

PLATO'S CRITIQUE OF DEMOCRACY AND HIS CONCEPTION OF EDUCATION FOR DEMOCRACY*

by

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ABSTRACT: In the history of the interpretation of Plato's political thought, the topic of Plato's criticism of democracy has dominated over his proposal of general and obligatory education (especially literacy) of the *demos*. Why should we think that the critical aspect is more important than the constructive one? The following paper seeks to demonstrate that these two themes of Plato's political philosophy are complementary and that awareness of their close interconnection is conducive to our understanding of the reason for, and aims of, Plato's criticism of democracy as exercised in Athens in the 4th century BC. These arguments are constituted by such main questions as: What does the word *demokratia* mean to Plato? Why is the quality of laws essential to his description of a "correct regime" (*orthē politeia*)? Why does a citizen of the law-abiding city of Magnesia in the *Laws* have to be a reader? Why did Aristotle associate Plato's name with the utopian ideas presented in the *Republic*, not with the idea of general education as expressed in the *Laws*?

INTRODUCTION

Criticism of democracy and education for democracy may be, but not necessarily are, mutually exclusive. The criticism may be a constructive element of the so-called deliberative democracy which derives its theoretical inspiration mainly from Jürgen HABERMAS' concept of "critical rationality"¹. It is beyond doubt that good civic education, that is one which stimulates the citizens' sense of civic and political responsibility, is a *condicio sine qua non* of such a democracy. But it remains a question as to whether without citizens who understand their rights and duties democracy exists at all. It is even more difficult to ascertain whether Plato criticised his contemporary democracy as a concerned beneficiary of a democratic element and democratic culture, or – as Karl POPPER recognised, with

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¹ More in SCHOFIELD 2006: 55–59, with a discussion of Peter EUBEN's position that Socratic dialogues reflect the "Habermasian dimension" (EUBEN 1994, 1996). Cf. WALLACH 2001: 400–410, for continuity and discontinuity between RAWLS' and HABERMAS' "deliberative democracy" and Plato's political art.

many other scholars concurring with him or following him – he did it because of his hostility towards it².

Contemporary reality gave us an answer to the first question: civic education is a necessary, but not sufficient, condition for democracy. The examples of Iraq or the countries of the Maghreb have shown that it is hard to instil democracy in a place where authoritarian tradition is strong, social ties have been weakened by factional strife and civic war, and where not all citizens have access to education; that is, a place where the appropriate educational, social and self-governmental structures are unstable. On the other hand, the current crisis of democracy in countries with a longer democratic tradition which allows them to fulfil that *condicio sine qua non* demonstrates that knowledge regarding universal civic rights and duties that constitute a just system cannot be conveyed on the level of general education, because there is no general consensus as to what those rights and duties are and whether they exist at all. As Thomas N. MITCHELL remarks in his introduction to the history of Athenian democracy,

[there] is a lack of agreement about what constitutes a genuine democracy. This leaves scope for regimes with scant respect for the rule of law or the rights of citizens to lay claim to the title in an attempt to legitimise their rule, creating a danger that the term may become so elastic as to be meaningless. Even among political scientists there is limited agreement about the essence of democracy³.

Even though the matter concerns current affairs, such lessons change our viewpoint regarding the past and deepen our understanding of it. Presumably this is why there is some parallelism between the more nuanced analyses of Plato's approach to democracy which have arisen in specialist literature from the middle of the 20th century onwards⁴ and the crisis of contemporary democracy – a democracy that tends to assume various guises; there are, for instance, the democracies of the Congo, the Philippines, the USA or even Poland, which differ radically when exercised by various "chosen men" or self-appointed representatives of the *demos*. There is no doubt that the majority of these governments deserve critical reflection; according to survey data analysed by the Economist Intelligence Unit (*Democracy Index 2020*), most of the states declare themselves to have a republican or democratic system, but only 8.4 percent of the world population live

² POPPER 1945. On "the stubborn endurance of the view of Plato as a proto-totalitarian thinker", see MONOSON 2000: 13, n. 29.

³ MITCHELL 2015: 2.

⁴ Analyses of Plato's dialogues which reveal them as an expression of the democratic culture in 4th-century Athens and read them against the broad context of problems are characteristic for current scholarship. See e.g. WALLACH 2001 (for the new approaches to Plato's critical political thought, see p. 9, n. 12); KASTELY 2015 (for scholarship demonstrating the importance of seeing Plato as a thinker concerned with the crisis of Athenian democracy, see p. XIV); SØRENSEN 2016 (for recent trends in the study of Plato's relation to democracy, see p. 6, n. 17).

in so-called full democracies with the rest living in flawed democracies, hybrid systems and totalitarian systems⁵. The reasons for those flaws naturally vary from state to state. It seems natural, therefore, that Plato had his reasons to criticise democracy in Athens as well; but it is less clear what those reasons, and, even more pertinently, what the aims of his criticism, may have been.

Regardless of the above, the label of a “critic of democracy” that seems to be permanently attached to Plato’s name is, in fact, deserved. That he was critical of it is beyond doubt, and this regardless of whether he was referring to a social system that promotes individual freedom and equality of all the citizens or to a political system that gives power to the people⁶. This label has shaped the common perception of his political thought to a large extent, perhaps causing many of his readers to ignore the question whether criticising a democracy from the perspective of its 4th-century citizen he was truly criticising those values that define the ideals of today’s democracy: the rule of law and social justice; in other words, what democracy exactly he may have criticised. Surely far fewer readers associate Plato with the earliest project of obligatory and general civil education of a properly governed *polis* confirmed in the sources. And yet, the *Laws*, Plato’s last dialogue, is the earliest known text to recommend the erection of schools, the recruitment of competent teachers, the establishment of a special office (a ministry, as we would say today) to deal with the matters of education, and the introduction of obligatory primary education (including literacy) for the children of all citizens, to be paid for by the *polis*⁷. Thus, in the history of the interpretation of Platonism, not only have Plato’s criticism of democracy and the project of general education (especially literacy) of the *demos* been separated, but also the latter has been treated as an issue of secondary importance⁸.

In this paper, I attempt to demonstrate that these two aspects of Plato’s political thought are complementary and that awareness of their close interconnection is conducive to our understanding of the reasons for, and aims of, Plato’s criticism of democracy as exercised in Athens in the 4th century BC. The recurring

⁵ <https://www.eiu.com/n/campaigns/democracy-index-2020/>, where 60 indicators of “full democracy” are set out (I quote the main ones on p. 36 below).

⁶ For the former situation, see *Alc.* I, 123a1–4; *Grg.* 452d–e, 502e, 513a–b; *R.* 405a9, 431c2, 557b–c, 558c5–6, 561d6–e1, 562b12–564a8; *Th.* 175e7; *Plt.* 298b6–300a, 300e; *L.* 684c, 698a10–b2, 699e–700a, 701a–b; for the latter, see *Plt.* 303a4–b1.

⁷ On school buildings, see *L.* 779d, 804c; on teachers paid by the *polis*: 804c–d, 813e; on the general and obligatory character of education: 804d, 808d–e, 812e; on the minister (head official) of education: 765d–766b, 801d, 809a–b, 811d–812a, 813a–d, 829d, 835a, 936a; on literacy: 809c, 809e, 810a–b, 951e, 953d.

