

PLATO'S INVISIBLE HERO OF DEMOCRACY: SOCRATES IN THE *REPUBLIC* AND *CRITO*

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Abstract: The author argues that a careful reading of *Republic VIII* 557a-558a, coupled with an analysis of the mythic backdrop to the conversation between Socrates and Crito in the *Crito*, reveals that Plato intends the reader to see Socrates as an invisible moral and political hero of the democratic polis even though Socrates was, for much of his life, a critic of the Athenian democracy, and even given the fact that Socrates doesn't give democracy the highest standing among the political regimes in the *Republic*. The author discusses the myth of Theseus and the Minotaur and Hesiod's races of man, in order to show that in the *Republic* and the *Crito* Socrates is portrayed as a hero, specifically one who supports democracy as the only regime in which philosophy and the philosopher can exist. Finally, the author argues that Socrates' final act of heroism in the *Crito* is the act of remaining in prison, in large measure out of respect for the laws of Athens and its democratic legal procedures, a respect evident in the very structure of the conversation among Socrates, Crito, and the Athenian laws. It is suggested that the conversation in the *Crito* is indeed an imitation of a democratic legal procedure that would likely have been used to convict Socrates of a crime against the democracy were he to have followed Crito's advice and escaped from prison.

Keywords: Plato, Socrates, hero, democracy, *Crito*, *Republic*, *Gorgias*, Hesiod, Theseus

In Book VIII of the *Republic*, in the course of the degeneration of the regimes, the democracy comes into being [557a ff]. It is a city full of freedom, free speech, and license or authority [exousia] to pursue or avoid whatever one chooses. Socrates says, "each man would organize his life privately just as it pleases him" [557b]. The democracy is described as a fair, maybe even the fairest [kalliste] of regimes to many because "all sorts of human beings come to be there" [557c] and it is a regime wherein anyone interested in founding a city (something that Socrates, Glaucon and Adeimantus have been in fact doing during

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their long conversation in the Pireaus this night) would come to “shop” for a constitution (557d).

After noting the attractiveness of the equality, freedom, and myriad human beings allowed to exist in the democracy, Socrates asks, regarding “...the gentleness toward some of the condemned” in the democracy, “haven’t you yet seen men who have been sentenced to death or exile, nonetheless staying and carrying on right in the middle of things; as though no one cared or saw, stalking the land like a hero”? [558a]. Referring to Socrates’ remark at 558a, “Isn’t the gentleness toward some of the condemned exquisite [in the democracy]?”, Bloom says, this “sentence is ambiguous; ‘of’ could be substituted for ‘toward.’”¹ I think that Plato could very well intend the ambiguity and that he means to use both of and toward, but in different respects. He wants the reader to note the gentleness of the Athenian democracy ‘toward’ the condemned *and* the gentleness ‘of’ the condemned, in this case Socrates the philosopher who, while being critical of the democracy, treated it gently by not breaking its laws, as doing so would have contributed to the destruction of the regime. With regard to the conversation in the *Republic* about the ideal state Bloom says, “Striving for the perfectly just city puts unreasonable and despotic demands on ordinary men, and it abuses and misuses the best men. There is *gentleness* [my emphasis] in Socrates’ treatment of men, and his vision is never clouded by the blackness of moral indignation, for he knows what to expect of men. Political idealism is the most destructive of human passions.”²

Bloom reminds us that the traditional heroes are divine beings that “were present but not seen”.³ It is difficult not to imagine that Socrates is referring to himself, and to the philosopher in the democracy, in at least two respects. First, Socrates is such a man who was condemned [katapsēphisthētōn from katapsēphizmai]. The sense of the word condemned here is important because it can mean “voted against” *and* “sentenced to death.” Also, once deposed and indicted, Socrates did carry on ‘right in the middle of things’, continuing to speak in the agora and to receive guests like Crito in his prison cell practicing philosophy right up until he drank the poison. Right through Socrates’

¹ Plato (1968). *Republic*. Allan Bloom (Trans. With notes and Interpretive Essay). New York: Basic Books Inc., note 16, p.468.

