

# PHILOSOPHY AND POLITICS: THE ANTI-POLITICAL CHARACTER OF SOCRATES' PHILOSOPHY AND PLATO'S PROJECT OF MAKING PHILOSOPHY POLITICAL

**Hrvoje Cvijanović**

Faculty of Political Science  
University of Zagreb  
E-mail: hcvijanovic@fpzg.hr

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**Abstract** The intention of this research is to elaborate on Socrates' philosophy and its serious consequences for the relationship between philosophy and politics, hence making them hostile to each other, and Socrates an enemy of the people. The author explores the tension between philosophy and public life by comparing and contrasting two opposing philosophical projects – Socrates and Plato's – while illuminating different methods and paths they follow in their understanding of philosophy and politics. Since the author makes a claim that Socrates' philosophy is anti-political and subversive, perceived useless for public life and leading to political instability, it tragically fails when confronted with political power, as Plato subtly reveals in the dialogues. On the contrary, Plato's political project, regardless of its own contradictions, failures and turnovers, represents a radical shift. It is the project of re-founding the city on the new political grounds, attempting to make philosophy political, and the city safe for philosophy by permanently looking for a *modus vivendi* between philosophy and politics.

**Keywords** philosophy, anti-political, subversive, instability, Socrates, Plato

Five years before the trial and death of Socrates, namely in 404 BCE, Athens was defeated after two and half decades of war with Sparta. Yet, this was not only a demise of the Athenian Empire as a supreme naval force of the Hellenistic

world. More importantly, this foreign policy and military debacle disintegrated Athenian democracy. Political turmoil and insecurity infested the inner domain exposing the ultimate fragility of Athenian democratic institutions.

These decades of war and instability coincide with the influence of Socrates and his philosophizing on life in Athens. For many, this type of philosophizing – its method, its influence, along with its visual appearance embodied in Socrates' lifestyle as well as the lifestyle of his followers – has been perceived subversive and thus responsible for weakening and destabilizing political institutions making him a notorious figure of public life. Both Socrates' own contempt and irony toward politics and politicians, as well as his image in the public, even among some of his close acquaintances, opened up the conflict between philosophy and politics, or public life in general. For example, in the *Gorgias* Socrates makes a radical statement that “we don't know any man who has proved to be good at politics in this city” (*Gorgias*, 517a), or that “those who profess to be politicians are just like those who profess to be sophists” (*Gorgias*, 519c). In the *Symposium* even Alcibiades, his lover and an admirer, articulates the public perception of Socrates according to which Socrates is full of contempt toward all values, goods, and people of the city:

“You can't imagine how little he cares whether a person is beautiful, or rich, or famous in any other way that most people admire. He considers all these possessions *beneath contempt, and that's exactly how he considers us as well*. In public, I tell you, his whole life is one big game – a game of irony” (*Symposium*, 216e).

Taking all these into an account, we should reexamine Socrates' philosophical project by putting an emphasis on its political consequences. Actually, his philosophizing will be taken as a paradigm for understanding the relationship between philosophy and public life in the context of democratic institutions and

practices, and as such we will be exploring the tensions between philosophy and politics and where these tensions are coming from. Therefore, I am going to review Socrates' philosophical project from the standpoint of its contribution to political instability. In order to understand this problem better, we should actually differentiate between two projects – the one of Socrates and the other of Plato. Unlike Socrates' anti-political and subversive project, it should be emphasized that Plato's political project is the project of re-founding the city on the new political grounds, thus being inherently political and aiming toward making the city safe for philosophy by pushing toward a *modus vivendi* between philosophy and public life. Was Plato successful in doing that? We will discuss that later.

The end of the *Theaetetus* is revealing. Plato is not just telling the story in retrospect since the *Theaetetus* belongs to the late dialogues, but the time setting of the philosophical discussion between Socrates and Theaetetus is placed before his trial in the court of Athens. “I must go”, Socrates concludes the conversation, “to the King's Porch to meet the indictment that Meletus has brought against me” (*Theaetetus*, 210d). We are suggested that philosophizing is willy-nilly interrupted due to the matters of public importance. The tension between philosophical and political life is implied: Socrates has to interrupt his philosophizing even though his commitment to philosophy is in stark opposition to the superficiality of public affairs. Namely, he could not care less about the public matters. Yet, he has to descend, so to speak, to the “cave” of public life to face the charges, and even more tragically, he is able to anticipate that the cave ‘beast’ – philosophically untouched *demos* –

will seal off his destiny.<sup>1</sup> Out of this traumatic experience for Socrates, Plato will try to bridge the gap between philosophy and public life – “the nonphilosophic orientation of the city” and thus its hostility toward philosophy (Bloom, 1991:310). Therefore, we will see that the ideal of the Socratic way of life is not the same as the one Plato suggests in the *Republic* and elsewhere in his later writings, thus making us aware that we are dealing with two different ‘Socrates’ – the historic and the Platonic one.<sup>2</sup> Pre-

cisely, as historical Socrates from the early dialogues, the one practicing cross-examination (elenchus) of his interlocutors gradually fades away, the Platonic Socrates takes his place in the middle dialogues, resulting in changing of the relationship between politics and philosophy.

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<sup>1</sup> “Descending” is a fundamental overall motive of Platonic philosophy. It can be noticed from the very beginning of the *Republic* – the very first word is *kateben* (‘I went down’) embodying strong symbolism of either bringing the light of knowledge into the darkness of socio-political reality, or the hardship of the whole epistemic journey someone has to take. This symbolism of descending as well as of rising is running throughout the whole text. For additional readings on this motive see, for example: Miller, 1995; Vogelin, 2000, Howland, 2004; Altman, 2013. Moreover, this motive is fundamental for the whole tradition of Western literature and philosophy starting from Homer’s *Odyssey* where Odeseus has to travel down Hades, to Nietzsche’s *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* where this motive is clearly depicted in the figure of Zarathustra who “must descend to the depths” and “bring the light to the underworld”, namely to “go under – go down” to man “to whom I want to descend” (Nietzsche, 1978:10).

