

PHILOSOPHICAL WALLS: PLATO AND THE DEBATE ON *PHILOPOLITICS* IN ATHENS' FIFTH AND FOURTH CENTURIES

Introduction

The idea for this essay came to me from the recent reading of an already classic thesis by Nicole Loraux, which appears in her book *L'invention d'Athènes*¹ and according to which the *politeiai* writers from the 5th-4th Centuries (Isocrates, Thucydides, but the same applies – as we will see – to others as well) since they find themselves unable to act in the political sphere, are forced to use words as a political strategy². We will, therefore, talk about words that express a political, albeit impossible, passion.

While searching for this passion amongst the books on my table, engaged in 5th-4th Century Athens – Aristophanes, Thucydides, Euripides, Gorgias and, obviously, Plato himself – I noticed a term that turns up often and that somehow reveals that all of these writers are engaged in defining this passion. It is the term φιλόπολις: a term in my opinion reducibly translated within the lexicon of patriotism. But before we think about philopolitics, one has to consider the historical context in which this literature is produced.

The tragic soul and the anthropologies of *πλεονεξία*

The cultural climate of all these authors is clearly the one that Vegetti, with a fortunate expression, calls *anthropology of πλεονεξία*, which has at the same time an ethical and a political meaning, in a solution of continuity typical of the Platonic thought, in which I find myself – as it were – «at home».

From the dramatic production of the tragedies, throughout the fifth century, there clearly comes a new concept of the soul, *i.e.* the individual, which can be called «tragic», *i.e.* intimately lacerated, torn between desires and

1. N. LORAUX, 1981.

2. This article was first presented as a paper at the *V Internacional Archaï Seminar*, Brasília, Brazil, June 2008.

wishes, between θυμός and βουλήματα, as it appears at the end of Medea's (1078–1080) famous monologue in Euripides' homonymous tragedy: an individual unable to live according to what he knows is right.

This tragic soul in intimate perennial conflict is developed in apparent controversy, with both typically Socratic moral intellectualism, as well as with the pretension of a monolithic soul, «alone in itself» (μόνην καθ' αυτήν) – as it is said in *Phaedo* (67 d) – of Orphic and perhaps Pythagorean traditions, which intended to save the soul, restoring it to its original purity³. Indeed, the contradictions of the πόλις, manifest in the literature of the period with terms like στάσις, ἔρις, ὕβρις and πλεονεξία, in addition to other social evils, are deeply rooted in the individual soul, so much so that it turns out to be irremediably «double», divided, fragmented within the expressions of its multiple desires.

So, at the end of the fifth century, the individual's tragic conflictuality is perceived – through the intellectual and political debate – in the interior of what we call *anthropologies of πλεονεξία*. By *anthropology of πλεονεξία* we mean the comprehension of the human being as a helpless victim of its lust for prevarication, of oppression upon the other. The pleonectic drive is the unlimited desire for «having more»: more power, more riches, and more social recognition. Thus Veggetti defines πλεονεξία:

The *pleonexia* law applies itself to the relationships between groups and individuals within each citizen community and to the relationships among the *poleis*, between the cities themselves. The historic context in which this anthropological thought is developed can be defined with precision: on the one hand, the Athenian imperialism, which, under the mask of a democratic company, reveals the nature of the state as one of *polis tyrannos*, according to the expression that Thucydides (II, 62) attributes to its biggest *leader*, Pericles himself; on the other hand, the internal conflicts among rival oligarchic and democratic groups, the *staseis* that break the citizenship pact upon which the historic experience of the *polis* was built⁴.

Πλεονεξία is – at heart – that which the violent master (βίαιος διδάσκαλος, III, 82, 3), the Peloponnesian War, in Thucydides' own expression, had taught the Greeks. The result of this teaching we find, always in Thucydides, in the beautiful fiction of the dialogue between the Athenians and the Melians, which, due to constraints of space, we cannot comment on here. So, Thucydides seems to conclude theoretically, the human being has a φύσις ἀναγκαῖα (V, 105, 2) that leads him to practise the pleonectic violence

3. The Socrates controversy seems actually more evident in *Hippolytos*: «the wise men, actually, even unwillingly, but equally love evil (κακῶν ἐρῶσιν)» (p. 380).

4. M. VEGGETTI (2003, p. 17).

against the laws of the city (III, 82, 2, 6), because of φιλοτιμία, of a lust for power and social recognition (III, 82, 8). And this nature is shared by men and the gods, for whom the same principle applies. Independently of right and reason: ἄν κρατὶ ἄρχειν (V, 105, 2), the one who has the strength has the command.

