CHAPTER 2

THE CITIES OF PLATO AND SOCRATES*

Geoff BOVE¹

¹Assoc. Prof. Dr. Istanbul Technical University, Faculty of Science and Letters, Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, Istanbul, Turkey

e-mail: gbove@itu.edu.tr

DOI: 10.26650/BS/AA23.2021.001-2.02

ABSTRACT

In Plato's *Crito*, Socrates has an imaginary conversation with the Laws of Athens. Socrates, say the Laws, lived in Athens for seventy years, raised children there, and made no attempt to change its laws. Socrates never left Athens, not even to attend a festival. This tacit acceptance of Athenian law is a strong argument against escaping. Socrates' deep connection to the city is marked in Plato's *Phaedrus*, where it is remarked that Socrates never leaves the city. Plato's literary representations attempt to create a deep linkage between Socrates and Athens. This depiction, and the argument of the Laws in *Crito*, is deeply Platonic, but is it Socratic? Variant texts of Plato's *Crito* suggest that Socrates attended the Isthmian festival. According to other sources, Socrates also visited Samos, and descended to the Piraeus to observe the Thracian festival of Bendis. Socrates relished talking with foreigners, but in the *Republic* Plato dismisses their ideas on justice. In *Republic* I Socrates discusses justice with foreigners like the Sicilians Cephalus and Polemarchus, and the Chalcedonian Thrasymachus. *Republic* I functions like an aporetic Socratic dialogue; in the constructive *Republic* II, the foreign interlocutors are replaced by Plato's brothers Glaucon and Adeimantus. Plato's dismissal of foreign speakers in favor of those with family and friendship ties to the city, suggests his deep commitment to a bond of citizenship as a prerequisite for political theory. For Socrates, justice seems to be quite abstract and logical; for Plato justice is something that emerges organically from a deep bond of soul and body to the city.

Keywords: Socrates, Plato, athens, peloponnesian war, law

* This article was prepared with financial assistance from Istanbul Technical University BAP General Research Project Number SGA-2018-41641.

Introduction

This paper has 3 parts and a speculative conclusion. Part 1 examines two artistic representations of Socrates that show how deeply in our historical consciousness Socrates is connected to the city of Athens. Part 2 problematizes this conception by showing how different manuscript versions of the *Crito* and other ancient sources offer variant evidence for this connection. Part 3 examines Plato's placing of Socrates in the Piraeus in his great work the *Republic*. These considerations allow us to reach some speculative conclusions regarding the political orientations of Plato and Socrates.

1. David's Death of Socrates and Caucig's Phaedrus

The French painter Jacques Louis David's representation of the execution of Socrates is instructive in so far as its depiction of the famous scene in Plato's *Phaedo* shows just how Athenian Socrates' death is. While a significant part of the *Phaedo* is a conversation between Socrates and two foreign Pythagoreans, Simmas and Cebes, on the immortality of the soul, how Plato describes the execution scene is instructive:

Death of Socrates, J.L. David, ca. 1787. Oil On Canvas.

Of native Athenians there was this Apollodorus, and Critobulus and his father, and Hermogenes and Epiganes and Aeschines and Antisthenes; and Ctesippus the Paeonian was there too, and Menexenus and some other Athenians. Plato, I think, was ill [Πλάτων δὲ οἶμαι ἡσθένει.] (Plato, *Phaedo* 59b)¹

1 Unless otherwise stated, Plato quotations are from Cooper, 1997.

There is an emphasis here on the Athenians present, which suggests Plato's intention to represent Socrates as a true Athenian son, deeply rooted in and inextricably connected to Athens, leaving behind him a legacy of truth, an honour that Athens must eternally contemplate. Socrates, as Plato famously depicts him, never leaves Athens, again reflecting Plato's desire to connect his literary figure Socrates to Athens in mind, spirit and law. In the *Phaedrus*, Plato places Socrates in an unusual setting, outside the city walls of Athens, a setting so unusual that it is remarked on at length at the beginning of the dialogue, a scene captured in the work of another Neoclassicist artist, Franz Caucig in 1810:

Socrates With a Disciple and Diotima? F. Caucig ca. 1810.