² Allan Bloom, “Interpretive Essay,” p.410.

³ *Ibidem*, note 17, p.468.

trial and his incarceration he not only practiced philosophy but exhorted his friends to do the same.

But there is a second respect in which Plato has Socrates refer to himself here in the midst of the discussion of the democratic regime. Some individuals who had been condemned by the democracy nonetheless stayed in the city and carried on, “stalking the land like a hero” [558a]. Strauss points out that “The descending order of the five kinds of regime [in the Republic] is modeled on Hesiod’s descending order of the five races of men: the races of gold, of silver, of bronze, the divine race of heroes, the race of iron. [We see at once that the Platonic equivalent of Hesiod’s divine race of heroes is democracy”.]⁴ It is noteworthy that Socrates self-identifies as a hero during his discussion of the democracy, the ‘race of heroes.’ That Socrates would be referring to himself in this passage would surely cohere with the pervasive characterizations of Socrates as a hero throughout the dialogues of Plato. Paul Shorey translates hero [hērōs] as “revenant” or one who is unnoticed because he is “one who has returned from the dead’, a spirit”⁵[558a]. The primary point here is that the philosopher-hero in the democracy is invisible. “Among the objects that the disorganized democrat pursues, on the same level as flute-playing and dieting, is philosophy. To him it is not a serious occupation, but democracy is the only one of the practicable regimes in which philosophy makes its appearance. Democracy is merely indifferent to philosophy, while other regimes are positively hostile to it. The moral or fiscal austerity of timocracy and oligarchy preclude the leisure necessary to philosophy and condemn the thought produced by it, at the same time, the life in these regimes is too organized for philosophy to escape *unnoticed* [my emphasis] for long. Philosophy is among the unnecessary desires and hence finds its home in democracy.”⁶

It is the combination of, on the one hand, the freedom to pursue individual interests and to satisfy one’s desires and, on the other, the equivalency of all desires and pursuits in the democracy that, as Bloom puts it, allows philosophy to go unnoticed; indeed, the freedom, penchant for leisure, and the indiscriminate equality of desires and

⁴ Leo Strauss (1989). “Plato” in *An Introduction to Political Philosophy: Ten Essays by Leo Strauss*. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, p.208. Cf. *Republic* 546e – 547a and *Hesiod’s Works and Days* 106ff. See also Strauss, pp.209-210.

⁵ Plato (1980). *Republic*, Paul Shorey (trans.). Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, note g, p.289.

⁶ Allan Bloom, *op.cit.*, p.421.

pursuits in the democratic regime renders the philosopher “invisible.” The desire for or love of wisdom is of equal value to any other unnecessary desire or preoccupation. In this sense, the freedom to pursue any sort of life and the equivalency of all desires makes philosophy of no greater value, and the philosophical life no better or worse, than any other lifestyle in the democracy. It is equally true that the failure of the democratic regime to educate citizens about the true value of philosophy and the philosopher’s role of providing for the good of the city and the democracy itself, is an indication of the ignorance of the democratic state and the indiscriminate temperament it breeds. This is an ignorance of the higher standing and value of philosophy and the philosopher-citizen. This ignorance is a consequence of the inordinate and unbridled fixation on freedom and equality as the highest goods, higher and more important goods than wisdom and virtue.

The importance of philosophy and the philosopher remain unnoticed by and invisible to the democratic regime until, of course, the philosopher is perceived as a critic of and threat to the democratic regime and the life it promotes. Recalling the claim by Polemarchus in the *Republic* that it is important to know who, among one’s fellow citizens, is a friend or an enemy, J. Peter Euben points out how especially important this is in a democracy. This is so because in such a regime a broad, shared understanding of the good of the whole regime, and of the obligation of individual citizens to sacrifice in service to it, is critical. The shorthand statement of this claim is that citizens in a democracy must relate to each other and to the state as friends. Unless there is clarity among the democratic citizenry about who are the friends and enemies of the regime, “it will be difficult to distinguish between critics of democracy attempting to recall or inspire fellow citizens to the highest possibilities of their culture—whether in argument, example, or provocation—from those who are anti-democrats”.⁷ It is perhaps true then that Socrates became “visible” to Athens as a perceived enemy of the regime while in reality he was its invisible hero,⁸ one who, in his philosophical activity, hoped to

⁷ J. Peter Euben (1997). *Corrupting the Youth: Political Education, Democratic Culture, and Political Theory*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, pp.204-205.

