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The good society and the good soul: *Plato's Republic* on leadership ☆

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ABSTRACT

This article assesses the relevance of Plato's *Republic* for discussions of leadership in contemporary democratic societies. Specifically, Plato's theory of the good life challenges contemporary consumer culture and the definition of the good life as desire satisfaction; his critique of democracy raises difficult questions about the ways democracies train and choose leaders; and his account of the ideal regime illustrates the importance and difficulty of taming endemic conflicts between private interests and the public good. At the same time, Plato offers an account of leadership as benefiting the entire community that remains morally attractive. Plato thus cannot be easily dismissed by advocates of democratic modes of organizing leadership; on the contrary, a close reading of *The Republic* reveals some of the enduring challenges facing democratic societies.

1. The problem — and payoff — of studying Plato

Few readers who pick up Plato's *Republic* for the first time are prepared for the book's startling contents: it is not every day that you find seemingly serious people entertaining proposals to abolish marriage, send children off to observe the rigors of war firsthand, and move society's leaders out of their comfortable private homes and into communal living quarters. The *Republic*'s unparalleled ability to stimulate the imagination and unsettle convention assures that it will long retain pride of place in liberal arts curriculums. What is less assured is that the book's robust, provocative arguments about the good life, the good society, and the nature and purpose of both leadership and followership will be given the serious attention they deserve.

The Republic presents an intellectual challenge of the first order to students and scholars of leadership. Far from being a "usable" thinker whose key themes and ideas can easily be translated to contemporary contexts, Plato offers a radical, far-reaching challenge to our fundamental social and political assumptions, and consequently our assumptions about the nature and purpose of leadership. It's clear that Plato wants to reject cynical interpretations of leadership as mere exercises of power by self-interested elites. But *The Republic* also criticizes the naïve view that leaders are as a matter of course motivated by the honorable advancement of a community's aims. Nor does Plato (in *The Republic*) have much use for the leader as do-gooding social improver, or the leader as brilliant politician, capable of inspiring the populace and transcending the limits of imperfect regimes. Plato's philosopher kings appear as odd to us as they surely did to his contemporaries.

This is no accident. Plato's conception of a good human life stands in marked contrast to the dominant conception of the good life promoted by our particular form of corporate capitalist democracy. Plato is no democrat, nor does his thought straightforwardly plant any germs of liberal democratic thought.

That, however, is precisely why *The Republic* needs to be read by contemporary students of leadership. Plato challenges, relentlessly, our received views about the desirability of democracy and its associated way of life. (Democrats are not alone in that respect: tyrants, militarists, and oligarchs are subject to equally biting criticism.) In the process, he provides a compelling normative

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standard for evaluating what genuine leadership is and what sort of person genuine leaders need to be, while at the same time providing a trenchant analysis of the fundamental obstacles to the exercise of such leadership in *all* existing regimes, including our own. Plato is no mere historical curiosity offering outdated, easily dismissed arguments. On the contrary, taking Plato seriously sheds light on both democratic theory and our own version of capitalist democracy; in particular, it can help us understand why the exercise of leadership within contemporary democracies so often yields disappointment.

Caution needs to be exercised in treading into the world of *The Republic*, however. *The Republic* is a philosophical account of an ideal regime, not a guide to practical politics. Other Platonic texts (such as *The Statesman*) deal with the exercise of specifically political leadership in non-ideal settings. If we are looking for a detailed analysis of practical political leadership as an art and a science, in opening *The Republic* we turn to the wrong place. What is of interest in *The Republic* is rather the social theory it presents; the normative conceptions of leadership and citizenship it advances; the account it offers of how the souls and characters of leaders and citizens must be shaped by the polis (city) if regimes are to be just and well-ordered; and the critique of democracy (and other political systems) it offers from the standpoint of the (idealized) best regime. Throughout this essay, I use the term "leadership" in its broadest sense. Leadership refers not just to the exercise of power by individual persons in positions of authority; it also denotes those processes by which a subset of society sets the terms of social life for the community as a whole. This clarification is important because in *The Republic*, Plato does not talk about the excellences of *individual* leaders within his ideal regime; rather he talks about the general character of and social functions performed by what we will term leadership *classes* (namely, the guardians and the philosophers).

The central argument of this article is that even citizens of democratic regimes have something useful to learn from deep critics of democracy. After recapitulating the substantive argument of *The Republic*, I advance four specific claims. First, I examine how on Plato's account, we cannot deal with the endemic challenges of both leadership and followership without also examining the nature of the good life. Here I argue that the view of the well-formed, justly ordered soul offered in *The Republic* corresponds well to contemporary criticisms of the consumerist way of life characteristic of modern capitalism. Second, I suggest that Plato's account of who should lead and why provides an interesting leverage point for analyzing several recurring problems with leaders and leadership in contemporary democratic society. Third, I show that Plato has reached his anti-democratic conclusions about who should rule on the basis of a moral conception of leadership that is in fact attractive and widely shared. Fourth, I argue that Plato (in *The Republic*) makes an important methodological contribution to leadership studies by locating his analysis of leadership *within* the context of a larger inquiry into the nature of justice and the nature of the good city.

My contention (or hope) is that an effort to examine *The Republic* as a whole, and indeed spend some time walking around in Socrates's imaginary city, might allow us to achieve the seemingly impossible: to step completely outside our current assumptions and commitments and view democratic theory and practice from the standpoint of a deeply informed skeptic. There is a formidable obstacle, however, in approaching *The Republic* in this way—namely, the difficulty of establishing what the argument of *The Republic* actually is. It is certainly possible to read *The Republic* and not understand it, and radically different interpretive understandings continue to proliferate among classicists and other Plato specialists. To avoid getting lost in this desert of interpretive criticism, we must fix our terms, so to speak: We must specify just what we mean when refer to the argument of *The Republic*.

Consequently, in the following section I provide an interpretive synopsis of the main arguments of *The Republic*. With that sketch of Plato's complex theory of social justice as a backdrop, in the succeeding analysis I draw out several implications of Plato's view for the contemporary study and practice of leadership within democratic contexts. The interpretations I rely on most heavily in constructing the following synopsis are those of philosopher C.D.C. Reeve, author of the influential study *Philosopher Kings: The Argument of Plato's Republic*, and classicist Malcolm Schofield, author of an important recent study of Plato's political theory as a whole, *Plato* (Reeve, 1988; Schofield, 2006). Reeve and Schofield's interpretations are attractive in that each scholar a) contends that there is a logical unity and coherence to Plato's argument as a whole; and b) contends that Plato takes his own arguments seriously; i.e., that *The Republic* is not intended to be viewed ironically or as a satiric commentary on the single-minded pursuit of justice. If either a) or b) is false, it is less clear why this book is worthy of detailed study, but influential commentators have often rejected one or the other of these positions.[1]

In drawing on relatively sympathetic commentators who each think Plato has something significant to say to the modern world, I follow the standard practice within contemporary normative political theory of seeking to present a doctrine in its most plausible light before attempting to critique it (Rawls, 1971). Indeed, the primary purpose of the following account and the article as a whole is not to show what is wrong with Plato's arguments, but rather what we can learn from them.