The «violent master» that is war (βίαιος διδάσκαλος, III, 82, 3) creates almost conceptual characters (were they not real and historic) like Alcibiades: an extremely worrisome and omnipresent figure both in Thucydides' and Plato's reflections, a paradigmatic symbol of πλεονεξία and of the lust that places the πόλις in check.

Thucydides refers to this, in a discourse attributed to Alcibiades (VI, 16) in response to Nicias considering the opportunity of another military expedition against Syracuse. Nicias had warned the people against Alcibiades, by the fact that the latter had

urged you to leave, thinking only of his private interest (τὸ ἑαυτῶν), even more that he is too young for commanding, wishing to be admired by his horse breeding and by the large expenses he makes, with intent to gain some advantages out of his post [of commander] (VI, 12, 2).

The answer that Thucydides puts in Alcibiades' mouth cannot be more revealing:

It is not unfair that someone, having high regard of oneself, refuses to be on equal terms with the others, because even those who find themselves in disgrace cannot find someone willing to take part in their misfortune on equal terms. It is the opposite, in the same manner that in disgrace one cannot receive a greeting, one cannot find meanness in the fact that successful men look down on the others [those who want equality should level with us], (VI, 16, 4).

There is, in Alcibiades' discourse, a defense of πλεονεξία, a justification of the search for personal interest: the assertion of the wish to have more pleonectic as an anthropological hallmark, the attempt of public legitimation of private interest. Thucydides does not hide his dissatisfaction with this.

Uselessly, Nicias once more warns the Athenians that «scarce are the advantages obtained by desire (ἐπιθυμία), vast are those obtained with prudence (πρόνοια)» (VI, 13, 1).

Historically, the desire-Alcibiades wins. And this seems to be a *leitmotif* for the whole war when seen from the Athenian's reactions. I have collected these references only from the *War's* book II: youth full of lust for war (II, 8, 1); the Athenians' wrath in the face of improvised attack (II, 11, 7); angry Athenians arguing in the face of invasion (II, 21, 2); Pericles admits difficulty, in his mournful discourse after the first year of war, in convincing his listeners of the heroics of those who had died, because his eulogies would cause envy in others and, consequently, suspicions about their truthfulness

(II, 35, 2). Furthermore, the most *tragic* reference: the triumph of the search for pleasure during the plague that ravages Athens: «All that was immediately pleasurable and that – whence-so-ever – was useful to get such pleasure from, had become beautiful and useful (χρήσιμον)» (II, 53, 3).

The debate on philopolitics in Athens' fifth and fourth centuries

Within the reflections on *πλεονεξία* found in the writings of these fifth and fourth centuries' authors, there is a term that opposes itself to the former and which emerges among others: it is the term *φιλόπολις*.

In Thucydides' work this term appears four times: once referring to Pericles and, meaningfully; the other three in the context of a criticism towards Alcibiades. Pericles, in the Assembly discourse, after the second Spartan invasion of the Peloponnesus, defines himself as «lover of the city and superior to money» (*φιλόπολις τε καὶ χρημάτων κρείσσων*, II, 60, 5), whereas in the mournful discourse after the first year of war, he had similarly exhorted the Athenians to become *ἐρασταί*, «lovers of the city» (*ἐραστὰς γιγνομένους αὐτῆς*, II, 43, 1).

The term reappears three times in the book VI, 92 of *War*, precisely from the mouth of the *traitor* Alcibiades, who, in his discourse to the Spartans, attempting to extricate himself from the bad impression caused by his betrayal of his own city, declares:

I do not want someone to judge me worse from the fact that I am, at this moment, together with your arch-enemies, going against the city [Athens] with all my strength, I who once seemed to be its lover (*φιλόπολις ποτε δοκῶν εἶναι*, VI, 92, 2).

Alcibiades declares himself, immediately afterwards, an expatriate (*φυγάς*, VI, 92, 3) in his own city, which he loves, and justifies his hostile acts towards Athens like this:

Love towards the city (*τό τε φιλόπολι*) I do not have when I have been unjustly treated [by it] (*οὐκ ἐν ᾧ ἀδικοῦμαι*), but it is when I am able to safely practise my citizenship (*ἀσφαλῶς ἐπολιτεύθην*). At this moment, I would not be sent against it (*πατρίδα*) but the opposite, I intend to reconquer the one that is already not (*τὴν οὐκ οὔσαν*). For it is, properly, lover of the city (*φιλόπολις ὀρθῶς*), one that would not be sent against it after having undeservedly lost it (*ἀδίκως ἀπολέσας μὴ ἐπίη*), but the one who so longs for it (*διὰ τὸ ἐπιθυμεῖν*) that he would try to take it back (VI, 92, 3-4).

