

'A Bit Deaf and Short Sighted': Plato's Critique of Democracy *D J Sheppard*

*Non est consilium in vulgo, non ratio. Cicero*¹

Who, today, will dispute the principle of democracy? In western political discourse at least, its victory is all but complete; the democratic ideal is constitutive of our socio-political ethos. That said it is of the nature of democracy that it remains a contested concept. Debate continues over which model of democracy best embodies the ideal – liberal, participatory, social or deliberative – and, related to these theoretical discussions, more immediate controversies abound: in the UK, a post-election debate about the credibility of the 'first past the post' system for elections to Westminster; in the European Union a debate over the 'democratic deficit' that threatens to undermine the legitimacy of EU institutions; internationally, a debate about the ethics of imposing democratic values on those nations that do not possess them – should undemocratic regimes be removed by force? Should economic aid be tied to democratic reforms? And so on. But the principle that the authority to govern is only legitimately conferred by the governed is the focus of a rare consensus. The state that would be just is the state that would be democratic; to suggest otherwise, whether from the Left or from the Right, is to consign oneself to the fringes of political discourse; to invite, as Socrates understands, being 'drowned in contempt' (473c).²

Against such a backdrop, the unstinting critique of democracy contained in Plato's *Republic* retains the power to shock.³ Indeed, read alongside the authoritarian alternative to democracy proposed in the dialogue, it has the potential to estrange the reader from Plato like nothing else in his thought. On the assumption that the philosophical and the political are inextricably linked in the vision of the ideal state, Plato's critique can colour the reader's view of the dialogue as a whole. It might even prompt the question why the study of a text manifestly alien to our democratic traditions is deemed so central to a philosophical education.⁴

The aim of what follows is not to diminish that potential estrangement, as some commentators are inclined to do,⁵ but to insist upon it, and emphasise Plato's attack on democracy in all its (vain) glory. In what, precisely, does Plato's critique consist? Is it coherent? What challenge, if any, does it present to us? To consider these matters I shall examine the portrayals of Athenian democracy in the similes of the ship (488a-489a) and of the beast – or 'large and powerful animal' (493a-c) – and the explicit confrontation with democracy and the democratic character in Books VIII-IX. As we shall see, Plato asks a number of searching questions about democracy and highlights many of its weaknesses. The sum effect of Plato's critique, I shall suggest, is twofold. On the one hand it clarifies precisely why we hold the principle of democracy so dear. On the other hand it presents us with a challenge, perhaps the most significant challenge faced by democratic politics in the twenty-first century. One of Plato's principal complaints about democracy is that its horizons are restricted to the present moment. What Plato challenges us to construct, I shall argue, is a democratic polity that understands its responsibility to the future.⁶

I

One does not have to have read as far as the simile of the ship in Book VI to appreciate that the *Republic* is not an argument for democratic pluralism. The description of the just state, as it emerges in Books II-V, makes this abundantly clear. It is a distinctly authoritarian state that Socrates outlines in which political decision-making is the preserve of a ruling elite whose legitimacy is based not on the consent of the citizenry but on their fitness to rule.⁷ However, it is only with the question of how the ideal state is realised that the dispute with democracy, as descriptive of the status quo in Plato's Athens, is made explicit. Socrates declares that the ideal state can only be brought about once philosophers become rulers (473c-e). Adeimantus is extremely sceptical: of the philosophers he knows, most of them become rogues; 'while even those who look the best of them are reduced by this study you praise so highly to complete uselessness as members of society' (487c-d). How is it possible that such figures are the saviours of the state?

The context is important if only to note that Socrates' purpose in the simile of the ship is not, as such, to expose the failings of Athenian democracy. Rather it is to account for why the philosopher is marginalized in contemporary society. Concerned in the first instance with the purported 'uselessness' of the philosopher, Socrates asks Adeimantus to imagine the state or *polis* as a ship, and the citizenry as the captain, 'larger and stronger than any of the crew, but a bit deaf and short-sighted, and similarly limited in seamanship' (488ab). The politicians are the ship's crew, 'all quarrelling with each other about how to navigate the ship, each thinking he ought to be at the helm' (488b).⁸ Socrates describes a democratic arrangement in which the citizen electorate is sovereign, but only in theory, since in practice it is not fit to exercise its authority and depends on a political class to advise it. However, there is no consensus as to what the advice ought to be. The ultimate source of the problem is quickly identified: none of the squabbling crew possesses the true *techné* or art of navigation needed to guide the ship, indeed no one believes that such a *techné* exists (488e). Their arguments are conducted in the name not of truth but of power, though their motivation for seeking power is unclear until we learn that their ultimate purpose is to 'lay out the honest captain [...], take control of the ship, help themselves to what's on board, and turn the voyage into a sort of drunken pleasure-cruise you would expect' (488c). In short, their motivation for entering politics is the opportunity it affords for self-aggrandisement and the satisfaction of material desires.