2. The argument of *The Republic*: An interpretive summary

The Republic opens in Book I with a question about justice: namely, what justice is and whether it is better to be just or unjust. Socrates quickly establishes that conventional, popular opinions about justice have important flaws (331–336).[2]

[1] The classic interpretation along these lines is that of Leo Strauss (1964). On Strauss's account, "Socrates makes clear in the *Republic* what character the city would have to have in order to satisfy the highest needs of man. By letting us see that the city constructed in accordance with this requirement is not possible, he lets us see the essential limits, the nature, of the city." Consequently, "*The Republic* conveys the broadest and deepest analysis of political idealism ever made." Strauss (1964): 138, 127. No one disputes the observation that achieving the ideal city described by Plato is highly improbable (see discussion of this point in Section III below); what is at issue is whether that city is itself obviously defective, and whether Plato intended for those defects to be obvious. The Straussian interpretation affirms both propositions; Reeve and Schofield's interpretations take the opposite view, on both counts.

[2] To aid readers interested in comparing the synopsis to the original text, I include references to the Stephanus page numbers for key passages in *The Republic* to which the synopsis refers. All quoted passages are taken from Plato (2004), The Republic, Trans. C.D.C. Reeve.

But Socrates himself is soon put on the back foot of the discussion. The central challenge to Socrates is posed by the fearsome, bellowing Thrasymachus. Thrasymachus argues both that a) "justice" is the advantage of the stronger and b) it is better and wiser to be unjust than just. Argument a) portrays "justice" as an ideology established by the rulers (whoever they are) that both defines what justice is and shape people's very vocabulary for thinking about justice (338c–339a). If this argument is correct, it follows that the person who adheres to "justice" in any given society will be acting in a way that benefits not themselves but someone else. Those who follow justice are either dupes, or too weak to be able to act unjustly in a profitable way.

Socrates provides a preliminary response to these questions in Book I, but the answers are unsatisfactory to himself, to Thrasymachus, and to close readers of Socrates's own arguments.[3] So the inquiry starts anew in Book II., with the brothers Glaucon and Adeimantus becoming Socrates's dialogue partners. Glaucon reports that it is the popular view that justice is not a good in itself, but rather a compromise reached between people too weak to impose injustice on others. That is, justice is a rational compromise between self-interested people who recognize that excessively violent conflict in pursuit of those interests will be damaging for all concerned. But, anyone who *could* get away with injustice undetected would do so (358c–361d). Related to this, Adeimantus points out that in popular moral teaching, stress is often laid on the positive consequences of moral and just behavior: if one follows the law, one won't be thrown into prison or acquire an unjust reputation. Popular teaching thus portrays justice not as an inherently good, but rather, like castor oil, as something inherently unpleasant that yields long term benefits (362e–367e).

Thus the two brothers challenge Socrates to show that justice *is* a good in itself. Specifically, Socrates is asked to show why a perfectly just person who had none of the practical benefits justice is thought to bring (i.e. positive reputation) should be regarded as happier than a perfectly unjust person who was unanimously praised as just and enjoyed the reputational benefits normally associated with justice (367). To succeed, Socrates must show that justice, in itself, is so closely linked to happiness that no just person would trade places with an unjust person, even if doing so would make one richer, more comfortable, more powerful and more highly thought of.[4]

Socrates suggests that this daunting inquiry will be best served by first looking at an entire city, not an individual person. Looking at an entire city has the effect of applying a magnifying glass to justice, making it easier to spot. So Socrates launches into a description of the famous "city in speech," or Kallipolis; it is here that Plato unveils his social theory and his account of the nature of leadership.

Socrates makes some basic assumptions in founding his city. In particular, he establishes very quickly that there needs to be a division of labor, with citizens specializing in different tasks (369b–372b). As the city grows in material aspiration, so it will also grow in complexity and in need for increased resources. Eventually, the city will run headlong into its neighbors, creating military conflict (372d–373e).

Consequently, the society will need a military capacity. The doctrine of specialization suggests that this task be carried out by professional soldiers. These guardian–warriors will be like hounds; fierce towards strangers but friendly towards those they know (374c–376a). The soldiers need to defend the city against outsiders but not use force to dominate their fellow citizens. A nature of this kind does not often emerge by accident; instead, what is required is a program of education aimed at nurturing the proper kinds of guardians.

Socrates thus lays out an extensive educational program for the guardians: Only the proper kinds of stories will be told these children, as well as only the proper kinds of music; they must undergo physical training intended to keep them flexible and skilled in war; and there must be a balance between the gentle and fierce aspects of their souls (376e–412b). Guardians will be provided meals and housing by the state, but they will not have private property, private space, or their own families. Such private ownership would give them incentive not to rule in the public interest (416a–417b). It later emerges that the guardian class itself is twofold; it includes those who are fit to be warriors, and those who are fit to actually rule. In the fully developed Kallipolis, Socrates later reveals, the task of ruling must be taken up by philosophers (473d).

In short, the city is to be divided into three classes: philosopher–rulers, auxiliaries (soldiers), and workers (money-makers). In the just city, the philosophers will rule on behalf of the other two groups, with the auxiliaries playing a helping role. The philosophers represent reason; the auxiliaries spiritedness; the money-makers appetites. The *justice* in this arrangement consists in each class carrying out the social role for which it is fit (442d–444a). Each class in this society will be ruled, directly or indirectly, by reason. For the philosophers, this happens internally (via the rational part being in charge within their own souls), and for the auxiliaries and money-makers, it happens by being governed by the philosopher–rulers (590d).

In an ideal city perfectly constituted, no social class would have reason to envy any other. The money-making class would not envy the philosophers; after all the philosophers have no money, and do not spend their time enjoying material comforts and other sorts of things that motivate money-makers (581d). Nor would the philosophers envy those who have more material goods than themselves; they would in fact not experience the lack as a deprivation, since their souls would be ordered so as to desire first and foremost the pursuit of knowledge, with other types of pleasures playing a very subordinate role (581e).

So in the well-formed city each class will have an interest in accepting and maintaining the structure of the regime. But they will also be persuaded to support the regime by means of what Socrates terms a "noble lie," namely a founding myth that informs

[3] For detailed deconstruction of Socrates's response to Thrasymachus in Book I and its flaws, see Reeve (1988): 19–22. Socrates, for instance, suggests that justice is a craft (like medicine) that benefits not its practitioner but those it is practiced on; but if this is so, justice cannot also be a virtue, possession of which benefits its holder. This example is particularly pertinent, because it is precisely the proposition that justice is a virtue that inherently benefits the just person that Socrates will defend in the remainder of the book.

[4] For an insightful discussion of this point, see Reeve (1988): 28–33.

citizens that, while all brothers, they each have different kinds of souls (gold, silver, bronze) and that catastrophe will befall the city if these metals are mixed up (414d–415e). Crucially, a city of this kind, even though it involves sharp hierarchy, does not make justice a matter of the "advantage of the stronger." Those who rule do so for the good of the whole, not simply their own benefit, and the social arrangements of the just city are (it is claimed) to everyone's advantage. Indeed, the philosopher–rulers take up the task of ruling out of a sense of civic obligation and in recognition of the rationality of the Kallipolis, not on account of an inherent desire to dominate others.

The parts of the just city correspond to the parts of the just individual person. In a just soul, the reasoning part rules over both the appetites and the spirited part. In a well-ordered soul of this kind, each part of the soul works together for rationally determined ends (442a–444a). In contrast, a soul that is dominated by its appetites or thirst for honor becomes a slave to those desires, which become all encompassing and incapable of being satisfied; and when it is not simply subsumed, the rational part finds itself in constant conflict with those desires, creating disorder and internal distress (444b–444e).