The semantic scope of Alcibiades' discourse is very clear: it shifts, within the context of exile, the sense of *love towards the city* (*τό τε φιλόπολι*), of *philopolitics*, so much that it results not in an ethical attitude of the individual, but rather the safety that the same city can offer the citizen (*ἀσφαλῶς ἐπολιτεύθην*): since it is Athens that expels him (at least from his point of view) is no longer his *πατρίδα*. Citizenship and the love towards the city are

consequences of the place one occupies in it and the treatment one receives from it. In a game of great rhetoric and political skill, Alcibiades inverts his ethical position: from attacker he becomes victim, from enemy to friend of the state, φιλόπολις. But all that at the cost of redefining the term citizenship and love towards the city, *i.e.* public ethics, to the detriment of advantage, of personal interest. There echoes here the criticism he had previously received from Nicias, according to which Alcibiades wanted to command the Athenian army in the Syracusan expedition «thinking only of his private interests» τὸ ἑαυτοῦ μόνον σκοπῶν (VI, 12, 2). Both concepts – τὸ φιλόπολι and τὸ ἑαυτοῦ – cannot go together in Nicias' public ethics, contrary to what Alcibiades may seem to think. The term φιλόπολις also appears significantly in Aristophanes four times: three in *Plutus* (726, 900, 901) and once in *Lysistrata* (544). The semantic scope and dramatic context of these occurrences are practically the same in Thucydides: a fierce criticism, which Aristophanes stages, in a passionate treatment, on the verge of turning the comic tone into tragedy⁵. In *Plutus* φιλόπολις is rather Asclepius (726), in the words of Chremylus's wife, for the god laughs while applying ointment to Pluto's eyes «to put an end to the plots hatched at the assemblies» (725); a clear reference to the propagation of *pleonectic* practices inside the official courts of Athenian politics during the end of the fifth century, a period when that comedy was probably written (although it was only presented in 388 B.C., perhaps in a second edition): «how clever and lover of the city is this god!» (φιλόπολις ὁ δαίμων καὶ σοφός) – comments the wife. In lines 900 and 901, likewise, the term reappears ironically in the mouth of a sycophant, who passes himself for a man of good deeds and lover of the city (χρηστὸς καὶ φιλόπολις, 900), to the astonishment of Justus, who repeats in disbelief the sycophant's self-definition in the following line: χρηστὸς καὶ φιλόπολις (901).

In *Lysistrata* the term appears in the Choir of Old Women, a eulogy to the virtues of Athenian women, in whom «there is no lack of character, nor grace, nor courage, nor intelligence, nor even wise virtue and lover of the city (φιλόπολις ἀρετὴ φρόνιμος, 545–547)». In this case it is their virtue which is φιλόπολις, and, by metonymy, they themselves. The context, it is well known, is again of Athenian military crisis and of Alcibiades' plots: performed at the Dionysia from 411 B.C., *Lysistrata* is Aristophanes' outcry, at the same time desperate and fantastically utopian.

But it is in the *Knights* that the image of φιλόπολις appears in a more precisely comic form, although we do not find the term itself in the verses of the

5. It is the case of the strong lyricism in the construction of the image of *Lysistrata*, or of the Chorus of the *Knights*.

comedy. The comedy starts at *Demos*' house, an allegory for the People, who is introduced by one of his servants, who are masked as Demosthenes and Nicias, as a short-tempered, broad bean eater and irritable boss (δεσπότης ἄγροικος ὀργήν, κυανοτρώξ, ἀκράχολος, 40-41), just like the democratic people. The reason for referring to the broad beans is the large amounts in which they were used owing to the frequent campaigns for election. This allegory is revealed in the next lines right after, again referring to *Demos*, the boss, called: «*Demos* supreme (Δῆμος Πυκνίτης, literally, *frequenter of the Pnyx*, a hill where the meetings took place), a stubborn and deaf old man» (δύσκολον γερόντιον ὑπόκωφον, 42-43).