The result is a radically unstable situation in which democratic conflict is forever threatening to descend into internecine violence: 'If one faction is more successful than another, their rivals may kill them', Socrates observes (488c). The implication is that democratic politics is little more than verbal civil war. In such a system the esteemed figure is the arch-manipulator, 'the man who knows how to lend a hand in controlling the captain by force or fraud' (488d). The true navigator, on the other hand, who 'must study the seasons of the year, the sky, the winds, and all the other subjects appropriate to his profession if he is to be really fit to control the ship' (488d-e) – and who represents the philosopher – is ignored. Significantly, the philosopher-navigator does not simply *appear* useless to the likes of Adeimantus, he *is* useless. This is because on the democratic ship of state the natural order is inverted: 'it is not natural'. Socrates maintains it is inappropriate 'for the master to request the crew to be ruled by him... [It is] not for him to beg them to accept direction' (489bc). By right

they ought to be asking him, as the only one who possesses the knowledge and qualities required to rule in the name of the good. But in a democracy the philosopher finds no place, or at least, he does not find his natural place.

There is much that we might recognise here: an ill-informed electorate every bit as 'deaf and short-sighted' as Plato's, and dissembling politicians whose priority is the pursuit not of truth but of office. We might also recognise the factional and adversarial nature of British political debate in the quarrelling of the crew, and in the 'man who knows how to lend a hand' see the 'spin-doctor' and the special advisor. On the other hand, it might be said that in drawing such parallels we are allowing ourselves to be seduced by Plato's cynicism. It might be argued that in Western liberal democracies the electorate as a whole is better educated and has access to more information now than at any time, and often shows itself capable of acting independently of the advice given by its political masters. (As I write, it has been announced that, following the French 'no' vote, the Dutch electorate has rejected the proposed European Constitution, despite the support for it from all the mainstream political parties). The political scramble for power witnessed during election campaigns may seem undignified, but, one might counter, to suggest that politicians' sole motivation is the lust for power and that they seek only to serve their own personal interests is unjustified; generally, politicians believe in the truth of what they say and consider themselves to be pursuing something like the common good. Moreover, it is inaccurate to describe the liberal democracies of the West as forever teetering on the brink of civil war and tyranny. One must never be complacent about such matters, but the separation of executive, legislative, and judicial powers in constitutional democracies does much to reduce the risk of democracy collapsing into tyranny. Least recognisable of all, perhaps, is Plato's insistence that democracy is a perversion of the natural order; we hold with equal certainty the contrary view that individual liberty is a natural right. As Isaiah Berlin expressed it, 'to be free to choose, and not to be chosen for, is an inalienable ingredient in what makes human beings human.'⁹

Further to the last point, the democrat might also call attention to the basic premise of the simile itself.¹⁰ As we have seen, Plato distinguishes between the Protagorean relativism of the crew, who believe that there is no objective *techne* of seafaring, and the true navigator who possesses precisely such a *techne*. On the basis of this distinction, Plato wishes to draw a parallel between the seafarer's ability to navigate and the philosopher's ability to rule (489c). Yet it might be argued that the analogy is a false one; the genuine parallel is between on the one hand the ability of the philosopher to rule, and on the other *both* the seafarer's ability to navigate *and* the ability of the ship's owner or – more to the democratic point – the ship's passengers to choose a destination. Consequently, in constructing the simile Plato elides the difference between means and ends; that is, the difference between questions concerning what is to be done as an end (what shall be our destination?) and questions concerning the means to attaining that end (how do we best navigate our passage to that destination?). Like the crew, the democrat contests the assumption that there is a natural elite who possess – or who can possibly possess – absolute knowledge about the ends of moral and political action. Rather it is essential that the two competences are separated, as they are in a constitutional democracy where an executive is charged with putting into effect what an *elected* legislature agrees are the desired ends. In sum, the democrat does not contest the simile if the ruler-navigator analogy is limited to the

suggestion that politicians require expertise to carry out the tasks delegated to them by the people's elected representatives. The irony is that, as Plato constructs it, this is all the analogy permits.