<sup>2</sup> It would be an interpretative slippery slope to make any assumptions about the historicity of Socrates having in mind that Plato’s dialogues are a literary form and the characters Plato introduces should be treated in the same way. Yet, if we take one of the early dialogues such as the *Apology*, we can notice that this dialogue resembles the historical trial of Socrates similarly presented by Xenophon as well. But it would be mistaken to argue that even these early dialogues should be treated as the historical record of actual conversations (Nightingale, 1995; Ruther-

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ford, 1995; Kahn, 1996; Blondell, 2002; Giannopolou, 2013). However, the difference between two figures – the so-called historical Socrates and the Platonic Socrates can be established. First, there are fundamental differences between the two figures of Socrates – the differences that actually envision different projects Plato writes about. As Vlastos pointed out, Plato throughout his early writings “remains convinced of the substantial truth of Socrates’ teaching and the soundness of its method” (Vlastos, 1991:53). After that period this is not the case anymore. For example, it looks like in the *Gorgias*, but especially from the book II of the *Republic* we have “another” Socrates speaking (I disagree with Vlastos about positioning the *Gorgias* in the early dialogues). On the one hand, in the *Gorgias* we still have the elenchus in which Socrates tries to cross-examine his interlocutors, along with the aporetic construction of the dialogue. On the other hand, unlike the benevolent Euthyphro, here in the *Gorgias* these interlocutors became more hostile to Socrates, and Socrates more convinced to defend a certain conception of knowledge, life and philosophy, but also trying to reinterpret the domain of practicing politics. But the fundamental discrepancy between these two figures of Socrates develops from the book II of the *Republic* to the last Plato’s dialogue. Aside from establishing his own metaphysics, Plato will only use the figure of Socrates to pursue his own articulation of the philosophical as well as the political program. This political dimension of Plato’s writings (especially articulated through the foundation of the state and the institutional/educational settings aiming to make the city safe for philosophy, if not completely inconceivable for the historical Socrates) is definitely fundamentally opposed to his anti-political sentiment.

As already mentioned, I would like to argue that, unlike Plato's foundational political project, Socrates' philosophical project is fundamentally anti-political, and as such it was perceived odious to the majority of Athenians, and Socrates himself was a figure whose sophistry was cunning as well as subversive for the city. In other words, to understand Plato's foundational political project deployed in the *Republic*, it is necessary to first look back at the Socratic project – namely, its anti-foundational and anti-political dimensions. In order to do so, we would need to rethink the political ramifications of Socrates' cross-examination activities, namely his elenchus as a method of searching for truth by questioning all the epistemological foundations. Precisely, would it be possible to make a claim that the method itself, the elenchus, made the city more vulnerable in the new political circumstances than ever before? Was it the clash between Athens on the one side searching for a firm ground, an anchor, and Socrates, on the other side, whose questioning was perceived as anchorless, corrupting, and politically and morally subversive? Namely, if Socratic elenchus pushes the instability of individual moral convictions, the political order, especially if haunted by the fear of political instability, may consider this elenchus as well as those practicing it as dangerous. In order to protect certain metaphysical and political foundations, the political order cannot rest on permanent dismantling of someone's moral universe. Hence, the trial and death of Socrates represent the end of his epistemological project because this project, as I mentioned, was not foundational while, at the same time, it was perceived as subversive and dangerous to the city. Plato will draw on that lesson realizing that philosopher's crav-

ing for truth embodied in the Socratic project is incompatible with the demands of public life. However, Plato will offer a reinterpretation of the role that philosophy has to play in public life in his *Republic*. Philosophy needs particular social settings in order to flourish; otherwise it is likely to perish. Its constitution is fragile, thus not properly equipped to grapple with the democratic "beast".

Therefore, in the argument that will follow I am going to show first why Socrates' philosophy should be considered as anti-political as well as politically subversive. Additionally I will show why Plato's political project, although politically subversive for another reason – namely, for Plato's flirting with the Spartan educational training and programming – is the final blow to the Socratic philosophy, but also an attempt to redraw the line between philosophy and politics by re-founding the city and making it safe for philosophy.

### **Anti-political and subversive philosophizing**

About fifty years after the death of Socrates, Aeschines, the Athenian orator and politician, in his speech against Timarchus said that Athenians "put Socrates the sophist to death because he was shown to have educated Critias, one of the Thirty who overthrew the democracy" (Aeschines, 2001:112). The perception given about Socrates in this speech is indicative for two reasons. First, Socrates is marked as a sophist. Second, and even more important, Socrates' philosophic influence has been perceived as subversive for the Athenian democracy. It is interesting that these views endured for more than fifty years after the trial and death of Socrates.

Moreover, such views had been present for at least a couple of decades before the trial. Namely, Aristophanes had depicted Socrates as a sophist and trickster in the *Clouds* (Aristophanes, 1998), about twenty years before Socrates was convicted. In the *Apology* this argument reappears showing that Socrates has a reputation of a person who “turns the weaker argument into the stronger, and teaches other to do the same” (*Apology*, 19c, 18c). Yet, these indictments about the sophistry of Socrates hardly made sense since no other sophist was put on a trial for simply being a sophist. Rather, it is my argument that the accusation about sophistry was politically motivated aiming to put an end to the subversive effects of Socrates’ philosophizing on public life. These subversive effects were manifested in destabilizing people’s dominant views about morality, in abolishing Athenian democracy, and in turning young people (such as the Athenian general Alcibiades) against their own institutions.

What I would like to argue is that Socrates is the anti-political hero *par excellence*. In the Greek tradition the best known anti-political figures are literary (and paradigmatic) characters such as Achilles or Antigone. Socrates belongs to that anti-political tradition as well. As is the case with both Achilles and Antigone, Socrates is guided by the transcendent imperative beyond communal life, and each type of such zealotry is characterized by inflexibility and fulfillment of one’s own duty, destiny, and mission whose ultimate end is death, not political community whatsoever. Precisely, Socrates refers to himself in a theological and even eschatological manner as, for example, a servant of god that brings the greatest good for the city (*Apology*, 30a), a gift of god (*Apology*,

30d-31b), a person who is on a mission led by god (*Apology*, 33c), and who cannot do otherwise because “that would mean disobeying my god” (*Apology*, 37e-38a). On top of that, and perhaps even more problematically, Socrates’ view of philosophy and philosophizing in the *Phaedo* is death-oriented, or life-averted: “...the one aim of those who practice philosophy in the proper manner is to practice for dying and death” (*Phaedo*, 64a); they should “keep away from all bodily passions”, and as such “they do not travel the same road” (*Phaedo*, 82cd) with other nonphilosophic creatures. For Socrates it is his mission – a pursuit of truth that is more important than the whole society – an unexamined life is not worth living (*Apology*, 38a). Hence, all those nonphilosophic ways of life are going to be opposed to the standards of life worth living for Socrates. In that case, we have an irreconcilable conflict or an open fracture between philosophy and public life.