⁸ The current popularity of gender studies may be one of the factors causing Plato’s proposal to educate women to be more widely discussed than the revolutionary political significance of the general and obligatory character of education (compare HOBBS 2015 on women with SCOLNICOV 2015 on education). The few scholars to focus on the latter are, e.g., NIGHTINGALE 1999: 102; BOBONICH 2002: 106–119; CLEARY 2003: 167; MICHELS 2004: 522.

question is: are there any reasons to perceive Plato more as a critic of democracy – who, in the *Republic*, presented a programme of educating only, or in the forefront, a relatively small group of “guardians” (the rulers/philosophers and soldiers, i.e., the intellectual and moral elite), rather than as an educator – who, in the *Laws*, wanted to prepare the *demos* for democracy⁹.

1. THE TERMINOLOGICAL COMMON DENOMINATOR: LAWFULNESS

The admirable phrase “education for democracy”, which may perhaps seem overly enthusiastic when used in reference to Plato’s thought, necessitates a remark concerning terminology. To Plato and his contemporaries, the word *demokratia* meant a different thing than it does to us. Ancient social and cultural elites perceived it as a not necessarily pleasant-sounding term for one of several methods of governing a *polis*, derived from the term for the men who exercised power in this method: the *demos*¹⁰. In Plato’s view, the matter of who governs at a given moment does not define the political regime (*polis/politeia*), but it defines “city administrations (πόλεων δὲ οἰκῆσεις) where the city is under the sway of despots, with some parts enslaved to other parts of itself” (*L.* 713a)¹¹. Thus, when a regime is called a monarchy, an aristocracy/oligarchy or a democracy, all that is defined in each case is the power (*kratos*) of the despot (*despotes*).

⁹ Regardless of the interpretations demonstrating that education in the *Republic* encompasses also the producer class (e.g. BROWN 2017, with references to 414d, 415c, 423d) and that the curriculum of the guardians does not materially diverge from the curriculum of the so-called Nocturnal Council in the *Laws* (e.g. KLOSKO 2006; see n. 24 below), it is hard to dispute that Kallipolis is founded on the proper upbringing of its guardians (*R.* 415c7–8: “there is an oracle that the city will be destroyed when an iron or bronze man is its guardian”; cf. 546d), and Magnesia in the *Laws* is founded on the general and obligatory education of the *demos*, even though it is non-obligatory at the stage of higher-level education (*L.* 804d6: every citizen “must of necessity become educated”). I do not examine here the issue that is widely discussed in literature, namely whether these two educational proposals are compatible (see e.g. WALLACH 2001: 360–387; KRAUT 2010: 57–70), but only whether Plato had democracy in mind when he proposed general literacy for the *demos* in the *Laws*. Here and henceforward I cite the *Laws* from PANGLE 1980 and the *Republic* from BLOOM 1968.

¹⁰ So in the earliest definition of *demokratia* in Thucydides II 37, 1; similar use of the term in Herodotus VI 43 (see MITCHELL 2015: 48). The value of the word *demokratia*, attested to in the sources from the second half of the 5th century BC onwards, was not constant, depending on the political and military situation on the one hand (after the Persian Wars, the proud Athenian democracy was contrasted to the tyrannies of the barbarians, including the Persians), and on the other, on the political orientation of those using the word (the democrats perceived the word *demos* as meaning “all the people, the citizen body as a whole”, while the aristocrats as meaning “the masses, the poor”; see CARTLEDGE 2009: 74). For more on the fluctuating connotations of the word *demokratia* in the 5th and 4th century, see KONSTAN 2004: 108–113.

¹¹ Plato makes this point also in the *Statesman* 303c: the criterion for governing bodies defines “not statesmen but seditionaries” (οὐκ ὄντας πολιτικούς ἀλλὰ στασιαστικούς). Here and henceforward I cite the *Statesman* from BENARDETE 1984.

Whether the despot is a single man, or several, or a majority (the *demos*), this is no more than a matter of quantity. Yet if any reasonable and free man wished to retain this traditional and generally applied criterion of defining regimes¹², the regime in which he would like to live – undoubtedly a reasonable one as well – should be called from the name “of the god who truly rules as despot over those who possess intellect” (L. 713a). This subtly ironic piece of advice suggests that those who do not possess intellect are ruled by some other god. This is exactly the meaning perceived in it by its addressee, who immediately asks: “Who is this god [who rules over those who possess intellect]?”, since he himself has his god, Zeus, and was quite correct in guessing that it was not this god that had been meant¹³. He receives an indirect answer, conveyed by means of the myth about Kronos’ former rule over the human race; according to the etymology in the *Cratylus*, Kronos was “pure reason” (ἀκήρατον τοῦ νοῦ, 396b). He is the one and only able to understand “that [...] human nature is not at all capable of regulating the human things, when it possesses autocratic authority over everything, without becoming swollen with insolence and injustice”; hence he placed “demons, members of a more divine and better species” as guardians above the human race (L. 713c–d). Those times were long gone, however, the gods passed away, only the animals and the humans remained. The animals can still be looked after by beings more perfect than themselves (it is a man that is a goatherd, after all, not a goat), but men must rely on other men to govern them¹⁴. If they wish to be governed well, they may only “imitate by every device the way of life that is said to have existed under Kronos” (L. 713e). On the private level, this act of imitation is performed when we obey the faculty which “within us partakes of immortality”, that is, our own reason; on the political level, it is performed when we obey “the common opinion of the city” (δόγμα πόλεως κοινόν) agreed upon through the method of reasoning. This opinion is called the law (L. 644d–645a, 714a). In 875c–d, Plato will state this more succinctly and explicitly:

For no law or order is stronger than knowledge, nor is it right for intelligence to be subordinate, or a slave, to anyone, but it should be ruler over everything, if indeed

¹² Application of the criterion of quality requires knowledge, experience, and time. It is certainly easier to ascertain *who* is governing than *how* that government is exercised. No wonder, therefore, that the classification of government systems according to the type of governance, dating back to Pindar (*Pyth.* 2, 86), has permanently entered political language. To characterise regimes according to the quality of governance (the level of lawfulness) has been standard practice since 2006, when the first Democracy Index was published.

¹³ In the *Laws*, even the gods have their god: reason (*nous*) is “god, in the correct sense, for the gods” (897b).

¹⁴ According to the version of this myth given in the *Statesman*, when Kronos ruled over the human race, there were no state systems (*politeiai*, 272a) or families. Political and family life came into being at the point of the god’s departure, when people were left to their own devices and with a decreasing memory of the former order (273b, 274d).

it is true and really free according to nature. But now, in fact, it is so nowhere or in any way, except to a small extent. That is why one must choose what comes second, order and law – which see and look to most things, but are incapable of seeing everything¹⁵.

Therefore, the quality of laws is essential to description of the type of political regime. This includes the way the governing entity governs the state, that is whether this is done by means of good/reasonable laws or not; what laws are good/reasonable; whether the laws cover both the governors and the governed; whether there exist institutions that control those who exercise any kind of power; whether the election procedures are overt and just. In the twelve books of the *Laws*, Plato discusses these criteria in detail, explaining why they are decisive to the “correct regime” (*orthē politeia*, 701e) and why this regime can come into being only in a mixed system, that is, one combining monarchic and democratic elements¹⁶.

To us, the word “democracy” has become synonymous with “the only correct regime”, where the indicator of “correctness” is not the declared constitution but, as it was for Plato, the actualisation of the ideal of the rule of law by means of appropriate political and social structures. As the *Democracy Index* reports¹⁷, there are sixty indicators by which states are assessed as full or flawed democracies and it is quite impossible to reduce them to the assertion that “the people hold power”, or even to the method by which they select and confer power on their rulers¹⁸. What is assessed in Plato’s manner, however, is the way power is exercised and divided, and this assessment covers also constitutional monarchies. Elements taken into consideration in assessing this are, primarily, justness of the election process, functioning of public administration, citizens’ participation in political life, and political culture. A regime where these indicators are high is nowadays called a “full democracy”¹⁹; testimonies found in the *Statesman* and

¹⁵ This imperative is strikingly reminiscent of what Plato highlights in the *Statesman* 293a–297e, 300a–301e.

