage all the affairs of the city" (Krentz 1982, 49). Both Theramenes and Critias became members of this ruling junta.

Once in power, the Thirty initially acted moderately. They built up an administrative capacity and selected magistrates, established a commission of ten men to rule the Piraeus, brought to trial former democratic leaders expected to cause trouble for the regime, sought to purge Athens of sycophants and corrupt officials, and began revising the democratic laws (Krentz 1982, 57-61). None of these actions apparently invited dissent or unrest, and some were well-received (such as the execution of sycophants) (Krentz 1982, 60).

A majority of the Thirty, however, wanted to bring more radical changes to Athens: "the Thirty intended to remake Athens on the model of Sparta, or rather on the model of an idealized Sparta" (Krentz 1982, 64). In building toward this vision, the Thirty hand-picked a list of 3,000

men believed to be loyal to the regime to be full citizens and share in the government (Krentz 1982, 64-65). All other Athenians were banned from living in the city proper (Krentz 1982, 65). This decree meant to force more Athenians into agriculture and orient the city away from naval power and commerce (Krentz 1982, 66). Additionally, the Thirty began to revoke legal rights which had previously been granted to certain foreign-born residents of Athens (Krentz 1982, 67).

The worst excesses of the Thirty Tyrants did not begin until they faced armed opposition. After relations between Thebes and Sparta deteriorated, Thebes provided material support to a small band of Athenians led by Thrasybulus who set out to overthrow the oligarchy and re-establish democracy (Krentz 1982, 70). With only seventy men, they captured a defensible hill known as Phyle north of Athens and fortified it by hiring several hundred mercenaries to join their cause (Krentz 1982, 73). The Thirty called out the 3,000 to squash the rebellion, but the onset of winter forced them to withdraw (Krentz 1982, 73). The presence of this armed resistance in Attica opened a rift between Theramenes and Critias, with Theramenes calling on the Thirty to broaden the government in order to reduce support for Thrasybulus' rebels. Rather than heeding Theramenes' advice, the Thirty led by Critias attempted to consolidate their power: they passed laws "giving the Thirty life-and-death power over those outside the 3,000… struck Theramenes' name from the list of the 3,000, and… condemned him to death" (Krentz 1982, 76). The Thirty then confiscated weapons from all Athenians, held them collectively in the Acropolis, and began to increase the number of politically-motivated executions, ultimately killing approximately 1,500 Athenians (Krentz 1982, 78-79).

At first, these actions were successful in repressing the Athenian population and keeping the rebellion small. This success was attributable to the support of the 3,000; although actions against foreign residents and supporters of democracy bred dissent, the 3,000 men selected as

full citizens stood firmly behind the Thirty (Krentz 1982, 82). Especially since non-citizens were no longer allowed to live within Athens proper, the supporters of the oligarchy were concentrated and well-organized in Athens. Those who might seek to undermine the regime were spread throughout the Piraeus and the countryside with little means of mounting an opposition given the Thirty's willingness to execute political opponents. Consequently, although Thrasybulus' force at Phyle had grown to 700 men by the end of April 403 B.C., "only a few more than 100 were Athenians" while the remainder were evenly split between mercenaries and foreigners (Krentz 1982, 83).

Although the Thirty were confident in the strength of their rule, the growth of Thrasybulus' force from 70 men at the onset of the rebellion to 700 men the following spring concerned them (Krentz 1982, 87). Despite still outnumbering the rebels by more than 2:1, the Thirty sought to solidify their position by asking Sparta to garrison the city (Krentz 1982, 87). The Spartans honored this request and sent 700 hoplites to Athens to support the oligarchic regime (Krentz 1982, 87). However, rather than increasing the strength of the Thirty, this extra garrison made the oligarchs overconfident (Krentz 1982, 89). Thrasybulus exploited this advantage and ambushed the Spartan forces when they sought to besiege the Phyle, inflicting heavy losses and capturing many weapons and other supplies (Krentz 1982, 89-90). Then, building upon the momentum generated by this victory, Thrasybulus took the bold move of using the cover of darkness to capture the hill of Munichia in the Piraeus (Krentz 1982, 90). Although risky, this move was of huge strategic importance for the rebellion. By capturing "the bustling center of Athenian commercial activity," the rebels would not only raise their visibility, but they would attract "many more metics and Athenians to their side" (Krentz 1982, 90). Indeed, just during the march from Phyle to Munichia, the rebel forces increased in size from 1,000 to 1,200 men

(Krentz 1982, 91). The Thirty attacked the rebel army in the Piraeus with all of their forces as soon as they discovered what had happened (Krentz 1982, 91). Although the pro-democracy forces faced a 5-1 disadvantage in hoplites, Thrasybulus' used light-armed troops to maximize the defensive benefit of holding the top of the hill (Krentz 1982, 91). Eventually, Critias was killed in the battle, and a counter-attack by the pro-democracy forces drove the oligarchs out of the Piraeus (Krentz 1982, 91-92).

This defeat marked the end of rule by the Thirty, but not of the oligarchy in Athens. The 3,000 decided "to send the Thirty to Eleusis and to elect ten men, one from each tribe, to rule the city" (Krentz 1982, 92). The Ten maintained many of the same policies as had the Thirty, but with Thrasybulus in a powerful position in the Piraeus their control over Attica was vastly diminished (Krentz 1982, 93-94). Eventually, the extent of the oligarch's control was reduced to the city of Athens proper (Krentz 1982, 95). At this point, the oligarchy convinced Sparta to intervene, and the arrival of additional Spartan forces was successful in pushing the democrats back to the Piraeus (Krentz 1982, 97). However, the demonstrated resolve of the democratic rebels and the harm to Sparta's relations with other Greek city-states caused by sending an army to Athens led the Spartans to realize that victory would be difficult to attain (Krentz 1982, 100-101). Rather than face the high costs of maintaining an oligarchy in Athens the Spartans choose instead to negotiate a peace, paving the way for restoring democracy in Athens (Krentz 1982, 101).

Relevance for the *Republic*

When the setting and characters of the *Republic* are viewed through the lens of the approaching civil war between Thrasybulus and the Thirty Tyrants, Plato's choices regarding where to set the dialogue and who to include in it take on a much deeper meaning. A

conservative analysis suggests that the decision to set the *Republic* in the Piraeus at the home of Cephalus with this particular group of interlocutors indicates that the resulting conversation regarding justice and government is not meant to support the oligarchy of the Thirty Tyrants; a more liberal analysis suggests that the choice of these particular contextual details indicates a support for the democratic cause.

The Piraeus and Home of Cephalus

By locating the dialogue in the Piraeus, Plato creates a stark juxtaposition between Socrates and his group of interlocutors and the Thirty Tyrants. The rule of the Thirty was consolidated in Athens proper, their economic focus was on agriculture, and their primary goal was to remake Athens into an ideal city for the 3,000 full citizens they had selected. In every way the Piraeus represents the antithesis to the society that the Thirty envision. It is the seat of Athenian naval power and commerce, the home of foreigners, slaves, laborers, and metics, and is broadly cosmopolitan. Not only does it provide the crucial strategic position from which Thrasybulus is able to rally the supporters of democracy and defeat the Thirty against long odds, but in many ways it is also the heart of Athenian democracy. As Bloom explains, "as the center of Athenian commerce, [the Piraeus] was the place to find all the diversity and disorder that come from foreign lands… [and] it was a center of the democratic party" (Bloom 1968, 440n.3). Leo Strauss concurs, labelling the Piraeus "the stronghold of the democracy" (Strauss 1964, 62). Furthermore, Plato's contemporaries shared this understanding of the Piraeus. Participation in the fleet gave the poor a claim to the right for participation in the state (Krentz 1982, 20), and the Thirty so strongly believed that "the naval empire was the origin of democracy" that they rebuilt the assembly meeting place to face away from the sea and toward the land (Krentz 1982, 62).

To the ancient Athenians who were Plato's primary audience for the *Republic*, these meanings associated with the Piraeus would have been immediately and readily apparent. Setting the dialogue in the Piraeus physically aligns the discussion with the cosmopolitanism, innovation, and democratic leanings of the port city. As a result of this separation, the *Republic* is not an attempt to justify the actions of the Thirty Tyrants or support their theory of oligarchic government. Had Plato wished to offer such support, he could have placed the dialogue within the city of Athens proper. However, he does not, and this decision is significant.

This interpretation is further supported by the fact that the dialogue is set not only in the Piraeus, but in the house of Cephalus in particular. Cephalus' sons Lysias and Polemarchus would play an important role in the rebellion against the Thirty (Bloom 1968, 440n3). Furthermore, Cephalus is a metic – a non-citizen tax-paying resident alien of Athens (Bloom 1968, 440n10). During the civil war, metics as a group opposed the Thirty Tyrants (Krentz 1982, 84). Thus, the dialogue in the *Republic* is set in the home of a man whose sons would help lead the resistance against the Thirty and whose class in Athenian society generally opposed the oligarchy. By setting the *Republic* in the Piraeus at the house of Cephalus, Plato essentially places the conversation in one of the future centers of the rebellion against the Thirty. This fact does not necessarily indicate a favorable disposition toward democracy, but it does serve to clearly distinguish Socrates and his interlocutors from the Thirty Tyrants.

Ten in the Piraeus

However, this separation does not constitute a complete schism. After Cephalus leaves the conversation early in Book I, there are ten remaining named participants: Socrates, Glaucon, Polemarchus, Adeimantus, Niceratus, Lysias, Euthydemus, Thrasymachus, Charmantides, and Cleitophon. This particular number of interlocutors is reminiscent of the commission the Thirty

Tyrants established to govern the Piraeus. Known as "the Ten in the Piraeus," this board was responsible for administering the Piraeus under the supervision of the Thirty, likely exercising "both executive and judicial powers" (Krentz 1982, 59). Bloom describes their rule as "brutal" and suggests that they were responsible for the eventual death of Polemarchus at the hands of the Thirty (Bloom 1968, 441n3). Although none of Plato's characters were members of the Ten (Strauss 1964, 63), the fact that the number of named characters present for the conversation in the *Republic* equals the number of men appointed by the Thirty to rule in the Piraeus should not be considered a coincidence. Several of the characters in the *Republic* do not have speaking roles, and by naming such characters Plato indicates that he particularly wanted them included in the text. It is purposeful that Socrates and his interlocutors form a group of ten.

Thus, Plato establishes an alternative "Ten in the Piraeus" in the *Republic*. Whereas the actual Ten sought to enforce the rule of the Thirty and administered their province accordingly, Plato's Ten act as legislators to create an entirely new hypothetical city from scratch. Therefore, Plato's Ten share essentially the same goals as the Thirty. The Thirty Tyrants sought to complete "a political restoration, putting down the democracy and restoring an aristocratic regime dedicated to virtue and justice" (Strauss 1964, 63). Socrates and his interlocutors hope to construct a city in speech that is "perfectly good" and which is therefore "wise, courageous, moderate, and just" in an effort to understand what justice is (Plato 427e). Plato's Ten and the Thirty Tyrants both seek to create a just city.

In sharing the Thirty's goal of creating a just city, Plato's Ten also share the Thirty's dissatisfaction with the status quo. Both seek to accomplish a "restoration of political health" (Strauss 1964, 63). The Thirty believe that democratic government is bad for Athens and that switching to an oligarchic regime similar to that of Sparta will make the city more virtuous and

just. Plato's Ten seek to meet the challenge posed by Glaucon to prove that the life of the just man is better than the life of the unjust man, and that the just life should therefore be enthusiastically pursued (Plato 357b; 358b-d). Neither group is satisfied with democratic government. For the Thirty, this dissatisfaction forms the basis of oligarchic theory and their rule. For Plato's Ten, this dissatisfaction stems from the fact that "the opinion of the many" is that "justice belong[s] to the form of drudgery, which should be practiced for the sake of wages and the reputation that comes from opinion but all by itself… should be fled from as something hard" (Plato 358a). For Plato's Ten, the popular or democratic opinion fails to give due consideration to justice and may actually embrace injustice. In pursuit of understanding the true nature of justice, they are willing to build from scratch according to the precepts of logic an ideal city which may ultimately prove undemocratic. Thus, for both the Thirty and Plato's Ten, the task of restoring political health involves a restoration of justice.

However, there are important differences between the two projects. The Thirty Tyrants have control of an actual, existing city which they hope can be made just if they restructure it. Plato's Ten are creating from scratch a purely theoretical city. The Thirty Tyrants look to an idealized version of Sparta as the ideal city upon which they will model their experiment in oligarchic government. Plato's Ten have no model to which they look in creating their city, and instead consider the city they ultimately design as this ideal. The Thirty Tyrants believe themselves to already understand the meaning of virtue and justice. Plato's Ten make no such presumptions and embark upon the project of creating an ideal city in order to acquire a true understanding of justice. Perhaps most critically, the Thirty Tyrants are bound by practical considerations and the inefficiencies of government. Plato's Ten are bound only by their ability to carry a line of

reasoning through to its logical conclusion. Whereas the Thirty Tyrants are politicians, Plato's Ten under Socrates' philosophical guidance are intellectuals.

These distinctions are important for further understanding how Plato distinguishes Socrates and his interlocutors from the Thirty Tyrants. When placed side-by-side in such a manner, the approach of the Thirty Tyrants appears woefully inferior to the methodology championed by Socrates. How could the Thirty ever hope to actually create a virtuous and just society when their strategy for doing so is based entirely upon unfounded assumptions? The Thirty assume that Sparta provides the best model for good government and that their understanding of justice is correct without ever questioning either premise. Yet without closely examining these assumptions, the Thirty cannot truly know what justice is; if they do not know what justice is then they cannot fully establish it. Furthermore, since politics involves a life of action rather than contemplation, the politicians who compose the Thirty are ill-suited to conduct the philosophic reasoning necessary to correct this error. These fatal flaws doom from the beginning the oligarchy's goal of establishing a just society, and their attempts to achieve this ambition instead result in extreme injustice.

In contrast to this abject failure, Plato presents the Socratic method of questioning everything and logically constructing the ideal city from nothing. Rather than going into the project with a preconceived notion of justice, Plato's Ten want to discover through careful consideration the true meaning of justice. In the *Republic* Plato's Ten engage in philosophic contemplation rather than the pursuit of political power, and this gives them the logical tools necessary to confront the problems posed by the question of justice. Moreover, their separation from the messy realities of politics gives them space to build and experiment without consequence. With reason as their

guide, Socrates and his interlocutors have a much better chance of understanding justice than the Thirty ever did at truly establishing it in Athens.

To Plato's audience of Athenians following restoration of the democratic government, the abuses of the Thirty and the subsequent civil war eliminated the desirability of oligarchy. Indeed, "oligarchy was so discredited in Athens by the rule of the Thirty that for three generations it was not a respectable alternative" (Krentz 1982, 18). In such a political environment, any argument that seemed to even remotely support oligarchy would lack credibility. This, however, creates a dilemma: how does one criticize the current regime, even in a constructive manner, when its primary alternative has been completely discredited? Plato's setting of the *Republic* allows him to avoid this problem. By placing the dialogue at the home of Cephalus in the Piraeus, Plato establishes that the content of the *Republic* does not support the oligarchic government. Then, by creating his own "Ten in the Piraeus," Plato signals that even though the content of the *Republic* opposes the ideology of the Thirty, their concern for justice and the political health of the city was not misplaced. Finally, the juxtaposition of the Thirty Tyrants and Plato's Ten enable Plato to simultaneously show that the Thirty went about attempting to promote justice in entirely the wrong manner and that the methodology used in the *Republic* produces a better outcome with none of the harms. Consequently, this analysis clearly reveals how Plato did not want the *Republic* to be interpreted: it is neither a defense of nor a justification for the oligarchic government of the Thirty Tyrants. Rather, Plato presents to his audience a superior alternative for use criticizing government.

The People of the *Republic*

A more detailed analysis of the cast of characters who join Socrates for the discussion of the justice in the *Republic* provides further evidence in support of this interpretation. At the broadest

level, the members of Plato's Ten represent a wide cross-section of the Athenian population (Nails 2012, 6). As Strauss explains, of the ten members of the conversation, "only five… are Athenians whereas four are metics and one [is] a famous foreign teacher of rhetoric" (Strauss 1964, 62-63). The five Athenians are Socrates, Glaucon, Adeimantus, Cleitophon, and Charmantides (Nails 2002). The four metics are Polemarchus, Lysias, Euthydemus, and Niceratus (Nails 2002). Thrasymachus, of course, is the teacher of rhetoric. The group also features variability in level of wealth, from the riches of Cephalus' family to the famous poverty of Socrates. Yet despite these differences in class, each character is equally welcome to participate in the dialogue. Although several named characters do not speak, there is never any indication that they are not free to do so if they choose. Thus, by placing Socrates with this group of interlocutors, Plato creates a democratic culture in which the conversation occurs. In this group, all are treated as equals despite their varying degrees of social standing and class.

This presentation differs starkly from the oligarchic theory of the Thirty Tyrants. For the Thirty, wealth and class are critical parameters for determining one's qualifications to participate in the state. Indeed, in terms of equality, this conversation even outperforms the democratic government of Athens: because they are resident aliens, metics lack the civil rights granted to full citizens (Bloom 1968, 441n11; Ferrari 2005, 12-13). However, in the dialogue of the *Republic* there is no distinction between citizen and foreigner – all have an equal stake to participate in the conversation. This environment of equality is the polar opposite of the oligarchic theory underlying the rule of the Thirty.

The *Republic*'s opposition to the Thirty Tyrants is further confirmed by the inclusion of Polemarchus and his brother Lysias as interlocutors. As previously mentioned, these brothers play an important role in the rebellion against the thirty. Lysias and Polemarchus "owned a

shield factory, from which the Thirty confiscated 700 shields" (Krentz 1982, 81). Furthermore, "Lysias is known to have helped Thrasybulus with mercenaries, money, and at least 200 shields, probably before even the first counterattack on Phyle made by the Thirty" (Krentz 1982, 81). As a result, both brothers suffered at the hands of the Thirty, "with Polemarchus murdered for his money and Lysias escaping into exile" (Ferrari 2005, 11). Polemarchus is responsible for organizing the conversation in the first place (Plato 328b), and Socrates appears friendly with Cephalus and Polemarchus throughout Book I. The message is clear: Socrates is friends with the enemies of the Thirty, and the important role played by the family of Cephalus in facilitating the dialogue clearly places the *Republic* in opposition to the oligarchy.

Once again, however, this definite separation from the Thirty does not constitute a complete schism. The dialogue features as Socrates' two primary interlocutors Plato's brothers Glaucon and Adeimantus, who come from an aristocratic background and have numerous ties to members of the Thirty Tyrants. As Ferrari explains, Glaucon and Adeimantus "counted among their kinsmen two members of the Thirty," one of whom was the leader of the oligarchy, Critias (Ferrari 2005, 11). Furthermore, the historical record indicates that Glaucon and Adeimantus' uncle Charmides was a member of the Ten in the Piraeus (Krentz 1982, 59; Nails 2002, 244). If the inclusion of Polemarchus and Lysias creates separation from and opposition to the Thirty, then the primacy of the role of Glaucon and Adeimantus in the *Republic* reconnects the dialogue with the Thirty.