It is on the basis of this view of the just and unjust soul that Socrates can claim that it is better to be just than unjust, regardless of the positive consequences justice may bring. The just person, because he or she has a well-ordered soul that keeps in check (and thereby more adequately satisfies) its desires will be happier than an unjust person who is constantly at war with himself, and, because he has failed to tame or moderate his desires, cannot satisfy them (442d–445b; 546–590).

In Book V, Socrates goes on to specify additional features of the ideal city: procreation and reproduction are to be carefully orchestrated by the state in order to produce the rights kinds of souls in the right proportion, and the resulting children are to be raised collectively (458–465). Socrates thus proposes to abolish the conventional family, and, equally radically, to abolish the gendered division of labor that assigns women to the domestic sphere: women too can be auxiliaries and philosopher–rulers (451d–456). Removing conventional families and instituting collective child-raising reduces the likelihood that guardians will become more attached to their private ends than to the good of the republic.

In Book VI, Socrates extends the discussion of philosophers and their nature. Attention is called to the fact that philosophical natures raised in unjust regimes will not be cultivated in the proper way; instead, those with the potential to become philosophers may become dangerous people, the objects of flattery, swayed easily by majority opinion or the favors of the rich, and arrogant (491d–495b). Given unjust background institutions, those philosophers with integrity will avoid public life and seek simply to do no harm (496b–e). Inferior persons not suited to philosophy will fill the void and call themselves "philosophers," discrediting the practice itself (495d–496b).

Here Socrates has to explain just what it is (true) philosophers can see that the money-making and honor-loving types cannot. The key distinction is between the visible—those things we can empirically see with our own eyes—and the intelligible—those things we can only understand intellectually. This is theoretical knowledge, including ultimately knowledge of "the Forms" of reality. To understand the true Form of beauty, a circle, or the good we must look beyond particular empirical examples to the underlying theoretical idea of each of these things; this is possible only through disciplined philosophical thought. Only philosophers can acquire true knowledge; those who make judgments—often incorrectly—based simply on what is visible have opinions and beliefs, but not knowledge (506c).

The critical importance of education in shaping our capacity to see beyond the visible realm and acquire true knowledge is illustrated in Book VII by the allegory of the cave. Socrates asks us to imagine a cave in which bound prisoners cannot see light directly, but can perceive flickering shadows in front of them cast by unseen movements of objects taking place above them. As a prisoner is freed, he or she sees more—the objects themselves, then the light, then the sun—and consequently has a better understanding of reality than the remaining prisoners (514a–517a). The contrast between the sun and the shadows on the wall correspond, in turn, to the contrast between genuine knowledge of the form of the good and opinions based on sense perception of the visible. The function of education is precisely to "turn" souls towards the good and genuine knowledge.

Socrates goes on to spell out the remaining components of the philosopher kings' training: study of math, geometry, and dialectics; fifteen years, starting at age 35, of practical service in the city in a military or administrative capacity; then finally taking up the life of the philosopher proper, while taking turns in ruling (521d–540). These philosophers will be obligated to rule, and will do so both because they recognize that their own way of life depends on the city being properly governed and because they recognize the city's role in having formed their souls (520b–521a).

Not even the ideal city lasts forever, however. Imperfections in the eugenics program will eventually lead to the development of an excess of honor-loving people (546a–547a). This will gradually unsettle the constitution, until it morphs into a *timocracy*, an honor-loving constitution similar to that of Sparta. Over time this constitution transforms into an oligarchy, or rule by the rich. Eventually, because oligarchy leads to great inequality, there will be a revolution, leading to democracy (547–557).

Democracy is characterized by unrestrained freedom and the free play of all desires, rational and irrational. Democratic souls want to do whatever they feel like, and reject the idea that some things are better than others as objects of desire. The best people in a democracy do not need to rule if they do not want to; consequently those positions are filled by others with less noble motives. These include popular leaders who learn to obtain pleasure from dominating others and being honored as a leader (557–566). This dynamic, combined with the instability generated by class conflict, sets the stage for the emergence of tyranny.

The comparison of the tyrant to the just person takes up Book IX. The tyrant can never satisfy his own desires, must surround himself with bad people, and enjoys no freedom. There is no limit to the depravities a tyrant will engage in to try to satisfy his basest desires. His life is like that of a person ruled by the depraved desires that in normal people only are expressed in dreams. In the end, the tyrant is fearful, friendless, and at war with himself. If this is what complete injustice looks like, clearly the just person is happier than the most unjust (586–588).

3. Implications for leadership and democracy

Plato's ideal city appears unappealing and strange, even perverse and offensive to those raised in mass democratic societies. Simply put, Plato has articulated a social theory premised not on equality but the notion that some people are by nature fit to lead while other people by nature are fit to follow.

Nonetheless, many of the ideas about leadership explicitly or implicitly advanced in *The Republic* retain an intuitive resonance. Adherents of democracy should find it troubling that these intuitively plausible ideas about leadership are, in Plato's reckoning, intrinsically connected to his critique of democracy, both as a political constitution and as a cultural ideal (Santas, 2007; Wren, 2007). Before turning more specifically to examine Plato's views of who should lead and who should follow (and why), we need to examine the difficulties Plato identifies in democratic (and other modes) of organizing leadership. We begin not with Plato's criticism of democracy as a political order, but his more fundamental criticism of democracy as a cultural ideal and a way of life.

3.1. The democratic soul and its problems

Plato calls democrats freedom-lovers. It is in democracies that we see every kind of human personality—democracies are a "bazaar" of souls on display. The masses follow their desires wherever they lead them, giving them full control and restraining none of them. Attempts to restrain freedom, to rein in the "anarchy" of democracy are fiercely resisted; democratic freedom is jealousy protected.

It is instructive and important to observe that Plato describes democrats first and foremost as *consumers*, and not, as most normative theorists of democracy would have it, as citizens or participants in political affairs. Plato's matter-of-fact description corresponds exactly to the complaint of contemporary civic republican critics of contemporary American democracy such as Michael Sandel and Benjamin Barber: we are nation unified not by our civic deliberations with one another but by our shared habits of going to the mall (or clicking and purchasing online). We may not share much else—not even tastes for consuming the same sorts of things—but we do have a shared conviction that consuming, having, and getting is our shared purpose in life, and that society goes best when we each have the fullest range of items and experiences to choose from (Sandel, 1996; Barber, 2007).

It is not hard to establish a resemblance between Plato's description of democracy and contemporary American culture. In teaching Book VIII, I ask students how many of them desire to make a lot of money, have a nice car, enjoy sex, consume alcohol, go on nice vacations, watch whatever films and listen to whatever music they want, try novel experiences, and in general do whatever they want to the fullest degree possible over the course of their adult lives. Invariably, almost all hands in the class go up. Barber is the most recent social critic to scrutinize this world view in his book *Consumed*; he describes the transition from Protestant ethic versions of capitalism emphasizing the importance of self-restraint to what he terms the "infantilist ethos" of contemporary society organized around unlimited individual choice (Barber, 2007).