Phaedrus: You don't go away from the city out over the border, and it seems to me you don't go outside the city walls at all [οὐτ' ἐξωτείχους ἐμοιγε δοκεῖς τὸ παράπαν ἐξίέναι].

Socrates: Forgive me, my dear friend. You see, I am fond of learning. Now the country places and the trees won't teach me anything, and the people in the city do. But you seem to have found the charm to bring me out." (Plato, *Phaedrus* 230d-e)

The *Phaedrus* depiction of a Socrates rooted in Athens would seem to be consistent with the Socrates we see in the *Crito*, who, in an imaginary conversation with the Laws of Athens, articulates an implied contract that he has established to obey them, because he has lived with and accepted the Laws of Athens for seventy years without complaint. Socrates concludes his imagined conversation with the personified Laws by stressing his connection to Athens:

if you go to one of the nearest cities, to Thebes or Megara...you will go as an enemy, to their government Socrates, and all who care for their own cities will look askance at you... Or you will keep away from these places and go to Crito's friends in Thessaly; for there great disorder and lawlessness prevail, and perhaps they would be amused to hear of the ludicrous way in which you ran away from prison by putting on a disguise, a peasant's leathern cloak or some of the other things in which runaways dress themselves up, and changing your appearance. (Plato, *Crito* 53b-d)

It is stated in the *Crito*, ostensibly at least, that with the exception of military service, Socrates never left Athens, not even to attend a festival, something which was very unusual. However, here is where we run into some discrepancies that require a certain amount of philological fine tuning.

2. Philological considerations in the *Crito*

Our present-day English translations of the *Crito* are based on a number of Greek manuscripts. Three important manuscripts are the following²:

A: 9th Century Manuscript at the Bodleian Library (Oxford)

B: 12th Century (copy of the Bodleian manuscript (A)) at the Marciana Library in Venice.

C: 10th Century Venetus T codex at the Marciana Library (Venice)

Manuscript B is a copy of A, but C is not a copy of either. Despite being in the same library as B, and having been transcribed two centuries after it, C contains a reference to Socrates attending the Isthmian games. That is why there are different English translations, those that mention Socrates attending the Isthmian Games (based on C) and those that do not (based on A or B). The passage in question (*Crito* 52b) is important because it famously creates the image of a Socrates as “rooted” to Athens by saying that he never left the city, **not even to attend a festival**, which was very uncommon. Here is Fowler's translation:

Socrates, we have strong evidence that we and the city pleased you; for you would never have stayed in it more than all other Athenians if you had not been better pleased with it than they; **you never went out from the city to a festival**, or anywhere else, except on military service, and you never made any other journey, as other people do, and you had no wish to know any other city or other laws, but you were contented with us and our city”. (Fowler, 1914)³

2 Cod. Bodl. MS E. D. Clarke 39, Cod. Ven. gr. 185, and Cod. Ven. app. cl. 4. 1, respectively.

3 Based on A or B.

Compare this with the translation of Benjamin Jowett:

For you never went out of the city, either to see the games, **except once when you went to the to the Isthmus** [ἵσθμῳ ἅπαξ εἰς Ἴσθμόν], or to any other place unless you were on military service.” (Jowett, 1875)⁴

Tredennick and Grube also exclude the reference to the Isthmian Games. Tredennick translates thus, “**You have never left the city to attend a festival** or for any other purpose, except on some military expedition” (Tredennick, 1961)⁵. Grube parses as follows, “You have never left the city, **even to see a festival**, nor for any other reason except military service”(Grube, 2002)⁶.

In short, several translators remove the reference to the Isthmian Games based on the fact that it only occurs in one Manuscript (C). But the copy of the *Crito* that Athanaeus was reading in the 3rd Century A.D. certainly had Socrates **at the Isthmian games**. This is a very ancient witness to the correctness of Manuscript C. Here is Athenaeus:

But in the *Crito*, Plato, that favourite of Memory, says that Socrates had never once gone out of Attica, **except when he once went to the Isthmian games**. ἐν δὲ τῷ Κρίτῳ ὁ τῇ Μνημοσύνη φίλος Πλάτων οὐδὲ ποιήσασθαι πώποτε ἀποδημίαν τὸν Σωκράτη ἔξω τῆς εἰς Ἴσθμόν θεωρίας εἴρηκε. (Athenaeus, *Deipnosophistae*, 5. 55, 343.)⁷

Athenaeus is calling Plato out for emphasizing Socrates’ “rootedness” in Athens, while Plato himself says that he attended the Isthmian games.