Just as the connection between the Ten in the Piraeus and Plato's Ten in the *Republic* serves to highlight a dissatisfaction with the status quo, so too does this connection between Glaucon, Adeimantus, and the Thirty Tyrants serve to highlight a reaction against the democratic government of Athens. As members of the Athenian elite and kin to the leader of the Thirty

Tyrants, Glaucon and Adeimantus likely share a preference for oligarchy and revulsion at the influence "lower orders" have in the democratic government (Ferrari 2005, 13). However, "both brothers… are too cultured, too noble to seek honour regardless of its cost, however much they may believe themselves worthy of holding public office," and thus "they react to the corruption of their society not as their kinsmen did, by staging a coup, but by holding themselves aloof and cultivating their souls" (Ferrari 2005, 13). Glaucon and Adeimantus are alienated by democratic Athens, yet rather than join their kin in launching a revolution to install an oligarchy, they turn to Socrates for an alternative. Thus, it is Glaucon who begins in Book II the quest for discovering the true meaning of justice.

Furthermore, the rest of the interlocutors beyond just Glaucon and Adeimantus are also happy to begin the search for justice. Glaucon may begin this journey, but the rest are happy to go along with it. None of the interlocutors protest when the conversation turns to a detailed examination of justice; all are interested in the question of whether the life of justice is preferable to that of injustice. Glaucon and Adeimantus may share the strongest connections of the group with the Thirty Tyrants, thusly indicating the greatest opposition to the democracy, but they are not unique in their dissatisfaction. All of the interlocutors share an interest in proving that justice is superior to injustice, and this interest is indicative of their concern for social decay and the potential spread of injustice. All want to see Socrates complete a restoration of justice.

This collective dissatisfaction with the status quo is unsurprising given that none of the interlocutors present are truly Athenian democrats. The four metics and Thrasymachus all lack the legal right to participate in Athenian politics. The family of Cephalus may fight for democracy and support the democratic cause against the Thirty Tyrants, but their status as resident aliens denies them the ability to participate in the government. Of the five Athenians,

Glaucon and Adeimantus are clearly not democrats, Charmantides is a wealthy old man with no record of political activism (Nails 2002, 89), and Cleitophon is established in the historical record as supporting the 411 revolution but favoring a more moderate oligarchy when the Thirty came to power (Nails 2002, 102-103). The group of interlocutors Plato assembles in the *Republic* therefore resides mostly on the fringes of Athenian political life; they are not champions of democracy. Furthermore, given that "it was in public life that a well-born or wealthy Athenian typically gained the respect of his peers… [and] shared in the honours of the state," the exclusion of these interlocutors from public life would give them additional cause for dissatisfaction with democracy.

However, Socrates is so far missing from this puzzle. His position in the conversation is very different from that of his interlocutors. When Glaucon raises in earnest the question of justice at the start of Book II, he raises it to Socrates in particular. In response to this request, the rest of the interlocutors enthusiastically encourage Socrates to take up the question. Socrates, however, is reserved – he claims at the end of Book I not to know what justice is (Plato 354c), and then tells the other participants in the conversation that he is "not capable" of providing the proof Glaucon desires (368b). He only takes up the argument in favor of justice after Glaucon and the others beg him to do so (368c). Thus, Socrates becomes the reluctant leader of the group as they embark upon their investigation of justice.

This position of leadership places him opposite Critias, the leader of the Thirty Tyrants. In this juxtaposition, the differences could not be clearer. Critias seeks power; Socrates seeks knowledge. Critias claims to understand justice; Socrates explicitly claims to have no such understanding. Critias is described as an "amateur among philosophers, and a philosopher among amateurs;" Socrates is simply the archetypical philosopher (Krentz 1982, 45). The

regime Critias creates is a disaster; the regime Socrates creates is presented in the *Republic* as the ideal form of government. In this comparison, Socrates is clearly the more favorable of the two.

This comparison reinforces the message that the Socratic pursuit of justice described in the *Republic* is vastly superior to the flawed methods used by the Thirty. The Thirty fail at least partly because Critias is a poor leader. He is a politician with some interest and experience in philosophy. But the question of justice is inherently and fundamentally philosophical, and answering it requires more than an amateur skill in philosophy. It requires the kind of thorough reasoning that only someone who has dedicated their life to contemplation can provide. It requires Socrates. The interlocutors may share with the supporters of oligarchy dissatisfaction with the status quo, but they do not make the mistake of turning to a Critias to solve the problem.

Furthermore, Socrates is the only member of the group who could most plausibly distinguish himself as a democrat. He enjoys the rights of full citizenship in Athens, fights in its wars, and participates in its civic institutions (Nails 2002, 264-265). Additionally, Socrates chooses to remain in Athens despite having the opportunity to reside elsewhere (Nails 2012, 5). The strength of this conviction is best displayed by the fact that Socrates submits to the death sentence laid upon him by the restored Athenian democracy rather than attempt to flee. Additionally, while not joining the rebellion against the Thirty, Socrates did engage in his own subtle opposition to their rule. The historical record suggests that Socrates engaged in civil disobedience against the Thirty Tyrants, and that even this limited opposition to the government was rare (Krentz 1982, 83; Nails 2002, 111-112). Indeed, the Thirty even "passed a law forbidding the teaching of the art of words" apparently aimed at Socrates, whose "habit of asking difficult questions and his prickly personality [may have] run him afoul of the oligarchs" (Krentz 1982, 83). Moreover, Socrates' reluctance to engage in the conversation about justice suggests

that he does not feel the question carries the same degree of exigency as his interlocutors. Such feelings could be indicative of less dissatisfaction with the status quo – perhaps Socrates does not fear the spread of injustice and corruption of society to the same extent as his companions because living in a democratic society has given him the freedom to already reach a philosophic understanding of justice. Consequently, Plato places Socrates not only as the opposite of Critias, but also as potentially the strongest supporter of democracy in the group.

Thus, Plato's choice of characters in the *Republic* follows the same overall pattern in framing the dialogue of the *Republic* as the setting. The presence of Polemarchus and Lysias distinguish the conversation from the theories of the Thirty Tyrants. Glaucon and Adeimantus provide a link back to the Thirty, establishing that Socrates' interlocutors share with the oligarchy an underlying concern for justice and a willingness to change the status quo. Finally, Socrates' position as leader of the conversation juxtaposes his group with Critias and Thirty Tyrants, starkly displaying the flaws of the later and the superiority of the discussion presented in the *Republic*. Plato therefore purposefully uses the contextual details surrounding his characters to support the alternative framework for criticizing government that he builds with the setting. Furthermore, the possibility that Socrates actually supports democracy adds additional credibility to this framework, as it suggests the possibility of criticizing the regime while still supporting it.

Implications for Democracy

At this point, Plato's purpose in selecting the particular time, place, and people that he uses in the *Republic* is fairly clear. Plato uses the context of the *Republic* to distinguish the dialogue from the Thirty Tyrants and their oligarchic theory, engage with a legitimate concern regarding the corruption of society, and establish a philosophic method for responding to this fear of injustice that contrasts with and is superior to the violence of the Thirty. However, the

implications for democracy of this interpretation remain unclear. Thus far, the evidence shows Plato aligning the *Republic* in opposition to the Thirty Tyrants and therefore in friendship with democracy. Yet on the other hand, these contextual details also indicate dissatisfaction with the status quo. Adding more confusion to this paradox is the lack of clarity regarding Socrates' position on democracy: it is possible that he supports democracy, criticizes democracy, or criticizes democracy while also supporting it. The door thusly remains open for Plato to offer almost any teaching regarding democracy. However, this analysis does eliminate one possibility: the *Republic* is not a simple rejection of democracy.

At the time the *Republic* was written, the civil war between Thrasybulus and the Thirty over the fate of future government in Athens was still a recent memory. The forces of democracy had fought for its very existence against the forces of tyranny and prevailed. Consequently, the tyrannical excesses of the Thirty's oligarchic government represent the arch-nemesis to Athenian democracy. As has been shown extensively, the contextual details of the *Republic* strongly separate the dialogue from the ideology of the Thirty Tyrants. Indeed, even though some of these details do serve to connect the conversation back to an oligarchic dissatisfaction with the status quo, the juxtapositions Plato sets up contrasting his Ten to the Ten in the Piraeus and Socrates to Critias put the *Republic* in direct opposition to the Thirty. Plato uses the setting and dramatis personae to cast the coming dialogue as altogether different than and vastly superior to the methods employed by the Thirty Tyrants, even if both share a goal of establishing justice.

Thus, Plato makes common cause with democracy against the Thirty. The placement of the dialogue in the Piraeus at the house of the Cephalus, featuring both Polemarchus and Lysias as interlocutors aligns the dialogue with the supporters of democracy. In a binary choice between democracy and oligarchy, Plato rejects oligarchy and chooses democracy.

However, alliance against a common enemy need not also indicate full support. Plato may use the context of the *Republic* to reveal a preference for democracy over the oligarchy of the Thirty Tyrants, but this does not provide sufficient evidence to conclude that Plato therefore has a general preference for democracy. The participants in the conversation of the *Republic* have serious concerns regarding political health and justice in the status quo. The bulk of the dialogue focuses upon answering these concerns, and the conclusions drawn therein may ultimately prove very critical of democracy. Nevertheless, even this limited contextual support for democracy is sufficient to describe Plato's relationship with democracy in the *Republic* as complicated. Although the *Republic* may still produce arguments critical of democracy, by positioning the conversation as democracy's ally against the Thirty Tyrants, Plato recognizes some value or usefulness in democratic government. The tyrannical oligarchy of the Thirty is simply rejected; the democracy is not.

The elimination of the possibility that Plato flatly rejects democracy leads to an important conclusion regarding Plato's treatment of the subject in the *Republic*: it is nuanced. Although Plato still has wide berth to offer a variety of teachings regarding democracy, ranging from highly critical to highly supportive, this teaching must ultimately explain the value that Plato recognizes in democracy. In other words, even if the *Republic* ultimately offers a philosophy that harshly criticizes democratic government, Plato has already conceded through his choice of contextual details that democracy has some value or usefulness. The treatment of democracy in the *Republic* therefore cannot be purely negative, and the key task in understanding Plato's teachings regarding democracy requires deciphering the value Plato assigns to it.

Chapter Two: Finding the Value of Democracy

Introduction

And so the key question: what value or usefulness does Plato assign democracy? As with deciphering anything in Plato, the answer to this riddle is not readily forthcoming and there are several possible interpretations supported by the text. The first offers the lowest level of support for democracy by finding that its usefulness lies in the rhetorical value of appearing democratic. Under this interpretation, the *Republic* is understood as a defense of Socrates and philosophy in general, and democracy is viewed as valuable based upon its ability to boost Socrates' public image. The second explanation offers a slightly higher level of support for democracy by treating democratic Athens as a political fact. Under this interpretation, the *Republic* is viewed as offering a series of solutions to help improve the quality of the government in Athens, and democracy is considered valuable simply because it is home for Plato and his contemporaries. The third explanation offers the strongest level of support for democracy by arguing that Plato builds in the *Republic* a robust philosophical argument in favor of democratic government. Under this interpretation, Plato becomes a proponent of democracy and offers multiple theoretical justifications for its value.

Explanation One: the Defense of Socrates

This first explanation views democracy as holding minimal value for Plato. It suggests that Plato does not necessarily view democracy as having any sort of philosophical value, but rather finds that appearing to support democratic government is politically expedient. If the premise is accepted that one of Plato's purposes in writing the *Republic* is to provide an extended defense of Socrates and philosophy, then it follows that Plato must portray the *Republic* as supporting democracy in order to help prove that philosophy does not constitute the subversive threat that leads Athens to sentence Socrates to death.

A common reading of the *Republic* holds that the dialogue is an expanded defense of Socrates, who acts as a proxy for philosophy. As Bloom explains, "the *Republic* is the true *Apology* of Socrates, for only in the *Republic* does he give an adequate treatment of the theme which was forced on him by Athens' accusation against him… the relationship of the philosopher to the political community" (Bloom 1968, 307). Under this interpretation, the accusations of injustice that Athens levels against Socrates "do not relate simply to the man Socrates who happens to be a philosopher but are meant to be a condemnation of the philosophic activity itself – and not on behalf simply of the city of Athens, but on behalf of the political community as such" (Bloom 1968, 307). At the time Plato was writing the *Republic*, philosophy was still young, and "the philosopher had to defend himself before the city, or the city would have been legitimated in discouraging philosophy's entrance into it as vigorously as possible" (Bloom 1968, 307). Given these stakes, "Socrates must show… that the philosopher is just and that it is he, not the poet, who is the one able to treat of political things responsibly" (Bloom 1968, 308).

Assuming that this reading is correct and that Plato does in fact intend the *Republic* to be the defense of Socrates and philosophy before a skeptical city, then creating the appearance of supporting democracy is an important aspect for the success of this project. Recalling that "oligarchy was so discredited in Athens by the rule of the Thirty that for three generations it was not a respectable alternative", one of the quickest ways for the *Republic* to have lost credibility among its target audience of Athenians was if it appeared to align with the Thirty Tyrants (Krentz 1982, 18). If philosophy or Socrates seemed to favor or support the Thirty, the battle would be lost before it had even begun. This problem was compounded by the fact that the public was already skeptical of Socrates' relationship with the Thirty: Critias had been Socrates'

student for a time and is given a speaking role in a number of other Platonic dialogues (Krentz 1982, 45; Nails 2002). Consequently, "Socrates was suspected of sympathy with and influence over the leaders of the tyranny because several had been among his companions" (Bloom 1968, 440n3). Indeed, "[he] was later charged with teaching Critias disrespect for Athenian laws and government" (Krentz 1982, 45). If Plato is to provide an effective defense of Socrates, he must begin by overcoming this public relations problem.

Under these circumstances, it is politically useful to appear supportive of democracy. Socrates is essentially accused of treason against the Athenian state with philosophy being the tool of his treason. By making the *Republic* appear aligned with the democratic government, Plato can demonstrate that this accusation is misplaced. What better way to counter charges of having influence over the members of the Thirty Tyrants than to show Socrates as an ally of the democrats? Furthermore, the use of contextual details to draw this connection would have maximum rhetorical impact on the audience. Socrates has a reputation for being a master of words, and even in the *Republic* Thrasymachus attempts to call him out for his rhetorical skills (Plato 336c; 337a; 341b). Consequently, an Athenian audience that suspects Socrates of having sympathy for the Thirty Tyrants will be less inclined to believe Socrates if he merely claims opposition to the oligarchy. In contrast, Plato makes this opposition more credible by using contextual details to show Socrates going to the Piraeus, being friendly with the family of Cephalus, and leading a superior alternative to the methods and ideology of the Thirty. Moreover, this is especially true to a casual reader of the *Republic* – the contextual details regarding democracy are literally some of the first words of the text, while the speech in which Socrates actually discusses democracy does not come until Book VIII. Someone who only reads Book I would come away believing Socrates to be aligned with democracy against the Thirty.

Additionally, if Plato only values democracy as a rhetorical tool that allows him to present a more favorable view of Socrates and philosophy to the Athenian public, then it would not be contradictory for him to later present a philosophic critique of democracy. Under this interpretation, Plato needs to convince a democratic public to accept Socrates, and this requires a certain apparent alliance with democracy. However, a philosophic teaching regarding democracy would not be aimed at the entire public, but rather only at a small group of the philosophically-inclined. Plato could offer a different message to each group: supportive of democracy to the broader public, critical of it to the philosophers.

Once again, Plato's method of using context to create the appearance of support for democracy lends credence to this possibility. None of Plato's characters in the *Republic* make a specific statement indicating their support for democracy, and Socrates appears to criticize democracy when he discusses it in Book VIII. Indeed, "Socrates makes very radical proposals of reform without encountering serious resistance" (Strauss 1964, 63). The contextual details of Book I display the *Republic* as opposed to Thirty Tyrants and hence as appearing aligned with democracy. However, assuming for the moment that Plato's philosophical teaching regarding democracy is best summarized by the account in Book VIII, then the use of context in Book I creates a smoke and mirrors effect that masks the later philosophical critique. The casual reader from the general public who does not make it past Book I sees only the apparent support for democracy, while the philosophic reader who thoroughly explores the entire text finds the full philosophic critique waiting for him in Book VIII.

However, even in this interpretation where Plato views democracy as a rhetorical tool for defending Socrates while also offering a philosophic critique of democracy, one cannot say that the philosophic critique captures Plato's entire teaching regarding democracy. In order to be

complete, Plato's teaching must reconcile the critique with the usefulness of democracy as a rhetorical tool. Consequently, if these circumstances prove to be the case in the *Republic*, then Plato's teaching regarding democracy would be both philosophical and pragmatic. It would consider democracy as philosophically flawed for the reasons laid out in the critique, while also warning future philosophers to ignore the political popularity of democracy at their peril.

It is far from proven, however, that the account in Book VIII offers the full philosophical teaching of Plato regarding democracy. As pointed out by the next two sections of this chapter, it is entirely possible that Plato does not offer a philosophic critique of democracy. Nevertheless, in such circumstances it would remain entirely plausible and likely that Plato would continue to value democracy's rhetorical usefulness. Even if he values democracy for other reasons as well, offering the appearance of supporting democracy still helps facilitate the defense of Socrates and philosophy before democratic Athens. Furthermore, Plato's broader teaching regarding the dangers to philosophy of ignoring the political popularity of democracy remain valid as well. Consequently, regardless of whether Plato goes on to offer philosophic criticism or support for democracy, at the minimum it holds rhetorical value. Whatever philosophic arguments about democracy Plato presents in the *Republic*, the importance of appealing to democracy when writing before a democratic public will be part of Plato's ultimate teaching.

Explanation Two: a Call to Reform Athens

The second interpretation of Plato's teaching regarding democracy in the *Republic* treats democratic government in Athens as a political fact that can be improved upon. Under this interpretation, advanced by Debra Nails in her essay "Plato's *Republic* in its Athenian Context," the *Republic* can be viewed as an extended manifesto calling for specific reforms to Athenian society. Democracy is thusly valuable because it is the government of Plato's chosen home.

Following this reading of the *Republic*, Plato may not find any inherent philosophical value in democratic government, but nevertheless wants to see Athens ruled well.

This interpretation begins by showing that Plato is a supporter of democracy. As Nails argues, the *Republic* "is an imaginative transformation of the Athens Socrates and Plato experienced" (Nails 2012, 5). Despite "living through some of the democracy's worst abuses" Plato resists "the wholesale rejection of rule by the people" and rather than leave Athens to reside elsewhere choose to remain and "[try] to cure its ills" (Nails 2012, 5). Nails argues that Plato's apparent criticism of democracy is actually his method as a philosopher of expressing friendship (Nails 2012, 5). Consequently, "Plato and the Socrates of his dialogues were friends of the Athenian democracy, even as they criticized the city's institutions, even when the city mistook its friend for an enemy and executed Socrates" (Nails 2012, 5).

This establishment of Plato and Socrates by extension as friends of democracy place the apparent criticism of Book VIII in a different light. The *Republic* is not a philosophic take-down of democracy; to the contrary, the juxtaposition of the ideal regime to the flaws of Athens during the Peloponnesian War is meant to spur innovation and improvement of the democratic government. Plato seeks to "heighten the contrast between Athens in war and its aftermath, on the one hand, and the kallipolis on the other, through a series of proposals that are usefully understood as counterweights to the Athenian democracy" in order to promote "a more nuanced examination of the middle ground" (Nails 2012, 5). Nails argues that "the diseased city Plato's Socrates says he is attempting to purge is very like the Athens he knew" and that consequently "his proposed improvements should be examined in that context rather than absolutely" (Nails 2012, 5).

