THE PHILOSOPHER AND THE FEMALE IN THE POLITICAL THOUGHT OF PLATO

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AT THE BEGINNING of the fifth book of Plato's *Republic* Socrates offers his radical proposals for the inclusion of women in the guardian class of his just city. The women are to train and exercise with the men as they prepare to become warriors to protect the city. They are to eat and live communally with the men, and when the philosopher-rulers are introduced women are allowed to enter their exalted rank. Though some have accepted the sincerity of Plato's attempts to rescue the female from her low status and sheltered life during the fourth century B.C. in Athens,[1] there are enough questions raised within Book V itself and elsewhere in the dialogue to make us doubt the seriousness of these proposals. While Socrates allows women to enter the ruling class, he affirms that they will always be weaker than men (455e; 456a; 457a).[2] While he argues that they are not by nature necessarily different from men, he calls the plundering of a corpse the work of a small and "womanish" mind (469d). As the discussion proceeds, the presence of women in the guardian class is sometimes forgotten (460ab; 465ab; 467e)[3] or Glaucon, hesitant to include them in the army (471d), must be reminded of the participation to which he had agreed earlier (540c). Elsewhere in the dialogue the critical remarks about women are more

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forthright: they succumb easily to grief while men remain strong (388a; 605e); they are like children in their enjoyment of the multifarious and the multicolored (431c; 557c); they bring about the degeneration of various political systems described in Book VIII. In Book V there is talk of equal participation in the governance of the city, common meals, and common education; yet in Book VIII it is equality and freedom between the sexes that characterize the city degenerating into anarchy and tyranny (563b). Socrates's famous proposals must be read with an awareness of these qualifications.

Since I cannot accept the view that Socrates wishes to emancipate the Athenian woman, I would like in this essay to raise the issue of how and why the female is introduced into Book V. As Socrates attempts to turn women into men by making them equal participants in the political community, he ignores the peculiar natures of each and thus undermines the perfection of the political society in the *Republic*. I shall be concerned with the appearance of women in the *Republic* as they go from courtesans in the early books to the de-sexed and unnatural females of Book V, and once again to the sexual female in Book VI—after eros has been reintroduced into the dialogue with the appearance of the philosopher. We can, I shall argue, gain from an understanding of this development an insight into the Platonic perception of the relationship between politics and philosophy, and how each, like the male and female, is to be allowed to preserve its independent nature. The opposition between women and men becomes a model for the opposition between philosophy and politics; the attempt to equalize both sets of opposites destroys all.

I. REPUBLIC *V: THE FEMALE DE-SEXED*

The women who enter the rank of the guardian class in Book V of the *Republic* are almost without body and, more important, free from eros. They are neither the desired nor the desiring. It is these women whom I shall call the "de-sexed" females. Before they make their appearance in Book V, however, there is much to prepare us and Socrates's companions for their arrival. The abstraction from the biological body is part of a continuing theme from the beginning of Book I. There the old Cephalus, in whose house the dialogue takes place, talks for a short while with Socrates. During the discussion women first appear; though Cephalus found them desirable once, his body now is weak and he no longer needs or responds to them. He describes his current condition with a quote from

Sophocles who, when asked how at ninety he was faring with regard to the sexual passion, replied: "Most happily I escaped it, as if fleeing a raging and wild master" (329c). Cephalus thus signifies the death of sexual eros and the deadening of the bodily desires that had been so strong in his youth. Though the old man leaves the scene, he has bequeathed his abstraction from the physical body to the remaining group, who in turn must go through a whole evening of discourse without the dinner that was promised.

The training which is given to the warrior class of the just city reinforces this abstraction. The warrior class emerges because Glaucon has been dissatisfied with the true city, or the city of pigs as he calls it (372d). He wants relishes (among which are women who had not appeared in the earlier city). However, to protect these relishes and acquire more, a warrior class must be established, a class that itself must be purged of all the desires for delights. Their education is first presented as "gymnastics for the body and *mousike* for the soul" (376e). The former, though, is entirely forgotten except for a short passage buried in Book III in which the details of the gymnastic education are left to the well-trained mind (403d). Rather, *mousike* that dominates the warrior's education works to eliminate all concern with the body and to purge the young men of any strong physical desires for food, drink, or sex. The discussion of gymnastics is replaced with admonitions against all forms of excessive bodily passions. Even doctors who tend to the needs of the body are expelled from the city and the sick are left to die (405a-410a).