II

The occasion for the simile of the beast is the discussion of the other aspect of Adeimantus' challenge: 'why are most philosophers rogues?' (490d). Socrates' aim is to show that their environment corrupts aspiring philosophers; that 'most gifted characters become particularly bad if they are badly brought up' (491e). It is not individual sophists who corrupt young men, he insists, it is the public 'who are themselves sophists on a grand scale', and who deluge the young philosopher 'in a flood of popular praise and blame' until 'he finds himself agreeing with popular ideas of what is admirable and disgraceful, behaving like the crowd and becoming one of them.' Coupled with the punishments that the public can impose on those who refuse to bend to their collective will, Socrates asks how anyone could possibly be expected to resist such pressure (492a-e).

Plato articulates a familiar complaint: that popular opinion has a corrosive levelling effect on the standard of public debate. As Oscar Wilde put it, 'public opinion exists only where there are no ideas.'¹¹ In a democracy, the political consequence is that the ruler's skill lies in catering to the desires of the lowest common denominator. This is what the sophist offers to teach the would-be politician: 'nothing but the conventional views held and expressed by the mass of the people when they meet; and this they call a *techne*' (493a). The simile of the beast follows as an illustration: 'Suppose a man was in charge of a large and powerful animal, and made a study of its moods and wants'; over time he would learn how to handle the animal, how to pander to its various desires. This learning he could systematise and call a *techne*, and then 'set up to teach it' (493a-b).

However, Socrates continues, such a *techne* would be unconcerned with which of the animal's desires 'was admirable or shameful, good or bad, right or wrong'; oblivious to the rational account of the good, he would simply use the term to describe what pleased the animal (493b-c). Such a man would be like the democratic politician who, in submitting his public service to the judgement of the masses, goes out of his way 'to make the public his master and to subject himself to the fatal necessity of producing only what it approves' (493c-d). The masses, Socrates concludes, will never approve of true philosophy, so the philosopher's corruption is inevitable (494a).

Much in the simile of the beast reiterates what has already been said in relation to the simile of the ship; most importantly, that in a democracy reason is usurped by desire, and any objective account of what is for the best is sacrificed to the subjective satisfaction of material desires. However, perhaps the most interesting contrast between the two similes is that whilst in the simile of the ship the electorate are depicted as the dupes of manipulative politicians, in the simile of the beast this is not the case. In this regard the simile of the ship is echoed in the simile of the cave, where the prisoners are in the thrall of those who orchestrate proceedings from behind the curtain wall (see 514a-515c). By contrast, in the simile of the beast the electorate is in charge, presented as a 'large and powerful' animal to whose desires it is essential that the politician cater in order to retain his position. Again, this is a picture that we might

claim to recognise: politicians formulating policies on the basis of focus group research rather than a coherent political agenda, pandering to the whims of voters in 'Middle England' instead of leading public opinion. However, we tend to make this accusation only when the government does not follow the policy that our personal focus group would have them adopt. We are committed as to a fundamental principle to the idea that the governed should choose their governors; as Berlin maintained, to be chosen for is inimical to our sense of what it means to be human. For example, I would venture to suggest that, irrespective of the position one takes in the debate over the European constitution, it is difficult for even the most zealous Europhile not to feel a *slight* democratic thrill at the inconvenience caused to the European political elite by the recalcitrant voters of France and The Netherlands. Ultimately, we rather approve of the vision of democracy presented in the simile of the beast. We are comfortable with the idea that the skill of the democratic politician lies in following the wishes of the electorate, rejecting as we do the possibility of a natural elite in possession of a *techne* of absolute ends and assuming as we do that the wishes of the electorate are in some measure informed by reason.

Of course, it is precisely the latter assumption that Plato contests: democracy is equated with the rule of the desiring rather than of the rational part of the soul. What Plato would seem to be unsure about is whether or not democratic electorates get the politicians they deserve: the simile of the ship suggests not, the simile of the beast suggests that they do. Is it the fault of politicians that public debate is so often reduced to the level of 'sound-bites' and slogans? Or is it because it is only at this level that most of the electorate are willing or able to engage in the debate? In the twentieth century the hope was that mass secondary education would produce a politically informed and engaged electorate. It might be argued that this represents an increasingly forlorn hope. Plato would certainly consider such a hope to be utterly misguided.