In the comedy, *Demos*, the Peoples' allegory, *His People*, therefore, is fawned upon by a servant named Paphlagonion, a tanner by profession, allegory of the demagogue: «immoral and deceiver as he is, he knows right away his owner's nature» (46), literally his τρόποι. The other servants, indignant, steal the sacred oracle that Paphlagonion keeps under lock and key, and discover that it holds prophecies about who will rule the city: first an oakum salesman, followed by a cattle trader and ultimately by a sausage seller (Ἀλλαντοπώλης, 143). Behind the evident Aristophanic controversy against the rise of the trade bourgeoisie, the sausage seller's definition is the comic inversion of the picture of the φιλόπολις: facing the wonder of the sausage seller, who claims he is not up to the responsibility, the servant declares: «It seems to me you must have something positive on your curriculum: are you not by chance a good man's son»? (ἐκ καλῶν εἰ καγαθῶν, 184). «By Zeus, no»! – answers indignantly the sausage seller – «I am rabble» (εἰ μὴ ἐκ πονηρῶν γε, 186). Then he asks later on: «and how am I supposed to rule the people?». The servants answer in a sarcastic one:

It is the easiest thing in the world (φανυλότατον ἔργον, 213): do as you always have done. Blend it, wrap up the odds and ends, always fawn on the people (ἀεὶ προσποίου, 215), soothe them with gourmet-like phrases (ὑπογλυκαίνων ῥηματίοις μαγειρικοῖς, 216). You already have the virtues of a demagogue: bestial voice, low descent (φωνὴ μιαρὰ, γέγονας κακῶς, 217). After all, you have all it takes for politics (ἅπαντα πρὸς πολιτείαν ἃ δεῖ, 218).

With the comically-inverted image of φιλόπολις in Aristophanes, the feeling of the city's ethical defeat is extremely revealing, permeated by the sensation that the world of politics is «upside down». Behind the *Knights* there is, clearly, an immediate criticism against Cleon (never nominated) and against Athenian politics in general, for some years by then involved in the roughness of the Peloponnesian War. But Aristophanes seems to intent going beyond this, and sketches ideal types of political figures. Though these representations are certainly satirical, they are also simultaneously political statements. Anyway, what we find in Aristophanes is the same motif of pol-

itics so deeply corrupted by πλεονεξία so that it is possible (as the proverb has it) to corrupt the entire Assembly with a single coin: «with a coin of onion, [to] put in the pocket all of the *Boule*» (τὴν βουλὴν ὅλην ὀβολοῦ κοριάννοις ἀναλαβών, 681–682).

Platos' philopolitics

We have finally come to Plato. It is not necessary to remember here the deep ethical-political preoccupation that both his work and biography show. It is enough for me to remark here, given the scope of this essay, that Plato also uses the term φιλόπολις four times. Two allusions are generic and appear in contexts of little theoretical value: in *Apology* 24 b, where Socrates calls Meletus, with sarcastic irony, someone who «calls himself a good man and lover of the city» (τὸν ἀγαθὸν καὶ φιλόπολιν ὡς φησι); in *Laws* III, 694 c, where King Cyrus is called «good general and lover of the city» (στρατηγὸν τε ἀγαθὸν εἶναι καὶ φιλόπολιν).

The other two allusions are – as one would have expected – in *The Republic*. In Book V, 470 d, in the context of the criticism of the στάσις, says that neither side in internal conflict deserves the nickname φιλόπολις:

that when anything of this sort occurs in faction, and a city is divided against itself (διαστῇ πόλις) if either party devastates the land and burns the houses (τέμνωσιν ἀγροὺς καὶ οἰκίας ἐμπιμπρῶσιν) of the other, the στάσις is thought to be an accursed thing (ἀλιτηριώδης) and neither party to be true lovers of the city (φιλοπόλιδες): otherwise, they would never have endured thus to outrage their nurse and mother (τὴν τροφὸν τε καὶ μητέρα).

This is a strong metaphor: it alludes to motherly love and to the atavistic image of the bosom betrayed by its creation. Love towards the city is envisaged as motherly love.

But, out of them all, the fourth allusion is perhaps the one that demonstrates greater theoretical abundance. It deals with an essential step from Book VI of *The Republic* (503 a), where, after solving «the matter of children begetting and of women's ownership», Socrates remarks that, regarding the institution of rulers for the city:

it will be necessary to begin once again almost from the starting point (ὥσπερ ἐξ ἀρχῆς). We were saying, if you recollect, that they must reveal themselves to be lovers of the city (φιλοπόλιδας τε φαίνεσθαι), when tested in pleasures and pains (βασανιζομένους ἐν ἡδοναῖς τε καὶ λύπαις), and make it apparent that they do not abandon (μεταβολή) this fidelity (δόγμα) under stress of labors or fears or any other vicissitude.

