

Democracy, Equality, and *Eidê*: A Radical View from Book 8 of Plato's *Republic*

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A Plato opposed to democracy fills the literature, and while some scholars question whether Plato adequately captures Socrates' possibly favorable views of democracy, Plato himself remains a paragon of elitism. I argue that Plato's response to democracy is far more theoretically interesting than simple disdain for the unenlightened masses. Rather, in Book 8 of the *Republic* he explores the fundamental tensions of a regime identified with freedom and equality, which he presents as characterized by formlessness, and the epistemological and theoretical problems posed by the absence of forms (*eidê*). *Eidê* give structure and identity to regimes and to their citizens; they are necessary for intellection and philosophy, but they are also the grounds for compulsion. Plato's analysis of democracy thus becomes a more serious challenge for democratic theorists than previously recognized.

An elitist Plato, opposed to democracy and hostile to the masses, fills the literature. In the midst of an extensive philological and grammatical commentary on Plato's *Republic*, James Adam (1902, 2.24, *ad loc.* 494a) includes the following brief but telling observation: "The theory of Ideas is not a democratic philosophy." He writes this in response to an interchange between Socrates and Adeimantus concerning the access of the many to the idea or form of the Good, during which Socrates claims: "It is impossible for the multitude to be philosophic." Only a few will have access to the forms (*eidê*).¹ A profound inequality of rule and authority seems to follow from that unequal access. I could begin with Adam's assertion that the theory of ideas is not a democratic philosophy, but the basis for my argument derives from a very different perspective, an epistemological one that has nothing to do with the capabilities, or lack thereof, of the many to attain a vision of the Good. Rather, I focus on the theory of the forms as a mechanism for categorization, opposing epistemologically, politically, and psychologically the openness of democracy. While Adam and numerous others see elitism in the Platonic theory of the forms because the many cannot ascend to a philosophic

vision,² I attend to the opposition between democracy and that theory to illustrate how Socrates' discussion in Book 8 of the *Republic* points to democracy's dependence on a "formlessness" that challenges claims of equality and of identity within democratic regimes.

The epistemological critique of democracy that derives from the theory of the forms points to very different challenges than those that motivated the judgment by Adam and others that the theory of the forms is not a democratic philosophy. For them, a hierarchy of intellectual skills justifies a hierarchy of political rule, and since the highest level of intellectual skill is required for an apprehension of the forms, a regime that distributes power equally to those who can ascend and those who cannot must fail. The parable of the boat from the beginning of Book 6, for example, captures this argument vividly. There, the somewhat deaf shipowner of limited vision who knows little about seafaring allows himself to be drugged by the quarrelsome sailors. Though they never learned the skill of navigation, they are eager to control the ship. Meanwhile, the true pilot is scorned as a useless "gazer at the heavens" (488a–489e). The discussion of democracy in Book 8 does not address that issue at all. Rather, it presents democracy as a regime that in its insistence on freedom and equality is a regime of formlessness, one that lacks *eidê*. The theory of forms insofar as it is explicated in Book 6 is in part the basis for our capacity to categorize—to recognize similarities and differences so that we can distinguish one person or object from another and recognize as well what unites them. On this rests the foundation of mathematics, our capacity to count, to add, to subtract, and our capacity to discriminate, to separate the good from the bad, the noble from the base, the citizen from the noncitizen.

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¹ *Eidê* (sing. *eidôs*) in the Homeric epics and later Greek literature often means simply that which is seen, the shape or form of something; it came also to mean "class" or "kind" of object. In the *Republic* and elsewhere in the Platonic corpus, the term refers to an immutable shape or form of a thing or value (e.g., Justice or the Good) that is accessible to the intellect only by abstracting from the senses and sensible particulars. In Book 6 (as discussed below) the form of the Good is the highest object of the philosophic soul's search, but *eidê* are more general than the limited repertory of value terms, such as the Good and the Beautiful. They help typologize (as in Book 8) and organize our sense experiences by rising above particulars subject to observation by the senses.

² Jowett and Campbell (1894, 3.281), for example, commenting on the same passage, reflect at length: "The opposition of the few and the many is almost as great in the reading age of the nineteenth century as in the hearing age of Socrates and Plato. In politics, in society, in the realms of thought and imagination, there are two classes . . . the inferior minds and the superior: those who are under the influence of the hour, and those who have character." They moderate these claims a bit by noting that the opposition "is not so entire and absolute as Plato seems to assume."

Democracy in its openness in Book 8 lacks this capacity for adding and for discriminating and thus lays out the tensions and dangers inherent in regimes founded on formlessness and on principles of equality. Claims of equality necessarily entail claims of inequality, of who is not equal. *Eidê* enable us to typologize, to define equal and unequal, but *eidê* also can tyrannize. The openness of democracy is the escape from that tyranny, but at the same time it may leave us lost without the grounds to make choices or structure the world in which we live. Thus, the epistemological critique of democracy in Book 8 points to the tensions underlying current debates concerning "identity" politics and the "politics of difference." In a contemporary world that cares deeply about equality, the formlessness at the heart of democratic principles creates profound contradictions about how to implement such claims. Likewise, contemporary demands that identity, a self-assertion of form, be acknowledged stand in tension with the openness of democratic "formlessness." The freedom we and Socrates in Book 8 associate with democratic regimes entails the rejection of tyrannizing *eidê*; but we cannot function either politically or intellectually without *eidê*. Socrates' examination of democracy as a regime of formlessness helps us understand the limits and contradictions of claims of equality and identity in democratic regimes—of an equality that effaces the *eidê* and of an identity that entails the assertion of *eidê*.

Book 8 traditionally stands as the book that traces the decline of regimes, but attention to that aspect has led scholars to ignore the equally strong focus that Plato places on typology, on the five forms (*eidê*) of regimes and their human counterparts.³ Socrates traces the movement from aristocracy to tyranny and the parallel personalities, how each one comes into being (the genetic analysis), but he also identifies the different *eidê* of political regime and how we can distinguish one from the other (the eidetic analysis). Among the *eidê* of regimes is Socrates' bizarre description of democracy, one that seems to have little to do with Athenian democracy as practiced in the fifth or fourth century B.C.⁴ or with the mechanisms of self-govern-

ment (the sharing of rule, isonomy, the assembly, the juries) that we may associate with the institutions of democracy past and present. Democracy is instead a regime of freedom and a radical equality arising from the absence of *eidê*, the very concept that controls the structure of Book 8. In Socrates' elaboration, this means that democracy, according to its fundamental principle of freedom, is the regime that is incapable of introducing typologies into the epistemological and political realm. The discussion in Book 8 thus subverts the book's apparent intention to give forms to regimes—as well as perhaps the philosophic explorations and claims of the previous books. A democracy true to its principles of equality and freedom must resist the tyrannizing of *eidê*, the boundaries and limits that define citizenship and the relations of parts. It must resist the typologies and forms that are part of a Platonic philosophical order. The conflict between philosophy and democracy is an epistemological one, not only a moral one.⁵