In Plato’s early dialogues Socrates is a public figure. It is important to notice a stark difference between the setting of these dialogues and that of the later ones. The early dialogues take place in the public, while the later ones are confined to the private discussions inside the house walls of the discussants. Unlike the “Platonic” Socrates, the “historic” Socrates is someone willing to discuss ethical and philosophical issues with all of his fellow citizens regardless of their status in the *polis*: “I offer myself for questioning to the wealthy and the poor alike, and to anyone who may wish to answer in response to questions from me” (*Apology*, 33b). Yet, Socrates’ desire to discuss these issues in the public is far from the conclusion that he shared the same enthusiasm about being involved in public affairs. Interestingly, the only sort of public matters Socrates has been

engaged with and praised for are military campaigns. Laches, the Athenian general and one of the leaders of the Athenian army, after the catastrophic defeat by the Boeotians at Delium in November 424 BCE said that Socrates was bravely defending his family's reputation as well as "that of his country. He marched with me in the retreat from Delium, and I can tell you that if the rest had been willing to behave in the same manner, our city would be safe and we would not then have suffered a disaster of that kind" (*Laches*, 181b). But aside from being praised for his valor in combat, Socrates did not participate in other public and political business whatsoever, having no respect for them. As I pointed out, for Socrates, philosophy is fundamentally an anti-political project. It is most clearly expressed in the *Apology* where the public domain has been perceived as inherently hostile to philosophy and thus, in order not to perish early, someone has to be led by his own sense of meaning that resides beyond the political sphere, namely that which transcends it. In Socrates' case this was a divine or a spiritual sign that manifests itself as an inner voice: "This is what opposes my engaging in politics – and its opposition is an excellent thing, to my mind; because you may be quite sure, fellow Athenians, that if I had tried to engage in politics, I should have perished long since and should have been of no use either to you or to myself" (*Apology*, 31de). The conclusion that follows reveals a complete anti-political nature of his philosophical project – it is not a matter of choice, but the existential dictum for a philosopher not to engage in public life. Socrates pointed out that during his defense:

please do not get angry if I tell you the truth. The fact is that there is no person

on earth whose life will be spared by you or by any other majority, if he is genuinely opposed to many injustices and unlawful acts, and tries to prevent their occurrence in our city. Rather, anyone who truly fights for what is just, if he is going to survive for even a short time, must act in a private capacity rather than in a public one (*Apology*, 31e-32a).

Philosophical search for truth and justice are in stark opposition with the nonphilosophic desires of the masses willing to accept only those views that please them the most, or those that reinforce their beliefs and pursuits. This anti-political stance fits perfectly with the view of philosophy as "training for dying" expressed in the *Phaedo* (*Phaedo*, 67e). Accordingly, as philosophy is inherently anti-political, its anti-political trajectory will sooner or later hit the reef of political reality and it is going to sink. Namely, every public engagement taken by Socrates was an omen of the failure of his philosophical project. For example, by examining the politicians Socrates concludes that they were impotent in acquiring the truth, and thus, since they were not living an examined life, they needed to be despised. According to Socrates, they operated in the world of shadows or opinions, thinking they possessed the truth, but being deluded by their false beliefs: "I formed the opinion that, although the man was thought to be wise by many other people, and especially by himself, yet in reality he was not. So I then tried to show him that he thought himself wise without being so. I thereby earned his dislike" (*Apology*, 21cd). The same happened when he had tried to find wisdom among other social groups – the poets and the craftsmen. Therefore, philosophical dwelling, due to its imprinted drive for challenging everything and everyone in the city, is

endangered and cannot take roots in this setting.

The problem can be formulated as following: either the city, namely the public domain is unsuitable for philosophy, or philosophy is unsuitable for the city. I suggest that Plato tragically, argues both, despite his attempts to make philosophy political. Before discussing Plato's political project, let me explain further a few fundamental problems of the Socratic philosophizing regarding its relation to public life. There are two fundamental traits of Socrates' philosophical project resulting from its anti-political framework: first, it is the method itself, elenchus – the very foundation and a recognizable feature of Socrates' cross-examination – that has been perceived as politically subversive and leading to instability, thus making his philosophy irreconcilable with public life; and second, philosophy has been viewed as ill-equipped for public life, not merely because every philosopher fails when exposed to the whims of political power, but also because he is seen as useless for political community. I will elaborate on these in detail.

### Elenchus and instability

Socratic elenchus (ἐλεγχος) is a dialectical method of cross-examination in which inconsistencies of arguments among interlocutors have to be exposed in order to get closer to the truth since it claims to be the final arbiter of moral truth; yet the whole elenctic enterprise cannot yield certainty, and hence ends up in aporia. The only prerequisite for participating in the elenchus is open-mindedness – “the questioner must follow wherever the person questioned may lead him” (*Euthyphro*, 14c) – and an uncompromised seriousness regarding

someone's beliefs – an interlocutor has to express his own sincere belief about a topic of discussion, not anyone else's.<sup>3</sup> For instance, Socrates pushes Crito to disregard the “popular opinion regarding just, honorable, or good actions” (*Crito*, 48a) in order to hear Crito's own account on these things. However, in the *Laches* Nicias discloses to Lysimachus a hidden agenda of Socratic elenctic method:

You don't appear to me to know that whoever comes into close contact with Socrates and associates with him in conversation must necessarily, even if he began by conversing about something quite different in the first place, keep on being led about by the man's arguments until he submits to answering questions about himself concerning both his present manner of life and the life he has lived hitherto (*Laches*, 187e).

Hence, when faced with Socrates, a person is subjected to a “rigorous test” – of his knowledge, and his ability to justify his way of life. At the end of the day, this person will be exposed in all his epistemic nakedness. However, Nicias suggested that the benefits of Socratic cross-examination override the condition of perplexity you might be slipped into while providing a detailed account of your life. “I don't think there's any harm in being reminded of flaws in our past or present behavior”, Nicias says. “On the contrary, in the future you're bound to be more thoughtful if you don't avoid this treatment but submit to it...

<sup>3</sup> For example Vlastos clarifies: “Socratic elenchus is a search for moral truth by question-and-answer adversary argument in which a thesis is debated only if asserted as the answerer's own belief and is regarded as refuted only if its negation is deduced from his own beliefs” (Vlastos, 1994:4).

and expect to go on learning as long as you live... Anyway, in my view being examined by Socrates isn't at all odd or unpleasant" (*Laches*, 188b). But such a positive attitude toward Socrates' elenchus was endemic. Quite contrary, this method was perceived as fundamentally destabilizing for the majority, and Socrates as a trickster and ironist who "plays" with his interlocutors. In the *Republic* Thrasymachus accuses Socrates for being inherently cunning: "I even told these others earlier that you would be unwilling to answer, that you would be ironic and do anything rather than give an answer, if someone questioned you" (*Republic*, 337a). Moreover, for Thrasymachus, anyone willing to submit to Socratic cross-examination should be considered as naïve if he is not aware of Socrates' cunning strategy. According to his view, Socrates indulges himself in asking questions while making you perplexed. In other words, instead of making you better or improved, Socrates left you corrupted. Therefore, we have two different impressions about the effects of Socrates' cross-examinations. Yet, both views have something in common: being exposed to Socrates will leave your character somewhat transformed. Socrates appears as knowing nothing at all, yet he was the only one able to make a way of life out of this premise, while his discussants were usually uncomfortable with the outcome of their conversation. For example, in the *Euthyphro* the elenchus leads to the interlocutor's perplexity and aggravation. Socrates, while having his own case in the court pending, starts an unexpected dialogue with Euthyphro who came to the court to put charges against his own father for impious actions. The whole conversation will become not only an exhausting search for a definition of piety, but more impor-