This *starting point* is exactly what had been presented in Book III, 412 d and in the following pages. There we find the definition of an *ethical* proof of love towards the city, by which the future rulers should be selected. The

first sign of aptitude for ruling is exactly the zeal towards the city (κηδεμόνας τῆς πόλεως). The concept used, κηδεμονία, means zeal, in the sense of «looking after», as well as matrimony itself. Not by chance, in the successive line Socrates states that «one would be most likely to be careful with that which he loved (ὁ φιλῶν)», thus introducing the φιλία towards the city as a fundamental ethical attitude for the identification of the future ruler. The description of this love takes a very romantic slant and extraordinarily condenses the experience of inter-personal love:

And just what one loves the most (μάλιστα φιλοῖ): what one considers to merit benefiting from (συμφέρειν) the same things as you, and – when everything goes well [with the other] – you may think yourself as well to be happy; and if not, the contrary would apply. Thus should be picked out from the other guardians such men as to our observation appear most inclined through the entire course of their lives to be zealous (συμφέρειν) with the city, and who would be least likely to consent to do the opposite (III, 412 d – e).

The philopolitical – as it were – *proof of love* is summed up in the ability of matching the individual interest with that of the city, the private with the public, to use more contemporary terminology. Up to now, the educative proposal of the ruler is extremely idealistic, and Plato is «accused» of this idealism by much contemporary philosophy. Some commentators, though – in my opinion – have not noticed that Plato's proposal is not finished here: one must go on with the argument.

Plato, indeed, introduces a realistic touch immediately afterwards, as it is revealed that this *love towards the city* is continuously subject to perils, and that, therefore, the keeping of φιλοπόλιδας rulers is a result of constant care:

I think, then, we shall have to observe them at every period of life, to see if they are capable of keeping this fidelity and never risk, never by sorcery nor by force (γοητευόμενοι μήτε βιαζόμενοι) to abandon it, letting it be forgotten, that is, this conviction that one must do what is best for the city (τῇ πόλει βέλτιστα) (III, 412e).

The subject of abandoning a belief becomes the occasion of some brief remarks on the voluntariness or less of this abandonment of a true belief (III, 412 e – 413 a). In the end, Socrates states that it is impossible for someone to voluntarily abandon a true conviction – such as doing what is best for the city – and therefore, this can happen only with someone who is a «victim of either a robbery, a sorcery or force» (κλαπέντες ἢ γοητευθέντες ἢ βιασθέντες, III, 413 a), repeating the above admonition about the precautions with the possibility of the rulers abandoning their love towards the city.

It is impossible not to remember, in the consequent arguments reasonably pointed out as reasons for the involuntary abandonment of the true convic-

tion, that is always wanting what is best for the city, the parallel articulation of reasons that appears in the Eulogy to Helen by Gorgias. Helen is said to have been «taken by force» (βία ἄρπασθεῖσαι, 20), «persuaded by a discourse that builds an illusion» (λόγος ὁ πείσας καὶ τὴν ψυχὴν ἀπατήσας, 8, 1) and dragged «by force of a sorcery» (δύναμις τῆς ἐπωδῆς, 8, 10) which «penetrates the conviction of soul (τῇ δόξῃ τῆς ψυχῆς, 8, 10), thanks to «the double arts of sorcery and magic» (γοητείας δὲ καὶ μαγείας δισσαὶ τέχναι, 8,10).

Obviously, this Platonic use of Gorgian texts deserves detailed treatment. I restrict myself to citing it as another sign of the intense debate about the moral autonomy of the individual that was part of the intellectual tradition at the end of the 5th century.

Not by chance, immediately afterwards, Socrates, almost apologizing to the reader for bringing up a thorny subject, states: «I am afraid I am speaking in ‘tragic style’» (τραγικῶς κινδυνεύω λέγειν, 413 b), the style of the writers of tragedy. That is, the way tragedy deals with these matters relating to the autonomy of decision and its restraints: the one we call *tragic soul*; so he specifies:

By ‘stolen’ I mean those who are persuaded in changing their opinion and those who forget it because it is subtracted, without their being aware, to some by time, to others by speech. By those who are constrained or forced, I understand those who are induced to change their minds under pain or pleasure (ἂν ὁδύνη τις ἢ ἀλγηδὼν μεταδοξάσαι ποιήσῃ); victims of sorcery – I would say – are those who alter their opinions under the spell of pleasure (ἡδονῆς) or terrified by some fear (ὑπὸ φόβου, III 413 b).

It is the picture of a tragic soul, torn, always in danger of defection in its decision (δόγμα) to do what is best for the city, potential victim of discourse, of oblivion by time, of pleasure and pain and all the other spells, which are «everything that deceive» (πάντα ὅσα ἀπατᾷ, III, 413 e).

We find the solution, if we return to Book VI. Here Socrates reveals, not before showing his customary hesitation (ὀκνος) in talking about this, that «as the most perfect guardians we must establish philosophers» (ἀκριβεστάτους φύλακας φιλοσόφους δεῖ καθιστάναι, VI, 503 b).