There often is a tendency among democratic theorists to avoid the theoretical complexity raised by typologies, that which asserts the need to search for differences at the same time as identifying similarities; such endeavors may foreclose addressing the more tractable aspects of democratic theory. Dahl (1986, 191), for example, prefaces a discussion of procedural democracy: "Since their origins in classical Greece, democratic ideas have been plagued by the problem of inclusion: what persons have a rightful claim to be included as citizens with full and equal rights to participate in governing the association. My strategy will be to leave this problem unsolved in order to set out the assumptions and criteria of procedural democracy." Charles Beitz (1989, 5) writes a magisterial volume on political equality, beginning with the exhortation: "For although nothing is to be gained by claiming that equality is not part of the definition of democracy, any philosophical theory of democracy that failed to take up the grounds of and content of political equality would be seriously deficient." Nevertheless, we hear little about the content of equality, and Beitz concludes by emphasizing the indeterminacy of his theory, avoiding the question of "who," though he thoroughly addresses the question of "how." A devotion to equality creates the difficulty of identifying the *eidôs* of the citizen for both.

Dahl and Beitz are just two of a notable and heroic heritage of modern democratic theorists who, while acknowledging the importance of asking what equality means and how it may be institutionalized, avoid addressing directly the complexities it poses for the very construction of a community that must assert inequalities by exclusion. Socrates in Book 8 addresses this problem directly by suggesting how equality is the most subversive of political goals, for it undermines the

³ The word *eidê* appears frequently throughout Book 8; a word for "decline" does not appear in the text. We read of change (*metaballei*, 545d), movement (*kinêthêtai*, 545d) and "mistaken (*hamartêmenas*) regimes" (544a). Yet, volume after volume on Plato records "the decline" but never the frequent appearance of *eidê*: Adam (1902, 2.195) refers to the "order of merit" of the regimes; Benardete (1989) entitles the subsection preceding the discussion of specific regimes "The Fall"; Jowett ([1897] 1962) entitles his chapter on this section "Successive Stages of Decline of Society and of the Soul"; Nettleship ([1901] 1962, 294) entitles his chapter "Successive Stages of Decline of Society and Soul," writes of democracy as a "lower form," and states that "a similar degradation is inevitable" (1901, 294, 299, cf. 300, 308). I am guilty also (Saxonhouse 1996, 90). See Annas (1981, 294).

⁴ Roberts (1995, 263–6) catalogs how Athens differs from the democracy in Book 8. See also Annas (1981, 300, 301). In contrast, according to Adam (1902, 2.234): "The materials for Plato's picture of democracy are of course taken from Athens more than any other single city. It is an extraordinarily vivid sketch . . . in spite of manifest exaggeration, [it] brings Athens nearer to us than almost any monument of ancient literature, Aristophanes alone excepted."

⁵ Concern with the moral failings of democracy appears earlier in the dialogue (e.g., 488a–489c, 492b–c, 493a–c) and in such dialogues as the *Gorgias*, the *Statesman*, and the *Laws*. A full discussion of Plato on democracy would require analyses of many other passages. For recent efforts see Euben 1994, Monson 1994, and Saxonhouse 1996. Here I attend only to the epistemological issues.

potential definition of the city itself and of its inhabitants. After being established by violence, the democracy of Book 8 appears as a regime of gentleness and tolerance in this openness. Yet, despite its gentleness, inherent in it are the contradictions that lead to tyranny, the harshest of political forms, and to the violence of the tyrant himself. The key concept for understanding this transition from the gentle to the violent regime, I argue, is *eidê*, which in Book 6 were identified as necessary for the philosophic endeavor and which dominate the typologies of Book 8, but which are lost in the description of the democratic regime.

EIDÊ: BOOKS 6 AND 7 AS PRELUDE

To jump into a Platonic dialogue at midpoint is an interpretive crime; the dialogues are constructed to build upon themselves. Since the discussion of democracy in Book 8 comes after much of the dialogue has been completed, let me set the epistemological stage for my discussion. In Book 6 Socrates introduces the idea or the form of the Good to his interlocutors. Then there is a significant shift in focus in the discussions of democracy, which parallels the shift in focus in the treatments of poetry. In books 2 and 3 Socrates had sanitized the poetry of the Greeks with a view to the moral education of the young. After articulating the theory of the forms in Book 6, Socrates offers in Book 10 an epistemological critique of poetry and art as representation. Similarly, the earlier critique of democracy warns of the appeal of popular demagogues and the dangers of a democracy in which the assembly, loudly praising or blaming its leaders, educates the young. The assembly does not even appear in Book 8.⁶ With regard to both poetry and democracy, the theory of the forms refocuses the nature of the discussion.

Book 6 introduces the form of the Good; Book 7 explores the education necessary to bring philosophers into the sunlight of the Good.⁷ Socrates and Glaucon begin this investigation of the education of the philosophers with numbers and “this foolish thing . . . of knowing the one and the two and the three” (322c). This leads by nature, Socrates suggests, directly to reasoning, or, as he phrases it, calculation and number are “something that draw in every way toward being [*pros ousian*]” (523a). How can calculation move us in the direction of intellection and the perception of being itself, that realm in which the Good lies? It can because it entails the act of distinguishing and assembling. To count we must distinguish; we must see similarities and differences. We must recognize that apparent differ-

ences, what the eyes and other senses recognize, do not preclude construing seen objects as “the same.” At the same time as recognizing that differences do not lead to an infinitely variable world, we must also avoid compressing all into one and thus overriding all differences. Once the soul with *noêsis* (mind, intelligence) enters, going beyond sight, we can distinguish (let us say) between the big finger and the little finger and yet also see their similarities; thus, we can add the little finger and the big finger to get two fingers:

We say that sight saw great and small not distinguished but mixed up together.

Yes.

For the sake of clarity, the *noêsis* was forced to see great and small not mixed up together but separated, just the opposite of sight (524c).

It is the capacity to distinguish one form from another and then to recognize what makes some similar to others that allows us to add and subtract, to count (see, e.g., Crombie, chapter 2 and 101–2). It is the *noêsis* and the ability to separate the parts from the whole—whether to add, subtract, divide, or multiply—that sets the mind on its way toward intellection, providing the mechanisms for comprehending the world we experience around us and for ascending to a vision of the Good.