tantly, an exposé of Euthyphro's way of life. Precisely, when Euthyphro defines piety as obedience to the law – "prosecuting wrongdoers" (*Euthyphro*, 5e) – he will back up his definition with a transcendent argument by deriving his convictions from the religious stories about gods. Socrates is going to unveil all the inconsistencies of such an argument. This procedure will be repeated for a while aiming toward an improved definition of piety. However, the equilibrium between the interlocutor's inner beliefs and the universal definition of piety will not be reached, ever. Even though Socrates asked for Euthyphro's perseverance in their open quest for a definition of piety, at the end of the day, Euthyphro abandons the conversation. On top of that, Socrates was not helpful in providing a proper definition of piety since it was not the goal of his elenchus.<sup>4</sup> Actually, Socrates would never be able to give the answer anyway since, according to his own admission, he lacks the knowledge to do so. In other words, Euthyphro should be able to find the answer by himself. For Socrates the method of cross-examination possesses an intrinsic value, not an instrumental one. The goal of Socratic elenchus is not to secure a certain definition of moral excellence – the destination is unknown, its value is an open dialectic encounter. These dialectical encounters allow an insight into the ambiguities of human knowledge. The purpose of Socratic elenchic method was to reveal these ambiguities by trying to show that the origins of human actions rest on the false un-

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<sup>4</sup> Yet, according to Vlastos, Socrates "has been doing his best to lead Euthyphro to the point where he could see for himself the right answer. What he positively refuses to do is to tell Euthyphro this answer..." (Vlastos, 1995:14).



derstanding of knowledge. Nevertheless, he never provides a straightforward recipe from his elenctic gridlock. Thus, the dialogue ends up in *aporia*, and the interlocutor is displaced from his epistemic certainty.

The problem is that the elenchus did not render Euthyphro happier or more virtuous. It attempted to destabilize his moral universe, and as such it appears potentially destructive for anyone who holds certain moral convictions opposed to the way of life Socrates advocates for. In the *Meno* we have additional proof of such dubious and destabilizing effects of the elenchus. Meno says: “Socrates, before I even met you I used to hear that you are always in a state of perplexity and that you bring others to the same state, and now I think you are bewitching and beguiling me, simply putting me under a spell, so that I am quite perplexed (*Meno*, 80a). In other words, the method itself is presented as politically and morally subversive. On top of that, Meno adds an astonishing statement that echoes the tragic events of the trial of Socrates: “...for if you were to behave like this as a stranger in another city, you would be driven away for practicing sorcery” (*Meno*, 80b). We cannot be sure if actually Meno implied that Athens had been tolerating Socrates being subversive for a while out of its love for freedom, or out of its weakness. What we can be sure about is that Socrates’ method of investigations turns out to be corrupting. Namely, according to the charges in the *Apology*, there are at least two possible scenarios: either your moral grounds will be displaced and not substituted with any formative content while leaving you without any moral compass; or/and you will spread the seed of Socrates’ corruptive influence by practicing the very same method to others.

In his defense Socrates wanted to refute these charges by claiming no aspirations and capabilities to be someone’s teacher (*Apology*, 19e, 20a). Yet, this argument makes no difference concerning the accusations for him being subversive. The only way to get out of this quandary for Socrates is to show that he was not subversive intentionally: “if I am corrupting them unintentionally, the law does not require me to be brought to court for such mistakes, but rather to be taken aside for private instruction and admonition – since I shall obviously stop doing unintentional damage, if I learn better” (*Apology*, 26a). However, it is hardly believable that Socrates was not aware of the consequences of his influence. He knew about his reputation for decades. Actually, Socrates admits that he was gradually becoming ‘the enemy of the people’ by practicing his method of cross-examination in the public: “I realized, with dismay and alarm, that I was making enemies” (*Apology*, 21e). He adds too: “You, my fellow citizens, were unable to put up with my discourses and arguments, but they were so irksome and odious to you that you now seek to be rid of them” (*Apology*, 37cd). Indeed. But he could not do any other way. On the one hand, according to Socrates a genuine philosopher has to be “some sort of gadfly,” a zealot, who radically questions and challenges social institutions along with the existing ways of living (*Apology*, 31a). On the other hand, he perceived his elenchus as an instrument of god’s will. He says: “That is why, even to this day, I still go about seeking out and searching into anyone I believe to be wise, citizen or foreigner, in obedience to the god. Then, as soon as I find someone is not wise, I assist the god by proving that he is not” (*Apology*, 23b). Consequentially, this means that either

god's will Socrates talks about is in opposition to the city, or that Socrates is blasphemous because of praising some of his own gods, or because "failing to acknowledge the gods acknowledged by the city" (*Apology*, 24c). Either way, this was understood as subversive – morally and politically – and as such contributing to political instability during the fragile times for Athens. Socrates' attempt to show the falseness of these accusations by trying to portray them as illogical and inconsistent is ill-conceived and weak. By using the "horse example" he claims that one person is not able to corrupt alone: "Do you think the same is true of horses? Is it everybody who improves them, while a single person spoils them? Or isn't the opposite true: a single person...namely the horse-trainers, can improve them; while lay people spoil them...? (*Apology*, 25b). However, the analogy can be inverted – one person can be well trained and so influential, and as such responsible for spoiling others even though there were many trying to improve them.<sup>5</sup> Socrates does not provide a convincing argument to disregard such an inverted conclusion.<sup>6</sup>

Yet, it would be a long shot to blame elenchus only for political destabilization. Socrates' closer friends did not mind being confronted during his cross-examination. As mentioned, Nicias was one literal example, the other was, for

example, Polemarchus in the book I of the *Republic*. Although destabilized through the elenchus, Polemarchus accepted his defeat and became willing to follow Socrates in his elenctic search saying: "I, for my part, am willing to be your partner in the battle" (*Republic*, 335e). Both characters were admiring Socrates' wit in discussion. However, for some of Socrates' followers the elenchus was a vehicle for bashing the Athenian institutions. But it was not the elenchus itself that should be held responsible for Socrates' subversiveness. For decades Socrates was publicly perceived as a concealed admirer of Sparta. His visual appearance was flirting with the "Spartan" lifestyle – long hair, self-deprivation of food and hygiene in order to prove one's own endurance, etc. It is not surprising that 15 years before the trial, Aristophanes in his *Birds* equalized those young admirers of Sparta with Socrates: "all men were mad for Sparta—with long hair, they went around half starved and never washed, like Socrates—and carrying knobbed sticks" (Aristophanes, 2008: 82 [1280]).<sup>7</sup> Some of them, like the Athenian general Alcibiades, as mentioned, later betrayed Athens for Sparta, while Critias became a tyrant responsible for massive killings of his fellow Athenians. In other words, Socrates

<sup>5</sup> Similarly, in Ibsen's play *An Enemy of the People* one character, the doctor, has been accused of doing damage to the city by discovering certain unpleasant truths.