Over the course of her essay, Nails then goes about detailing the ways in which the arguments advanced in the *Republic* correspond to various areas of reform needed in Athenian government and society. The call for the ideal city to have a force of guardians dedicated to the defense and well-being of the city indicates a call by Socrates for a professional army to replace Athens' citizen militia (Nails 2012, 10). Socrates' proposed regime of censorship seeks to reform the "Athenian educational practice of memorizing epic poetry" as a remedy "for a society in which poetry plays too great a role, usurping the dialectical questioning that would later be identified with philosophy" (Nails 2012, 11). Proposals for rule of the ideal city by the Guardians and later the philosopher-kings reflects a need in Athens for expert leadership, given that under the democracy most officers were selected by lot and served short terms (Nails 2012, 12). Socrates' "myth of the metals" seeks to substitute a merit-based system for "the class system based on wealth and birth" created by the traditional Athenian origin story (Nails 2012, 14-15). The proposals for a strict separation of labor in the ideal city are meant to provide an improvement over "the democratic practice of keeping Athens' administrative tasks so simple that any citizen selected by lot could perform them competently" (Nails 2012, 15). Socrates' suggestion that women should join in the education and training argues for some degree of universal education in Athens to correct the situation wherein "Athenian education simply excluded girls to an extent unprecedented elsewhere among ancient poleis" (Nails 2012, 17). Finally, Socrates' suggestion of eliminating the nuclear family is an effort to reform the institution of marriage in Athens and promote greater political cohesion in the city (Nails 2012, 18-21).

Furthermore, examining the contemporary political culture in Athens at the time the *Republic* was written following the Peloponnesian War offers additional evidence supporting the argument

that the *Republic* was a manifesto for reform in ancient Athens. The structure of Athens' direct democracy was such that "[it] allowed the average man to play a direct part in government when the spirit moved him" (Strauss 1987, 12). However, for those who sought power and prominence, politics was a full-time occupation which required attending meetings of the assembly, monitoring the deliberations of the council which prepared the assembly's agenda, following the activities of the courts, acquiring "expertise in Athens' economy, military, and foreign policy," and maintaining both foreign and domestic political connections (Strauss 1987, 13). For these aspiring leading politicians, the roads to power were "oratory, technical expertise, class or interest politics, military success, [and] munificence" (Strauss 1987, 14). As historian Barry Strauss summarizes Athenian political culture:

> The Athenian politician was ambitious and aggressive, intent on reaching the top of the mountain and claiming it for his own. His public reputation, his honour, was of immense concern. He was devoted to his philoi [friends] and equally hostile to his enemies. He would try equally to reward every favour and avenge every insult. Patriotism, intelligence honed by training in oratory, and unflagging energy were his virtues; a taste for vengeance, envy, and the refusal to submit to the rules of others his vices. (Strauss 1987, 35)

Unfortunately, in the era of restored democracy following the Peloponnesian War, this political culture created an environment where "complex cords of jealousy and enmity [were] tied more tightly than ever after a generation of defeat and revolution" (Strauss 1987, 36).

In many ways the ideal city presented in the *Republic* does seem to provide an answer to the flaws of this political culture. One of the key focuses of Plato's ideal city is unity: Socrates argues that there is no "greater evil for a city than what splits it and makes it many instead of one… [and no] greater good than what binds it together and makes it one" (Plato 462b). This unity is strongly related to the definitions of moderation and justice: moderation involves bringing unanimity between the various parts of the city while justice involves each part of the city performing the task for which it is best suited (Plato 432a; 433a; 443d-e). Various elements

of the design of the ideal city, such as the education of the guardians, the noble lie, the communal sense of family, and limitations on private property and wealth all serve to support this sense of unity.

This focus on unity can be viewed as a direct assault against an Athenian political culture that values ambition and personal honor above all else. Such a focus on individual achievement is harmful for the city in that it leads to personal feuds and petty retributions that do not serve the public benefit of Athens as a whole. One way to solve this problem is to create a shift in the culture such that political leaders identify their personal good with the good of the city as a whole, as is accomplished through the various laws Socrates and his companions establish regarding the living conditions and education of the guardians in the ideal city. Indeed, Plato even directly takes aim the central tenet of Athens' political culture: helping one's friends and harming one's enemies. This ethos is presented by Polemarchus in Book I as one of the first possible definitions of justice. However, Socrates quickly dispenses with this argument by showing that "it is not the work of the just man to harm either a friend or anyone else… but of his opposite, the unjust man" (Plato 335d). Since "it is never just to harm anyone," helping friends and harming enemies is not justice, and this belief's central place in Athenian political culture brings a degree of injustice to the functioning of the democracy. By turning instead to the Platonic theories of justice offered in the *Republic* which encourage unity, the vengeful aspects of Athenian politics can be eliminated and the health of the democracy increased.

Thus, under this interpretation of the *Republic*, democracy is treated as valuable because it is the political society in which Plato and his contemporaries live. This reading treats the *Republic* as a critique of democracy, but not in the philosophic sense. Rather, it treats the entire text as laying out the flaws of a singular existing democratic city during a particular period in time and

offering particular reforms as solutions to these problems. This interpretation is therefore almost completely divorced from whatever philosophical teachings Plato offers in the *Republic* given that it treats the text as a manifesto for the political reform of Athens. The argument begins with the assumptions that Plato is a supporter of the Athenian democracy and that this democracy is imperfect. Any critiques of democracy that occur in the text therefore merely reinforce the notion that Athens is imperfect and every contention made in the text provides some manner of correcting or improving one of these imperfections.

This interpretation of the *Republic* is deeply flawed. In the first place, it relies upon the difficult assumption that Plato supports democracy as the foundation for the entire argument. Since Plato always uses a dialogue format and never speaks in his own voice, deciphering his true feelings is notoriously difficult. As Strauss explains, "in none of his dialogues does Plato ever say anything… hence we cannot know from them what Plato thought" (Strauss 1964, 50). Drawing conclusions regarding Plato's thought requires careful analysis and interpretation of his texts; in order to understand Plato one must engage in the philosophic method. Plato's true feelings regarding democracy are therefore simply unknown. The fact that he remained in Athens throughout his life may indicate a degree of support for the democratic regime, but it need not; it is easy to imagine Plato having other reasons for staying. Starting an investigation into Plato's teachings regarding democracy by assuming he is a friend to democratic Athens cannot produce rigorously supported conclusions because it inherently excludes from consideration the very real possibility that Plato did not support democracy. Furthermore, once the assumption that Plato is a friend of democracy is relaxed it is no longer apparent that the *Republic* is presented as constructive criticism. It may simply be criticism.

In the second place, this interpretation of the *Republic* as a manifesto for improving and reforming the democratic government of Athens ignores the philosophical discussion occurring between Socrates and his interlocutors and the explicit statement that the discussion of cities occurs for the purpose of gaining a clearer understanding of justice in the individual (Plato 369a). If the text was meant to simply lay out a curative agenda for Athens' flaws, why go to the trouble of hiding these reform proposals behind an abstract and highly philosophical conversation about justice? Nails concedes that she "do[es] not claim to exhaust the purposes of the dialogue" by laying out her interpretation of the *Republic* (Nails 2012, 1). However, if a broad philosophic teaching occurs simultaneously with a practical political teaching, then the philosophic and political must somehow be related. The work would lose its logical coherence if these two teachings contradicted each other. Which raises the question: if Plato presents a philosophic critique of democracy in the *Republic*, then are practical political criticisms of Athens still constructive? Maybe. It is possible that despite disagreeing with democratic government on a philosophical level, Plato accepts it as a reality in Athens and wants to see it improved. Yet it is equally possible in such a scenario, however, that Plato uses practical comparisons to contemporary Athens to provide careful Athenian readers with empirical illustrations of his broader philosophical points.

Finally, it is also possible that this reading of the *Republic* provides an application of Plato's teachings more than a particular interpretation. In other words, rather than having the problems of democratic Athens specifically in mind when writing about the ideal city, Plato may have hoped to provide a universal template against which the problems of all cities could be compared. Indeed, this goal is implied by the text – Plato's Socrates claims that "if... [the ideal city] has been correctly founded [then] it is perfectly good" (Plato 427e). If the thought

experiment creating such a city is successful, then every real city or political society ought to find suggestions for improvement and reform when compared against it. Indeed, this universal quality founded in rationality continues to make the *Republic* relevant even today, thousands of years after its initial publication (Bloom 1968, 309-310). It is no surprise that various aspects of the ideal city fit so well as solutions to Athens' problems – one could likely use the *Republic* as a guide to suggesting reforms for any society, ancient or modern. However, correlation does not equal causation, and just because the *Republic* can be applied to Athens does not mean this was Plato's intent. Particularly in light of the fact that Socrates and his interlocutors build the ideal city from the ground up without reference to conditions in Athens, there are strong reasons to believe that Plato's *Republic* is much more than a guide to reforming that ancient polis.

Thus, it is possible that this second explanation correctly places the value of democracy in the *Republic* on its political reality as the regime in which Plato lived. The various structures proposed as part of the ideal regime do match well with the problems facing Plato's Athens, from the need for specialization to improving education and building a less divisive political culture. Yet this is a tenuous conclusion. The argument begins to unravel without the assumption that Plato supports democracy and it completely ignores the philosophical teachings of the *Republic*. While it is entirely possible and unsurprising that Plato did hope his arguments in the *Republic* would be applied in such a manner to improving the quality of government and society in his home city of Athens, such political hopes cannot be divorced from the philosophical teachings of the text. Indeed, the *Republic* in large part attempts to show precisely how philosophical considerations underlie the political world. Consequently, understanding the *Republic* as a guide to reforming Athens only makes sense in the context of a larger

philosophical teaching regarding government and democracy with which such a political goal would be consistent.

Explanation Three: Philosophical Support

The third explanation for the treatment of democracy in the *Republic* argues that Plato values democratic government for philosophical reasons beyond rhetorical usefulness or Athenian political reality. Such a reading of the *Republic* therefore offers the strongest level of support for democracy. The previous two explanations assigned value to democracy for reasons extrinsic to its design as a government. Under Explanation One, democracy has value for its usefulness as a persuasive tool; under Explanation Two, the value of democracy lasts only as long as it remains a political reality. By contrast, this interpretation affirms that democracy has theoretical rather than merely practical value by philosophically supporting it as a system of government. This explanation therefore argues that Plato assigns merit to democracy as a means of organizing and governing society, in addition to whatever other rhetorical and political usefulness he gives the concept. Although this interpretation initially seems counterintuitive in light of the apparent criticisms of democracy delivered in Book VIII, Mara makes the case for a democratic understanding of Plato and, although his interpretation is open to criticism, the application of his methods opens the door to a serious evaluation of the *Republic* as presenting a philosophy favorable to democracy.

Gerald Mara in *Socrates Discursive Democracy* makes the case that Plato gives philosophic support to democracy. Mara begins by arguing that "Socratic discourse seems… characterized by a particular relation between speech – logos – and action or deed – ergon" (Mara 1997, 3). As Mara explains,

> Socratic logos points by implication not only to the rational solution of the political problems faced by human beings but also to the inevitable involvement

> of those problems with our deepest human concerns, including those concerns which take us beyond the human in the ordinary sense. Yet Socrates' ergon, his behavior within practical discursive contexts, shows the need to temper the discovery of those discursive solutions with an awareness of the limitations which restrict the degree to which those solutions may be practically affected. (Mara 1997, 3).

Thus, Plato uses the juxtaposition of Socrates' speech and actions to create a tension between the ideal and the practical. Since this tension is purposeful, Plato values concern for both the ideal and the practical. Consequently, "reflections on individual and political perfection and even on the nature of being itself need not turn us away from the imperfect and concrete world of becoming" (Mara 1997, 7). Despite focusing largely on broad theoretical topics, the discussion maintains a concern for implementing these conclusions in the real world.

Furthermore, Mara argues that focusing only upon the speeches made in Platonic texts leads one to the conclusion that Plato is "an enemy of democracy" (Mara 1997, 7). However, this style of reading Plato ignores the important role of action in the dialogues: "the intertwining of speech and psyche in the dialogues suggests that any interaction, any clash or harmony, between Socrates and his interlocutors occurs not simply on the level of thought, but also on the level of action" (Mara 1997, 15). Consequently, the fact that so many of the Socratic speeches in Plato "occur within the city of Athens involves Socrates essentially with the culture of the democracy" (Mara 1997, 16). While too greatly emphasizing speeches alone suggests an opposition to democracy, placing these speeches in their "dramatic context or action of [the] dialogue" alters their philosophic importance (Mara 1997, 16). Analyzing the speeches in such a manner reveals that they "[are] democratic conversations… conducted in such a way as to be neither vitiated by exclusions nor corrupted by empowerments" (Mara 1997, 3). Moreover, as Mara describes:

> Through these conversations, Socrates articulates criticisms of and alternatives to, not only democratic politics, but also politics in general. Yet these critical and alternative views are also voiced within, and to a certain extent enabled by, a democratic culture. (Mara 1997, 3).

Thus, Socrates presents "alternatives to democratic political institutions… within a democratic political context" (Mara 1997, 3).

Understanding the philosophic merit of such a seemingly contradictory situation requires returning to the previously described tension between the ideal and practical which Mara describes Plato as creating through the use of both logic and action in his dialogues. On an ideally theoretical or utopian level, perhaps Socratic philosophy finds fault with democratic institutions. Yet this does not indicate a philosophic rejection of democracy. Rather, Plato uses "reflection on foundational questions such as 'What is human perfection?' and 'What is being'" as a means of creating insights that "serve in a way as the conditions or presuppositions for more practical deliberations" that "aspires to satisfy the human need for moral guidance" (Mara 1997, 17). Consequently, consideration of government at the level of the perfect ideal can help humans derive a better practical philosophy for government in the imperfect reality of life. Additionally, this kind of deep philosophic reflection "can only occur within the context of a broader activity which makes that reflection an issue for human beings" and "within the constructed world of the dialogues this context is philosophically discursive and practically democratic" (Mara 1997, 17). Therefore, Plato presents a democratic environment as a necessary condition for enabling deep philosophic reflection. Democracy as a system of government may have flaws, but it nevertheless provides the best practical opportunities to enable philosophy. Under this interpretation of Plato, the philosophic value of democracy lies in its ability to enable philosophy itself.

However, this interpretation also features an important failing: it sidesteps a frank evaluation of Socratic speech regarding democracy. In an effort to overcome the bias toward Socratic speech at the expense of action, Mara in turn shifts to placing too great of an emphasis on

Socratic action. His argument contends that Platonic action tempers the soaring idealism of the speeches with pragmatic reality. However, "temper" is different from "dismiss": tempering an ideal or utopian argument requires discovering how that argument develops when placed among the practical conditions of real world. The argument may require potentially drastic revision, but it is not completely dismissed. Furthermore, if one looks hard enough, glimmers of the ideal still shine through. Through the "Divided Line Analogy" at the end of Book VI and the "Cave Analogy" at the start of Book VII, Plato's Socrates endorses this view as the appropriate method of understanding the relationship between the ideal world of the forms and the visible world of objects – the visible is naught but an imperfect shadow or reflection of the ideal. If this teaching of Plato's Socrates also indicates how to interpret the relationship of the ideal and the practical in the *Republic*, then the practical teachings of the text must in some way reflect the corresponding idealistic teachings. In other words, the lessons of the speeches must shine through to the tempered world of reality.

However, in applying this method to interpret Plato's teachings regarding democracy, Mara concedes that Socratic speech criticizes democracy, yet he allows the content of these criticisms to fall by the wayside. For Mara, the key point is that these "critical and alternative views are… voiced within, and to a certain extent enabled by, a democratic culture" (Mara 1997, 3). Mara uses this democratic context to justify the importance of democracy – democracy has philosophic value because it enables philosophic discussion. Yet in drawing this conclusion, Mara fails to reconcile the support for democracy indicated through the active context in which the dialogue occurs with the apparent critiques of democracy offered by the speeches of that dialogue. He takes the actions themselves as evidence of support for democracy without discussing how the

speeches critical toward democracy are not relevant for understanding the practical philosophic value of democracy in the real world.

To further illustrate this point, it is not at all clear that the apparent critiques of democracy offered in Book VIII are meant to only have relevance in abstraction. The descriptions of democracy offered therein are part of a larger arc of regimes showing a descent from the best regime, the ideal city created by Socrates and his interlocutors, to the worst regime, tyranny. Democracy's position in this descent immediately prior to tyranny already places it far from the ideal, and indeed the description of the democratic regime in many ways also describes democratic Athens. Both Plato's democratic regime and democratic Athens feature "a certain equality to equals and unequals alike" (Plato 558c; Krentz 1982, 20) in which "the offices in it are given by lot" (Plato 557a; Nails 2012, 12) and the people, "whenever they assemble… constitute the most numerous and most sovereign class in a democracy" (Plato 565a; Strauss 1987). Furthermore, Plato uses Adeimantus to explicitly draw this connection: in response to Socrates' description of the freedom of even animals in a democracy, Adeimantus remarks "I, myself, repeatedly suffer that very thing when journeying to the country" (Plato 563d). For Adeimantus at least, his experience of Athenian democracy mirrors the description of democracy offered by Socrates. Socrates may discuss democracy in the *Republic* in broad terms, but this discussion engages with both democracy as an existing form of government and as a means of reflecting upon the ideal regime and desirability of the just life.

Consequently, one cannot simply dismiss any critique of democracy occurring in this discussion as some component of an ideal that does not translate to a discussion of the real world. In relating the philosophic discussion of democracy to the realities of Athens' democratic constitution, Plato precludes this possibility. The discussion of democracy therefore

simultaneously interacts with both the ideal and the pragmatic, and any critiques offered therein must be assumed to act at both levels. In other words, critiques of democracy offered in the *Republic* would not only indicate flaws in comparison to the ideal regime, but also problems more generally as a practical system of government. That these critiques are leveled within a democratic conversation need not inherently signal support for democratic government, but rather create a puzzle in need of a solution: how does the philosophic discussion of democracy in the *Republic* fit with the democratic nature of the conversation? Solving this puzzle requires a return to the method proposed by Mara and a thorough examination of the textual evidence offered in the *Republic*.

For the time being, therefore, this third interpretation remains incomplete. Without a much more lengthy investigation, it cannot offer a solid answer as to the philosophic value Plato assigns to democracy. Mara suggests that the value of democracy for Plato lies in its practical ability to enable philosophic pursuits. However, the analysis used to reach this conclusion is incomplete, as it fails to adequately engage the criticisms of democratic government arising in Platonic speech. This conclusion may indeed capture some or all of the philosophic value of democracy, or it may fail to do so altogether. Without evaluating the content of the dialogue alongside its active context, one cannot understand what philosophic value Plato attaches to democracy in the *Republic*.