Calculation is not the end of the process. Socrates takes Glaucon through a series of subjects that must be studied next in order to turn the soul toward the idea of the Good and that which is beyond sight, but we begin the process with the capacity to distinguish, to isolate differences and similarities, to recognize the *eidê*, from which we move on to the comprehension of the highest things. Democracy as portrayed in Book 8, however, is the regime in which we do not make that first step, in which access to the highest forms of knowledge is denied to us because of the inability (or unwillingness) to engage in distinctions, to impose the *eidê* on what we observe around us; democracy in its love of freedom precludes imposing *eidê* on what we see. The consequences are serious. The theory of the forms and the philosophic endeavor require categorization and the *eidê*, which democracy in its concern with freedom rejects.

In Book 6 Socrates articulated the image of the divided line to distinguish the philosopher from the sophist. Shortly before, Socrates had introduced the idea of the Good and used the analogy of the sun to help us understand the role of the Good. As the sun gives the light by which we see and the warmth by which we grow, so does the Good enable us to see and to grow. Though this idea of the Good, or the sun as the analogue of the Good, dominated the earlier discussion, in the image of the line, the idea of the Good appears to be above the line, outside—and perhaps even beyond—intellection.⁸ In the image of

⁶ This is especially surprising for contemporary readers, since much recent discussion of Athenian democracy has focused on popular participation. (Just to begin, see Hansen 1991 and Ober 1989, 1996.) This concern is entirely absent from Book 8.

⁷ As in the discussion of democracy, in this article I focus on the epistemological aspects, not the moral qualities, of the forms. For the latter, see especially 500d–501c, where the philosopher as painter turns to the forms of moderation (*sophrosunê*), justice, and popular virtue (*dêmotikês aretês*), using these divine patterns (*tôi theiôi paradeigmati*) to fill in the city’s blank slate (500d–6).

⁸ See Jowett and Campbell’s diagram (1894, 3.313). Benardete’s (1989, 176–7) rendering of the line includes both the sun and the Good, but outside the line, not as part of it. Bloom (1968, 464) draws a similar diagram but does not include the sun or the idea of the Good. See further Gadamer 1986 (28–32, and translator note 22).

the line, the object of *noêsis*, the highest level of intellectual endeavor, is not the idea of the Good. Rather, the objects of our *noêsis* are the *eidê*.

What are these *eidê* that give for many the epistemological, moral, and theological thrust to Plato's work? They are in fact little discussed in the *Republic*, and where they are discussed, the Greek is especially difficult. Yet, they remain at the center of the *Republic* and of Plato's epistemology. As Santas (1983, 233) notes: "A considerable body of literature has been built around the relevant passages. Yet, it is not hyperbole to say we have no satisfying or widely accepted answers to our questions."⁹ Here I want only to point to Socrates' insistence that *eidê* are necessary to add and subtract, to see what separates and what unites the indiscriminate world our senses perceive, and that it is our *noêsis*, through which we impose *eidê*, which enables us to comprehend the world around us. Or, as Santas (1983, 256) concludes about what it is that the form of the Good accomplishes: "[It] serves his metaphysics by bringing into relief the very ideality of the Forms, the eternal order and stability of the entities that must exist if this world is not be a 'vast sea of dissimilarity.'" The relevant passage is from Book 6, 507b, which Bloom (1968) translates as follows:

We both assert that there are . . . and distinguish in speech many fair things, many good things, and so on for each kind of thing. . . . And we also assert that there is the fair itself, a good itself, and so on for all the things that we then set down as many. Now, again, we refer them to one *idea*,¹⁰ each as though the *idea* were one, and address it as that which really is.

The thrust behind these confusing sentences seems to be that while there is the idea of the Good and of the Beautiful, there are also the *eidê* that unify the particulars into categories or shapes. Particulars (*polla*) are part of a class, and for us to recognize them as such we must be able to see what makes particulars similar and what distinguishes them from others. To compress the many into one, we must abstract from particular differences that can overwhelm the senses, from what makes the many many.

To clarify his argument, Socrates uses the example of geometers:

They make arguments for the sake of the square itself and the diagonal itself, not for the sake of the diagonal they draw, and likewise with the rest. These things that they mold and draw . . . they now use as images, seeking to see those things themselves, that one can see in no other way than with thought . . . this is the form I said was intelligible [*noêton men to eidos*] (510d–511a, Bloom 1968).

Glaucon wants Socrates to lead him beyond the forms, to the idea of the Good itself. Socrates resists. The forms are essential for our understanding and comprehension of the world we experience; beyond the

forms—toward the idea of the Good—we move beyond that which we need for a comprehension of this world to a theological unity and normative standard that may not be grounded directly in the experiences of our own lives. The forms that categorize and distinguish enable us to order what we experience and enable us to live in this world. The idea of the Good may take us beyond the foundations in this world.

REPUBLIC BOOK 8 AND DEMOCRACY

March and Olsen (1995) identify a series of issues that democracies must address. Among their criteria is:

Governance involves *developing identities* of citizens and groups in the political environment. Preferences, expectations, identities, and interests are not exogenous to political history. They are created and changed within that history. . . . It is the responsibility of democratic government to create and support civic institutions and processes that facilitate the construction, maintenance, and development of democratic identities (pp. 45–6).

Can democratic governments "facilitate the construction . . . of democratic identities" without raising questions about the fundamental principles on which they are built? This is the question Book 8 makes us confront.

Context

At the end of Book 7, after recommending the expulsion of all who are age ten or older and thus founding Callipolis "most quickly and easily" (514a),¹¹ Socrates concludes that he and his interlocutors have discovered the city and the man they sought. In the last phrase of Book 7, he states: "It seems to me that it is the end [*dokei moi telos echein*]" (541b). Book 8 begins anew, with Socrates summarizing the qualities of the city that is governed "most highly" by recalling the institutions agreed to in Book 5: the community (*koinas*) of women, the community (*koinous*) of children and their education, the common (*koina*) preparation for war, and rulers who are the best in philosophy and war. *Koinon* (that which is common) and its derivatives dominate this brief introductory paragraph (543a). Absent from this recapitulation is the inclusion of women among the rulers. That may be implicit in the reference to a "common education in war," but Socrates avoids explicit allusion to the comical and radical arguments that filled the first sections of Book 5 and gave that book its outrageous tone.