The solution, therefore, is once again philosophy. But it is an extremely idealised solution: and – this time – not because Plato is an impenitent dreamer, but, on the contrary, owing to a quite concrete problem: there are no more philosophers in the state⁶!

6. We will dedicate, due to the restrictions of this essay, a smaller space for the solution, because it appears in several ways in Plato’s work and life and is, somehow, less important than the way that he presents the problem.

And there are none – as Socrates says in Book VI of *Republic*, because «every seed and growth, whether vegetable or animal, that cannot receive the necessary food, season and place that suits it, the more vigorous it is the more it needs nourishment» (VI, 491 d). The fact that there are no more philosophers in the city is at the same time the cause and the consequence of its corruption: the cause, for only with the philosophers the city could be orderly and just; as a consequence, without a just city there is no necessary soil for the growth of philosophers.

A vicious circle is set. The philosophy plant must be sought, by consequence, on non-*poleis* soil, *outside* the city. This might be the meaning of the typified list of the few philosophers left from *Republic* VI, 496 b – c. Nothing authorizes us, in my opinion, to see it as ironic, «a la Strauss», as some suggest: the severity of the situation described, in tones of abandon and disaster, the existential implication that the list must mean *historical* Plato, do not seem to me to admit lighter readings. The sarcastic controversy itself that follows in the previous footsteps, against those who, despite being educated in philosophy, give in to the adulations of political success, and are compared to the tragicomical image of the «little bald-headed thinker» *parvenu* (VI, 495 e), does not seem to me to leave any doubts. Socrates calls them ἀνθρωπίσκοι («ominicchi» as the great Sciascia would say), *little men*, in a derogatory sense.

On the other hand, «very few are those who consort worthily with philosophy» (κατ' ἀξίαν ὁμιλούντων φιλοσοφία, 496 b), in the sense of *being familiarized with it*, or *keeping themselves busy with it*. The list is significantly open to those who are outside the city, by the philosopher in exile, as if to mark the impossibility of philosophy in the more corrupt city. Next to be considered are those who, having a great soul (μεγάλη ψυχή), live in a little town (σμικρὰ πόλει), and are therefore removed from public businesses. The big city is the problem: that is, Athens is what Plato is thinking of. The third kind is represented by «those, wellborn, who disregard their *technai*, which they justly disdain; and devote themselves to it [philosophy]», a probable reference to sophists such as Theaetetus. In the example of the latter kind a name is cited, Theages, who, being sick, and thus searching for νοσοτροφία, for the *cure of his body*, is thus exempt from politics (VI, 496 c). Νοσοτροφία becomes, paradoxically, an advantage, another chance of escaping the city in order to practice philosophy. We leave aside, by Socrates' own suggestion, a fifth kind: those who received the *demon sign* (δαμόνιον σημεῖον), because «just him [Socrates] received it».

The foreignness of the city to these few (ὀλίγοι) surviving philosophers, it bears saying, is marked by an image that I meant to use as the title for my article: the philosopher hidden behind *a wall* (τειχίον) as a shelter from the storm.

Indeed, by way of concluding the list, Socrates invites Adeimantus to note that, owing to the fact that «no-one does anything sound in favor of the public businesses» (οὐδεὶς οὐδὲν ὑγιὲς περὶ τὰ τῶν πόλεων πράττει, 496 c), the philosopher has fallen among wild beasts, unwilling to share their misdeeds, but running the risk of dying and becoming worthless (ἄνωφελής) to himself or others, before he could do something good for the benefit of his friends or the city. Having reflected about this, he remains quiet (ἡσυχίαν) and minds his own affair (τὰ αὐτοῦ πράττων), as if he stood under a storm, under shelter of a wall (ὑπὸ τειχίον), of dust and rain brought by the winds; and seeing others filled with lawlessness, is content to live his life free from inequity and unholy deeds (VI, 496, d).

The key to reading the list of philosophers that are not in the city and the foreignness itself of the philosopher to that city «of wild beasts» seems to me to rest here: he ponders and stands off, but lest he become useless to it (and to himself): that is, the seclusion, the philosopher's self-exile also aims, somehow, towards the usefulness of the city. For the philosopher who finds himself in a city like this ends up minding his own affairs because of the impossibility of looking after the city, or better still, exactly as a form of looking after it.