Prior to Book V, the women who do appear are the ones who excite men's erotic passions and are therefore in opposition to the process of abstraction from body that characterizes the founding of the just city. Cephalus focuses specifically on the sexual desire for women in his discussion of old age. When Glaucon gives his speech extolling the benefits of injustice, he refers to the queen of Lydia who is seduced by Gyges during his rise to power (360b).[4] In Glaucon's fevered city, women appear as courtesans right in the midst of an enumeration of delights including seasonings, perfumes, incense, and cakes (373a), as needing womanly dress or ornaments (373b), or as wet nurses (373c). In Book III, as the educational program for the warriors is developed, Syracusan tables (i.e., feasts), Sicilian relishes, and Corinthian maidens who serve as mistresses must be removed from the experiences of the youth (404cd). And it is noted later that members of the warrior class, having been deprived of all personal wealth, will be unable to make gifts to their mistresses (420a). Women, far from participating in the political structure in the early

books,[5] are presented as the provokers of the sexual eros, which must be restrained among the guardians as well as among the founders of the just city. The one reference to the female as a member of this city before Book V has to do with "the [common] possession of women, marriages and the procreation of children" (423e), not with their participation in the affairs of the city, much less equal participation.

Thus, it is with much hesitation, as one who might "be an unwilling murderer of someone" (451a), that Socrates suddenly introduces the female as the equal of the male among all species, canine or human. In order to establish this equation Socrates must disregard his earlier portrait; he must de-sex the female, make her void of any special erotic attraction or function. In so doing he must disregard the principle that had guided his original search for justice, namely the principle of nature or *phusis* that dominated the founding of the first city and the subsequent definition of justice. Socrates's use of the concept of *phusis* is different from his Sophistic contemporaries who focused on the distinction between nature (*phusis*) and convention (*nomos*) and the inhibitions which the *nomoi* imposed on the pursuit of power and pleasure.[6] The Socratic definition of *phusis* has nothing to do with power or pleasure; it has to do with virtue (*arete*). *Arete* is the excellence of a thing—a shoe or a man. *Arete*, in Plato, is no longer the exclusive property of the courageous warrior who fights nobly before the Trojan walls. Rather, one's excellence or potential for *arete* is defined by one's *phusis*, one's natural capabilities. A person's *phusis* is what that person does well or better than anyone else. The man naturally (*phusei*) fit to build houses is the man who builds the best houses most efficiently. If he builds them well according to his abilities he possesses *arete*. This interpretation of *phusis* and *arete* leads directly to a theory of specialization, to the performance by each person or thing of that for which he/she/it is most suited.

The definition of justice which Socrates discovers in Book IV is based on this ideal of specialization as each part of the polis (or the soul) performs that function for which it is most suited. The first city in Book II had originated through a process of specialization as each member performed the function for which he was suited by nature. "Each one of us grows (*phuetai*) not entirely similar to another, but differing in nature (*kata phusin*), each one fitted for a separate task" (370ab). As the city grows out of an agrarian community into a commercial society with expansion of trades and occupations, it does not turn into a city of convention such as we with our modern notions of a "return to nature" might imagine; as long as the specialization of function according to ability continues, this city is according to nature.

When Socrates begins to discuss the role of woman as potentially man's equal in his best city, he indicates the apparent contradiction that his earlier use of *phusis* based on specialization presents for his proposals. He puts the argument in the words of a fictitious opponent:

> Is it the case then that a woman does not differ very much from a man with regard to their nature (*phusis*)?
>
> How does she not differ?
>
> Then is it not fitting to assign a different task according to his/her nature? [453bc]

Socrates makes his apology by suggesting that men and women differ only as much as bald men differ from those with long hair, i.e., superficially and not with regard to their natures. Disregarding the sexual qualities of the female, he concentrates only on physical strength and notes that since women are weaker than men they will be given lighter tasks. However, while Socrates does give women this opportunity to participate in the protection of the city with man and recognizes only insignificant differences, he goes on to argue that there is no area except such ridiculous ones as weaving or cooking in which the male is not superior to the female (455cd). This is patently absurd, for Socrates, ignoring the sexual female, also ignores the peculiar biological qualities that women, and women alone, have. Clearly the female is superior to the male of any species in her ability to bear children; even those women least skillful in this task do it better than any man—except perhaps for Zeus. If one's *phusis* is defined by that which one does better than anyone else, then Socrates has disregarded the *phusis* of the female.

Socrates does acknowledge that "the female bears, while the male covers" (454de), but rather than consider the implications of this distinction he chooses to undermine it. Motherhood after birth is reduced to the bare minimum of nursing some child at appointed times. As Glaucon refers to it: "You describe an exceedingly easy child bearing for women guardians" (460d). This minimizing of the female's reproductive role is what makes women in Socrates's city not only weaker but ultimately also inferior to men. "There is no pursuit," he says to Glaucon, "concerning the governance of the city which belongs particularly to a woman" (455b). Her natural role in the preservation of the city through the procreation of the next generation is left unconsidered. By forcing her to participate in the activities of the male warriors and later philosopher rulers, Socrates removes from woman her individual *phusis*—that particular

specialty in which she excels. Woman's sexual, bodily nature is forgotten and she becomes almost irrelevant in Socrates's best city.