In such a culture, excessive choice quickly leads to unreflective choice. To discriminate between different ways of living, different sorts of ends, is an affront to the pure democrat and a threat to democratic equality. Everything is put on display, with individuals left to choose for themselves what they want and what they want to become. The young become easily seduced, on this account, by the "multifarious pleasures" available to them, and will allow these to orient their desires. Even the Benjamin Franklin-esque oligarchic virtues of thrift and patient capital accumulation will escape the democrat. Plato thus describes the transition from the oligarchic to the democratic soul through the image of a young man exchanging "an upbringing among necessary appetites for the freeing and release of useless and unnecessary pleasures." (561a).

Many modern readers may wonder exactly what the problem is here. Isn't the American economy the greatest machine ever devised for satisfying people's preferences? The answer lies in Plato's rejection of the idea that true happiness consists in enjoyment of as many "appetitive" pleasures as possible; instead, happiness consists in having a well-ordered soul governed by reason.[5] Plato thinks that democracies, by celebrating all pleasures indiscriminately, makes the satisfaction of desire the definition of the good life. But to view the satisfaction of desires, whatever they are, as the highest good is profoundly mistaken, according to Plato; the democratic conception of the good is in fact a recipe for producing disturbed, unhappy people. On Plato's view, people with well-ordered souls are not led to and fro by their passing appetites in this direction and that; nor are they prone to irrational actions indulging their prideful desires for honor and glory. Rather, they are guided by their rational, calculating part, which moderates and steers the passing desires in a healthy direction, using the spirited part of the soul as an ally.

Plato is, however, a realist about the possibilities of reining in appetites. The Kallipolis makes a large concession to the money-making mentality: he assumes most people will be governed (internally) by their appetites, though he appears to believe that the well-crafted polis would tame the excesses of materialism and manage to at least steer money-lovers towards the satisfaction of necessary rather than unnecessary desires (421d–422a; Reeve, 1988). Indeed, Plato might not be so troubled about modern forms

[5] For a useful discussion focusing on just this point see Solomon (1990): 63–101. Note here that Plato's argument is distinct from a work ethic critique of consumerism that urges greater self-discipline and harder work at money-making; this is what Plato would term the oligarchic critique of democracy. Plato does not think this argument is wrong in itself—it is better to be a slave to necessary desires than to unnecessary desires—but stresses that oligarchic souls also are unhappy: oligarchs must "forcibly [hold] in check the other bad appetites within; not persuading them that they had better not, not taming him with arguments, but using compulsion and fear…" Such a person is not "free from internal faction, and would not be a single person but somehow a twofold one, although his better appetites would generally master his worse appetites." (554c–554d). Notably, Socrates adds that such disciplined money-makers are "more respectable than many other people" and "the sort the majority admire" (554e, 554b).

of "democracy" in which most citizens lived lives organized around appetite satisfaction, so long as those same persons had only a very limited role (or no role at all) in ruling. Leaders, however, need to be cut from a different cloth, and it is a large problem if the leadership class also equates happiness and the common good with the unlimited satisfaction of all desires, no matter what they are.

3.2. Who should lead? The character of leaders and citizens

Plato argues that persons whose souls are not well-ordered, in the sense of being governed by reason, must not be leaders. An individual who cannot even rationally guide herself and steer her own actions in a healthy direction should not be given authority and power over others. Unhealthy persons given such power are likely to use it for quasi-tyrannical purposes, to benefit their own appetitive desires or need for honor. It would be better for persons like that to be under the rule of others who do in fact have rational control of themselves. Indeed, such persons should not only not be rulers; they also should not be *citizens*, in the sense of having a share of political power.

Stated in such stark teams, Plato's train of thought may seem unappealing, but it is wrapped up with three familiar and relatively congenial ideas. The first is the general notion that the best educated people, who are able to distinguish knowledge and truth from mere opinion and belief, should have the principal leadership positions and principal positions of responsibility. The idea is there should be a fit between people's capabilities and the tasks they are asked to perform. This general view is still very widespread among people who count themselves as democrats, even radical democrats.[6] The second is the notion that leaders should have a broader moral horizon than followers; leaders are to look beyond immediate desires and concerns and see a larger picture, and to take action on behalf of a broader, public good (Burns, 1978).

We will return to more detailed consideration of both those ideas shortly, after examining at some length the third Platonic claim about leadership: that the character of leaders makes a large difference in whether they are able to rule effectively on behalf of the community. Plato's philosopher kings are not motivated by pleasure, money, honor, or power. Because they are not attracted to power for its own sake, and have rational control over their own desires, philosopher–rulers will avoid abuses of power and prevent personal desires from upsetting their public responsibilities.

To rule the just city, leaders must have the right kind of knowledge; but contrary to modern assumptions Plato contends, as Reeves puts it, that "capacity to acquire knowledge" is not "independent of moral character" (Reeve, 1988: 115). In particular, Plato is concerned with how "desire-induced fantasy" distorts the vision and knowledge of persons without well-ordered souls. By taming their desires through education, philosophers learn to see the world more clearly and accurately: in particular, they learn both what happiness (for the individual and the *polis*) really is, and how to obtain it in practice (by constructing the Kallipolis). On Plato's view, knowledge of "the good" implies the ability to realize to the fullest degree possible the good life (which for the philosophers involves satisfying the "ruling desire for the pleasure of knowing the truth.") (Reeve, 1988: 99) Consequently, in contrast to "spectators" who seek "an accurate representation of the way things really are" while themselves remaining detached, Plato's metaphysics and epistemology are "for agents, who, because their principal aim is to change the world in order to realize the good, are involved in ethics and politics from the beginning" (Reeve, 1988, 117).[7]

Plato's metaphysics and epistemology may be difficult to comprehend, but the practical upshot of this view (as interpreted by Reeve) is fairly clear: what we see, perceive, and believe depends critically on who we are—that is, what sort of character we possess.[8] Leaders whose view of the world is distorted by appetitive and honor-seeking desire will also lack adequate knowledge of reality; they will see what their desires induce them to see, not reality itself. Such leaders simply cannot govern well.

We might illustrate this point with a contemporary example. There can be little doubt that Bill Clinton was an extraordinarily gifted public leader in many respects, possessing a sharp and voracious intellect and a remarkably wide knowledge base. Those gifts, coupled with his equally impressive communicative skills, earned him an enormous public trust, as well as a responsibility to those who put him in office. Yet at the height of his power, he abused it for the sake of purely private ends, ends his rational self should have known to be incomparably trivial relative to his political goals (Williamson, 1999). As a result, his presidency was tarnished, and his party lost control of the White House even after eight years of peace and prosperity, an event that has taken on world-historical significance as the last decade has unfolded. Plato's diagnosis suggests that not lack of intellect but lack of a proper ordering in the soul between reason and desire led to Clinton's undoing.

The Clinton example is apropos here, precisely because it fits poorly into standard accounts of ethical failure by leaders: the root of Clinton's problems lay not in a desire to abuse his position of power in a straightforward way (he likely did not enter the White House with the conscious aim of using the position to enhance his opportunities for bodily pleasure), or in a failure to recognize the moral obligations of Americans and their leaders to other peoples, or some other type of cognitive failure (Price, 2006). Instead, it can be more plausibly described as being the product of a disordering in Clinton's own soul, consisting precisely of an inability to

[6] John Rawls, for instance, takes for granted that a just social organization will have "positions" and "offices," and argues that there should be substantive equality of opportunity to attain such positions. See Rawls (1971).