III

As we have already mentioned, neither the simile of the ship or the beast is concerned with the critique of democracy as such, and whilst they reveal much about Plato's attitude to democracy, it is not until the discussion of the imperfect forms of society in Books VIII-IX that the purported shortcomings of democracy become the sole focus.

Plato describes the progressive corruption of the ideal state in four stages: timocracy – military rule – degenerates into oligarchy – literally the rule of the few, but Plato understands it as the rule of the rich – which in turn degenerates into democracy and concludes in tyranny. The discussion of each stage is accompanied by a consideration of the archetypal character that each new form of government produces.¹²

To appreciate Plato's analysis of democracy it is necessary to give attention to the account of its descent from oligarchy. The defining constitutional characteristic of an oligarchy is the electoral property qualification; it is a system 'in which power is linked with property' (553a). The result is in an ever-widening rift between the rich and the poor, who are forever plotting against one another (551d). Oligarchy descends into democracy when all restraint in the accumulation of capital is foregone. This is inevitable, Socrates maintains: 'love of money and adequate self-discipline in its citizens are two things that cannot co-exist in any society' (555c-d). In order to satisfy

their respective desires, irresponsible lenders allow individuals to borrow money that they are subsequently unable to repay. The latter are ruined, and, 'with hatred in their hearts, [...] plot against those who have deprived them of their property and against the rest of society' (555d-e). Democracy comes to pass when the poor revolt and the rich are prompted, either by the threat or the actual use of violence, to relinquish their position (557a).

There is much that is questionable in Plato's account of the degeneration of the ideal state, just as there would be much to question in any attempt to see in Plato's description a mirror image of our own political situation. Nonetheless, certain parallels are striking, not least Plato's description of the development of democracy in relation to the development of what we know as consumer capitalism. Plato makes a distinction between necessary or natural desires, 'whose satisfaction benefits us' (558e) – presumably the desires for food, shelter, and clothing mentioned at 369d – and unnecessary or unnatural desires for luxuries; desires 'whose presence either does us no good or positive harm' (559d-e). In so doing Plato anticipates the distinction made in economic theory between 'needs' and 'wants', the consumer capitalism that we experience in an advanced form in which the basic needs of the populace for food, clothing and shelter are generally satisfied, and continued economic growth depends on the generation of ever-new wants. What defines the transition from oligarchy to democracy is that those who once restricted themselves to the satisfaction of necessary desires turn to the satisfaction of unnecessary ones. On Plato's account this happens because there is no principled rationale for why the oligarchic capitalist exercises restraint in the first place; he does so simply because he fears for his business reputation. However, this fear is eventually overwhelmed by the desire to accumulate further capital (554c-d), and the hierarchy between the two types of desire is eroded.

It is the erosion of all hierarchical structures in the complete victory of the desiring part of the soul that characterises the democratic state and the democratic character. Plato's ideal state is one in which the natural hierarchy between the three different classes guarantees the unity of the whole. In an oligarchy this unity is lost as society divides into rich and poor, although a hierarchy, albeit a degenerate one, is maintained in the rule of the former over the latter. The democratic state, by contrast, is characterised by the complete absence of unity or hierarchy. Thus, if in the ideal state each individual is understood as 'a link in the unity of the whole' (520a), then in the democratic state 'the whole' signifies nothing more than a contingent aggregation of individual desiring machines: 'there will be in this *polis*,' Socrates says, 'the greatest variety of individual character', and every possible way of life will be on display; an attractive prospect, Socrates concedes, but only to the simple minded (557c-d). Concomitantly, the hierarchical principle gives way to an extreme egalitarianism in which all men are treated as equals, 'whether they are equal or not' (558c). According to Socrates, in the democratic state the desire for money mutates into an equally intemperate desire for freedom, which, like the desire for money before it, is elevated to an absolute principle: 'in democracy, there's no compulsion either to exercise authority if you are capable of it, or to submit to authority if you don't want to' (557e). The lust for liberty leads to the dissolution of the most fundamental social hierarchies; sons no longer respect their fathers, and the latter respond by imitating their children in an effort to ingratiate themselves; likewise teachers are compelled to pander to their students (562e-563b).