Body or biological attributes apparently do not determine the *phusis* of the guardians; rather, it is the skill or *techne* which they have. "We said that the souls of a man and a woman who are skilled in medicine have the same nature" (454d). On the other hand, a doctor, male or female, has a nature different from a carpenter, male or female. This argument is surrounded by laughter (452a-d) and must be seen as comic in intent. One's ability to be proficient in any craft is dependent upon the use of one's body, with the notable exception of philosophy.[7] What craft one executes well cannot be dissociated from one's bodily abilities. As the first city grows in Book II, the artisans perform those tasks for which they are suited, but all of the tasks described require the full use of their bodies–housebuilding, weaving, sailing, farming, and so on. The men engaged in the lowly profession of trade (which cannot be called a craft) are those who are "weakest in body and useless for doing any other work" (371c). The female body as the bearer of children cannot be dissociated from her *phusis* by Socrates. Likewise, the body cannot be removed from the particular *techne* under discussion in Book V: warfare.

The importance of the body for warfare appears when the participation of women in the warrior class is discussed, particularly in terms of gymnastics. In the earlier books when the training of the warriors was under consideration and there was an attempt to abstract from body, gymnastics was left to the well-trained mind. Suddenly, in Book V in the sexually integrated group, the training of warriors focuses not on *mousike*, which one might expect would have greater appeal to the feminine, but on the exercise of the body. Once it has been purged of its pertinent biological characteristics and once its needs have been severely circumscribed, the body may be readmitted to the city. It is a body that is to be primed for war, not a body that responds to stimuli–whether food or sex. Women and men exercise in the palaestra, naked next to each other; this causes neither laughter nor shame since both sexes are insensitive to the erotic qualities of their bodies and the desire for procreation.

After Socrates has purged the sexual desire so effectively in his equalizing of the male and female, he is confronted with the problem of reinstituting it in order to preserve his city through procreation. Women cannot bear children without attention to the biological aspects of their bodies and without yielding to the sexual eros. Socrates admits that men and women who are together all the time and in all circumstances

> will be drawn by an inner natural necessity to mixing with one another. Or do I seem to you to talk of needs?
>
> Not geometrical, he [Glaucon] said, but erotic needs, which may happen to be the sharpest of those for convincing and drawing the mass of common men. [458d]

The discussion in Book V prior to this point had been carried on as if there were only such "geometrical" needs, and indeed continues in this fashion; for Socrates disregards the bulk of the population and treats breeding among his warriors as if they were dogs or show birds. In fact, it is precisely an error in the mathematics of the breeding process that leads to the downfall of the best city (546b-d). The erotic necessities are to be circumscribed by what is most beneficial (for appearances' sake translated into what is most sacred, 458e). There is to be no mixing in a "disorderly manner" (*ataktos*) (458d). The image is that of a disorganized army; procreation is to be practiced with the same precision that warfare demands.

Socrates relies on a certain residual drive to surface only at precisely defined moments. These opportunities for intercourse may come as the result of a "sacred marriage" or as a prize for valor in war (460b). The sharing of a woman's bed as a reward for bravery does not mean that the warriors of Book V are driven during battle by a sexual eros. The laurel leaf was not of value in and of itself. The opportunity to sleep with a woman would represent such an honor and therefore be desirable for men who are driven on by spirit (*thumos*); the female prize, though, has social benefits in terms of reproducing the best warriors, which the laurel leaf does not. The sexual passion then reenters the city under the guise of the sacred and the honorable, but only to the extent that it serves the needs of the city.

The question must now arise as to why Socrates (or Plato) suddenly introduced women, de-sexed them, and put them on the same level as men. Why discuss them at all? Why not leave them as mistresses forsaken by the well-trained warrior class? Allan Bloom in his interpretive essay on the *Republic* argues first that men need women and that unless the women are also properly trained they will destroy the men whom the city has so carefully educated.[8] Second, he suggests that the male qualities developed in the education for battle must be tempered by female gentleness, that "humanity is a discreet mixture of masculinity and femininity."[9] Bloom then argues that feminine qualities cannot be forgotten as we are about to leave the warrior guardians, with their particularly male attributes, and

encounter the philosopher guardians. The philosopher needs the gentleness of a woman, and must, like the woman of Socrates's city, strip himself bare of all conventions before he can function.[10] In this analysis, however, Bloom is overlooking the distortion which is perpetrated on the female in order to bring her into the political community and the significance that this distortion may have.