[7] On Reeve's account, the theory of the forms developed in *The Republic* portrays the forms as "paradigms" for goods or states of affairs that might actually be realized in practice; the Kallipolis is thus a form for a just city that might in fact exist. Because these "forms are real possibilities, which can be instantiated by particular things," it follows that the philosophers are not simply "theoreticians," but "master craftsmen who know how to use their knowledge [of the good] to make, or commission others to make, a better world. They not only understand the world; they change it." Reeve (1988): 110, 84.

[8] In this vein, Reeve describes Plato as a "character utilitarian." Reeve (1988): 269.

constrain his own desires. Those desires, in turn, distorted his view of reality in ways that ultimately damaged both others and himself.

Yet Plato's diagnosis cuts far deeper than discussion of the shortcomings of any particular individual. Plato would argue that Clinton's failure was predictable, not an aberration, and in fact a variant of the sort of leadership failure we should expect in societies that place all pleasures on display for their youth while failing to provide the kind of education needed to mold souls fit to govern themselves and others. Bill Clintons do not emerge in a vacuum; Plato tells us that the character of the constitution—the nature of the political regime—shapes character and people's sense of what is valuable in life in ubiquitous ways. Clinton is in this sense a peculiarly American leader—a predictable byproduct of a culture that celebrates physical pleasures, material consumption, and the acquisition of status as the constituent parts of the successful human life. (Nor, as the case of Elliot Spitzer in New York more recently shows, is Clinton's case unique).

But implicit in *The Republic* is the notion that it is possible to use reason to shape the constitution itself with the aim of altering the kinds of persons it produces. Education is the central vehicle by which this character-forming process must take place. The education offered to the philosophers is designed to nurture their souls in a rational direction; to provide a series of stringent tests that weed out those not suited to serving the common good; and to inculcate an undiluted devotion to that common good. Accomplishing these goals requires close attention to the details of what stories the young are told, what sorts of rhythms they are exposed to musically, and much else besides.

The plainly illiberal features of Plato's proposed education are self-evident; and yet, few would want to commit to the idea that the content of our public popular culture and the cultural messages children are exposed to simply do not matter for how those children turn out (Nehamas, 1999; Rosen, 2005). In modern democratic societies, we do not aim to produce philosopher kings, but we do aspire to produce responsible citizens capable of adhering to law, making an effort to meet their own needs, and exercising good judgment about both private and public affairs. Accomplishing that goal requires attention to education, including (just as Plato thought) not just formal schooling but the totality of what we teach, tell, and show our children during their formative years.

In modern societies, responsibility for this culture filtering process is traditionally assigned to parents, with support from additional social contexts that provide "healthy" messages to the young (i.e. churches, perhaps schools). Given the widely acknowledged weakening of those institutions (family, churches) in recent decades and the orchestrated bombardment of children with consumerist cultural messages, there is legitimate reason to doubt that this traditional response is sufficient. Allowing the cultural messages aimed at children to be crafted and disseminated by corporate entities who view children as potential cash cows to be harvested and nurtured as lifelong loyal consumers has the predictable effect of inflaming rather than taming appetites for pleasures (Schor, 2004). In short, even achieving the comparatively modest goal of educating citizens and leaders in a liberal democratic society will be difficult so long as our political–economic regime promotes an unqualified consumerist ethos.

3.3. The selection of leaders

That difficulty, in turn, is related to the problem of how to make leadership positions in public life sufficiently attractive so that talented persons will want to devote their life to them. This is a double-edged sword for Plato: *The Republic* urges us to be enormously suspicious of those who seek to exercise political power within non-ideal, actually existing societies, but also posits the seemingly sensible notion that a well-ordered society must have talented, public-spirited leaders. To the extent this is not true, suspicion of those who pursue political power in existing societies is warranted.

Relatively few young, talented Americans today grow up aspiring to a committed life of public service. Politicians are seen as self-interested, and alternatively incompetent or corrupt; "bureaucrats" are self-important bumblers who waste the public dime. Predominant youthful aspirations are to acquire money or glory through private endeavors (i.e. joining the corporate elite, if one can), or simply to have a family of one's own (Saez & Barrera, 2007). Even those young people who do harbor social idealism of some variety increasingly look to vehicles other than politics (such as service or religious organizations) to carry out those commitments (Zukin, Keeter, Andolina, Jenkins, & Carpini, 2006). Research by the Higher Education Research Institute at UCLA indicates that both interest in and actual participation in civic engagement *declines* over the college years: recent college graduates are less likely to be engaged than first-year college students. For instance, in the fall of 1994, 34.8% of entering students had the goal of becoming a community leader, but at graduation in 1998 only 31.7% still had that goal, and by 2004, only 15% of the class of 1998 held fast to that aspiration (Vogelgesand & Astin, 2005).

There are, of course, many exceptions to this sort of generalization, but it seems fair to conclude that the American educational system, taken as a whole, neither functions nor aims to steer the most talented potential leaders into public service roles. This, in turn, reflects a broader cultural presumption that the good life is to be defined primarily, if not exclusively, by pursuit of private aims, with the work of politics left to those who happen to have a taste for that sort of thing. We cannot, then, be very surprised if political leadership roles are frequently filled by mediocre leaders, political hacks, and shameless self-promoters (Elkin, 2006).

Consider again Plato's warning that if the most talented souls are not trained in the proper way, or given an appropriate place in society, numerous dangerous results await: would-be philosophers whose souls are ill-formed become capable of enormous wickedness, and tend to become arrogant and corrupted by public opinion. Plato predicts, in effect, that the most talented people will simply be drafted into the service of existing elites, accepting the brass ring but failing to develop their philosophical natures. At best, such people, by nature capable of being the best sort of person, use their talents to uphold the status quo and serve the already powerful; at worst, they become capable of monstrous, disruptive injustices.

Now consider the life of a talented and privileged person who has excelled in high school, attended a top college and excelled there, landed a job at a prestigious law or business firm, and risen smoothly to the top rank of society, with access to the privilege

and wealth this entails. It would be hard if not impossible for such a person not to acquire a sense of entitlement and inherent belief in one's own superiority relative to the mass of people, and not to become overconfident in one's self and one's judgment (Price, 2009). But this is precisely the social strata from which America tends to recruit its top business and political leaders. It should be little wonder that such leaders often have difficulty seeing beyond their particular social location and grasping a broader public good, let alone helping lead the rest of society towards realizing it. In the *Laws*, Plato's Athenian Visitor offers a striking warning about the hubris of the privileged: "He who bursts with pride, elated by wealth or honors or by physical beauty when young and foolish, whose soul is afire with the arrogant belief that so far from needing someone to control and lead him, he can play the leader to others—there's a man whom God has deserted...Many people think he cuts a fine figure, but before very long he pays to Justice no trifling penalty and brings himself, his home and state to rack and ruin" (Plato, 1997:Laws IV, 716b).

3.4. The ends of leadership

This leads us to directly consider just what Plato means by leadership, defined here as exercising the power to shape society as a whole. The general argument is that truly moral and just leadership must benefit not only the leaders, but also those who are led. Leadership failing to meet this test falls prey to Thrasymachus's critical observations about power-holders ruling (and constructing ideologies) in their own interest, at the expense of everyone else.