<sup>6</sup> In addition, he puts himself in contradiction imagining himself as someone profoundly trained for his mission by making a parallel with the horse-trainers. However, he could neither provide any certificate to prove his excellence, nor could he do that due to his disavowal of knowledge.

<sup>7</sup> In his study of Socrates' life, Luis Navia emphasizes that all of the followers of Socrates wore long hair to display their admiration for Sparta (Navia, 2007:69). Although Plato as well sympathizes with certain features of the Spartan system, his commentary about the necessity for legislating visual appearance and behavior in his ideal polis includes a subtle criticism of Socrates' "Spartan" appearance. Namely, young people would have to abide by the state's prescribed outlook – "styles; clothing; shoes; the general appearance of the body; and everything else of that sort" (*Republic*, 425b)

influenced some of the most notorious enemies of the Athenian democracy. He was aware that his cross-examinations triggered discontent among the many, leaving others morally debased, and as such contributing to the overall political instability. This is why he was held indirectly responsible for providing a fertile soil for the anti-democratic processes in Athens – the rise of the rule of the Thirty Tyrants in particular. Aside from taking the legalist position in the *Crito* and accepting the legal penalty, Socrates, if not intentionally subversive, was unsuccessful in teaching how to be a good man and good citizen at once. His stance in the *Crito* can be seen not only as a justification of his personal quandary – the acceptance of his own defeat in front of his fellow Athenians – but also a philosophical checkmate of his project. After all, if the people were left debased and perplexed after the elenchus, if he was not able to define the content of moral excellence, if he did not feel any responsibility about the effects of his cross-examinations, and, if out of this irresponsibility the very foundation of Athens was shaken and faced with the enemies of democracy, he should be considered reasonably responsible having his public influence in mind. Therefore, if not a harbinger of the Athenian fall, for many he appeared politically amoral or lacking political and moral sensibility in the whole political context. In that respect, the trial against Socrates was a trial against a figure that turned out to be a threat to fragile Athenian democracy. Being personally accountable or not, with his cross-examinations contributing to a greater or lesser degree to destabilizing the city, Socrates' philosophizing was not perceived as harmless. Interestingly, what his enemies and many followers had in common is the view that

this philosophizing was useless for public life. Having in mind all of these, Plato will become a decisive figure in dismantling Socrates' philosophical legacy.

### **Uselessness of philosophy and political power**

The most famous excerpt from the *Republic* is about philosopher-kings. Namely, Plato's epic announcement: "Until philosophers rule as kings in their cities, or those who are nowadays called kings and leading men become genuine and adequate philosophers, so that political power and philosophy become thoroughly blended together... cities will have no rest from evils... nor, I think, will the human race" (*Republic*, 473cd). One fundamental implication of that statement can be noticed immediately – if compared with Socrates, Plato makes a radical change regarding the relationship between philosophy and public life suggesting that practicing philosophy becomes a prerequisite for public betterment. However, such a statement is puzzling if we have in mind the shadow of Socrates over Athens – bad reputation of philosophers and philosophy in general. But Plato is aware of these circumstances. On top of that, for the majority of Athenians philosophy was regarded as completely devoid of any instrumental value for the society. The tragic predicament of philosophy and one of the most interesting moments in the *Republic* is Plato's take on philosophy through the mouth of Adeimantus, a follower of Socrates, acknowledging problematic reputation of philosophers and uselessness of philosophy in public life:

all those who take up philosophy... those who continue in it for a longer time – the majority become cranks, not

to say completely bad, while the ones who seem best are rendered useless to the city because of the pursuit you recommended... How, then, it can be right to say that there will be no end to evils in our cities until philosophers – people we agree to be useless to cities – rule in them? (*Republic*, 487de)

Indeed. Actually, the very argument suggesting that philosophy is ill-equipped for public life appears even earlier in the *Gorgias*, but it has also been repeated in the late dialogues, especially in the *Theaetetus*. Plato's project in the *Gorgias* is to attempt to readdress the problem of the initial Socratic project that was doomed to end tragically in the *Apology*. Now Socrates is a figure willing to engage in the public affairs even though he is aware that he would likely perish in this engagement. This philosophical project distances itself from the current politics led by those sophists who indulge the masses performing just an imitation of politics. Socrates in the *Gorgias* says: "This is because the speeches I make on each occasion do not aim at gratification but at what's best. They don't aim at what's most pleasant... But if I came to my end because of a deficiency in flattering oratory, I know that you'd see me bear my death with ease" (*Gorgias*, 521de, 522d). *Gorgias* exposes the dead end of Socrates's philosophizing. Socrates' acknowledgment about the deficiency of philosophy reveals that philosophy lacks persuasiveness and as such is deemed useless not only for public life, but also when a philosopher is confronted with political power. This is clearly shown by Socrates' adversaries in the dialogue – Callicles in particular. But first, in the conversation with Polus, another sophist, Socrates introduces a surprising argument: philosophy is the most regarded craft in the city, a com-

plete opposite from oratory, and as such more powerful craft too, hence the "orators have the least power of any in the city". Polus sarcastically and severely fires back: "Really? Don't they [*the orators*], like tyrants, put to death anyone they want, and confiscate the property and banish from their cities anyone they see fit!" (*Gorgias*, 466bc). Socrates is shocked. The only way out for Socrates will be trying to redefine the meaning of "having power" by confusing Polus throughout the cross-examination. But Polus' argument reveals the problem philosophy will be faced with – first, it is a craft completely ill-equipped for the challenges arising out of its public exposure, and second, it is perceived as useless. In addition, Plato, through the mouth of Callicles, will enunciate the failures of Socrates' philosophizing by pointing toward the tragic predicament of philosophy, echoing what is later restated by Adeimantus in the *Republic*, as previously quoted. One of the arguments of Callicles' attack on philosophy is that it although philosophic life can be regarded as "a delightful thing" (*Gorgias*, 484c) for some, it appears to be politically debilitating since it is obscure, solitary and, as such, confined to the private sphere, thus not fitted for the demands of public life. Philosophy is described as an endeavor suited only for a particular period of life – youth (*Gorgias*, 485a-c). Namely, practicing philosophy as an adult means being ill-fitted for the tasks the city since philosophy lacks political practicality. Callicles is going to scold philosophy fiercely:

When I see an older man still engaging in philosophy and not giving it up, I think such a man by this time needs flogging. For... it's typical that such a man, even if he's naturally very well favored, becomes unmanly and avoids the

centers of his city and the marketplaces – in which according to the poet, men attain “preeminence” – and, instead lives the rest of his life in hiding, whispering in a corner with three or four boys, never uttering anything liberal, important, or apt (*Gorgias*, 485de).