The sudden introduction of the de-sexed female must be studied within the context of Book V, the book in which the philosopher ruler makes his/her first appearance. However, we must note that the female is introduced into political life—which is historically, at least, alien to her—only through a perversion of her *phusis* or nature. In order to become political, she must sacrifice her role as the female of the species. When Aristophanes introduced women into the political arena in both the *Lysistrata* and the *Ecclesiazusae,* he did not remove from them their femininity or their sexuality. It is precisely their sexuality that is the motive cause in both plays, and it is their love of family life that gives the *Lysistrata* its central theme.[11] As far as we know, other literature of the time did not cast women into a political role. Rather, as Thucydides writes in Pericles's funeral oration, women were to bear children as a security to the state and, while doing this, to be unseen and unheard.[12] Socrates rejects this portrayal of women in Book V and goes even further to reject his own definition of nature. The female does not engage in politics in order to satisfy the female eros and *phusis* as Lysistrata and Praxagora do. Rather, she is destroyed as woman in order to participate. This is only preparatory to Socrates's perversion of philosophy. For just as woman is "de-natured," treated without regard for that in which she can excel, in order to be made part of the political world, so too is philosophy. To Socrates, try as he might to create the natural city where each individual performs according to his/her natural capabilities (whether it be the bearing of children or the making of shoes), politics can only be a perversion of what is natural; for it turns some men and all women away not from the pleasure and power of the Sophists but from the pursuit of excellence.

The relationship of philosophy to politics parallels that of women to politics. Neither one naturally participates in politics, and in both cases the needs of politics distort the needs of the individual. While the female is brought into politics through a disregard for her body, the philosopher enters politics through a disregard for his soul. The absurdity of a naked old woman practicing gymnastics is matched by the absurdity of a philosopher ruling over a city. Socrates recognizes this as he dreads the tidal wave of laughter that threatens him just before he offers his famous

proposals (473c). Glaucon's reaction is filled with warnings of the indignation that men "who are not foolish" will feel (474a). As the imagery of the cave is developed in Book VII, it becomes clear that it is not only the city that does not want philosophy but also the philosopher who does not want to be involved in the affairs of the city. The compulsion that fills this section of the dialogue is necessary because the philosopher does not by nature move to the world of politics. The philosopher hates the lie (485cd; 490bc), and yet as political leader he must lie (414c; 459c). Socrates in founding his just city is unjust to philosophers, whose souls are oriented away from the political world of opinion and toward the world of being.

In order to create the best city, Socrates must do the worst to philosophers; he must make them live worse lives, *cheiron zein* (519d). The injustice which Socrates does to the female at the beginning of Book V is a forewarning of the injustice that politics imposes on the philosopher himself. In other Platonic dialogues, women usually appear as an inferior form of human being (*Phaedo* 60a; *Timaeus* 90e). Socrates tells us in the *Republic* that as the political community may by its demands destroy even the lowest human natures (women), so too it may destroy the highest natures. For Socrates the human animal does not find fulfillment of his *phusis* through politics. Women and philosophers fit awkwardly into the political world, even the one which aims to be most just. Their *phuseis* are opposed to it, and it in turn makes unjust demands upon them.

II. REPUBLIC *VI: THE SEXUAL FEMALE*

The equation between the female and the philosopher, which occurs in Book V of the *Republic*, is carried on to Book VI. Here, however, Socrates is attempting to develop the characteristics of philosophy without the encumbrances that political life imposes. Consequently neither woman nor philosophy is perverted by her/its relationship to politics, and both regain their true *phuseis.* While the philosopher is allowed to pursue reality freed from the demands of the political community, the female regains her body, her reproductive capabilities, and her sexuality. In so doing she becomes a symbol of the vital pursuit of wisdom. Up through Book V, eros had been persistently eliminated from the discussion. Immediately after the introduction of the philosopher in Book V, words having to do with eros and desire begin to predominate. The philosopher is first compared to a lover of young boys, an erotic man who loves young men

whether they have snub noses or long ones, and then to wine-lovers, to lovers of honor, and to lovers of food (474d-475c). With the emergence of the philosopher, the erotic and bodily passions are introduced into the purged city.