3. Socrates in The Piraeus

How “rooted” was the historical Socrates? Aside from military service and the *Phaedrus*, we have late reports from Diogenes Laertius that Socrates visited the Island of Samos, and the ancient testimony suggests that Socrates did indeed visit Corinth. Moreover, Plato deliberately places Socrates in the Piraeus in the *Republic* for symbolic reasons. While the Piraeus is technically within the borders of Athens – inside the city walls of Themistocles that were completed in 446 B.C. - the Piraeus is a place where foreigners and foreign sentiment reigned supreme. It is a long walk along those city walls from Athens’ city center, where Socrates is depicted as so deeply rooted. When we approach the *Republic* contextually and as a work of literature, we naturally ask questions about setting and character, and most simply at the outset

4 Based on C.

5 Based on A or B.

6 Based on A or B.

7 Quotations from Athenaeus are from Yonge, 2016.

about the time and place. We can ask what Plato's motivation is for setting the dialogue in the Piraeus, especially since Socrates rarely leaves Athens, and why it takes place during the festival of Bendis. Socrates has no real connection to this foreign goddess, yet he claims that he went to the Piraeus for the purpose of observing this festival (*Resp.* 327a). In order to offer answers to these questions, I will examine several symbolic elements that Plato employs in the *Republic*.⁸ These are:

1. The use of Artemis/Bendis and Apollo, and the implicit use of Athena
2. The use of two sets of brothers as Socrates' interlocutors, namely Polemarchus and Lysias in

Republic I, and Glaucon and Adeimantus in *Republic* II-X

3. The battles in the Piraeus between democracy and tyranny that ended the Peloponnesian War

Why the festival of Bendis? Bendis is, as I have mentioned, the Thracian goddess of the moon and the hunt, just as the Athenian and Ephesian Artemis was. As Artemis has a twin brother Apollo, Bendis has a twin brother Deloptes. Ferguson has argued that in addition to diplomatic reasons for allowing the worship of Bendis in Piraeus, worshiping her would enlist the help of her brother, the healing god Deloptes, and, given the Plague of 430-29, the Athenians needed all the help that they could get. The Athenians had no difficulty in adopting Bendis, given her similarity to Artemis, although they would have seen Bendis as a lesser "barbarian" version of their more civilized moon goddess. Proclus tells us in his commentary on Plato's *Timaeus* that the festival of Bendis was held a day ahead of the festival of Athena, and the significance of this should not be lost on us. Both Artemis and Athena are goddesses of light, but the light of Artemis is a physical light, reflected in the world, much as the moon reflects the light of the sun in Anaxagoras' theory. By contrast, Athena represents bringing intellectual light to souls. At least this is the thought of Proclus in his commentary on the *Republic*:

Or do we not know that the Bendidia is a festival in honour of Artemis in which the goddess is worshiped according to the custom of the people of Thrace, and that 'Bendis' is a Thracian name? [...] The Panathenaic festival, on the other hand, and especially the little Panathenaic to which Plato refers, was a celebration in honour of Athena which followed the Bendidia in the calendar. Both Artemis and Athena... are light-bearing deities, though there is a difference between them in that [Artemis]... brings to light the hidden formative principles of nature whereas the other [Athena]... kindles the intellectual light of the souls. (Proclus, in *Resp.* 1,18)

8 The considerations that follow here are based on Bowe, 2018 *passim*.

Moreover, in commenting on the difference between Hera and Artemis in Homer, Proclus tells us that,

The opposition of Hera and Artemis represents the bipartition of the earthly souls, of which some are rational and some irrational, some separable and some inseparable, some supranatural and some natural, Hera is the cause of the better souls whereas Artemis delivers and brings to light the less worthy souls. (Proclus, in *Resp.* 1.95)⁹

If Bendis/Artemis governs the evening of *Republic* I, then Plato implies that the discussions among foreigners constitute only weak reflections of the truth, and none of the intellectual light of Athena. The intellectual light of Athena will be pursued by children of the city named for her, Plato's brothers Glaucon and Adeimantus. That is to say that the discussions of *Republic* I are between Socrates and foreigners under the governance of a foreign and false light – Bendis. If we ask why they are abandoned for Plato's brothers in *Republic* II, it is because Plato wants to indicate a shift from false physical light to true intellectual light – the metaphorical next day of the procession of the festival of Athena where Athenians climb the Acropolis.