At the beginning of Book 5 Socrates desexualized the female to incorporate her into the public realm (Saxonhouse 1976). At the beginning of Book 8 he ignores that earlier effort; the sexual female, along with the distinction between the sexes, returns. The change in orientation appears immediately when Socrates curiously refers to what Bloom translates as "houses" (543b). The phrase is *katoikousin eis oikêseis* ("they live

⁹ Santas (1983, 257 n. 2) has a helpful bibliography for tracing the history of the debates surrounding these passages. See also Fine 1990, Irwin 1995 (chapter 16), Sallis 1986 (chapter 5), Teloh 1984 (chapter 3), White 1976 (section 3), and the multiple references in each.

¹⁰ Sallis (1986, 383) notes that Socrates uses the words *eidê* and *idea* synonymously.

¹¹ Callipolis is the community of wives and property, of potential women rulers, and of philosopher rulers that Socrates and his interlocutors founded in Book 5 and called the just city.

in homes”), and the word *oikêseis* (homes, residences, dwellings) is repeated in the next line of the text. The word never appears in Book 5; *oikêseis* are not only the buildings we associate with houses but also entail the notion of what is one’s own. The widely used root, *oikei*, means “of the same household” or “related by kinship.” In Callipolis, there are no kin and thus no *oikêseis*. Socrates, using the word in his redescription of Book 5, prepares us for the tensions that will explode in the transformation of Callipolis to the regime that loves honor (*philotimon*), which he chooses to call “timocracy” (545b): the deep split between male and female, between what is public and what is private, between an unmoving present and a world of motion. Socrates glided over these tensions by eliminating the private along with female in the construction of Callipolis, making ambiguous how the city might address the passage of time and leaving Glaucon to refer vaguely to “erotic necessities” (458d). The reference to *oikêseis* at the beginning of Book 8 suggests that distinctions between mine and thine may even exist in the “highest” city. As much as any errors in identifying the correct season for the begetting of children that result from miscalculating the nuptial number, these distinctions turn Callipolis into a timocracy.

Glaucon recalls the end of Book 4, when they had digressed from the flow of the argument, and comments on the parallels not between the city and the human being (*anthrôpos*), but between the city and the male (*anêr*) (543c–544b).¹² Glaucon, never completely comfortable with the conflation of the sexes, easily reverts to a world in which differences between male and female exist. No longer do we place male and female warriors and philosophers in the same class or *eidōs*, looking to similarities rather than differences; now differences dominate, and separate identities mark male and female. Rather than aggregating into an undifferentiated unity by abstraction (Saxonhouse 1994, chapter 6), Socrates imposes differentiation, re-introducing sexuality, time, and misogyny.

Socrates informs us that change in regimes comes from faction among those who hold office. Faction entails differences. Callipolis was a factionless city. Individuals held nothing, not even bodies, in private: “Whenever anyone of us injures a finger, the entire community . . . senses it and all suffer together with the part that was injured” (462cd). Such a compressed, unified city is not fractured easily. Recalling Homer’s invocations, Socrates calls upon the Muses “to speak to us how first faction fell on them” (545d). Homer’s Muse spoke of human and divine passions; Socrates’ Muses focus on the divisions between the sexes and the difficulty of discovering the proper time for procreation. The complexity of the nuptial number continues to perplex scholars, but that complexity first arises because divisions within the city depend on acknowledging *eidê*, on categorizing male and female.

Mathematizing, as the education of philosophers in Book 7 had shown, entails the ability to distinguish.

¹² *Anêr* appears three times in 543d–544a. Socrates continues to discuss the *anthrôpos* (544d).

Even to deal with the nuptial number, as the Muses do, is to acknowledge that we live in a world of similarities and differences—of *eidê*. Callipolis had tried to transcend the categories of male and female by which we compartmentalize humans, impose *eidê* on them, creating realms of public and of private at war with one another. The bodily need to reproduce—a need grounded in a nature that arises from the eidetic differences between male and female—required the “erotic necessities,” which the founders of Callipolis would just as well have done without (458d). As we shall see below, the democracy of Book 8 is most similar to Callipolis in this regard: both abstract from differences between the sexes, the former to create the regime of complete unity and commonality, the latter to create the regime of infinite variety and particularities.

In Book 8, Socrates identifies five regimes: aristocracy (Callipolis); timocracy, oligarchy, democracy, and tyranny. He then asserts there are *only* five, challenging Glaucon: “Or do you have some other idea of regime which appears in a distinct form [*en eidêi diaphanei tine*]” (544c)? Likewise for human types: “Then if there are five [*eidê*] of cities, there would also be five arrangements of the souls of individuals” (544e). Glaucon could easily have challenged Socrates. For sure, he knew Herodotus’ tale of the debate among the Persian conspirators about the virtues of three regimes (3.81–83); in the *Statesman*, Plato has the Eleatic Stranger identify six regimes. The *eidê* that Socrates proposes in Book 8 obviously do not exist by nature; yet, Socrates argues that they derive from nature in a more profound sense. With a quote from the *Odyssey*, Socrates draws us to the scene where Penelope questions Odysseus, disguised as a stranger and stripped of any identity. She asks: “From where are you? For you are not sprung from an oak of ancient story nor from stone” (19.162–63). Socrates, in turn, asks Glaucon: “Or do you think out of oak and stone emerge regimes rather than from the character of the people in the cities” (544d)? Humans are not born from the froth of the sea, and, contrary to Athenian autochthony myths, citizens do not spring forth from the earth. The regime, in this telling, grows naturally from the inhabitants of a place and takes on the form of those living there. Glaucon listens appreciatively, raising no objections, allowing Socrates to map a limited number of human types onto regimes (544e).

Book 8 begins with the assertion of the *eidê* of human character, of political regimes, and thus of the importance of categorization. Were it not so late in the evening, Glaucon or one of the others still awake might have had the energy to question the proposed typology. As it is, they let Socrates proceed with his five *eidê*. Epistemologically, as we learned in the earlier books, we need *eidê* to understand what it means to add, to subtract, to use our intellects, to set our perceived world into some sort of order. Politically, though, what is the legacy of these categories of regimes? To analyze we need to have *eidê* of individuals and of regimes, but do they become Procrustean beds, originating not in nature but merely in Socrates’ fantasies that they are

based on a limited number of human types? Democracy and the democratic man provide the antidote to the argument from the beginning of Book 8; they deny the categorizing and summarizing role of the *eidê* and instead allow variety to flourish. But does the freedom from *eidê* and consequent equality mean that democracy allows monsters to be born? Or does true freedom require the absence of *eidê*?

