IN DEFENCE OF PLATO

J. R. WALLACH: *The Platonic Political Art: A Study of Critical Reason and Democracy*. Pp. xi + 468. University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2001. Paper, $25. ISBN: 0-271-02076-8.

In this ambitious book, John R. Wallach attempts to do many things: to distinguish his own 'critical historicist' interpretive approach to Plato from those he calls, respectively, 'contextualist' and 'textualist'; to ascribe to Plato the twofold aim of seeking, on the one hand, to solve the 'Socratic problem', that is, the problem of how democratic Athens could have so unjustly put Socrates to death, and, on the other, to narrow the gap between λόγος and ἔργον in the political realm; to defend Plato against the charge that he is radically antidemocratic; and, finally, to bring Platonic political wisdom to bear on social problems today, particularly in America.

In the final analysis, the book emerges as a thoughtful challenge to the ready assumption that Plato is an unremitting and unequivocal opponent of democracy. Indeed, it goes so far as to claim that Plato might well approve of democracy as a political system, provided that justice were at the core of the education and life of the citizens in it, and provided the citizens were not simply a collection of competing interests to be reconciled through compromise. In pursuing this claim, the book largely succeeds. Employing his 'critical historicist' method, according to which Plato's philosophy is neither a mere product of his historical situation nor wholly divorced from the real problems he encountered, Wallach argues convincingly that Plato's opposition to democracy is directed not against democracy *simpliciter*, but against the corrupt Athenian democracy that understood justice in terms of power. Wallach contends, quite rightly, that despite *Rep.* 8's relegation of democracy to the position of next-to-worst (tyranny being worst) among forms of government, what Plato actually says about it is far less damning than what he says about oligarchy. As Wallach points out (p. 293), it is oligarchy that is said to be 'full of many evils' (*Rep*. 544c4–5—the phrase is συχνῶν γέμουσα κακῶν), and, as I would add, Socrates uses words containing the root κακ- at least eight times in connection with oligarchy but not even once in connection with democracy. Wallach identifies, moreover, important points of convergence between Plato's thinking and some aspects of the typically democratic outlook, such as a preference for persuasion over forcible domination, an emphasis on education as a way of advancing the flourishing of all, and a prizing of freedom when it does not conflict with justice.

Any adequate defense of Plato's non-antipathy to democracy must address his notorious élitism. And Wallach is certainly well aware (pp. 416–17) that (i) Plato places authority in the hands of philosopher-guardians who exercise censorship, disseminate the 'noble lie', and regard reform as painting 'on a blank canvas'; (ii) Plato promotes belief in the unitary character of political knowledge; and (iii) Plato sees progress in politics as emanating from the top. Wallach's strategy for dealing with Plato's unabashed élitism is to insist that it is not central or essential to Plato's political thought. Although he is quite prepared to acknowledge that Plato could never favor (not in the *Republic*, *Statesman*, or even *Laws*) any serious exercise of political leadership on the part of the majority (p. 373), he cannot give up the hope that the art of leadership might become in some way an art of citizenship. The political art that is for Plato, as Wallach admits, the province of the few, could nevertheless, he insists, 'potentially . . . be read, and learned from, by all' (p. 329). Wallach fails to elucidate, however, what it might mean for the citizens to 'read and learn from' the political art;

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indeed, it is difficult to see what more it might mean for Plato than their coming to see that it is best for them to be persuaded to do as the wise few see fit. When, therefore, Wallach comes finally to apply Platonic lessons to contemporary issues, one can perhaps look favorably upon his conclusions (i) that Plato would prefer rehabilitation to incarceration for criminals; (ii) that he would advocate the teaching of 'religious ethics' in public schools; and even perhaps (iii) that he would favor institutional autonomy for universities (since his Academy might well have been a haven for unpoliced discourse), but one wonders how Wallach could think that Plato would be intolerant of 'political correctness' (p. 430), understood as the promoting and promulgating of certain views to the exclusion of others. For Plato, must not the many be taught what and what not to believe?

Despite offering valuable insights not only into the *Republic*, *Statesman*, and *Laws*, but into the *Protagoras* and *Gorgias* as well, particularly as they bear on the question of democracy, Wallach's book is both imprecise and unsubtle in interpreting the shorter dialogues—*Laches*, *Charmides*, *Euthydemus*, and *Meno*. In several instances his account fails to get straight even the basic facts of the dialogues, not to mention their arguments. To consider just the *Laches*, it is not the case that the two fathers in the *Laches* seek to have their sons taught ἀνδρεία (p. 132)—it is Socrates who so narrows the focus of the discussion; also, Laches points out not that craftsmen lack ἐπιστήμη of hopes and fears and therefore lack courage (p. 133), but that they lack courage despite having such ἐπιστήμη. Wallach's penchant for aggregating scholars and then labeling them substitutes, in many cases, for nuanced readings of their work, and even suggests, on occasion, that the author has at best only second-hand acquaintance with the works he cites. The book is overly long and repetitious. And the author should have taken more care with the Greek. His transliterations are inconsistent and inaccurate (*dynamis*, but *hupothesis*; *therepeuein* and Melisias instead of *therapeuein* and Melesias). In consulting the Greek text, the author does not always know which Greek words correspond to which English words in the translation (the most egregious instance of this being his selection of φάρμακον as the Greek for 'original' [p. 343] in a translation of *Pol*. 277c).

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OUSIA IN ARISTOTLE

M. V. WEDIN: *Aristotle's Theory of Substance: The* Categories *and* Metaphysics Zeta. Pp. xii + 482. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000. Cased, £37.50. ISBN: 0-19-823855-X.

W.'s first book was *Mind and Imagination in Aristotle* (New Haven, 1988). In that excellent work, W. championed an unorthodox position. He argued that, for Aristotle, episodes of cognition are explained through appeal to lower-level systems that rely on basic physiological structures. Importantly, he argued that even Aristotle's account of intellect must give way to a non-transcendentalistic analysis. In that work, W. exhibited all of the virtues that are associated with the best Aristotelian scholarship in the analytic tradition. At each turn, he offered sophisticated textual exegesis, mapped and evaluated the possibilities for interpretation, and presented thorough discussion of the relevant secondary literature. Through that work, W. introduced an interpretation that may well emerge as a new orthodoxy.

In this, his second book, W. once again attacks an existing orthodox position. Here

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