Consider the sacrifices that are demanded of the philosopher kings. They cannot spend all their time doing that which they most love (contemplating and pursuing knowledge) since they are obligated to spend some time ruling. While Plato does suggest why rational philosopher kings might agree to help govern this sort of society (in order to create the kind of community where philosophers might not be driven to alienation or worse), he also leans on the possibility of establishing a sense of duty motivationally strong enough to prevent the philosophers from shirking their leadership responsibilities.

This brings us back to the crucial point: the aim of leadership is the good of the whole, not the good of the leaders. What makes the Kallipolis not an unjust inequality machine of the sort Thrasymachus critiques is precisely that (given Plato's view of the diversity and inherent inequities of human nature) it allows each class within the city to flourish to its fullest possible degree. In this sense, the Kallipolis meets John Rawls's standard of justified inequality: it is inequality that benefits the least well off.[9] Ordinary workers are better off living in a well-ordered regime under wise rule than in any kind of city, including democracy, Plato contends. (Rawls's own theory, of course, avoids such a conclusion by positing a system of equal basic liberties, foremost of which is equal political liberty, as his first principle of justice; any economic inequalities are to take shape against a background equality of political liberties, of the very sort that Plato rejects.)

Indeed, despite its endorsement of the idea of natural inequality and plainly paternalistic social arrangements, *The Republic* does show a certain respect (albeit limited) for non-leaders. Plato does say that money-lovers and honor-lovers have inferior souls in the sense of not being able to fully govern themselves in the correct way. But if properly guided by a correct constitution (i.e. the laws and government administered by the guardians) they are capable of leading lives that conform to their nature, moderate their desires to the point that they can be satisfied, and thus realize a form of virtue (389d–e). And, they exercise keen intelligence in the pursuit of their particular tasks; the money-maker is clever with respect to making money, the soldier is clever and savvy with respect to fighting battles; the craftsmen and carpenter wise with respect to their specific trades. As the businessmen Cephalus and Polemarchus point out at the beginning of the dialogue, even money-making has its own internal morality (i.e. fulfilling contracts and paying debts) that its (honest) practitioners invest considerable time and effort in upholding.[10]

This is not a theory in which the most talented are justified in lording it over or dominating the less talented. Rather, the emphasis is on the *unity* of the city; Plato repeatedly derides cities marked by class divisions as being not one city but many. Likewise, in the just city, ordinary people call philosophers and guardians not "masters" or "rulers" but rather "preservers" and "auxiliaries," whereas workers themselves are referred to as "paymasters" and "providers," not, as in other cities, as "slaves" (463a–b). In fact, philosopher–rulers will have fewer material possessions than the masses, and any who show an inclination to prefer themselves or to seek concrete benefits for themselves will be weeded out. Surprisingly, Plato is offering not only an explicitly hierarchical, non-democratic concept of justice, but also an explicit model of leadership as service to the community.[11]

[9] Rawls (1971). The Kallipolis might be thought of as corresponding to what Rawls terms "aristocracy," a social system in which substantive equality of opportunity is absent but rule is claimed to be in the interest of the least well off; see Rawls (1971) 57 and 64–65, esp. 64 n12.. Note also that the relationship between the classes in Kallipolis is intended to model another Rawlsian virtue, reciprocity: the philosophers recognize that their own lives and happiness are dependent on the sustenance and safety the workers and auxiliaries provide them, just as the auxiliaries and workers recognize that they benefit from the philosophers' rule. For a telling passage on this point, see 462d–463e; for further discussion see also Reeve (1988): 204–208 and Schofield (2006): 212–227. For further points of comparison between Rawls and Plato, see Santas (2007).

[10] For a more pessimistic account of the class structure of *The Republic*, see Bobonich (2002): 42–81. Bobonich stresses that on the account of *The Republic*, non-philosophers cannot achieve genuine virtue happiness, though it is possible that they might achieve an approximation of such virtue and contribute cooperatively to the good of the city as a whole. Bobonich argues, however, that *The Republic*'s account of cooperation between different classes is internally flawed; among other problems, he argues that the non-philosophers will be less likely to accept rule by philosophers than *The Republic* suggests if they do not recognize the worth of philosophy or understand why certain pleasures are denied to them by the city's laws. Bobonich's study goes on to argue that the later Plato becomes more optimistic about the possibility of non-philosophers acquiring a greater measure of virtue and a capacity to share in deliberation. Bobonich then describes how Plato's revised ethical views translate into a revised political theory in the *Laws*, which he takes to be a significantly more plausible account of how philosophers and non-philosophers might together form a cooperative community.

[11] It is not, however, a theory of self-sacrificial, altruistic service; the philosophers themselves derive benefits from ruling the just polis.

The flip side of this is that Plato does have a sharp critique of the masses—that is, the dominant way of life in any actually existing city. The masses are governed by folklore, superstitions, and mere opinion; they are not interested in prodding beneath the surface to find the truth of things; they are oriented towards pursuing satisfaction of lower, vulgar appetites; if allowed to do so unchecked many will self-destruct or lead unhappy lives of being slave to their baser appetites; and, precisely because they have no sense of the pleasure of knowledge, they will wrongly scorn the philosophical life and proclaim that their way of life is the best and that their appetites and desires are the only ones that are real. From the standpoint of philosophers, the lives of the merchant and working class are not worth living (although Plato recognizes that the merchants and workers themselves see things differently; they don't want or demand from life what philosophers want).

This is the perennial complaint of the intellectual regarding the conditions of the masses. For some conservative intellectuals, a critique of this sort provides a justification for elite rule (Kirk, 1953). For some liberal intellectuals with roots in the educated class, like John Stuart Mill, a critique of this sort underlies both proposals to configure the constitution in ways so the most talented have the most influence on policy, even within a "democratic constitution," as well as support for programs intended to morally improve and enhance the skills of workers; for radicals like Marx, a critique of the degraded sort of life the masses have to lead and the lack of freedom workers have to develop their own talents is fundamental to the overall critique of capitalism and other systems of exploitation.[12] Unlike Plato, Mill and Marx do not hold that certain classes of people by nature have inferior souls; but they recognize that in actually existing social reality, there are large inequalities of education and consequently (it is claimed) character, judgment, and culture. From here an interesting debate, not yet resolved and perhaps not resolvable, unfolds between Marx and Mill: Marx would surely reject justifications of inequality rooted in Platonic notions about the "best" people with the most refined minds needing to rule as sheer ideology; Mill does not appear to be so sure, and advocates a reformist program that aims at moral improvement of workers under the *de facto* guidance of legislation written disproportionately by the most enlightened citizens. Many programs of social reform implicitly side, one way or another, with Mill rather than Marx on this point. In short, Plato's legacy is very much with us, even within the parameters of mainstream liberal democratic thought.

3.5. The difficulty with democratic regimes

Plato's ideal city, despite its seeming implausibility and utter strangeness, articulates an attractive normative conception of what good leadership is: good leadership is that which advances the group as a whole and the interests of all within it. That basic standard closely matches the recent benchmark for evaluating leaders offered by Hogan and Kaiser in their recent review of the business management literature on leadership (Hogan & Kaiser, 2005), and the basic standard can help us think about things such as what it means to be a good teacher, a good coach, a good dean, a good nonprofit leader, and so on.