¹⁶ A history lesson given in Book III indicates that “they shouldn’t have legislated great ruling offices, or unmixed authority” (οὐδ’ αὖ ἀμείκτους νομοθετεῖν, 693b2–5), “no city will ever have a fine political life if it lacks a share in either of these” (ἀμφοῖν τούτοις, 693d8). This is because a correct regime is characterised by “freedom, friendship, together with prudence”, that is, qualities which require moderation in freedom (i.e., the democratic element) and reasonable obedience/authority (the monarchic element, 693d–701e). See also 757a–e: equality consistent with human nature can be achieved only in a regime that strikes a balance between a monarchy and a democracy.

¹⁷ See n. 5 above.

¹⁸ See MITCHELL 2015: 3, for a criticism of Joseph Schumpeter’s view that the electoral method is “the essential defining characteristic of democracy”.

¹⁹ The highest level of democracy is today evinced by two constitutional monarchies, Norway and Sweden, whereas the lowest by North Korea, which calls itself, in a pleonastic augmentation, a Democratic People’s Republic.

the *Laws* are enough for us to assume that Plato would have called it a “correct regime” (*orthē politeia*), with the proviso that to him, any law-abiding regime, one that is “free and prudent and a friend to itself” (*L.* 693b), is a “correct regime” regardless of the number of entities that exercise power²⁰.

Thus, in Plato's language, the term *demokratia* is not synonymous with the rule of law but with the rule (*kratos*) of the *demos*; but if democracy is understood in a contemporary broad sense as a rule of law as actualised also in constitutional monarchies, then an equivalent to the contemporary phrase “education for democracy” would be, in his thought, “education for lawfulness”, which is achievable in a democratic monarchical system.

Let us now recall the initial state of our problem once more, arising from the fact that Plato is ascribed the label of a “critic of democracy”, and let us consider whether there are any reasons to suppose that the critical aspect of his thought is separate from, and more important than its positive, that is, educational aspect.

2. THE GENERAL FORMS AND GENERAL EDUCATION

The question why the critical aspect dominates over the constructive one in interpretations of Plato's political thought could find a facile answer that takes into consideration two factors which are independent from us. The first of them is a certain psychological mechanism, skilfully exploited by the mass media, according to which the negative aspect of reality draws more attention than the positive one. The second is the fact that the *Laws*, Plato's last work, is relatively difficult to read, until the 20th century lying on the margin of the *Corpus Platonicum*; even today hardly anyone manages to reach that far in their Platonic curriculum, let alone making it a starting point of their analysis²¹.

But there are also more complex reasons for this state of affairs, ones arising from conceptual approaches. In view of William V. HARRIS' remark that “no classical city is in fact known to have required all free-born boys, let alone girls, to attend school or to learn to read or write; nor is any city of this era known to have subsidised elementary education in any way”²², Plato's recommendation that any free-born resident of the city of Magnesia as postulated in the *Laws* – that is, girls as much as boys – be subject to mandatory state-funded education is

²⁰ See *Plt.* 293d–303c: a regime is “correct” when, and to the extent that, its legislation imitates a reasonable king who continually analyses the ever-changing reality. Plato's appreciation of change and innovation constitutes “a novelty in ancient legislative thought” (HORN, MÜLLER, SÖDER 2009: 174).

²¹ Until a few years ago, BOBONICH (2010: 4) was justified in saying: “Although there has been much more scholarship on the *Laws* since the beginning of the 1990s than in the preceding decades, we are still at the very early stages of reflecting philosophically on the *Laws* in connection with Plato's other dialogues”.

²² HARRIS 1989: 99, n. 1.

certainly significant and worth investigating²³. But the nature of Plato's proposal appears far less extraordinary when it is read against the background of his earlier work, the *Republic*. This is the case of the two leading monographs concerning the Greek *paideia*, those by Henri-Irène MARROU and by Werner JAEGER – both works monumental even today – where Plato's proposal is mentioned in connection with the “utopian”, as it is put by MARROU, or “ideal”, as preferred by JAEGER, concept of a political regime as expounded in the *Republic*, completed with the vision of “general Forms”²⁴. Regardless of whether this mandatory education pertains mainly to the ruling elite or involves also the producer class, the project of state-conducted general education is so suitable for the totalitarian Kallipolis that to enquire as to its proper goal seems superfluous²⁵.

This utopian, idealising vision chimes with the bitter assessment of the real advantages that a civilisation derives from acquiring the ability to write, as proposed by Claude LÉVI-STRAUSS and shared by many anthropologists from the school of Bronisław MALINOWSKI. This assessment is as follows: before it becomes a tool for enlightenment, writing bolsters authority and facilitates control, making people obey the governing entity; an effort to end illiteracy is associated with the state's increased control over its citizens: in a literate society, no person

²³ This is emphasised by MORROW 1960: 322; NIGHTINGALE 1999: 102; SCHÖPSDAU 2003: 553.

²⁴ MARROU (1982) states this in Chapter VI, titled “Utopia and the Future”. JAEGER (1986: 246), in turn, emphasises that in the *Laws* Plato ascribes the same importance to the general education exercised by the state as he ascribes, in the *Republic*, to the education of rulers. For a similar point, see KŁOSKO (2006: 221), according to whom the system of general education as presented in the *Laws* “is similar to that of the *Republic* though it is more rigorous and described in greater detail”. However, similarity between educational programmes is not tantamount to their having an identical aim. In both programmes the function of education is to uphold the system, but the systems' divergent requirements change the aims of education. In the aristocratic Kallipolis some are being prepared to govern and the rest to be governed, following the oft-repeated principle that “each one must do his own/one work” (*ta hautou prattein*, e.g. 370b5, c4, 374a6, b9, 394e3, 397e2, 400e6, 433a6, 435b6, 453b5, 550a2 and so on); this aim is served by “the noble lie” (*gennaion pseudos*, 414b–416b), inculcated in the rulers themselves “in particular” (*malista*). In the democratic monarchy of Magnesia, in turn, every citizen is to be able to govern as well as be governed, following the principle that “a perfect citizen [...] knows how to rule and be ruled with justice” (643e5–6, 942c7–8); this aim is served by the generally taught reading, especially preludes to laws (*prooimia*) that explain the reasonable rules underlying concrete laws (720a–723a, 811d–e). It must be noted that the first principle chimes with the definition of moderation (*sophrosyne*) by Critias the Tyrant (DK B 41a; Plato, *Chrm.* 161b6), the other is democratic in its tone (cf. *Mx.* 239a1–2; see n. 40 below).

²⁵ The process of founding Kallipolis – which is totalitarian in the sense that it subjects the lives of all its citizens to the supervision of the guardians, all unanimously sharing a common goal, that is the good of the *polis* – does not, of course, exhaust the contents of the *Republic*. However, the critical assessment of Kallipolis or the interpretation of the results of this intellectual experiment as presented in the latter part of the dialogue by Plato's Socrates (427c ff.) lie outside the scope of this essay. This aspect of *Republic*'s self-reference is discussed by, among others, EUBEN 1990; ROOCHNIK 2004: 2009; HOWLAND 2018.

can cite as an excuse their unfamiliarity with the law²⁶. Ascribing such an intention to Plato may find justification in the *Phaidros*, where Plato, anxious about the individual's soul rather than political unanimity, famously subjected writing to criticism²⁷. Thus, the question of why he wished to fight illiteracy on political grounds finds a ready and obvious answer.