The *Republic*, as I have written elsewhere, is an ascent from the weak light of the weak version of Artemis (Bendis) to the shining source of her light – Apollo (Bowe, 2007, *passim*). Apollo represents unity and formal knowledge, whereas Bendis represents multiplicity and physical knowledge. Socrates ascends from the Piraeus to the allegory of the Sun, which explains a principle that is so powerful that it is beyond being (*Resp.* 509c). To this statement Glaucon replies “Apollon” – by Apollo – which Plutarch tells is the symbol of unity – that which is “not many” or “A-pollon” (Bowe, 2004, *passim*). In sum – why the Bendidia? It is a moon festival of weak foreign knowledge and physical light, a preface to the intellectual light pursued by Plato's kith and kin, the festival of the metaphorical next day of the Panathenaea or Festival of Athena. Again, according to what I think is the most likely date of the inaugural Bendidia, Anaxagoras was tried in the same year, and it is not at all unlikely that *Republic* I also has this dramatic date. This fits nicely with Socrates' remarks that while the foreigner Anaxagoras claims that mind orders all, his light is the physicalist light of the old generation of thinkers, the physical light of Bendis, and now the new intellectual light of Athena's pupils, Socrates, Glaucon and Adeimantus.

We may look further into why Plato changes interlocutors between *Republic* I and II, and why the interlocutors have nothing to say in *Republic* II-X. In the first instance it is useful to know something about the foreigners of *Republic* I, keeping in mind that Glaucon

9 A longer (and much more complicated) treatment of Proclus' views on Artemis can be found in Rangos, 2000.

and Adeimantus are true Athenian citizens, and Plato's own brothers. The *Republic* takes place at the home of Polemarchus, his father Cephalus and his brother Lysias. All were Syracusan foreign residents living in the Piraeus at the invitation of Pericles; they owned a weapons factory there, producing swords and shields for Athens during the Peloponnesian War. Their ideas are democratic, and indeed they were supporters of democracy, in terms of their desire to have full Athenian citizenship. Polemarchus bought property in Athens, despite having a residence in the foreign quarter of the Piraeus, and Lysias was unsuccessfully nominated for citizenship after the war. The reason for Lysias' nomination is significant. His brother Polemarchus was executed by the Thirty tyrants and his property seized, while Lysias himself escaped to Megara where he lent considerable support to the resistance to the Spartan sponsored tyranny, a resistance that eventually overthrew the tyranny and restored democracy in 403. Many of the details of what happened to Lysias' family are preserved in the prosecution he wrote called "Against Eratosthenes". Ironically, Lysias, one of the ten great orators in Ancient Greece, says absolutely nothing while sitting at the table that night in the Piraeus with Polemarchus and the others. He is present but remains silent, however in the *Clitophon*, Socrates says that he overheard Clitophon telling Lysias that he preferred Thrasymachus to Socrates. The other foreigner present at dinner who does say a lot is the famous Thrasymachus of Chalcedon (Kadikoy), who opts for a position akin to tyranny. In short, the positions entertained by Socrates in *Republic* I are those of supporters of democracy and dictatorship respectively, and both of them leave Socrates dissatisfied. When the constructive part of the *Republic* gets going in Book II, Socrates literally abandons discussion of tyranny and democracy – the positions of the foreign interlocutors - in order to embark upon a new, Athenian intellectual political inquiry. Plato leaves behind shadows of the truth and enemy camps of the Piraeus. I now turn my attention to the two enemy camps – those of the democrats and tyrants - and their two specific historical battles in the Piraeus that brought the Peloponnesian War to a close.