Moving Forward

Thus, there are many roads by which Plato may attach value to democracy in the *Republic*. It is important to note that none of these three explanations are mutually exclusive. The truth of any one explanation in no way renders any of the others as necessarily untrue. Furthermore, it stands to reason that if Explanation Three is an accurate description of the value Plato assigns to

democracy, then all the explanations will be accurate: if Plato assigns philosophical value to democracy, then he likely also wants to improve the quality of the Athenian democracy and utilize the full rhetorical benefits of the concept of democracy. But this argument is getting ahead of itself. As it stands now, Explanation One seems highly likely – regardless of whatever philosophic praise or criticism Plato ultimately offers democracy, the concept as a minimum has rhetorical value in presenting a defense of Socrates and philosophy to an Athenian audience. Explanation Two seems much more dubious. There are strong reasons to question whether Plato wrote the *Republic* purely as a guide for reforming Athens. Nevertheless, the *Republic* does seem to offer solutions to many of the problems that faced Plato's Athens. There is consequently some plausibility to the notion that Plato finds value in democracy because of political reality in Athens, and therefore hopes the *Republic* will become a manual for reforming and improving the democratic government. This explanation would be much easier to accept if it could be shown that Plato also attaches philosophical value to democracy in the *Republic*. However, the jury is still out on the question of Explanation 3, and it will take the remaining two chapters of this thesis to reach an understanding of the philosophic value of democracy.

Chapter Three: Action and Speech

Introduction

Understanding what philosophic value Plato attaches to democracy requires understanding Socratic speech in the context of Socratic action in the *Republic*. A careful analysis of first action and then speech confirms the existence of a puzzle over democracy in Plato, but fails to resolve this puzzle. The action of the *Republic* sets up a system of majority rule while the speech of the *Republic* builds an ideal regime which is entirely nondemocratic. This juxtaposition is further complicated by the fact that using a majority rule system does not necessarily indicate full support for democracy and the ideal regime is practically unsustainable. However, this analysis produces a series of insights into the nature of politics and good government which may subsequently be used to fully evaluate the role of democracy in the *Republic*.

Action in the Republic: Creating a Democratic Context?

Analyzing the actions of Plato's characters provides a window into practical politics, in juxtaposition to the ideal city Socrates and his interlocutors design. Such an analysis offers insight into the fundamental nature of politics, the legitimacy of political institutions, and the advantages of using a system of majority rule. Furthermore, these factors combine such that the characters structure their conversation in a manner functionally equivalent to a democratic assembly. The active context of the *Republic* therefore offers an endorsement of a democratic style of organizing deliberative institutions. However, the extent to which such an organizational method is distinct from the deliberative institutions of other types of governments remains an open question.

The Fundamental Nature of Politics

Plato is quick to remind his audience in the *Republic* that power and force fundamentally lie at the heart of political society. In the second paragraph of the text, Polemarchus sends his slave

to order Glaucon and Socrates to wait; the first character to speak in Socrates' narration is this slave boy with the words "Polemarchus orders you to wait" (Plato 327b). Thus, Plato immediately introduces the notion of hierarchy into the text. Polemarchus owns a slave and issues an order to Socrates and Glaucon – he immediately assumes a position of power. This power is justified by the strength of his group: he is accompanied in this opening scene by Adeimantus, Niceratus, and "some others" (Plato 327c). Taking full advantage of this strength, Polemarchus issues the ultimatum to Socrates to "either prove stronger than these men or stay here" (327c). Socrates responds by suggesting that Polemarchus presents a false dilemma, and asks him "isn't there still one other possibility… our persuading you that you must let us go?" (Plato 327c). Polemarchus precludes this possibility by firing back "could you really persuade… if we don't listen?" (Plato 327c).

This exchange captures the fundamental nature of politics: at the most basic level politics involves power and the use of coercion to achieve one's goals. Polemarchus has the ability to issue orders to Glaucon and Socrates because he is leading a larger group of men and therefore has superior strength. His use of a slave as a messenger reinforces this air of gravitas. Polemarchus is aware of his strength and uses it to coerce Socrates: Socrates may come with Polemarchus either willingly or unwillingly, but either way Polemarchus will get his way. Only if Socrates and Glaucon prove physically stronger than Polemarchus and his group can they continue the day they had planned. One can therefore distill politics down to who controls superior force. He with the biggest stick may dictate to all those who are weaker, and they have little power to resist these demands. Socrates proposes persuasion as a means of both resisting superior physical force and gaining the support of that force for oneself, but Polemarchus points out the fatal flaw of this approach. Persuasion requires an audience willing to listen in order to

achieve its desired goals – even the most rhetorically convincing speech will fail if it falls on deaf ears. The pen is not mightier than the sword when no one is willing to read the words the pen writes. Therefore, at a basic, brutish level politics revolves around who has the strength to enforce their will. Politics is a relation of unequals with the most powerful being sovereign.

Glaucon immediately concedes to Polemarchus' superior strength. He makes the decision to follow Polemarchus' order to wait when it is delivered by the slave and then readily agrees with Polemarchus' suggestion that persuasion will fail without active listeners (Plato 327b-c). Socrates, however, remains silent. The threat of violence alone is insufficient to change Socrates' mind. Perhaps sensing this resistance, Adeimantus attempts to persuade Socrates of the value of remaining by tempting him with the prospect of a sunset "torch race on horseback" (Plato 328a). Polemarchus then joins this tactic, further tempting Socrates with dinner, an all-night festival, and conversation with many young men (Plato 328a). These attempts at persuasion, however, represent little more than a bribe: Polemarchus exhorts Socrates to "stay and do as I tell you" and in return Socrates will enjoy all the benefits of food, festival, and conversation (Plato 328b). In a way this tactic is an extension of Polemarchus' initial forceful coercion; one could consider it an act of "soft power" in modern parlance. However, aside from being a more diplomatic way of attempting to secure Socrates' acquiescence, it also presents an additional insight into the fundamental nature of politics. Politics involves the control of resources. Polemarchus has a good that he and Adeimantus believe Socrates will want, and they use this advantage to pressure Socrates to accept their demands.

Socrates, however, continues to remain silent, and this silence reveals that Socrates and Polemarchus are implicitly bargaining over the terms of Socrates remaining in the Piraeus. Socrates' silence in response to the initial threat of coercion indicates his unwillingness to

concede to physical threats. It may also indicate recognition by Socrates that the threat of violence by Polemarchus is not credible. After all, Polemarchus is accompanied by Glaucon's brother Adeimantus, and Book I later reveals Cephalus and Socrates to be on friendly terms; it would therefore be unsurprising if Polemarchus and his group were unwilling to actually use violence on a pair of friends to force their compliance. In other words, the costs to Polemarchus of using force and potentially destroying friendships likely outweighs the benefits of compelling Socrates and Glaucon to remain. Recognizing that Socrates has called their bluff, Adeimantus and Polemarchus attempt to sweeten the deal by offering Socrates the benefits of eating dinner, viewing the horse race, attending the festival, and engaging in conversation. Polemarchus maintains the condition, however, that he remain in the powerful position as leader of the group by including the demand that Socrates "stay and do as I tell you" (Plato 328b). Again, Socrates keeps his silence and Glaucon readily accepts the terms (Plato 328b). This back and forth reveals a third aspect of the fundamental nature of politics: it requires bargaining and negotiation. Politics inherently involves strategic interaction between multiple actors. Under these circumstances, relative superiority in control of force and resources strengthens a bargaining position but does not guarantee an outcome. Conditions often exist that render certain actions too costly, creating the necessity of compromise. Furthermore, bargaining requires communication and discourse, and is therefore fundamentally persuasive. Persuasion thusly plays an important role in politics, even if a refusal to listen may occasionally limit its effectiveness.

Majority Rule

In the *Republic*, the necessity of compromise is reflected in Socrates' counter-offer to Polemarchus. Socrates agrees with Glaucon that they should stay by commenting "if it is so

resolved… that's how we must act" (Plato 328b). Although this statement initially seems to indicate an acceptance of Polemarchus' terms, it actually represents a radical departure from the proposals made by Polemarchus. The term resolved is loaded with meaning in the Athenian democracy. As Bloom explains, "Socrates uses this word as it was used in the political assembly to announce that the sovereign authority had passed a law or decree" (Bloom 1968, 441n6). Consequently, by using this term, Socrates indicates that the will of the majority is the critical factor in his decision to stay in the Piraeus. Socrates does not decide to stay because of Polemarchus' threats and bribes; rather, he stays because he respects and is bound by the will of the majority.

After Socrates makes this statement, they go directly to the home of Polemarchus. Thus, Polemarchus tacitly accepts Socrates' counter-offer that the decision to stay was one made by the majority. This fundamentally changes the dynamic of the conversion. When Polemarchus first approaches Glaucon and Socrates, he does so from a clearly advantageous position. He is the most powerful member of the group in terms of controlling the most physical strength and other resources. Polemarchus does not put up for a vote the suggestion that Socrates and Glaucon stay in the Piraeus and attend the horse race and festival that evening. He demands that they stay. Polemarchus is presented as first among a group of men in which none can rival him. In contrast, Socrates is presented as having next to no power – not even persuasion will help him against Polemarchus. Switching to a system of majority rule negates these disparities in power. Now Polemarchus, Socrates, and every other member of the group each represent one voice and one vote. Majority rule brings all members of the group into a state of relative equality.

The majority rule system therefore provides a political environment particularly conducive for the use of persuasion. Given that majority rule gives all members of the group the

opportunity to vote, and therefore to contribute in group decision-making, individual members must convince a majority to support their ideas before the group will adopt and implement those ideas. The simplest and least costly method of convincing others to support one's cause is to persuade them. Furthermore, the need to build a majority in order to make decisions creates a ready audience for those introducing proposals for the group to act on. Although coercive methods of gaining support may still receive use in majority rule systems, they cannot eliminate the need for persuasion. Given the relative state of equality among group members in majority rule systems, buying votes through either intimidation or bribes still requires bargaining, which in turn requires persuasion (albeit typically on a smaller scale than what would be necessary to convince the group as a whole to support a particular action).

As a consequence of this embrace of persuasion, a majority rule system is also conducive to philosophy. As Socrates demonstrates throughout the text of the *Republic*, the philosophic method involves constant questioning to arrive at conclusions. Further, Socrates describes his dialectical approach to knowledge as using hypotheses as "steppingstones and springboards" to reach an understanding of the truth (Plato 511b). Although logic and reason guide such philosophic investigations, persuasion also plays a necessary role – the art of philosophy involves staking out a claim, defending it in the face of rigorous questioning, and then using this experience to gain a deeper understanding of the truth. Having an environment amenable to persuasion is therefore a necessary, if insufficient, condition for engaging in philosophic activities. This insight helps to explain both a potential motive for Socrates to guide the conversation to a majority rule system and for why the system stays in place for the remainder of the dialogue (as evidenced at Plato 368c and 450a).

Rule of Legitimacy

Furthermore, switching to a system of majority rule provides a window through which to understand what makes group decisions legitimate. Prior to the establishment of the system of majority rule Polemarchus assumes the role of leadership for the group, claiming this position on the basis of his superior strength. However, he has this greater physical strength precisely because he has the support of a large group of comrades. He assumes this support is ironclad, as demonstrated by his insistence to Socrates that "we won't listen [to your attempts at persuasion]" (Plato 327c). Yet in using the language of a democratic assembly and shifting the group's decision-making mechanism to that of majority rule, Socrates recognizes a deeper truth. Polemarchus' strength relies upon the willingness of his friends to support him. Each character faces an independent choice regarding how much they are willing to support Polemarchus. Polemarchus is therefore just as dependent upon the will of the majority as Socrates; perhaps he realizes this and seeks to stop Socrates from making an attempt at persuasion out of fear of losing his majority.

Consequently, if Polemarchus' strength depends upon the support of others, then there is no clear reason why he ought to be entitled to leadership. He assumes a leadership role only because the other members of his group allow him to do so. Socrates' shift of the group to a majority rule system therefore makes explicit what had been true all along: authority in the group ultimately lies with the members of the group collectively. Thus, Plato presents a rule of legitimacy. Although a long way from the notion of "government by consent" developed two millennia later during the Enlightenment, this rule nevertheless suggests that the effectiveness of group decisions requires the group actually going along with the decision. Extrapolated to a larger political community, this rule indicates that the effectiveness of political decisions

depends upon the broader political community accepting those decisions. Under this basic rule of legitimacy, popular support may be acquired through any means - force and intimidation, bribery and munificence, or persuasion – what matters is that the support is obtained. When legitimate institutions act, the people follow the decision. By contrast, the actions of illegitimate institutions are ignored or fought over by the populace. Legitimacy is therefore associated with a degree of unity in the political community, while illegitimacy is associated with discord.

Furthermore, this definition of legitimacy would consider a system of majority rule as particularly legitimate. Under majority rule, the level of electoral support for a given proposition indicates the level of support for that proposition in the group. Those actions that most people want are taken, while those that most people oppose are not. Additionally, decisions of the majority are binding upon the entire community. Socrates admits as much when he states "if it is so resolved… that's how we must act" (Plato 328b). A minority may oppose a political decision, but having voted on the proposal and thusly seeing that they are in the minority, they are bound to respect the decision of the majority (with the understanding that their decisions will be respected when they find themselves in the majority). A majority rule system therefore enables disagreement without discord or a loss of unity. Since disagreement on some issue is inevitable in any group, a system of decision-making that manages disagreement while maintaining unity allows that group to sustain the legitimacy of the decisions it makes even on divisive issues. Majority rule therefore provides a system particularly well-suited for establishing and maintaining the legitimacy of decision-making.

Lessons for Politics

A close examination of the active context of the *Republic* therefore offers numerous insights into the nature of practical politics, summarized as follows:

Observations on the Fundamental Nature of Politics
Observation 1: Politics involves power and the control of force
Observation 2: Politics involves the control of resources
Observation 3: Politics involves bargaining

Rule of Legitimacy
The legitimacy of political institutions and decisions depends upon the degree to which those institutions and decisions maintain political unity.

Characteristics of Majority Rule Systems
Characteristic 1: Majority rule systems create a degree of relative political equality
Characteristic 2: Majority rule systems are conducive to the use of persuasion
Characteristic 3: Majority rule systems produce outcomes binding on all members
Characteristic 4: Majority rule systems are highly legitimate per the Rule of Legitimacy

Based upon these insights, it is far from obvious that the active context of the *Republic* is in fact democratic. Clearly, a majority rule system would seem necessary to consider a government democratic. It may potentially be a sufficient condition if the relevant decision-making group involves all members of a society. Thus, given that all the characters in the *Republic* appear able to participate in the majority rule system governing major shifts in the conversation, there is a strong case to be made that the structure in which the dialogue occurs is functionally democratic.

However, the presence of a majority rule system is not automatically a sufficient condition for democracy. For instance, a group of oligarchs may use majority rule as a means of governing their decision-making processes. The characteristics of majority rule make it a broadly useful tool in organizing group decisions in a manner likely to maintain the political unity of the group (and hence its legitimacy). The determining factor between democratic and non-democratic regimes that both use majority rule systems would therefore be the number of eligible voters. Who can vote, and therefore how many can vote, are the distinguishing questions. On these questions, Plato provides an unclear answer: the ten characters featured strongly throughout the dialogue could either represent democratic society or the "Ten in the Piraeus." Taken as a whole, therefore, the active context of the *Republic* displays the importance of a majority rule

system of governing without decisively indicating a preference for either democracy or non-democracy.

Speech in the Republic: A Non-Democratic Ideal

In contrast, the ideal government developed through the speeches of Socrates and his interlocutors very clearly presents a non-democratic understanding of government. By tracing its development from the "City of Pigs" onward, the distance of the ideal from democratic government becomes obvious. In structure and policy, the ideal regime presents an alternative far removed from democratic governance. However, application of the insights into politics revealed in the dialogue's active context raises serious concerns regarding the practical sustainability of the ideal regime. Viewing the ideal city again in terms of these concerns allows for the definition of four principles of good government. Socratic speech in Plato therefore presents an ideal that is entirely non-democratic and practically unsustainable, but useful for understanding the characteristics of good government.

The City of Pigs

Socrates and his interlocutors set about the task of constructing the ideal city in order to discover the nature of justice and injustice (Plato 368e). The construction of the ideal society begins in Book II with the "City of Pigs." This city proceeds from the provision of bare necessities (Plato 369c). It is a small city in which each resident specializes in the task to which he is best suited; consequently, "each thing becomes more plentiful, finer, and easier, when one man, exempt from other tasks, does one thing according to nature and at the crucial moment" (Plato 370c). Upon this foundation, all the people who have skills necessary for the survival of the community are brought into the community: farmers, housebuilders, weavers, shoemakers, craftsmen, herdsmen, merchants, sailors, tradesmen, and wage laborers (Plato 369d-371e). The

city will feature a market and a currency so that each of these specialized laborers may exchange the goods they produce with each other (Plato 371b). For entertainment and pleasure, the citizens of this city will dine on simple fare, after which “they will drink wine and, crowned with wreathes, sing of the gods” (Plato 372b). Additionally, the residents “will have sweet intercourse with one another… not produce children beyond their means… [and keep] an eye out against poverty or war” (Plato 372b). This city is therefore devoid of luxury and to Socrates it represents the true, healthy city (Plato 372e).

This “healthy city” lacks several features typically associated with political society: government, soldiers, and provisions for education. The city seems to work on the basis of a certain kind of cooperative understanding, such that each citizen does the job to which he is best suited and then trades in the market the product of his labor so that the needs of all residents are met. Politics in this community therefore appears essentially non-existent. It has no mechanism for employing force or for acquiring resources and wealth beyond that which is necessary for life. There is additionally no evidence that any government, democratic or not, makes decisions for the community. This healthy city seems content to remain essentially unchanged as generation upon generation of people live out simple lives that lacking in luxury but meeting all necessities (Plato 372d).

In this simple community absent luxury or greed, the role of the active context of the dialogue in tempering the ideal immediately shines through. This healthy city does not feature any of the observations fundamental to politics suggested by the action at the start of Book I. Beyond lacking a political system broadly, the healthy city also features no violence or force, a constant equilibrium or equitably distributed resources, and no political bargaining (only economic bargaining). The healthy city therefore seems entirely apolitical, which appears highly

unrealistic. In Socrates' opinion the "true" city may be this healthy city (Plato 272e), but the everyday experience of life indicates that politics is ever-present. Although a nice ideal, the usefulness of this healthy city for real life is limited because real life is inescapably political. Adeimantus and Socrates' inability to locate justice and injustice in this city reinforces this point (Plato 371e-372a).

The Luxurious City

The task of constructing an ideal city relatable to modern society begins in earnest when Glaucon objects to the healthy city lacking all luxuries; Glaucon wants to see the construction of a luxurious city (Plato 372c-d). Socrates agrees to this endeavor, admitting that "in considering such a city too, we could probably see in what way justice and injustice naturally grow in cities" (Plato 372e). The reintroduction of luxury to the city consequently also reintroduces greed, and whereas previously the healthy city survived only upon that which it needed, the "feverish" city must grow to accommodate all the new artisans, entertainers, servants, and luxury goods that the residents now demand (Plato 373a-c). This growth makes war a necessity, as the city must "cut off a piece of our neighbors' land, if [it is] going to have sufficient [land] for pasture and tillage" (Plato 373d). Furthermore, now that the city has accumulated wealth, other cities may want to steal this wealth; as a result, "the city must be still bigger… by a whole army, which will go out and do battle with invaders for all the wealth and all things [now located in the city]" (Plato 374a).