The eroticism of the philosopher is most fully developed in the sixth book, the book devoted to the discovery of the nature of the philosopher. It is here that the object of philosophy and the process of philosophy itself are described in feminine terms. The paedophile of the previous book is left behind; consummation there leads to no birth. As the male erotically desires the female, the true lover of learning is similarly portrayed at one point as desiring what is (*to on*):

> He naturally struggles to obtain what is, and not tarrying by the many particulars which are thought to be, but he goes and is not dulled nor does he cease from his love until he has laid hold of the nature of each thing itself which is with the part of the soul that is suitable to seize hold of such a thing. It is suitable for that which is akin to it. Being near to it and joining together with what really is, having begotten mind and truth, he both knows and lives truly and is nourished and thus ceases from the pangs of labor, but not before. [490ab]

The language in this passage is explicitly sexual (*migeis, gennesas,* and *odinos*) and bears a close relationship to language and imagery found in the *Theatetus.* In that dialogue Socrates frequently portrays himself as a midwife to philosophical ideas (e.g., 150b-151c; 157c; 161e; 210c). This analogy gives Socrates frequent cause to describe the philosophical process in terms of labor and birth, images which constantly call to mind the biological function of women (156a; 160e; 210b). Though most of the fetuses which Socrates brings forth turn out to be wind eggs, the relationship between the intellectual and bodily process of labor and birth ties Socrates and his activities to biological woman.

While the philosophic process is portrayed as resembling the sexual experience of woman from being desired to giving birth, philosophy itself in the *Republic* is also portrayed as a woman with the erotic qualities of the sexual female. At one point, philosophy is the deserted female, left unfulfilled by those who live neither appropriate nor true lives: "Others, unworthy, come to her, as one bereft of relatives, and defile her" (495c). Or philosophy is compared to the daughter of a lowly craftsman about to be married to the unworthy but recently wealthy employee of her father (495e). Socrates is concerned with the quality of the offspring of such a poor match: "What sort of things are such men likely to engender? Will they not be bastards and undistinguished?" (496a). They parallel the

offspring of those men who are incapable of philosophy and yet attach themselves to her. "Whenever those who have been inappropriately educated come to her and consort with her not according to what is appropriate, what sort of thoughts and opinions shall we say they engender?" (496a)—again the language is of birth. Though the female may be deserted or married to someone who does not deserve her, she nevertheless preserves her feminine function and is defined explicitly by her biological attributes. Philosophy, too, is allowed to be itself and is not, at least in Book VI, forced into the service to the political community. Once this freedom is achieved, Socrates can begin the ascent to the good. Meanwhile, women submit to marriages arranged by their money conscious fathers and bear children.

In Book VII the philosopher is once again perverted and forced to engage in politics. This brings on a new round of laughter (516e; 517d; 518ab), reminding us of the beginning of Book V. Then it was the naked women in the palaestras; now it is the philosopher returning to the world of the cave who is subjected to ridicule. The situation is the same; in each case the natural is perverted, and an injustice is done to the individual. Laughter arises at the sight of the absurd or fantastical—birds founding a city, women stopping a war, or a philosopher entering the world of politics. In Book VI there is little laughter;[13] *phusis* is permitted to fulfill itself, as both the philosopher and the female do that for which they are most suited. Eros has returned.

III. PHILOSOPHY AND THE FEMALE

Once the equation between the philosopher and the female has been suggested, the question arises as to why Socrates (Plato) introduces it and what he means to tell us about the philosophic pursuit through it. Bloom is again one of the few commentators to deal with this particular question. Considering the dramatic structure of the dialogue, he argues that the sexual metaphors will appeal particularly to Glaucon, the erotic young interlocutor,[14] though the sexual imagery that appeals to him is mostly concerned with pederasty (474de; 485c). Bloom argues further that the male, the *aner,* with his qualities of courage and strength, represents only half of humanity. Philosophy needs the feminine qualities like gentleness as well.[15] I believe that the significance of this analogy can be carried somewhat further.

Philosophers in the Platonic corpus and women in the Greek tradition are private individuals. They belong to the world of the *idios,* not to the community or the *koinon.* While women may stay in seclusion inside their homes, the philosopher must insulate himself not from the activity of the agora, but from the opinions of the city. He must remain independent of the demands that the city makes upon his intellect. To be a member of the city, a *polites,* one must sacrifice one's private knowledge and accept the views demanded by the city. This is something the philosopher cannot do. He must ask his questions without regard for the political consequences or the political needs of the community; women likewise perform their functions privately, irrespective of the political circumstances. Women bear children whether they live in Sparta, Thebes, or Troy. Their nature traditionally has removed them from politics. True philosophers pursue the good whether they live in Sparta or Thebes. But political man behaves quite differently wherever he may live. The female and the philosopher live apart from the political world. They both satisfy their erotic desires independently of the needs or demands of the city, though they both may need the security that the city offers.

The philosopher like Socrates may become dangerous, but more often, again like the woman, he is simply useless for the actual practice of politics. When Adeimantus specifically accuses the philosopher of being useless (487d), he recalls the words of Pericles who is made to say by Thucydides: "We alone think of one who does not participate in [public] affairs not as a quiet man, but as a useless one" (II.40.2). The Greek political community had no place for the *idios.* Thus, the tensions that surround the introduction of the female into political life are the same as those that surround the introduction of the philosopher. Both naturally belong to the world of the private. Yet the aim of Book V in which both enter political society is to make public all that previously had been private—from sexual intercourse to a hurt finger (462c).[16] In the process of becoming politicized the female and the philosopher are removed from their natural environments.