⁸ The interplay of the philosopher Socrates’ visibility and invisibility is also evident in the *Euthyphro*. In that dialogue the Many in the assembly do not take Euthyphro seriously [*Euthyphro* 3c] or recognize the seer as endemic to the corruption of the

provoke and “stimulate debate, to have Athenians become more thoughtful about what they had done and could do in the future”⁹ as a democracy.

If *Republic* 558a is indeed a reference to Socrates, the invisible hero who stalks the city of Athens, it should also be said that well-documented are both the attempted overthrow of the democracy in Athens in 411 B.C. and the briefly successful revolution of the 30 Tyrants in 403 B.C., as are the amnesties that were proposed to the citizenry for informing on enemies of the democratic regime who were alleged complicitious with the oligarchs. That Socrates was caught in the political web has also been much testified to; clearly, Socrates, the loyal democratic citizen, remained, on the one hand, invisible to his accusers and many Athenians, and yet on the other, heroic in Plato's eyes nonetheless. However, as opposed to Socrates the citizen who sometimes praises other regimes, “Socrates the philosopher desires democracy”.¹⁰ Indeed, within the discussion of the decline of the regimes Socrates is “actually engaged in a defense of democracy against its enemies the potential tyrants”, the timocratic Spartans.¹¹

But we must ask, however, why would Socrates mount such a defense, given that it is the Athenian democracy, that will have him executed? Gerald Mara observes that “. . . the most important part of the *Apology* is not the verdict and its aftermath but the *apologia* itself, wherein the complex nature of the problems confronted by the philosopher in a democratic society are represented.”¹² The reason

Athenian civic religion in the 5th and 4th centuries B.C. Equally well, those in the assembly are “in earnest” about Socrates, taking him quite seriously [*Euthyphro* 3e], neither laughing nor jesting, (though Socrates wishes they would laugh and not take him so seriously) seeing the philosopher as the perpetrator of religious corruption in the city. The soothsayer *Euthyphro* here is the visible laughingstock and yet invisible disease and Socrates the philosopher is the visible corrupter but in reality the invisible cure for the decaying Athenian civic religion. Because of the ignorance of the Many, the pious and potential hero of Athenian religion remains invisible to them.

⁹ J. Peter Euben, *op.cit.*, p.205. Recall also in this connection *Republic* 386a where Socrates talks about the importance of friendship in the ideal regime saying that the guardians must be enjoined to value friendship and/or “not take lightly their friendship with each other.”

¹⁰ Allan Bloom, *op.cit.*, p.421.

¹¹ *Ibidem*.

¹² Gerald M. Mara (1997). *Socrates' Discursive Democracy: Logos and Ergon in Platonic Political Philosophy*. New York: State University of New York Press, p.58. See also George Anastaplo (1964), “Human Being and Citizen: A Beginning to the

seems to be that the democracy appears to be the only regime in which the philosopher can exist and practice philosophy relatively undisturbed, at least for a time.¹³ In the *Republic*, Socrates clearly doesn't assign the democracy a high place in the order of regimes. "Socrates did not prefer democracy to all other regimes in speech' [logos], one could say that he showed his preference 'by deed' [ergon]: by spending his whole life in democratic Athens, by fighting for her in two wars, and by dying in obedience to her laws".¹⁴ Of course this last part of Strauss' comment harkens the *Crito* dialogue.