Accordingly, the philosopher should be cured out of his philosophy if not for his own sake then for the sake of the city. If we, for a moment, disregard the image of Socrates challenging the very foundation of the city and invoking political instability, the argument of ultimate uselessness of philosophy for public life, the view that philosophical life brings no good to the city, still stays relevant in the context and represents a serious obstacle for justifying the ends of philosophical dwelling. Furthermore, Callicles continues his diatribe on Socrates, here taken as a exemplary philosopher, by showing the tragic consequences of this type of philosophizing: impotent in persuading anyone in the matters of public importance, as well as, persuading people in Socrates’ own matters in front on the court. As Plato implies:

Socrates... You couldn’t put a speech together correctly before councils of justice or utter any plausible or persuasive sound. Nor could you make any bold proposal on behalf of anyone else... don’t you think it’s shameful to be the way I take you to be, you and others who ever press on too far in philosophy? ... “how can this be a wise thing, the craft which took a well-favored man and made him worse”, able neither to protect himself nor to rescue himself or anyone else from the gravest dangers, to be robbed of all property by his enemies, and to live a life with absolutely no right in his city? (*Gorgias*, 486bc).

Indeed, if you, as Adeimantus said to Socrates in the *Republic*, “have spent

your whole life investigating this and nothing else” (*Republic*, 367de), and you fail in front of all, thus sealing-off your own destiny by being possibly executed and jeopardizing the craft itself – as in the case of the sailors and ship analogy that Plato deliberately introduces (*Republic*, 488c) – what conclusion can we make about this type of philosophizing? Not only that the perception from the *Apology* is confirmed – that Socrates makes people worse, not better – but we are also witnessing a depiction of philosophy as impotent in its public usage, thus becoming aware of its ultimate fragility in front of realities of political life, namely, when faced with power-struggles. On top of it all, political power is capable of disposing with the lives of the subjects. Callicles bespeaks to Socrates by restating the argument introduced earlier by Polus: “this ‘imitator’”, as Callicles mockingly refers to orators like himself, “will put to death, if he likes, your ‘non-imitator,’ and confiscate his property” (*Gorgias*, 511a). “I do know that”, Socrates calmly responds, “yes, he’ll kill him, if he likes, but it’ll be a wicked man killing one who’s admirable and good” (*Gorgias*, 511b). According to my view, what Socrates implies here is that philosophy and public life are incommensurable rather than just incompatible. Callicles judges philosophy from the perspective of political life or, more precisely, from the demands to use politics for pursuing mundane interests, the bodily pleasures in particular. He presents a conventional view of life that Socrates was opposed to. Callicles’ view, in fact, mirrors the view of Thrasymachus from the *Republic* leading toward the conclusion that life of pleasure is better than any other alternative. Namely, he equates what has been perceived as publicly acceptable or better with what

should be accounted as superior as such (*Gorgias*, 489c). Socrates is going to argue that the standards of judging differ – even though for Socrates the judging that deals with the transient bodily pleasures cannot be on the equal footing with the one that favors the intransient pleasures of the soul, we see that Socrates' acceptance of his fate in his answer to Callicles is linked with the different standard of the good. If the philosophic life is about to perish when confronted with the politically hostile environment, let it be, but this does not constitute the fact that death should be regarded as the greatest evil for the philosopher. Rather, the greatest evil is not to perish but to act unjustly. Socrates, maintains that acting unjustly is always more severe than suffering injustice, namely the benefits of someone's happiness cannot trump the outcomes of an unjust life (*Gorgias*, 509cd). It is the soul that matters the most, not the body: "But if a man has many incurable diseases in what is more valuable than his body, his soul, life for that man is not worth living" (*Gorgias*, 512a). In that sense, Socrates did not suffer from death, but from life, as Nietzsche pointed out, interpreting his "last words" in a way that he was finally cured of a disease – in other words – life (Nietzsche, 1974: 272). However, in the *Gorgias* this care for the soul, i.e. philosophy, is surprisingly, equated with politics (*Gorgias*, 464b). Therefore, Socrates shockingly announces: "I believe that I'm one of a few Athenians – so as not to say I'm the only one, but the only one among our contemporaries – to take up the true political craft and practice true politics" (*Gorgias*, 531d). But this is not the same Socrates character from the earlier dialogues whose "divine sign" diverts him from practicing politics. Here we have a "modified

Socrates" redefining politics, claiming that he actually practices "true politics" in comparison with those "imitators" of the political craft. What this "Socrates" introduces here is actually the dawn of Plato's political project – the attempt to bring together philosophy and politics together- whose peak is the *Republic*.

### **Plato's project of making philosophy political**

As we have seen, "Socratizing" Athens had subversive political implications. In the *Republic* Plato implies that Socrates' philosophical project has always been doomed to failure because of its subversiveness – it contains the seed of its own destruction including destruction of the city as well. But, philosophy cannot be left adrift on the margins of the city. Plato will make a radical turn in addressing the problem of the city and philosophy proclaiming: "How a city can engage in philosophy without being destroyed... (therefore)... I am going to argue that a city should practice philosophy in the opposite way to the present one" (*Republic*, 497de). In other words, philosophy has to become political and play a crucial role in public life. It has to rule the city, not turning the city into its enemy. Therefore, Plato is going to make the city safe for philosophy.

Unlike historic Socrates, Plato's political project is going to be foundational. Its aim is to reestablish the city in a way that will fuse both philosophy and politics together, and this fusion will culminate in the concept of the philosopher-king. But before that we witness a transformation from one philosophical program to other. Namely, the end of book I of the *Republic* corresponds with the end of the aporetic elenctic encounters. Henceforth, Plato, talking through

the mouth of Socrates, has a different mission – the *elenchus* as an indefinite search for truth is incompatible with the process of founding the ideal city. Aside from being potentially subversive, the *elenchus* has never resulted in anything useful for public life. In other words, Socrates has never offered an institutional framework for his educational efforts. Now the Platonic Socrates is involved in developing a theory along with those, such as Glaucon and Adeimantus, who are willing to join the founding project as his disciples. From now on, this Platonic Socrates is not going to deal with the conversational opponents anymore, but rather with conversational partners who were already in agreement with his view. The conversation is not conducted as a process of cross-examination and refutation. Glaucon and Adeimantus are not defending their own views, but rather pushing (Plato's) Socrates to refute a certain common view of justice recognized as problematic but attractive to the most, in order to build up a new institutional foundation for the city. In other words, the dialogue should lead to something constructive. Plato cannot allow for the aporetic outcome anymore. People cannot be trusted to arrive at the truth without a proper and clearly specified education facilitated through the *polis*. Now, the truth and the notion of justice, outlined and shaped by Plato and his disciples, have to be filtered through the city, not through the philosopher's (Socrates') mind. Questioning of the truth and justice is not allowed. In other words, philosophy as the enterprise of genuine questioning of everything and everyone is not allowed anymore. Plato is going to be a harbinger of death of philosophy in the sense Socrates defined it. For example, the work of poets should be syn-

chronized with the city or forbidden: "we must put a stop to such stories; if we do not, they will produce in our young people a very casual attitude to evil" (*Republic*, 392a). Furthermore, the citizens should be exposed to rigorous musical training so the lawlessness would not be able to penetrate through music "because rhythm and harmony permeate the innermost element of the soul, affect it more powerfully than anything else" (*Republic*, 401d).