If, however, we view Plato's thought from the perspective of the lesson provided us by modern history, which reveals that the condition of democracy is closely connected with the condition of education and the level of social and legal culture, it will be justified to assume that this particular mechanism of well-ordered state evinces historical continuity and that Plato's dialogues confirm his awareness of it. This is because the precept that the condition of the rulers determines the condition of the state, which is made evident in the Kallipolis, lies at the foundation of both the critique of democracy and the constructive proposal of educating the *demos*. As we will see in the following sections, there are reasons to assume that, firstly, while criticising his contemporary democracy, Plato was, actually, laying bare the fact that the Athenian *demos* – i.e. the ruler in democracy – was not ready for self-determination, as well as bemoaning the absence of institutions that might teach future citizens how to fulfil their roles. Secondly, this criticism was followed by practical reflection: presenting, in his *Laws*, the lawful regime of Magnesia – which in its mixed constitutional structure evinces many features of Athenian democracy of the 5th and 4th century BC – he proposed a detailed and multi-levelled programme of education of law-abiding citizens based on the general and obligatory education (including literacy) funded by the *polis*. In order for us to capture the essentially democratic aim of this education, it will be helpful to outline the social and political realities that stimulated Plato's thinking, that is, the realities of Athens as they were in his lifetime.

3. WHEN PLATO CRITICISES DEMOCRACY, WHAT DOES HE CRITICISE?

Democratic reforms in Athens, initiated by Cleisthenes (508/507), were confirmed as effective primarily by the victories over the Persians at Marathon and Plataea (490 and 479) and consequently were continued, in building an empire, by Ephialtes (462) and Pericles (450)²⁸. It is tempting to suppose that it was their politically and socially integrating effect that caused these reforms to be introduced faster than the reforms in education – if it is possible to speak of any

²⁶ LÉVI-STRAUSS 1973: 296–300. More in HARRIS 1989: 38–39.

²⁷ *Phdr.* 274e–278b; see also *Prt.* 329a; *Ep.* VII 344c–e.

²⁸ This point was made clear by MITCHELL (2015: 39–59): the political reorganisation of Attica by Cleisthenes served as the basis for “a military organisation that fully exploited the national manpower and drew together in its main units soldiers from different areas and backgrounds and placed them under an elected commander” (p. 42).

consistent and well-considered education programme tailored to the needs of the Athenian democracy, that is, to the citizens' general, tenured access to various forms of governmental power²⁹. From the latter half of the 5th century onwards, the Athenian *demos* was in full possession of a legally defined citizenship, which also means codified political rights and duties. What it did not have were equally codified educational structures. Throughout the entire Classical period, like in the "olden days", children's access to education depended on the individual decisions of their more or less affluent parents³⁰.

The activity of the sophists and Isocrates' school of rhetoric provide a partial answer to the educational needs of a democracy. Despite the differences in their approach to the educational potential and the aim of rhetoric, the addressee to whom the services of these competing paid institutions are directed is the same: an ambitious or politically gifted individual. The sophists, in all their variety, educated an equally varied range of candidates to numerous administrative and official positions, thus awakening the craving for personal social or political success; Isocrates, in turn, aimed to educate a conscientious ruler or politician, a man attentive to the state's affairs and mindful of the common good of Athens and, in fact, of all Greeks³¹. The extent to which Isocrates was careful to maintain his school's aristocratic profile is indicated by the fact that his pupils were described as *synontes* or *plesiazontes*, these terms marking them as different from *mathetai*, pupils learning a craft and coming from lower social classes³². Neither

²⁹ The existence of laws regulating the functioning of gymnasia and, clearly stated as different from them, schools of *mousike* is confirmed in the sources from the beginning of the 5th century onward. However, this constitutes heritage and a continuation of the archaic, aristocratic education while the source references have an occasional rather than systematic character. A list of sources in T. MORGAN 1998: 47–49; cf. also MORROW 1960: 319–322; on the doubts regarding Solon's law on the mandatory education of all boys, see BECK 1964: 92–94. In the late 5th and early 4th century, as writing entered an increasing number of fields of public life, *mousike* and *gymnastike* were complemented with a third educational element, *grammata*; changes in the relationship between these elements as confirmed by the texts still do not evince features of a systemic education but seem to result from grass-roots, functional and spontaneous fluctuations in trends resulting from social, not political, pressure. See PATTERSON 2013: 373.

³⁰ In view of the testimonies confirming the existence of public, most probably non-mandatory, schools outside Athens (cited in BECK 1964: 77; HARRIS 1989: 57–58), and in Athens, the existence of public funds (*merismos*, HANSEN 1999: 149, 158, 173) and community doctors (Plato, *Plt.* 259a), the absence of any mention of public (state) schools or mandatory education is significant. Thuc. II 46, 1 confirms only the fact of the state's protection of war orphans.

³¹ For more on the differences between the sophists' and Isocrates' educational programmes, see POULAKOS 2004: 74–78. The image of Isocrates as the educator of the elites is discussed in a more nuanced manner by K. MORGAN 2004: 134–146, pointing to the features of "civic education" in his rhetorical programme. But the fact remains that Isocrates' concern with the education of the entire civic community is mediated through, or perhaps limited to, the education of the elite circle centred on his school.

³² LIVINGSTONE (1998: 264, n. 8) mentions that young aristocrats from Isocrates' circle treated with contempt the students of craft.

of these programmes reveals an interest in granting general access to education, but perceives it as contingent on the individual's social status and his desire to rise above the *demos*. Educating the *demos* was not perceived as a political requisite of a democracy.

Yet, at the grass-roots level, a natural and spontaneous process was occurring: the *demos* made use not only of its political rights as guaranteed by political equality (*isonomia*) and equal freedom of speech (*isegoria*), but also selectively used those achievements of the aristocratic culture which it found attractive. This varied process of the democratisation of culture encompassed many factors shaping its educational contents; and there are four main factors of which Plato was highly critical, as can be inferred from the three dialogues with openly political titles (*Republic*, *Statesman* and *Laws*) which are complementary in this respect:

I. Some elements of an aristocratic upbringing became popular all but automatically. The non-aristocrats (*plethos*), the mass (*demos*) gradually acquired a taste for activities formerly available only to aristocrats, especially those in the fields of gymnastics and music. The fashion for horse riding among the descendants of the *Marathonomachoi* was ridiculed by Aristophanes³³. Plato, in turn, warned against the detrimental effects of teatrocracy, whereby the uncouth crowd, convinced that the quality of a theatrical work was determined by the pleasure of a beholder regardless of "whether he be better or worse" (*L.* 700e3), used their clapping or whistling to decide what was superior or beautiful onstage:

the opinion that everyone is wise in everything, together with lawlessness, originated in our music, and freedom followed. People became fearless, as if they were knowers, and the absence of fear engendered shamelessness. For to be so bold as not to fear the opinion of someone who is better, this is almost the same as vile shamelessness, and springs from an excessively brazen freedom.

(*L.* 701a5–b3)

Plato perceives the artistic freedom of democracy as having the same potential for self-destruction as the one he perceived in the Persians' despotism. The anarchy of the people, originating in the theatre as the audience rejects the existence of laws in music – which takes it just a step away from rejecting the customary and political laws – is just as destructive to a good regime as any subjugation of citizens by a despot³⁴. In the former case, the people do not want to obey laws, in the latter, they do not have them; in the former, they do not have the internal capability, in the latter, the external possibility. This act of equating Athens with

³³ *Nubes* 14–32, 63–77, 107–125, 243.