There is evident a rich mythic backdrop to the conversation between Socrates and Crito, during which Crito attempts to persuade Socrates to escape from prison; that mythic backdrop is established early on in the dialogue. Recall, the beginning of the dialogue; Socrates' friend Crito comes early to Socrates' prison cell where the philosopher awaits execution. Crito tells Socrates that, because the ship is returning from Delos that day, Socrates will be executed the next day. The mention of the ship calls to mind the myth of Theseus, arguably the greatest Attic hero, and his remarkable voyage to Crete with seven boys and seven girls aboard his ship. These adolescents were to be sacrificed to the Minotaur, the mythical half-bull, half-man monster.¹⁵

In response to Crito's report about the ship arriving on this day, Socrates says he believes that it will in fact arrive in the Athenian harbor, Piraeus, the next day, and so that he would expect to be executed the day after it docks. What shall we make of this obvious evocation of the myth of Theseus and the Minotaur in this dialogue that has as its guiding question, should Socrates, with the assistance of Crito and his friends, break the law, by escaping from prison, or stay and stand for execution in the very near future? Why does Socrates elicit the story of Theseus? My suggestion will be that Plato intends us to witness a generally favorable comparison between the traditional Attic hero Theseus and the philosopher Socrates, the ultimate

Study of Plato's *Apology of Socrates*" in Joseph Cropsey (ed.), *Ancients and Moderns: Political Philosophy in Honor of Leo Strauss*. New York: Basic Books, pp.16-49.

¹³ See Bloom, p.421 and Strauss, p.209.

¹⁴ Leo Strauss, *op.cit.*, p.210.

¹⁵ See Jacob Klein, "Plato's *Phaedo*", *The College*, Vol. XXVI, no. 4, January 1975, pp.1-10—especially page 1- for a good brief synopsis of the story of Theseus and the Minotaur.

significance of which is to portray Socrates as a new hero, one whose heroism is both moral and political.¹⁶

Quite a lot has been made of the comparison between Theseus and Socrates. However, interestingly, most of this discussion has occurred in commentaries on the *Phaedo* where the myth of Theseus and the Minotaur is more explicitly mentioned and summarily recounted [58a-c]. That the lion's share of the reference to this story, and commentary on it, occurs in the *Phaedo* makes sense from a dramatic point of view because the telling of Socrates' last day and his death is a recollection or reminder of Socrates' trial, imprisonment, and execution. Dramatically, however, the *Crito* conversation came before the one in the *Phaedo*, and the opening of the *Crito* reminds us about the story of Theseus' pilgrimage to Delos. So, we must attend to the comparison of Theseus and Socrates evoked in *that* distinctive conversation.¹⁷ A chart might be helpful to illustrate a favorable comparison between heroes Socrates and Theseus as this comparison is elicited in the *Crito*.

¹⁶ For an argument that Socrates is not in fact a "traditional" Greek tragic hero, see A. W. Gomme, who suggests that, based on Aristotle's argument in the *Poetics*, Socrates would not be the "best tragic hero" because he is not like ourselves, as he surpasses "all men in virtue and goodness" and in his final days, his life does not "change from happiness to unhappiness" or misery as do the lives of the traditional heroes. A. W. Gomme, "The Structure of Plato's *Crito*", *Greece and Rome*; Second Series, Vol.5, no.1 (March 1958), pp.45-51. Of course Socrates differs from traditional Greek heroes like Achilles for many other reasons. In his essay, "Socrates as Hero," *Philosophy and Literature*, Vol.6, nos.1 & 2 (Fall 1982), pp.106-118, Robert Eisner, shows how Plato's Socrates mimics many of the qualities and behaviors of the traditional heroes but he "turns his back on the heroism of the old school" (p.111). Socrates becomes a hero and master of the soul (p.107) and a "warrior of the Logos" (p.109) who performs heroic deeds only similar to those of the traditional heroes. A good case can be made, one I will make in another article on the *Crito*, that preeminent among the many tasks that Plato takes up in this dialogue is an expansive contrast between the traditional hero Achilles and the new Athenian hero Socrates.