But Plato also, by cataloguing the defects of existing political regimes and stating frankly just how difficult it will be to bring Kallipolis into being, helps us see just how difficult both the ideal city and the ideal form of leadership are to attain in practice. We have already discussed one difficulty: the deleterious impact of the indiscriminate pursuit of desires (especially in the form of modern consumerism) on the formation of healthy souls capable of self-government. Now consider another fundamental, near-universal defect of existing political regimes: that of private interests or factions coming to dominate public life, assuring that the exercise of public power is corruptly steered towards the particular purposes of individuals or particular classes (factions) within the community.

Complaints about the ubiquitous role of wealth and corporate influence in contemporary American politics speak to this defect, as do Marxist critiques of the "structural constraints" (i.e. pro-business bias) of the capitalist state, commonplace criticisms of interest group politics, and James Madison's worries about the problem of faction in constructing the American regime.[13] In *The Republic*, it is in the account of oligarchy that we find factional conflict in its most extreme form: "A city of this sort is not one, but inevitably two—a city of the poor and one of the rich, living in the same place and always plotting against one another." (551d) That oligarchies are marked by class conflict seems straightforward enough, but so too, according to Plato, are democracies: Plato predicts that the most politically active force in democracies will be "drones"—"idle and extravagant men"—who will attempt to use the political process to direct resources to themselves. While the working class majority does "get a share of the honey" in democracies, it is a share that "allows the leaders, in taking the wealth of the rich and distributing it to the people, to keep the greatest share for themselves (565a)."[14]

Plato's solution to this problem was radical: to eliminate property holdings among the auxiliaries and philosophers and forbid them from developing non-material private attachments that might distract and corrupt them. Most contemporary readers would

[12] Compare Mill (1868)'s proposals for giving the educated classes disproportionate political influence in Considerations on Representative Government with Marx and Engels's demand for "equal liability of all to labour" in the Communist Manifesto (1848), as well as Mill (1879)'s relatively sympathetic view of "petty bourgeoisie socialism" (see his On Socialism [1879]) compared to Marx's hostility towards such ideas.

[13] See, respectively, Wolin (2004) for a critique of excess corporate power; Przeworski (1985) on the structural constraints facing social democratic politics within capitalist states; Lowi (1979) on interest group politics; and Elkin (2006) on both Madison's views of faction and broader issues of institutional design within democratic commercial societies.

[14] An interesting contemporary example that seems to fit Plato's prediction in this passage is the regime of democratically elected Thaksin Shinawatra in Thailand from 2001–2006. Thaksin won popularity through populist schemes benefiting the rural poor, but also used state power to benefit his own vast business empire. Thaksin was eventually deposed in a coup in September 2006, months after his family profited from the tax-free sale of Thailand's leading telecommunications firm to the Singapore government. See Phongpaichit, and Baker (2005), as well as McCargo and Pathmanand (2005).

today conclude that this solution is worse than the disease it aims to fix: the Kallipolis ends the tension between public and private aims simply by abolishing the private lives of guardians, conventionally understood. Modern readers, in contrast, even those who identify as republicans in some sense, assume that a central aim of politics must be to provide a secure context for private life. If we accept that assumption, then we cannot do away with the tension between private and public interest, a truth that Plato helps us see both by his description of the problem and by showing the extreme (and extremely unlikely) measures it would require to realize perfect justice.[15] Rather than hope to abolish the endemic conflict between private interests and the public good, we must see it as a problem to be managed, limited, and contained.[16] This is the tack Plato himself takes in his detailed description of the second-best regime in the *Laws*, where both private property and the nuclear family re-enter the picture, albeit in a highly regulated way (Schofield, 2006: 234).

4. Democracy and leadership: A summation

It may be helpful to restate briefly the problems with democracy Plato identifies, in analytic terms. First, democratic culture excessively celebrates freedom as an end in itself, while disdaining the idea that some ways of life are better than others, with the consequence that much of the population leads lives devoted to pursuing unnecessary pleasures and the material goods that make their satisfaction possible. Second, the emphasis on the satisfaction of desires in all directions characteristic of democracies affects the kinds of characters that democratic societies produce, including the characters of leaders, predictably producing people who have difficulty rationally mastering their desires. Third, democratic societies are unlikely to be governed by the most qualified rulers, both because the people may not choose well and because the most qualified may refuse to serve. Fourth, because the best suited people are unlikely to be selected or to serve, actual democratic leaders are insufficiently motivated by concern for the good of the whole (as opposed to advancing the interests of themselves or their particular constituents). Fifth, conflicts between private and public interests in democratic societies are likely to be endemic, turning democratic politics into a clash of self-interested factions in which those with the most political influence get their way (and call it "justice").

Those criticisms, to the extent they are accurate, suggest that we cannot expect democracies ordinarily to be governed effectively and wisely. Put another way, effective leadership that uses genuine knowledge about the world to advance the interests and well-being of the entire community will be relatively rare if a) claims to superior knowledge and insight are routinely dismissed by the populace; b) potentially talented leaders have no interest in or see no possibility in advancing the common good through the system and hence disengage; c) leaders succumb to the temptation to act in self-interested ways, or more likely, never develop a capacity for seeking the good of the whole as opposed to this or that group or constituency; d) leaders who challenge existing ways of life or other aspects of the status quo are generally punished for doing so; and e) leaders wishing to maintain viability "within the system" cannot get too far ahead of the citizens, meaning they must sacrifice independence of judgment in order to conform with the wishes of the masses, whatever they are.

It might be justly observed that this is a one-sided brief against democracy; yet the problems Plato points to are not unfamiliar to contemporary democrats. Indeed, to understand that democratic regimes of all stripes have persistent problems that must be addressed and managed by both institutional (constitutional) arrangements and cultural norms is to take the first step in engaging with the work of modern political science (Elkin, 2006). Plato's criticisms of democracy serve as a potent reminder of the perennial problems that any democratic society and democratic conception of leadership must grapple with, thereby contributing a welcome sense of realism about democracy, its advantages, and its disadvantages.

Yet his critique, as I have suggested, also provides resources for a reconstruction of democratic theory and practice. Plato shares many of the ends to which contemporary democratic theorists aspire: the insistence on the unity of the community (as opposed to a social order marked by competing classes striving for domination); the notion that the aim of leadership is to serve the good of the whole; the notion that the state should be informed by knowledge, not ignorance; and the notion that individual leaders within any polity must themselves be properly motivated (at least not corrupt). The challenge for democratic theorists then is to provide an account of democracy which might realize those ends better than does Plato's proposed regime. While that is hardly an easy task, particularly for democratic theorists who favor more widespread popular participation in politics and believe (contra Plato) that ordinary people are capable of engaging in rational deliberation about the public good, it does constitute a worthwhile research program for 21st century theorists of democracy and democratic leadership.[17]

Plato offers an important clue to how that investigation might proceed by suggesting that the deepest problems of democracy stem from its characteristic valorization of desire satisfaction as the measure of the good, whether such a conception is endorsed explicitly, as in utilitarianism, or tacitly, as in versions of liberalism that seek to remain "neutral" towards concepts of the good. Notably, the conception of freedom as unconstrained desire satisfaction has come under increasing critical scrutiny from theorists concerned with promoting deliberative civic virtues (Dagger, 1997; Talisse, 2005) as well as from green political theorists concerned with promoting a way of life consistent with ecological sustainability (Cannavo, 2007).

[15] Here I echo Strauss's conclusions in *The City and Man*, with the caveat that it is because of *our* commitments to conventional private life (not Plato's own theory) that perfect Platonic justice is unattainable.