Symbolically, Socrates puts discussions with foreigners about democracy and tyranny to rest in *Republic* I, before he embarks on a quest for a new kind of intellectualist government with his Athenian brothers in *Republic* II. More can be said about this, however. In 403 B.C. those rebel resistance forces supported by Lysias drove the army of the Tyranny of the Thirty down into the Piraeus, where a decisive battle was fought on the Hill of Mounycion – the very hill where the Thracians had erected a temple of Bendis. It was in this battle that Plato's uncle Critias was killed. One very last battle, fought not far away in the Piraeus resulted in a face saving victory for the Spartans, but led to reconciliation talks, whereby

the democracy in Athens was restored. Within four years of the restored democracy, Plato's friend Socrates was tried and executed for impiety, the same charge that was brought against Anaxagoras 30 years before. Perhaps one could excuse Plato for having little sympathy with the fighting factions of democracy and tyranny. The Tyranny of the Thirty destroyed his relatives Critias and Charmides, and democracy executed his friend Socrates. Both tyranny and democracy are regarded by Plato as materialistic and unintellectual – as Bendidian light, not Athenian light. The dismissal of foreign interlocutors and belligerents from the discussion of Plato's intellectual kallipolis is symbolized both in the location of the *Republic* and in its evening – the Bendis festival - not far from the locations of historic conflicts between democracy and tyranny. As the Piraeus saw the end of the Peloponnesian war, only to restore an anti-intellectualist democracy, one that had little patience for Anaxagoras or Socrates, Plato symbolically dispenses with both tyranny and democracy at the end of *Republic* I, and seeks the intellectual light of Athena with Plato's Athenian brothers starting with *Republic* II.

Results - A Speculative Conclusion

Plato's dismissal of foreign speakers in favor of those with family and friendship ties to the city, suggests his deep commitment to a bond of citizenship as a prerequisite for political theory. For Socrates, justice seems to be quite abstract and logical; for Plato justice is something that emerges organically from a deep bond of soul and body to the city. In the *Phaedrus* and the *Crito*, Plato might be thought to go to some lengths to depict a Socrates deeply rooted in the city, reflecting Plato's own views. Plato in the *Republic* suggests - by his use of character and setting - that a constructive discussion of justice must be discussed with the city's citizens. By contrast, the "historical" Socrates seems to be willing to entertain a more "cosmopolitan" concept of justice. However, all of this must be considered with the following caveat. Most of our evidence for the historical Socrates is largely dependent on what Plato tells us and on how accurate our copies of his words are, as the *Crito* manuscripts reveal.

References

- Bowe, G.S. (2003). Glaucon's Response. J. Upton-Ward (Ed.), *New millennium perspectives in the humanities* (21- 35). New York, USA: Global Scholarly Publications.
- Bowe, G.S. (2007). In Defense of Clitophon. *Classical Philology*, 102(3), 245-64.
- Bowe, Geoff (2018). Anaxagoras and the Athenian Artemis. I. Kucuradi, H. Erdem, M. Gunay (Eds.), *Urlali bir filozof: Anaxagoras* (49-62). Ankara, Turkey: Türkiye Felsefe Kurumu.
- Cooper, J. (1997). *Plato: Complete Works*, Indianapolis, USA: Hackett Publishing.
- Fowler, H.N. (1914) *Plato: Euthyphro, Apology, Crito, Phaedo, Phaedrus*. Cambridge Mass., MA: Harvard University Press.

- Grube, G. (2002). *Plato: Five Dialogues*, Indianapolis, USA: Hackett Publishing.
- Hamilton, E. (1961). *Plato: Collected Dialogues*, Princeton, USA: Princeton University Press.
- Jowett, B. (1875). *Plato: Complete Works*, Oxford, USA: Clarendon.
- Rangos, Spyridon (2000). "Proclus and Artemis: On the Relevance of Neoplatonism to the Modern Study of Ancient Religion," *Kyrynos*, 13, 47-84.
- Yonge, C. (1854). *The Deipnosophists, or, Banquet of the learned of Athenaeus*, Berlin, Germany: Henry G. Bohn.