Pericles's oration is spoken for those who died in battle for the city. For Pericles the fulfillment of one's role as a member of the city is achieved through death for the city—the ultimate expression of the unity of the self and the political community. Participation in public affairs is defined in terms of war with other cities. It is precisely during war that the skills of women and philosophers are irrelevant. Yet it is war that is the theme particular to Book V.[17] War was a highly masculine affair in Greece. The word commending bravery in battle specifically denotes its masculine orientation (*andreia* from *aner*). At no point, especially in fifth- and fourth-century Athens, could political activity be isolated from relations with other cities and the potential for war. Politics was inherently a masculine pursuit. Yet women guardians are obviously to be trained for war (452c; 453a; 457a). When Glaucon discusses their actual participation in a battle, qualifications to the original proposals for equality appear. After describing an army composed of "brothers, fathers, and sons," he adds the note: "And if the female part should join the campaign, stationed either in the line itself or behind in order to frighten off the enemies if ever there would be any necessity for aid, I know that with all these things they would be unbeatable" (471d). Glaucon still seems hesitant to accord women full equality in war. Even Socrates apparently undercuts his own arguments when he offers as a prize for valor in battle "more frequent opportunity to share the bed of women," as a means to increase the offspring of brave warriors (460b). The philosopher in battle does not appear in the *Republic*, but we do find him in Alcibiades's speech in the *Symposium.* Alcibiades reports Socrates's unshakeable countenance during battle, but he also makes the philosopher appear ridiculous. He uses a quote from Aristophanes to describe Socrates's stride during the retreat from Delium. The language of the comic poet underlines the absurdity of a philosopher engaging in war.

Though both the philosopher and women are cast uncomfortably into a political community that concentrates on war, there is a sudden shift in the discussion in Book V to the manner in which the best city will carry on war. With absolutely no warning, we are jolted away from the question of the possibility of the best city to a discussion which seems completely alien to the topic at hand.

> Is it not now left, I said, to go through whether it is possible among men as among the other animals, that there come into being such a community and in what way it is possible?
>
> You were the first to mention, he [Glaucon] said, what I intended to raise.
>
> About the affairs during war, I think it is obvious, I said, in what manner they will carry on war. [466de]

With this we are launched into several pages of how and whom the warriors shall fight. I would suggest that this sudden change in topic intrudes at this point to highlight the position of both women and philosophers as poor citizens in a city which needs to do battle against its enemies.[18]

The analogy presented in the *Politicus* between the art of statesmanship and the art of weaving (279b) creates some difficulty in the parallel opposition of both female and philosopher to the masculine art of politics. Weaving is a woman's craft that is practiced privately at home. Penelope, our most famous weaver, used the craft as an excuse to escape from involvement in the politics of Ithaca. Weaving is one of the two crafts, specifically mentioned in the *Republic,* where women may have a superiority (455c). In the *Politicus*, though, the analogy is developed of the statesman who, like the weaver, oversees the handling of the wool before uniting the woof and warp into a strong cloak. However, the most important task of weaving together the courageous and temperate souls is ultimately achieved through control over matrimony—the proper breeding of disparate types. The task becomes a sexual one, one having specifically to do with reproduction, the arena for female activity. Politics in the *Politicus* is isolated from the masculine pursuit of war (305a) and is more nearly akin to philosophy (299bc). The true statesman in the *Politicus* is the philosopher, only here he is not forced down into the world of politics, his *phusis* is not perverted. Instead of interfering with the nature of the philosopher, political communities in the *Politicus* are guided by depersonalized laws, a second-best but nevertheless practical solution. Thus, the feminine analogy may still be appropriate. In fact, we learn at the beginning of the dialogue that in this particular discussion it is possible for a private individual (*idiotes*) to be the true statesman (259ab). This would hardly be possible in the highly communal life of the rulers of the *Republic.*