However, despite the proposed educational program, and its accompanied politics of breeding (eugenics) that ought to lay foundations for the rise of the philosopher-king in what seems to be a properly prepared social and political soil, it looks like Plato ultimately submits to the tragic view that acknowledges "the insanity of the masses". Namely, the masses are so resilient to education and discipline, so the philosopher-king will not be able to thrive even in these new socio-political circumstances, and no philosopher will have any incentive to participate in public life. Actually, after proper training Plato's guardian-philosopher will be obliged "to go down into the cave" (*Republic*, 539e), but the tragic outcome has yet to culminate. In this octroyed mission to dispel the world of shadows that shape the cave of political reality, the cave will likely devour him: "And as for anyone who tried to free the prisoners and lead them upward, if they could somehow get their hands on him, wouldn't they kill him?"; asks Socrates, and Glaucon confirms – "They certainly would" (*Republic*, 517a).

Therefore, as a result of this intrinsic fragility of philosophy in front of the reality of public life, Plato's philosopher-king would be a normative ideal rather than a possibility. In dealing with the democratic "beast" Plato admits that the

philosopher can choose between a couple of possible surviving strategies, yet all of them are going to be inhospitable for philosophy. First option is the exile (*Republic*, 496b). Second is being quiet, or concealed from the public. He has to choose an apolitical life of “living in a small city” and disdaining “the city’s affairs” (*Republic*, 496b). Socrates adds:

they have also seen the insanity of the masses and realized that there is nothing healthy, so to speak, in public affairs, and that there is no ally with whose aid the champion of justice can survive; that instead he would perish before he could profit either his city or his friends, and be useless both to himself and to others – like a man who has fallen among wild animals and neither is willing to join them in doing injustice nor sufficiently strong to oppose the general savagery alone. Taking all this into his calculations, he keeps quiet and does his own work, like someone who takes refuge under a little wall from a storm of dust or hail driven by the wind. Seeing others filled with lawlessness, the philosopher is satisfied if he can somehow lead his present life pure of injustice and impious acts (*Republic*, 496cd).

However, there is the third option too, but it looks unrealistic on the political horizon of any sort. It presupposes thriving in a proper constitutional setting where “his own growth will be fuller and he will save the community, as well as himself” (*Republic*, 497a). But as Plato himself admits, this is unlikely because there are no viable constitutions in the current political settings suitable for philosophy: “There is not one city today with a constitution worthy of the philosophic nature... It is like foreign seed sown in alien ground: it tends to be overpowered and to fade away into the native species” (*Republic*, 497b). Discon-

tented with everything, practically admitting the failure of his political project too, Plato’s vision is gloomy. Even if this would not be the case, even if the public soil would be fertile for philosophy, according to Plato, there should be two complementary preconditions for a philosopher-king to rise – chance and compulsion:

No city, no constitution, and no individual man will ever become perfect until some chance event compels those few philosophers who are not vicious (the ones who are now called useless) to take care of a city whether they are willing to or not, and compels the city to obey them – or until a true passion for true philosophy flows by some divine inspiration into the sons of the men now wielding dynastic power of sovereignty, or into the men themselves (*Republic*, 499b).

It is completely unclear what kind of chance would set up an ideal constitution suitable for philosophy, or who would compel a philosopher to rule having in mind the existential insecurity of such a venture. It seems like Plato suggests the masses will eventually realize that they were wrong and thus, driven by an unexplainable spark of reason, would install the one who has previously been perceived as politically useless as well as subversive (*Republic*, 500e). But such political philosophy rests on a couple of paradoxes. First, in order for that to happen the masses, unhappy with the existing constitutional arrangements, would need to understand that the pleasures of the soul outweigh the pleasures of the body. However, the tension between these types of pleasures has never been reconciled in Plato’s political philosophy. On the contrary, the tension itself perpetuates a never-ending hostility between politics and philosophy thus, from Pla-



to's standpoint, legitimizing the need for philosophy to keep in check political realm against disorder. The second paradox of Plato's reasoning here is bizarre at least – the masses, according to Plato's proposal, after surrendering themselves to the hands of philosophers would allow them to completely “re-paint” their characters: “They [philosophers] would take the city and people's characters as their sketching slate, but first they would wipe it clean – which is not at all an easy thing to do” (*Republic*, 501a). As the world of politics primarily deals with the appearances, while philosophy's demands are much deeper and likely incommensurable, Plato's project from the *Republic* fails, both philosophically and practically.

However, is it somehow possible to reconcile philosophy and politics, to make philosophy useful for public and political life as well as to make the city safe for philosophy? The key for answering this quandary might be found in Plato's later dialogues. It is clear that Plato's argument from the *Theaetetus* as well as from the *Statesman* differs from the project in the *Republic*. Interestingly, in the *Statesman* Plato basically abandons a discussion about the role of philosophy in public life. The project from the *Republic* is dismantled along with the philosopher-king ideal, to be replaced by the ideal of the statesman, or the “weaver-king” (*Statesman*, 310e), conceiving “that statesmanship is the art which is responsible for managing a state” (*Statesman*, 280a). In that respect, the analogy that fits managing the state the best is the analogy of weaving as a paradigm for statesmanship whose task “is the production of the city, understood as the artifact that protects us from the conflicts that result from our imperfect ‘tameness’ or ‘sociality’” (Már-

quez, 2012: 51). Thus, the premise of Plato's argument in the *Statesman* is the impossibility of the so-called “clean slate” Plato was idealizing about in the *Republic*. The project is more realistic. The “true statesmanship”, as Plato calls it, takes different people's constitutions like the weaver carefully takes different threads combining, separating, and interweaving them together into one tapestry:

The point is that the only task the weaver-king has to do, the sum total of his work, is to ensure that restrained and courageous characters never drift apart; he has to weave them together by having them share beliefs, respect and disrespect the same quantities, and betroth their children to one another. He has to form them into an even and, we might say, well-textured fabric, and never allow positions of power in the state to be held by one or other type exclusively (*Statesman*, 310e).

In dealing with the tensions between philosophy and public life, aside from the “weaver-king” solution from the *Statesman*, Plato offers another possibility in the *Theaetetus*. There, his implied criticism of philosophy outlines again that demands of political life require an effective decision-making process and political proficiency that philosophy is unable to deliver. We are told that philosophy needs time for deliberation while at the same time lacks experience in dealing with public affairs. Plato recalls the problems of the Socratic project admitting that philosophy is ill-equipped for dealing with the matters of public life. As we have seen in the *Apology* and the *Gorgias*, the world of politics is not led by truth, rather by power and the imitation of truth masked behind indulging and mellifluous rhetoric. The fragility of philosophy is predicated by the fact that the type of conversation and

devotion that has been highly valuable among true philosophers is not of any value in political activities. The *Theaetetus* will confirm that view. According to my view, the *Theaetetus* is a final blow to philosophy in the way idealized and practiced by Socrates, as well as the proof that “the philosopher-king project” is abandoned since here, according to Plato, evil cannot be eradicated with the rise of the philosopher-king. Namely, “Socrates” from the *Theaetetus* argues that dualism of good and evil in the world cannot be overcome: “it is not possible... that evil should be destroyed – for there must always be something opposed to the good... it [evil] must inevitably haunt human life” (*Theaetetus*, 176a).