Book 8 begins by forgetting the effacement of the differences between the male and female that initiated the radical proposals of Book 5. As Socrates addresses the difficulty of deriving the correct nuptial number, he ignores this earlier effacement and worries instead about reproduction and the mingling of the two distinct sexes. Therewith, a latent misogyny surfaces. In Book 5 Socrates dismissed any natural inferiority of female to male; in Book 8 imposing *eidê* on male and female establishes classes and hierarchies that appear prominently when Socrates describes the rise of a timocracy. Miscalculation of the proper nuptial number results in the lawless mixing of iron, silver, and gold (547a), but the emergence of the timocratic man is more dramatic than this obscure lawless mixing suggests. A nagging wife and mother, the *eidôs* of the female such as would appear in an Aristophanic comedy, gives rise to the timocrat. He hears his mother express anger that her husband (*ho anêr*) is not a ruler, does not seek wealth or engage in civil suits. He is not ambitious, she complains; he is "unmanly" (*anandros*) (549c–e). Adimantus, never one to speak positively about women, wholeheartedly agrees: Many such things belong to women. With the reintroduction of the *eidê* of male and female, with the reinforcement of the differences between them, there is the identification of particular qualities associated with each, and the term "unmanly" becomes a derogatory epithet. In Callipolis, the conflation of male and female precluded such language.

Timocracy, itself arising from the reintroduction of sexual difference, in turn becomes oligarchy, since once there are private treasure houses, the desire for private accumulation replaces the desire for honor.¹³ The rise of oligarchy exacerbates distinctions between groups within the city; oligarchy is a city torn within itself, divided into two factions, lacking the cohesion of Callipolis, on the one hand, and the openness and freedom from compulsion that we find in democracy, on the other. The concentration of wealth and the creation of a class of those without money leads to beggars, thieves, purse-snatchers, and craftsmen of all sorts of evils. The portrait of the oligarchic city is one of misery and division; the accumulation of wealth for the few means the absence of any cultivation of moderation among the rulers or among the poor. Licentiousness follows for the wealthy, hatreds and plotting for the poor (555d). The move to democracy is no

"decline." It is a blessing, with the extremes of poverty and the evils associated with oligarchy left behind and the divisions between rich and poor surmounted. To achieve this, though, there must be the violent overthrow of the oligarchic regime. The strong poor, desirous of new things (*neôterismou erôntes*, 555de), kill and exile the lazy, fat men of wealth (555d–556a). After the violence of the transition to democracy, we arrive at a regime of softness and gentleness, no longer plagued by factions and without compulsion—though its gentle formlessness begins in the violent expulsion of the wealthy and ends in the violence of the tyrant.

Democracy

Dêmokratia then comes into being whenever the poor, not weakened by the overindulgence and the laziness of the rich, are victorious (557a), killing and exiling the "resourceless" (556d) rich. Socrates takes us briefly to the institutions of democracy: "They [the inhabitants of a democratic regime] partake of the regime and the offices from an equality [*ex isou*], and for the most part the offices in it are by lot (557a)." This is all he says about the institutions of a democracy. He quickly turns to the question that will control the rest of the discussion of democracy: What sort of regime is this (557b)? The way of life, its culture, dominates; we hear no more about offices or the lot, much less assemblies or juries. The defining characteristic of democracy, Socrates tells us, is freedom. "The city is full of freedom [*eleutherias*]," freedom of speech, *parrhêsia*, the opportunity (*exousia*) to do in the city whatever one wishes; in a democracy, Socrates reiterates, each one will arrange his private life (*idian*) as he pleases (557b).

From the central theme of Callipolis, the *koinon*, the sharing of friends, property, and family, we move to a privatized world. The democratic regime exalts the *idion*, that which separates, makes us distinct from others; and the democracy of Book 8 has the openness to incorporate all those distinctions, to allow for what is our own, and not to demand the sharing of qualities, place, friends. Democracy here is the private regime in which we act as individuals, not as parts of a common enterprise. This "idiocy"¹⁴ does not bring faction to democracy; it leads rather to an egalitarian gentleness that imposes neither *eidê* nor hierarchy. Differences do not matter, as "each arranges his [her] private thing [*idian*]" (557b). This regime's emphasis on particularity results in a vast variety of human types (*anthrôpoi*, 557c). This appears in contrast to the earlier claim that there were only five human types. We experience democracy's multiplicity without sorting or categorizing, defying any theoretical model that can distinguish and then unify multiplicity into *eidê*. Democracy as it appears here is pre- (or post-) eidetic, allowing for a wide array of visual and sensual experiences.

In the passages on the freedom of democracy,

¹³ In this discussion of oligarchy, Socrates (and/or Plato) in no way defends the rich against the poor. Reservations about democracy in Book 8 come not from hostility to the poor or worries about the unskilled having political power. Rather, the portrait of the wealthy is devastating. The Woods (1978) claim that Plato associates poverty and engagement in banal trades with the lack of moral character. The opposite is true here.

¹⁴ I use "idiocy" in the sense that derives from *idion*, that which is private and distinctive, that which separates an individual, a family, a species from another, that which does not attend to the public. See further Saxonhouse 1983.

Socrates repeats forms of the word *poikilos* four times (557c) and claims that this “multihued” quality makes the many judge democracy the most beautiful (*kalliston*). In Callipolis, the beautiful city by name, there is the uniformity, stability, and oneness of the human *eidos*; in the city which is most beautiful to the many, there is no categorization, no effort to move beyond the particular to identify what unifies. The particular is accepted in its uniqueness, not as a tool to extend beyond itself or to become a part of the larger whole. Consequently, democracy provides the setting in which Socrates can imagine a multiplicity of regimes, including, of course, Callipolis.

Democracy, dismissing the unifying *eidê*, means that nothing and no one is imprisoned in a form. Socrates extends this even to the level of language; in a Thucydidean twist, words unconstrained by definitions take on multiple meanings. Describing the transformation of the youth into the democratic man, Socrates speaks as if he were quoting Thucydides on the Corcyrean revolution (Adam 1902, 2.243). Moderation is called cowardice; arrogance, good education; anarchy, freedom; wastefulness, generosity; and shamelessness, courage (560d–e). The malleability of words matches the fluidity of a democracy; unrestrained by *eidê*, words like people are free, unbounded by history, tradition, or past usage. In Thucydides, the openness of language is the basis for civil strife; in Socrates’ democracy it is merely one example of the absence of compulsion. Neither individuals nor words are forced into *eidê*. In Callipolis, the regime of necessity, there was no uncertainty about form; that uncertainty becomes the underlying principle of democracy.