However, even in this luxurious city the one man, one job principle of specialization established in the healthy city continues. Therefore, the addition of this army to the city's population must consist of men which are by nature "fit for guarding the city" (Plato 374e). For Socrates, this means that "the man who's going to be a fine and good guardian of the city… will

in his nature be philosophic, spirited, swift, and strong" (Plato 376c). These guardians are subject to a rigorous regime of education meant to develop this nature and produce good people excelling in courage and moderation; this education is extensively described in Books II and III and features heavy censorship of religion, poetry, and music. The best of guardians who are "the most skillful at guarding the city" will be selected as its rulers; a constant process of examination beginning in childhood distinguishes these rulers from the rest of the guardians (Plato 413c-414a). These rulers are "entirely eager to do what they believe to be advantageous to the city and would in no way be willing to do what is not" (Plato 412d-e). Consequently, Socrates henceforth refers to the rulers alone as the guardians, while the rest of the warrior class that fails to rise to that level of leadership is referred to auxiliaries.

Socrates proposes a "Noble Lie" to convince the city to accept without question the leadership of the guardians and auxiliaries. This lie will seek "to persuade first the rulers and the soldiers, then the rest of the city" that the earth is their mother and that "now, as though the land they are in were a mother and nurse, they must plan for and defend it, if anyone attacks, and they must think of the other citizens as brothers and born of the earth" (Plato 414e). Under this Noble Lie, "the god, in fashioning those… who are competent to rule, mixed gold in at their birth; this is why they are most honored; in auxiliaries, silver; and iron and bronze in the farmers and the other craftsmen" (Plato 415a). The lie would additionally inform the populace that the citizens of any of the metals may be born from any parentage, and that these children will be educated according to their own merit rather than the merit of the parents (Plato 415a-c). However, the lie will also include "an oracle that the city will be destroyed when an iron or bronze man is its guardian" (Plato 415c). This lie seeks to unite the city behind the leadership of

the guardians and their auxiliary supporters, and make every man content with his role in society. In essence, it establishes the ideal regime as a perfect meritocracy.

Even in this perfect aristocracy, however, Socrates and his interlocutors remain highly concerned with the problem of corruption. Glaucon and Socrates fear that since the auxiliaries are stronger than the citizens, they may "become like savage masters instead of well-meaning allies" (Plato 416b). To guard against this possibility, Socrates emphases the importance of the guardians receiving an appropriate education, as laid out at length in Books II and III. Beyond the correct education, Socrates proposes additional precautions to defend against the temptations of greed:

> First, no one will possess any private property except for what's entirely necessary. Second, no one will have any house or storeroom into which everyone who wishes cannot come. The sustenance, as much as is needed by moderate and courageous men who are champions of war, they'll receive in fixed installments from the other citizens as a wage for their guarding, in such quantity that there will be no surplus for them in a year and no lack either. They'll go regularly to mess together like soldiers in a camp and live a life in common. (Plato 416d-e).

Furthermore, Socrates also suggests using the noble lie to make strong exhortations against the accumulation of wealth to the guardians and auxiliaries:

> We'll tell them that gold and silver of a divine sort from the gods they have in their soul always and have no further need of the human sort; nor is it holy to pollute the possession of the former sort by mixing it with the possession of the mortal sort, because many unholy things have been done for the sake of the currency of the many, while theirs is untainted. (Plato 416e-417a).

These exhortations support a legal prohibition on guardians or auxiliaries being in close proximity to gold or silver, under which "it is not lawful [for them] to handle and to touch gold and silver, nor to go under the same roof with it, nor to hang it from their persons, nor to drink from silver or gold" (Plato 417a). With these rules, Socrates creates among the leaders of the city something akin to the original "healthy city" in which the guardians and auxiliaries only have access to the necessities and are insulated from both want and greed. In such a manner

Socrates hopes to maintain a situation in which the guardians and auxiliaries believe "that the same things are advantageous to [the city] and to [themselves]" (Plato 412d). By removing greed and luxury from the lives of the guardians, the guardians enable the city as a whole to maintain it luxurious lifestyle.

In response to these precautions, Adeimantus raises the concerns that the guardians will be unhappy as a result of enjoying nothing good from the luxuries of the city. To these concerns, Socrates replies that "in founding the city [they] are not looking to the exceptional happiness of any one group… but, as far as possible, that of the city as a whole" (Plato 420b). Consequently, when city features citizens striving to be "the best possible craftsmen at their jobs" and is "fairly founded," then Socrates and his interlocutors "must let nature assign to each of the groups its share of happiness" (Plato 421c).

This concern with the happiness of the city as a whole in turn generates a concern for influences which may corrupt the city as a whole. Socrates first identifies wealth and poverty as two leading influences which may corrupt the city. Wealth makes artisans less willing to attend to their arts and "become idler and more careless" (Plato 421d). Similarly, poverty prevents artisans from being able to "provide [themselves] with tolls or anything else for [their] art" and thusly leads to "shoddier works" and a general inability of the artisan to pass his craft along to pupils (Plato 421d). Consequently, Socrates tasks the guardians with preventing as much as possible the entry of wealth or poverty into the city, "since the one produces luxury, idleness, and innovation, while the other produces illiberality and wrongdoing as well as innovation" (Plato 422a).

Socrates then identifies size as a second leading source of corruption for the city. According to Socrates, most real city should really be thought of as being multiple cities: in most cities,

"there are two [cities]… warring with each other, one of the poor, the other of the rich… and within each of these there are very many" (Plato 422e-423a). In other words, most cities fail to have any semblance of unity, but rather represent many factions constantly fighting for control. Socrates relates this phenomenon to a function of size – at some point a city is simply unwilling to operate as one. Consequently, the guardians must "guard in every way against the city's being little or seemingly big" and should rather ensure that it is "sufficient and one" (Plato 423c).

Thus, by the middle of Book IV of the *Republic*, Plato's Socrates has described the basic outline of the ideal regime. With the goal of discovering the best city which can provide both necessity and luxury, the ideal city described in the speeches of Socrates' and his interlocutors uses as its starting principle the idea of "one man, one job" in which every person does the task to which they are best suited by nature. The advent of wealth in the city makes the maintenance of an army necessary to claim sufficient land for the city and defend it from invaders. Application of the one man, one job principle to this army gives rise to the guardians, whose specialization is protecting the city and who are subject to a rigorous system of education to ensure they are prepared to best defend the city. The rulers of the city are drawn from this warrior class, thus dividing it into the guardians (which now refers exclusively to the rulers) and the auxiliaries. This system is justified to the population using the Noble Lie, which solidifies the division of society into guardians, auxiliaries, and everyone else into the three classes of gold, silver, and iron. The Noble Lie also establishes the society as a natural meritocracy in which only those best suited by nature to become guardians actually become guardians. In order to protect the guardians and auxiliaries from corruption, they are kept entirely insulated from the luxuries of the city. In turn, they are tasked with protecting the city as whole from influences which could corrupt it – wealth, poverty, and disunity.

From this city, Socrates and his interlocutors abstract the definitions of the four virtues: wisdom, courage, moderation, and justice. Wisdom consists of "a kind of knowledge belonging to some of the citizens that counsels not about the affairs connected with some particular thing in the city, but about how the city as a whole would best deal with itself and the other cities" (Plato 428d). This kind of knowledge is associated with the guardians, and it is therefore the case that "from the smallest group and part of itself and the knowledge in it, from the supervising and ruling part, that city founded according to nature would be wise as a whole" (Plato 428e). Just as Socrates finds the wisdom of the city as a whole in the guardian class, he finds the courage of the city in the auxiliary class (Plato 429b). This courage does not consist of fearlessness in the face of battle, however. Rather, it is a "political courage" which involves "the preserving of the opinion produced by law through education about what – and what sort of thing – is terrible," where preservation is defined as "not casting [that opinion] out in pains and pleasures and desires and fears" (Plato 429c). Wisdom is found in the knowledge of the guardians while courage is found in the steadfast dedication of the auxiliaries to that which the city defines as good.

In contrast to wisdom and courage, which Socrates locates in various parts of the city, moderation and justice are found in the city as a whole. Moderation consists as a harmony between the various parts of the city: it "stretches throughout the whole, from top to bottom of the entire scale, making the weaker, the stronger and those in the middle – whether you wish to view them as such in terms of prudence, or, if you wish, in terms of strength, or multitude, money or anything else whatsoever of the sort – sing the chant together" (Plato 432a). Thus, "unanimity is moderation, an accord of worse and better, according to nature, as to which must rule in the city and in each one" (Plato 432a). Lastly, justice in the city stems from the foundational principle upon which the city was founded, the idea that "each one must practice

one of the functions in the city, that one for which his nature made him naturally most fit" (Plato 433a). Based upon this principle, Socrates argues that justice in the city involves "the minding of one's own business and not being a busybody" (Plato 433a).

Implications for Democracy

With the ideal city of the *Republic* thusly described, the non-democratic nature of the city becomes abundantly clear. Nothing about this society could be termed democratic. It is rigidly class-based with political advancement based entirely upon natural ability. Only the elite best of the best have the opportunity to become guardians and rule the city. The rest of the citizenry have no input into these governmental or political decisions. On a broader level, individual freedom is greatly restricted. Of the three classes, the iron class of farmers, craftsmen, wage earners, and other "money-makers" has the most liberty, but this freedom is entirely economic in nature. Although not allowed to participate in politics, members of this class are allowed to accumulate wealth and enjoy the luxuries wealth can buy. However, even this freedom is restricted, as the guardians are instructed to limit extremes of wealth and poverty. The gold class of guardians enjoys the next largest degree of freedom, but this freedom is entirely political. The guardians make decisions and judgements to facilitate running the city, but live in a communal setting of bare necessity and cannot possess (or even be near) money. The silver class of auxiliaries enjoys the least amount of freedom, as they can exercise neither political nor economic liberty. Like the guardians, they live in communal settings and cannot possess money; like the money-makers they do not participate in making political decisions for the city. Indeed, the notion of political courage expects the auxiliaries to stand steadfastly behind the laws and civic determinations of good and bad in the face of all challenges.

This lack of freedom is immaterial to the ideal regime – the regime exists for the benefit of the city as a whole, not any particular individual or group. Moreover, the restrictions on freedom are in fact purposeful. The principle of one man, one job limits every person to the job for which they are by nature best suited. The money-makers and the auxiliaries are not allowed to participate in ruling because their natures are not suited for rule. Only by placing political leadership in the hands of those best suited for such leadership can one maximize the quality of rulers. This phrase holds true for every possible area of specialization. Restrictions on freedom, therefore serve the purpose of maximizing the quality of government.

Restrictions on freedom also serve the purpose of preventing corruption of the leaders, the government, and the city in general. The guardians and auxiliaries are kept in a communal environment separate from the wealth and luxuries of the city in order to prevent them from developing a sense of greed and turning against the city. Restricting the freedom of the rulers and the soldiers is therefore necessary to ensure that they do not turn their strength against the city and become exploitive rather than protective. Similarly, the lower classes are barred from ruling because they are by nature unfit to rule; they would therefore be unable to identify their own good with that of the city and would attempt to use the apparatus of government for their personal gain. Preventing such actions dangerous to the city requires limiting the freedom of the people. Similarly, Socrates points out that wealth and poverty both have corrupting influences on the city as whole. The guardians are therefore tasked with limiting both, which practically imposes limits on the degree to which the money-making class may save or spend. Again, these limitations of freedom keep the city free from corrupting influences in the larger sense.

To further emphasize the importance of limiting freedom to simultaneously limit corruption, the education of the guardians and auxiliaries is filled with very strict censorship. The young

future leaders and soldiers are taught only in manners deemed good and truthful, and any teachings not supportive of courage or moderation are kept away from the students. In limiting access to knowledge and freedom of speech, Socrates seeks to educate the guardians and auxiliaries such that they become perfectly good.

The ideal regime is therefore entirely non-democratic. Rather than valuing freedom or mass participation in government, the ideal regime treats placing limits on freedom as a tool with which corruption in the city may be limited and the quality of governance increased. Socrates asserts that "our city – if, that is, it has been correctly founded – is perfectly good" (Plato 427e). Placing limits on the freedom of various groups inside the city is a critical aspect of the process of founding the city, and therefore is a contributing factor in making the city good. The ideal city's non-democratic character is thusly an important factor in elevating that city to the level of the ideal. As Plato presents it in the *Republic*, the best regime is not a democracy.

Lessons for Practical Politics

Comparing this ideal regime to the active context of the *Republic* offers additional lessons for understanding practical politics. One can easily trace how the insights into politics derived in the active context find expression in the ideal, and also how these insights temper this ideal with a dose of pragmatism in a manner that questions the regime's practical sustainability. However, this dose of pragmatism also throws new light upon the definitions of virtue in the city and enables the derivation of four principles of good government from these definitions.

Unlike the "healthy city," the luxurious city recognizes the reality that politics involves the control of force, control of resources, and bargaining. Indeed, these fundamental facts of politics create the necessity of introducing the guardians to the city. The guardians and their auxiliary supporters have a monopoly on the use of force, are responsible for ensuring the city has

sufficient resources to be neither impoverished nor wealthy, and bargain with other cities to form alliances during times of war (Plato 422d). Additionally, the Rule of Legitimacy with its focus on unity is essentially a watered-down version of the definition of moderation Socrates provides in Book IV. In the regime itself, the Rule of Legitimacy finds expression in the Noble Lie. Rather than implement a majority rule system to create unanimity throughout the city, the ideal city uses the Noble Lie to bind all of its citizens together, solidify their place in the class structure of the city, and bring all citizens into agreement that the guardians are the right and proper rulers of the city.

If the political observations derived from the active context of the *Republic* thus find expression in Socrates' ideal regime, they also temper this ideal in ways that raise questions regarding the practicality of the regime. Socrates is hugely concerned with influences that may corrupt the city – these influences are all ultimately related to the three observations regarding the fundamental nature of politics discovered by studying the active context. Socrates fears that controlling force and resources will lead the guardians to act selfishly in manner that harms the city. Similarly, he seeks to avoid the city growing so large as to cease being one community, and therefore create a situation where the different factions in the city bargain and fight with each other over various political goods. In order to prevent these corruptions, Socrates seeks to provide the guardians and auxiliaries with an education that inspires to live a good life in accordance with the laws of the regimes, insulates them from wealth and luxury by implementing a simple communal lifestyle among them, and instructs the guardians to rule the city in a manner that keeps it one community. However, if the control of force, the control of resources, and the necessity of bargaining are truly fundamental to politics, as the active context suggests, then this raises questions as to whether any of these precautions will truly be effective.

If they are fundamental, and therefore always work their way into politics, then the guardians and auxiliaries cannot be insulated from them forever. The active context of the *Republic* therefore belies the practical unsustainability of the ideal regime.

This tenuous sustainability is further displayed when one examines the regime's use of the Noble Lie to meet the Rule of Legitimacy. If the population buys into and supports the Noble Lie, then it works fantastically well in creating a society unified in support of its regime. The Lie creates a society in which the people consider the land upon which the city is built as their mother, everyone else living in the city as their brother, and their class within the city as their natural place in society as selected by "the god" (Plato 415a). Thus, if everyone believes the Noble Lie, then the city will be unified behind the rule of the guardians. However, if the people begin to question the Noble Lie and a sufficient number stop believing in it, then the guardians lose their mandate to rule. The city becomes fractious and divided, and the legitimacy of the city gets called seriously into question. The legitimacy of the ideal regime therefore depends upon the persuasiveness of the Noble Lie. Failures of persuasion in these regards point to a collapse of support for the regime, and although Socrates takes efforts to limit innovation and styles of education that may call the Noble Lie into question, on a city-wide scale such failures are practically inevitable. This fatal flaw in the Noble Lie on a pragmatic level points again to the city's unsustainability.

However, in the ideal sense the precautions Socrates puts in place work as they are supposed to and corrupting influences never find a way into the city. In the ideal, "the regime, once well started, will roll on like a circle in its growth," creating a self-reinforcing cycle of goodness (Plato 424a). Thus, in the ideal the practical failures and frictions of the real world fall by the wayside and Socrates' "perfectly good" regime becomes perfectly sustainable (Plato 427e). This

sustainability of perfect goodness enables Socrates and his interlocutors to locate the four virtues in the city and provide definitions for each of them. Once defined, however, these definitions are not intrinsically tied to the existence of the ideal regime; whether or not the regime is actually sustainable, the definitions of the virtues describe how the city that is "perfectly good" would look. To an imperfect regime, therefore, the definitions of the virtues offered in the *Republic* provide targets at which to aim for the improvement of the state.

The definitions of the four virtues in the city as provided by Book IV of the *Republic* can therefore be restated as four principles of good government:

Four Principles of Good Government

Principle 1 (Wisdom):

Political leaders should have knowledge "about how the city as a whole would best deal with itself and the other cities" (Plato 428d)

Principle 2 (Political Courage):

Those empowered to use force on behalf of the political community should maintain a steadfast preservation under all circumstances "of the right and lawful opinion about what is terrible" (Plato 430b)

Principle 3 (Moderation):

The city should be unified as a single community, and should therefore meet the highest standards of legitimacy

Principle 4 (Justice):

The city should enable and encourage citizens to specialize according to their natures; justice consists in thus "minding one's own business and not being a busybody" (Plato 433a)

Three Waves

Socrates, however, has more content to add to the description of the ideal regime. Although he originally intends to leave out this part of the argument, at the urging of Adeimantus, Polemarchus, Glaucon, and Thrasymachus he is forced to return to areas of the argument he previously skipped over (Plato 449a-451b). In "three waves" of argumentation, Socrates discusses three key aspects of the ideal city: the equality of women, the community of women and children, and the philosopher-kings. The first two of these waves provide additional means of protecting the city from corruption, while the final wave seeks to allow for the possibility of

its coming into being. Furthermore, all three waves provide additional clarity to the previously described principles of good government.

The first wave calls for a degree of equality between the male and female guardians. To a modern audience, this statement seems obvious – naturally women and men are equal. In the fourth century B.C., however, this was a radical claim. Socrates has to prove that women are capable of joining men in performing the duties of guardians:

> There is no practice of a city's governors which belongs to woman because she's woman, or to man because he's man; but the natures are scattered alike among both animals; and woman participates according to nature in all practices, and man in all (Plato 455d).

However, Socrates does not advocate a perfect equality between men and women. Although "many women are better than many men in many things," it is nevertheless true that women are "quite dominated in virtually everything" by men (Plato 455d). Socrates argues that women are generally weaker than men, but nevertheless capable of performing all the same tasks as men. Therefore, female guardians receive the same education as the male guardians and participate in performing all the same roles and responsibilities.