³⁴ *L.* 699e, 701b–c; see also *R.* 564a7–8, 569c2–4. The connection between anarchy in music and the shamelessness of young men, the sons of the *Marathonomachoi* generation, is a motif evident in the discourse of Just Cause in Aristophanes' *Nubes* (961–999).

their enemy, the Persians, the victory over whom had justified and accelerated democratic reforms, is in itself provocative. The victors did little to avoid slowly growing similar to enemies, who were, after all, barbarians; they did not learn to perceive the presence of the laws within the real world or to respect them in the name of their freedom and rationality. Aristoxenos, two generations younger than Plato, will call this creeping democratisation of theatres their “barbarisation”, as reported by Athenaeus, who shared this view³⁵.

II. The uncontrolled process of the democratisation of culture and education attests to the vitality and power of the aristocratic poetic tradition. Old models of upbringing based on heroic virtues as derived from Homer and Hesiod were still valid in the 4th century; they were complemented by the encomia and epinicia by Simonides, which, despite their “enlightened” nature, still presupposed the old ethical dualism of friend vs. enemy³⁶. This dualism was justified by the patriotic memory of the victorious wars against the Persians; yet after the Peloponnesian War, which was a fratricidal struggle rather than a war against an external enemy and which caused a re-evaluation of traditional values, the friend vs. enemy dualism lost its clarity in favour of the opposition of the democrats vs. the aristocrats. In these circumstances, the very question of what justice is required rethinking.

Thus, in the *Republic*, Plato focuses on the issue of justice as existing outside the friend vs. enemy relationship. He points to the obsolescence of Simonides’ black-and-white reality and the inapplicability of Homer’s feudal ethics and theology to the new political and social conditions³⁷. These deficiencies are revealed by the realistic diagnoses delivered by intellectuals from the circle of the sophists: Antiphon, Critias, Thrasymachus, the Old Oligarch and others, asserting that the reality in which the Peloponnesian War generation had to exist was by no means Homeric; moreover, Thucydides confirms that it had been a demoralising war during which justice lost its morally uplifting quality. Plato is this generation’s heir and thus he succeeds to its problems, which continue to be persistent. Thus, he will replace the binary friend vs. enemy, aristocrat vs. democrat relations with the vision of an individual man’s complex soul, of which the *polis* is an enlarged image, and will seek justice in internal relations between the faculties of a single soul, some of which are aristocratic (reason), some democratic (emotions). Finding justice to be present in such a psychological and political structure, in which power is held by the faculty of reason, he will present a programme for educating the elite, the reasoning section of the *polis*, and will test the model of a political structure assuming the hegemony of a reasonable authority, which

³⁵ *Deipn.* XIV 632b; Athenaeus approvingly refers to the old view that a play’s popularity among the populace meant it was an inferior work (631f).

³⁶ This ethical principle is examined through the plays of Sophocles in BLUNDELL 1989.

³⁷ A critique of Simonides: *R.* 331e–335e; a critique of moral models in the entire earlier poetic and literary tradition: 362e–367a; a critique of Homer and the poetic tradition referring to him: 378c–394a.

he called “a pattern [...] laid up for the man who wants to see and found a city within himself on the basis of what he sees” (*R.* 592a–b). The tale of Er, which concludes the dialogue, indicates that this intellectual simulation was conducted in order to better explicate a person’s spiritual condition as depending on the regime in which they would prefer to live. Tell me in what state you would prefer to live, Plato seems to say, and I will tell you who you are³⁸.

In the *Laws*, he tests another structure, this time one in which every person could live in the best possible manner³⁹. In this structure, reason is not identified with any distinct and homogeneous social group; it is the law, called “the common opinion of the city”, that is considered to be an expression of the reason for the entire community; hence the constructive quality is, in this case, the justice of a citizen who is able to both rule and submit himself to the rule of law (*L.* 643e)⁴⁰.

III. In the realities of the 4th-century Athenian democracy, the question of how to shape such a political culture and how to introduce the *demos* into it was a pressing one, at least for Plato. Considering the absence of testimonies confirming that the democratic politicians of classical Athens took an interest in general education⁴¹, Plato’s definition of “an art of politics truly in keeping with nature” (ἡ κατὰ φύσιν ἀληθῶς οὖσα [...] πολιτική) as one that educates citizens (*Plt.* 308d–309b) constitutes an answer to the deficiency of the *status quo* he really felt. Characteristic of those realities was the fact that writing was being introduced into increasing areas of everyday and public life, yet the essential educational content was still being drawn from models provided by Homer, Hesiod and Simonides, who had shaped the oral culture. But even this model of *paideia*, one that according to Plato was anachronistic, was not available to all the citizens who theoretically had access to power, be it at the *ekklesia* or at the people’s courts. Although it is assumed that the introduction of ostracism in Athens in 508 must have been accompanied by organised instruction in reading and writing (which is confirmed by an increased number of remarks concerning schools), this schooling did not extend beyond the private sphere, even though the latter was responsive to greater or lesser social pressure, and

³⁸ *R.* 544e ff.; 618b–c: ultimately, Er asserts that a human being’s greatest talent is to perceive the interconnected advantages and disadvantages of various psychological and political structures in order to select the life / the regime that shall improve their soul, with the awareness that living in a good regime does not guarantee making a correct choice; this requires a philosophical approach (619c).

³⁹ Most probably the best manner, Plato hastens to add, since the assessment requires this structure to be tried out (*elenchos*) in practice (*L.* 702b1–3).

⁴⁰ Cf. *L.* 701a5–b3. As MITCHELL (2005: 43) notes, Aristotle presents the principle of rule and be ruled “as a primary characteristic of democratic equality”. SCHÖPSSDAU (1994: 226–227) makes a similar point (with reference to *Pol.* 1277a25 ff., 1332b41 ff.).

⁴¹ HARRIS 1989: 30, 62.

did not encompass all the strata of the civic community⁴². The general situation in the early 4th century was that less than a half of the population of the entire Attica could read and write⁴³. This minority originated from the upper social classes and from affluent backgrounds, the group able to educate themselves, and their children, at private schools which promoted aristocratic culture or the culture of rhetoric⁴⁴. In practice, it was this minority that constituted the decision-making majority in the democratic regime. The expansion of writing into courts, offices and many spheres of public life, which is confirmed by the sources from the middle of the 5th century onward, is accompanied by silence on the subject of public (state) schools, that is, on the democratisation of literacy. The proud statement made by Pericles in the funeral oration (Thuc. II 37) about Athens being a majority-governed democracy was most probably “pure theory”⁴⁵, an expression of the idealistic conviction, common in the Classical period, that the public, social and religious life of the Athenian *polis* itself educated its citizens in the proper manner (Thuc. II 41).

But the cave in the *Republic* – “an image of our nature in its education and want of education” (514a) – is the image of the demagogic upbringing conducted by the *polis* availing itself of the agora, the theatres, the holy places and other public assembly spaces where the majority is meant to look and listen without any preparation for a critical reception of the conveyed contents. The prisoners in the cave see and consider real things that are shown to them by others⁴⁶. Only a few were to meet Socrates and were equal to the challenge of his individualistic education.

IV. In view of the democratic leaders’ reliance on the educating power of the *polis* itself and, as a result, of the lack of interest in general education and the level of political culture within the *demos*, this void can be easily filled with the next available model: the aristocratic/military model of Sparta. In fact, Sparta

⁴² See HARRIS 1989: 101, 161.