Corresponding to the egalitarianism found in the democratic society as a whole, there is also an egalitarianism of desire at the level of the individual soul. The democratic character convinces itself, in the manner of the Benthamite utilitarian, that 'all pleasures are equal and should have equal rights' (561c). As a consequence, each individual becomes a slave to ever changing desires, a state of affairs that, at the level of society as a whole, ultimately leads to tyranny (see 562a-576b). Every desire has to have its turn: 'one day it's wine, women and song, the next water to drink and a strict diet; one days its hard physical training, the next indolence and careless ease, and then a period of philosophical study.' It is a life devoid of any 'order or restraint', although, rather touchingly, one to which the democratic character is devoted 'through thick and thin' (561c-e).

Plato's account of democracy is highly rhetorical, and, it might be argued, often lapses into unrecognisable caricature. According to Plato the practice of democracy is 'mere anarchy', to borrow a phrase,¹³ for he cannot see how the line between liberty and license can possibly be held in such a system (560e). But from the perspective of a constitutional democracy founded on the rule of law, the answer is relatively straightforward. In the liberal state freedom is not absolute, as Plato supposes, rather it is qualified. As J.S. Mill insisted, 'the only freedom that is worth the name is that of pursuing our own good in our own way, so long as we do not attempt to deprive others of theirs or impede their efforts to obtain it'.¹⁴ In other words, the individual is free to act as he or she wills until such time as the exercise of that freedom prevents other individuals from doing the same. The rule of law is fundamental in this relation, since it defines the limits on liberty that prevent that freedom from descending into license. The absence of the liberal conception of freedom in Plato's account seriously compromises its effectiveness as a critique of any democratic system that we would recognise. Further, it is one reason for questioning the subsequent explanation of the descent of democracy into tyranny. Plato's argument is that 'an excessive desire for liberty at the expense of everything else is what undermines democracy and leads to a demand for tyranny' (562c). Yet, as was mentioned earlier in the context of the simile of the ship, in a constitutional democracy significant safeguards are put in place to prevent just this eventuality. These safeguards are not an absolute guarantee against the fate to which Plato condemns democracy, but they certainly sufficient for us to question its purported inevitability.

Notwithstanding this fundamental disagreement over the nature of freedom, it might well be argued that Plato's democratic dystopia may yet return to haunt us, if it does not do so already. His vision of a fragmenting democratic culture united only by its capacity to consume, a culture in which the pursuit of the lowest common denominator has taken on the aura of a religious quest, is not one that we can so easily dismiss; there are too many signs to suggest that it may be uncannily prescient. Plato's observation about fathers and sons is a remarkable case in point. Before the 'invention' of the teenager in the 1950s, the period of adolescence was understood as the time during which the young took on the attitudes and demeanour of their parents in preparation for adulthood. One might wonder whether we are witness to the role reversal predicted by Plato. Rather than the son imagining the day when he will be measured for his first suit, a walk along many high streets would suggest that it is now the father who dreams of owning the same 'trainers' as his son.

There is one further aspect of Plato's critique of our democratic faith in particular on which I wish to comment. We have observed that, on Plato's account, one of the dominant characteristics of the democratic character is its commitment to giving each desire its day in the sun. As a consequence, its temporal horizons are strictly limited to the present moment. G.K. Chesterton described such an ethos as oligarchic rather than democratic. His concern was the importance of tradition. 'Tradition,' he wrote, 'means giving votes to the most obscure of all classes, our ancestors. It is the democracy of the dead. Tradition refuses to submit to the arrogant oligarchy of those who merely happen to be walking about.'¹⁵ The arrogant oligarch is a perfect summation of Plato's account of the democratic character, though not only in the manner that Chesterton suggests, I would argue.

Chesterton warned of the inadequacy of a conception of democracy that did not understand itself as the embodiment of tradition; the latter, he said, 'is only democracy extended through time'.¹⁶ His interest is in the relation between the present and the past, but I would contend that the criticism applies equally to the relation between the present and the future. Let us assume for the sake of argument there is indeed overwhelming evidence to support the claim that, for the sake of the future of the planet, the advanced liberal democracies of the West need to make significant changes in the manner in which they consume the earth's resources. It might be said that one of, if not the, greatest obstacle to effecting such change is democracy itself. No political party with realistic prospects of winning a General Election wants to be the one to propose that we make radical changes to our patterns of consumption today for the sake of tomorrow, since Plato's point about the democratic character is well taken: it is primarily interested in the short term, in 'indulging the pleasure of the moment.' If ours is a democratic culture that ignores the votes of the dead, then it also ignores the votes of those yet to be born. But if this is the case, then how are we to be weaned from our arrogant belief in the superiority of the present?