And this is also Plato in the *Seventh Letter*. Plato observes (σκοποῦντι, 325 c) the political vicissitudes of στάσεις, that is:

the men engaged in public affairs, the laws and the customs, the more closely I examined them and the farther I advanced in life, the more difficult it seemed to me to handle public affairs aright (ὀρθῶς). [...] Regarding the written laws and the customs, they were being altered for the worse very rapidly, so much that I, even though desirous of occupying myself with public affairs (ὀρμῆς ἐπὶ τὸ πράττειν τὰ κοινά), seeing (βλέποντα) all being ruined, ended up lost (τελευτῶντα ἱλιγγιάν). And, although I observed (σκοπεῖν) if there was any likelihood of improvement in general, and specially regarding the city's government, I looked for a suitable opportunity to act (τοῦ δὲ πράττειν αὖ περιμένειν αἰεὶ καιροῦς, 325 c - e).

In the aforementioned page there are three different allusions to a Plato who *observes: behind the wall* – one feels like saying – and waits a καιρὸς τοῦ πράττειν, suitable opportunity to act.

And behind the wall there is, evidently, the Academy: the τειχίον, which is the opposite of a τεῖχος, the walls of the town: the private rather than the public. A place from where to observe, to *think* the city, and be useful somehow. But the Academy is neither the city nor a substitute for it: it is rather a point of view over the higher walls.

Why, in the same page of Book VI, in response to Adeimantus' consent regarding this exiled philosopher and his contribution to the city («really, it is not little that he could have achieved before leaving», 497 e) Socrates con-

cludes:

it is not the maximum, since he did not receive a suitable city (οὐδέ γε τὰ μέγιστα, μὴ τυχὼν πολιτείας προσηκούσης); because in an adequate one he would have been successful and would have preserved both his and the common good (μετὰ τῶν ἰδίων τὰ κοινὰ σώσει) (VI, 497 e).

That is, *maximum* is something else. It is binding the common good with the personal interest: this is the *philopolitical dogma*. The ruler's fidelity is to be first defended from attacks against voluntariness itself, against the tragic drama of ethical life, in which *πλεονεξία* is always lurking (as we have seen at III, 503, a).

Unfortunately, though, philosophy – Socrates will say in the successive lines – is, in *this* city, as a foreign seed (ξενικὸν σπέρμα), sown in an alien soil (VI, 497, b). It is exactly why the formation of the ruler will take place necessarily – in a storm and blast of *pleonectic* dust – *under shelter of a wall*: where there is a *garden*, or better still a stove – to give it a botanical image, often present in these pages – an *in vitro* culture, separated from the city, yes, but existing in relation with the city, never in its place. A wall, therefore, always *permeable*.

Perhaps this is the meaning of the experience in the Academy, which in fact shows, as Isnardi Parente has pointed out, unmistakable signs of political involvement, and the Syracusan voyages, which Plato undertakes⁷ – as he confesses in the *Seventh Letter*, «not to seem even to myself altogether nothing but words» (μὴ δόξαμι ποτε ἑμαυτῷ παντάπασι λόγος μόνον ἄτεχνῶς εἶναι τίς, 328 c). Plato doesn't *sit on the fence*, then.

Conclusion

I believe that the matter of Plato's political passion and its modalities are solved essentially in one detail: right timing, of *καιρός* to act, mentioned above in the *Seventh Letter* (325 d-e). Indeed, a strong sense of this *καιρός* touches the Platonic pages lightly.

In the same page of the *Seventh Letter*, for instance, it appears in the words of Dion by which he invites Plato to *step down from the fence* to come to the philosophical-political project of Syracuse:

What better moment more promising than that which is at this moment offered to us by a sort of luck with a divine touch? (τίνας γὰρ καιρούς, ἔφη, μείζους περιμενοῦμεν τῶν νῦν παραγεγονότων θεία τινὶ τύχῃ; 327 e).

7. M. ISNARDI-PARENTE (1979, pp. 274-305).

Behind terms such as καιρός, νῦν, τύχη there is a whole lexicon of combination of circumstances in this Platonic page. It is the tension of he who waits affectionately, and not without slightly suffering, for the occasion to look after the city, to be its lover, φιλόπολις.

It is the hope that Socrates states, indeed, immediately afterwards, in the same page of Book VI of *The Republic*, that we had been reading:

that neither city nor polity nor man either will ever be perfected before the few philosophers, who now bear the stigma not of evil but of uselessness, by some necessary fate (ἀνάγκη τις ἐκ τύχης), take charge of the city's healing, whether they wish it or not (εἴτε βούλονται εἴτε μή, πόλεως ἐπιμεληθῆναι, VI, 499 b).

And there is an evident tragic sense, in the above page, when investing the philosopher as ruler, both from the reference to the *necessary fate*, and a certain constriction of his wish: *whether they wish it or not*, will be invested in healing the city.