[16] This is not to say that there is no scope for reforms intended to reduce the scale of conflicts between private interests and the public, in fact, Plato helps us see why such reforms should be welcomed, even if we are not willing to take the more radical steps he proposes.

[17] For especially notable contributions to such a program that speak directly to the issues raised in this paper, see Elkin (2006) and Estlund (2007); see also Santas (2007).

Taking Plato seriously also has substantial implications for future work in the study of leadership. First, and most obviously, Plato puts onto the table in a compelling way the question of moral character and self-control: what we know, and consequently how we act and lead, is shaped by who we are and whether our souls are well-formed and properly governed. It follows that attention to moral character should play a more central role in both the evaluation and education of leaders. Second, Plato argues that the decisive form of knowledge for leaders is knowledge of the good and the good life; moral knowledge, not knowledge of management technique.[18] If this is correct, than the study of philosophy, literature, and the humanities as a whole must play a primary, not peripheral role, in the education of leaders. Third, Plato argues that we cannot expect either moral character or knowledge of the good to spring up on their own with any regularity in the absence of a supportive set of social and educational institutions aimed at producing such persons. On this view, the question of how to nurture good leaders is inextricably linked to questions about the nature of the good life and the good society; consequently, the critical study of leadership must be linked with the critical examination of our most fundamental social institutions and cultural practices.

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[18] The focus of this article has been on the social theory of *The Republic,* the constitution of the ideal city it proposes, the criteria for selecting and judging rulers it advances, and the critique of other types of constitutions (especially democracies) it mounts. As noted at the outset, *The Republic* says surprisingly little about the activity of leadership itself; although Plato provides a rich, detailed account of the long education of philosopher rulers, as well as a detailed (if at times obscure) account of the aims of philosophy itself, he gives few concrete examples of how the philosophers would exercise rule over the Kallipolis, instead simply informing us that their task is to first, found the city, and second, "[guard] the city's laws and practices" (484c).

Indeed, it is misleading to speak of "political leadership" within Kallipolis in the conventional sense, for politics, understood as an organized contest for power, will be absent within the ideal city. On the account of The Republic, what qualifies philosophers to rule the ideal city is not mastery of management skills or of political science, but their transcendent moral character, a character that has been shaped by knowledge of the good itself. This does not mean that practical skills will be lacking; recall that philosophers must serve for fifteen years in "matters of war and the other offices suitable for young people, so that they won't be inferior to others in experience" (540a). But it is philosophers' superior moral character that is decisive. This character, along with the practical knowledge acquired over the course of their education, will allow philosophers to become "painters of constitutions," informed by knowledge of what is good and beautiful in nature and motivated by a desire to craft human beings that might be called "divine" and "godly" (501a–501c). As Schofield puts it, "It is because the moral order of eternal reality has shaped the philosophers' own characters that they are equipped for statesmanship: it is their goodness as much as their wisdom that counts" (Schofield, 2006: 162).

But what of non-ideal regimes, where quasi-divine philosopher rulers are not on hand? Plato does give an account of the practical activity of ruling in actual, not ideal, states in his dialogue *The Statesman* (written subsequent to *The Republic*). After a long, exaggeratedly painstaking inquiry into what distinguishes the practice of statesmanship (or ruling), the Eleatic Visitor (the primary speaker in the dialogue) describes statesmanship as a form of expertise involving care of the whole community together." (Plato, 1997, *The Statesman*, 276c). Statesmanship is to be distinguished from the practical arts of lawyering, generalship, and other tasks in which the state is involved: the statesman is not the one who carries out these activities, but who *directs* those activities, exercising good *judgment* about the proper timing of these various activities. (The most prominent example mentioned in the dialogue is that of making judgments about when to go to war.) As Schofield has noted, the discussion of judgment in the *Statesman* prefigures Aristotle's familiar conception of virtue as ability to do the right thing, for the right reason, in the right way, at the right time (Schofield, 2006: 171).[18]

But statesmanship involves more than just wise judgment with respect to directing the activities of the state; it also involves what the Visitor terms "weaving" together social cohesion, given the fact of diverse human natures. Specifically, it is posited that there are two kinds of virtuous people (bad people, on this account, are to be shut out or enslaved), some characterized by courage, some by moderation. Individuals possessing one of these two character types are attracted to similar persons, and repulsed by their opposites. This is problematic, because if the two character types are not forced to interact with one another, each will decay into an exaggerated version of itself and begin to produce not the virtues of moderation and courage but the corresponding vices of inaction and rashness. The job of the statesman is not to favor one type or another, but to achieve a proper balance between the two character types as well establish friendship and community between the groups; leadership thus involves "the weaving together, with regular intertwining, of the dispositions of brave and moderate people" (Plato, *The Statesman*, 311c).

The account of leadership provided in *The Statesman* certainly reflects conventional understandings of leadership as involving a form of management undertaken by individual rulers to a far greater degree than does *The Republic*. Yet, as Schofield persuasively argues, from the viewpoint of *The Republic*, the concentration on leadership as technique offered in *The Statesman*, though brilliant on its own terms, falls short in several crucial respects. First, there is no account offered of where the learned statesman comes from or how his (or her) soul is formed; we are simply to assume the existence of the very quality (disinterested wisdom) that *The Republic* teaches can only be gained by an arduous, carefully constructed educational program located within a regime of a particular kind. Second, followers in *The Statesman* are portrayed essentially as subjects, who can be commanded willingly or unwillingly; missing is the sense of partnership between leaders and followers and the emphasis on the unity of the city stressed in *The Republic*. Third, the statesman is not portrayed as involved in philosophy in any substantial sense; this is problematic because it implies a departure from the crucial argument from *The Republic* that the best rulers are those who rule reluctantly (i.e. who would rather be doing philosophy) (Schofield, 2006: 164–185).

In short, *The Statesman* reduces leadership in two senses: by envisioning it as a form of strategic management, and by analyzing in terms of the characteristics possessed by an individual or select set of individuals. While both of these reductions fit nicely conventional expectations in the field of leadership studies as well as much everyday discourse about "leadership," from the standpoint of *The Republic*, such a narrow understanding of leadership represents, as Schofield puts is, an "impoverishment." For on the agenda of *The Republic*, we cannot address the question of who should lead and why, or how good leaders can be formed, without addressing the nature of the social structure itself: we must see the city whole before we can understand the place of leadership. Likewise, we cannot divorce discussion of the techniques of leadership from attention to the ends which leadership is to pursue. On this reading, it is not an omission but a virtue of *The Republic* that it pays so little explicit attention to the nuts and bolts of leadership as a craft or science, precisely because the capacity to exercise practical wisdom on behalf of a common good is derivative of the nature of leaders' souls and the way of life they lead, and in turn the educational system and larger social structure which shape those souls. For these reasons, Schofield concludes that *The Statesman* should be treated as an experimental thinkpiece designed to flesh out the possibility of a science of political management, an experiment that leads to a dead end.

None of this to say that the leadership-as-weaving metaphor advanced in *The Statesman* is without merit or potential use for contemporary would-be statesmen. Rather, the point is that it is folly to hope to be saved by the superior wisdom of some individual statesman within the context of a political and social order that itself rejects claims of wisdom and celebrates the pursuit of appetitive pleasures.

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