The role of women as private beings cloistered in the home is related to their role in the bearing and raising of children. The female is generative; she gives birth and represents the beginning, but not necessarily the completion, of a project. It is this generative role that purposefully is ignored in the fifth book of the *Republic.* By forcing woman into politics, Socrates turns her away from the generation of life to a concern with death—politics in the *Republic* being identified with war and consequently with death as well. From the first step of Socrates down into the Piraeus, politics is discussed within a framework of death. It is death in the thoughts of Cephalus that introduces us to the discussion of justice, and it is death that concludes the dialogue. Gyges, who is to change from a private shepherd into a king, begins his transformation into a political man through contact with a corpse on whose finger he finds his magic ring (359d). The warriors of the just state must be trained specifically not to fear death lest they refuse to participate in the activities of the political

community, which, as Pericles so powerfully expresses it, demand death. Thus, all the poets at the beginning of Book III must be purged of references to death. The cave imagery further supports the equation of politics with death. The image of the deep, dark cavern into which the philosophers are forced to return recalls Hades in the Greek myths. In the beginning of Book III the passages which must be excised from the poets are those that describe the world of Hades as a cave with fluttering shadows (386d-387a).[19] When women enter the world of politics in Book V they must forget their life-generating functions, for politics in this dialogue is not a life-generating process. To involve the female in politics, she must be reoriented toward death.

In the Socratic dialogues the practice of philosophy is likewise generative and characterized not as the attainment of knowledge but as the pursuit of knowledge. In the *Theatetus,* Socrates portrays himself as sterile, incapable of giving birth to any idea himself (150cd), but skilled at assisting in the birth of ideas. In the development of the *Theatetus* no successful birth actually occurs, but in the process of trying to discover what knowledge is, the generative process is frequently described in terms of birth, and this tells us more about the complexities of the notion of knowledge than any specific definition might. While the body of the dialogue is devoted to an inquiry that replicates this process of birth, the *Theatetus* is introduced with a brief conversation between Eucleides and Terpsion in which death and politics are once again united. Eucleides reports that he has just been with Theatetus who was being carried away from battle, "living, but barely" (142b). The demands of politics force Theatetus into battle for Athens and his involvement there leads to his death. It is the masculine activities of war that lead to his death; the feminine activities in which he engaged earlier with Socrates, and which are recorded in Eucleides's book, are related to life, birth, and generation. The short introduction to the *Theatetus*, which may at first appear almost irrelevant to the subsequent dialogue, actually presents again the important contrast between the masculine/political world of death and the feminine/philosophical world of life.

The presentation of philosophy not as the completion but as the pursuit of knowledge is developed most vividly in the myth of the birth of Eros told by Diotima in the *Symposium.* She intends to equate eros and philosophy: both are described as the pursuit of the good (204b). It is the striving of both Eros and philosophy that is important, not the final attainment. Once the good is attained, philosophy and eros cease. "No one of the gods philosophizes nor desires to be wise—for he is—and if anyone

else is wise, he does not philosophize" (204a). Hans Kelson in his psychoanalytical study of Plato's sexual orientation finds in the story of the birth of Eros evidence of the hostility which Plato felt toward women. Poros, or Plenty, is the father of Eros, Penia or need the mother. "The sex act," Kelso argues, "occurs only against the will of the man, everything good in its result come from the father, everything bad from the mother."[20] While this is true in conventional terms, Eros would not be the philosopher without Penia as his mother. It is the mother who bequeaths to Eros those characteristics that make him so similar to Socrates: his squalor, his bare feet, his lack of bed, his hanging around gates and doors, and the like (203d). He is like his father in his manliness (*andreios*) and his eagerness and even in his "philosophizing throughout his life" (203d). But without the feminine qualities of incompletion and generation, Eros would not strive for the good or parallel the philosopher. In all the speeches prior to Socrates's in the *Symposium* (except for a moment in Phaedrus's speech, 179bc) heterosexual love is either forgotten or else mockingly scorned. Though later in Diotima's presentation, love of a female and the generation of a child puts one on the lower rungs of the ladder of love, Eros is born from such a heterosexual relationship—not a necessity among the gods—and it is only through those qualities inherited from Penia, from the necessity to create, that Eros and philosophy are united in their pursuit of the good.

If, then, we see philosophy as united with the female in its generative powers and in its privatism, a failure or refusal to participate in the public world of politics and war—the paradoxes suggested by the notion of a philosopher-ruler—becomes distressing. In the same way that masculinity is the opposite of femininity, so too is (masculine) politics the opposite of (feminine) philosophy—just as going up out of the cave is the opposite of going down into the cave. However, in both cases the opposites are in need of each other. Male needs female in order to preserve the species, or, in more particular terms, to give the city sons; female needs male in order to fulfill her nature as the bearer of children. The philosopher, as both the *Apology* and *Crito* so vividly demonstrate, needs the city, the organized political unit, for without the city the philosopher would have no place to practice. Though the relationship is more tenuous, the city needs the philosopher as well. In the *Apology,* Socrates likens the city to a noble horse, which "because of its size is sluggish and in need of being stirred on by a certain gadfly, so that, it seems to me, God has given me to the city, who sitting down everywhere and for the whole day does not cease stirring you up and persuading you and chiding you about everything" (30e).