Nevertheless, the references to the observation, the wait for the promising moment, a certain suffering and tragic sense of the phatic necessity for the philosophers to take over the government, point to – as far as I am concerned – the fact that Platonic philosophy and the Academy do not represent a disdainful removal from politics, but rather, somehow, a real preparation (which passes through the ethical strainer of πλεονεξία) that intends to return to it later on, as in the return of the philosopher to the cave in the celebrated allegory. These are words of a political passion – Plato's – which, if it is momentarily hidden behind the Academy wall, flutter and wait impatiently for the moment when «everything that now seems impossible finally happens» (πάντ' ἐπιτελέσαι τὰ νῦν ἀπιστούμενα, 502 b).

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G. CORNELLI
(Brasilia)

**ΤΑ ΤΕΙΧΗ ΤΗΣ ΦΙΛΟΣΟΦΙΑΣ:
Ο ΠΛΑΤΩΝ ΚΑΙ Η ΣΥΖΗΤΗΣΗ
ΓΙΑ ΤΗΝ ΕΝΝΟΙΑ ΤΗΣ «ΦΙΛΟΠΟΛΙΤΕΙΑΣ»
ΣΤΗΝ ΑΘΗΝΑ ΤΟΥ 5^{ου} ΚΑΙ ΤΟΥ 4^{ου} ΑΙΩΝΟΣ**

Π ε ρ ί λ η ψ η

Τὸ ζήτημα τῆς σχέσης μεταξύ ἀρχαίας φιλοσοφίας καὶ πολιτικῆς, ποὺ μᾶς ἀπασχολεῖ ἐδῶ, ἐκκινεῖ ἀπὸ τὴν πνευματικὴ συζήτηση ποὺ γίνεται στὴν Ἀθήνα κατὰ τὸν 5ο καὶ 4ο αἰ. π.Χ. Ἡ συζήτηση αὐτὴ φαίνεται πὼς συνοδεύει τὴν ἀνάδυση μιᾶς νέας ἀτομικότητας, ἡ ὁποία σημαδεύεται ἀπὸ τὴν ἀνακάλυψη τῆς τραγικότητας τῆς ψυχῆς. Μέσα σὲ αὐτὴ τὴν πνευματικὴ κίνηση γίνεται πολὺ ἔντονα αἰσθητὴ ἡ ἀνάγκη ἐπαναπροσδιορισμοῦ τοῦ ἐνδιαφέροντος γιὰ τὴν πολιτικὴ, σὲ ὅλη τῆς τὴν ἱστορικὴ ἀσάφεια καὶ τὴν ἠθικὴ ἰδανικότητα. Ὁ Ἀριστοφάνης, ὁ Θουκυδίδης, ὁ Εὐριπίδης, ὁ Γοργίας καί, προφανῶς, ὁ ἴδιος ὁ Πλάτων δείχνουν ζωντὰ ἐνδιαφέρον νὰ ὀρίσουν τὴν πιθανότητα (ἢ μὴ) ἐνὸς διαλόγου ἀνάμεσα στὴ φιλοσοφία καὶ τὴν πολιτεία, ἀνάμεσα στὸ δημόσιο καὶ τὸ ἰδιωτικό, τὴ δικαιοσύνη καὶ τὸ ἀτομικὸ συμφέρον, τὸ ἄτομο καὶ τὸ σύνολο. Ἡ λύση ποὺ προτείνει ὁ Πλάτων ἀποκαλύπτει τὴν πολυπλοκότητα καὶ τὴ θεωρητικὴ διατύπωση ποὺ εἶναι χαρακτηριστικὲς τοῦ στοχασμοῦ του: ὁ φιλόσοφος ποὺ φυλάγεται ἀπὸ τὴν κακοκαιρία, κρυμμένος πίσω ἀπὸ τὸ τεῖχος τοῦ «ἀκαδημειοῦ» (Πολ., 496 d) εἶναι ὁ ἴδιος ποὺ, προκειμένου νὰ «μὴν φανεῖ στὸν ἴδιο του τὸν ἑαυτὸ πὼς εἶναι μόνον λόγια» (μὴ δόξαιμι ποτε ἐμαντῶ παντάπασι λόγος μόνον ἀτεχνῶς εἶναι τις, Ζ' Ἐπιστ., 328 c), ἀναχωρεῖ γιὰ τὸ ἀβέβαιο ἐγχείρημα τῶν Συρακουσῶν.

Gabriele CORNELLI
(μτφρ. Ἀννα ΤΑΤΣΗ)