⁴³ Any figures are approximate and debatable. HARRIS (1989: 114) is pessimistic in his assessment of 5–10% of the population as literate, in contrast to many optimistic conjectures made on the basis of scattered but, from the beginning of the 5th century, increasingly numerous references to writing in texts and vase painting (similarly T. MORGAN 1999: 48, n. 9).

⁴⁴ Plato, *Prt.* 326c.

⁴⁵ HARRIS (1989: 79) argues that the democratic phrase *skopein toi boulomenoi*, denoting every citizen’s right to see officials’ letters or registers, did not translate into every citizen’s participation in the privileges granted by democracy; this is contrary to the image of the literate Greeks of the Classical period which is dominant in specialist literature (pp. 74–88, 94).

⁴⁶ The image of the cave is recognisable as the actual mechanism by which the moral sensibility of the young Athenians was shaped “from youth onwards” (ἐκ νέων, *R.* 367a2) by means of a cohesive cultural system in which their fathers, poets, writers and priests immersed them. This system was bitterly described by Plato’s brother, Adeimantus, in the *Republic* 363a–367a. The process of spiritual subjugation of the Athenian citizens by poets and theatres was equally bitterly described by an anonymous Athenian in the *Laws* 700d–701c.

was the first *polis* to introduce, in the middle of the 6th century, an institutionalised system of mandatory education for citizens⁴⁷. But the Athenian Laconophiles were not interested in this particular model; it would have been strange if they were, since Athens had a broader civic base – educating its members would have endangered the oligarchic/aristocratic factions, who were very careful to maintain their unique character. But precisely the aspects which these Laconophiles disregarded were a point of interest to Plato, who, in turn, rejected the elements they were concerned with.

Plato's admiration for Sparta's system is selective: he criticises its main content and accepts its form, that is, the mandatory character of education and a well-considered control of the state over it, because an uneducated or badly educated man "is the most savage of the things that the earth makes grow" (*L.* 766a). The flaw in the Spartan educational content is shown very clearly in Books I and II of the *Laws*: Sparta educates rank-and-file soldiers who stand firm in battle⁴⁸, hoplites loyal to the *polis*, brought up on the models derived from Tyrtaios: "dare to look on bloody death, and staying near assail the foe" (629e). It is easy to display national valour, Plato argues, if one considers other people to be enemies of one's own family and fatherland. Moreover, very many mercenaries, most of whom are "rash, unjust, insolent, and very imprudent, with only a very few who are not" (630b), are also prepared to die. It is much more difficult to display the sense of justice, self-control and wise judgement, that is, virtues the voice of which may be heard only when the din of battle valour dies down.

The fact that Sparta's lawgivers were not concerned with "quiet virtues" corresponds with the remark made by the author of *Dissoi logoi* from ca. 400 (most probably a Dorian, a disciple of Protagoras)⁴⁹: "The Lacedaemonians hold the view that it is fitting that their children learn neither music nor literature"; some sixty years later this state of affairs is confirmed by Isocrates⁵⁰. This approach is certainly alien to Plato. The hoplite mentality is detrimental to a system that considers peace the healthy state of affairs and war the unhealthy one (*L.* 628d). The implementation of unconditional obedience to the leader, as well as the perception that only those things that serve the interests of the state/the ruling elite are just, are destructive to the citizens' sense of happiness and mutual friendship.

⁴⁷ SCHÖPSDAU 2003: 553. PATTERSON (2013: 373–374) is sceptical about this "common knowledge", pointing to "the lack of contemporary evidence (especially of Xenophon) for compulsory education, as opposed to military training, in Sparta" (p. 373). If, however, we reject PATTERSON's differentiation between education (understood, in the Athenian manner, as taking care of the body and the soul) and training (Spartan physical exercise) and, following Plato (*L.* 666e), reduce the Spartan education to "military training", we may speak of a mandatory form of Spartan education.

⁴⁸ MARROU 1982: 15–16.

⁴⁹ As suggested by the fact that the text is written in the Doric dialect. See SILVERMINTZ 2008: 147 (therein an outline of positions on the dating).

⁵⁰ *Dissoi Logoi* II 10; Isocr. *Panath.* 209.

They should be predisposed to abandon or destroy their *polis* if it turns out that the regime changes “into one whose nature is to make human beings worse” (L. 770e5–6).

The question of how to make the citizens perceive that the *polis* makes them inferior is a fundamental political and educational problem for Plato. A variety of the philosophical and individual aspects of this problem are discussed in almost all dialogues focusing on ethical, political and pedagogical issues⁵¹. In its practical and social aspect, this is a long-term process that extends over more than one generation. In keeping with the meandering narration of the *Laws*, it requires each generation to reflect anew on the hierarchy of values that is in keeping with human nature, and to stimulate the love of beauty and goodness from the earliest age, so that, in the end, a citizen would possess the ability to notice the moment – dangerous to the community as much as to the individual – when it is not beauty and goodness, but ugliness and wickedness that begin to bring pleasure⁵². The fundamental and infallible tool for inculcating this harmony of reason and feeling in each generation is provided by *choreia* (the tri-unity of movement, word and melody), grammar and arithmetic. All these disciplines make a person sensitive to the matters of law: *choreia* to the laws/rules of harmony and rhythm (the ambiguity of the term *nomos*, meaning “song” and “law”, is utilised several times in the *Laws*)⁵³; arithmetic reveals the laws/necessities of mathematics (in the *Republic*, the prisoners are led out of the cave through learning mathematics)⁵⁴; grammar grants access to the message of the lawgivers who – in a written culture – write down the laws, as well as access to the verse or prose works (to Plato’s *Laws* in particular) of writers who bequeath to later generations models for education and debate⁵⁵.

Writing makes it possible to repeatedly return to difficult issues, eliminating the danger that they would become distorted in fallible memory; this is what Plato asserts not in the *Phaidros*, but in the *Laws* (891a). In the *Phaidros* he criticised writing, which cannot be engraved in the soul, for being an illusory medicine (*pharmakon*) to grant wisdom and memory⁵⁶; in the *Laws* he perfected

⁵¹ See esp. *R.* 546d–547a: in time, even the beautiful *polis* (*Kallipolis*) disintegrates from within, convinced of its own beauty. See n. 38 above.

⁵² On the restating of fundamental questions, to which answers had already been given, see *L.* 632d, 701c–d, 742c–d, 829e; on completing, testing and amending laws, see 769c–771a, 957a–b, 957d; on the harmony of reason and feeling as the goal of education, see 653a–653d, 654c–656b, 689a–c; on the deformation of the effects of *paideia* and the need for a recurring correction of one’s emotional and intellectual stance (*epanorthosis*), which shows some aspects of the Dionysian trial, see esp. 644b, 648b–650b, 653d, 671a–672a, 735a, 831a, 946c, 961a.

⁵³ *L.* 700b, 722d–e, 734e, 775b, 799e, 800a, d, 870e–871a.

⁵⁴ *L.* 818a–822d; *R.* 524b ff.

⁵⁵ *L.* 811c–e, 891a, 957d.

⁵⁶ See n. 27 above.

the recipe for this medicine, namely, he preceded a legal text with persuasive introductions (*prooimia*), which help the citizens understand the reasoning underlying the written laws and thus help the laws to become engraved in the citizens' souls. Through this, he turned a legal text that has undergone the process of social deliberation into an antidote (*alexipharmakon*) to all other texts that silently (since their contents had not been subjected to critique and was accepted without reflection) circulate around the *polis* (L. 957d)⁵⁷.