The need which each opposite has for the other, though, emphasizes that they must not be equalized. The female with her particular characteristics must not be turned into a male. The philosopher similarly cannot be made into a politician. The attempts to do both of these things in Book V of the *Republic* leads to much laughter among the listeners and talkers, but more seriously it shows an attempt to destroy the natural or *phusis* in both categories. That Socrates must so pervert the natural in order to create the best political system must raise doubts about its value. The appearance of women in the *Republic* must not be seen as an instance of "anti-Platon chez Platon,"[21] nor as a remnant of a "real" Socrates who was close to being a feminist,[22] but rather as a means of casting an important and philosophically significant shadow over the whole enterprise of trying to create the perfect city. Perhaps the *Republic* tells us that politics is fundamentally imperfectable and must always be plagued by the conflicts between the public and the private, between opinion and wisdom, between warfare and weaving.

NOTES

1. E.g., James Adam, *The Republic of Plato,* with critical notes, commentary, and appendices (Cambridge: At the University Press, 1902), Vol. 1, p. 280; Ernest Barker, *Greek Political Theory* (London and New York: University Paperbacks, 1960), p. 254; Benjamin Jowett, *The Dialogues of Plato,* trans. with analyses and intros. (New York: Scribner, 1871), Vol. II, pp. 129-130; H. D. Rankin, *Plato and the Individual* (London: Methuen, 1964), pp. 92-93; Dorothea Wender, "Plato: Misogynist, Paedophile, and Feminist," *Arethusa,* VI, 1 (Spring 1973), 76.

2. Standard Stephanus pagination will be used for all citations from the *Republic* and other Platonic dialogues.

3. In the first two instances Socrates uses the word *aner,* a specifically masculine word, to refer to the members of the auxiliary and guardians class. In 467c he refers only to fathers.

4. In Herodotus' story the queen does not have a passive role nor does she excite erotic passions; rather, upon secretly being seen naked by Gyges at the request of her husband, she instigates the overthrow and murder of the king, with threats to Gyges if he should not comply (I. 10-11).

5. Other references to women in Books I-IV show women to be weak, weepy, and unworthy of imitation (387e; 395de; 396a; 398e; and 431c).

6. See Antiphon, "On Truth," in Barker, *Greek Political Theory,* pp. 95-98; Callicles in Plato's *Gorgias*; and the Melian Dialogue in Thucydides, V., 85-112.

7. See Cephalus, 328d, and especially Theages, 496bc, whose care of a sickly body kept him from politics. Leo Strauss argues that this abstraction is necessary in order to "understand the city as an association of artisans or in order to effect as

complete a coincidence as possible between the city and the arts" (*The City and Man* [Chicago: Rand McNally, 1964], p. 95).

8. Allan Bloom, *The Republic of Plato,* trans. with notes and an interpretive essay (New York and London: Basic Books, 1968), p. 383.

9. Ibid., p. 384.

10. Ibid., and p. 458, n. 11.

11. See Cedric H. Whitman, *Aristophanes and the Comic Hero* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press for Oberlin College, 1964), pp. 205-211.

12. Thucydides, *History,* II. 45.2; see also Xenophon's *Oeconomicus,* VII, where the wife is active but exclusively inside the home, directing domestics, supervising weaving, and managing what is brought in from without.

13. References to laughter are infrequent in Book VI and appear in a concentrated form only in section 504d to 509c (four times) when Socrates is being forced to discuss that which he should not—the good.

14. Bloom, *The Republic of Plato,* p. 461, n. 1.

15. Ibid., p. 384.

16. Ibid., p. 380.

17. From the moment that the inhabitants of the fevered city "cut off land from their neighbors" (373d), the focus of the *Republic* is on war. Neighbors are assumed to be present, and the good city must be concerned with self-protection (422a-d). In contrast, in the *Laws,* where there is the assumption of relative isolation from all other political communities, the Legislators can concentrate on the inculcation of individual virtue.

18. Benjamin Jowett and Lewis Campbell (*Plato's Republic: The Greek Text* [Oxford: At the Clarendon Press, 1894], Vol. II Notes, p. 241) offer this explanation of the sudden change in topic: "The real motive of the digression is an artistic one. The great *peripeteia,* the on-rushing of the 'third wave,' is made more impressive by being delayed." This is hardly satisfactory.

19. The parallel between these two sections is further emphasized by the repetition of the quote of Achilles from the *Odyssey* (386c and 516d).

20. Hans Kelsen, "Platonic Love," *American Imago,* Vol. 3, Nos. 1 and 2 (April 1942), 15.

21. Wender, "Plato . . . ," p. 85.

22. A. E. Taylor, *Plato: The Man and His Work* (Cleveland and New York: World Publishing, Meridan Books, 1956), p. 278.

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