Words are but one example of this formlessness. Socrates offers many other illustrations of this extreme freedom (563b). In democratic regimes, slaves do not differ from citizens. “Men who are bought and women who are bought are no less free than those who bought them” (563d). Slavery, categorizing humans and setting them into hierarchical relationships, is meaningless in a society which sets no common boundaries between individuals, which has no *eidê* by which we classify individuals. This formlessness extends as well to the freedom of women toward men, of men toward women, leading to the complete promiscuity of the sexes. The parallel to the mingling of the sexes practicing gymnastics in the palaestra in Callipolis is striking, but the similarity derives from opposite impulses. In Callipolis, a unifying *eidos* abstracts from the particular differences of the sexes, focusing on what is shared rather than what differentiates; in democracy, the mingling comes from the absence of *eidê* that might give the male or female sex any form or meaning. In each case, no hierarchy exists because each regime considers sex as irrelevant, one by unifying male and female into one *eidos*, the other by allowing for an infinite multiplicity of forms.

As with slaves and their masters, as with male and female, so, too, even with animals in a democracy. Animals are freer in a democracy than in any other regime. Anyone who had not experienced it would not believe how much freedom they have. Thus, “female

dogs according to the proverb become of the same sort as their mistresses and also the horses and asses are accustomed to journeying freely on the roads, hitting whoever stands in their way if they do not stand aside, and thus all the rest is full of freedom” (563cd).¹⁵ Animals, having equal access to the streets of Athens, unself-consciously bump into humans. Meanwhile, men condemned to death or exile do not take on the form of “condemned men”; they dwell in the midst of the city. Like the animals, they wander the city unremarked upon (558a).

Freedom, in the problematic meaning that it acquires during Socrates’ discussion, entails the failure to distinguish one form from another, to give form to the slave as opposed to the master, to the female as distinct from the male, to the dog as distinct from the human, to the condemned man as distinct from the innocent citizen. This fluidity and malleability, this absence of *eidê*, attractive in its abstraction from the compulsion that marked Callipolis, nevertheless creates an underlying unease as Socrates clarifies the dangers inherent in this formlessness.

From Gentleness to Compulsion

Democracy as a forgetfulness of form extends to the inability to distinguish between good and bad pleasures—to the toleration of all. In Socrates’ democracy, freedom is not being forced into a shape. Democracy thus entails a rejection of the very principle that dominated the *Republic* since Book 2, when the first steps were taken toward founding the just city: Each individual is suited for one task, Socrates told us there. Such a principle is meaningless in a multifarious democratic regime, where all do many things, where no one retains a single form that lasts over time.¹⁶ The politics of the first city of the *Republic*, Glaucon’s so-called city of pigs (372d) and its extensions throughout the dialogue, depend on the principle that each person performs one task, everyone having a prescribed *eidos* that sets him or her into a category. Once the individual is properly identified according to his or her nature, there is no fluidity; the house builder remains the house builder and does not become the shoemaker. This then becomes the definition of justice in Book 4: “Each one must practice that one thing about the city, the one for which his nature has made him naturally most suited” (433a).

Earlier in the *Republic* the forms gave political—and

¹⁵ Jowett and Campbell (1894, 3.398) write: “Cicero cites, but can’t carry over the jest. The most extravagant and comical ideas . . . often occur in the works of Plato. But the manner of saying them . . . does away with the feeling of bad taste and impropriety.” We need to read these passages as more than comical. They are integral to Plato’s presentation of the fundamental assumptions about democratic principles.

¹⁶ Here we see recollections of Athenian democracy, in which citizenship entailed taking on many forms, from juror to ecclesiast to hoplite to port inspector. See also footnote 4. Annas (1981, 300) misconstrues Athenian democracy when she responds to the tolerance theme of this section by commenting: “What Plato presents as the tolerant indifference of democracy could not be further from the state of affairs in Athens.”

epistemological—order. Any blurring of *eidê*, by someone not doing his or her own thing, would erode the potential for justice of the city; yet, just as the just city is built on an adherence to form and the exploitation of form for the structure of society, so democracy, as the regime that rejects forms, is in Socrates' words an "anarchy" (562e). Lest that word take on contemporary connotations of violence, anarchy here means simply being without rule, which leads to a profound gentleness. In this soft regime where compulsion is banished, where forms do not tyrannize, all do as they wish. The parable of the cave in Book 7, which tells of dragging one with the potential to be a philosopher out of the cave and then forcing him back down, makes us harshly aware of the compulsion of Callipolis. About democracy in Book 8, Socrates states: "There is no compulsion to rule in this city, even if you are competent to rule, nor to be ruled, if you do not wish to, nor to war when the city is at war" (557e).

The lack of distinction between male and female, animals and humans, condemned men and innocent citizens makes clear that the forgetting of form, and the absence of compulsion attending it, also means the absence of hierarchy. With the blurring of form, criteria for authority dissolve, claims to rule retreat. As Socrates begins to identify the negative aspects of democracy deriving from the absence of *eidê*, he offers as examples how in a democracy the teacher fears and fawns on the students (563a); how the young show no deference to the old; how there is no difference between the ruler and the ruled, whether in public or in private (562d); how the father habituates himself to his son; how the city dweller fears the metic, the foreigner without rights living in this city (562e); how the old and the young converge and compete (563a); and how there is no distinction between strangers and citizens (563a)—calling into question the very structure of a polis that cannot identify its own citizens. Everything (one) blends into the other. We can no more tell moderation from cowardice than we can tell a father from a son, a teacher from a student, or a citizen from a noncitizen.

In contemporary understandings, the absence of hierarchy translates into equality, but that is too simple a translation for what occurs in the *Republic*; equality entails the identification of those who are equal, an apprehension of the forms that unite and separate. The democracy of Book 8 gives us such a radical view of equality that there is no foundation for recognizing those who are equal or unequal, which in turn would lead to a hierarchy—whether of male over female, humans over animals, or Greeks over barbarians. Likewise, an Aristotelian theory of distributive justice, of equals to equals and unequals to unequals, cannot survive Book 8's radical equality or the formlessness of a democratic regime that, according to its principles of freedom, refuses to impose forms.

The same fluidity, absence of compulsion, and abstraction from hierarchy characterize the soul of the democratic man, "of such a sort in private [*ho toioutos idiai*]" (558c). The transformation of the oligarch's son into the democratic man begins with the unacknowl-

edged opposition between freedom and necessity (561a). There is at first the freeing of all desires, necessary and unnecessary, the submission to all, scorning neither the necessary nor the unnecessary and nourishing each equally. The democratic man, like the democratic regime, lacking the compulsive categories of *eidê*, is unable to distinguish, to place any desire in a box with a label telling him whether to use or repress it or to set it in a hierarchical relation. "If someone says there are good and bad pleasures, he throws his head back and says all are alike and must be honored equally" (561c). There is no order in his life, but he calls his life "sweet, free, and blessed" (561d). Without necessity, he can live multiple lives. Like the city filled with many *paradeigmata* of individuals, he is filled with a multiplicity of life styles:

He lives his life having set pleasures into an equality [*eis ison*]. To the chance passion he hands over rule of himself until he is full and then to another, scorning none but nourishing all from an equality [*ex isou*]. . . . He lives each day welcoming the desire that falls on him, at one time getting drunk and playing the flute, at another drinking only water and restraining himself, then doing gymnastics and again being idle and careless of everything, and then spending time as if he were philosophizing. Often he is active in the city's affairs and jumping he says and does what he chances on (561bd).