4. PLATO'S EDUCATIONAL PROPOSAL

Thus, Plato's lawgiver expects the citizens to understand the intentions of particular laws or, if a person's mind is not broad enough for understanding, to obey them. In both cases, the aim is for everyone to exercise their own rights and to respect the rights of others, always in a just manner. To reach this aim, education must be "from childhood in virtue, that makes one desire and love to become a perfect citizen who knows how to rule and be ruled with justice" (L. 643e)⁵⁸.

In the *Laws*, Plato discusses numerous official and political (electoral) functions fulfilled by all the residents of Magnesia who possess full rights and are elected for a term of office by means of transparent procedures of selection by vote or by lot. The realities assumed in his discussion are those of the 4th-century Athenian democracy, when writing was already well established in the official context, even though most Athenians were still illiterate. Since, in practice, the ability to read and understand the judiciary, official and legal texts is a condition for the full use of civic rights, a citizen of the law-abiding city of Magnesia had to be a reader⁵⁹. Considering the practice in Athens of the era, where an illiterate judge would listen to writings being read out to him, it can be added: he or she

⁵⁷ The deliberative nature of Plato's laws: L. 718c, 719e–720e, 788c, 857c–e, 859a; on the innovative, in Plato's view, function of the introductions to laws: 722e–723b. General availability and potential intelligibility of principles that lie at the foundation of legal norms furthers the process of their social internalisation (this aspect of the laws is considered innovative and fundamental in the *Laws* by, e.g., NIGHTINGALE 1999: 103–104; BOBONICH 1996: 269. Differently T. MORGAN 1999: 58 and K. MORGAN 2004: 126.

⁵⁸ See n. 40 above.

⁵⁹ See L. 680a: in the development of political life, the phase of lawgiving is conditioned by the introduction of writing; 721e–720a, 858c, 891a, 922a, 934c, 957d: introduction of the 5th and 4th-century terminology, according to which *grammata*, *graphe* (writings, writ) denotes the decrees and laws proclaimed and ratified by organs of democratic authority (the *boule*, the lawgiving committee of the *nomothetai*, the *ekklesia*); 788b, 793b, 822e: the laws of Magnesia are written down, but are protected and shaped into a coherent whole by unwritten customs; 858c–859a, 890c, 957c: a lawgiver is a writer whose writings the citizens are obliged to know; 754d: the duty to submit personal property declarations in writing; 754e, 845e, 919e, 948a: the written form of court petition; 762c, 811e, 871a, 920c, 923e–924a, 943d, 953e, 955d: other applications of writing in law-abiding public life.

had to be a self-reliant reader who could return several times to the passages that were difficult to comprehend and “examine them often” (891a).

One of the tasks of such a state is, therefore, to subject all the children of the citizens to mandatory education in the rudiments of music, grammar and mathematics. Plato emphasises the obligatory character of this education:

And it will not be left up to the father’s wish to decide who shall attend and whose education shall be neglected, but rather, as the saying goes, “every man and child insofar as he is able” [...]. Indeed, my law would say all the very same things about females that it says about males.

(804d)

By establishing this law, Plato, while being critical of democracy, does for it precisely what it needs in order, firstly, not to become an ochlocracy, secondly, not to come into conflict with aristocrats, but to co-govern with them, united in obedience to sensible law. In his critical assessment of the condition of Athenian democracy, he does not assume the position of an external, rival ideologue, but that of a participant in, and the beneficiary of, the intellectual ferment of the 5th- and 4th-century democratic culture weakened by the internal struggle with the aristocratic faction.

His pedagogical proposals derive also from the observations and educational experience of contemporary intellectuals, the so-called sophists. The few surviving testimonies enable us to mention, first of all, Protagoras, whose draft for a constitution for Thurioi – which had been commissioned from him by the ardent supporter of democracy, Pericles – is in some points parallel with Plato’s project of Magnesia⁶⁰. However, we do not have source materials that would permit us to establish any actual inspirations in this respect. Diodorus reports approvingly (without mentioning Plato) that Charondas of Catania in Sicily was the first lawgiver to decree that all sons of citizens learn *grammatike* and that teachers be paid by the state, since the ability to read and write offers the noblest knowledge⁶¹; yet he commits a strange chronological error, most probably resulting from confusing or combining some testimonies. Namely, he associates Charondas, who lived in the 6th century, with the colony of Thurioi, established in 443 and currently associated, following Heraclides of Pontus, with the lawgiving

⁶⁰ Diog. Laert. IX 50; Plato, *Prt.* 317b; *Tht.* 167c. Similarities concern the colonists originating from many parts of Greece, a circumstance that was not typical of earlier colonies (Diod. XII 11, 3; *L.* 707a–d); the geometric layout of the city (the layout of Thurioi was designed by Hippodamas of Miletus, who had already proved himself during extension works at Piraeus; Diod. XII 10, 7; Plato, *L.* 778c–779b). On Protagoras’ notion of general education, see MUIR 1982: 21–23, with the hypothesis that the popularity of this idea lessened as the influence of Athens on Thurioi grew weaker.

⁶¹ The eulogy of literacy by Diodorus brings to mind the words of Euripides (fr. 578 N) which, in turn, may be taken from Protagoras (Diod. I 8, 1–7, cf. Plato, *Prt.* 320c–322d; after MUIR 1982: 22, n. 33).

endeavours of Protagoras⁶². It is thus not clear whether Plato revived Charondas' old law directly or whether he was inspired by Protagoras, who selected a variety of old laws by Italic and Sicilian lawgivers (especially Charondas and Zaleucus of Locri). Yet we mainly associate Protagoras as a teacher with demanding the payment of a considerable lump fee from his pupils (a notion probably influenced by Plato); all we can say is that sometimes Plato is also associated not with the things he should be.

Aristotle's report in the *Politics* is also significant in this context; enumerating innovations in the laws, among others those made by Charondas and Plato, he does not mention this law (1274b). Instead, he oddly combines political ideas offered in the *Republic* and the *Laws*, as if both dialogues, which he actually remembers as conducted by Socrates (1264b), had the same aim and evinced the same philosophical strategy, and writes that Plato's law-giving efforts stipulate a "community of wives and children and of property, and the common meals for the women [...], and the regulation for military training to make men ambidextrous during drill" (1274b)⁶³. The first law comes from the *Republic* and frequently appears in pre-Platonic sources in the context of mockery; in the *Laws*, it is not so much neglected as deliberately rejected⁶⁴. Although the remainder of the laws are derived solely from the *Laws*, Aristotle fails to mention Plato's concept of general education. Yet it is Aristotle's report that helped to shape the commonly held image of Plato's regime: this is usually associated with the community of wives, children and property, and not with general education.

It is possible that the reason why Aristotle, who looked for innovations in the lawgiving processes, did not mention that law in the context of either Charondas or Plato was that he ascribed it to a third party, namely Phaleas of Chalcedon. This rather mysterious lawgiver wished to equalise the level of affluence and education of all citizens, but failed to mention what exactly such an education was supposed to be like; he was criticised by Aristotle for this omission (*Pol.* 1266b). It is surprising, however, that Aristotle, in turn, did not mention that this topic was discussed in detail by Plato.

It would be easy to distort Plato's thought here, however, by assuming that he had modelled his views on those of Phaleas and ascribing to him not only the idea of general education, but also the desire to equalise the level of education of all citizens. Book II of the *Laws*, which tells us about the Chorus of Dionysus, which exceeds the mandatory and egalitarian – "herd-like", as it is ambiguously termed by Plato (666e) – education of children and young people, and Book XII,

⁶² Diod. XII 12–13 (see HARRIS 1989: 21, 98; MUIR 1982: 19).