¹⁷ See Michael J. Rosano, "Citizenship and Socrates in Plato's *Crito*", *The Review of Politics*, vol.62, no.3 (Summer 2000), pp.451-477 for a short helpful review of recent studies on the *Crito*, studies especially focused on questions of political and legal obligation [Cf. pp.451-454]. Fewer studies of the *Crito* have attended systematically to the myth of Theseus. For a very notable exception see Jeremiah Conway, "Socrates and the Minotaur: Following the Thread of Myth in Plato's Dialogues," *Teaching Philosophy*, vol.16, no.3 (September 1993), pp.193-204.

Theseus

Risks his life for, and protects and saves the young from being sacrificed to the Minotaur; slayer of other monsters

Contributes to the future of Athens by saving its young people

Through heroic exploits challenges traditional political, religious, and moral practices

Serves Apollo by establishing a festival on Delos honoring him

Listens to the knowledgeable few [Ariadne and Daedalus re. the golden thread]

Skilled navigator of mazes/labyrinths

Slays the ravenous Minotaur that, unsated, would catalyze the destruction of Athens [NB. Minos' threat to vanquish Athens]

Socrates

Risks his life for, and through philosophy, protects and saves the youth of Athens from the monstrous, Minotaur-like Many¹⁸

Serves Athens by educating the young in philosophy

Does the same through philosophical questioning

Serves Apollo by philosophically examining himself and others in Athens

Listens to those few who have knowledge of the soul and what harms it or makes it good

Skilled navigator of maze-like/labyrinthian arguments

Slays, with arguments, the politicians, sophists, and the monstrous Many that are destroying Athens

¹⁸ I have suggested that in the *Crito*, the Minotaur that Theseus slays is an image of the Monstrous Many that devours the Athenian youth by corrupting them with false views of the best life. For different perspectives on what the Minotaur symbolizes in the *Phaedo*, see Laurel A. Madison, "Have We Been Careless with Socrates' Last Words? A Rereading of the *Phaedo*", *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, vol.40, no.2 (October 2002), pp.421-436. She argues that in the *Phaedo*, the Minotaur represents "carelessness". See p.431, note 28 for Madison's comments on other competing views about the image of the Minotaur as it is used by Plato in the *Phaedo*. Among such views are that the Minotaur represents fear of death, or misogyny, or the inability to let go of Socrates the man.

Uses <i>logos</i> and also has <i>thumos</i>	Uses <i>logos</i> and exhibits <i>thumos</i> as he slays politicians, sophists, and the monstrous Many
Almost poisoned by his father, Aegeus, who was under Medea's spell	Actually made to drink the poison, hemlock, by mother/father Athens [Cf. <i>Crito</i> 51b-c]
Heroic founder of Athenian democracy	Heroically protects Athenian democracy by obeying its laws and by infusing the city with critical philosophical discussion

For the many ways in which Socrates is like the hero Theseus, perhaps the most important, for my purposes here, lies in their shared commitment to democracy. In Euripides' play, *Supplikes* [403-408, 426-428] we hear Theseus' praise of the democracy, evincing his role as the legendary founder of the Athenian democratic regime [Thucydides 2.15].¹⁹ Moreover, Greek engravings and sculptures testify to an association of Theseus with democracy²⁰. Socrates' last heroic deeds of standing trial, accepting the verdict of the court, and especially, remaining in prison and standing for execution, display his loyalty to the democratic polis of Athens, or certainly, and at least, his unwillingness to destroy it.

Because the democracy was likely the only regime in which the philosopher could exist and perhaps survive, if only for a while, continuing to practice philosophy, Socrates, who had himself been

¹⁹ See also Paul Woodruff (2005). *The First Democracy: The Challenge of an Ancient Idea*. Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, pp.45, 237, 238, 245 and Edward M. Harris "Pericles' Praise of Athenian Democracy: Thucydides 2.37.1," *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology*, vol. 94 (1992) pp.157-167.