The list goes on and on.

The democratic man who does not recognize some pleasures as equal in their necessity and others as unequal in that they are unnecessary has in his soul "the most characters [*êthôn*], and is beautiful and many-colored [*poikilon*]" (561e). He possesses within the soul the radical equality of the democratic regime of complete freedom. His soul, like the city he reflects, is anarchic. Anarchy etymologically means not only "without rule" but also "without *archê*," without beginning or foundation. There is no primary resting place. The city and the individual float without origins or direction defined by a moment of creation. A nature controlling, limiting what one does, is absent. Both the democratic man and democracy exhibit the fluidity and flexibility of form that opposes the fundamental principles of the philosophy and politics articulated in the previous books.¹⁷

The portrait of the democratic man suggests a maniacal experimentation with various lives and a loss of the gentleness of the democratic regime. In all the references in this section to the beauty and gentleness of this multiplicity, to the genial—almost comic—democracy, there is nevertheless the threatening undercurrent of the violence of a life without *eidê*, whether public or private, a life without categories. This disturbing undercurrent surfaces when Socrates and Adeimantus, quoting from Aeschylus, recognize that dwellers in a democracy say whatever comes to their lips. Perhaps this is an allusion to Athenian *parrhêsia* (freedom of speech) but also, given the

¹⁷ Wolin (1994, 49–50) captures briefly the point I am making here when he discusses the limitations that constitutionalism imposes when it assigns form and "reconstitutes politics as identity." To underscore his point, he turns to the democracy of Book 8.

reference, to blasphemy. If the inhabitants of a democracy have no worries about blasphemy, are there no gods who care about what they say? Are the citizens irrelevant to the gods? Or the gods to the citizens? For the Greeks, the gods would not control a world in which men say freely whatever comes to their lips. No punishments come from the gods. No image of a bloodied Oedipus or an Antigone hanging in a cave outside the city need disturb their sleep.

Socrates tells us that democratic citizens pay no attention to law (563d), written or unwritten, so that no one can be their despot. Yet, again, behind this delicious freedom remains the ancient readers' recognition of the divine source of the unwritten laws and the tragic consequences of blurring the boundaries between human and divine. Antigone's famous speech about the unwritten laws of Zeus reminds us of those decrees that come from the gods and not from humans. The gentle regime of tolerant men and women who abstract from *eidê* is so gentle that it is profoundly impious and inattentive to the laws of the gods, just as it is inattentive to the judgments of execution or exile by its own citizens. In this softness, however, democracy lays the groundwork for the severest forms of violence.

As boundaries between gods, humans, and animals dissolve, or are never even recognized, freedom becomes slavery, and the epistemological denial of *eidê* finds expression in regimes of severe rather than gentle consequences. The transformation of democracy into a tyranny and the democratic soul into the tyrannical soul, so powerfully depicted in all its depravity in Book 9, is a sad tale. According to Socrates, the cause is a certain greediness for what democracy has defined as a good: freedom and, as we understand now, freedom as the destruction of *eidê*. But the image that captures most profoundly the end of democracy comes at 565d and the mythos of the temple of Lykaian Zeus in Arcadia. Socrates relates the story:

What is the beginning of the change from a leader into a tyrant? Or is it clear that when the leader begins to do the same thing as in the myth which is spoken about the temple of the Lykaian Zeus in Arcadia . . . how the man tasting human organs cut up with organs of other sacrificial animals necessarily becomes a wolf (565de).

The leader who becomes the tyrant "tastes the slaughter of kin with unholy tongue and mouth" (565e), and if he is not killed, he becomes a tyrant, and he changes into "a wolf from a human being [*anthrôpou*]" (566a).

Democracy ends with a story of human sacrifice and cannibalism. The democratic regime, in which one says whatever comes to one's lips, in which a radical equality means no hierarchy, in which animals are treated no differently from humans, and in which humans see themselves as not needing or as no different from gods, ends with the impious and repugnant cannibalism to which such blurring of boundaries leads. Tyranny takes over the principles that marked democracy and shows the darkness to which a regime that ignores *eidê* leads once the violence of the passions takes over. The tyrant does not distinguish between being human and being a

wolf, just as democracy does not distinguish between the human being, the ass, and the horse.¹⁸

Socrates concludes Book 8 by telling how the tyrant gains power. In a reference to themes from the early passages of the dialogue, we learn that the tyrant does not know how to distinguish friends from enemies. Such categories appeared vivid to Polemarchus when he was first challenged to define justice; they were questioned as Socrates explored our capacity to recognize friend and enemy, our need for a sharper and more profound ability to make those distinctions. The tyrant, the final expression of the democratic man, is the full expression of this incapacity to distinguish. He must (*dei*) do away with those who speak honestly to him about what is happening (those who are his friends) if he intends to rule; no one of any worth among his friends and foes remains (567b). Tyranny likewise is purged of both friend and foe, so the Polemarchian problem that set the interlocutors forth to find justice and injustice disappears, just as in a democracy, according to the principles of Book 8, the Polemarchian problem—and with it the impulse to philosophize—disappears, not by a purging but by its irrelevance.¹⁹

CONCLUSION: *EIDE* AND DEMOCRATIC FREEDOM

In the traditional story of the gigantomachy between ancients and moderns, theories of equality and inequality have divided the two camps. It is argued that the ancients—Plato, Aristotle, Cicero—offer a hierarchical world view in which political regimes succeed insofar as the order they impose matches the natural hierarchy of talents, whether they be those of the philosopher rulers of the *Republic*, the freemen of Aristotle, or the well-born of *De Officiis*. In contrast, from (let us say) Machiavelli onward, the hierarchy based on some natural criterion of worth breaks down. The chain of being which controlled much of medieval thought shattered under the bold assertions of Machiavelli, who urged men to imitate beasts, women to imitate men, and men, in order to outwit Fortuna, to imitate fickle

¹⁸ The tyrant in Book 9 continues the theme of formlessness, not recognizing the difference between waking and sleeping (571cd), gods and humans (573c); he is himself like a woman (579b). The description of the tyrant illustrates the true tragedies that arise when the failure to distinguish is combined with eros and with political power. On the close connection between the tyrannical man and the democratic man, note the use of *poikilos* in the description of the parts of the soul at the end of Book 9 (588c).