⁶³ Transl. by H. RACKHMAN.

⁶⁴ R. 457c–458d; L. 739c–739e: shared possession of all goods is possible only in a *polis* of the gods or children of gods. But a human being is only "a divine puppet, put together either for their play or for some serious purpose – which, we don't know" (L. 644d).

relating the issue of the elitist Nocturnal Council, make it possible to assume that this monolithic nature of the *polis* is destructive, as it damages its sense of reason, whereas it is, ultimately, a reasonableness for which lawfulness has to work out well. In a reasonable regime, also such individuals should be brought up who would be able to face a conflict that, with the progress of time, arises in every community, namely the one between the freedom of thought which, in search of the truth, poses questions and seeks answers, and the ready-made truths embedded in the law and identified with the truth, implemented and cemented by the all-encompassing system of education and religious belief. Therefore, *akribestera paideia*, higher education, is intended for those intellectually and morally superior individuals (ones above 30 years of age)⁶⁵. In the last pages of his *Laws*, Plato declares such individuals to be members of the Nocturnal Council, which was announced from the beginning of the dialogue and subsequently as the Chorus of Dionysus. Having the elitist, highest, continually verified and raised level of education, those individuals comprise the constitutional tribunal that controls the uncertain balance between the laws of reason and the laws expressed in the decrees issued by officials or by any authority.

Thus, a system of lawful education encompasses two principal levels dependant on the pupils' age and predispositions⁶⁶. The first, rudimentary level, which is general and mandatory, provides the state with citizens; the second, a safety valve of a kind, protects the citizens against the officials' desire to appropriate the laws in order to remain in power, which is inherent in any human authority⁶⁷. General education financed for by the *polis*, adjusted to the process of the implementation of writing in political culture, which unfolded in 4th-century Athens, is the element that joins these two pillars of lawful education.

Aristotle does not mention these pillars, even though he discusses the issue of education. When, in Book VIII of his *Politics*, he presents his views on the *paideia*, he summarises Plato's opinions on general education as expressed in the *Laws* as his own, but he fails to mention Plato's name (1337a). To say that it was solely Aristotle's fault that Plato's name became associated with the utopian idea of the community of wives and children, not with the idea of general education rooted in the needs of 4th-century democracy, would be an exaggeration. Yet it is a fact that Aristotle contributed to Plato's name being associated with a utopia, and in the areas where his own thinking coincided with Plato's, he failed to mention his name. Regardless of his reasons for such a one-sided presentation of Plato's thought, which are difficult to ascertain, this image as presented by Aristotle chimes with our equally one-sided image of Plato as a critic of

⁶⁵ L. 670e, 965b. Cf. R. 503d: men of a steady, "not easily changeable" and trustworthy character are not very studious.

⁶⁶ See L. 735a, 809c–810b, 818d–e, 965b.

⁶⁷ L. 714d.

democracy, not an educator for democracy. The reasons that shaped this depiction may be as complex, and as difficult, to ascertain as in the case of Aristotle. Yet the elementary fact that remains is that Plato's *Laws* is the only surviving text of Greek Antiquity where the need for a general and mandatory education in a lawful regime is justified from the psychological, ethical and political perspective, and where a detailed programme is proposed for such education.

CONCLUSION

In the light of HARRIS' remark that the existence of primary schools subsidised by the *poleis* is first attested in the Hellenistic period⁶⁸, that is in a system no longer democratic, the starting point of this essay – the issue of a balance between Plato's criticism of democracy and his idea of education for democracy – turns out, on the basis of actual political and cultural processes, to be secondary to the question whether, introducing an obligatory education of all citizens in the *Laws*, Plato meant its benefits for democracy. This is because, as it turns out, not only democracy needs an educated *demos*.

The answer must take into consideration two meanings of the word "democracy" as contained in the first question. When Plato criticises democracy, he refers to a political phenomenon (i.e. to one of three main government systems classed according to the simplest criterion of the subject that exercises power), in which the sovereign is the *demos*. This traditional classification, which dates back to Pindar, clearly points to a certain regularity: the type of the system is determined by the type of the element that exercises power. This narrow meaning of the word *demo-kratia* is contained in almost all the passages in which Plato uses it⁶⁹. This usage is not only in keeping with the linguistic practice of his era, but also extracts a more complex mechanism from the regularity assumed therein: the condition of any political system depends on the condition of those who exercise power. The pivot of Plato's criticism of democracy is thus the *demos*' lack of real preparation for the fulfilment of its function. The beautiful and noble ideals of equality and liberty cannot replace *technē politike*; without it, they turn into their opposites.

The diagnosis of the unsatisfactory condition of the Athenian *demos* starts with its grotesquely exaggerated depiction given in the *Republic* (where they are like sailors with no knowledge of sailing, who "are quarrelling with one another about the piloting", 488b), and in the *Statesman* transforms into a reflection on the requirements of *technē politike*, which on the philosophical level becomes a condition for the correctness of the regime (*orthē politeia*) in general.

⁶⁸ HARRIS 1989: 101.

⁶⁹ *Mx.* 238d3–4; *R.* 338d8–339a4; *Plt.* 291d7, e10, 301c7, 302d4; *L.* 710d–e, 712d6–713a2, 714a3, 832c; 757d3: *kratos demou*; except for *R.* 557b–c, 561d6–e1, 562b16–564a8, where *demokratia* is associated with abuse of freedom.

It was not because of a paradoxical concurrence of historical conditions that the rule of law, which in Plato's political considerations is the *definiens* of *orthe politeia*, in Western political thought became a synonym for democracy in its broad sense. On the contrary, this semantic condition is a result of reflection on *techne politike* that has been carried out for over 2,300 years, initiated by Plato in the *Republic* and continued by Aristotle, who cites Plato's name when he criticises him and fails to mention him when he concurs with him. This art – stimulated and perfected by Roman statesmen as interdependent with the practice of government and then tested in Europe for the longest period in its monarchic version, in existence until the 17th century – made it possible to presently see the rule of law as an ideal that defines the just system actualised in the Western culture in various types of democracy. As the *Laws* suggests, Plato would have called them “mixed regimes”. The history lesson which he summarised in Book III of the *Laws* served him to draw the conclusion that since there was no human government that would not eventually make law subordinate to its own rule, it was the mixed regime that allowed to maintain the rule of law for the longest period; and this was the condition for the actualisation of the ideal of social and political justice.

To Plato, this seemingly simple mechanism – that the condition of the rulers determines the condition of the state – is not only a rhetorical device to use as a starting point. Since a lawful regime (*orthe politeia*) can be actualised in a mixed regime, where the power is shared by the *demos* (the civic body) and the aristocracy (because, by definition, those who are the best, also morally and intellectually, are always fewer) who exercise mutual control and exist in a dual state of governing and being governed, the general and obligatory education of the *demos* – on the basic level that ensures, through literacy, access to the writings of the lawgiver and, on the higher level, for the selected cadre (the so-called Nocturnal Council) – is pro-democratic in its intention. This is because education makes the *demos* able not only to co-govern with the aristocracy, but also to verify the naturally unstable level of its “superiority”. And it is only together that they can constitute a healthy political organism, comparable to a man having a sensible head and, as it is said in the *Republic*, a human torso (*R.* 588c–589d, 591c), and in the *Laws* – an agile torso (*L.* 964e–965a). The head without the body and the body without the head would be monsters that would terrify the world.

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