Socrates uses this second wave to logically set up his description of the community of women and children. For the guardians in the ideal regime, "all these women are to belong to all these men in common, and no woman is to live privately with any man… and the children, in their turn, will be in common, and neither will a parent know his own offspring, nor a child his parent" (Plato 457d). Furthermore, procreation will be strictly controlled by the rulers so that the children of such couplings either maintain or improve the quality of the guardian and auxiliary classes and so that the city becomes neither too big nor too small (Plato 459a-460a). Essentially, Socrates proposes breeding the guardians like one would breed dogs or horses:

> There is a need for the best men to have intercourse as often as possible with the best women, and the reverse for the most ordinary men with the most ordinary women; and the offspring of the former must be reared but not of the others, if the flock is going to be of the most eminent quality. And all this must come to pass without being noticed by anyone except the rulers themselves if the guardians' herd is to be as free as possible from faction. (Plato 459d-e).

The implementation of these breeding program involves elaborate rituals and a rigged lottery to ensure that "the privilege of more abundant intercourse with the women must be given to those of the young who are good in war or elsewhere, so that under this pretext the most children will also be sown by such men" (Plato 459a-460b). Through the implementation of such a program of procreation, the best members of society will produce excellent offspring capable of one day replacing their parents as people in the city with the best natures.

Socrates additionally advocates raising these children in common and eliminating the private family. All the children born around the same time will call each other brothers and sisters, while all the adults who procreated between seven and ten months prior to the birth of these children will call them all sons and daughters (Plato 461d-e). Not only will this system prevent incest, but it will also tie the guardian class as a whole into one large family. This common family is a natural extension of the communal sharing of property among the guardians described earlier. Under this system of absolute communism in property, mating partners, and children, "all [give] the name 'my own' to the same thing" rather than "different men giving it to different things – one man dragging off to his own house whatever he can get his hands on apart from the others, another being separate in his own house with separate women and children, introducing private pleasures and griefs" (Plato 464c-d). By creating one family among the guardians, the community of women and children supports communal property in creating unity among the guardians.

This unity is hugely important to the city. As Socrates points out, there is "[no] greater evil for a city than what splits it and makes it many instead of one" and "[no] greater good than what binds it together and makes it one" (Plato 462b). Consequently, "the best governed [city is that] which is most like a single human being" (Plato 462c). The best city operates as a single cohesive unit, such that "when one of its citizens suffers anything at all, either good or bad, such a city will most of all say that the affected part is its own, and all will share in the joy or the pain" (Plato 462e). The community of women and children, by binding the guardians together into one large extended family and in conjunction with the moratorium on private property, creates this cohesive unity in the ideal city. As Socrates explains, "[the guardians] will then be free from faction, to the extent at any rate that human beings divide into factions over the possession of money, children, and relatives" (Plato 464d-e). Furthermore, Socrates asserts that "since [the guardians] are free from faction among themselves, there won't ever be any danger that the rest of the city will split into factions against these guardians or one another" (Plato 465b).

In protecting the city from faction, the community of women and children acts as a natural extension of and supplement to the Noble Lie. When Socrates introduces the Noble Lie in Book III, he admits that the Noble Lie may not persuade the city's rulers (Plato 414c). However, this creates a problem – the legitimacy of the regime rests upon the populace accepting and believing the Noble Lie. If the rulers do not support the Noble Lie, then this provides an opening for them to begin associating their personal good with something other than the good of the city, which in turn is the first step toward faction and the collapse of the regime. The community of women and children plugs this whole by tying the guardian class together into one large family,

achieving in actuality for the guardians the brotherhood that the Noble Lie merely claims as true for the rest of the city.

The community of women and children also provides further evidence of the non-democratic nature of the regime. One has difficulty imagining a family life less free than the one Socrates thus describes in Book V of the *Republic*. The guardians and auxiliaries are literally treated like animals to be bred and face severe consequences for breaking these laws regarding reproduction (Plato 461a). Moreover, mating partners are selected by the city's rulers to ensure the best children are produced. This society clearly does not offer the freedoms of a democracy. Once again, however, Socrates and his interlocutors do not view these restrictions on freedom as harmful. To the contrary, by promoting such a high degree of unity among the guardians and auxiliaries, "the community of children and women… has therefore turned out to be the cause of the greatest good to our city" (Plato 464b). This "second wave" seeks to further insulate the guardians and auxiliaries from corruptive influences and increase the legitimacy of the regime by turning these classes into one large, united, extended family.

However, when viewed in light of the active context of the *Republic*, it becomes apparent that the ideal regime still suffers from the same flaws of practical unsustainability as it did before Socrates introduced the community of women and children. Socrates and Glaucon admit that "erotic necessities" are a fundamental aspect of human life (Plato 458d). Indeed, the need to reproduce is a core instinct of all living things. Just as control of force, control of resources, and the necessity of bargaining will inevitably work their way back into politics, so too will sexuality eventually overcome the laws Socrates imposes to control it among the guardians and auxiliaries. An illicit affair, a child reared in secret without the permission of the state, or the discovery of the biological identities of parent and child could all reintroduce private family and destroy the

unity the community of women and children works so hard to create. Since none of these occurrences are particularly unlikely, the community of women and children will eventually unravel and the ideal regime remains unsustainable.

Nevertheless, even when viewed from the light of this practical unsustainability, the community of women and children highlights unity as the greatest good for a city. In the best city, this unity is so complete that the city resembles a single human body. However, even in imperfect regimes, more of the "greatest good" is by definition always better than less of it; this rule therefore presents a corollary to the moderation principle of good government:

Corollary to Principle 3 (Moderation): Unity is the greatest good a city may obtain.

The Philosopher Kings

With the first and second waves thus explained and examined, attention must now shift to Socrates' third wave. In this portion of the argument, Socrates concerns himself not with explaining details of how the ideal city functions, but rather with how the ideal city may be initially and plausibly brought into being. This investigation begins as the behest of Glaucon, who asks Socrates to take on the task of "try[ing] to persuade ourselves that [the ideal regime] is possible and how it is possible" (Plato 471e). Socrates responds that the project of creating the ideal city means to provide a pattern "both for what justice by itself is like, and for the perfectly just man" (Plato 472c). Consequently, the ideal city is ideal – it is not constructed "for the sake of proving that it's possible for [it] to come into being" but rather as a means of understanding the nature of justice (Plato 472d). Nevertheless, Socrates tells Glaucon that "if we are able to find that a city could be governed in a way most closely approximating what has been said, say that we've found the possibility of these things coming into being on which you insist (Plato 473a). The ideal regime therefore acts as a model against which existing regimes can be

measured. In taking this measurement, one must "seek out and demonstrate what is badly done in cities today, and thereby keeps them from being governed in this way, and with what smallest change… a city would come to this manner of regime" (Plato 473b).

With this method thus in place for investigating how the ideal regime may be created, Socrates argues that the change necessary for existing political society in order to enable the existence of something akin to the ideal society is the ascension to power of the philosophers:

> unless… the philosophers rule as kings or those now called kings and chiefs genuinely and adequately philosophize, and political power and philosophy coincide in the same place, while the many natures now making their way to either apart from the other are by necessity excluded, there is no rest from ills for the cities… [nor] for human kind, nor will the regime we have now described in speech ever come forth from nature, insofar as possible, and see the light of the sun (Plato 473d-e).

To justify this claim, Socrates presents philosophers as the only people who meet the necessary qualifications for guardians – "those who look as if they're capable of guarding the laws and practices of cities should be established as guardians" (Plato 484c). A philosopher is "by nature a rememberer, a good learner, magnificent, charming, and a friend and kinsman of truth, justice, courage, and moderation" (Plato 487a). Furthermore:

> It is the nature of the real lover of learning to strive for what is; and he does not tarry by each of the many things opined to be but goes forward and does not lose the keenness of his passionate love nor cease from it before he grasps the nature itself of each thing which is with the part of the soul fit to grasp a thing of that sort; and it is the part akin to it that is fit. And once near it and coupled with what really is, having begotten intelligence and truth, he knows and lives truly (Plato 490b).

Consequently, "it's the philosopher, keeping company with the divine and orderly who becomes orderly and divine, to the extent that is possible for a human being" (Plato 500d). Thus, philosophers are uniquely qualified to grasp and understand truth, and when placed in positions of power can use this knowledge to their fellow men toward moderation, justice, and virtue

(Plato 500d-501b). Only philosophers are capable of acting as guardians because only philosophers can see the truth and therefore purposefully guide the city toward that which is truly best for it.

Socrates illustrates the position of the philosopher as the appropriate leader of society with a parable regarding the piloting of a ship. In this story, "the sailors are quarreling with one another about the piloting, each supposing he ought to pilot, although he has never learned the art and can't produce his teacher or prove there was a time when he was to learn it" (Plato 488b). The sailors are always fighting with each other and doing everything possible to convince the shipowner to turn over the rudder of the ship to them, convinced that "the man who is clever at figuring out how they will get the rule" is a "'skilled sailor,' 'pilot,' and knower of the ship's business'" (Plato 488d). The true pilot, however, knows that "it is necessary to pay careful attention to year, seasons, heaven, stars, winds, and everything that's proper to the art, if he is really going to be skilled at ruling a ship" (Plato 488d). Since he is a "stargazer" the other sailors reject the true pilot as useless, but he is the only one among them capable of actually skilling ruling the ship (Plato 488e). Such is the relation of philosophers to society – by understanding the truth about human nature and the virtues, they are the only members of society capable of steering the ship of state in a skillful manner. Other men may be skilled at attaining office and accumulating power, but this is a wholly different activity from governing well.

The philosophers have an additional qualification to rule – they care about a greater good than the material well-being abuse of political life may offer. Having turned their heads upward, considered questions of profound importance, and discovered true knowledge, Socrates describes in Book VII that the philosophers experience the greatest happiness from practicing philosophy. Using the Cave Analogy in Book VII, Socrates describes the long process by which

philosophers, and philosophers alone, may eventually gain an understanding of the Idea of the Good. The Idea of the Good "is in fact the cause of all that is right and fair in everything… [and] the man who is going to act prudently in private or in public must see it" (Plato 517c). Having acquired this enlightenment and gained an understanding of truth, philosophers "won't be willing to act, believing they have emigrated to a colony on the Isles of the Blessed while they are still alive" (Plato 519c). As a result, philosophers identify their happiness more than anything else with philosophizing. Consequently, none of the goods the city can offer them can even come close to competing with this ultimate happiness, and the philosophers have no incentive to allow any aspect of the fundamental nature of politics to corrupt their judgement regarding what is best for the city. As Socrates puts it, "that city in which those who are going to rule are least eager to rule is necessarily governed in the way that is best and freest from faction" (Plato 520b). Having understood true happiness through philosophy and therefore having no greed for lesser material goods, true philosophers are the only type of people who meet this burden.

Thus, via the introduction of the philosopher-kings, Plato proposes that philosophers alone are capable of truly governing well, and are therefore the only people who could bring the ideal society into existence. Again, this is a non-democratic sentiment – Socrates calls for the philosophers to rule as kings, separate from the whims and preferences of the people. Furthermore, although in creating an approximation of the best city these philosophers are separate from the political machinery and practical unsustainability of the ideal regime, the proposal for philosophers to rule still suffers from problems of impracticality. Socrates acknowledges that philosophers do not want to rule and that people are generally not inclined to let them rule (Plato 496c-e). Thus the likelihood of philosophers actually ascending to positions of power is low. Despite this low probability of their actually taking power, however, the

analysis regarding philosophers remains valid – they are the only people in society who have the knowledge necessary to purposefully implement good government. An additional corollary to the previously discussed principles of good government follows from this observation:

Corollary to Principle 1 (Wisdom): Only philosophers have the necessary knowledge to purposefully guide the city to good government; good government purposefully created therefore requires either that philosophers take power or that current rulers adequately philosophize.

Criteria for Evaluating Government

Thus, examining Socratic speech in the context of Socratic action has not yet solved the puzzle of democracy in the *Republic*. If anything, this analysis has only brought the puzzle into a more clear focus. Socratic action establishes majority rule for its system of decision-making, thus enshrining in the *Republic* a key democratic institution. However, systems of majority rule may be applied to governments beyond only democracies depending upon how voting rights are defined. Thus the active context is neither clearly democratic nor clearly nondemocratic. In contrast, Socratic speech produces an ideal society that is very clearly nondemocratic. Hence the puzzle: in action Socrates embraces a majority rule system of decision-making that seems democratic, yet in speech he advocates for an ideal regime that is not democratic at all. A deeper investigation into the conversation particularly regarding democracy is necessary to unravel this mystery.

However, the examination of Socratic action and Socratic speech provide the tools necessary to perform this evaluation of democracy. The analysis conducted in this chapter provides a series of insights into the fundamental nature of politics, political legitimacy, good government, and the advantages of a majority rule system. By applying these insights (summarized below) to understanding the descent from the ideal regime to tyranny that occurs in Book VIII, one may ascertain the value Plato places upon democracy as a practical, imperfect regime.

Observations on the Fundamental Nature of Politics
Observation 1: Politics involves power and the control of force
Observation 2: Politics involves the control of resources
Observation 3: Politics involves bargaining

Rule of Legitimacy
The legitimacy of political institutions and decisions depends upon the degree to which those institutions and decisions maintain political unity.

Characteristics of Majority Rule Systems
Characteristic 1: Majority rule systems create a degree of relative political equality
Characteristic 2: Majority rule systems are conducive to the use of persuasion
Characteristic 3: Majority rule systems produce outcomes binding on all members
Characteristic 4: Majority rule systems are highly legitimate per the Rule of Legitimacy

Principles of Good Government
Principle 1 (Wisdom):
Political leaders should have knowledge "about how the city as a whole would best deal with itself and the other cities" (Plato 428d)
Corollary to Principle 1 (Wisdom): Only philosophers have the necessary knowledge to purposefully guide the city to good government; good government purposefully created therefore requires either that philosophers take power or that current rulers adequately philosophize
Principle 2 (Political Courage):
Those empowered to use force on behalf of the political community should maintain a steadfast preservation under all circumstances "of the right and lawful opinion about what is terrible" (Plato 430b)
Principle 3 (Moderation):
The city should be unified as a single community, and should therefore meet the highest standards of legitimacy
Corollary to Principle 3: Unity is the greatest good a city may obtain.
Principle 4 (Justice):
The city should enable and encourage citizens to specialize according to their natures; justice consists in thus "minding one's own business and not being a busybody" (Plato 433a)

Chapter Four: Democracy in Book VIII

Introduction

With Socratic speech and Socratic action thus examined, only the key task of diving into the content of Book VIII and finally solving the puzzle of democracy's philosophic treatment in the *Republic* remains. The juxtaposition of action to speech proved extremely useful in generating a series of insights regarding the fundamental nature of politics and the Principles of Good Government. By first laying out the various imperfect regimes and the means by which they come into being, and then evaluating each of these regimes using the Principles of Good Government implied by the ideal regime, a clear picture of their desirability emerges. This picture reveals not only that democracy has philosophic value, but also that it is the best of all the imperfect regimes.

Unsustainable Ideal: the Descent to Tyranny

Book VIII of the *Republic* provides a descent from the best regime, which Socrates refers to as a kingship or aristocracy, to the worst regime, tyranny. In this descent, democracy resides just above tyranny. All of the regimes after aristocracy are imperfect and flawed; they therefore model regimes actually occurring in the real world. However, despite being on a descent, it remains unclear the value Plato places upon each regime. Laying out the descriptions of each of the regimes and further explaining the movement from aristocracy to timocracy to oligarchy to democracy to tyranny sets the stage for an evaluation of these governments.

Beginning with aristocracy, the principles and outline of this government are discussed at length in the previous chapter. This regime falls because of the eventual development of faction its ranks caused by failures of the breeding system (546a-547e). As previously pointed out in Chapter 3, the ideal regime was practically unsustainable for a variety of reasons. For the purposes of discussion prior to Book VIII, however, Socrates operates on the assumption that all

the systems of the city will work perfectly, thus allowing the continual perpetuation of the ideal. In Book VIII he relaxes this assumption, and the practical difficulties and frictions of the real world disrupt the ideal regime. Socrates focuses specifically on the failures to control reproductive processes. Over time, the rulers of the city fail to provide for perfect purity in reproduction and the various classes mix. To use the language of the Noble Lie, "a chaotic mixing of iron with silver and of bronze with gold engenders unlikeness and inharmonious irregularity, which, once they arise, always breed war and hatred" (Plato 547a). Faction is introduced into the ideal regime, and a struggle ensues between those who seek "possession of land, houses, gold, and silver" and those who still seek "virtue and the ancient establishment" (Plato 547b). These factions find compromise, and the timocratic regime is born.

The timocratic compromise produces a regime that "is a mixture of bad and good" (Plato 548c). In this regime, the prohibition of private property among the rulers and auxiliaries is eliminated. The warrior classes distribute among themselves "land and houses to be held privately" (Plato 547c). The populace whom the guardians previously protected now find themselves "enslaved and held as serfs and domestics [by the warrior classes]" (Plato 547c). Timocracy still imitates the ideal regime in "honoring the rulers," "the abstention of its war-making part from farming and the manual arts and the rest of money-making," and "in its provision for common meals and caring for gymnastic and the exercise of war" (Plato 547d). However, the regime is unique in that it no longer "bring[s] the wise to the ruling offices," and it leans "toward spirited and simpler men, men naturally more directed to war than to peace," holds "the wiles and stratagems of war in honor," and spends all its time making war (Plato 547e-548a). Timocracy is distinguished by its spiritedness and its corresponding "love of victories and of honors" (Plato 548c).

However, wealth proves to be timocracy's fatal flaw (Plato 550d). Under timocracy, the open acquisition of wealth among the warrior class will remain taboo, but nevertheless "[such men] will desire money just as those in oligarchies do, and under the cover of darkness pay fierce honor to gold and silver, because they possess storehouses and domestic treasuries where they can deposit and hide them" (Plato 548a). Additionally, these men "will also be stingy with money because they honor it and don't acquire it openly; but, pushed on by desire, they will love to spend other people's money; and they will harvest pleasures stealthily, running away from the law like boys from a father" (Plato 548b). Over time, however, such activities to acquire and spend money become more publically acceptable, the rulers begin to change the laws regarding wealth, and money-making becomes increasingly honored in the city (Plato 550d-e). Eventually, "instead of men who love victory and honor, they finally become lovers of money-making and money; and they praise and admire the wealthy man and bring him to the ruling offices, while they dishonor the poor man" (Plato 551a). Thus oligarchy is born.

An oligarch regime is defined when the city laws down laws and regulations "fixing an assessment of a sum of money… prescribing that the man whose substance is not up to the level of the fixed assessment shall not participate in the ruling" and enforce these laws through either force or fear (Plato 551b). Thus, an oligarchic city really represents two cities: "the city of the poor and the city of the rich, dwelling together in the same place, ever plotting against each other" (Plato 551d). This city is "perhaps unable to fight any war, first, on account of being compelled either to use the multitude armed and be more afraid of it than the enemy, or not to use it and thus show up as true oligarchs on the field of battle; and, besides, on account of their not being willing to contribute money because they love it" (Plato 551e). Additionally, the oligarchic regime features huge disparities between the super-rich and the extremely

impoverished, as well as the rise of "thieves, cutpurses, temple robbers, and craftsmen of all such evils" who must be held down by force (Plato 552d).