²⁰ See A. E. Raubitschek, "Demokratia", *Hesperia: The Journal of the American School of Classical Studies*, vol. 31, no. 3 (July – September, 1962), pp. 238-243. Theseus's heroic legend includes the story about how, on becoming King in Attica, he united the citizenry into a single city with Athens as the capital of the state. In Athens he created the Boule and instituted the Panathenaea, institutions and symbols of new political solidarity among the citizens of Attica. *The Penguin Dictionary of Classical Mythology*, Pierre Grimal, Ed. London: Penguin Books Ltd., 1986, p.433. When Theseus's bones were unearthed by Cimon, he brought them to the Athenians who "gave their hero's bones a magnificent burial in the city, near the site of a refuge for fugitive slaves and poor people who were being persecuted by the rich, for Theseus had been the champion of democracy in his lifetime" p.435.

born in and sustained by the democracy, had an obligation to defend it. While it would have been dangerous for one to practice philosophy in the Athenian democracy, it was more dangerous for the Athenian democracy itself for philosophers not to practice it. The reason Socrates talked to and allegedly “corrupted” young aristocratic politically ambitious men was because these young men were “political tyrants, who [were] products of the democracy”.²¹ The worry would be that with training in philosophy, those with philosophical skills, but also possessed of political ambitiousness, might become tyrants, having been seduced and educated by the monstrous Many. As David K. O’Connor puts it, “The potential tyrant is the potential philosopher”.²² Such talented men, skilled in the art of refutation, might be swayed by the Many to apply their dialectical skills eristically in the political arena. Enticed by the praise and rewards, wealth and honors that they could receive, they could become pawns of the multitude. While the democracy is characterized by freedom and equality, and is therefore a regime that tolerates the philosopher more readily than other regimes, it is also the regime most likely to permit demagogues to rise to power and destroy the democracy and with it the prospect of philosophy [*Republic* 574a ff].

We should recall here Socrates’ caution about another danger of the inculcation of philosophy and dialectical thinking in those, the young, who have yet to reach an age when their nature has become “orderly and stable” (*Republic* 539a ff). The young might treat philosophy as a game, using their skill at dialectical argument narrowly eristically, refuting just to refute. Socrates says, “Then when they themselves refute many men and are refuted by many, they fall quickly into a profound disbelief of what they formally believed. And as a result of this, you see, they themselves and the whole activity of philosophy become objects of slander among the rest of men” (*Republic*, 539c). It is important for both the future of philosophy and for just rule in the democracy that the true philosophers, who have been rigorously trained in philosophy and to rule, and whose resolve to pursue justice and the good of the city overall, come to “despise the current honors and believe them to be illiberal and worth nothing” (*Republic*, 540d).

²¹ Allan Bloom, *op.cit.*, p.425.

²² David K. O’Connor (1998). “Socrates and Political Ambition”, *Proceedings of the Boston Area Colloquium in Ancient Philosophy*, Lanham, MD: University Press of America, vol.4, p.51.

While Athenians worried that philosophy was a clear and present threat to their democratic political regime, Socrates worried, ironically, about the corruptive influence that the democratic culture of rule by the multitude could have on burgeoning philosophers. At the same time, however, Socrates realized that preserving democracy was necessary for the preservation of philosophy. And so Plato has Socrates speak and act in the *Crito* in a manner indicative of his resolve not to destroy the Athenian democracy and indeed to preserve it. Even the very structure of the conversation in the *Crito* evinces this resolve. Gregory Steadman has argued that by having the laws of Athens speak in the *Crito*, Plato intends to model the entire conversation between Socrates and Crito on an Athenian procedure called *graphē paranomion*, an “indictment against illegal procedures.” According to Steadman, “The *graphe* proceeded in the same fashion as most public indictments. Both the citizen who issued the indictment and the defendant who had proposed the decree appeared before a jury, and each delivered a single speech (*logos*) in defense of his position: the prosecutor argued that the proposal did not follow the proper procedures or contradicted a pre-existing law, while the defendant argued the contrary. The task of the jurors was to choose between the two competing *logoi* and decide in favor of either the prosecutor or the defendant”.²³ Crito offers the illegal proposal that Socrates escape from prison and the speech of the Laws portrays them as “the litigant in a *graphe paranomion*. ...Socrates makes it very clear to Crito that the speech about to be delivered by the imaginary Laws is the same speech one might expect to hear from an Athenian prosecuting a *graphe paranomion* in the law courts”.²⁴ By creating what Steadman calls a “pseudo-paranomion”, or by having Socrates model or imitate this legal procedure, “Plato portrays Socrates as an advocate not only for the rule of law but more importantly for the Athenian procedure for deliberating and protecting such laws.”²⁵ One could conclude not only, as Steadman does, that Socrates is being portrayed as a loyal citizen but also that Socrates would support and defend the democratic and legal procedures that were used to convict him; indeed he employs them in his entreaties to his friend Crito, arguing that Crito’s plan to escape from prison would amount to an ‘illegal procedure’. The very