Even though the maieutic method to some extent resembles the earlier elenctic search for knowledge, Plato here implicitly but severely (with a subtle aura of mockery) dismantles the Socratic philosophical legacy. By depicting the fate of historical Socrates, Plato through the mouth of Socrates asks: “how natural it is that men who have spent a great part of their lives in philosophical studies make such fools of themselves when they appear as speakers in the law-courts” (*Theaetetus*, 172c). First of all, since for Socrates delivering philosophical ideas takes time, the philosopher will always lose in front of those skillful rhetoricians allying with political power. The concept of time is fundamental in Socrates’ understanding of philosophy and marks a necessary prerequisite for philosophizing. This is especially clear in the *Apology* – “it is not easy to clear oneself of such grave allegations in a short time” (*Apology*, 37b), but also in other works, for example in the *Theaetetus* where Socrates explains that, unlike “the man of the law-courts”, the philosopher needs “plen-

ty of time. When he talks, he talks in peace and quiet, and his time is his own... It does not matter to such men whether they talk for a day or a year... But the other – the man of the law-courts – is always in a hurry when he is talking” (*Theaetetus*, 172d). It is suggested again that philosopher is unable to persuade others, namely that his craft is useless for anything else, but certain self-indulgence. Second, philosophy lacks experience in public affairs and as such it is ill-equipped for politics. Paradoxically, philosophy is able to rethink the nature of reality, but not to deal with something at hand, namely the nature of political reality. Thus, in one of the most striking paragraphs of the *Theaetetus*, Plato brings up the story about Thales as an allegory of the life of a philosopher, the story that should be read, in my view, as an allegory of Socrates, or a warning about how not to practice philosophy:

they say Thales was studying the stars... and gazing aloft, when he fell into a well; and a witty and amusing Thracian servant-girl made fun of him because, she said, he was wild to know about what was up in the sky but failed to see what was in front of him and under his feet. The same joke applies to all who spend their life in philosophy. It really is true that the philosopher fails to see his next-door neighbor; he doesn’t only notice what he is doing; he scarcely knows whether he is a man or some other kind of creature... On all these occasions... the philosopher is the object of general derision, partly for what men take to be his superior manner, and partly for his constant ignorance and lack of resource in dealing with the obvious (*Theaetetus*, 174ab, 175b).

So, what is the solution, if any, in the *Theaetetus* to reconcile philosophy with the demands of public life, or politics in

particular? According to my view, the answer can be found in the concept of philosophy as midwifery (*maieutike*). The midwife analogy allows the preservation of the philosophical enterprise as well as positioning the philosopher into the fabric of the city as someone able to lead youth in their preparation for the civic life. The purpose of the philosophical midwifery is that the philosopher helps “to determine whether the young mind is being delivered of a phantom, that is, an error, or a fertile truth” (*Theaetetus*, 150c). This is completely altered philosophical and educational project from anything previously articulated by Plato<sup>8</sup> The philosopher is going to tutor previously selected students in order to help them deliver their own ideas. This is a noticeable shift from the early elenctic dialogues where Socrates had been aggravating his interlocutors, and the whole *elenchus* was far from tutoring of the best, but rather an intense outwitting usually with Socrates’ antagonists. This is also opposed to what we witness in the *Republic* where we have an imposed educational program, as well as those disciples willing to follow, yet not those willing to learn, as is the case with young *Theaetetus*.

It seems that this maieutic Plato’s project in the *Theaetetus* allows politics and philosophy, even if incommensurable in valorizing reality, to coexist. Fur-

thermore, it is the project that opens up a possibility for philosophy to educate for statesmanship. In other words, Plato’s project from the *Theaetetus* grows out of his own critique of a philosopher who is preoccupied with useless and irrelevant pursuits, as depicted through the anecdote about Thales. It turns into the vision in which philosophy, if not highly praised or deeply integrated in institutions, can become useful for the city, and as such finally melded in the city’s fabric. According to my view, “the philosopher-midwife project” shows not only that philosophy is possible, even if this would not be easy, in the existing constitutional framework where it can spark the interest in knowledge and justice within those selected and rare young men willing to learn, but also in preparing them for the future in the city. In fact, Plato’s maieutic and tutoring approach from the *Theaetetus* can be seen as a vision of philosophy and public life weaved together and as such able to forge either philosophically educated ‘midwives’, as in the case of Plato’s disciple Aristotle, or philosophically trained statesmen, as in the case of Aristotle’s student Alexander the Great. Seeing the tragic predicament of philosophy, Plato knew, to paraphrase on Nietzsche, how to pick the philosophy’s spear and throw it onward from the point where Socrates had left it.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> As Burnyeat clarifies, we have, on the one hand, the sophist who “treats his pupil as an empty receptacle to be filled from the outside with the teacher’s ideas,” and on the other hand, Socrates who “respects the pupil’s own creativity, holding that, with the right kind of assistance, the young man will produce ideas from his own mind and will be enabled to work out for himself whether they are true or false” (Burnyeat, 1992:56).

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<sup>9</sup> Nietzsche’s original reference is actually to the Greeks who, according to his view, had moved onward philosophical thinking in comparison with their former predecessors (Nietzsche, 1998:30).

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## **Filozofija i politika: anti-politički karakter Sokratove filozofije i Platonov projekt kojim filozofija postaje političkom**

SAŽETAK Namjera ove studije je pojasniti posljedice Sokratove filozofije za razumijevanje odnosa između filozofije i politike, njihove međusobne tenzije i Sokrata kao neprijatelja naroda. Autor istražuje tenziju između filozofije i javnoga života usporedbom dva suprotstavljena filozofska projekta – one Sokrata i Platona – pojašnjavajući različite metode i smjerove koje slijede u svojem shvaćanju filozofije i politike. Autorova je tvrdnja da je Sokratova filozofija antipolitička i subverzivna, beskorisna za javni život, te vodi političkoj nestabilnosti i, kako Platon otkriva u svojim dijalozima, tragično osuđena na propast u susretu s političkom moći. S druge strane, Platonov politički projekt, uz sve njegove kontradikcije, neuspjehe i preokrete, predstavlja radikalni zaokret od Sokratove filozofije. Radi se o projektu osnivanja grada na novim političkim temeljima, pokušavajući učiniti filozofiju političkom, a grad siguran za filozofiju stalnom potragom za *modus vivendijem* između filozofije i politike.

KLJUČNE RIJEČI filozofija, antipolitičko, subverzivno, nestabilnost, Sokrat, Platon