An overwhelming greed for money proves the downfall of the oligarchic regime. The oligarchs constantly seek more wealth; inevitably, this sometime results in "human beings who are not ignoble to become poor" (Plato 555d). As a result, "these men sit idly in the city, fitted out with stings and fully armed, some owing debts, some dishonored, and some both, hating and plotting against those who acquired what belongs to them and all the rest too, gripped by a love of change" (Plato 555d). Meanwhile, the money-makers care only about accumulating ever greater wealth for themselves, harming the rest of the city in the process and making "the drone and the beggar great in the city" (Plato 556a). At the same time, the oligarchs become "luxurious and without taste for work of body or of soul, too soft to resist pleasures and pains, and too idle" (Plato 556c). The poor see these weaknesses and realize it gives them the perfect opportunity to strike back against the oligarchs, and the city is in perfect condition to divide into faction and battle itself (Plato 556e). Democracy arises when the poor thus defeat the oligarchs (Plato 557a).

Democratic government involves sharing the regime among all the people, with ruling offices filled through the drawing of lots (Plato 557a). Freedom is the founding principle of this regime. A democratic city is "full of freedom and free speech… [and there is] license in it to do whatever one wants" (Plato 557b). This freedom extends throughout public and private life: there is neither compulsion to rule or be ruled, nor to make war or peace against one's private desires (Plato 557e-558a). This freedom therefore provides the residents of democracy "a way of passing the time [which is] divinely sweet for the moment," and all the various types of human disposition can be found within such a city (Plato 557c-558a). Consequently, democracy

is “a sweet regime, without rulers and many-colored, dispensing a certain equality to equals and unequals alike” (Plato 558c).

Furthermore, Socrates argues that three classes of people generally exist in democracy: drones, the wealthy, and the people (Plato 564d-565a). The drones, just as in the oligarchy, are citizens who contribute no productive work to the city. However, whereas these drones became criminals and beggars under oligarchy and were held down by force, in a democracy these men strive to take up positions of leadership. They are professional politicians, men who excel at acquiring and keeping power through using speeches and persuading others in the public assembly (Plato 564d-e). Since the rest of the public is engaged in money-making, those who are “most orderly by nature become, for the most part, richest” (Plato 564e). Finally, “the people would be the third class, all those who do their own work, don’t meddle in affairs, and don’t possess very much” (Plato 565a). Although ruling officers are generally not drawn from this class, the people nevertheless form the heart of democracy: “whenever they assemble, they constitute the most numerous and most sovereign class” (Plato 565a).

The downfall of democracy, in turn, stems from its love of freedom. An overabundance of liberty turns into licentiousness and the city descends to anarchy. As Socrates explains, once a democratic city has “thirsted for freedom, gets bad winebearers as its leaders and gets more drunk that it should on this unmixed draught, then, unless the rulers are very gentle and provide a great deal of freedom, it punishes them, charging them with being polluted and oligarchs” (Plato 562a). From this ethos, an absolute sense of freedom develops, such that “if someone proposes anything that smacks in any way of slavery, [the citizens] are irritated and can’t stand it” (Plato 563d). As a result, “they end up… paying no attention to the laws, written or unwritten, in order that they may avoid having any master at all” (Plato 563d).

In this environment of freedom so extreme it borders upon anarchy, the drones leading the government seek to take substance from the wealthy and promise it to the people as a means of both continuing to enjoy popular support and pocketing a large share of this stolen wealth for themselves (Plato 565b). When the wealthy attempt to defend themselves from this theft, they are labelled as oligarchs even if they have no intentions of overthrowing the democracy, and this forces them to truly become oligarchs to defend themselves and their belongings (Plato 565b-c). In response, the people raise up one man as their leader and champion against the oligarchs, and a contest for power ensues (Plato 565c). This leader thus takes over "a particularly obedient mob" and begins a process of unjustly charging men before the courts, banishing, killing, and proposing "cancellations of debts and redistributions of land" (Plato 565e-566a). In doing so, this leader "incites faction against those who have wealth" (Plato 566a). The wealthy attempt to exile or kill this leader, and in response he makes "the notorious tyrannical request [of] ask[ing] the people for some bodyguards to save the people's defender for them" (Plato 566a-b). Out of fear the people grant the request, and the oligarchs flee the city, realizing that they have lost the battle for control of the city and face only death if they remain (Plato 566c). Consequently, the leader elevated by the people now has unopposed control of the city, and tyranny is born.

This tyrannical regime begins benignly enough, with the tyrant stopping to "smile at and greet whomever he meets," denying in public and private that he is a tyrant while granting freedom from debts and redistributing land (Plato 566d-e). However, once his power is consolidated within the city, the tyrant embarks upon a path of constant warfare that will keep the populace indebted to him and give him an excuse to rid the city of dissidents (Plato 566e-567a). At this point, some of his friends begin stepping up to criticize his actions in leading the city, but in presenting this criticism they also prove themselves to be a threat to his leadership

(Plato 567b). The tyrant therefore embarks upon the task of seeing "who is courageous, who is great-minded, who is prudent, [and] who is rich," and purging them from the city (Plato 567c). Therefore in need of new and more trustworthy bodyguards, the tyrant takes slaves away from the citizens, frees them, and uses them as his new armed guards (Plato 567e). The tyrant will then plunder the "sacred money in the city… along with the property of the men he has destroyed, so that people won't be compelled to bring in such large contributions" (Plato 568d). If the people should finally realize and reject his tyrannical ways, however, by this point the tyrant's power will have become so absolute that he has no difficulty using force against the populace, despite owing his position in the first place to the people (Plato 568e-569b). For the people, then, "in the place of that great and unseasonable freedom they have put on the dress of the harshest and bitterest enslavement to slaves" (Plato 569c).

Evaluating the Types of Government

With the various types of regimes thus described, it is now possible to use the Principles of Good Government derived from the analysis of the ideal city to understand the value Plato places on each of these imperfect regimes. This analysis excludes both aristocracy/kingship and tyranny. Aristocracy or kingship is the name Socrates gives to the ideal regime. It is already established that this is the best regime, and that it is very difficult to bring this regime into actual existence and to maintain it in the event that it can be made to exist. Of concern, therefore, is understanding the relative value of the various imperfect regimes that may govern society. However, Socrates makes abundantly clear in Book IX that tyranny is the worst possible regime (Plato 576d). Therefore, tyranny always has the least value when compared to timocracy, oligarchy, and democracy. Since its value is therefore known, tyranny is also excluded from

consideration. Consequently, the value Plato assigns to each of the three remaining regimes can be understood by measuring how well each regime achieves the Principles of Good Government.

The Wisdom Principle

Principle 1 (Wisdom):

Political leaders should have knowledge "about how the city as a whole would best deal with itself and the other cities" (Plato 428d)

Corollary to Principle 1 (Wisdom): Only philosophers have the necessary knowledge to purposefully guide the city to good government; good government purposefully created therefore requires either that philosophers take power or that current rulers adequately philosophize

Measuring each of the three imperfect regimes types against this First Principle of Good Government reveals that democracy best upholds this Principle of Wisdom. Applying the corollary to this principle is crucial in understanding why democracy upholds it better than timocracy or oligarchy. Per the corollary, knowledge of the crucial kind demanded by the principle, "about how the city as a whole would best deal with itself and the other cities," is only accessible to philosophers or to rulers trained in philosophy (Plato 428d). Thus, it logically follows that the likelihood of philosophers coming to power in a given city determines the extent to which the political leaders of the city have the knowledge necessary to provide good government. The prospect of philosophers ruling is broadly unlikely in all three of the regimes, but of the three it is most likely to occur in democracy.

To begin with timocracy and oligarchy, both of these regimes fairly explicitly prevent a philosopher from coming to power. The timocratic society is "afraid to bring the wise to the ruling offices" and instead selects as its leaders "spirited and simpler men" who are experts at making war (Plato 574e). Timocracy features rule by individuals with great knowledge of the art of warfare; these individuals are distinct from philosophers who have knowledge of the truth. Furthermore, the society's distinctive love of victory and honor would prevent a philosopher

from rising to a position of prominence within a timocracy. If leaders in timocracy must be outstanding generals skilled in acquiring victory and having through military triumph accumulated great honor, the path to becoming such a leader is simply divergent from the path to becoming a philosopher. This timocratic leader receives an education in force rather than persuasion and neglects "arguments and philosophy while giving more distinguished honor to gymnastic than music" (Plato 548b). By contrast, the philosopher "must from youth on strive as intensely as possible for every kind of truth" (Plato 485d). Although Socrates indicates at multiple points throughout the dialogue that physical training is an important part of the philosophers' education, this training serves the ultimate goal of producing a philosophic mind turned toward the discovery of truth. The ruler of a timocracy treats physical and martial training as an end in itself. Given the divergence of these paths, a timocracy will always select as its leader great war heroes and lovers of victory and honor above all else. Philosophers simply do not fit this description.

Similarly, philosophers fail to fit the description of leaders who come to power in oligarchic regimes. Leadership in oligarchy is based entirely upon wealth; hence, the individuals who rise to the highest levels of prominence are those who are most skilled at making money. However, philosophers have little concern for money beyond using it to procure necessities – philosophers are "concerned with the pleasure of the soul itself with respect to itself and would forsake those pleasures that come through the body" (Plato 485d). Indeed, Socrates is very explicit on this point: a philosopher is "moderate and in no way a lover of money" (Plato 485e). Without being a lover of money, a philosopher will simply not accumulate sufficient wealth to join the ruling class of an oligarchy. Moreover, since an oligarchic regime is so intensely focused on earning money, existing members of the ruling class are reared to love money above all else. They do

not receive an education anywhere near sufficient to turn them toward philosophy. A philosophic leader, therefore, simply cannot come to power in an oligarchy.

In contrast to these two regime types, the institutions of democratic government do allow for the possibility of a philosopher coming to power. This possibility begins with the fact that the good valued by democracy, freedom, leads to a vast multitude of different types of people within a democratic city. In timocratic and oligarchic regimes, the strict focus on achieving honor or wealth creates among the rulers of those regimes a uniformity of purpose in pursuit of those goods. By contrast, "thanks to its license, [democracy] contains all species of regimes" (Plato 557d). Spread throughout the democratic populace are people concerned with every aspect of human life. Naturally this includes lovers of honor and lovers of wealth, to be sure, but also lovers of truth. As a consequence of this diversity, Socrates suggests that "it is probably necessary for the man who wishes to organize a city, as we were just doing, to go to a city under a democracy" where he may "choose the sort that pleases him, like a man going into a general store of regimes, and, once having chosen, he would thus establish his regime" (Plato 357d). Although Socrates' seems to use democracy in this passage as a staging area from which the founder of an ideal regime can stock up before leaving to start his regime, the message that democracy contains all the ingredients necessary to approximate the ideal regime is important to note.

An additional consequence of this diversity is that in a democracy, the money-maker, soldier, philosopher, and other citizens are all treated with political equality. Consequently, since the ruling offices of democracy are granted by lot, the luck of the draw alone could propel a philosopher into a position of leadership. Relying upon pure chance to put a philosopher in a position of rule in a democratic office for some defined term is hardly the most reliable method

of succeeding in putting a philosopher in power, but some chance of this outcome happening is still better than no chance. On this point alone, therefore, democracy meets the Wisdom Principle of Good Government better than either timocracy or oligarchy.

However, this line of reasoning has a critical flaw which must be dealt with: even if selected by lot to fill one of the democracy's ruling offices, the philosophers may not comply with duty. Socrates indicates that philosophers are happy to stay out of public life (Plato 496d-e). Indeed, Socrates argues that a true philosopher will despise political office and vastly prefer to stay cloistered in his studies of the true and the good than turn to the labors of the city (Plato 519b-521b). In the ideal city, Socrates and his interlocutors can compel the philosophers to rule because they have been purposefully raised to one day take up leadership of the city (Plato 520b-d). In a democracy, however, a philosopher does not owe his education to the city, and therefore is justified not finding it necessary to join in the political life of the city (Plato 520b). Furthermore, in describing democracy, Socrates establishes that democratic government features "the absence of any compulsion to rule in this city" (Plato 557e). Thus, if philosophers do not want to rule and democracy cannot force them to rule, then even if a philosopher will like not take office even if selected by lot to rule.

Despite this seeming setback for the possibility of philosophers taking office in democracy, following this line of argumentation further reveals that it actually creates an incentive structure which may ultimately thrust philosophers into a role of much greater importance for the city than the random chance of the lottery would allow. This line of reasoning follows thus: true philosophers want to live a happy life of contemplation and are content to avoid public responsibilities that draw them away from this contemplative bliss. Democracy, in lacking the ability to compel people to rule, offers precisely this opportunity. Furthermore, the general

tolerance of everything and every way of life in a democracy, corresponding with the value the regime place upon freedom, provides an environment in which philosophers are free to engage in their contemplation generally without harassment. This equality is vastly preferable for philosophers to the inequality of timocracy or oligarchy, in which the philosopher's lack of great martial skill or fabulous wealth may place him in a subservient position to the rulers and prevent him from dedicating necessary time to contemplation. Moreover, one of the hallmark descriptors of democratic government is freedom of speech, which implies freedom of thought (Plato 557b). Democracy therefore provides the philosopher with an environment in which he may freely practice his art, with no reciprocal requirement to participate in the civic life of the city. Democracy, therefore, is the philosopher's preferred regime.

Consequently, one would expect a community of philosophers to establish itself and begin to grow in a democratic city as people inclined toward philosophy emigrate from cities under differing regimes. As text of the *Republic* shows, philosophy is not a purely individual activity, but rather also an act of conversation. Philosophy thrives in argument and counterargument, as two or more people work together to achieve a greater understanding of the truth. Indeed, Socrates defines the dialectic, the highest level of philosophic inquiry, as occurring "when a man tries by discussion – by means of argument without the use of any of the senses – to attain to each thing itself that is and doesn't give up before he grasps by intellection itself that which is good itself, he comes to the very end of the intelligible realm" (Plato 532a). Dialectic requires at least one other person, and so the philosophers residing in democracy must seek each other out to truly engage in their craft.

When a group of people regularly meet with each other to perform a certain task in a community, whether that task is philosophy or anything else, word of these meetings will

somehow spread, and interests in these philosophic discussions will grow beyond the original community of philosophers. Individuals of a philosophic nature who had never previously considered philosophy may now view it with interest and wonder. In response, the philosophers may set about trying to educate these philosophic natures and turn them toward philosophy. One of the major themes of the *Republic* is the necessity of a proper education to truly embrace the philosophic, and the best, way of life. The Cave Analogy in Book VII provides the perfect illustration of this point. A man shackled in the Cave does not simply find his own way out of the Cave; rather he is released from his shackles, compelled to view his Cave environment through new eyes, is dragged up and out of the Cave, and forced into the light of the sun (Plato 515c-516a). The person responsible for this compelling, dragging, and forcing is an educator, a philosopher who having seen the Idea of the Good has returned to help others see it also. Just as the philosophers in the ideal city are justly required to enter political life after having seen the Idea of the Good because the city provided for their rearing and education (Plato 520b-d), so to do philosophers in practical contexts face the just obligation to educate the next generation of philosophers in order to ensure the survival of their art. Thus, the philosophic community within democracy begins to educate the youth in the city and turn them toward philosophy.

These extensions of the philosophic community flow naturally from the philosophic activity itself, yet they necessarily involve the community of philosophers with the civic life of the city. Insofar as the philosophers have begun to educate the city’s youth, they perform a role beyond quiet contemplation and the avoidance of politics. Particularly if these youth decide to lead a philosophic life, the philosophers are in many ways impacting the future development of the city. Like it or not, philosopher has become intrinsically linked to the politics of the city.

This linkage produces many paths by which philosophers may come to power in a democracy. In the first place, given that the city's civic life now inescapable, philosophers may simply stop declining if their name comes up in the lottery for ruling offices. Particularly if the community of philosophers within this democracy is large, in becomes more probable that at least some will feel an obligation to serve if called upon. Furthermore, given that Socrates argues for philosopher-kings in the *Republic*, it should be unsurprising if other philosophers reach the same conclusion and therefore do not selfishly reject a call to service.

In the second place, philosophers may seek out involvement in politics in order to protect philosophic activity from the political community. Philosophy poses a risk to cities by rigorously seeking the truth and undermining the traditional order. The city may thus fear the expansion of philosophy within its borders, particular when it takes up the education of the youth. Reacting out of this fear, the city may seek to persecute philosophers, as Athens does when it executes Socrates. Such actions may force the philosophers to become more politically active out of defense and protection of their happy contemplative way of life. Alternatively, given that democracy is the only regime other than the ideal in which philosophy can thrive, philosophers have an incentive to keep the city from collapsing into one of the other imperfect regimes. Philosophers may thus be spurred into public life to defend the political arrangement that enables them to thrive. In either case, the philosopher's foray into politics matches the motivations of the philosopher in the ideal city – both act out of necessity (Plato 540b).

In the third and final place, through their system of education, the philosophers may bring a number of the important politicians in the city over to philosophy. In democratic regimes, Socrates identifies a class of professional politicians as being a "class of idle, extravagant men" whom he refers to drones (Plato 564b). At least some the men who fall in this category are

"human beings who are not ignoble" (Plato 555d). That some drones are noble men forms an interesting parallel to Socrates' description of men who are philosophic by nature who do not get the correct education: "those with the best natures become exceptionally bad when they get bad instruction" (Plato 491e). Thus, it seems likely that at least some of the drones that form the political class in a democracy are actually philosophically-inclined men who never had the opportunity to receive the proper education. The advent of the philosophic community in a democracy providing philosophic education would solve this problem. If philosophic education becomes relatively widespread among this professional political class (or individuals aspiring to join it), or if some of the most influential members of this political class take up a philosophic education, then this ruling class may "philosophize adequately" enough to satisfy the corollary to the Wisdom Principle. In such a situation, even though the philosophers themselves do not take power, the philosophy among this governing political class still may be sufficiently strong to satisfy the Wisdom Principle.

There is no guarantee that any of these three scenarios will come to pass. It is entirely possible to imagine a democratic regime in which philosophy plays no public role. Nevertheless, each of these three explanations makes possible, if not necessarily probable, that philosophy may come to power in a democracy. Since the structure of timocracy and oligarchy are such that philosophers could not come to power in either of these regimes, democracy best upholds this First Principle of Good Government.

The Political Courage Principle

Principle 2 (Political Courage):

> *Those empowered to use force on behalf of the political community should maintain a steadfast preservation under all circumstances "of the right and lawful opinion about what is terrible" (Plato 430b)*

Measuring each of the three imperfect regimes against this Second Principle of Good Government reveals that oligarchy and democracy do the best job of upholding this Principle of Political Courage. Both of these regimes hold steadfast to the enshrining concept their regime defines as good – the accumulation of wealth in oligarchy, freedom in democracy. Indeed, each of these regimes remains so steadfastly true to its founding value that overindulgence in these values leads to the destruction of the regime. For oligarchy, this overindulgence consists of oligarchs accumulating so much wealth that they grow weak with luxury while the rest of the city suffers, thereby sowing the seeds of rebellion. For democracy, this overindulgence consists of taking freedom to the point of anarchy, thereby paving the way for a tyrant. In both cases, the supporters of the regime cling to the founding value even as it destroys the regime. Although this suggests that the founding value is misplaced if it is destructive in its extremes, the willingness of these regimes to remain so attached to these values can only be termed political courage.