²³ Gregory Steadman, “The Unity of Plato’s *Crito*,” *The Classical Journal*, vol 101, no.4 (2006), pp.361-382.

²⁴ *Ibidem*, p.364.

²⁵ *Ibidem*, p.367.

structure of the conversation in the *Crito* is an implicit defense of democracy and it would seem that Plato's Socrates is "one who unhesitatingly chooses to abide by the democratic protection of Law, even when such protection comes at the cost of his life"²⁶.

Socrates acquiesces to the arguments of the laws in part because the possibility of philosophy depends on the preservation of the democracy. Perhaps, as Gerald Mara claims, "Socrates' own democratic experiences, including his service as hoplite and as *prytanis* along with his first-hand knowledge of the shifts in the regime [in Athens] from democracy to oligarchy and back again suggests more respect for the ordinary functions of the city: to protect security, administer justice, and establish some form of civic community or common culture"²⁷, a culture, I would add, that would be the most tolerant of the philosopher. This common culture would include a democratic political regime. It seems true that Plato brings the long deceased Socrates, a spirit or revenant, back from the dead to stalk the landscape of his dialogues, as he once stalked Plato's Athens, then and now an invisible hero of democracy.²⁸

²⁶ *Ibidem*, p.379. In his commentary on Plato's *Gorgias*, J. Peter Euben illustrates "the ways in which Socrates' vocation can be seen as an elaboration of Athenian democratic practices even when he is explicitly critical of democracy" (Euben, p.203). Two of the examples of such democratic practices that Euben discusses are the *dokimasia* or "preliminary screening" and the *euthūnai* or "final accounting," democratic procedures, respectively, that any Athenian citizen had to go through before they could take up or step down from their service as a magistrate (Cf. Euben especially pp. 94-97). Euben does admit that the *Gorgias* is "not very helpful for anyone trying to make a case for a democratic Socrates" (p.204). Euben admits further that in this dialogue Socrates does seem to be an anti-democrat. Indicators of this, among several others, are, Socrates' contempt for the multitude, majority rule, and jury pay and his "indifference to the question of who enjoys political rights and prerogatives of citizens", his endorsement of "expert political knowledge, and his acidic disparagement of "the revered democratic leaders of Athens" (p.204). All in all, these views of Socrates, as he is portrayed in the *Gorgias*, indicate a substantial critique of democratic politics. All of that said, Euben reads the *Gorgias* "against the grain of traditional interpretations" of the dialogue. (p.204) He argues that Socrates "is more of a democrat than he seems and that much of what he says about democracy in the *Gorgias* is directed at the way democracy is being construed by the interlocutors in the dialogue and those in Athens that agree with them." (p.204).

²⁷ Gerald M. Mara, *op.cit.*, p.59.

²⁸ Mara argues that the Platonic dialogues present a "unique model of or better, ...an attitude toward, democratic discourse" that is to be found in "Socrates' democratic conversations" (p.3). In a similar vein, Euben follows Benjamin Barber who argues, "reflexivity conditioned by civic education turns out to be democracy's greatest

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virtue" (p.208). Even while Socrates worries about majority rule in the democracy, and especially about "the corruption of political rhetoric, misuse of political language...that preys on the ignorance of the [democratic] Many", Socrates is committed to "a philosophically informed, politically grounded rhetoric that could help constitute a political education for a democratic citizenry" (p.207).

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