We are familiar with Plato's authoritarian answer to this question: place political power in the hands of those who understand the good of the whole. However, one of the consequences of the twentieth century experience of totalitarianism is that we have as little faith in Plato's remedy as we have an unshakeable faith that our right to freedom is sacrosanct. In the final analysis, it is this faith that separates us, estranges us even, from Plato. As Thomas Carlyle laments that '(L)iberty' is a thing men are determined to have',¹⁷ we applaud. The question, perhaps more pressing today than it has ever been, is what we ought to do with that liberty. The challenge is to prove Plato wrong. How, then, do we propose to exercise our freedom in the name not only of the past but also of the future? I would suggest that the answer begins with the need to conceive of democracy not so much as a liberty to be indulged in as a responsibility to be practised. The legacy of democracy may well rest on our willingness and ability to meet this challenge.

D. J. Sheppard
Kenilworth School
Warwickshire

¹ 'There is no judgment in the populace, nor reason'.

² All references to Plato's *Republic* are to Desmond Lee's translation (London: Penguin, 1987).

³ I shall assume that Plato's is a critique rather than a defence of democracy. For the latter view, see Leo Strauss *The City and Man* (Chicago: Rand McNally, 1964).

⁴ Richard Rorty asks precisely this question. In *Achieving Our Country* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 1998), Rorty cites Plato's dialogues as examples of obsolete texts that have lost their power to transform us in the twenty-first century.

⁵ Julia Annas, for example. In her *Plato: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), Annas argues that, 'For Plato, democracy is the worst form of government, except for all the others.' (p. 64) We might come to this conclusion having read the *Republic*, but it is surely not *Plato's* conclusion, at least not in this dialogue.

⁶ Since the particular concern of this essay is the relevance of Plato's critique to our democratic faith, I shall not be considering its viability as a critique of Athenian democracy in the fifth century B.C. However, it is worth highlighting the key difference between Plato's experience of democracy and our own. For most of Plato's lifetime the *polis* or 'city-state' of Athens maintained a system of direct democracy in which all adult male citizens had the opportunity to participate in the political process at large open-air meetings. This excluded the majority of the population, not only women but also *metics* – inhabitants of Athens of foreign descent – and slaves, nevertheless it did mean that political power was distributed beyond the aristocratic elite. At its height there were roughly 40,000 Athenian citizens out of a total population of around 300,000. By contrast, we possess a representative system with a universal franchise in which each constituency elects an individual to represent it in the legislature. What is more, it a system organised on a much larger scale; for the purposes of comparison, the size of the electorate in the UK is around 40 million. For further detail on Plato's Athens, see J.W. Roberts, *City of Sokrates: an introduction to Classical Athens* (London: Routledge, second edition, 1998).

⁷ On the important question of the specific particular of Plato's authoritarianism, see C.C.W Taylor, 'Plato's Totalitarianism', in *Plato's Republic: critical essays*, edited by Richard Kraut (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 1997).

⁸ Presented in this manner, such a system would appear to more akin to a representative than a direct system of democracy. However, whilst all citizens were entitled to speak in the Assembly, we know that a group of *rhetoires* or speakers emerged who made speeches on behalf of the different sides in a debate. These figures were the closest to a professional political class that Athens possessed, and are presumably the group to whom Socrates is referring in this passage.

⁹ Isaiah Berlin, *Four Essays on Liberty* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969).

¹⁰ The following discussion is indebted to Renford Bambrough, 'Plato's Political Analogies,' in *Philosophy, Politics and Society*, edited by Peter Laslett (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1963), pages 105- 6.

¹¹ Oscar Wilde, 'A Few Maxims for the Instruction of the Over- Educated', in *Saturday Review*, November, 1894.

¹² For a discussion – beyond the remit of the current essay – of the coherence of Plato's account in Books VIII-IX in relation to the argument in the *Republic* as a whole and of the extent to which Plato's account corresponds with the reality in fifth century Athens, see Julia Annas, *An Introduction to Plato's Republic* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981).

¹³ The phrase is borrowed from W.B. Yeats' poem *The Second Coming*, not altogether inapposite in this context: 'Turning and turning in the widening gyre/The falcon cannot hear the falconer;/Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;/Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world.'

¹⁴ John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty* [1859], (London: Penguin), page 72.

¹⁵ G.K. Chesterton, *Orthodoxy* (London: The Bodley Head, 1908), page 82.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ Thomas Carlyle, 'Past and Present' [1843], in *Works*, volume III, page 183 (London: Chapman and Hall, 1906).