¹⁹ Benardete (1989, 200) analogizes between the democracy of Book 8 and philosophy, arguing: "Democracy's failure to enforce its decisions and protect itself parodies philosophy, for which everything is open to revision." (Cf. Barber 1996, Euben 1996, Monoson 1994.) This is too strong. Philosophy as the exercise of the intellect pursues *eidê*. Democratic freedom and equality entail the dismissal of *eidê* and thus create tensions with the philosophic endeavor. This does not mean that philosophy necessarily accepts the *eidê* any political regime imposes. In Book 2 Polemarchus thought he knew who was friend and who was foe. Socrates shows that the *eidê* Polemarchus established were not adequate. Philosophy is willing to question the constructed *eidê*; the democracy of Book 8 dismisses them. Insofar as philosophy seeks *eidê*, it remains an activity of compulsion—dividing and uniting—rather than one of freedom.

women. The heroes of Machiavelli's story transform themselves from subjects to rulers, from advisers to princes, and break through what appeared to be natural distinctions. The flux of nature denies any determination of who or what men and women will be. Machiavelli gives us a world of fluidity, in which forms are not given by nature, to be discovered by the intellect and put into place in the political structure. Forms are the result of human assertion and efforts applied in opposition to a formless nature (Pocock 1975, chapter 6 and 169).

The above discussion suggests that, at least insofar as Plato is concerned, the story of the gigantomachy, with the ancients at swords with the moderns over issues of equality and the fluidity of nature, is far too simple a tale. Plato does not merely favor hierarchy and reject equality as a political principle; he does not merely assert the pre-existence of *eidê* waiting to be forcefully stamped on individuals to set them into an ordered world.²⁰ Instead, inquiring into the principles of a democracy, he explores the premises of a fluid nature, of a world without *eidê*. Machiavelli, offering a new world view of a fluid nature, challenges medieval thought and prepares the foundation for the modern world's claims of equality, whereby no individual so differs from another that s/he can claim authority over others. Plato's Socrates in Book 8, like Machiavelli, offers a view of a natural world of flux without any fixed point, lacking beginning and form. Precisely because the early modern theorists did not follow through on the theoretical principles behind the rejection of *eidê* in the embrace of equality, as did Socrates in Book 8, they did not address the difficulty of justifying the imposition of *eidê* in a world of flux; they did not confront the problem of identifying the *eidê* of those who were supposedly equal. History has shown and continues to show the indeterminacy of equality in a Machiavellian world of flux.²¹ It has been a truism almost since the birth of liberal theory that freedom and equality are at odds. The democracy of Book 8 suggests not that they are incompatible, but that the mistake is the failure to recognize that true equality can only come from the freedom from tyrannizing *eidê*. Plato forces us to see the deepest consequences of our casually held principles.

While the democracy of Book 8 gives us a threatening portrait of the city without *eidê*, at first there is something very appealing about the multihued regime that transcends categories to include all—women, slaves, horses. Socrates uses the word *kalos*, beautiful (three times in 557c), to describe this regime. Though it is easy to dismiss this as ironic, perhaps our prejudices about the *Republic* as extolling the city of Book 5

and our insistence on describing Book 8 as the story of regimes "in decline" make us assume irony here. We lose the richness of Plato's work and let ourselves be drawn into worn-out models of "the ancients versus the moderns" if we see the democratic regime in Book 8 as simply a decline on the way to tyranny. Socrates has other criticisms of democracy. By Book 8, he turns away from familiar critiques about democratic assemblies and identifies the epistemological problem democracy introduces, namely, that a radical equality may entail the incapacity to assess who rules, to decide who—metic, slave, woman, Cyclops, horse—is inside and who is outside the city. And Book 8 may ultimately reveal how that incapacity to impose forms, whether they be by nature or not, leads to the cannibalism of the temple of the Lykaian Zeus, setting the stage for the violence of the tyrant. Taking more seriously this section of the *Republic* than has been done previously points to the political role of the epistemology of the *Republic's* central books. Plato's concerns about democracy do not come only from an animus toward the regime that executed Socrates; they arise because of the problematic forgetting of *eidê* that is central to the freedom of the democratic regime. The investigation of *eidê* in the democracy of Book 8 forces us to face an inherent tension in all democratic regimes.

March and Olsen (1995, 46), as noted above, ask that democratic governments "create and support . . . [the] development of democratic identities." They reflect the current sensitivity to the value placed on individual and communal identities. What else is "identity" but the imposing of an *eidô*s on the self or others? Socrates' portrayal of democracy in Book 8 questions whether democratic governments committed to freedom and the radical equality that is the true companion of that freedom can help create those identities without working against their own fundamental principles and without becoming tyrannical. To develop identities is to impose *eidê*. The freedom of democracy is the rejection of restrictive *eidê* which lead to exclusion and hierarchy. Yet, to live without political and epistemological *eidê* is to create the conditions in which gentleness may be readily transformed into violence, in which thought becomes a disordered melange, in which words have no history, and in which the soul begins an inevitable journey to tyranny.

Book 8 presents the epistemological and psychological challenges to claims that democratic governments should enable the construction of identities. The issue Socrates poses is not whether regimes should or should not do so, but rather that the underlying openness at the heart of democratic principles defies *eidê*, makes such demands contradictory, and points to the potentially tragic incompatibility of such choices. Without addressing directly the need for, as well as the dangers of, *eidê*, we ignore the inherent theoretical contradiction in the democratic regimes we inhabit. To address them effectively, we must understand the challenge Plato posed almost 2,500 years ago to the readers of his dialogues. Most basically, there is the question of whether the very identification of citizens and noncitizens violates the principles on which democracies have

²⁰ The myth (*pseudos*) of the metals from Book 3 may seem to undermine my claims here, but that passage remains ambiguous. It need not be read as a defense of *natural* human inequality. It is a view of human inequality required by the politics of Callipolis, for which Socrates invents it.

²¹ See Thomas (1983) for a discussion of this problem in early modern England, as it struggled with how to differentiate humans from animals and then how to justify distinctions among humans, male and female, black and white.

been founded. One longs for a Platonic theory of statecraft that would lead us out of these contradictions, but Socrates does not offer such a solution. As always, he leaves us in a state of *aporia*, pointing to the depth of the issues and the complexities of any solution to the problem that even the best contemporary thinkers glibly set aside. We cannot expect democratic political regimes to help develop identities until we resolve the incompatibilities Socrates, by confronting radical equality head on, has shown between identity and democratic freedom, between the tyranny of the *eidê* and our need for them.

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