In contrast, timocracy does not display much political courage. Considering that this regime values warfare and victory above all else, one would expect it to be the most politically courageous. However, this public valuation of honor conceals a private, secret valuation of money, even though wealth officially remains taboo. The timocratic regime does not fall because an oligarchic faction overthrows the warrior class; it falls because the warrior class grows increasingly enamored with wealth, to the point that the pursuit of wealth eventually supplants the pursuit of honor as the guiding societal ethos. Consequently, the timocratic regime does not maintain a steadfast preservation of the values handed down by the law. Insofar as it allows these values to erode and ultimately to completely wear away, the timocratic regime does not meet this Second Principle of Good Government.

The Moderation Principle

Principle 3 (Moderation):
The city should be unified as a single community, and should therefore meet the highest standards of legitimacy
Corollary to Principle 3: Unity is the greatest good a city may obtain.

Measuring the three imperfect regimes against this Third Principle of Good Government proves more challenging of an investigation than those regarding the other principles. This challenge stems from a lack of knowledge regarding what institutions each regime uses to justify the rule of its rulers, or in other words, to provide for legitimacy. The Moderation Principle is closely tied to the Rule of Legitimacy, which states:

Rule of Legitimacy
The legitimacy of political institutions and decisions depends upon the degree to which those institutions and decisions maintain political unity.

Combining this rule with the Moderation principle would therefore state that increasing the legitimacy of a society's political institutions maximizes unity within society, thereby providing a city with its greatest good. Consequently, measuring the extent to which a regime upholds this third principle depends upon the extent to which the regime employs institutional mechanisms that uphold a high degree of legitimacy. Unfortunately, the descriptions Socrates offers of the imperfect regimes do not include descriptions of these mechanisms, making it difficult to determine how well a regime unifies its political community and upholds this third principle.

In order to further understand the magnitude of this issue, consider the example of the ideal regime. In this regime, everyone is united behind the rule of the guardians/philosopher-kings. Decisions of the rulers are not questioned, and the polity maintains a state of perfect cohesion to function as one body. The mechanisms which enable this unity are the Noble Lie and communism among the guardians and auxiliaries. These policies bind the city together as one in support of the regime – as long as people believe in the Noble Lie and communism is practiced

among the rulers and auxiliaries, faction cannot form in the city. These policies are therefore highly legitimate and provide the city the highest possible degree of unity. Understanding the mechanism which provides for legitimacy is therefore the key to understanding how well the city maintains political unity. Unfortunately, in Book VIII Socrates provides only some general descriptions of possible or realized divisions within each society, and grants no window into the mechanisms each regime uses to attempt to create a political community united in support of the regime.

Luckily, however, Plato provides the necessary tool to solve this problem. In Book I, Socrates and his group of interlocutors adopt a majority rule system of decision-making. An analysis of the active context of the *Republic* reveals several characteristics of this system:

Characteristics of Majority Rule Systems
Characteristic 1: Majority rule systems create a degree of relative political equality
Characteristic 2: Majority rule systems are conducive to the use of persuasion
Characteristic 3: Majority rule systems produce outcomes binding on all members
Characteristic 4: Majority rule systems are highly legitimate per the Rule of Legitimacy

However, as was previously discussed, this majority rule system is not exclusively democratic; it is adaptable to many regimes by restricting or enlarging the scope of who may participate and vote. Thus, without knowing precisely what Socrates has in mind in Book VIII when he describes each of the imperfect regimes, one can assess the legitimacy of each of these regimes by assuming that each uses a majority rule system adapted appropriately to its peculiar nature. Furthermore, given that per Characteristic 3 majority rule systems are highly legitimate, differences unity between the regimes after the implementation of this assumption must be due to differences between the regimes. Therefore, when this assumption is applied, it becomes evident that oligarchy is the least and democracy the most legitimate of the three imperfect regimes.

Beginning with oligarchy, the oligarchic regime is defined "by fixing an assessment of a sum of money… prescribing that the man whose substance is not up to the level of the fixed assessment shall not participate in the ruling offices" (Plato 551b). Thus, adapting the system of majority rule to oligarchy would be merely to say that those men at or above the wealth threshold for holding a ruling office have eligibility to vote on the decisions of the city, while those men below this threshold do not. The oligarchic regime, however, is hopelessly and irreparably divided into faction between rich and poor (Plato 551d). Applying the system of majority rule to its government brings some unity among the oligarchs themselves and enables them to adopt cohesive policies for the city without devolving into open warfare against each other for maximum control of wealth. However, the policies produced are often beneficial only to the oligarchs, leaving the so-called "drones" and the impoverished dissatisfied with the oligarchy and ready to start civil war to overthrow the regime with only the slightest pretense (Plato 555d-556e). The oligarchic regime therefore features a very low level of legitimacy; it is a "sickly" regime that has no real political unity (Plato 556e).

Timocracy does a better job of establishing political unity than its oligarchic counterpart. In the timocratic regime, the ruling offices are granted to the most successful military men (Plato 547e). Thus, adapting majority rule to this regime gives voting rights only to the city's top generals who make decisions regarding its affairs. In these regards, the timocratic regime resembles a military junta in regards to structure, to use modern terminology. Vesting rule in this council of top generals produces a large degree of unity among the military classes. This is unsurprising – their high rank and honor, combined with their well-established skills as warriors, give the generals a high degree of credibility among the other soldiers. The majority rule system

creates a sense of unified decision-making body at the executive level which is then extended to the lower ranks via military tradition.

This unity among the soldiers, however, conceals a deep and violent schism in the timocratic society. After the fall of the aristocratic regime, the warrior classes that rule in timocracy seize private property for themselves and enslave the members of the general populace whom the guardians and auxiliaries had previously protected in the ideal regime, turning them into "serfs and domestics" (Plato 547c). As a result, the military classes must constantly guard against these men who they have enslaved (Plato 547c). Thus, the timocracy finds itself engaged in a more or less constant struggle with itself. The highly cohesive and unified warrior classes must maintain constant vigilance for uprisings of the populace in rejection of their enslavement. The people always lose these skirmishes, as they are a rabble facing a strong professional army; nevertheless, this tension sets up the eventual victory of the people over the oligarchs. Timocracy, therefore, is more legitimate than oligarchy only in that in maintains a greater unity among the military classes; both regimes feature irreconcilable divisions within society that prevent them from having a unified state.

It may initially seem odd that democracy, what Socrates describes as "a many-colored cloak decorated in all hues" should maintain the highest level of unity of these three regimes (Plato 557c). However, consider the system of majority rule operating in a democracy – it would extend voting rights to every member of the society, giving voice to the people and making them "the sovereign class" (Plato 565a). Thus, all members of society have some degree of buy-in regarding the establishment of the laws; this creates a certain unity of the regime in accepting its laws. There are, however, limits to the laws the democratic society will accept; it must avoid anything that represents a serious infringement upon freedom. As long as the majority stays

within these limits and does not pass laws violating liberty, the people generally accept and follow the decisions of majority and the acts of those who, selected by lot to fill the city's ruling offices, supplement the majority with administrative and executive capacities. This unity, in fact, is placed on display even as the democratic government begins to collapse toward tyranny: the wealthy whose money is appropriated by the state do not initially fight this decision of the majority (Plato 565a). Although they feel that they suffer a great injustice, they originally acquiesce to the democratic order. It is not until they discover that the majority has become unwilling to listen to them whatsoever, and, led by a drone, is intent on doing them more injustice that they break the unity of the democracy. Only at this point do the wealthy transform into oligarchs and plunge the city into violence between factions.

However, the implementation of a definite majority rule system may provide Socrates' democratic society with an innovation. One of the characteristics of a majority rule system is that it is binding upon the entire system; even those who dislike a law passed by the majority are nevertheless compelled to go along with it. This aspect of a majority rule system conflicts with Socrates' description of the city as lacking any serious compulsion to act (Plato 557e-558a). On the other hand, Socrates likens freedom to a draught upon which the city can get drunk, strongly implying that "good winebearers" could provide the right amount of freedom to allow liberty while preventing anarchy and maintaining order (Plato 532d). The majority rule system provides one example of a way a democratic city could walk this line between freedom and order, by making the will of the majority binding but also giving every person a voice in determining that will. Alternatively, this lack of compulsion need not entirely clash with majority rule, if the binding nature of such a system is relaxed. If a measure enjoys broad public support, then most people are likely to follow that measure – if they did not follow it, they would not have cast a

vote in favor. Compulsion of a minority who oppose the measure is therefore irrelevant in most cases in terms of achieving the actual policy outcome.

In either case, however, the salient observation regarding democracy is that government decisions do not immediately lead to faction. The majority rule system gives all members of society an outlet for expressing displeasure and discontent, and indeed a forum to advocate for changes to policy. Thanks to the expansion of voting rights throughout all parts of the city, everyone thus has a say in producing government decisions. A class of professional politicians may lead this discourse, but at the end of the day the people are sovereign. Knowing this, mere discontent does not lead to disunion. Faction only arises when the majority refuses to listen to one of its constituent parts and embarks upon policies to purposefully harm that minority. The democratic society is thusly united by their central value of freedom.

Therefore, the democratic regime therefore is the most legitimate of the three imperfect regimes and does the best job creating unity in its political community. Timocracy and oligarchy both feature the irreparable schisms between the ruling classes in each society and the masses. In both cases, these schisms turn violent, plunging the city into a state of violence against itself. Democracy, on the other hand, is not necessarily divided by faction. Whereas the existence of faction is a fundamental reality to timocratic and oligarchic society, it only arises in democracy when the government is mismanaged and bad policies are enacted. Consequently, democracy more successfully achieves a united political community than either of the other two imperfect regimes. In better providing this "greatest good" for a city, the democratic regime best upholds the Third Principle of Good Government.

The Justice Principle

Principle 4 (Justice):

The city should enable and encourage citizens to specialize according to their natures; justice consists in thus "minding one's own business and not being a busybody" (Plato 433a)

Measuring the three imperfect regimes against this fourth and final Principle of Good Government is a considerably easier process than measuring the regimes against the Moderation Principle. In performing this evaluation, one discovers that oligarchy is the least just of the three regimes, while timocracy and democracy both produce mixed results.

Once again, oligarchy performs extremely poorly when measured against this principle. This poor performance stems from the fact that the overriding concern under oligarchic government is the accumulation of wealth. Everyone, then, practices the art of money-making. As a result, those who are not money-makers by nature and are therefore bad at generating wealth or choose not to attempt to generate wealth often find themselves impoverished. This poverty consequently forces such people to take whatever actions are necessary for their survival, which subsequently prevents them from pursuing mastery of the art to which they are naturally inclined. Additionally, those who are adept at money-making find themselves thrust into positions of political leadership and rule for which they are not naturally inclined. Essentially, then, the value oligarchy places upon money-making turns the oligarchic society into a city of busy-bodies. Citizens are not encouraged to specialize according to their natures, and the city simply fails to uphold the Justice Principle.

By contrast, the timocratic society tries hard to maintain a system of specialization reminiscent of that established in the ideal regime. It continues to have three classes, the generals, soldiers, and the people; those skilled in the arts of war are separated out from society and developed into outstanding soldiers; those skilled in other arts remain in the third class, presumably where they continue to specialize in those endeavors to which they are best suited. However, important differences between it and the ideal regime now exist – philosophers are not

allowed to rule, and all the non-warrior classes serve the warrior classes as slaves, serfs, and domestics (Plato 547c). Thus, the timocratic regime encourages specialization according to nature, but also encourages its citizens to become busybodies – the generals because they must rule when they are not naturally inclined to do so, the soldiers because they now manage wealth and property when they are not naturally inclined to do so, and the other craftsmen because they now must serve the warrior classes rather than focus only on the improvement of those arts to which they are naturally suited. Timocracy, therefore, succeeds in upholding half of the justice principle and also failing to uphold the other half of the justice principle.

Democracy finds itself in a similar situation. In its focus on liberty, democratic government allows people to pursue whatever style of life they find most appealing. Thus, the democratic regime neither encourages nor discourages people from specializing in those arts to which they are naturally inclined. Consequently, some will and some will not. This contributes to the multihued diversity of the democratic regime (Plato 557d). Additionally, by enabling all citizens to partake in the act of governing, the regime seems to encourage people to mind the business of others. Consequently, in the democratic society, Socrates describes a class of drones developing who act as professional politicians, contributing nothing productive to the city and only minding the business of others (Plato 564b-e). On the other hand, this same freedom allows the other members of society the ability to focus on mastering their individual work without having concern for others. Indeed, Socrates describes “the people” as “all those who do their own work, don’t meddle in affairs, and don’t possess very much,” and who “constitute the most numerous and most sovereign class in a democracy” (Plato 565a). According then to Socrates, the majority of the people of a democracy seem to mind their own business and not be busybodies; they are just in terms of justice in the city.

On this point, a reader familiar with Plato may argue that this particular application of the definition of justice is flawed. Such an observer may contend that in creating this initial definition of justice in the city in Book IV, Socrates means to set up a later definition of justice in the individual that focuses on the parts of the soul. Under such an interpretation, "the minding of one's own business and not being a busybody" would refer to each class in the regime performing its proper role, just as later on Socrates argues justice in the individual consists of each part of the soul performing its proper role (Plato 433a-444a). This parallelism like is intentional and holds great merit as an argument; nevertheless, there is also evidence that Socrates intends for this definition of justice in the city to be applied more directly to each citizen. As Socrates explains, "the city [is] done the most good by the fact that – in the case of child, woman, slave, freeman, craftsman, ruler, and ruled – each one minded his own business and wasn't a busybody" (Plato 433d). Furthermore, Socrates describes that in judging lawsuits, the rulers of the ideal city will have "[no] other aim in their judging than that no one have what belongs to others, nor be deprived of what belongs to him," therefore establishing that "from this point of view too, the having and doing of one's own and what belongs to oneself would be agreed to be justice" (Plato 433d). Socrates thus clearly presents this initial definition of justice as applying both to citizens within the city and to the city as a whole.

Consequently, when Socrates speaks of the people in democracy as "all those who do their own work, don't meddle in affairs, and don't possess very much," he does in fact describe them as being just (Plato 565a). Thus, democracy finds itself in the interesting position of simultaneously violating and upholding the Fourth Principle of Good Government. Democracy at once produces citizens who do not specialize according to their natures and who make a career out of being a busybody or minding the business of others alongside those who do specialize,

mind their own business, and are not busybodies. Therefore, democracy has some success in upholding the Justice Principle.

The Verdict on Democracy

Now that each of the three imperfect regimes has been described and evaluated in terms of the Four Principles of Good Government, the results of these evaluations may be tabulated and summarized. Democracy best upholds the Wisdom Principle, is tied with oligarchy in upholding better than timocracy the Political Courage Principle, best upholds the Moderation Principle, and is tied with timocracy in upholding the Justice Principle better than oligarchy. Therefore, based upon the standards of good government Plato establishes with the ideal regime, democracy is the best of the imperfect regimes.

It is true that the *Republic* presents democracy as flawed. The ideal regime Socrates and his interlocutors design outperform democracy in each of the four principles. Democracy, however, is distinguished from timocracy and oligarchy by having the greatest likelihood of bringing philosophers to power in a united political community that maintains political courage and includes a large number of just citizens. In its imperfection, democracy nevertheless finds ways to manage faction and accommodate philosophy; the other regimes are simply unable to do either. Furthermore, this successful combination of factors breathes hope for success into the democratic regime. In the *Republic*, democracy ultimately does fall into faction and descend into tyranny. Yet, if the democratic regime can retain its unity for long enough that philosophy has the chance to securely found itself in the city, then perhaps the entrance of philosophers onto the political scene can produce sufficient improvements in the quality of government to stave off collapse into tyranny. Even more optimistically, perhaps this arrival of philosophers onto the political scene can create a virtuous cycle that combats the imperfections of the democratic

regime and seeks always to improve the quality of government in society. As the most preferable of the imperfect regimes, the *Republic* therefore endorses democracy as a practical alternative to the best government enshrined by the ideal.

Conclusion: Democracy in the *Republic*

It is now possible to present a coherent and unified interpretation of Plato's treatment of democracy in the *Republic*. He begins by placing the conversation in the Piraeus at the house of Cephalus, thereby drawing a stark difference between the *Republic* and the Thirty Tyrants, and placing the text in alliance with the Athenian democracy against the Thirty. However, he also indicates that this alliance does not constitute absolute support – the presence of Glaucon and Adeimantus indicate some connections with the oligarchy of the Thirty, and the inclusion of ten participants in the conversation mirroring the Ten in the Piraeus established by the Thirty Tyrants indicates Socrates and his interlocutors share a concern with the corruption of society. Socrates may ally with democracy, but he does not support it absolutely.

The reasons for this lack of absolute support become clear when one examines the ideal regime Socrates and his interlocutor create. This regime is specifically designed to in every way provide for wisdom, political courage, moderation, and justice in the city. As Socrates describes it, he means for this city to be "perfectly good" (Plato 427e). Socrates does not provide absolute support for democracy because the ideal regime is far superior. However, considering the description of the ideal city in the active context of the *Republic* reveals that it suffers serious flaws when faced with the practicalities of the real world. Namely, it is unsustainable and very difficult to bring into being. If this is the case, then the ideal city is less a political innovation that rulers should attempt to implement in their city, and more of a model city showcasing the components of good government. Viewing the ideal city in this light leads to the derivation of the Four Principles of Good Government.

If the ideal city is practically speaking out of the picture for real political society, then one of the remaining imperfect regimes must be the next best alternative. Evaluating timocracy,

oligarchy, and democracy through the lens of the Principles of Good Government reveals that democracy is this next best alternative. Although not perfect, democratic government provides the opportunity for philosophers to come to power and lead the city according to their wisdom and knowledge, steadfastly preserves its founding value of freedom, maintains unity in its political culture, and typically features a large population of just citizens. Plato thusly associates philosophical value with democracy as the regime most likely to provide good government if the ideal regime is unattainable. If this is the case, it follows that Plato finds additional value in democracy for its rhetorical and political purposes. Fulfilling the public role for philosophy that democracy enables (but does not guarantee), Plato leads by example to defend philosophy and Socrates before Athens and offer solutions to the political problems facing the city. In such a manner, perhaps Plato hopes to enshrine philosophy in the political culture of Athens and thusly prove the ability of philosophy to bring about good government in a democracy. The *Republic*, therefore, as a matter of practical philosophy to improve political society in the real world, points out democracy's imperfections but nevertheless supports it as the regime realistically most likely to achieve good government.

This interpretation challenges the assumptions of the scholarly status quo. The *Republic* is not a simple denunciation of democracy; quite to the contrary, it presents a deeply nuanced understanding of government which ultimately finds value in democracy as a practical alternative to the ideal. Fully exploring the implications of this insight into Platonic theory requires continuing beyond this paper and using its conclusions to launch a dialogue with the Enlightenment philosophers who developed modern liberal democracy. Yet even with this project remaining, understanding the *Republic* as offering practical support for the imperfect regime of democracy throws into stark relief the harms and benefits of democratic government.

Studying the *Republic* provides a picture into how democracy may succeed and how it may fail, offering crucial insights into the fate of democratic government. These insights, in turn, provide the first steps toward constructing a revitalized democratic tradition suited for the rapidly changing world of the Information Age. The *Republic* alone cannot answer the normative question of democracy, but it can offer a starting point for building the democratic theory of tomorrow.

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